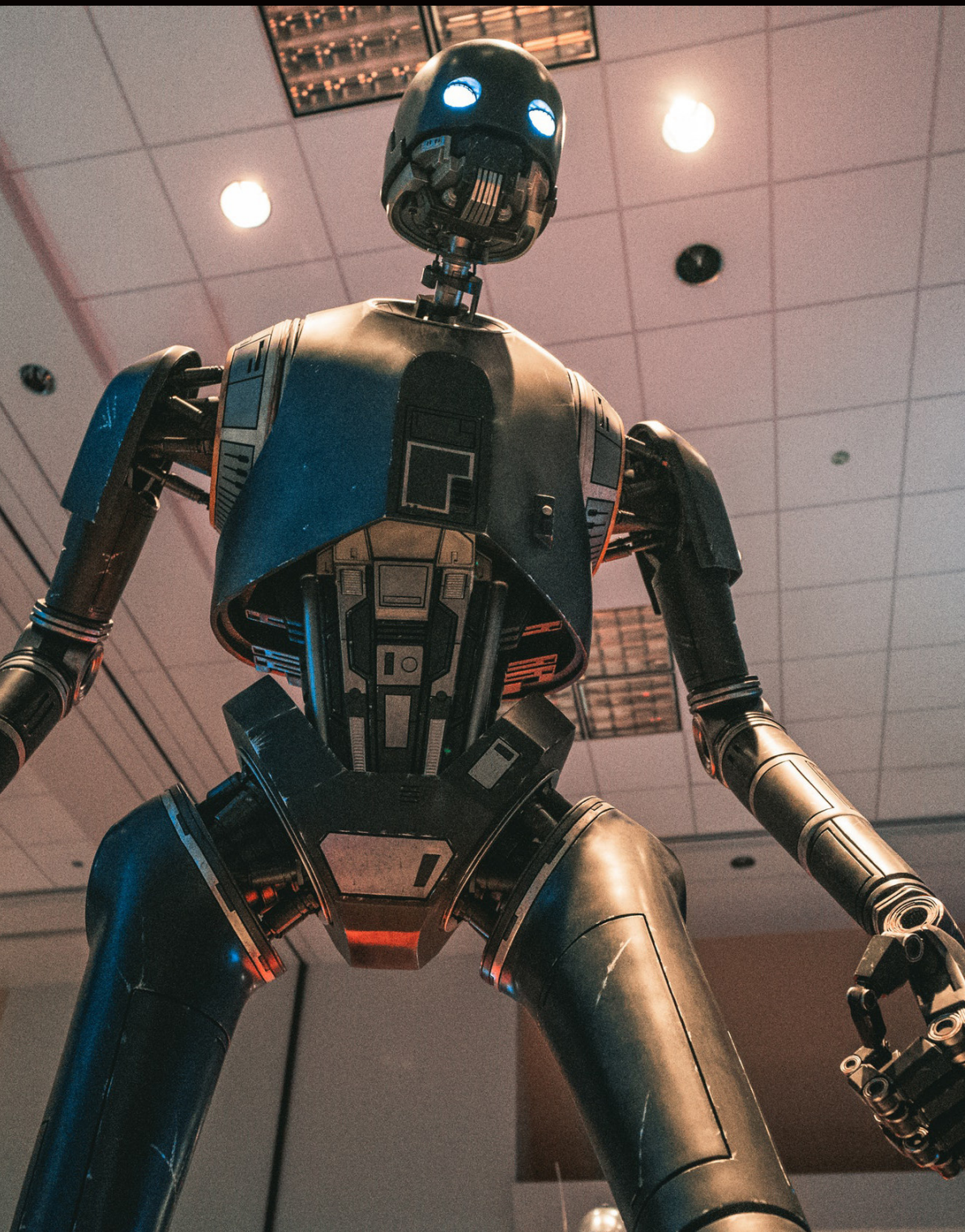# X CXO FOCUS

AGILE LEADERSHIP ENABLES ORGANIZATIONS TO MEET NEW DEMANDS

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As enterprise technology infrastructure has converged in the cloud, organizations have benefited from greater levels of freedom. With that freedom comes an ability to be more innovative. Many of today's challenger businesses are also benefiting from the freedom of converged infrastructure. Digital challenger businesses have grown as a result of their rapid adoption of cloud-based technologies and the iterative product development cycles they operate.

Dubbed Agile, does this new way of working challenge the role of the C-suite in organizations? For some yes, but as we will see, for many leading business and technology leaders, Agile methods is an opportunity to truly lead in ways that are beneficial to the customer.

Agile software development has 12 core principles, which focus on customer satisfaction and an ability to welcome changing requirements. These principles also include regular software delivery, cooperation between software creators and users, trust, face-to-face conversations, progressive software measurement, technical excellence, simplicity, architecture developed by self-organizing teams and lastly reflection. Agile also incorporates other well-known methods such as Scrum and Kanban.

"In Scrum and Agile software development frameworks, the delivery team works directly with a product owner, who is generally drawn from the business," says Amazon Web Services strategist, author and former CIO Mark Schwartz in his book for leaders 'A seat at the table'. "Agile approaches seem to remove the CIO - and the rest of the IT leadership - from the value delivery process." Schwartz believes the advent and adoption of Agile is an opportunity for the CIO role to be reconsidered in terms of its scope.

"The way the CIO role is defined, conceived and executed today is incompatible with Agile thinking," he says.

Schwartz identifies that the CIO role needs to be redefined. Those sectors facing the highest levels of disruption have been the first to recognize that the CIO can no longer remain responsible for IT systems. Today, technology is the first interaction a customer has with an organization and businesses that were once brick and mortar are moving to a strictly digital platform. As a result, we've seen the emergence of the Chief Technology and Product Officers in sectors such as travel, media, retail and financial services. This follows the Chief Digital Officer (CDO) role. The CDO role was driven by the understanding that great digital services required strong underlying technology, therefore a customer centric and product-oriented CIO was needed who also had a strong operational IT heritage.

With that freedom comes an ability to be more innovative

Leadership change

Michelle M. Coelho, a research director at Gartner says "Agile has nothing to do with technology. It's a mental shift in how we approach projects."

CIO for Nutanix Wendy Pfeiffer agrees with Coelho on the attitude shift, "we have been talking about this phenomenon of Agile for some time. It was not our job to be outward focused, but that has changed and now as a CIO, you have to be able to context switch."

Pfeiffer adds that the challenge of accepting technology leaders as Agile and customer centric is a challenge for the organization as well as some of her peers. "Some of the blush has come off the rose of digital transformation because there is a need for the business to continuously reinvent themselves. Digital transformation is not a separate function." Having no end date is a concept that many in business leadership are struggling with.

But organizations have to adapt. "The market dictates expectations. I expect to download an app for a bank and then join it," CTO for global bank HSBC Jack Bennie says. "If we can't do that, then we have failed. You have to own the customer problem and solve that digitally," he says.

"As CIOs, we all share many similar challenges such as complexity in the environment, working in silos, lacking in agility, and muddled technologies," says Fin Goulding, who until recently was International CIO for insurance firm Aviva. Goulding is amongst a new wave of business technology leaders that have embraced Agile and allowed it to flourish in their organizations.

"It is a fear of admitting that you don't know something, but once you start working with these techniques, all of a sudden you get this interest that goes wider and wider across the company, so I call that taking Agile forward," Goulding says. The former CIO from the travel and insurance sectors is now a specialist advisor helping leadership teams take Agile methods into their organizations. He also recently authored a well-received book titled Flow.

Fellow author Mark Schwartz agrees that business leaders who embrace a new way of leading can use Agile as a way of remaining, and in many ways, regaining relevance. "I believe that if we re-conceive the role of IT leadership based on Agile principles, we can make sense of all of this confusion and turn IT into a value creation engine." He adds, "the only way to become an Agile IT leader is to be courageous, to change the attitudes and assumptions that have left the CIO meekly begging for a seat at the table."

Mark Lockton-Goddard, CEO of Change Specialists Embracent and formerly CIO of energy firm Drax and financial services firm Fidessa describes the modern role of the CIO as being Chief Engagement Officer, promoting all areas of the organization to engage with new technologies, new ways of working and new ways of engaging with the customer.

"You have to believe it's possible and commit to it," Bennie of HSBC says, adding that the most important thing for a leader to do in an organization that has adopted Agile methods is to ensure everyone is empowered. "They are given responsibility and they are held accountable," he says.

"It's important to remember Agile is a thinking process, you have to focus on the people, the automation and the customer," says David Espley CTO of global legal and information services business LexisNexis. "If you have great people, you can assume they're doing the right thing at the right time with the information available. The whole point of Lean and Agile is to get things in front of people to make commercial decisions," he says.

"Agile is not something you buy, it's what you are. However, you're probably getting pressured into buying services to implement into your companies," Goulding says of how Agile has become a buzzword and created a market for "consulting".

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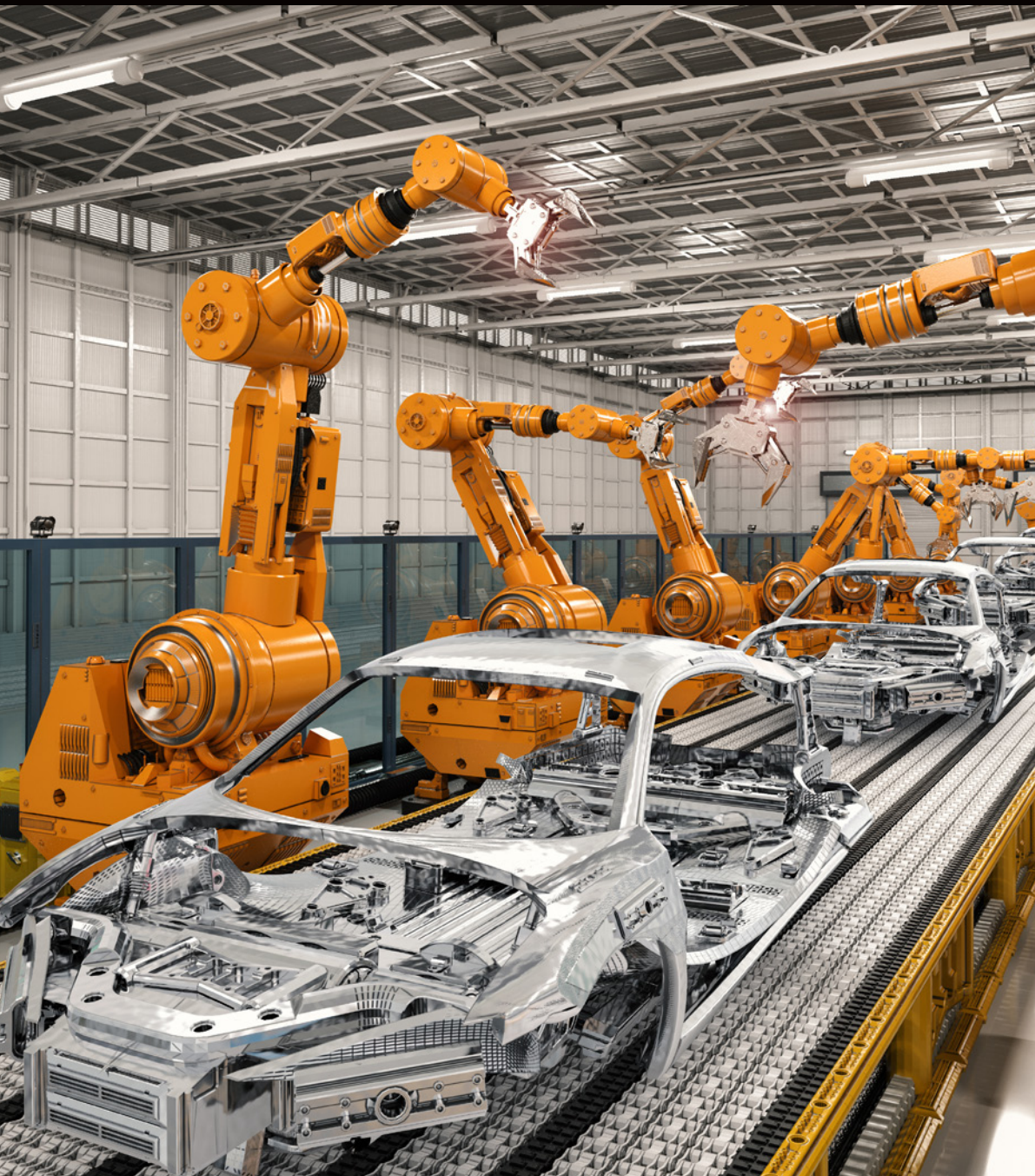
Agile is therefore not a replacement for leadership, it is a new way for organizations to work, from the very senior leadership right through the organization. C-level leaders in a variety of sectors will tell you the biggest benefit and therefore the hardest element of Agile is changing the culture of the organization.

For the senior leadership at Aviva, International CIO Fin Goulding created a meeting wall, with all the visual transparency of an IT development team. As a result, everyone at the Aviva offices in Dublin, Ireland could see the outcomes senior leaders were tasked with, had delivered and had yet to deliver, pinned up on a wall showcasing which were potentially moving forwards or backwards. The senior leadership team also met, standing up, like a team of developers and presented their tasks in front of the entire organization.

"They were uncomfortable with it at first, then it flows down to projects and teams. It is the great big wall of business and how we get our strategy aligned to business outcomes. It's a big Kanban wall for executives, we have ideas, inception, delivery, MVP, feasibility, in-play and done. These columns are where the business play with new ideas and priority sequence," Goulding says.

In the world of manufacturing when Stephen Kneebone was European CIO of Nissan, the automotive giant, he and the leadership team developed a breakout room on the factory floor where those on the lines were able to experiment with ways of increasing the pace of car manufacturing. On a visit to a Nissan factory, Kneebone showed me how a seated arm on the production line was devised by a worker who realized it would be faster to install interior parts to vehicles sitting down rather than stepping in and bending down.

These examples demonstrate that Agile is a cultural shift that all members of the C-suite must adopt in order to create organizations that can benefit from the latest wave of technology and react to the changes in consumer demand.

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