CIOA CHRONICLES

THE SPIRIT THAT BUILT THE WORLD'S LARGEST CIO COMMUNITY

Dear Esteemed Members,

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural edition of the CIO Association Newsletter, a dedicated platform that celebrates the leadership, innovation, and community spirit of our vibrant CIO network.

Eighteen years ago, we began this journey with just 10 members and a bold vision: to build a community that is inspiring, close-knit, and constantly evolving. At the time, we could never have imagined reaching this scale, but with every milestone, our aspirations have only grown.

Today, with a community of 3,000 across 17 (and counting!) chapters, we are proud to be the world's largest community of CIOs. Yet, we've always aspired to be more than just a professional network. We are a collective force driving transformational change and thought leadership across industries - a family bound by trust, mutual respect, and a shared commitment to learning, sharing, and growing together.

Our strength lies in our shared purpose, enriched by over 70,000 years of collective experience, $5B+ in IT spending influence, and more than 120 thoughtfully curated engagements each year.

These engagements span a wide range of formats, from chapter meetings and flagship annual events to bespoke, co-created programs with technology partners. We host webinars, peer-learning forums, leadership roundtables, and exclusive visits to partner facilities such as manufacturing units and data centers.

Family-inclusive gatherings & wellness-centered initiatives help us forge deeper bonds, and I know many of our spouses and children look forward to

these events just as much as we do.

We're excited to share a first glimpse of our CIO IT Priorities Survey 2025, a annual feature that highlights the evolving focus areas for IT leaders. This year's survey offers grounded, credible insights into technology adoption, innovation, and shifting CIO priorities. Over the next few days, we'll be releasing the full results to inform and inspire conversations across our community, a glimpse of which is included here.

But to quote Robert Frost, "there are miles to go before we sleep." This newsletter, published every alternate month, will serve as your window into this thriving ecosystem. It will spotlight emerging trends, surface peer-driven insights, explore leadership wellness, and most importantly, foster a space where we can learn from one another.

I invite each of you to be part of this journey not just as readers, but as contributors and champions of this vibrant family. Let us shape the future of enterprise technology together, with the same spirit of unity and purpose that brought us here in the first place.

With Warm Regards,

Umesh Mehta
President of Governing Body,
CIO Association

CIOs: FROM UPTIME TO PRIME TIME

By Neetan Chopra, Chief Digital and Information Officer at IndiGo
Member - DELHI NCR Chapter

IT's journey has been a wild ride. There was a time when point solutions proliferated like weeds, each automating a tiny slice of business. I call this phase of evolution: Transaction IT. Sure, this delivered some 'quick wins' across domains, but every win came with a hidden tax: spiraling costs and tangled tech stacks, as technologies morphed under our feet. Enter phase two: Strategic IT. Enterprise architecture became the new religion. Suddenly, we were mapping the entire application landscape, rationalizing what had mushroomed before, and ensuring every new project fit into some grand organizational jigsaw. The language evolved—"alignment," "enabling"—but let's not kid ourselves: most businesses still saw IT as a support function. The CIO (or Head of IT, if you prefer) still reported to Finance more often than not. That fact in itself told the real story!

However, the future of IT is already here, just not evenly distributed (quoting William Gibson). I've seen firsthand, through my own work and in the research that fueled my book, "Acceleratedv Digital
Transformation" (Kogan Page), that this future is disruptive, digital, exciting, full of potentiality and demands more from the CIO than ever before.

Any business is a cocktail of its business model, its operating model, and its culture. In an excellent course with London Business School, I had learnt that a business model is about value creation and value capture, whereas operating model is about value delivery across scale, scope and learning. And IT is now moving the levers on all three dimensions of any business. Take Shein—the fashion juggernaut. They churn out over a million fashion designs each year, leaving their closest rivals eating dust at 20-30,000 items. They're valued at north of $40B for a reason: they're not a fashion company powered by IT; they're an IT company that happens to sell fashion. Or look at Moderna. CEO Stéphane Bancel nailed it: "We are a technology company that happens to do biology." Their digital-first approach led to the fastest vaccine go-live in history and a market cap of $31.61B as of August 2024. These businesses don't just use IT—they are IT. This isn't just a trend. It's an inflection point. Digitally native companies — and smart incumbents — are wielding technology to

invent new business models and, more crucially, to overhaul their operating models. As I argued in "Accelerated Digital Transformation," the old industrial playbook was all about economies of supply. Scale scale scale, and initially it all works in your favor till you hit the tipping where costs ramp up due to complexity, innovation stalls and you are in the zone of diminishing returns.

But digital operating models play a completely different game: economies of demand. With network effects and AI-driven learning, every additional unit, customer, or transaction drive marginal costs closer to zero. Think Amazon—synonymous with scale, scope, and speed, built on a meticulously engineered digital backbone.

In context of such profound change and impact, what then is the future of IT? I call this future: Transformative IT. This is where the CIO morphs. No longer the guardian of infrastructure or the "enabler" function, the CIO becomes the architect of business reinvention. Too many companies still relegate IT and their CIO to the sidelines, treating digital and AI as playgrounds for edge-case innovation. Sure, you might get a shiny new app or spark a side hustle, but unless the core of the organization is re-engineered, you're just rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic.

The DNA of the business must change. That means the CIO and CEO need to be partners—co-founders in transformation. Forget the endless jargon about "business-IT alignment." Sunset it. Kill it. The new mandate is for IT to work hand-in-glove with the CEO, with a license to reimagine and reinvent—not just tweak—how value is delivered. Digital and AI aren't about trimming around the edges; they're about reinventing the operating model from the ground up. The CIO, once boxed in as a cost center manager, is now uniquely positioned for the top seat. They see the business from every angle: tech, people, process, commercial. They understand network effects and platform thinking, and they're fluent in the language of both value creation and delivery. In a world where transformation is a constant, this is the expertise enterprises need in the CEO.

The future of IT is here—in fits and starts, yes, but it's real. My hope is that more boards and leadership teams embrace the ethos of transformative IT. Unleash your CIOs. Give them the remit to reinvent, not just support. The next chapter of business won't be written by those who dabble at the edge—it will be led by those who fuse IT and business at the core. For customers. For employees. For shareholders. For the future.

Neetan Chopra is the Chief Digital and Information Officer at IndiGo, India's largest passenger airline. He is responsible for the business outcomes of a varied portfolio including technology, analytics, cybersecurity, marketing, loyalty, IndiGo Ventures, as well as creating new digital business models and revenue streams. Previously he held similar technology and digital roles at Dubai Holding and Emirates Airlines. Neetan began his career as a consultant at Accenture.

Neetan is a passionate advocate of 'being digital' as opposed to just 'doing digital' and helping enterprises compete in the digital era. He is on the board of multiple technology start-ups and VCs, helping bring digital advisory to entrepreneurship.

He is a TEDx speaker and frequently speaks on topics such as digital transformation, emerging business models and change management. Neetan has been recognized by Silicon Valley's Constellation Research into BT150 (Business Transformation 150), which is a global elite list of top executives leading innovative business transformation efforts. Neetan is the Author of "Accelerated Digital Transformation", a seminal guide on how to drive digital transformations in enterprises.

Neetan has a quest for continuous learning, holds two Master's degrees (MBA, MCA) and has studied in premium global institutions such as London Business School UK, St. Gallen Switzerland, Bradford UK, NIT Trichy India, and Delhi University India.

DRIVING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH CULTURE & CHANGE LEADERSHIP

Why CIOs Must Lead Not Just Technology, But the People Agenda
Editorial

Digital transformation is no longer a technology initiative, it is a business imperative. We have Neetan Chopra from Indigo Airlines talk about just that in this very same edition. CIOs are now expected to lead not just systems upgrades or cloud migrations, but fundamental shifts in how organizations think, operate, and compete. Yet, as multiple studies continue to show, most transformations fall short. The reasons are rarely technical. The real barrier? Culture.

For transformation to stick, CIOs must step up as culture leaders and change agents. This article outlines how CIOs can embed the right mindsets, behaviours, and governance models to make transformation sustainable, not superficial.

Culture: The Hidden Driver of Transformation
CIOs are often tasked with implementing cutting-edge tools cloud, AI, automation, and often big budgets to implement... but success hinges less on tech adoption and more on cultural absorption. Employees must be willing to embrace new ways of working, learn continuously, and challenge legacy thinking. That shift doesn't happen with a software rollout; it happens through **deliberate cultural influence.**

This means CIOs need to think like cultural architects. They must identify blockers to change, and not just technical ones, but attitudinal and behavioural. They need to constantly address these blockers with empathy and persistence. Celebrating small wins, empowering internal change agents, and reinforcing cross-functional collaboration all play a vital role.

CIOs as Change Leaders
You have told us, that today's CIOs are not just technologists. You are drivers of enterprise change & transformation. Driving transformation requires influencing mindsets across functions, managing resistance, and aligning digital goals with business outcomes. That shift in role is especially critical in complex environments where digital fatigue or organizational inertia is real.

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In leading organizations, CIOs:
- Translate business goals into compelling digital visions.
- Foster cross-functional collaboration instead of working in tech silos.
- Help the C-suite and board understand digital risk and opportunity in business terms.
- Promote a culture where employees feel safe to experiment, and even fail, as they learn.

Digital transformation becomes truly enterprise-wide only when technology meets trust, capability meets courage, and systems meet shared purpose.

Embedding Digital Thinking, Not Just Tools
Digital transformation is more than implementing technology. It's about changing how people make decisions, collaborate, and solve problems. This requires instilling a digital-first mindset across all levels of the workforce.

That includes:
- Promoting data-driven decision-making as a daily habit.
- Training employees to be digitally literate, not just in tools, but in ways of thinking.
- Structuring incentives around learning, agility, and adaptability.

CIOs must also ensure that systems and structures align with cultural goals. For instance, moving to agile project delivery or integrating real-time feedback loops into daily operations reinforces the behaviours digital culture demands.

Lessons from Indian CIOs

In India's rapidly digitizing economy, several leaders stand out for successfully navigating the culture-technology nexus.

Anupam Saraph, India's first city-level CIO, was ahead of his time in using digital platforms for citizen engagement, demonstrating how culture and governance could merge in public service.

Vineet Nayar, though not a CIO by title, championed a groundbreaking philosophy -"Employees First, Customers Second" at HCL Technologies, reshaping company culture and proving that empowered employees drive innovation.

Leaders like Debashis Chatterjee, who oversaw the Mindtree–LTI merger, showcased how integrating two distinct cultures with agility and a clear digital narrative could unlock significant enterprise value.

These examples reinforce a core truth: successful digital leaders prioritize people, not just platforms.

Change Governance: Creating Structure for Culture

To lead cultural change, CIOs must build governance models that promote transparency, shared accountability, and cross-functional buy-in. This involves creating digital councils or change leadership teams that include HR, business heads, and technology leads. These teams ensure that culture and capability-building efforts remain aligned with digital priorities.

Metrics also matter. Instead of tracking only system adoption, forward-thinking CIOs measure employee engagement with digital tools, speed of decision-making, and confidence in using new platforms.

These indicators offer richer insight into whether transformation is taking root.

Sustaining Momentum

Perhaps the greatest challenge in culture change is sustaining it. It's easy for transformation energy to fade after initial wins. CIOs can counter this by institutionalizing learning, conducting regular retrospectives, and keeping change visible (Both internally & externally) through stories, dashboards, and recognition programs.

Continuous learning platforms, digital upskilling programs, and open forums where employees can share feedback all contribute to an adaptive culture. When teams are equipped and energized, transformation becomes a continuous process.

Final Thought: Culture Is a CIO's Competitive Edge

For CIOs today, the call to action is clear: lead with empathy, communicate with clarity, and embed learning into the fabric of your teams. The CIOs who will define the next decade are those who drive not just digital adoption, but cultural transformation—where people, not just platforms, lead the way.

CIO UNDER SPOTLIGHT

Shobhana Lele
CIO, Bombay Dyeing
Member - Mumbai Chapter

Shobhana is a seasoned IT Professional with more than 2 decades of experience in various Industry domains like Retail, FMCG, Manufacturing and Real Estate. Her specialties include Strategy, Digital Transformation, Stakeholder Management, etc, and currently Leads IT for The Bombay Dyeing and Mfg Co Ltd.

What's a personal habit or daily ritual you swear by to stay grounded and focused?

I truly believe in "Give your best and leave the rest". It helps me to cut down on expectations and yearning for results or outcomes. What drives me is the personal satisfaction that I have given my best. Fortunately, being focused and staying grounded come naturally to me. That I suppose is in my DNA.

Who or what has been the biggest influence in shaping your leadership style?

My parents for sure. The principles imbibed in me not only influence my style of leadership but also keeps me realistic and practical.
I also believe that we can learn from everybody around us. It need not be a celebrity or well-known person. Just look around and you will find a lot of qualities in every single person that you can adopt.

**Outside of work, what are you most passionate about—any hobbies or causes that energize you?**

Travelling is a must-do for me. It gives me a break from daily routine, expands my thought processes and gives me a fresh perspective on a number of things. Other than that reading, walking, cycling and music are some of the things that help me to energise myself.

If you could instantly master a new skill or discipline, what would it be and why?

In current times, I think it would be on sustainability. While we all know that technology has transformed the world to be more connected and brought in a lot of conveniences, it pains to see that not only digital waste but also a number of Lifestyle related conveniences are putting the environment at a huge risk. I would definitely adopt a discipline that can plug this even in the smallest way.

What is the one aspect of your digital transformation role that truly excites you right now?

"Process Automation" really drives my interest to see how we can decode a process to make it more efficient and use technology to bring in speed, governance and agility. AI is an evolving space and learning the nuances of this technology to see how it can be applied in a positive and ethical manner to business processes is another exciting area.
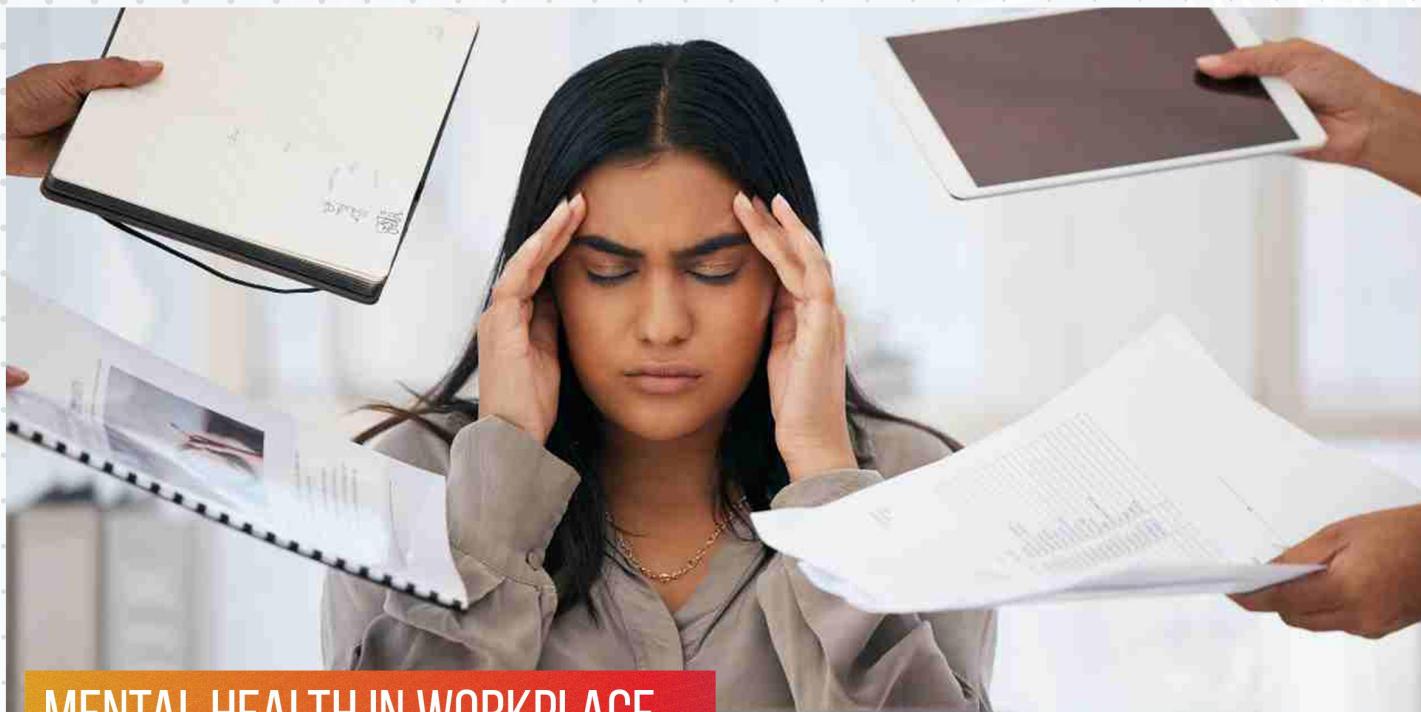
MENTAL HEALTH IN WORKPLACE

Experts tell us how to spot stress at work and ways to manage it

By Namrata Sindwani, Journalist & Features Writer at Happiest Health

As young adults, many of us wish to be responsible for our lives, be financially independent and achieve something meaningful and worthy. To realise our dreams, we aspire to work for reputed organisations housed in those imposing multi-storeyed buildings.

The workplace comes with a different set of realities and emotions. The joy and relief of getting there must now meet long working hours, tight deadlines, sacrifice of personal time and sometimes pressure due to co-workers or leaders.

Mental health issues in workplace, such as depression and anxiety, are pervasive inworkplaces globally now, affecting productivity and attendance. This year, World Health Organization has also recognised this issue, highlighting the need to make mental health in the workplace a priority that needs global action.

The reasons are many. In their act of climbing the ladder of success, employees often battle workplace toxicity and crushing deadlines, more so if they are struggling with low motivation. "Lack of motivation is one of the most difficult issues one experiences at some point in career.
.

That is when one looks for a new job or a shift in career path," says Sakshi Singh, founder of Gurugram-based wellness company GoodLives.

Working remotely away from office has its own challenges. After a meeting by video conference, one misses the interactions and exchange of views with fellow workers and can feel lonely.

In recent times, employees feel a heightened anxiety due to widespread layoffs in an unpredictable job market.

How to spot work-related stress
Bengaluru-based Nisha (name changed on request) is just 27 years old but says, "I often feel mentally drained due to a fast-paced environment and intense pressure [at work]. Finding time for therapy seems impossible, and I wish my company offered leave and counselling services to manage my anxiety and stress." She regrets that neither her previous nor her current employers provide such support.

A 2021 study titled All in the Mind: The State of Mental Health in Corporate India, which was conducted by staffing solutions company Gi Group,

revealed the following data:

• 42 per cent of employees surveyed experienced work-related stress
• 29 per cent of the employees surveyed suffered due to erratic work schedules
• 21 per cent suffered due to reduced salaries

Telltale indicators
Luckily, it is not difficult to identify a person who might be stressed. Any significant change in a person's mood, productivity or social interests is a signal of stress, points out Ambika Chawla, clinical psychologist, LISSUN, a Gurugram-based mental health platform. If an employee who is generally cheerful becomes quieter or reclusive, it can be a clear mark of being stressed. Another indicator is when the person takes leave of absence too often.

Any form of distress lasting beyond two weeks, especially physiological changes such as abrupt sleep, increased or decreased appetite, changes in menstrual cycle, libido levels or other hormonal issues also are symptoms of stress.

Finding the balance
While striving to excel at work is laudable, chronic overwork is dangerous for one's health. Pushing oneself beyond one's limits consistently leads to burnout and health issues. "Work is a part of life and not our entire life and should be treated in a balanced way," Singh warns.

Employers play an important role in establishing a healthy workplace environment for employees. "When it comes to work, it is important to focus on the bigger goals of the organisation and not be set on smaller issues," Singh says. Every employee has a different motivation for best performance, which could be a reward or recognition.

The onus then is on managers to treat their teammates considerately, with empathy and support.

An employer's guide to mental well-being
(Reviewed by clinical psychologist Ambika Chawla)

1. Lead by example: Leaders must lead by example, openly discussing their struggles and demonstrating a healthy work-life balance.

2. Avoid information overload: Do not bombard employees with unnecessary communication. Frequent mails and messages lead to decision fatigue and stress.

3. Communicate openly: Foster a culture of open communication by encouraging employees to discuss workloads and stress. Regular check-ins create a safe space for these conversations.

4. Foster work-life integration: Champion work-life integration through flexible work arrangements and paid leave benefits. Leaders can demonstrate that employee well-being is important at work.

5. Win with care: By proactively discussing boundaries and scheduling needs, leaders can cultivate a work style that promotes well-being without sacrificing productivity.

HR and mental health in workplace
The practice of human resources is not just paperwork—it is the architect of workplace wellbeing. Today, HR teams are transforming office culture by implementing flexible appraisal systems, bridging the gap between employees and management. They are cultivating meaningful connections through team activities.

Singh suggests, "Technology can also be used to automate laborious tasks, allowing HR employees to focus on building human connections."

Getting employees to bond beyond work is the bedrock of a company's culture, while working from office or remotely.

An evolving landscape

A view is that the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-21 has shifted workplace priorities, emphasising employee well-being over mere productivity. This change has led many employees to choose healthy work environments, even if it means accepting lower salaries.

Chawla says the pandemic has allowed people to be more self-aware than before. Helping them understand and choose the mode of work that suits them – being at office, working remote or perhaps in a hybrid manner.

HR and health professionals admit that it is concerning that young professionals face stressful environments without adequate resources to address mental health concerns.

However, Nisha believes that "Companies seem to prioritise growth over employee well-being, squeezing maximum productivity until burnout sets in." Like her, another Bengaluru-based professional who does not wish to be named hopes that mental health leave and support become a norm across professions. "What bothers me most is not just that corporate employees are overworked; it is the fact that managements conveniently overlook it. They pretend [that all is well] and if you speak up, you are made to feel like the odd one out," she confesses.

Mental health in workplace requires an individualised approach and there is no one glove that fits all'. The cost and time that professional therapy requires can deter many employees who may want to use it.

Chawla suggests that work-stressed individuals can do some self-care. It can be journalling, exercise, meditation and taking up hobbies. It can help them cope with the situation and their emotions. Such practices can complement professional support or be the starting points for mental wellness.

The takeaway

While a moderate amount of stress at work can drive performance and motivation, it is crucial to maintain a work-life balance. Employer and employee should both remember that work is just one facet of life. This will help them approach workplace challenges with clarity and resilience.

A calm and practical mindset along with stress management techniques will arm professionals to build a sustainable relationship with their work environment.

SPOTLIGHT ON KNOWLEDGE EVENTS

Here's a glimpse into the exciting Knowledge Events that include Flagship, Anniversary & Bespoke Events, exclusive events hosted by our vibrant CIO Association chapters across the country this past 2 months

Delhi NCR : India Cyber Security Summit 2025
3rd May 2025

Mumbai : Datacenter & Cloud Summit 2025
Transforming Infrastructure for Tomorrow
14th June 2025

Pune : TechSaga 2025
Bigger Bolder & a More Impactful Way
12th July 2025

Hyderabad : Think AI Event
6th July 2025

Coimbatore : AI in Daily Operations Workshop
A focused workshop where local CIOs explored the integration of AI in everyday enterprise functions, with actionable takeaways.

SPECIAL CHAPTER MOMENTS

Alongside our major and exclusive chapter events, a few unique gatherings stood out for their innovation and personal touch:

Kolkata – CIO FAMILY SYNC 2025
A heartfelt initiative bringing CIOs and their families together for an evening of connection, celebration, and community spirit.

Kerala: Family Event : 24/05/25
A memorable day blending professional bonding with family fun.

Box Cricket Event : 24/05/25
Mumbai

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

KERALA

TECH 25

Date: 15 & 16 August 2025
Venue: Kochi, Kerala

Announcing TECH 25 - India's sharpest & largest enterprise AI leadership summit. This exclusive two-day gathering brings together over 150+ CIOs, tech innovators, and AI pioneers from across sectors. Led by Dr. Shailesh Kumar, one of India's most respected AI minds, TECH 25 dives deep into the entire AI stack - from infra and platforms to intelligence, governance, and adoption at scale.

Click Here to Participate
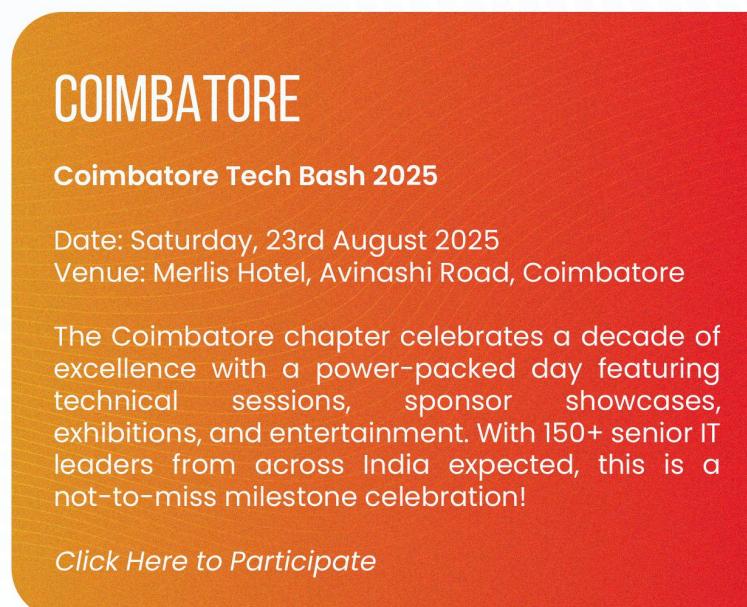
COIMBATORE

Coimbatore Tech Bash 2025

Date: Saturday, 23rd August 2025
Venue: Merlis Hotel, Avinashi Road, Coimbatore

The Coimbatore chapter celebrates a decade of excellence with a power-packed day featuring technical sessions, sponsor showcases, exhibitions, and entertainment. With 150+ senior IT leaders from across India expected, this is a not-to-miss milestone celebration!

Click Here to Participate

TECH ROYALS SUMMIT 2025

CIO Association

The **Most Influential Tech Event** of Rajasthan Is Here

TECH ROYALS SUMMIT 2025

📍 Udaipur Marriott   📅 6ᵗʰ September 2025

Hosted by CIO Association Rajasthan Chapter

- 100+ CIOs, CTOs, CISOs & Key Decision-Makers
- Strategic Dialogues on AI, Cloud, Security, and Digital Transformation
- Exclusive Peer-to-Peer Networking

EXPRESS YOUR INTEREST

JAIPUR

Tech Royals Summit 2025 (10th Anniversary)

Date: Saturday, 6th September 2025
Venue: Udaipur Marriott, Rajasthan

Hosted by CIO Association Rajasthan, this is the state's most influential tech gathering, bringing together 100+ tech leaders across sectors like NBFC, manufacturing, healthcare, and energy. Attendees will experience impactful knowledge sessions, breakout discussions, and unparalleled networking with Rajasthan's CIO elite.

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BANGALORE

CIO Habba 2025 (15th Anniversary)

Date: Saturday, 27th September 2025
Venue: Bangalore

The Bangalore chapter's grandest celebration yet, CIO Habba 2025 marks 15 years of collaborative tech leadership. Expect over 300 IT decision-makers, interactive sessions, high-energy networking, and immersive tech showcases. It's more than an event, it's a festival of CIO excellence!

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CIO Association

CIO ASSOCIATION BANGALORE CHAPTER
presents

HABBA 2025

15ᵗʰ ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION
27ᵗʰ SEPTEMBER 2025

— MARK YOUR — **CALENDARS** | — MORE DETAILS — **DROPPING SOON**

CIO LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIUM

4th OCTOBER, 2025
at JW Marriott Aerocity, New Delhi
10:30 AM Onwards

REGISTRATION OPEN NOW

DELHI

CIO Leadership Symposium 2024

Date: Saturday, 4th October 2025
Venue: JW Marriott Aerocity

Delhi is set to host the much-anticipated CIO Leadership Symposium 2025, a convergence of some of North India's most forward-looking technology leaders. Expect a compelling mix of keynote insights, strategic discussions, and peer networking, all aimed at shaping the future of enterprise IT.

Click Here to Participate

JUST IN

SNEAK PEEK INTO CIO PRIORITIES FOR 2025–26

Straight from the minds of CIOs and tech leaders across India...

Each year, we reach out to hundreds of India's top CIOs and technology decision makers to understand their strategic focus areas, investment priorities and challenges. This year's survey saw the best ever participation yet, so thank you for that!

Top Tech Trends – Snapshot Edition
What's really shaping IT investments this year? Here's a quick look at the **Top 3 Priorities:**

1. Artificial Intelligence & Automation
From predictive analytics to GenAI, AI is no longer optional — it's mission-critical.

2. Cybersecurity
With DPDP compliance looming and cyber threats evolving, securing digital frontiers is at the top of the list.

3. Data & Analytics
Powering smarter, faster decisions and driving deeper personalization across the enterprise.

And that's just the beginning...
The full report drops soon - with deep dives, sectoral cuts, and CIO playbooks. **Stay Tuned!**

Top Four CIO IT Priorities 2025

Cybersecurity, Digital Trust & Data Privacy (DPDP)

Artificial Intelligence & Automation

Customer Experience and Personalisation

Digital Manufacturing & Industry 4.0

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