



HOW TECH LEADERS OF TOP-PERFORMING COMPANIES SPEND THEIR TIME

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The role of technology leaders is changing fast. As large established companies become increasingly digital, offering connected products and services and leading or participating in ecosystems, their tech leaders must balance many demands and opportunities for their time. And as digital technologies have become pervasive in enterprises, these demands and opportunities often fall outside the traditional CIO role.

Since 2007, MIT CISR has been researching how tech leaders spend their time and analyzing how those in top-performing companies differ from the rest. In this briefing we share how time allocations for tech leaders have changed over fifteen years and look at the time allocations of tech leaders in companies that lead their peers on success metrics. To illustrate the findings and lessons learned, Gail Evans, a technology leader at Disney Experiences, describes how she allocates her time.

HOW TECH LEADERS ALLOCATE THEIR TIME

We asked tech leaders how they spend their time in 2007, 2016 and 2022.¹ In 2007 and 2016, the majority of tech leaders had the title of chief information officer (CIO). But in 2022 an increasing number of tech leaders held variations on that title, so we opened up the research to include the roles of chief technology officer (CTO) and chief digital officer (CDO) in addition to CIO. In this research we identified four roles for tech leaders that compete for attention (see figure 1): (1) running their own tech function, (2) collaborating with business colleagues, (3) managing a complementary enterprise business capability, and (4) working with external customers or channel partners.

In the following descriptions, the percentage associated with each role represents tech leaders' average time allocation at the end of 2022.²

Running Their Own Tech Function: 41 Percent

The foundation and main source of credibility and trust for any tech leader is effectively and professionally running their own tech function. This role includes leading the tech function; overseeing budgets, security, and compliance; and performing a myriad of other tasks. The amount of time tech leaders spend managing their tech function is influenced by many factors, such as the health of the tech unit when they took over, the business strategy and digital ambitions of the company, and the maturity of company assets and platforms. Over the fifteen years we've studied tech leader time, we have seen a small reduction in the percentage of time the average tech leader spends in this role.

Collaborating with Business Colleagues: 23 Percent

This role is focused on the tech leader's activities as a senior officer of the company. The tech leader works with colleagues outside of their primary responsibility on areas such as strategy, competencies, innovation, and mergers. In addition, a key part of this role is increasing the digital savviness of the tech leaders' business colleagues and explaining the art of the possible in a digital and AI-enabled world.³ Over time we have seen a significant reduction in the amount of time tech leaders spend on this role—in 2007 it was 36 percent of their time—most likely because the digital savviness of their non-tech-oriented peers has steadily increased.

¹ We published results of the 2007 research in P. Weill and S. L. Woerner, "How CIOs Allocate Their Time," MIT CISR Research Briefing, Vol VIII, No. 1A, March 2008, https://c isr.mit.edu/publication/2008_03_1a-ciotti-mealloa-weillwoerner. We published results of the 2016 research in S. L. Woerner and P. Weill, "Are You the CIO Your Enterprise Needs?," MIT CISR Research Briefing, Vol. XVII, No. 1, January 2017, https://c isr.mit.edu/publication/2017_0101_CIO-Time_WoernerWeill.

² 2022 MIT CISR Executive Time Survey (N=434). Findings presented here are from a CIO/CDO/CTO subset of the data from the full survey (N=95).

³ See Peter Weill, Stephanie L. Woerner, and Aman M. Shah, "Does Your C-Suite Have Enough Digital Smarts?," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, March 3, 2021, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/does-your-c-suite-have-enough-digital-smarts/>; and Peter Weill, Thomas Apel, Stephanie L. Woerner, and Jennifer S. Banner, "It Pays to Have a Digitally Savvy Board," *MIT Sloan Management Review*, March 12, 2019, <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/it-pays-to-have-a-digitally-savvy-board/>.

Managing a Complementary Enterprise Business Capability: 19 Percent

An increasingly important role of a tech leader is to also run an enterprise business capability that complements the primary responsibility. These capabilities help capture value from the technology by enhancing the organization's operations, culture, and customer offers. Examples of complementary capabilities include risk management; data services; shared services; digital innovation; and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) management. Over time we have seen a dramatic increase in the percentage of time tech leaders spend in this role, with it nearly doubling since 2007.

Working with External Customers or Channel Partners: 17 Percent

As companies have become more digitally connected to their customers and channel partners, the amount of time tech leaders spend in this role is increasing. The tech leader works with external customers or partners to sell, connect, and provide services, making the company more successful by strengthening the relationship with the customer. The time spent in this role is also critical for enabling the company's innovation as it informs an understanding of customers' needs, now and in the future. Over time we have seen a 70 percent increase in the time the average tech leader spends in this role.

Tech Leader Time Allocation Key Takeaways

In future briefings we will share a deeper analysis of these findings, but here are the key takeaways⁴:

- **Technology leaders in the top quartile of innovation spend more time with customers.** They spent 20 percent of their time working with external customers and channel partners, versus 12 percent for tech leaders from bottom quartile companies. Innovation was measured as the percentage of revenues coming from new offerings introduced in the last three years.
- **Technology leaders in the top quartile of profitable growth spend more time on a complementary enterprise capability.** They spent 22 percent of their time managing a complementary enterprise business capability, versus 14

percent for tech leaders from bottom quartile companies. Profitable growth was measured by combining self-reported growth and profitability compared to competitors.

THE TIME ALLOCATION OF DISNEY'S GAIL EVANS

Gail Evans is Executive Vice President, Chief Digital and Technology Officer for Disney Experiences, one of the three business segments at The Walt Disney Company. Disney Experiences brings the magic of Disney's powerful brands and franchises into the daily lives of families and fans around the world. The segment includes six resorts, twelve theme parks, fifty-five resort hotels, a top-rated cruise line with eight ships by 2025, a popular vacation ownership program, new Disney-branded home communities, guided adventure businesses, and immersive professional development and event exploration offerings.

In her role, Evans oversees the development and implementation of digital and technology strategies across all of the segment's businesses around the world. She leads a global multi-disciplinary team of digital, technology, product, data, and operations professionals that brings digital and physical together to extend Disney's boundless storytelling at the center of the segment's growth strategy and guest experience.

Disney Experiences is guided by innovation, creativity, commitment to the customer experience, and employee engagement. Evans reflects, "My days are never boring; they are always full of opportunity. We say on my team, 'At Experiences, we power the magic.'"

Running Her Own Tech Function: 20 Percent

Evans describes running the tech function as table stakes. She reflects, "The tech function is something I'm very passionate about. There are so many opportunities to pursue, like establishing agility models, green light and portfolio reviews, and core tech services." The tech function needs to run at maximum efficiency for Evans to invest time in other activities, so she built a great team to look after the day-to-day operations.

Collaborating with Business Colleagues: 30 Percent

To gain the trust of business presidents in that Evans is a business leader who thinks about their businesses and doesn't push technology for technology's sake, her collaborations with them focus on how technology can drive business growth. The role includes co-creating with them, listening and finding ways to help achieve their goals, and keeping them informed about future opportunities to leverage tech-

4 2022 MIT CISR Executive Time Survey, N=434. Takeaways based on CIO/CDO/CTO subset (N=95) of full survey data. Tech leaders in companies in the top quartile of innovation spent significantly ($p < .05$ level) less time running their tech function, more time collaborating with colleagues, and more time working with customers. There was no significant difference in the time spent managing a complementary enterprise capability. Tech leaders in companies in the top quartile of profitable growth spent significantly ($p < .06$ level) more time managing a complementary enterprise capability. There was no significant difference in the time spent running their tech function, collaborating with colleagues, or working with customers.

nology that they might not have seen. New products, services, and business models come out of those conversations.

Managing Business Capabilities: 35 Percent

The goal of this role is creating a total guest experience that is simple, engaging, and integrated across the ecosystem. This previously led to the groundbreaking design of Magic-Band+, an RFID bracelet that enhanced the Disney guest experience by providing an easy way for guests to access many of Disney's services digitally such as in-park purchases, opening one's hotel room door, and even new forms of storytelling and entertainment. Evans is bringing the next phase of enhancing the digital ecosystem by implementing open innovation so that it's not just the innovation team that innovates, it's everyone's job. To implement this open innovation concept, Evans's team developed an "innovation as a service" program that consists of a set of innovative modules. These includes hackathons and ideathons, blue-sky design thinking, and a test-and-learn lab where her team can create clickable prototypes to test value propositions on various innovations. Evans explains, "[Innovation as a service] is a mindset, it's a capability, it's been super popular, and continues to deliver great results."

Working with External Customers and Channel Partners: 15 Percent

Walt Disney once said, "In this volatile business of ours, we can ill afford to rest on our laurels, even to pause in retro-

spect. Times and conditions change so rapidly that we must keep our aim constantly focused on the future."

In that tradition, Evans is a firm believer that a company must never rest on its laurels, and she continues to nurture existing external relationships as they improve productivity, provide opportunities for learning, and create new business models. In her first month, she met with Disney's top external partners to ask, "What value do you think you have that we're not taking advantage of? How can we co-create customer value together? How do we innovate together?"

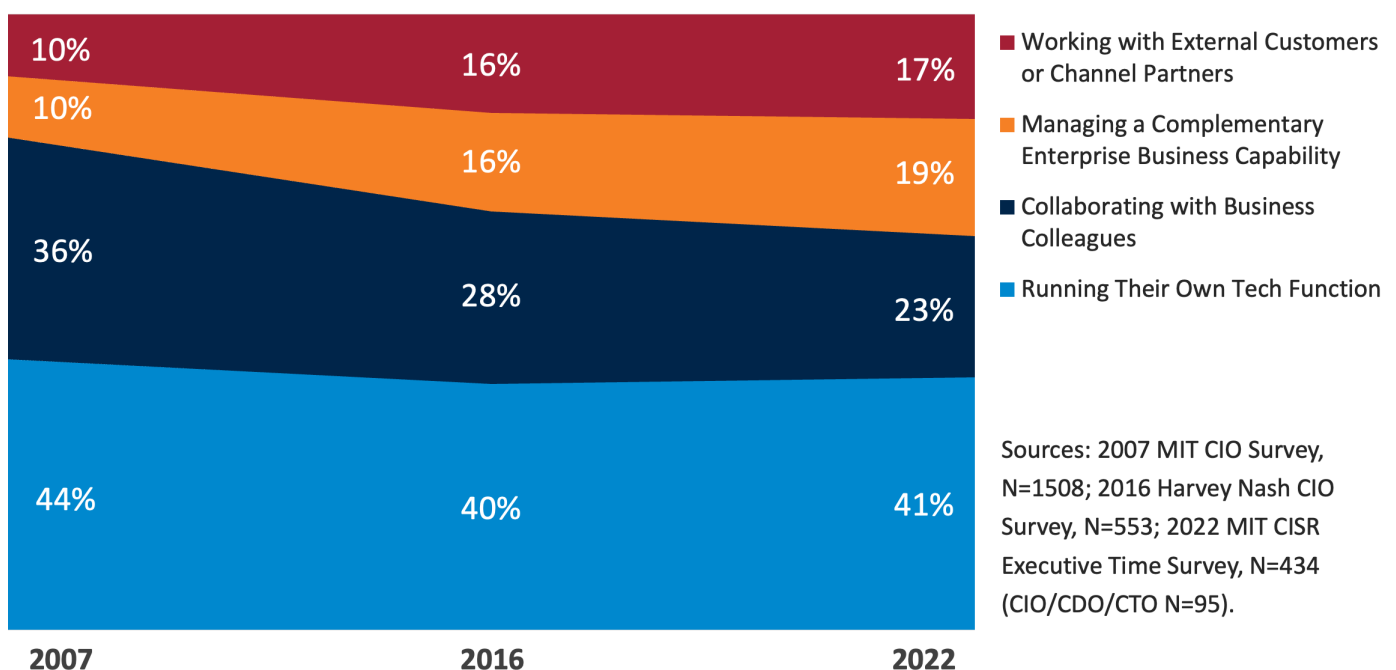
THE OPPORTUNITIES IN TIME ALLOCATION

As a tech leader reading this briefing, this is a great opportunity to reflect on how you spend your time today and how that should change over the next twelve months. An effective technique is to color-code your diary according to the four roles and then analyze the allocations.

We did this with the CIO of a large technology company. After color-coding his diary, the tech leader met with his team to discuss whether that was the right pattern of allocations and what should change. He set new time allocation goals, and working with his team, he proactively managed his diary to achieve those goals. Every three months he and his team fine-tuned the process, which led to major changes, including spending more time with external customers.

How should you spend your time—perhaps your most precious resource?

Figure 1: Changes in Tech Leader Time Allocation, 2007–2016–2022



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MIT CISR helps executives meet the challenge of leading increasingly digital and data-driven organizations. We provide insights on how organizations effectively realize value from approaches such as digital business transformation, data monetization, business ecosystems, and the digital workplace. Founded in 1974 and grounded in MIT's tradition of combining academic knowledge and practical purpose, we work directly with digital leaders, executives, and boards to develop our insights. Our consortium forms a global community that comprises more than seventy five organizations.

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