



EXEC CONNECTS 2024

# The executive agenda: Adaptability, ROI, and emerging tech

Today's leaders need to develop adaptive strategies that prioritize innovation, empower their teams, and align to business needs.

**slalom**

Once upon a time, the business landscape was built on a foundation of exhaustive research, established use cases, and well-documented regulations. Every investment was given extensive consideration. The ROI was calculated and clear.

Throw AI, regulatory compliance concerns, and other emerging technologies into the mix, and things have drastically changed. [In a recent survey of more than 700 senior leaders](#), 91% believe investments in emerging technologies would put them at the forefront of their market. However, 73% say the need to act quickly leads to investing before establishing a business case.

“Now more than ever, leaders should be making strategic plans for their organizations, but things are moving too fast for leaders to spend months developing a single roadmap,” says Amalia Goodwin, managing director of Business Advisory Services at Slalom. “This means building adaptive plans that allow for varying roadmaps, helping businesses quickly adjust to external influences and make smaller bets that can scale quickly.”

In our Q2 executive forums, we spoke with 100 leaders about how they’re establishing a foundation that allows their teams to stay proactive amidst constant change.

“The old world was focused on doing a lot of research and then making big bets. But things move faster today, and we don’t always have time, money, or confidence for big bets. So how can we make more small bets to learn and succeed fast?” – **Fortune 100 CEO**

## 1. Building an adaptive organization

From navigating economic headwinds to adopting new regulations and adjusting to [a shrinking workforce](#), today’s organizations need to be built to pivot and maintain resiliency during constant turbulence. CMOs may need to adjust their digital strategies to accommodate third-party cookie deprecation, while sustainability leaders must be conscious of intricate and evolving ESG regulations.

While embracing both agility and resilience are key, leaders must also build an adaptive workforce that can thrive amidst constant change.

“An adaptive organization is one built on the foundation of continuous learning, effectively balancing ongoing innovation with risk management,” says Michelle Page-Rivera, PhD, managing director of Business Advisory Services at Slalom. “It requires decisive leaders who are also willing to quickly flex as new insights surface.”

## 2. Embedding innovation into the organization

There’s no longer room for innovation to exist in silos—it must become a core capability within the business. For c-suite leaders, this means adopting innovation-at-scale to increase speed-to-market and drive continuous improvements.

Today’s leaders can’t rely on external entities to bring new ideas to life; they must embed innovation across processes, products, and platforms. This includes empowering employees to be innovators by providing the necessary tools and resources. Building an [innovation lab](#) that’s tightly linked to critical business operations is one of the best ways to guarantee innovation is happening both quickly and ubiquitously.

## 3. Aligning stakeholders with business needs

With the onslaught of emerging technologies, many organizations have spent time and effort building proof-of-concepts (POCs) and then get stuck on how or what to drive forward.

“POCs without a path to production is a clear path to pain,” says Kevin McLelland, general manager at Slalom. [Building clear ROI use cases](#), closely aligning with stakeholders throughout the build process, and measuring value through experimentation is what will keep innovation momentum.

Technology and business leaders need to partner to support both top-down directives and bottom-up initiatives, sourcing ideas from a cross-section of team members across the organization while also ensuring ideas are properly vetted and align with business goals.

“We need to connect people who don’t always get to work together. That’s where ideas come from.” – **Fortune 500 CIO**



## Key takeaways across functions

### Chief human resources officer (CHRO)

The leaders who will be successful in the future are those who can help their organizations embrace today's rapid technological advancements and build resiliency when faced with uncertainty. Many organizations are beginning to deploy leadership programs specifically focused on building adaptive leadership capabilities, including:

- Identifying systemic challenges that require innovative solutions
- Providing support and guidance through significant changes
- Empowering individuals to take initiative and devise unique solutions
- Promoting and protecting diverse perspectives that enhance decision-making

Slalom developed the Shift AQ assessment tool to measure adaptability and resilience in teams facing change. The tool identifies the adaptability at the individual, departmental, and organizational levels, enabling tailored cultural and leadership development interventions.



## Chief information officer (CIO)

From nurturing innovation to embedding AI in operations, chief information officers are focused on how to utilize AI as an enterprise capability. According to our survey, most CIOs believe data, privacy, and security should be the primary focus areas for a successful AI integration.

These leaders also emphasized the importance of:

- Developing a comprehensive strategy with involvement from legal, information security, IT, product, and engineering teams
- Defining and leveraging a capability model for AI readiness, including determining where to invest
- Engaging teams through regular training and office hours to increase AI adoption
- Maintaining flexibility and continuously evolving based on external changes and shifting business priorities

## Chief marketing officer (CMO)

In 2024, the priorities of marketing leaders are spread across data, talent, infrastructure, and privacy practices. According to [Statista](#) and [Gartner](#), CMOs have an estimated budget of \$2.5M to spend on privacy programs while also facing pressure to cut MarTech spending.

To navigate the changing data and privacy landscape, marketing leaders are focusing their energy on building robust data strategies, prioritizing technology investments, adapting attribution models, and providing more personalized customer experiences.

## Chief data officer (CDO)

Today's data leaders are most concerned with how to influence key stakeholders and quantify the value of their data transformation efforts. This starts with identifying key decision-makers and engaging a small, senior team to develop a roadmap that aligns with business priorities.

When it comes to measuring ROI, CDOs need to become "capital-savvy" to better speak to the value of data investments. By partnering cross-functionally with key decision-makers and quantifying the value of prior initiatives, CDOs can make future data investments more tenable for CFOs and finance leaders.

## Chief product officer (CPO)

This quarter's roundtable discussion among product leaders solidified the importance of building team skills and capabilities to more effectively integrate AI. The group also emphasized the importance of:

- Alignment between technology and business objectives
- An outcome-driven focus with measurable success metrics
- Integrating business and technology
- A clear understanding of customer behavior and needs
- Allocating time and resources for innovation
- Developing a diverse skill set among product teams

Across industries, CPOs agreed that adopting a customer-centric approach and leveraging data for decision-making will continue to be key success factors in the coming months.

## Sustainability leaders

Today's ESG and sustainability leaders are keeping an eye out for regulatory changes and challenges on the horizon. This includes identifying leaders across the organization who can serve as sustainability stewards by educating internal stakeholders, prioritizing quality governance, leveraging sustainability data management tools, and anticipating future ESG reporting requirements.

In preparation for any future changes, these leaders continue to prioritize cross-functional collaboration, streamline technology efforts, and better utilize existing capabilities.

## Chief operations officer (COO)

From building a fleet of digital experts to identifying pricing opportunities and streamlining decision-making, COOs are exploring ways to drive scaled research and insights with generative AI.

Like many other c-suite leaders, upskilling, investing in data infrastructure, and aligning investments to business objectives are top-of-mind. To create a future-forward workforce that keeps humans in the loop, COOs are also focused on:

- Enhancing security measures through audits and assessments

- Encouraging cross-functional collaboration between human teams and AI systems
- Using AI to analyze market trends, customer behavior, and operational data
- Regularly reviewing and updating AI policies, strategies, and use cases to reflect new insights and market conditions

## Chief technology officer (CTO)

In our CTO forum, technology leaders discussed how to leverage AI in product development as well as how they're measuring productivity and results. They also shared innovative ways for driving employee adoption, including regular feedback sessions and improved workflow integration.

Key topics included:

- Establishing AI as a core capability
- Focusing on (and investing in) employee engagement
- Ensuring robust security and privacy measures
- Monitoring and managing AI-generated outputs
- Balancing business value with continuous learning

## Innovation leaders

Through innovation labs and other strategic initiatives, today's innovation leaders are establishing dedicated teams to test new ideas safely, without the impact of live environments. In our roundtable discussion, these leaders discussed overcoming legacy mindsets, cross-departmental acceptance, inspiring clients to push boundaries, and counteracting the creative bottleneck that resulted from COVID-19.

To stand out in today's market, organizations are investing in innovation by setting aside physical lab space, encouraging cultural adaptation, defining clear success metrics, and engaging with other business leaders. [Slalom Element](#)—an innovation lab dedicated to pressure-testing concepts across augmented reality, robotics, and AI—is just one example of how organizations can make innovation more tangible.

## About Slalom

Slalom is a next-generation professional services company creating value at the intersection of business, technology, and humanity. With our fiercely human approach, we deeply understand our customers—and their customers—to deliver practical, end-to-end solutions that drive meaningful impact. Backed by over 700 technology partners, our nearly 12,000 team members in eight countries and 49 offices help people and organizations dream bigger, move faster, and build better tomorrows for all. We're honored to be consistently recognized as a great place to work, including being one of Fortune's 100 Best Companies to Work For nine years running.

Learn more at [slalom.com](https://www.slalom.com).

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