



The Chief Intelligence Officer: A 2026 Leadership Blueprint for CIOs in the AI Era

Turning unmanaged and emerging AI into enterprise intelligence.



Mission of the Role

A new era demands a new set of skills.

In the AI Era, the CIO's mission is evolving to meet the moment. As enterprises shift from IT-systems of record to AI-systems of intelligence, CIOs must shift from governing systems to **governing intelligence**. Intelligence, in this case, is defined as the sum of human expertise and AI-augmented or AI-led work.

That means turning the “sea of unmanaged AI activity” into an intelligence asset that enables your enterprise to navigate towards AI-first organization.

Achieving that goal in 2026, means that CIOs must assume a new persona, **Chief Intelligence Officer**. They must understand their role as the executive responsible for ensuring that intelligence — not just information — drives action. Lanai's conversations with more than 250 CIOs across industries during the past 18 months confirm something most already suspected. It's no longer an option to remain focused on technology delivery alone. If you do, you're at risk of being irrelevant.

At Lanai, we define intelligence governance in three dimensions:



Visibility

Where AI is being used,
when, where and by whom.



Trustworthiness

The work is accurate,
auditable and aligned to
business purpose.



Responsiveness

The organization adapts
and acts on those insights.

Responsibilities of the Role

There are five core responsibilities that emerging global research confirms are central to the 2026 CIO charter:

01. Intelligence Stewardship & Risk Oversight

The CIO must be accountable for **designing the systems and policies** that govern how data, models and outputs are used. This includes establishing frameworks for oversight of models, prompts, outputs. This ensures that decisions made with or by AI can be traced and trusted.¹

02. Strategic Innovation Leader

Beyond running technology, the CIO must convert AI and data potential into **business capability**. That means turning insights into revenue-oriented products, improved customer experience, or market differentiation. Recent research shows that CIOs with a clear strategic innovation mandate drive higher outcomes.²

03. Workforce Transformation Architect

Intelligence is a human + machine equation. The CIO must **lead the organizational change**, which includes reskilling staff, defining new roles (e.g., “agent coach,” “gen-AI safety lead”), and crafting norms for human-agent collaboration.³

04. Cross-Functional Orchestrator

Intelligence flows across operations, finance, marketing, HR and legal. The CIO must **align these stakeholders** and create an enterprise intelligence ecosystem. A fragmented IT silo won't work. Multi-department coordination is now a primary responsibility.⁴

05. Board & Ethical Engagement Partner

With intelligence at the core of value creation, the CIO must **partner with the board and C-suite** on ethics, transparency, regulatory readiness and disclosure of AI-related risk.⁵



Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

To manage intelligence effectively, the CIO must measure their mandate.

The one KPI to rule them all is value realisation due to AI: **The % of EBIT uplift attributable to intelligence initiatives**. If intelligence doesn't improve profit, the rest of the KPIs don't matter.

The other key KPIs, to ensure a healthy intelligence system include::

DIMENSION	KPI	DEFINITION
Primary		
Value Realisation	The % of EBIT uplift attributable to intelligence initiatives	The share of incremental profit linked to AI-driven products or processes.
Secondary		
Visibility: Intelligence Trust	The % of AI-driven decisions with end-to-end audit trail	Tablestakes to achieve the rest. The proportion of decisions made using AI where prompt, model and output are logged and reviewable.
Trustworthiness: Risk Resilience	Resilience ratio: Intelligence-related incidents / total incidents Number of intelligence-related incidents per year	Includes misuse of data, model failures, trust breakdowns.
Responsiveness: Human Enablement	Human-AI interaction quality: The % of tasks completed through AI-augmented workflows	Measures transformation of roles and capacity.

These KPIs move beyond generic “governance” or “productivity” terms. They define measurable intelligence outcomes.

Decision-Rights Framework

Clarity about decision rights is critical in a landscape where data, models and intelligence-driven decisions cross boundaries. The CIO leading in the AI Era will:



Own Outright

- Enterprise intelligence architecture (data pipeline, AI capabilities)
- Data governance & model lifecycle oversight
- Selection of core intelligence vendors and in-house capabilities
- Workforce development for intelligence roles



Co-Decide With CEO/CFO

- Intelligence investment portfolio and ROI frameworks
- Workforce redeployment, automation strategy and change management
- Definition of risk appetite and intelligence ethics thresholds



Advise The Board On

- Intelligence risk reporting, transparency, and disclosure
- Strategic insights on how intelligence capacity maps to enterprise strategy

Recent surveys highlight that CIOs who shift from purely operational decision-rights to strategic ones are more likely to lead organisations that succeed in the intelligence era.⁶

Attributes of top CIOs for the AI Era

A modern CIO in the AI Era embrace these attributes correlating with success in an intelligence-driven enterprise:

01. Strategic Intelligence Literacy

Go beyond fluency with technology and nurture the ability to map data, models and outcomes to business strategy and balance-sheet impact.

02. Risk & Trust Discipline

Demonstrate capacity to embed auditability, provenance and ethical guardrails into AI-driven programs.

03. Cross-Domain Credibility

The modern CIO will be seen as a peer by Finance, Operations and HR leaders. They'll influence the business with clear outcomes and without IT-centric language.

04. Transformation Agility

Develop a proven track record of leading change, reskilling talent, and re-designing workflows for new ways of working.

05. Outcome Orientation

Focus less on “governance” as compliance and more on intelligence as a measurable asset. Be a center for dashboards, metrics and business impact.





Why Now? The Intelligence Inflection

We live in a moment defined by unprecedented capability and complexity. According to research from Gartner, **“40% of enterprise applications will have task-specific AI agents by the end of 2026, up from less than 5% today.”**⁷ That means a sharp shift from AI as a set of tools to AI as a networked intelligence fabric embedded in workflows.

Meanwhile, a recent survey of **over 900 IT executives found that 80% are now responsible for researching or evaluating AI technologies, and 52% expect their role to be strategic** (rather than operational) over the next 3-5 years.⁸

The consequence? Intelligence isn't optional. It's becoming table stakes.

A modern enterprise will be defined not by the data it stores or the cloud it deploys but instead by the intelligence it harnesses. That places the CIO at the center of transformation, strategy and competitive advantage.



The role of the CIO has entered its most ambitious chapter yet.

The modern CIO is no longer simply the steward of infrastructure, security or applications. The modern CIO is the Chief Intelligence Officer, an architect of the organisation's intelligence system, custodian of trust and value, orchestrator of human-AI collaboration, and strategic partner to the board and C-suite in their pursuit of AI-First Enterprise.

For organizations to win in 2026 and beyond, it isn't enough to adopt AI tools. Businesses must govern intelligence flows, build trust, measure impact and embed intelligence in the way they think and act. If you're a CIO, your charge is clear: convert the chaos of unmanaged AI into a system of continuous insight and strategic advantage.

The Work Ahead

AI has become the fabric of work—yet most CIOs still see only fragments: app lists, budgets, compliance reports. What’s missing is visibility into the workflows themselves.

Your people are building their own AI operating systems across the enterprise—writing prompts, training copilots, automating workflows—faster than governance can keep up. That’s innovation, but it’s unseen and unmeasured.

This is the Chief Intelligence Officer’s moment. The leaders of 2026 and beyond will be those who transform AI activity into measurable intelligence—and that starts with visibility.

Lanai is your observability platform for enterprise AI. We show what your humans, copilots, and agents are actually doing with AI—so you can measure and scale what works. Other platforms track apps; Lanai reveals the workflows, prompts, and outcomes that lead to business value.

Our customers typically discover 3–5× more AI usage than they expected, eliminate 30–40% of wasted spend, and uncover and invest in the hidden workflows that are powering productivity. Within weeks, they answer the board’s toughest question: Is AI working?

Lanai deploys in 48 hours, maps your entire AI landscape in a week, and delivers measurable savings within a month. You can’t govern what you can’t see—or scale what you can’t measure.

See AI. Make it valuable.

Visit withlanai.com to request a demo or receive your personalized AI benchmark report.

Sources

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