







From CISO to...?

Exploring career growth in
the boardroom and beyond

November 2020

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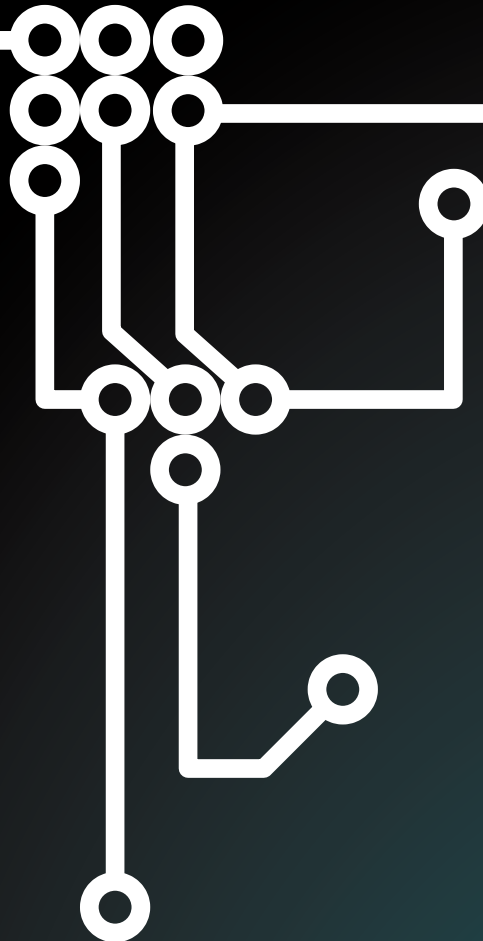
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Introduction

'Why am I CISO? Is my role fulfilling me?' Against the backdrop of your weighty responsibility, when was the last time you paused, reflected on yourself and asked such purposeful questions? Have you asked yourself 'is this my role for life? Am I aiming too high if I wanted to become, say, CEO? What options do I have, and what steps do I need to take?'

"It is tough to be strategic when you're always putting out fires". Through our CISO Transition Lab Programme¹ we commonly hear this statement. When the urgent becomes the priority, and strategy takes a back seat to the tactical; the 'fires' of your position can easily distract you from focussing on your own career progression.

In this insight paper, we want to encourage you to reflect on the person behind the CISO, in an attempt to look at your 'why' and your 'what now', then etch your 'how-to' towards fulfilling your ambitions.



"It is tough to be strategic when you're always putting out fires"

'Why?'

Navigating with self-knowledge

The key to a fulfilling career is self-awareness and understanding your key motivations. Whilst the initial incentive behind your first job may have been to meet basic needs and provide financial security, as your career progresses this often becomes a lower priority compared to other motives.²

Once past a certain monetary threshold, higher financial reward is often attributed to increased stress levels due to the pressure attached with the higher profiled role. This can lead to dissatisfaction, caused by factors such as dealing with pressure of the role attached to the salary. It is essential to ensure your responsibilities are fulfilling and not draining you, irrespective of the financial security they may bring.

So where else do you turn to for fulfilment? Daniel Pink's model summarises the key motivators in his book 'Drive', which sets out three key components of intrinsic motivation: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Understanding the relative importance you place on each is an essential first step in orientating your career.



1. Autonomy

relates to having increased, but not absolute, control over your work and environment. Autonomy can be coupled with increased influence, which is sought after by some. The flip side is the higher responsibility and accountability. It is key to ensure your role meets your autonomy requirements. These can involve requirements around *what* you do, *when* you do it, *with whom* you work, *where* you work from, and *how* you work.

2. Mastery

is the desire for continual improvement or furthering your expertise in a specific domain or task, and is an established stimulating reward. Do you feel like you have reached stagnation? Have you considered if this is because there's no opportunity for improvement, or because you've not taken the time to set improvement goals and work towards them? Your role as CISO is steadily evolving, especially as cyber is an increasing priority on the board's agenda. With that comes an expanding opportunity for mastery. But is that something you crave, or do you prefer to avoid the detail? What mastery goals, short and long-term, technical or otherwise, would you like to achieve? How about feeling less anxious when dealing with the board and communicating more effectively? By setting goals that are challenging, yet not out of reach, you can see clearer which role helps you achieve them best.

3. Your Purpose

is the ultimate 'why' that you define for yourself, and should be built on your beliefs and values. Meaning and purpose are essential to feeling at peace in the workplace and the world, and should guide your definition of the above autonomy and mastery goals. Some purpose-led questions you could ask yourself are: 'Do I want to be part of something bigger? Do I want to do something meaningful, something for others? Does my work leave an impact noticeable enough to satisfy me?' Answering these, and similar questions, will help you visualise your career map, and realise if you have reached your desired destination or wish to move elsewhere.

The above reflections are not straightforward, but worthwhile. Digging out your deepest motives can be tricky, and you might commonly find yourself avoiding inner conflicts of thoughts and emotions. It is important to undertake this self-check exercise, and retake it at regular intervals, as your answers will alter during a lifetime of experience and inner-growth.

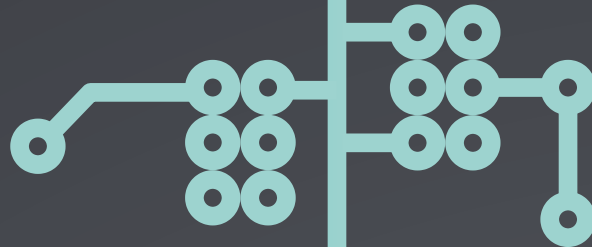
'What now?'

Where can you go from here?

Regardless of where your personal motivations lie, there are multiple career paths available to the CISO. These broadly fall under: the **alternative career move** outside cyber, and the **continued cyber professional role**.

Alternative career move

Through years of increasing cyber risk and outstanding CISO efforts, senior leadership is increasingly recognising the prominence of your role and the skills it requires. This opens up two main pathways:



Business leadership path:

Can you become a strong and successful business leader? With the increasing importance of cyber risk oversight, CISOs are beginning to aspire beyond their current role, even outside cyber altogether and into the business. Does the idea of becoming CEO at some point excite you, or does it fill you with fear, or simply indifference? As CxO, you'd bring a deep understanding of risk as well as business operations – a key characteristic to enable the business to thrive, particularly in uncertain times. However, the move to business leadership is not a straightforward journey and requires specific steps to render it achievable.

Alternative subject matter expert (SME) path:

Your subject matter expertise can be applied to other C-suite positions related to risk, such as Chief Security Officer (CSO) or Chief Risk Officer (CRO). Unlike the business leadership path, this direction doesn't divert you far outside your comfort zone; it simply refocusses the skills and knowledge you already possess. Would a change of a scene and new challenge, but in a safe environment, be something that fulfils your motivations?



Continued cyber professional role

Given the exciting nature of the CISO role and its increasing importance and influence, it is understandable if you wish to remain in this battlefield, and explore other opportunities within. These include:

Continued CISO path, increasing achievement:

By remaining CISO, you've not reached the pinnacle of your career, you're still on a progressive path given the expected continual evolution and eminence of the role. Do you still crave change or a new challenge? Do you wish your role allowed you to indulge the 'inner geek' and get hands on with technology, perhaps in a smaller team? Or does your current role not give you the influence you would like? How about another industry or group CISO role? Even if you're happy where you are, you can continually achieve more for yourself by pursuing further education to expand your skill set.

Non-Executive Directorship (NED) and independent roles:

Are you predominantly a purpose-led individual? You might feel, after years of CISO experience, a compelling need to give back to society whilst keeping your SME hat on. You can achieve this by taking on responsibilities such as NED or advisory roles to regulatory bodies, councils or policy-making entities.

Cyber consulting path:

Whether you're starting your own consultancy or advising for an established organisation, there's plenty you could do. You may want to boost your consulting value by broadening your focus to include other areas of risk or technology. Try to cultivate a niche within your SME and grow your reputation for it in your network. Perhaps the autonomy associated with working across multiple organisations is what you need? You may need to depend more on your sales skills by positioning yourself as the trusted advisor. This in itself can be daunting, but perhaps a new skill to master?

'How-to'

Key steps for all paths

As you re-affirm or even discover your own motivations and consider what's next, there's no guarantee of an easy transition. Whatever your next step, you should take the opportunity to use your current role to lay the groundwork by nurturing existing skills and traits, addressing any skills gaps and planning strategically.

How good are your softer skills?

Let's start with the skills and traits you might already possess or lack. Having a niche technical background is great, but the following potential catalysts are vital in propelling your career.

The board are typically aware and highly concerned about cyber risk, but they lack the knowledge of how to address it. They turn to you, seeking assurance, accountability and leadership in this field. Are you a **true leader that projects confidence**? Whilst your role might position you more comfortably as a technology leader, strive to increase your prominence as business leader, showcasing shrewdness by thinking business when strategising cyber. The board crave this skill in you as it enables them to have a better night's sleep. Irrelevant of your next move, business leadership skills are invaluable.

Along your journey, **build out wider networks** that will support your career progression. Even the brightest minds can't advance without establishing the support and buy-in that these networks provide. People skills are essential for this purpose, but they might not come naturally for a technically-focussed individual. Work on strengthening these skills, and your relationships and networks inside the organisation, as well as in the wider industry. This will strengthen your reputation and personal brand.

How honed are your **communication skills**? These reflect your ability to leave a memorable impact – a prerequisite in order to grow into your desired role. You're usually the first person turned to in the event of a breach, and first impressions are most remembered. Will your response be chastised as inappropriate and insufficient, or lauded as an example to other businesses? Your ability to make pivotal decisions during stressful times, and your personal resilience and persuasiveness will help position you as an influential, trusted advisor, who can be relied upon in challenging times.

Many modern-day CISOs have been appointed at a relatively young age.³ Other CISOs might not be as young but have worked in a cyber capacity long enough to have endured continual change and growth. A key characteristic of both situations is that they offer the advantage of fostering an **innovative mind-set, through youth or experience** – so use it.

Revolutionise the business and offerings, shake up archaic ways of working and shape a more dynamic working environment. You can bring fresh ideas that will enhance working culture and help employees thrive, incentivising them to remain on your team.

Strategic steps for the move

The groundwork you lay for your next move should also involve strategic planning, which will benefit your organisation as much as it will enhance your personal brand. This should help to build not only your own confidence, but that of your senior leadership. Your strategic steps should include:

Defining legacy: What do you want to be known for? The right legacy is based on your organisation's and your team's priorities, as well as your own – think mastery and purpose components of intrinsic motivation. Focus on these priorities, mapping out how to achieve them and communicate them upwards. Distinguish which priorities are the most *important*, and don't just focus on the most urgent.

Succession planning: Building and motivating a strong team should always be a key focus, but for you to progress, make it an even higher priority. Empowering your team members will let you advance with your aspirations whilst sowing the seeds for a suitable successor. The board need to feel confident that you are not their single point of failure, but that you are building competent succession within your team.

Personal development: In a study, 53 per cent of CISOs surveyed said they need to increase their expertise in how departments drive growth and sales, 48 per cent said they need a better understanding of non-IT business functions, and 43 per cent admitted they need to improve their business and commercial acumen.⁴ Don't let time constraints be a roadblock. Here's an opportunity to assess your average week and reallocate hours that could be better spent on identifying the personal development you need and then making that happen.

Changing perception: If your experience lies solely in cyber security or IT, it may fall short in terms of other C-suite roles – think business operations, marketing, finance or corporate strategy. Even if your experience does fit the bill, you may still suffer from the misperception of other senior board members that 'you don't have what it takes'. Use your interactions with other parts of your organisation to showcase your well-rounded understanding of the business, projecting confidence in your ability outside your reputed field.

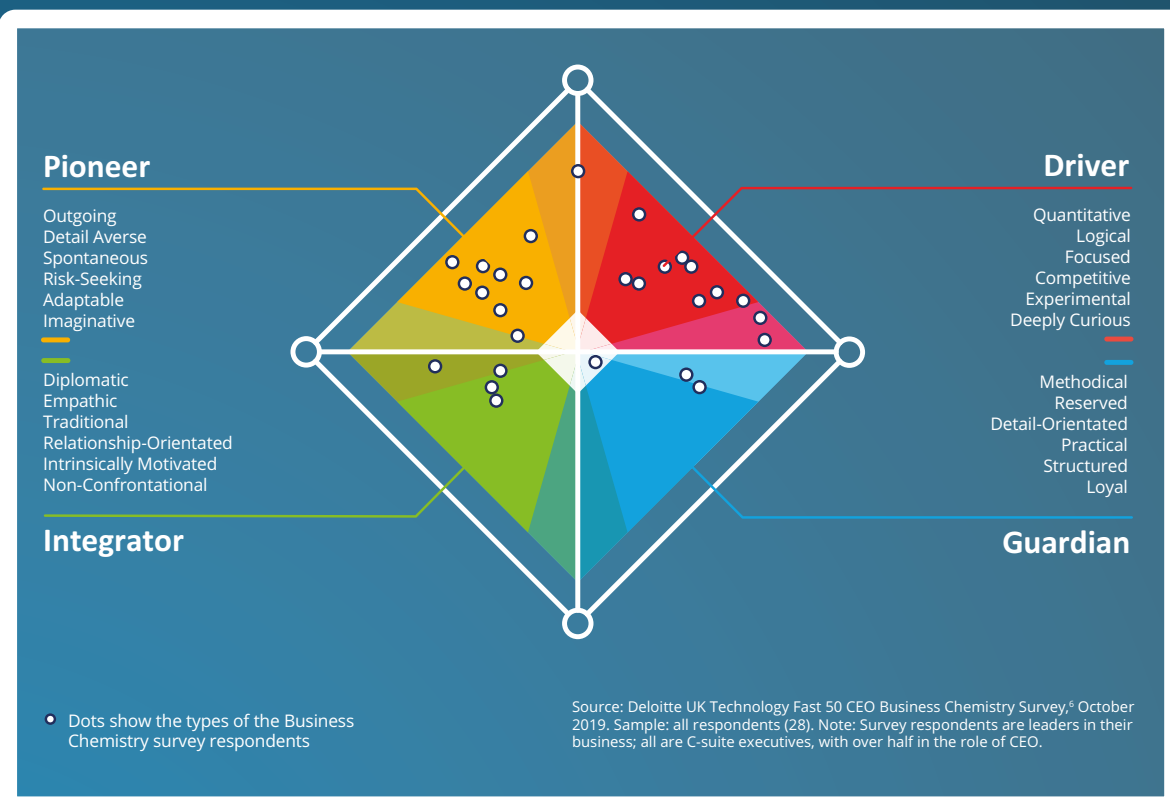
Accelerating down the business leadership path

Aspiring to become a CFO, COO or CEO is likely to feel like a progression far outside of your comfort zone, and potentially therefore out of reach. With the right mind-set, earnest efforts and adjustments, you can position yourself as the right candidate for such a role.

This is a process that needs to run its course in order to refine yourself as a business leader, but you have to take the right steps to start it.

Leaning forwards: Being detail-orientated and methodical are praised attributes for a successful CISO. Such traits typically form a Guardian type, as characterised in our Business Chemistry model.⁵ Business leaders, on the other hand, are predominantly of the Pioneer or Driver chemistry type (refer to the figure below), with hallmark characteristics of leaning forwards, being less risk-averse, and disruptive thinking at the forefront. That said, you can still become a business leader. After all, your

business chemistry type is not set in stone, and will alter depending on the day-to-day context you operate in. In order to step into a business leadership role, you need to work on accentuating your leadership traits to align better with the forward-leaning attributes of successful business leaders. Escape from the detail to focus more on the bigger picture, value challenges and seek to take the right risks rather than avoiding, preventing or transferring them altogether.





Further education: Understanding finance, corporate strategies, marketing, leadership and operating models is pivotal to a business leadership role. An MBA or general management courses at a business school – even if costly and not strictly necessary for your current position – can boost your credibility and appeal as a business leader candidate. Even without future progression in mind, it can satisfy the mastery motivation and a route to furthering your personal knowledge.

Increased boardroom engagement: Board members need to perceive your presence at the table as pivotal. You need to thoroughly understand the board's agenda and sharpen your ability to think in the 'language of the business' and translate technical terms into board-digestible concepts. Showcase how cyber-related ideas enable the business to thrive and sometimes drive business growth. Share the load of your responsibility with the board, encouraging them to be accountable for cyber decisions. This will help the board perceive your decisions as theirs, and include you as an inherent part of them.

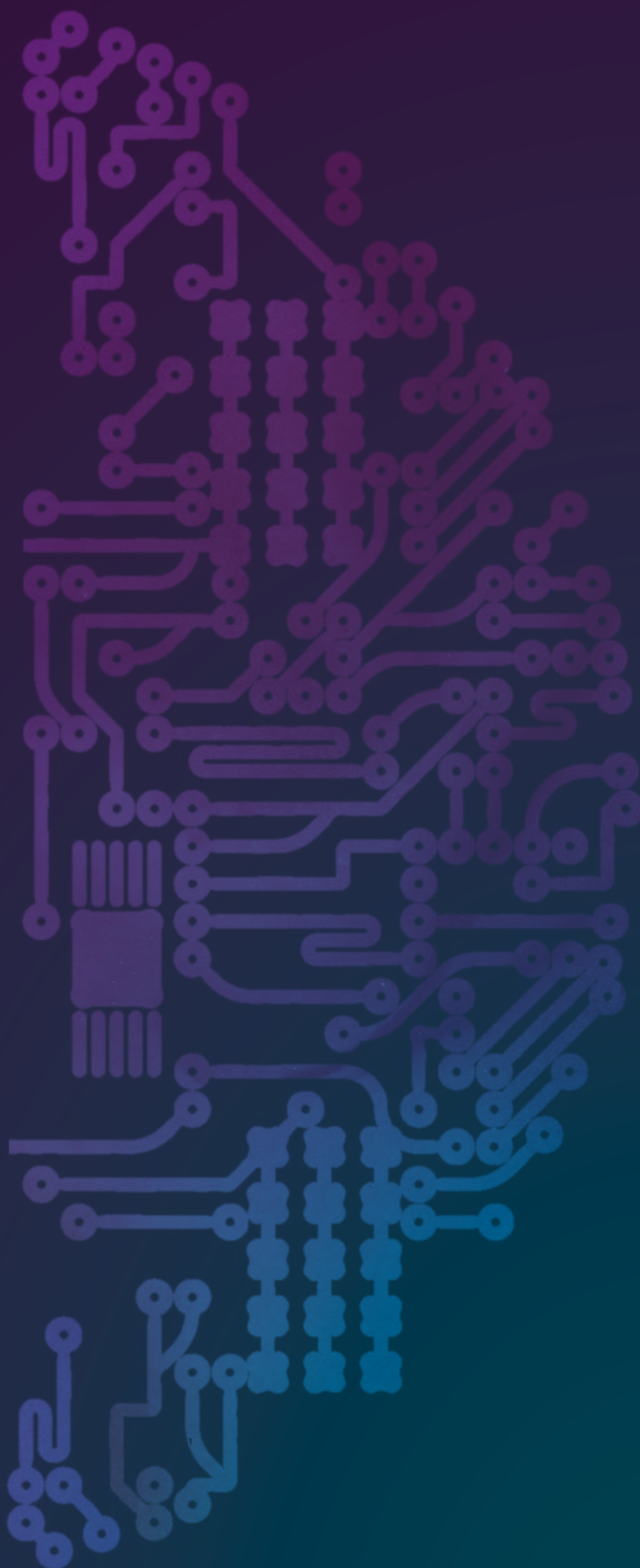
Realistic steps: Realistically speaking, it's unlikely you'll go straight from CISO to become a business leader. You'll most likely need to take a sideways or sometimes downwards step, outside your comfort zone, before segueing into a business leadership role. To ensure the interim step is best positioned to enable your ultimate transition, aim for a role that strengthens your confidence in the sought after area prior to commanding leadership in it.

Accentuate your leadership traits to align better with the forward-leaning attributes of successful business leaders

Forward thinking – Progressing with or without movement

The open career pathways are wide and varied. This is unlikely to have been the case ten or even five years ago for the typical CISO, either because the role was not as high profile as it is now, or because it was traditionally seen as a role predominantly fulfilled by technical people. This change is mainly due to the relentlessness and diligence that you have had to show in order to withstand the increasing responsibility and demands of your board. The traits and skill set you've developed should enable you to work towards your next desired career step – some directions, such as business leadership, requiring more substantial efforts than others.

Prior to any career decision, you need to ensure that you take the time to assess if your current career, or an alternative one, yields your desired goals and feeling of achievement. Self-awareness of your main motivators is key. However, if your current role is fulfilling you, and the main reason you might consider a change 'From CISO to...' is solely to avoid stagnation, then you need not worry if you were to remain CISO. The perpetually increasing prominence in cyber security over the past two decades, coupled with the transformation of the CISO role in the past five years, indicates that the coming years will continue to shape the role, solidify its indispensability and increase its influence and affluence.



Acknowledgments

If you would like to discuss your career path, any of the steps discussed or if you have any feedback regarding this paper please **contact us at NSEdeloitteCISOProg@deloitte.co.uk**.



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Footnotes

1. Deloitte's CISO Transition Lab Programme is designed to assist recently appointed CISOs to hit the ground running and thrive in their new roles. Through it, we aim to develop cyber leaders by helping individuals make an efficient and powerful transition.
2. Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.
3. "The current state of Chief Information Security Officer jobs", Online Marketplaces, 11 March 2020. Read more [here](#).
4. "Could a CISO become your next CEO?", CSO, 30 November 2018. Read more [here](#).
5. Deloitte's Business Chemistry framework provides a simple yet powerful way to identify meaningful differences between people's working styles. It categorises a person's working traits into one of four possible chemistry types: Pioneer, Driver, Guardian or Integrator. Read more [here](#).
6. Although the survey is focussed around UK Technology company leadership, our experience has shown the results to successfully extrapolate to industry business leadership in general.



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