

# The Path to the Boardroom for Technology Executives



In boardrooms, technology has shifted from a specialist topic to a shaper of strategy, risk, capital allocation and competitiveness. However, leaders who have run enterprise technology functions remain a minority in most boardrooms.

As boards enhance governing AI adoption, cyber resilience, and digital operating models, the demand for directors with tech expertise is increasing. The good news is that there is a large population of untapped technology leadership talent for boards to consider. Russell Reynolds Associates' recent analysis of 398 public company boards across major indices and regions found that, while nearly half include at least one director with senior technology officer experience, only a small share of chief information officers (CIOs) and chief technology officers (CTOs) from these indices currently hold board seats.

The question now becomes: what skills do senior technology officers with board aspirations need to develop?

Through targeted interviews with six technology executives currently serving on major boards, we find the answer is less about "bringing a tech lens" and more about a fundamental role shift from transformation operator to governance steward. The technology leaders who make the transition learn to speak in enterprise performance terms, choose committee roles that sharpen judgement, and moderate their tempo in the boardroom, asking the questions that strengthen oversight without stepping into management.

This paper is part of RRA's Technology and Governance Series, which examines how top technology officers transition into public company board roles, what differentiates those who successfully move from enterprise operators to governance stewards, and how boards can institutionalize technology fluency in a technology-defined era.

**Read more:**

- [The New Qualified Technology Executive: Redefining Board-Level Technology Expertise in 2026](#)
- [The Emerging Archetypes of Technology Leadership in the Boardroom](#)
- [Why Tech-Q Alone Isn't Enough: Bringing the Right Technology Expertise into the Boardroom](#)



# The director landscape: Senior technology officer board experience

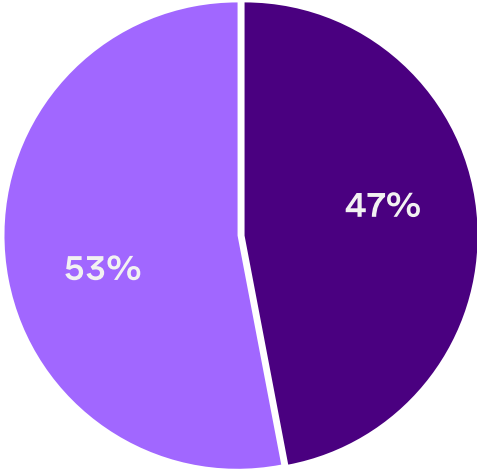
## Board presence: How widely this experience is showing up

Nearly half of public company boards globally (47%) include at least one director with enterprise technology officer experience (Figure 1). However, representation varies meaningfully by region.

**Figure 1: Enterprise technology officer representation on public company boards**

Share of public company boards with at least one director who has served in an enterprise technology officer role

■ Board includes enterprise technology officer experience    ■ Board does not include enterprise technology officer experience



Source: RRA proprietary analysis of directors with enterprise-scale technology leadership experience, n = 398 public company boards & 3,431 directors.

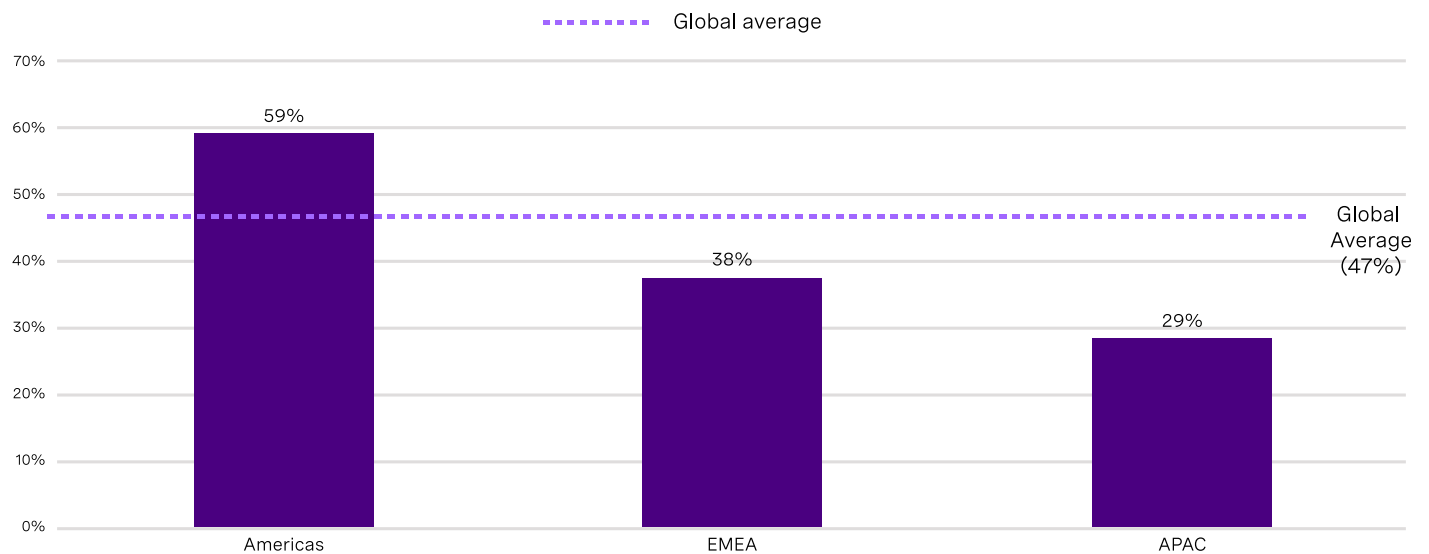


Boards in the Americas show the strongest overall concentration of board tech talent, as 59% include at least one director with enterprise technology officer experience (Figure 2). This often correlates with higher baseline fluency in discussions around technology risk, AI investment trade-offs, and digital capital allocation.

In EMEA, 38% of boards include at least one director with enterprise technology officer experience. While this signals adoption, the overall penetration level suggests that technology expertise is not yet systematically embedded across governance structures.

APAC remains the least progressed. Only 29% of boards include a director with enterprise technology officer experience, underscoring a structural gap in board-level capacity to govern enterprise-scale technology transformation in rapidly evolving markets.

**Figure 2: Regional variation in enterprise technology officer representation on public company boards**



Source: RRA proprietary analysis of directors with enterprise-scale technology leadership experience, n = 398 public company boards & 3,431 directors.

Where boards lack direct technology expertise, oversight can become fragmented across audit, risk, and strategy committees. In those cases, directors may rely heavily on management assurances when evaluating AI, cybersecurity resilience, and the value case for other major technology investments.



## Director-level reality: Enterprise technology leadership remains scarce

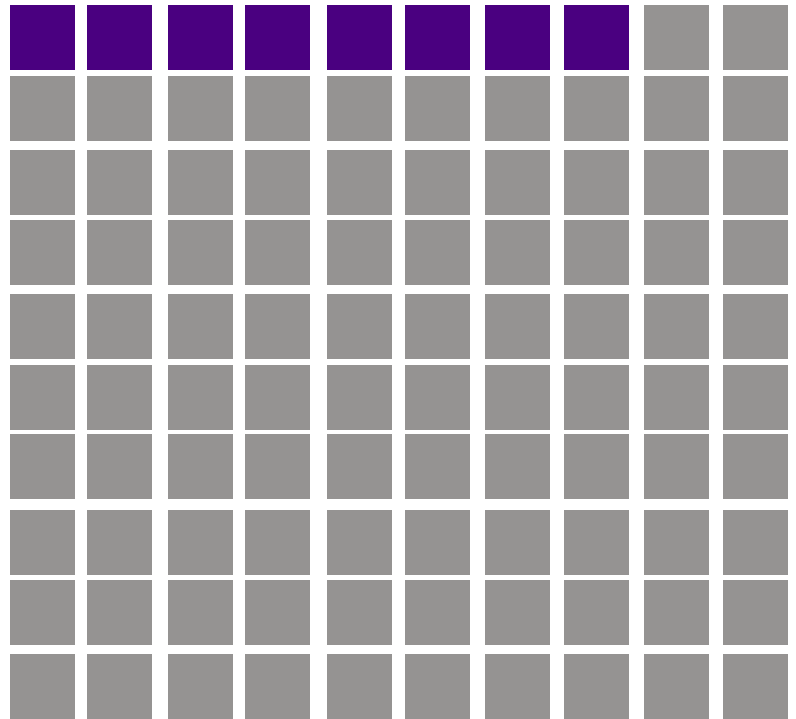
Across more than 3,400 directors analyzed, only 8% have served in enterprise-scale technology officer roles (Figure 3). The majority of directors with enterprise technology leadership backgrounds come from CIO or CTO roles. Other functional pathways, including product, cybersecurity, and data leadership, represent only a small fraction of board seats.

**Figure 3: Only 8% of public company directors have led technology at enterprise scale**

8%

Directors with enterprise technology leadership experience

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Source: RRA proprietary analysis of directors with enterprise-scale technology leadership experience, n = 398 public company boards & 3,431 directors.

## From cyber to AI governance: How the board landscape has changed for tech leaders

Technology is no longer an enabling function, but a primary driver of competitive advantage, operating resilience, and enterprise risk. Boards are being held accountable for how well they govern it, with agendas shifting accordingly:

- Risk and audit committees are spending more time on cybersecurity, operational resilience, and third-party exposure.
- Governance discussions are widening to include AI controls, data accountability, and model risk.
- Strategy debates increasingly require informed challenge on technology-enabled business models and the capital allocation behind them.

Against that backdrop, adding directors with deep technology leadership experience is not about creating a permanent “technology seat.” It is about strengthening enterprise oversight: raising the quality of challenge, improving judgement on risk-return trade-offs, and bringing greater discipline to major technology investment decisions.

For CIOs and other enterprise technology leaders, the 2026 fusion of technology and strategy means they are on boards not to represent IT but to operate as an enterprise steward.

# From enterprise technologist to public company director: Recommendations from leaders who made the shift

We spoke with senior technology leaders who now serve as non-executive directors. Their view is consistent: board impact is rarely about proving technical authority. Instead, it's about governance judgement; influencing decisions without drifting into an operating role.

## 01 The difficult tempo shift of moving from operator to steward

Executive instincts — speed, ownership, solutioning — are rewarded in management. But in the boardroom, those same instincts can undermine credibility. Directors described the risk of coming in “too hot,” confusing oversight with execution. The board role is not to lead transformation, but to govern it. Impact comes from sharpening assumptions, surfacing risk, and clarifying trade-offs.

**Experience to build:** Repeated exposure to enterprise-level oversight decisions where you are accountable for judgement, not delivery.

**How to position it in the boardroom:** Demonstrate disciplined restraint by sharpening assumptions, risk appetite and trade-offs without “taking the problem home.”

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## 02 Credibility is built with enterprise performance terms

Board discussions are anchored in value, performance, and downside. Technology leaders who land well can move easily from platforms and programs to revenue impact, margin, cash, and capital allocation. They also have the confidence to stay in the room when the discussion turns to funding, ratios and hard constraints, rather than retreating to “technology metrics.”

**Experience to build:** Explicitly tie technology decisions to value creation and downside protection, including capital allocation and funding constraints.

**How to position it in the boardroom:** Translate technology choices into the board's language (cash, margin, risk exposure) for credibility when the discussion turns to ratios and hard trade-offs.

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## 03 Committee rooms are where CIOs become “board-shaped”

For many, the steepest learning curve comes through committee work; particularly, audit and risk. These settings demand rigor around controls, assurance, disclosure, third-party exposure, and operational resilience. That experience changes how technology leaders contribute: less “innovation voice”, more disciplined oversight of risk, third parties and operational resilience.

**Experience to build:** Comfort with governance mechanics (controls, assurance, disclosure, third-party and operational resilience) ideally through audit/risk-style oversight work.

**How to position it in the boardroom:** Show that you can strengthen oversight discipline, not just advocate for innovation, by asking the questions that improve assurance and accountability.

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## 04 The most effective directors refuse to be boxed as “the tech person”

Technology may open the door; it should not define the contribution. Interviewees were deliberate about presenting as a director first, technology expert second, and about avoiding being pulled into implementation detail. Their value comes from simplifying complexity into board decisions and contributing beyond the technology lane: e.g., into accountability, incentives, operating model and risk.

**Experience to build:** Leadership experience that touches operating model, talent, incentives and enterprise risk, not only “technology transformation.”

**How to position it in the boardroom:** Present as a director first and a tech expert second, reframing technical complexity into decision points the board can govern.

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## 05 Learning the business requires structure

Be methodically curious. A director described building a simple personal rubric to surface knowledge gaps and identify “unknown unknowns.” It is a disciplined way to develop enterprise perspective quickly, rather than relying on absorption over time.

**Experience to build:** A structured method for learning the business and surfacing blind spots quickly, rather than relying on exposure over time.

**How to position it in the boardroom:** Signal intellectual humility and rigour by showing how you identify what you don’t yet know and how you close those gaps.

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## The key takeaway for tech officers with board aspirations

For the technology officer, a board appointment is an opportunity to move technology oversight from the periphery to the core. Success isn’t about being the lone expert; it’s about strengthening the board’s collective judgment. By demonstrating enterprise breadth and anchoring technology across committees, you position yourself as a vital architect of long-term strategy. True board readiness is the transition from managing a function to governing an enterprise.

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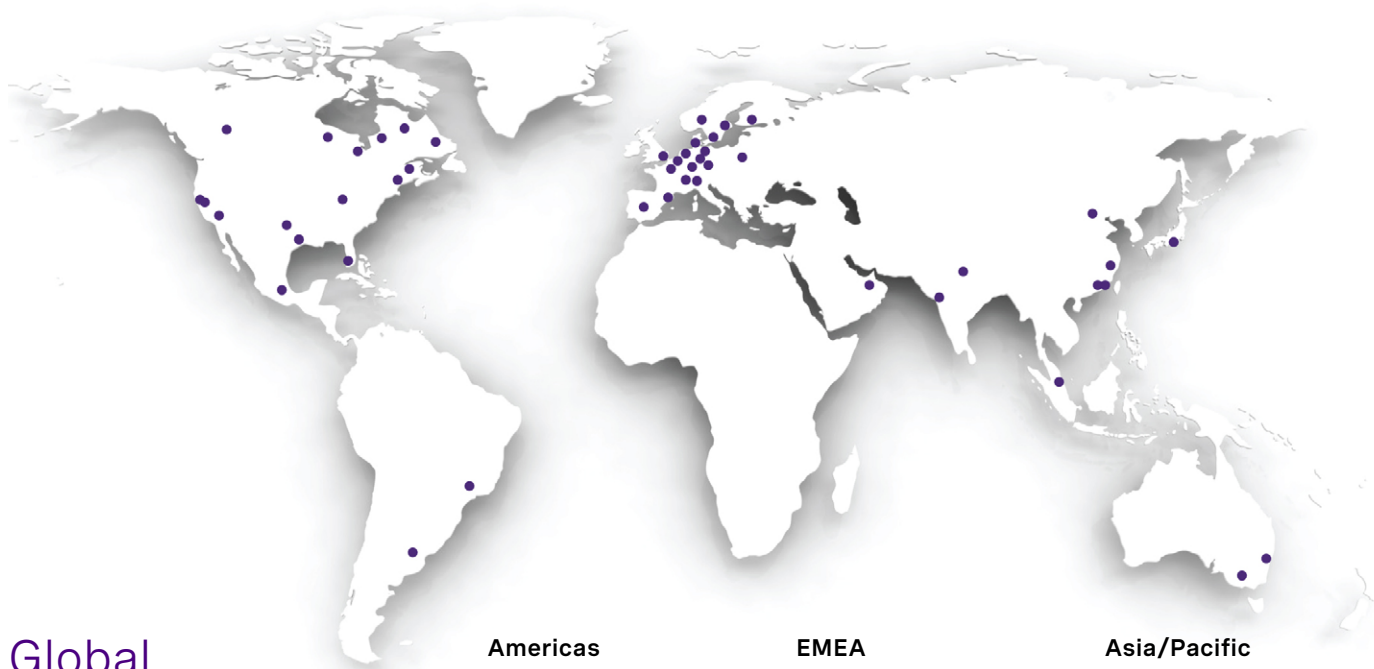
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# About Russell Reynolds Associates

Russell Reynolds Associates is a global leadership advisory firm. Our 500+ consultants in 47 offices work with public, private, and nonprofit organizations across all industries and regions. We help our clients build teams of transformational leaders who can meet today's challenges and anticipate the digital, economic, sustainability, and political trends that are reshaping the global business environment. From helping boards with their structure, culture, and effectiveness to identifying, assessing and defining the best leadership for organizations, our teams bring their decades of expertise to help clients address their most complex leadership issues. We exist to improve the way the world is led

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