

WHITE PAPER

REPOSITIONING YOUR IT DEPARTMENT AS A BUSINESS PARTNER

*The 2 pillars to transform the perception of
your IT organization in 6 months.*

By
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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A former Executive Partner at Gartner and Partner at Hubadviser, he advises executive committees and CIOs on governance, IT performance, strategic prioritization, and AI adoption. He is also President of CJOCoaching, a certified coach, and an NLP Master Practitioner.

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INTRODUCTION

90% of the conversations I have with CIOs end up in the same place. Not on tech. Not on budgets. On internal politics.

How can I gain more influence at the executive committee level? How can I finally be seen as a business contributor, not just a risk manager? How can I change my relationship with my CEO?

If these questions resonate with you, you are not alone. And you are not complaining, you are clearly seeing what is holding you back.

I am Cyril Jouan. 25 years as a CIO in radically different environments: industry, startups, retail, SMEs, Fortune 100. Then several years as an Executive Partner at Gartner, supporting around fifty CIOs on their strategy and internal positioning.

What have I seen everywhere, without exception? Competent CIOs struggling to operate at the right level. Not due to lack of talent, but due to lack of political visibility.

That's exactly what we're going to work on here.

Two pillars: reassess, then reposition.

Concrete actions, field-tested tips, pitfalls to avoid. And for each action, a deliberate political dimension, because that's where everything truly happens. Adopt this framework, and you will change the place of your IT department within the organization.

PILLAR 1: REASSESS (MONTHS 1–3)

“You cannot change a perception without first understanding how it was built”

THE 4 KEY ACTIONS


ACTION 1: RE-DECODE POWER DYNAMICS WITH A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

You know the org chart. You know the people. But do you really know the power map as it exists today? Alliances shift. Power dynamics evolve. A director who was your ally two years ago may have changed priorities.

The classic mistake of an established CIO: believing political dynamics are fixed because they were once understood. Rebuild your map from scratch:

- Are your initial sponsors still truly there?
- Who is slowing down your initiatives behind the scenes, and what are they protecting?
- New executive committee members: have you proactively briefed them on what IT does, or are you waiting for them to come to you?
- Within business teams, power dynamics have shifted. Who has gained influence? Have you repositioned accordingly?

Method: Organize one-on-one lunches with each executive committee member, even those you think you know well. Ask them a simple question: “If you had to describe the role of IT to someone external, what would you say?” Their answer will reveal the real perception they have of your department.

 **Tip:** Do the same exercise with second-level managers, not just the executive committee. This is often where the most honest perceptions and frustrations emerge.

ACTION 2: CONDUCT A PERCEPTION AUDIT OF YOUR IT DEPARTMENT


Before trying to change your positioning, take a snapshot of the situation. You cannot improve what you do not measure.


What you need to assess:

- If your executive committee had to rate you today, what score would they give, and based on what criteria?
- Do business teams see you as an accelerator or a bottleneck?
- Does your CEO truly trust you, or are they managing IT around you without telling you?
- Is your seat at the executive committee secured, or simply tolerated?

Method: Ask your CEO for structured feedback. Not informally, schedule a dedicated time slot and ask precise questions:

1. "In which areas do you believe IT has delivered well over the past 12 months?"
2. "On which topics would you like me to be involved earlier?"
3. "How would you describe the role of IT in our 3-year strategy?"

 **Tip:** Complement this internal audit with an external benchmark. Reach out to 2 or 3 CIO peers in comparable companies and compare your positioning. This will give you concrete arguments for your executive committee.

 **Warning:** If your CEO says "everything is fine" without going into detail, it is a red flag. It often means they lack visibility on what you do, which can be worse than direct criticism.


ACTION 3: MAP YOUR QUICK WINS AND BLIND SPOTS


You know your IT landscape. But do you know it from a “perceived business value” perspective? This is where most CIOs have a blind spot.

Rework your mapping using a different framework:

- **Actual impact vs perceived impact:** Identify 3 to 5 initiatives that had measurable impact over the past 18 months. Who knows about them outside of IT?
- **Chronic irritants:** What are the 3 topics that keep coming up in executive meetings or informal discussions?
- **Available quick wins:** What concrete problems could you solve in 4 to 6 weeks with visible impact?
- **Unaddressed strategic topics:** AI, data, cybersecurity, do you have a clear, consistent position, or does it change depending on who you are speaking to?

Method: Identify 3 high-visibility quick wins that you can deliver within 8 weeks. These are your concrete proofs of value.

 **Tip:** Choose quick wins that directly impact the daily work of the executive committee or key business teams. A dashboard for the CEO, an automation that saves the CFO 2 hours per week, or a visible improvement on a tool used by sales teams. Perceived impact matters more than technical complexity.

 **Warning:** Resist the temptation to launch a “large transformation program”. That is exactly what reinforces the perception of slow and costly IT. Start with fast and visible wins.

ACTION 4: ASSESS YOUR REAL MATURITY WITH AN EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE

You have been in your role for a long time. You know your IT better than anyone. And that is exactly the problem.

This is not a criticism, it is neuroscience. The more immersed you are in a system, the more your brain automatically fills the gaps. You no longer see certain flaws because you have adapted to them. You have integrated them as constants, not as problems. An external perspective does not have that memory. It sees what you no longer notice.

That is why an external audit is not a sign of weakness. It is a management tool.

Step 1: Frame the audit so it is useful, not decorative

Not a 200k€ exhaustive audit producing a 300-page report that no one reads. A 3 to 5-week flash diagnostic, focused on 3 specific areas:

- **Cybersecurity:** Is your security posture truly up to date? An incident is what turns an ignored weakness into a public crisis and personal accountability.
- **Governance:** Are your IT decision-making processes clear and respected by business teams, or bypassed whenever possible?
- **Delivered value:** Can you demonstrate, with data, what IT has concretely contributed to the business over the past 12 months?

Who should you appoint? Avoid large generalist consulting firms for this type of mission, you will mostly pay for their brand. Turn instead to specialized firms (cyber, IT governance) or senior independent consultants, former CIOs themselves, who understand the operational reality of mid-sized companies.

A reasonable budget for this type of flash diagnostic ranges from €15,000 to €40,000, depending on the size of your IT landscape and the number of areas covered. This is the cost of an informed decision, not just a report.

Step 2: Get approval from your CEO without signaling weakness

This is where many CIOs fail. They present the audit as a defensive necessity or worse, as self-criticism. Both approaches signal uncertainty. The right approach is to position the audit as an offensive lever.


“We are entering a transformation phase. Before committing additional resources, I want an objective view of our starting point, not mine, an external one. It will give us stronger arguments for upcoming budget decisions.”


You are not asking permission to check if everything is fine. You are proposing a strategic management tool for the executive committee.

Step 3: Use the results as a political lever

Compare the audit conclusions with how your IT department is perceived by the executive committee. The gap between the two, in either direction, becomes your working material.

An external audit gives legitimacy that your own voice cannot achieve. It is no longer “the CIO asking”, it is “an external diagnosis recommending”. For budget or resource requests, the difference is significant.

 **Tip:** Present the results in 15 minutes, not 2 hours. 3 slides: findings, risks, recommendations with associated budget. Decision-makers remember what is short and impactful.

 **Warning:** If the audit reveals issues you were already aware of but did not escalate, own it. It is a moment of truth. It is better to be the one leading the diagnosis than the one subjected to it.

CHECKPOINT MONTH 3: ARE YOU READY TO STEP UP?

These first 3 months have laid the foundations.

Before going further, ask yourself these 4 questions honestly:

1. Do I really know how my IT department is perceived at the executive committee level? Not what people politely told me, but what decisions, budgets, and behaviors actually reveal.
2. Do I have an objective measure of my IT maturity? Not my own, inevitably biased view, but an external perspective on cybersecurity, governance, and the value delivered to the business.
3. Have I identified my 3 quick wins for the next 8 weeks? Concrete, visible, measurable. Wins that tell a new story about my IT department.
4. Do I know my sponsors and my resistance forces? Who will support this repositioning with me? Who will slow it down, consciously or not?

If you do not have these answers, do not move to Pillar 2. Restart the perception audit, or get support.

PILLAR 2: REPOSITION (MONTHS 4–6)

“An IT department without a strategic narrative is one that is controlled by others”

THE 4 KEY ACTIONS


ACTION 1: REFRAME YOUR IT VISION AS A BUSINESS VISION


You probably already have an IT vision. But is it expressed in business terms or in technical language? This is where the difference lies between a CIO perceived as strategic and one seen as an internal service provider.

Revisit your vision, this time with a different lens :

- **Language vs impact:** does each pillar of your vision answer the question, what concrete business impact does it deliver? Or does it simply describe what IT does?
- **Executive readability:** can your vision fit on one page? Can it be understood by a Sales Director, a CFO and an HR Director in 30 seconds? If you need to explain it, it is not ready yet.
- **Strategic alignment:** is every IT initiative clearly linked to a business objective? Growth, margin, customer experience, resilience. If the link is not explicit, no one will make it for you.
- **Consistency between ambition and resources:** is your vision aligned with your actual budget and resources? A vision disconnected from reality destroys your credibility before it is even presented. Refer to the “Reality Triangle” in Appendix 1.

Method: take your 3 to 5 priority initiatives and rewrite each one as a business outcome in a single sentence. Test them with a business leader, a finance stakeholder and an operational manager. If all three understand without asking questions, your vision is solid.

 **Tip:** do not start from scratch. Start from what the executive committee wants to achieve this year, growth, cost reduction, market expansion, and show how IT is a direct enabler. That is what speaking business really means.


 **Warning:** never present your vision as an “IT strategy”. Present it as “IT’s contribution to the company’s strategy”. The wording changes everything in how it is perceived.


ACTION 2: ESTABLISH CO-DECISION GOVERNANCE WITH BUSINESS TEAMS

Does your IT governance rely on internal IT committees? If so, you are unintentionally reinforcing the image of a siloed IT function. Most CIOs are aware of this, yet few take the step toward truly shared governance. This is precisely where your repositioning happens.

- **Transform your project committee into a value committee:** stop presenting technical progress. Present delivered value, business risks and required trade-offs. Invite business leaders to co-chair, make them co-owners of IT decisions. When they decide with you, they defend with you.
- **Clarify the rules of the game using the Pace Layering model from Gartner (see Appendix 2):** classify each project according to Innovation, Differentiation or Core. Three categories, zero ambiguity. Your decision-makers immediately understand why an AI proof of concept is not managed the same way as an ERP project, and prioritization becomes less of a battle.
- **Take on the role of a transversal control tower:** each department focuses on its own priorities. You see the bigger picture, dependencies, resource conflicts and collision risks. This is a strategic role that no one else can play. But you must claim it explicitly, not wait for it to be given to you.

Method: identify an existing governance forum and propose transforming its format. Invite a business leader to co-chair. Change the agenda, value first, technical topics in appendix. One transformed committee is worth more than three new ones.

 **Tip:** create a monthly projects by departments matrix. At a glance, the executive committee sees who is impacted by what. This tool naturally positions you as the guardian of overall coherence, without having to claim it explicitly.


 **Warning:** do not multiply committees. Limit yourself to three instances maximum, a value and prioritization committee monthly for 1 hour 30 minutes, a run review twice a month for 30 minutes, and a CEO meeting monthly for 1 hour. Everything else is noise.


ACTION 3: EVOLVE YOUR TEAM TOWARD A BUSINESS-CENTRIC MODEL

Your team is the reflection of your IT department. If it is perceived as technical and reactive, your IT function will be perceived the same way. You can change your messaging, transform your governance and reformulate your vision, but if your team continues to talk about tickets and incidents in front of business stakeholders, you are back to square one.

Repositioning goes through them. Not just through you.

- **Apply the 20/60/20 rule with a new criterion:** are your top 20% performers able to present a project in terms of business value? Or do they fall back into technical jargon as soon as they step outside IT? This simple diagnosis reveals where the real challenge lies.
- **Give visibility to those who can speak the language of value:** identify 2 or 3 profiles in your team who already have this mindset and put them in the spotlight, let them present their results directly to the executive committee. You send two signals at the same time: to the business, that IT has changed. To your team, that this is the posture that is valued.
- **Create concrete bridges between IT and business:** have your project managers spend a day within operational departments, not to deliver, but to understand. Then integrate a business satisfaction indicator into annual reviews. What gets measured drives behavior.
- **Hire hybrid profiles whenever you have the opportunity:** a hybrid IT and business profile changes the dynamic of a team far beyond their formal scope. Do not miss this opportunity when a position opens.

 **Tip:** organize a team seminar on repositioning. Your team must understand the new ambition and commit to it. Without their engagement, you will not change perception.


 **Warning:** resist the trap of constant reorganization. Changing boxes on an org chart does not change perception. What changes perception are behaviors and visible results.


ACTION 4: BUILD YOUR NARRATIVE AND MAKE YOUR RESULTS VISIBLE

This is the most underestimated action, yet the most decisive. Most CIOs deliver value without ever making it visible. The result: no one knows what IT actually does, and perception does not change.

You need to build an internal communication strategy based on three levers:

- **Quarterly value report:** a single slide presented to the executive committee: what IT has delivered, the measured business impact, time saved, costs avoided, risks reduced, and the three priorities for the next quarter. Short, factual, impactful.
- **Business success stories:** for each delivered project, build a short five-line case study with the relevant business leader: the initial problem, the solution, the result. Have it co-signed by the business. It is no longer IT communicating, it is the business testifying. The difference is huge.
- **Strategic presence:** request to present once per quarter to the executive committee on a forward-looking topic: AI, cybersecurity, digital sovereignty, market trends. You position yourself as a strategic advisor, not as an infrastructure manager.

 **Tip:** speak in numbers that the CFO understands. Not “we deployed 15 microservices” but “we reduced order processing time from 3 days to 4 hours, freeing up €200k in cash flow per month”. Euros, hours, risks avoided, always.

 **Warning:** do not fall into excessive self-promotion. Communication must remain factual and co-owned with the business. If it is perceived as internal IT marketing, the effect will be the opposite.

CHECKPOINT MONTH 6: HAVE YOU TRULY REPOSITIONED YOUR IT DEPARTMENT?

Ask yourself honestly these four questions:

1. Does my IT vision speak business: validated by the executive committee, not just presented.
2. Do my business teams truly co-decide: governance in place, decisions carried jointly.
3. Have I delivered concrete proof: at least three quantified, visible, co-signed quick wins.
4. Have I made my value visible: a report presented to the executive committee, a strategic presence initiated.

In some organizations, three months of results will not be enough. It may take six, even nine. This is not a failure, it is the unavoidable timeframe of cultural change. What matters is not slowing down the effort.

CONCLUSION

Repositioning your IT department is not an IT project. It is an act of leadership. And often, an act of courage.

I have seen technically brilliant CIOs remain stuck in the role of an “internal service provider” for years. Not because they lacked skills. Not because they lacked motivation. But because they lacked visibility.

Because they delivered without telling the story, delivered value without ever making it visible. And the executive committee kept seeing IT as a cost center. This is not inevitable. It is a narrative problem. And it can be worked on.

The CIOs who successfully achieved this repositioning all did the same thing: they stopped waiting for their value to be recognized. They started making it visible, deliberately, methodically, month after month.

The two pillars of this guide: Reassess and Reposition, are not boxes to tick. They are habits to embed. Because the executive committee changes, priorities evolve, and power dynamics shift. This work does not stop. It starts here.

If you want to challenge your situation with an external perspective, I am here. A real conversation between peers, to look together at what is blocking you and what you can start activating right now.

And you do not have to do it alone. With Hubadviser, we are a community of experts and IT leaders ready to share, challenge and support. A collective intelligence serving your progress.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: THE REALITY TRIANGLE

The Reality Triangle is a strategic diagnostic tool that I systematically use to assess the feasibility of an IT vision. It is based on three interdependent pillars:

1. Ambition: what you aim to achieve. This is the strategic target: transforming the information system, deploying AI, modernizing infrastructure. Ambition must be aligned with the company's strategy and validated by top management.

2. Budget: the financial resources available. Without a realistic budget, ambition remains wishful thinking. The budget includes CAPEX, OPEX and hidden costs such as change management, training and technical debt.

3. Resources and Skills: the teams and expertise required to execute. This is often the most underestimated pillar: you may have the budget and the ambition, but if the skills are missing, nothing gets delivered.

Key principle: if one of the three pillars is weak, the triangle becomes unbalanced. It is a powerful negotiation tool at executive level: it makes trade-offs visible and rational.

"You can reduce ambition, or increase the budget. But you cannot sustain all three without consistency."

APPENDIX 2: GARTNER'S PACE LAYERING

Pace Layering is a model created by Gartner to categorize applications based on their rate of change and their business purpose. The core idea: not all applications should be managed in the same way.

- **Systems of innovation (0 to 12 months):** exploratory applications, rapid iterations, high tolerance for failure. Examples: AI proof of concepts, experimental chatbots. Lightweight governance, agile methods.
- **Systems of differentiation (1 to 3 years):** business tools that create competitive advantage. Examples: CRM, e-commerce platforms. Hybrid governance, clear business value.
- **Systems of record (5 to 10 years):** core foundations of the information system, ERP, payroll, critical infrastructure. Maximum stability, controlled change, strict governance.

For a CIO undergoing repositioning: Pace Layering helps qualify each project and reassure the executive committee. It protects experimentation while ensuring rigor on critical systems. It is both a political and a methodological tool.

WANT TO DISCUSS IT?

This interview was conducted by Hubadviser, a network of sparring partners and experts in IT, Data and AI for CIOs, Heads of CIO Office and Chief Enterprise Architects. This guide provides a framework, but every situation is unique.

If you want to challenge your thinking with an external perspective, discuss your specific context or simply test your ideas, we can talk directly.

No commitment, no pitch: just a conversation between peers.

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