

ODGERS BERNDTSON CIO AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

# Technology Leadership in Focus: Evaluating Competencies, Challenges, and Future Opportunities



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# 1. Introduction

The role of Senior Technology Officers has transformed and expanded significantly in recent years. Today, the Chief Information Officer (CIO), alongside the converging positions of Chief Technology Officer (CTO), Chief Digital Officers (CDO), and Chief Information Security Officer (CISO), are, as corporate executives, expected to act as key contributors to, and enablers of, strategy. While the pace of digitalisation and the rapidly evolving technological landscapes makes it difficult to predict what the future holds for senior Technology Officers, it is clear that broader leadership competencies and agility will be critical for success.

The question remains: **How equipped are the current and future Technology leaders to take on these broader leadership responsibilities?**

Using data from the leadership profiles of 65 senior IT professionals, this study sought to identify the key strengths and critical gaps in leadership competencies across both the current and next generation of Technology Officers.

This whitepaper will explore these findings and their broader implications in more depth, and offer suggestions for how organisations can work to leverage the strengths and mitigate the risks in

their talent pipeline, to help build and enable future-fit Technology Leaders.

## Key Findings:

1. The Technology leaders showed a **relative strength in "Strategic Clarity"**, suggesting an innately strategic mindset;
2. The Technology leaders showed a **relative strength in building teams**, with an opportunity to adopt a more collaborative approach to enhance their impact;
3. The Technology leaders were **weaker at systematically building out the organisation behind the strategy**, with a particular gap in their focus on governance; and
4. The next generation of Technology Officers are **less effective at delivering results**, less equipped to operate effectively **under pressure**, and less able to **bounce back** from setbacks than those currently in-post.

## 2. Methodology

This study used data from 65 Technology leaders completing the LeaderFit profile, derived from the online Saville WAVE psychometric questionnaire, which profiles personality traits and benchmarks them against a global norm group of 16,000 senior managers and executives.

The profile has been found to have strong predictive validity for performance. It comprises 36 dimensions mapped against 6 performance and 4 agility competencies aligned with “World-Class Leadership”.

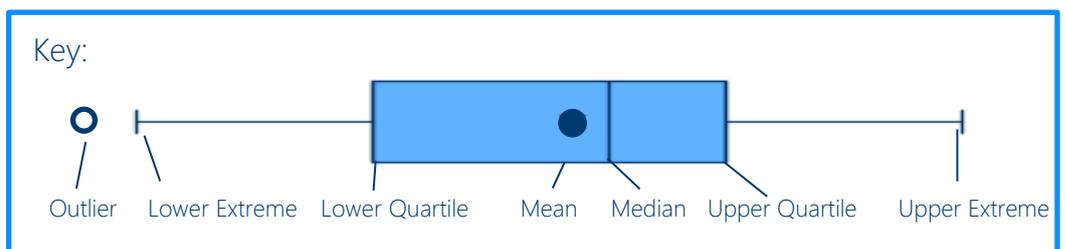
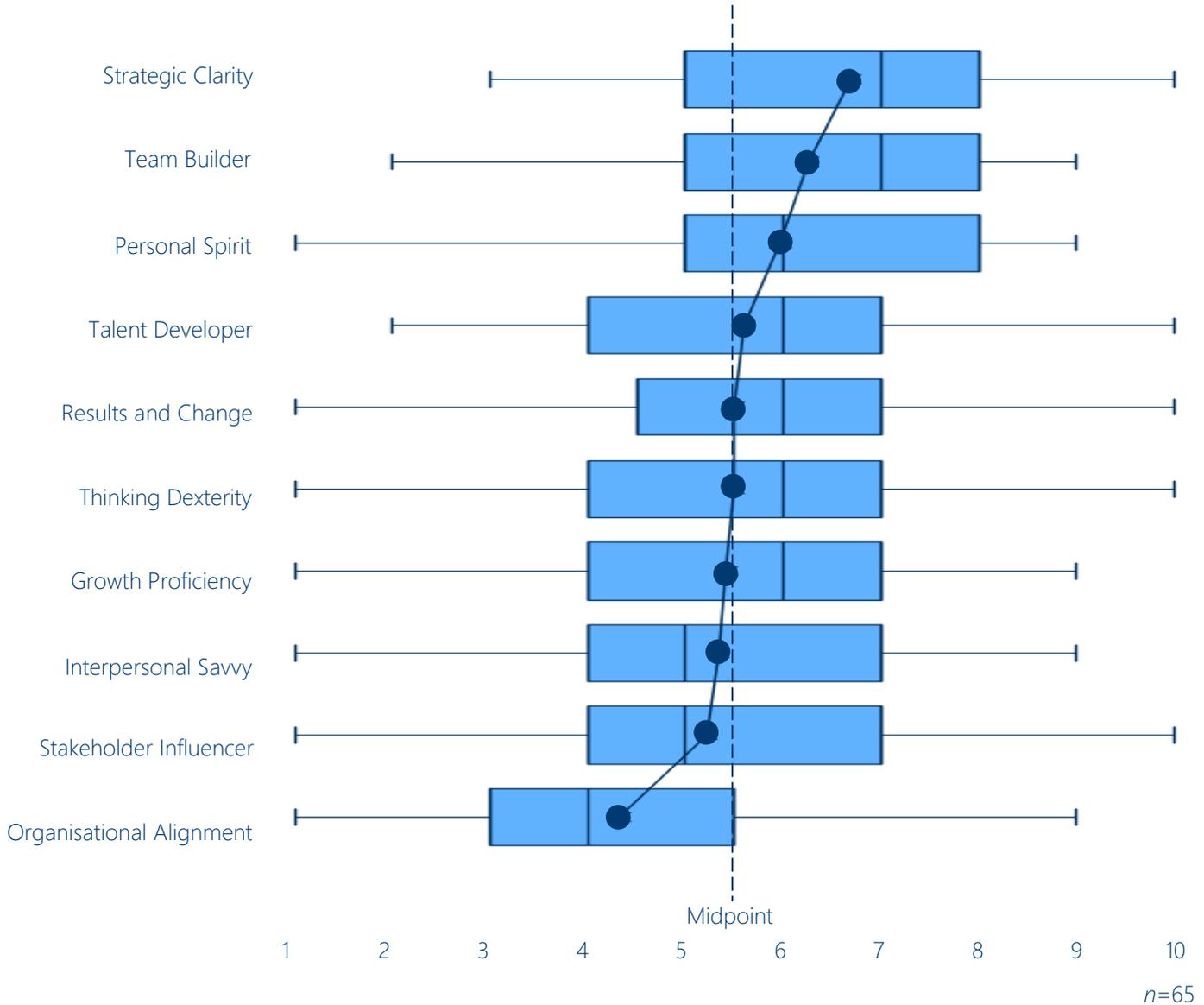
The 65 Technology leaders represent leaders from the UK, Ireland and the Netherlands, and were comprised of:

- 37 “established” Technology Officers (ie currently holding C-level IT positions such as CIO, CTO, CDO), and
- 28 “next generation” Technology Officer leaders (ie currently reporting into the CIO, CTO, CDO etc).



# 3. Overview of Findings

LeaderFit competency scores ranked highest-lowest



## Key Finding 1: Technology leaders showed a relative strength in Strategic Clarity



Strategic clarity, defined as “the capacity to envision the future, develop a clear vision, proof strategy and enable innovation which drives sustainable organisation performance” emerged as the strongest competency overall.

This is reassuring given the increasing expectation and requirement for today’s Technology Officer to be an integral contributor to corporate strategy, particularly as:

- Technology-related issues were identified the 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest strategic priority for businesses in 2023<sup>1</sup>;
- Emerging/disruptive technologies were identified as among the top 3 biggest risks to organisational growth in 2023<sup>2</sup>; and
- Other C-suite leaders are not seen to have sufficient digital acumen to make informed decisions, therefore remain reliant on the Technology Officers to contribute to the strategic decisions around technology<sup>3</sup>.

In our experience, strategic clarity is perhaps the most important, but among the most difficult to develop, leadership competencies, and can be lacking even among the most senior executives. It is promising therefore, that the Technology leaders profiled appear to have the strategic mindset which, if combined with the requisite intellectual horsepower, positions them to develop robust strategic capabilities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/en/articles/what-matters-to-ceos-and-cfos-right-now>

<sup>2</sup> <https://kpmg.com/xx/en/home/insights/2023/09/kpmg-global-ceo-outlook-survey.html#disruptivetechnology>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.odgersberndtson.com/media/12011/odgers-berndtson-leadership-confidence-report-2022\\_us.pdf](https://www.odgersberndtson.com/media/12011/odgers-berndtson-leadership-confidence-report-2022_us.pdf)

## Next generation Technology leaders may lack the long-term vision of established Technology Officers.

Whilst both established and next generation leaders scored reasonably high across all three underlying dimensions, and are similar in their ability to bring a conceptual, innovative approach to strategic problem-solving, the established Technology Officers emerged as significantly stronger in “developing strategies” as compared with the next generation of Technology leaders, suggesting they bring a stronger long-term vision and focus on formal strategy development.

This is perhaps unsurprising and may simply reflect the differing levels of executive maturity between the groups. However, it is a critical skill to develop and for organisations, this is a key area worth investing in.

There are a number of ways to do so, for example:

- Working with an external mentor
- Taking on a secondment to a more strategic role, or
- Participating in a strategic planning process.

Established vs. Next Generation Scores – Strategic Clarity and Underlying Dimensions



\*Statistically significant difference ie  $p < 0.05$

## Key Finding 2: Technology leaders show a relative strength in Building Teams



The second strongest competency for the group was Team Builder, defined as “the capacity to attract talent and enhance collective performance through developing high performing teams”.

This is a critical competency for all senior leaders, as research indicates that:

- High performing teams deliver 20% more economic value<sup>4</sup>; yet
- Only 13% of teams are high performing<sup>5</sup>

“Team Builder” might be particularly crucial for Technology Officers, who need to adopt a more generalist approach as they oversee a breadth of responsibilities and must rely heavily on a team they can trust to bring the necessary expertise and capabilities to deliver their responsibilities.

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<sup>4</sup> [7 Characteristics of High Performing Teams: What Sets Them Apart? | Thomas.co](#)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.atlassian.com/blog/state-of-teams-2022>

## There is room for improvement in Collaboration

The Technology leaders were stronger in “giving direction” and “empowering individuals”, suggesting they are willing and able to take control as a leader and to co-ordinate, inspire, and motivate the team.

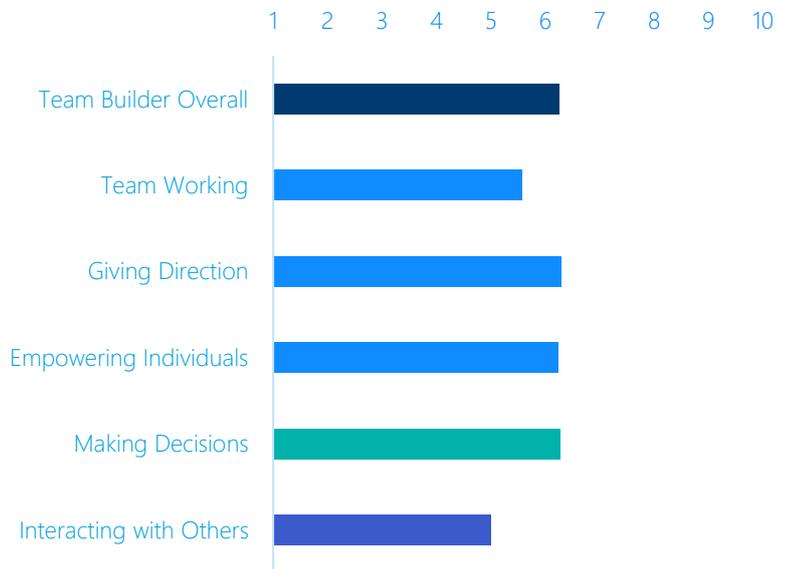
Equally, “making decisions”, emerged as a relative strength, suggesting a willingness and ability to take responsibility for big decisions and hold firm opinions. However, “Team Working”, was more moderate, so whilst this does not indicate a weakness, it implies that on average, Technology leaders may tend towards a more directive, rather than inclusive, approach.

Combined with the moderate score in “Interacting with Others”, the findings suggest Technology leaders would benefit from taking a more proactive approach to forming influential relationships and alliances with stakeholders to ensure earlier buy-in and create opportunities for integrated, cross-organisational collaboration which creates mutually beneficial value.

Given that insufficient collaboration, insufficient stakeholder involvement, lack of buy-in from leadership, and lack of alignment across the business are often cited as among the top reasons why IT projects and digital transformations fail<sup>6 7</sup>, this is clearly an area worth investing in. Indeed, as a recent publication by Deloitte argues, “Digital transformation is a team sport”.<sup>8</sup>

Team interventions can help, such as workshops or coaching programmes focused on enhancing collaboration, as can participation in cross-organisational projects or initiatives. However, this also requires a mindset shift and conscious effort on the part of the leader.

Team Builder and underlying/ related Dimensions



n=65



<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cio.com/article/228268/12-reasons-why-digital-transformations-fail.html>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.cio.com/article/230427/why-it-projects-still-fail.html#:~:text=Not%20enough%20resources%20or%20not,desired%20work%20done%20on%20time.>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.deloitte.com/global/en/our-thinking/insights/topics/digital-transformation/digital-transformation-approach.html>

## Key Finding 3. Technology leaders show a relative weakness in Organisational Alignment, with a particular gap in Governance



The lowest scoring competency overall across both the established and next generation profiles was **Organisational Alignment**, defined as “the capacity to define, develop and align market dynamics, customer demand, culture, structure, processes, systems and resources through business plans and good governance”.

This is concerning given the critical role Technology Officers play in building the digital foundations that underpin the effective delivery of strategy and secure critical revenue growth.

Indeed, UK CEOs see the advancement of digitisation and connectivity across the business as their top operational priority for 2023<sup>9</sup> (ie through implementing emerging technologies such as AI, building consistent technological systems and processes, and effective usage of cloud).

Yet, given economic volatility and budgetary cutbacks, there is also an ongoing need for Technology Officers to balance digitalisation for growth with an ability to optimise previous investments and digitalised processes, and reduce operational costs through clear and effective prioritisation.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2023/10/kpmg-ceo-outlook-2023.pdf>

## Technology leaders appear to be less systematic and conscientious about planning and execution

Whilst there was a relative strength in “Optimising Market Opportunities”, meaning the Technology leaders are reasonably effective at identifying business opportunities, they were less strong at Managing Tasks, meaning they will likely be less effective at establishing clear priorities and less systematic in defining plans.

Other comparatively low-scoring dimensions that might be exacerbating this issue are ensuring rigor and meeting timescales, suggesting that conscientiousness about deadlines, and focus on quality, detail and thoroughness are lacking.

Commenting on this finding, one CIO interviewed stated: “This is not so surprising; as a function a lot of us are the problem solvers who relish a technical challenge and are energised by finding new, innovative solutions, rather spending our time on ongoing operational management”.

Another stated “the mentality of “fail fast” seems to have crept in across the IT function – but fail fast shouldn’t mean “fail all the time” – we have over-indexed on innovation and experimentation, but shouldn’t forget the CIO’s critical responsibility as a guardian of technology”.

Organisational Alignment and underlying/ related Dimensions



n=65



*“The mentality of “fail fast” seems to have crept in across the IT function – but fail fast shouldn’t mean “fail all the time” – we have over-indexed on innovation and experimentation, but shouldn’t forget the CIO’s critical responsibility as a guardian of technology”*

## There is a worrying gap in focus on Governance

Perhaps most concerningly, the lowest scoring dimension overall was in governance, ie a focus on risk, rules and procedures. This is particularly worrying given the increasingly critical need for vigilance in cyber security and data governance, compliance, and risk mitigation.

Indeed:

- 82% of boards or senior management in UK businesses see cyber security as a top priority<sup>10</sup>; with 32% of UK businesses suffering a cyber-attack or breach between 2022-2023 (rising to 59% in medium businesses and 69% in large businesses);
- 80% of CIOs reported that they plan to increase spending on cyber/information security in 2024<sup>11</sup>, the top technology category for increased investment; and
- CIOs are being held personally accountable in ensuring these requirements are being met - as evidenced by the PRA fining the former TSB CIO for failing to comply with their Manager conduct rules earlier this year<sup>12</sup>.

Whilst further research would be necessary to explore whether these trends are observable across a broader population of IT leaders, they might help explain why despite the increasing need for cyber security vigilance:

- Only 19% of businesses implement extra training sessions after a cyber attack<sup>13</sup>
- Only 19% of UK businesses have a formal incident response plan to a cyber attack<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/cyber-security-breaches-survey-2023/cyber-security-breaches-survey-2023>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.helpnetsecurity.com/2023/10/27/worldwide-it-spending-2024/#:~:text=In%20the%202024%20Gartner%20survey,for%20organizations%2C%E2%80%9D%20said%20Lovelock.>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/news/2023/april/pr-a-fines-former-cio-of-tsb-bank-plc-for-breach-of-pra-senior-manager-conduct-rules>

<sup>13</sup> <https://aag-it.com/the-latest-cyber-crime-statistics/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://aag-it.com/the-latest-cyber-crime-statistics/>

Reassuringly, organisations can help mitigate these risks in a number of ways.

Technology leaders who are less strong in this area naturally can build their capabilities over time through [experience and exposure to best practices](#), or alternatively, they can ensure they have a strongly [operational right-hand person](#) on their team whom they can rely on.

Additionally, having the correct [organisational structure](#) will be critical. The CIO/ Technology Officer will need to foster [strong partnerships](#) with the Board, particularly the [Risk Committee](#), and other members of the C-suite, particularly the [COO and CFO](#).

Indeed, there is an increasing argument to be made that critical digital initiatives should be [co-owned](#), with [shared delivery responsibility](#) across multidisciplinary fusion teams – allowing for more effective [integration](#) into key business processes to enable better [enterprise-wide outcomes](#). This is supported by recent research by Gartner<sup>15</sup> which indicates that those CIOs who co-lead, co-deliver and co-govern digital initiatives with their CxO peers were much more likely to meet or exceed expectations for digital outcomes compared with CIOs who retain digital delivery responsibility themselves.

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2023-10-17-gartner-survey-of-over-2400-cios-reveals-that-45-percent-of-cios-are-driving-a-shift-to-co-ownership-of-digital-leadership>



# Key Finding 4. Next-Generation Technology leaders scored significantly lower in Personal Spirit and Results and Change



Established vs. Next Generation Scores  
**Results and Change** and Underlying Dimensions



Established vs. Next Generation Scores  
**Personal Spirit** and Underlying Dimensions



\*Statistically significant difference ie  $p < 0.05$

The findings suggest that established Technology Officers are likely stronger at driving the execution of plans or change initiatives to deliver successful outcomes at pace (ie Results and Change), and reaching for higher goals and being successful despite challenging circumstances (ie Personal Spirit). Furthermore, established Technology Officers were significantly stronger at embracing change and taking action, suggesting they are more open to new challenges, more comfortable with ambiguity, have more drive and energy, and are stronger at making things happen.

These findings reflect messages we have heard from our clients who report they are *struggling to find step-up candidates who have the ability to “get things done”*, and supports research which indicates 69% of digital transformation projects fail<sup>16</sup> and on average, large IT projects run 45% over budget and 7% over time, whilst delivering 56% less value than predicted<sup>17</sup>.

From a Board and CFO perspective, these figures are concerning. One would hope that that the next generation of Technology Officer should be improving on these worrying statistics, rather than perpetuating or making them worse.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/successful-transformations>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/delivering-large-scale-it-projects-on-time-on-budget-and-on-value>

## Next-Generation Technology leaders appear to be less resilient and less effective under pressure.

The findings indicate a significant gap in Showing Composure, suggesting the next generation of leaders are more likely to worry about, and be less calm during, important events, and are less likely to operate effectively under pressure, compared with established Technology Officers. Furthermore, whilst not statistically significant, there was a gap in "Thinking Positively" suggesting that the next generation are likely to be more pessimistic, less happy and less likely to bounce back from setbacks at pace.

These findings are concerning, and support recent research which suggests there is widespread exhaustion and change fatigue in the IT function in the aftermath of the pandemic<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, a 2022 survey of over 32,000 IT professionals globally<sup>19</sup> found that 2 in 5 were at high risk of burnout, with 62% reporting feeling emotionally and physically drained. Of those with high risk of burnout, 42% considered quitting their job in the next six months. Additionally, Gartner predicts nearly half of cyber security leaders will change jobs by 2025 due to issues relating to workplace stress<sup>20</sup>

Without intervention, these issues are only likely to get worse. Various studies have indicated that Millennials and Gen Z are more likely to report feeling stressed and burned out in work<sup>21 22</sup> than Gen X and Baby Boomers, meaning the long-term talent pipeline may be less emotionally equipped to handle the pressure that is likely to come with a rapidly increasing pace of digitalisation.

The most successful Technology Officers of the future will need the courage to challenge the status quo, try to do things differently and provide the constructive challenge to senior leadership to innovate and remain competitive; all of which requires strong inner grit. It is therefore critical that the next generation invest in growing these capabilities urgently, and ideally before they take the step up to the top position. These qualities can, in part, be built up like a muscle over time given sufficient effort and exposure to other pressurised situations. However, as issues which affect self-confidence, courage and inner resilience can be deep-rooted and difficult to resolve, more intensive leadership interventions might also be necessary, for example coaching, working with an external mentor, or group-workshops which focus on growing resilience.

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.cio.com/article/657960/burnout-an-it-epidemic-in-the-making.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://f.hubspotusercontent30.net/hubfs/7677235/The%20State%20of%20Burnout%20in%20Tech%20-%202022%20Edition.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/en/newsroom/press-releases/2023-02-22-gartner-predicts-nearly-half-of-cybersecurity-leaders-will-change-jobs-by-2025>

<sup>21</sup> <https://futureforum.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Future-Forum-Pulse-Report-Winter-2022-2023.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.cigna.com.hk/iwov-resources/docs/Cigna-360-Global-Well-being-Survey.PDF>

## 4. Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light into the capabilities of the current and future leaders of the IT function. Contrary to the stereotype of a deeply technical back-office expert, our study showed that these Technology leaders display a promising strategic mindset, and a willingness to take on the role as a decisive and inspiring leader of teams. However, as the Technology Officer needs to carefully balance a strategic focus with a more operational approach, there appears to be a more concerning gap in the talent pool's focus on systematic building of organisational capabilities to deliver enhanced value and drive long-term, sustainable success, including through collaborating with other business functions, integration into other business processes, and in particular, a vigilant focus on governance. Finally, there is a worrying theme which suggests the next generation of Technology Officer may lack the drive, energy, and resilience of the current incumbents.

As discussed throughout this whitepaper, it is imperative that organisations address these critical gaps to fully equip the future Technology Officer for the future challenges they are facing. In Odgers Berndtson, we offer a range of solutions which can support you in better understanding, and developing, your Technology Leaders, including:

- Team profiling, providing a high-level overview of the team's collective strengths, gaps, and likely dynamics, leveraging the LeaderFit Profile data
- In-depth Leadership Assessments to determine stretch potential, readiness and development priorities
- Succession Planning
- Individual and/or Team Coaching Programmes
- Team Development Programmes focused on specific critical outcomes (including enhancing collaboration, building resilience)

If you are interested in learning more about our services please contact [Caroline.Sands@odgersberndtson.com](mailto:Caroline.Sands@odgersberndtson.com) or [Katie.Boucher@odgersberndtson.com](mailto:Katie.Boucher@odgersberndtson.com).



# About the Authors



**Katie Boucher**  
*Consultant*  
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Katie has been working as a leadership consultant since 2017, supporting global organisations with their leadership and broader talent. She has worked across industries including Technology, Financial/Professional Services, Non-Profit, Energy, and Retail, assessing and developing their leaders, teams, and boards and advising on succession, talent management, corporate governance, and culture transformation.

Prior to joining Odgers Berndtson, Katie was a Leadership Advisory Expert in Egon Zehnder. Katie has a BA in Psychology from Trinity College, Dublin, and an MSc from Kings College, London.



**Caroline Sands**  
*Partner*  
Head of CIO &  
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Caroline Sands is a Partner and Head of the CIO & Technology Officers Practice. She began her career in executive search in 2000 and has since developed a niche in the appointment of senior Tec leaders, with a particular focus on cyber security, data and digital transformation. Prior to joining Odgers Berndtson, Caroline operated in search within the IT services and management consultancy arena where she recruited Senior Managers through to Partner level.

On graduation Caroline joined a specialist technology search firm as a Researcher and was engaged in high-level appointments for the application software industry.



**Liz Stewart**  
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Elizabeth (Liz) has over 30 years' experience as a business consultant, working for global professional services firms. For the last 15 years she has focused on advising on Boards, CEOs, the C-Suite and their pipeline of successors.

She has worked with organisations across a breadth of private and public sectors on strategic, business, talent management and leadership issues, including Strategic Leadership Capability and Risks, CEO & C-Suite Benchmarking & Succession Strategies, Board Reviews and Top Team Performance, and Realising Leadership Potential through Development.

Prior to becoming Odgers Berndtson's UK Head of Executive Assessment & Development, she was a Board, CEO and C-Suite Consulting Partner, with Heidrick & Struggles Board Practice, Managing Principal, Leadership & Talent Consulting with Korn Ferry International, and Associate Director, People Services in KPMG. She is a Chartered Accountant by profession with a BSc in Mathematics, TUA/TUP qualified and accredited in Executive Coaching



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