# ACORA CIO REPORT 2021

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# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

I'm delighted to present our second annual CIO Report. Building on the success of last year's inaugural survey, we've expanded its scope: more than just a summary of our findings, we've tried to give a broader sense of the technical, commercial and practical landscape in which CIOs are operating today.

The context for this year's survey is, of course, entirely different to 2020, and the Covid-19 pandemic naturally shaped both our survey questions and the results. While it's obviously impossible to isolate CIOs' experience and thinking from the events of the past 12 months, we've attempted to look beyond Covid-19 to the new normal that now seems to be evolving, and the emerging trends and longer-term changes that will affect the CIO role in future.

Just as we believe CSAT and other traditional measures don't give the full picture of users' experiences, we've looked beyond the survey data and included anecdotal evidence from our own clients in the Report. These conversations bear out many of the themes we've identified in our findings, particularly around the delivery challenges facing CIOs in the year ahead.

What's clear is that while the immediate challenges of the pandemic are now largely behind us, CIOs face new, complex decisions around supporting distributed users and hybrid working models. For some organisations, Covid-19 seems to have acted as an accelerant for changes that were already being considered or actively implemented anyway; for others, it's forced a radical reassessment of how users interact with both technology and support services. Either way, IT and IT leaders have been thrust into the foreground as never before. So as well as capturing a unique period in history, this Report could mark the moment when the nature and status of the CIO role within organisations changed profoundly.

**David Rabson**

*Chief Executive Officer*

**Lee Ganly**

*Chief Information Officer*

# OUR SURVEY
# METHODOLOGY

For this year's CIO Report, we've examined five key areas:

**1** **THE IMPACT OF COVID-19, AND IT LEADERS' RESPONSE**

**2** **TRENDS IN REMOTE WORKING AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS**

**3** **IMPROVING THE EMPLOYEE IT EXPERIENCE**

**4** **AUTOMATION AND AI**

**5** **DELIVERING IN TODAY'S IT ENVIRONMENT**

Our overall objective was to reveal the key priorities for today's CIOs, their biggest concerns and in what areas businesses are spending their technology budgets. Our sample comprised of 100 UK-based IT decision makers, over half of which are organisations with up to 1,000 employees. They included a wide range of industries and sectors, with the largest proportions in finance and insurance services (19%).

We conducted the survey between March and June 2021 with our partners at International Data Group (IDG), the world's leading technology media, data and marketing services company, and the owner of the well know publication 'the CIO'.

https://www.idg.com/our-brands/cio/

**100**
**UK BASED COMPANIES**

**100+**
**EMPLOYEES**

**19%**
**FINANCE AND INSURANCE SERVICES**

# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19, AND IT LEADERS' RESPONSE

# 70%

**REPORTED NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFICULTY OR DISRUPTION**

At the start of the pandemic, CIOs found themselves in the unprecedented situation of going, almost literally overnight, from operating as single locations with multiple users to working as multiple locations, each with a single user. With hybrid working now becoming increasingly normalised, it's clear that the old, pre-Covid world has gone, leaving CIOs with new and evolving technical and practical problems to solve.

In our survey, we examined the general state of preparedness among CIOs, how they responded as the pandemic unfolded, and the possible longer-term effects on their teams and operations.

## OUT OF THE BLUE

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, IT departments found themselves on the front line. Working practices changed almost literally overnight, and IT was the key to maintaining business as usual – or as near normal as possible under the circumstances.

In the pandemic's early stages, many organisations had to switch from being 'non-agile' to 'super-agile' at rapid pace and often significant scale. From our conversations with clients, it's clear that the efforts and achievements of those first two to three months were critically important. Organisations have gained a new and lasting appreciation of the value of their IT, and their IT teams.

## STATE OF READINESS

So how well prepared were CIOs and their teams for this unprecedented event? According to our survey, it would seem impressively so. Just over a third (34%) told us they were able to effortlessly expand on existing practices; another 36% said they needed few changes. By their own assessment, then, 70% of CIOs met the pandemic's challenges without significant difficulty or disruption. We should perhaps caveat this slightly: as we discuss elsewhere, 30% of respondents make no effort to measure their users' experience, so there may be an element of confirmation bias; nothing actually collapsed, therefore everything was OK.

But what of the rest? Our findings show 28% needed a rapid, urgent ramp-up of existing functionality. This is borne out by our clients' experiences. Broadly speaking, larger companies were able to adapt more easily, since they already had some degree of WFH already in place; they also tended to have the necessary bandwidth, software and other resources to increase WFH capacity quickly and easily.

It's worth noting that in the 100-249 employee group, 99% also told us that under their current IT model, it was going to be somewhat or very challenging to deliver business objectives in the coming year.

For a small minority – just 2% of our respondents – the pandemic required fast procurement of new, untested solutions. The data doesn't give details, but we suspect this is also connected with WFH: deployment of comms and collaboration platforms, new security measures, and so on.

## THE WFH REVOLUTION

As we discuss in the next section, the biggest pandemic-induced change for IT teams has been the massive increase in remote and hybrid working. Organisations have shifted at pace from operating as single locations with multiple users to working as multiple locations, each with a single user.

Although we estimate it will take another 6-12 months for the long-term picture to emerge, it's beyond doubt that hybrid and remote working are with us for good. It's also clear that for CIOs and their teams, the practical, technical and financial challenges of managing distributed IT and users will now be a permanent feature of the technology landscape.

The efforts and achievements of the first two to three months of the pandemic were critically important. Organisations have gained a new and lasting appreciation of the value of their IT, and their IT teams.

The rise in hybrid working is focusing attention on the user experience. Ensuring a positive UX, by seeing people as individuals rather than just 'users', should be a top priority for post-pandemic IT investment.

## COUNTING THE COST

Our survey states that 49% of IT decision-makers didn't require additional funding for pandemic-related IT requirements. The vast majority of this group (88%) required few or no budgetary changes to cope. This suggests that their technology investments were in the right areas.

As before, though, the more pertinent questions concern the 29% who were forced to divert funding from their existing technology budget; we also learned that 22% required additional funding for pandemic-related spending.

Anecdotally, we generally saw IT projects delayed rather than cancelled outright. This was simply and self-evidently a function of the uncertainty around Covid-19. Organisations didn't know how the situation would develop; subject matter experts were among those on furlough; revenues were falling; and management's attention was directed, quite rightly, to ensuring people's immediate wellbeing and productivity. This view is supported by the fact that projects are now coming back on stream as restrictions ease, people return to work and revenues start to recover.

As we explain in the next section, the rise in hybrid working is focusing attention on the user experience. We suggest that ensuring a positive UX, by seeing people as individuals rather than just 'users', should be a top priority for CIOs in post-pandemic IT investment.

◀◀ Hybrid and remote working are with us for good. For CIOs and IT teams, the practical, technical and financial challenges of managing distributed IT and users will now be a permanent feature of the technology landscape. ◀◀

# 49%

**OF IT DECISION-MAKERS DIDN'T REQUIRE ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR PANDEMIC-RELATED IT REQUIREMENTS**

# TRENDS IN REMOTE WORKING AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

# TRENDS IN REMOTE WORKING AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

While it's still too early to say what the future 'normal' looks like, it's clear that remote and hybrid working are going to be a big part of it for many organisations. Our survey looked at how IT leaders are planning to address the technical, practical and budgetary challenges of supporting a dispersed user base in the longer term.

**PROPORTION OF THOSE WORKING AT HOME AT SOME POINT**

20 19 **27%**

20 20 **37%**

Research by the ONS and the University of Warwick

## A NEW WORLD OF WORK

Our survey results don't tell us exactly what proportion of respondents' staff have been working from home (WFH) during the pandemic, or intend to continue doing so. But we can draw some inferences and make some reasonable assumptions based on other sources.

Research by the ONS and the University of Warwick, released in June 2021, showed that in 2019, 27% of the UK workforce worked from home at some point. This increased to an average of 37% in 2020, as people followed government guidance to stay home where possible. For fairly obvious reasons, WFH was far more prevalent in some

industries and sectors than others. The proportion was highest in Information and Communication (81%) and Professional, Scientific and Technical activities (71%); these are also the sectors best placed to maintain it in the longer term.

## HYBRID VIGOUR

Forced by the pandemic to rethink and redesign their work processes almost overnight, organisations discovered many of their perceived obstacles to WFH were either surmountable or illusory. In research by the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD) 71% of those surveyed said WFH had no detrimental impact on their productivity,

with 33% saying it actually improved, while 38% said it was unchanged.

When combined with the benefits for staff wellbeing and potential cost savings it's perhaps unsurprising that 63% of companies in the CIPD survey plan to introduce or expand what's become known as hybrid working – combining some time in the usual workplace with WFH. This certainly chimes with our own anecdotal evidence from client conversations over the past 12 months.

# 71%

**SAID WFH HAD NO DETRIMENTAL IMPACT ON THEIR PRODUCTIVITY**

# 33%

**SAID WFH HAD IMPROVED THEIR PRODUCTIVITY**

For CIOs, and their service providers, the challenge now is ensuring systems and services deliver an equally robust, reliable and seamless experience whether people are working on-site or remotely.

## SUPPORTING A DISTRIBUTED WORKFORCE

In our survey, respondents told us that over the next 12 months, 8% of their IT budget will be allocated specifically to remote working capabilities. This appears to be 'new' spending, since it didn't appear at all in last year's survey. This suggests that organisations are prepared to invest in meeting the new challenges of providing IT services to a distributed workforce. This is reflected in other investment priorities highlighted by the survey, with 12% putting extra funds into private or public cloud (PaaS / SaaS / IaaS) and 16% increasing their spending on security services.

## GOOD ENOUGH?

On the practical IT front, we know that some companies extended their existing Citrix or RDS deployment to enable remote working during the pandemic. Driven by the need to find quick, pragmatic solutions in a rapidly-evolving situation, IT leaders had little choice but to make the best of what they had. With hybrid working becoming normalised, temporary fixes now need permanent solutions.

For CIOs, and their service providers, the next challenge is ensuring systems and services deliver an equally robust, reliable and seamless experience whether people are working on-site or remotely. In the CIPD study, 41% of companies surveyed are planning to invest in the quality of their technology, with 35% looking to expand their overall IT estate to support WFH long-term.

## SECURITY QUESTIONS

Our own CIO survey showed that funding earmarked for security services, such as threat protection and prevention and incident response, is up from 9% to 16% year-on-year. It seems reasonable to assume that this is also driven by the increase in remote and hybrid working – and is certainly welcome in view of the security challenges this model presents. We know some organisations temporarily relaxed or suspended their normal security provisions to maintain productivity during the pandemic. But while flexible working changed how data and device security were enforced, the underlying policies themselves often remained unaltered.

## BRIDGING THE GAP

That discrepancy needs addressing as organisations gain a clearer picture of what the 'new normal' is, or will look like. Will people working remotely be formally permitted to access files and systems using their own, non-corporate devices? Is BYOD something you're happy to see continue in future? For ISO or Cyber Essentials Plus accredited organisations, in particular, policies need to be updated or reintroduced in full before as audits recommence.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

Protecting data and systems, and articulating their importance at the top table, is central to the CIO role. If these issues haven't already been discussed and decided at senior level, CIOs need to assume leadership and ask the business what it wants in terms of
> How people access and interact with IT services.
> Management and distribution of end user assets.
> Your identity and authentication services.

# IMPROVING
## THE EMPLOYEE IT EXPERIENCE

Our survey covered a period in which people's experience of using and interacting with IT changed more suddenly and profoundly than it has for many years. This has thrown a new and revealing light on the critical connections between the user experience, productivity and wellbeing, and the relationship between users and IT support.

Given our emphasis on user satisfaction as a central metric for our own services, we wanted to know how (or even if) IT leaders were measuring their users' experience – and what, if any, steps they were taking to maximise and enhance it.

## ASKING THE AUDIENCE

The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way in which many users interact with IT. People using their own devices at home to access their 'work' data and services has shone new light on the importance of the user experience (UX) and its relationship to productivity and general wellbeing.

In our survey sample, 45% of respondents told us they run annual surveys to measure employee satisfaction with technology. Almost a quarter (23%) said they use an industry methodology, such as CSAT or Net Promoter Score (NPS), with 32% relying on an IT service management tool.

We don't know how many respondents are using more than one method to measure their UX, although clearly some are. More revealing, and concerning, is our finding that 30% make no effort to measure the employee experience at all. The raw data suggests that 77% of these respondents employ fewer than 1,000 people, and maybe don't see it as a priority. But are they right?

## HOME ADVANTAGE

In our view, measuring the employee experience has become much more significant with the expansion of remote and hybrid working. It's also become more difficult for CIOs and CEOs to gather the ad hoc,

informal feedback from spontaneous encounters and 'watercooler moments' that can often be as, or more revealing than CSAT and other scheduled processes. We see clear and fairly obvious links between the UX and individual and team productivity; and users are becoming much more aware of how IT issues affect them.

Through the pandemic, people have grown accustomed to technologies that were previously new and unfamiliar. Now they've discovered it's so easy to talk and collaborate with colleagues using easily downloadable apps like Zoom and Teams on their phone, tablet and other home devices, they're starting to ask: why is it so hard to do this at work?

Measuring the employee experience has become much more important, with clear and obvious links between the UX and individual and team productivity. Users are becoming much more aware of how IT issues affect them and their own wellbeing.

At the same time, this shift has created its own issues and considerations for IT leaders. Teams/Zoom fatigue is becoming commonplace, and people are having to adapt to new practices around meeting etiquette – sessions of 50 rather than 60 minutes, and allowing for 'virtual travel time' between meeting rooms.

## A CRUCIAL LINK

The UX can also have a huge impact on an organisation's wider wellbeing agenda. People may be having problems but choosing just to reboot rather than bother the helpdesk. They might not be using, or finding ways round expensive new applications, preferring 'the old system' they'd got used to. Some may

not even realise there's a problem and assume 'that's just how it is' – or, worse, conclude 'it must be me'. Over time, these seemingly minor technical niggles can become major sources of stress, frustration, annoyance and despondency. But unless we measure these experiences, they remain hidden and pernicious, driving down morale, productivity and, ultimately business performance.

Imagine if, as CIO, you could present the HR director with evidence that X% of the workforce were having a bad IT experience. If HR could then correlate this with their own data and feedback on wellbeing issues, you have a powerful business case for change.

# 45%

**OF RESPONDENTS TOLD US THEY RUN ANNUAL SURVEYS TO MEASURE EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION WITH TECHNOLOGY**

# 23%

**SAID THEY USE AN INDUSTRY METHODOLOGY, SUCH AS CSAT OR NET PROMOTER SCORE (NPS)**

# 32%

**RELYING ON AN IT SERVICE MANAGEMENT TOOL**

## OPENING THE CONVERSATION

Given the potential positives, why are many organisations seemingly so reluctant to canvass their users' opinions? As we've already mentioned, we suspect it's simply not on some companies' radar; this in turn may be simply be because they're not sure how to go about it.

Our survey results suggest that the majority of respondents still see legacy or traditional means, such as CSAT or an annual survey, as an appropriate measure for experience. CSAT is entirely reactive and tech-focused: users are simply asked to rate the service after a specific problem has been fixed. And for most users,

an annual survey is just a boring set of questions from the IT department. Too few questions and it won't tell you anything useful; too many and people won't bother to answer at all. Either way, you risk ending up with poor response rates and patchy results.

These methods are fairly crude, but they're also familiar, straightforward and uncontroversial. And here, perhaps, lies the deeper issue. It may be that organisations actually don't want to measure experience: it's more difficult to do; and, to be honest, they may be anxious about what the results will show. Uncovering a problem may mean reprioritising an already stacked roster of projects. If no one's actually telling us

there's anything wrong, logic says, we can safely assume everything's OK.

## A NEW CHALLENGE

At Acora, we're challenging that status quo. In developing managed services solutions for our clients, we're deliberately moving away from legacy tools like CSAT and on-line surveys in favour of specially designed, insight-based communications. These capture user sentiment 'in the moment', vastly improving feedback and response rates.

All the evidence suggests that a good UX leads to a better customer experience, which in turn boosts business performance. It's a simple, powerful equation; but it

seems many organisations are missing crucial data they need to balance and resolve it.
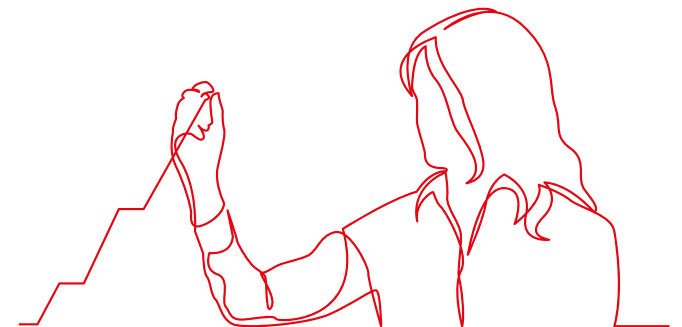
# AUTOMATION
# AND AI

# 32%

ARE ACTIVELY
INVESTING
IN AI AND
AUTOMATION

It seems everyone's talking about automation and artificial intelligence – including organisations in sectors that, until recently, seemed unlikely candidates for these technologies. That interest increased markedly during the pandemic, as business leaders suddenly grasped machines' potential to keep things going in the absence of human beings.

We decided to investigate the role our survey sample see for AI and automation in their operations, and learn where they are, or would like to be, on their automation journey.

## RISE OF THE MACHINES

Automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are central to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, also referred to as Industry 4.0, which is transforming traditional manufacturing and industrial practices. Smart technology such as large-scale machine-to-machine communication (M2M) and the internet of things (IoT) increasingly allow machines to self-analyse and diagnose issues without human intervention.

Our survey sample included only a handful of what many would regard as these 'typical' users, with 6% in manufacturing, 2% in automotive and just 1% in aerospace. Across the board, only 5% of respondents are already using automation and AI, confirming the unfortunate truth that UK plc still lags well behind comparable industrialised nations. Yet 50% of our sample told us they're currently exploring the benefits of automation and AI, with another 32% actively investing in it. So what are they doing, or looking to do, in their business contexts?

## AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE

During the pandemic, the overriding objective for organisations and IT leaders was simply avoiding disaster and keeping things running as close to normally as possible.

Although staff shortages caused by illness, furlough and isolation are now easing, many IT teams have been formally downsized, as our survey data seems to bear out. Last year, 50% of respondents had more than 30 people in their team; that's down to 47% now. More significantly, the number with a team of nine or fewer has almost doubled, from 16% last year to 30% in 2021 – and they now make up the second-largest group in our survey population.

Looking more broadly, the pandemic forced a basic but profound change in conventional working

practices. Not having people on the premises has seen many organisations replace manual processes with automated alternatives. Put simply, they've seen the value of having systems that can look after themselves, without requiring human presence, oversight or intervention.

We suspect that what started as 'digitalisation by default' is now becoming 'digitalisation by design'. With their workforces increasingly dispersed, businesses are increasingly investigating the potential of automating routine tasks, such as document scanning – as borne out by our survey data. We expect to see this trend accelerate, particularly in the automation of lower-level admin processes.

## AHEAD IN THE CLOUD

Moves towards automation may also help explain why 12% of respondents in our survey said they'll be investing in private or public cloud (PaaS / SaaS / IaaS) over the next 12 months.

The cloud has already revolutionised machine learning and AI by giving businesses the hyperscale data processing capability required for the 'teaching' phase. Now, Microsoft Azure effectively offers 'machine learning as a service'. Instead of building their own complex learning engines in-house, users can simply rent Azure's on demand.

For organisations working with legacy systems, we see this as another important factor driving them towards a decision-point on cloud migration. Quite apart from all the other benefits around data management, applications and IT infrastructure, becoming cloud-based unlocks this massive new potential for machine learning and AI.

In the light of these two complementary impulses – the increase in automation sparked by the pandemic, and the new opportunities presented by the cloud – our survey findings suddenly seem perfectly logical and consistent. AI and automation are clearly live issues and growing priorities across business sectors that, until fairly recently, would have seemed unlikely settings for these technologies.

From industry, automation spread quite naturally to B2C applications such as fraud prevention. Like quality control in manufacturing, it depends on the system knowing what 'normal' is and being able to reliably spot the 'abnormal' in vast quantities of data. In our view, the real growth area now is in 'pure' B2B environments, such as legal services.

In IT, the ability of systems to recognise anomalies means they're becoming more proactive. For example, rather than simply raising an alarm when available storage space is 90% full, systems can pick up anomalous activity that's causing it to be filled up faster than usual, triggering remedial action long before the critical limit is reached.

# 50%

**HALF OF RESPONDENTS TELL US THEY'RE ACTIVELY EXPLORING AUTOMATION AND AI. IS THIS PURELY IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC, OR ARE WE SEEING A LONG-TERM TREND EMERGING? WE'RE WATCHING CLOSELY.**

# DELIVERING IT
## IN TODAY'S
## ENVIRONMENT

# 5 DELIVERING IT IN TODAY'S ENVIRONMENT

After months of pandemic-related firefighting, CIOs' attention is gradually turning to the larger question: what happens next? We asked our survey participants how Covid-19 had changed their IT delivery, and how they viewed the 12 months ahead in terms of resources, investment, service provision and specific challenges for their organisation.

## OVER THE WORST?

As we've discussed elsewhere, CIOs and their teams have faced extraordinary challenges over the past year – and in most cases, risen to them magnificently. But what of the year ahead? There's a general feeling that post-pandemic, how and where people work will be fundamentally, and probably permanently different. So are IT leaders approaching this brave new world with confidence, or trepidation?

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

Given the continuing uncertainty surrounding the pandemic's trajectory,

it's perhaps unsurprising that over half (57%) of our respondents feel it will be somewhat challenging to deliver on business objectives over the next 12 months with their current IT model. Add to them the 23% who believe it will be very challenging, and seven out of 10 of CIOs we surveyed foresee a tough year in prospect. From our survey, it's clear the biggest challenges for technology implementation are likely to be the usual suspects: too little funding, too few staff and a shortage of the right skills within the team.

## CHEQUES AND BALANCES

Where IT budgets are concerned, there is some good news. Last year's

survey showed 53% of CIOs expected their budget to increase over the next 12 months. That's remained broadly unchanged in 2021 at 50%; welcome stability for IT leaders, and further evidence that companies have really recognised IT's true value and importance during the pandemic.

The other side of the equation is more interesting, though. Our survey shows 25% of ITDMs expect no change in their IT budget over the next 12 months. In 2020, that figure was 40%. More significantly, 25% expect their budget to shrink, compared to just 7% in 2020. Those reductions are potentially significant: 7% are looking at a fall of 0-10%, with 18% predicting a drop of more than 10%.

Around 50% of our respondents told us they had an annual budget of under £2m. This was broadly unchanged since last year, but the number working with smaller budgets has increased, especially at the lower end of the scale. This year, 14% of respondents had a budget of less than £100K – up from just 4% last year.

Overall, then, 50% of our respondents are expecting to have the same or less money in 2021 than they did last year. Plus, 25% of IT decision-makers feel lack of resource holds back their IT capabilities, with 14% specifically citing a lack of adequate budget or investment.

## HUMAN RESOURCES

As well as smaller budgets, many IT leaders are now working with depleted teams, too. Last year, 50% of respondents had more than 30 in their team; that's down to 47% now. But the number with a team of nine or fewer has almost doubled, from 16% last year to 30% in 2021 – and these companies now make up the second-largest group in our survey population. Furlough, redundancies and people changing jobs and direction all play a part; what's clear is that recruiting and retaining high-calibre staff is not getting any easier.

# 57%

**RESPONDENTS FEEL IT WILL BE SOMEWHAT CHALLENGING TO DELIVER ON BUSINESS OBJECTIVES OVER THE NEXT 12 MONTHS WITH THEIR CURRENT IT MODEL**
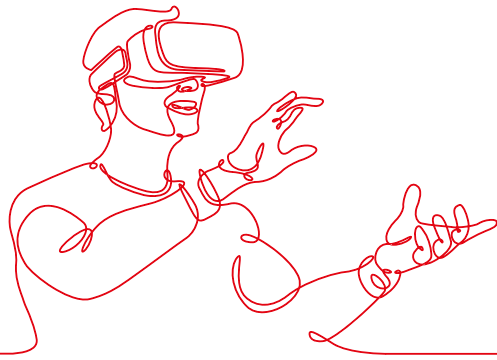
## BLOCKS TO PROGRESS

It's notable that only 4% of respondents specifically cited 'business uncertainty' as a factor holding them back. This is surprisingly low given the circumstances, but equally, it's a simple fact of life that exists regardless of a global pandemic.

Perhaps more revealing is that over three times as many (14%) feel hamstrung by competing company demands; anecdotally, this is the lack of a single overarching strategy for IT. This in turn leads to the oft-quoted 'CIO Dilemma' phenomenon: IT leaders charged with simultaneously ensuing zero IT problems day-to-day, while delivering the transformational change the business's digital ambitions demand – all with the same resources. This underlines the need for CIOs to articulate the importance of IT effectively at the top table.

Other factors respondents believe are holding them back include legacy IT infrastructure (14%), staff focused heavily on operational BAU duties (also 14%) too much time spent resolving end user issues and problems (6%) and lack of skills within their team (also 6%).

Taken together, this may help to explain why 50% of respondents say managed services are important to them; a recognition of the need for external expertise, and the benefits of cloud-based services and eliminating on-site infrastructure.

We've seen this shift even in sectors that have historically resisted outsourcing. In legal services, for example, many CIOs struggled to make their case for remote support services: it was simply too great a cultural change for their lawyer colleagues, who felt they needed their entourage to be physically present at all times to provide an instant, personal response. However, since the start of the pandemic, five of the UK Top 50 law firms have engaged Acora to manage some or all of their IT support, prioritising performance transparency and visibility for their now largely remote teams.

## INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Much new investment is focused on addressing the challenges of providing services to a distributed workforce. Through our own conversations with clients, we know security is a top priority for many organisations. Security perimeters that were adapted or relaxed to maintain BAU at the height of the pandemic are now being reviewed as remote and hybrid working become embedded.

As we saw in the previous section, business intelligence/analytics, business process management and customer experience technologies are all becoming increasingly important, as companies seek greater resilience and automation. We'll continue to monitor these trends and adoption rates with interest.

**"ORGANISATIONS ARE FACING MAJOR NEW TECHNICAL AND PRACTICAL CHALLENGES. CIOS NEED TO ARTICULATE THE IMPORTANCE OF IT EFFECTIVELY AT THE TOP TABLE."**
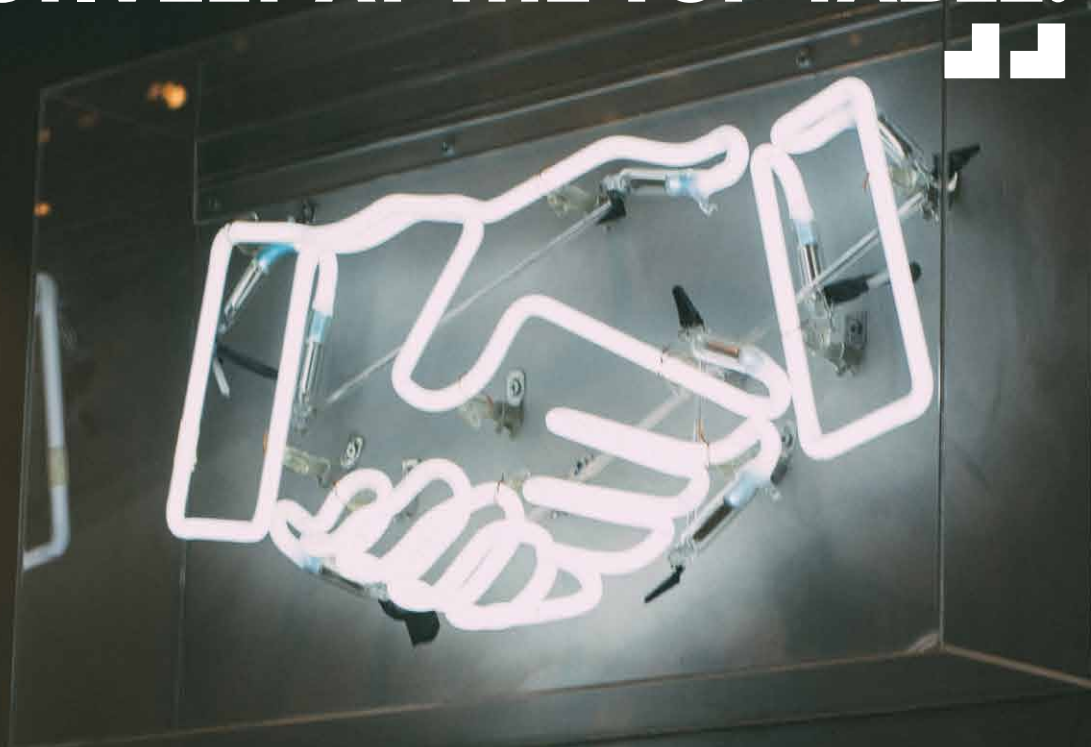
# CONCLUSION

## SO, WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED – AND WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

For the second year running, our survey has given us a unique and invaluable snapshot of how CIOs are thinking about and managing a wide range of issues and challenges. Self-evidently, this year's findings have to be seen in context: our respondents were embroiled in a situation none of us could have foreseen, and which demanded extraordinary and unprecedented actions.

However, there are clear trends and indicators – and for us, one truth really stands out as we emerge from the pandemic.

As we enter this new phase, the organisations that will emerge as dominant within their sectors will be those that place a high value on user experience. The past year has shown that how people interact with, feel about and respond to IT has a massive effect on their productivity and wellbeing, as well as the organisation's overall business performance.

In our view, the UX becomes even more significant during hybrid working as people choose to work from home, the office and other locations. It has never been more important for organisations to have a clearly defined position on UX, and provide a reliable, seamless service to their users.

As a thought-leader in the managed services space, we'd identified and anticipated this development, even before it was accelerated and escalated by the pandemic. Our pioneering, "experienced focused" end-user support service seeks to change the approach to delivering end user support services from reactive (inbound) to proactive (outbound) using real time insight data and advanced problem management techniques.

Rather than be limited to measuring success through traditional methods such as Service Level Agreements (SLAs) we're now able to measure success through the perception of the individual consuming the service (e.g. Experience Level Agreements XLAs.)

As of now, we still don't know what 'normal' looks like. What seems certain is that the pre-Covid world has gone forever. How much our role as CIOs has changed, and how permanent those changes turn out to be, will become clearer in the months ahead. And though the circumstances will (we hope!) be very different, next year's survey promises to be every bit as fascinating and revealing as this one. We're already looking forward to it.

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