CIO Compass

Navigating the tech waves to deliver *meaningful impact*
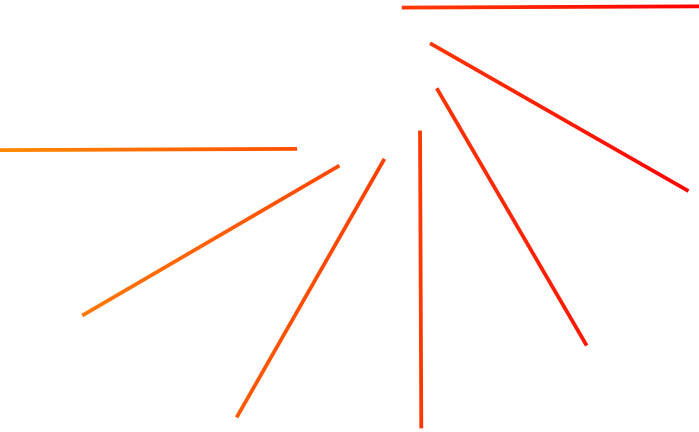
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next

Introduction

In an increasingly volatile and competitive environment, CIOs stand at the crossroads of business transformation and technological acceleration. They are no longer simply responsible for IT performance : they are BizTech leaders shaping how technology delivers measurable business impact.

Their mission:

➜ **Leverage the IT system to drive business transformation** by successfully integrating new technological solutions into the existing legacy landscape.

➜ **Turn the IT department into a catalyst for enterprise performance** by balancing business value with industrial maturity and modernising collaboration with business functions.

Unlike traditional trend outlooks, the CIO Compass focuses on the "must-do" actions for the next 18–24 months — helping Tech leaders turn innovation into measurable impact.

Based on our work with CIOs across Europe, the CIO Compass identifies the four cardinal directions shaping this transformation:
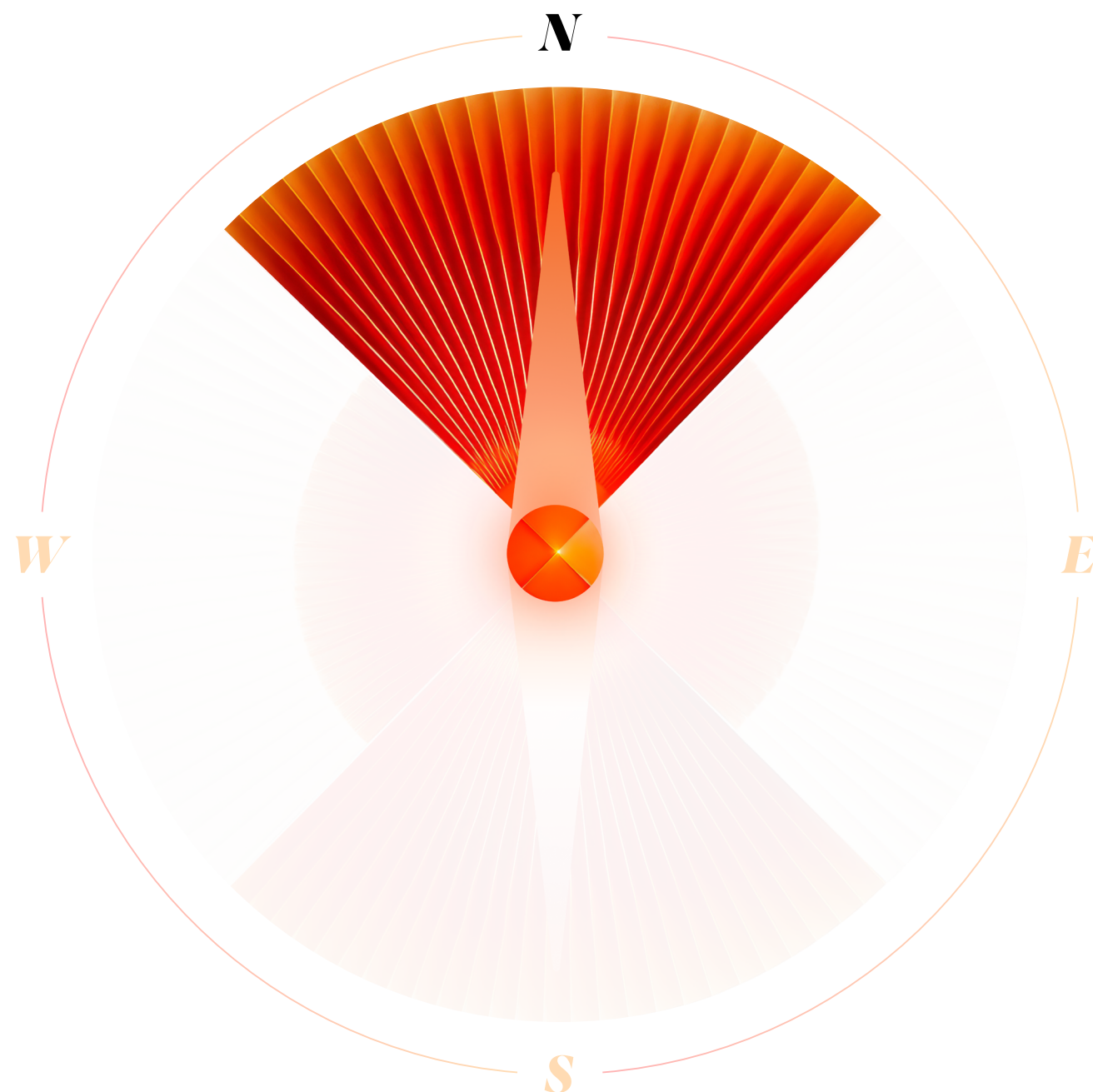
➜ *North*
   Scale AI for impact

➜ *East*
   Build a data platform and governance aligned with the highest standards

➜ *South*
   Move towards agile and secure IT infrastructures

➜ *West*
   Redefine how IT department performance is assessed

In the coming months, our teams will dive into each of these 4 strategic challenges for CIO decoding how to strike the right balance to help you succeed as BizTech CIOs.

CIO Compass brings you Sopra Steria Next's uncompromising, buzz-free perspective on the 10 key topics we believe should be on every company's agenda in 2025–2026.

North

Scale AI
for impact

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Moving beyond
the Gen "hAIpe"

Reinvent End-to-End
Processes by Unleashing AI

Curiosity has turned into a demand for measurable outcomes. CIOs must move from proof to purpose : industrialising AI responsibly with FinOps, MLOps and clear ROI guardrails. The challenge is not to multiply pilots, but to scale what works, under governance that ensures trust, sovereignty and impact. The winners will master the balance between creativity and control, turning experimentation into lasting business performance. True impact comes when AI is embedded in reimagined processes : combining Smart Lean methods with AI Factory execution to scale transformation end-to-end.

No Train, No Gain

Step Beyond Code to Propel
the AI Shift Across Your Entire
SDLC activities and teams

The real leap comes from deploying AI across the entire Software Development Life Cycle. Each user story becomes the new unit of value, capturing intent, evidence, and impact. Success relies on five visible signals: lead time, escaped defects, rework, coverage and unit cost per story.

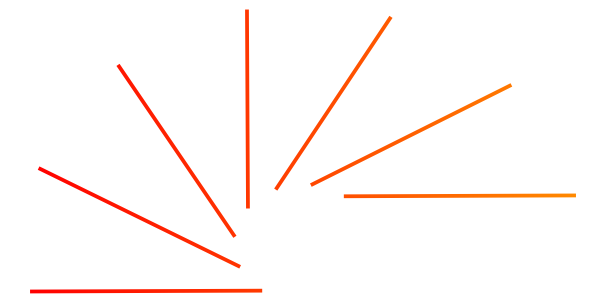This approach transforms development from faster typing to measurable, trusted delivery while upskilling teams and preserving engineering discipline. Sustainable gains require a culture of learning and pairing, where developers and QA teams continuously refine prompts, tests, and runtime evidence.

Hack to the Future

Anchor Agentic AI
as the Cornerstone
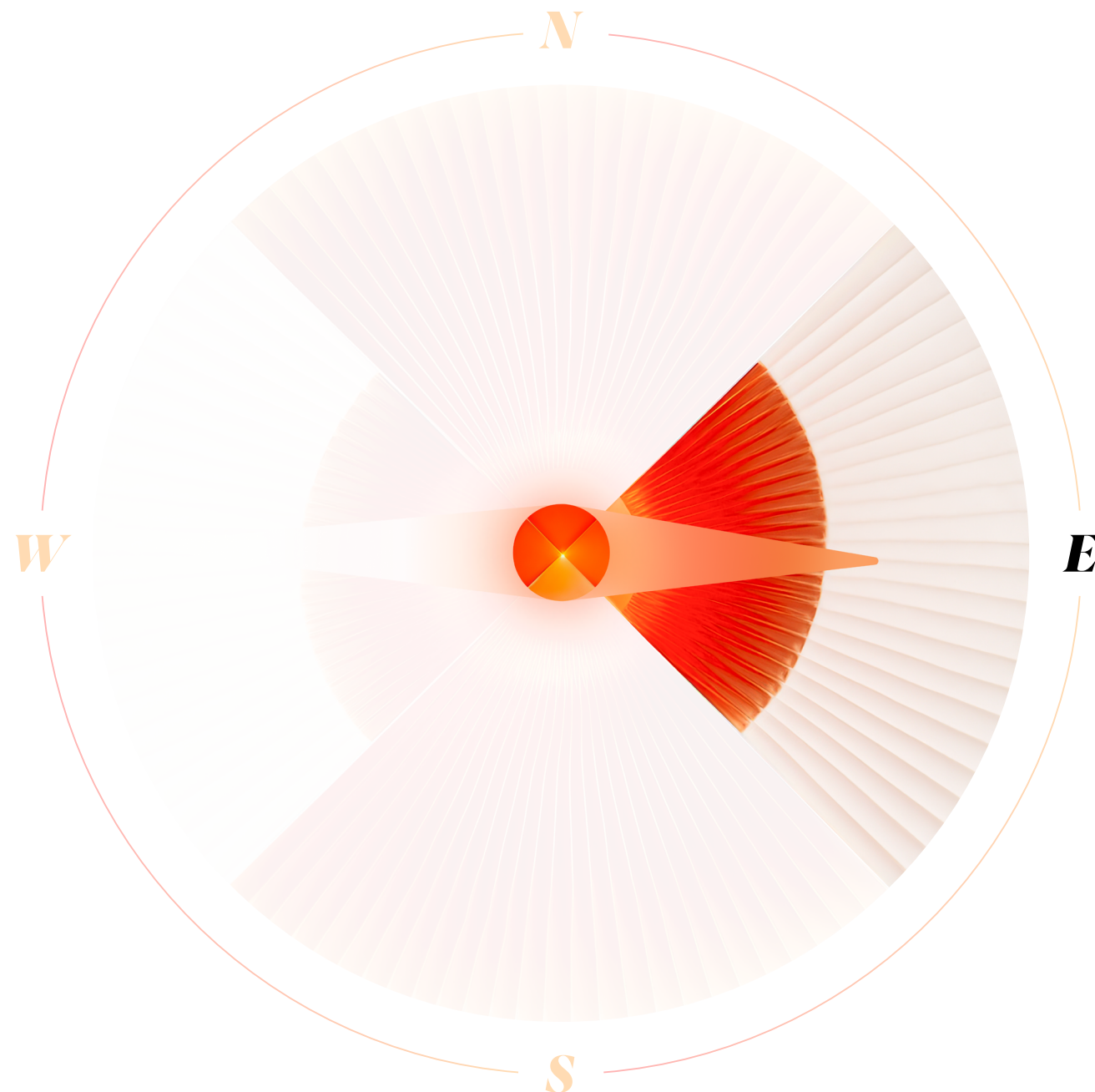### of Your Cyberstrategy

The next frontier is agentic AI, autonomous systems able to detect, simulate and neutralise threats in real time. CIOs must move from a defensive posture to continuous, AI-driven resilience, secure by design and sovereign by default. By coupling automation, threat intelligence and European sovereignty, organisations can restore trust and turn cybersecurity into a strategic advantage rather than a constraint. Agentic AI will not replace security frameworks; it will make Security by Design operational and adaptive in real time.

East

Build a data platform and governance aligned with the highest standards

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AI is nothing without control and purpose

Strengthen data governance to foster the rise of AI

AI has no impact without trusted data.
For AI to deliver measurable value, organisations must first master their data foundations: quality, lineage, and control. The next frontier is the fusion of data governance and AI governance, ensuring that what trains the model also drives business performance. This requires a new leadership role, the Chief Data & AI Officer (CDAIO), orchestrating ethics, compliance, and architecture.
In the age of the AI Act, trusted data is no longer a technical issue; it is a condition for innovation and sovereignty.
The upcoming AI Act turns compliance into an opportunity, making responsible data the new competitive standard for AI.

Innovation fusing digital and physical

Harness Digital Twins to Streamline and Perfect Industrial Processes

Digital twins are no longer an innovation lab topic; they are becoming the new operating model of industry. By linking physical assets, IoT data, and AI, they create a continuous feedback loop between design, operation, and improvement.

The goal is to make systems not only automated but self-learning and self-optimising. This convergence of data, simulation, and decision intelligence enables predictive performance, shorter cycles, and safer, more sustainable production.
Across industries, from rail to manufacturing, digital twins are evolving into self-learning factories, combining AI, XR, and data to improve safety, efficiency, and sustainability.
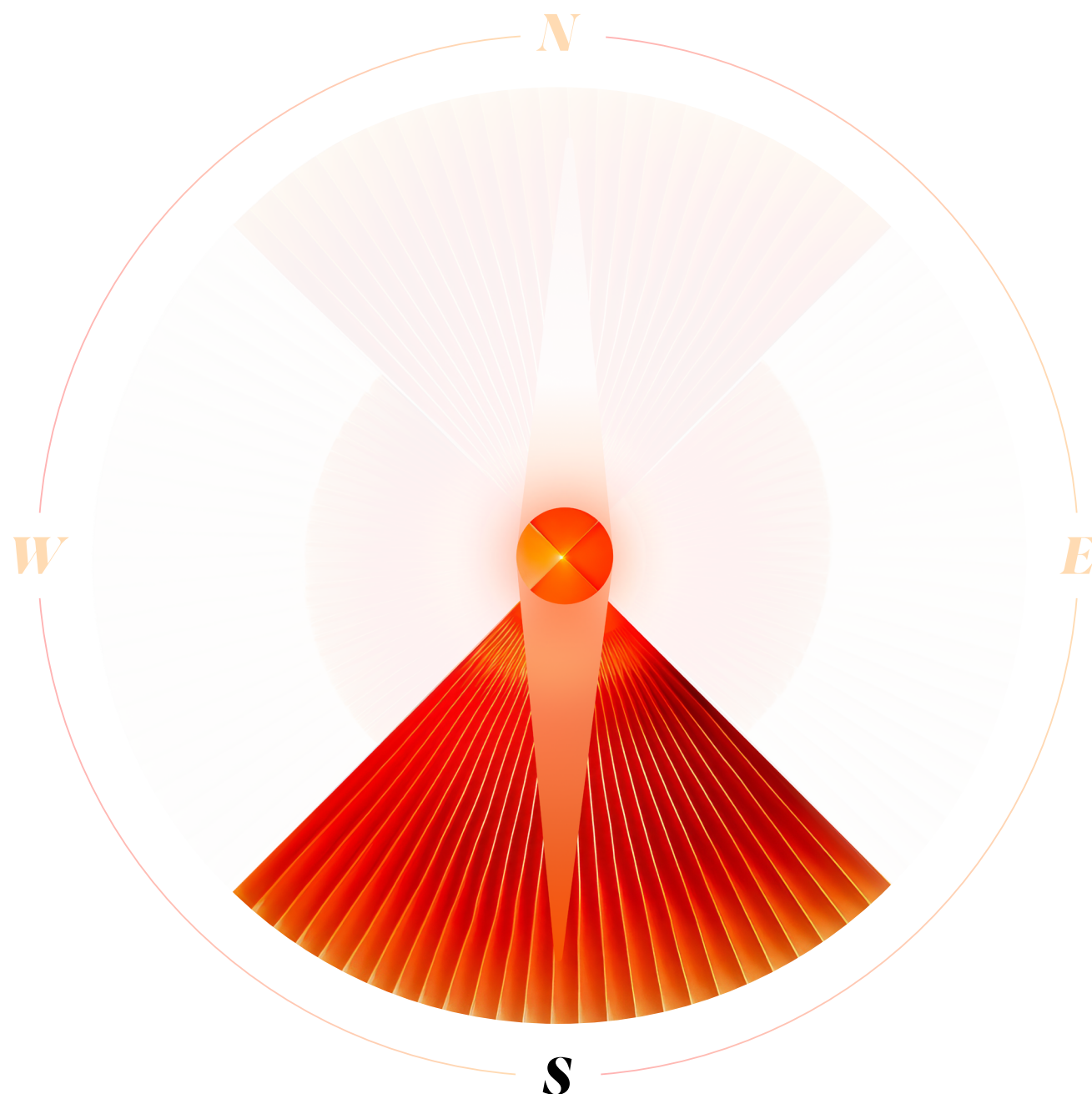
Escaping the data maze

Reinvent Your Organisation and Platform with a Data-as-a-Product Mindset

Every company now claims to be data-driven, but few truly are. The challenge is no longer access to data but its industrialisation. Leading organisations adopt a Data-as-a-Product mindset, treating datasets as certified, reusable business assets rather than isolated projects. This shift requires standard architectures, clear ownership, and shared value metrics.
When data becomes a product and its lifecycle is industrialised, it shifts from an IT cost to a business accelerator, fueling AI use cases and faster decisions.

South

Move towards agile and secure IT infrastructures

IT is Getting Smarter

Elevate IT with Smart and Agile Operations

IT is becoming truly intelligent, moving from reactive to predictive. Generative AI and automation now enable operations that learn, anticipate, and self-correct in real time. CIOs must combine **observability, AIOps, and FinOps** to gain continuous insight into cost, performance, and user experience. Beyond productivity, the goal is resilience: turning IT into a live engine of performance that scales innovation safely. Intelligent IT is not just efficient; it is the foundation of a faster, more adaptive enterprise.
Next-gen observability platforms, now make resilience measurable, cutting downtime, optimising spend, and enhancing user experience.

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Lean Portfolio Management and product-mode operating models allow teams *to focus on real value creation.***"**
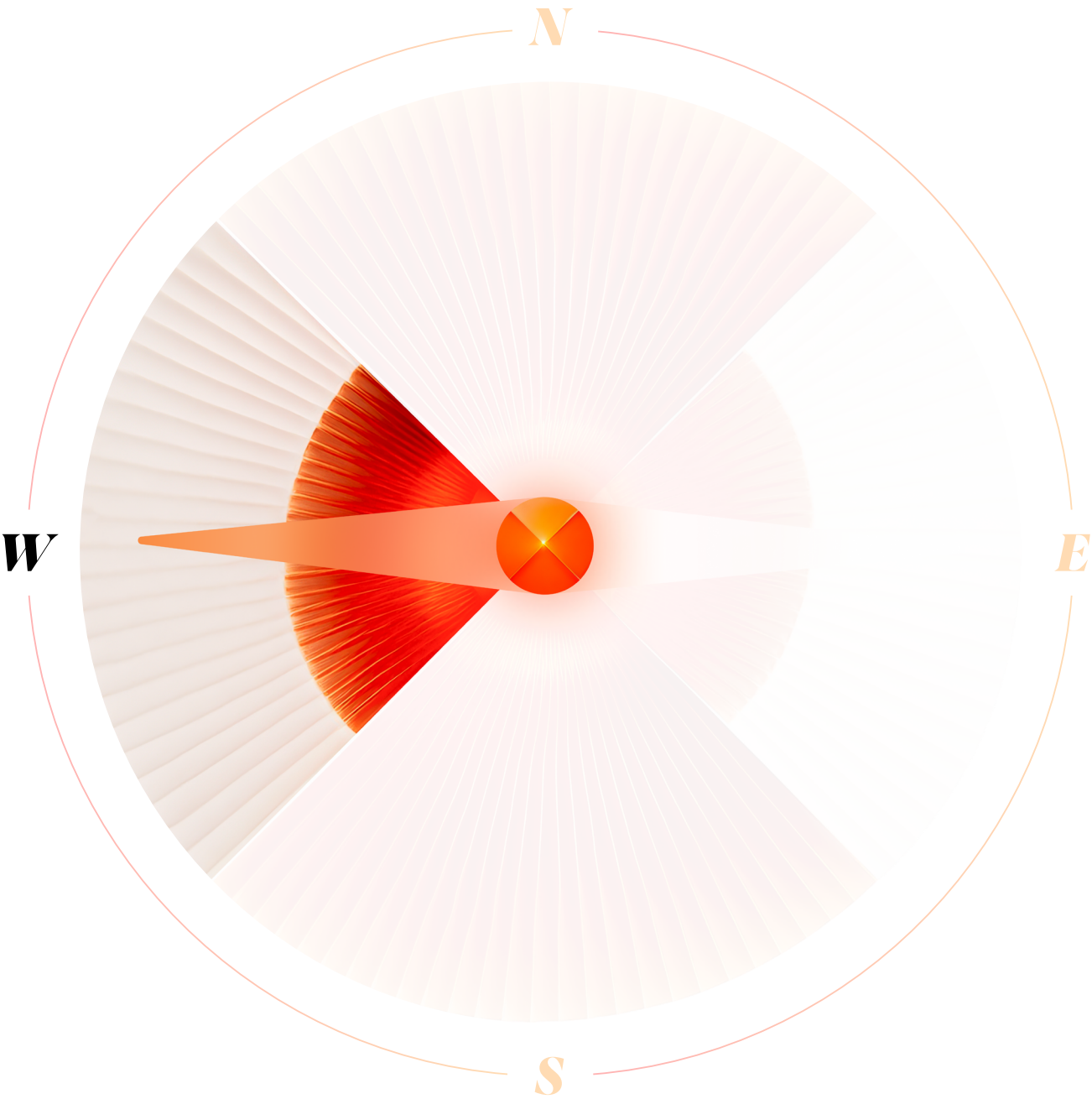

Heads in the cloud, Feet on the ground

Fast-Track IT transformation with Hybrid Cloud and AI

Hybrid cloud has become the backbone of digital transformation. The challenge is no longer migration but optimisation and sovereignty. CIOs now mix public, private, and trusted clouds to balance agility, cost, and control. AI-powered modernisation factories accelerate "legacy-to-cloud" transitions, while hybrid governance frameworks ensure compliance and performance continuity. The winning formula remains the same: head in the cloud for innovation, feet on the ground for resilience and trust. Hybrid cloud is no longer a technical choice but a strategic decision. CIOs must decide what stays, what moves, and what remains sovereign, balancing agility, performance, and control across trusted environments.

West

Redefine how IT department performance is assessed

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IT must adopt automation, real-time observability, AIOps, agile delivery, and FinOps *for smarter cost control.***"**

The leaner the greener

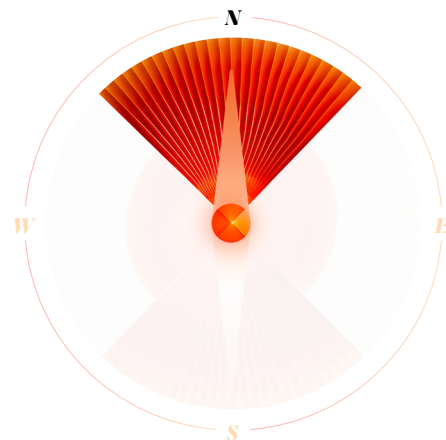### Leverage ESG transformation to drive Peak Performance

ESG has evolved from compliance to performance.
By combining automation, data governance and AI, CIOs can industrialise sustainable practices, from efficient processes to transparent reporting.
Embedding eco-design principles into IT and business operations turns regulation into advantage: lower waste, higher engagement, and measurable impact.
CIOs are now central to the operationalisation of ESG, automating CSRD-grade data collection, embedding eco-design, and aligning sustainability with business KPIs.

Entering the Post CAPEX Age

Master New Performance and Cost Control Paradigm

The shift from CAPEX to OPEX redefines how CIOs steer performance.
Flexibility matters only if governance keeps pace. Lean Portfolio Management (LPM) replaces annual planning with continuous funding tied to outcomes, enabling faster reallocation toward what truly delivers value. Product-mode teams bring accountability and agility, while FinOps provides real-time visibility on cost and impact.
The Post-CAPEX CIO becomes a financial strategist, balancing adaptability, efficiency, and trust in a constantly shifting economy.
From digital natives to global insurers, leading CIOs now combine LPM, FinOps, and architectural redesign to regain financial control and flexibility.
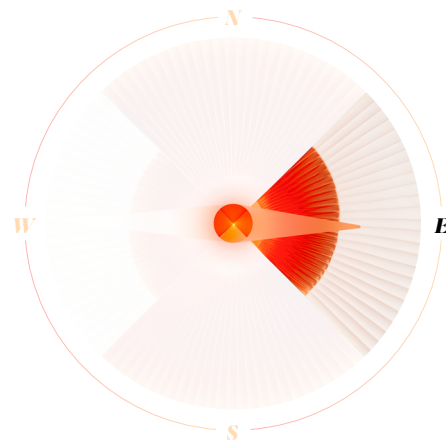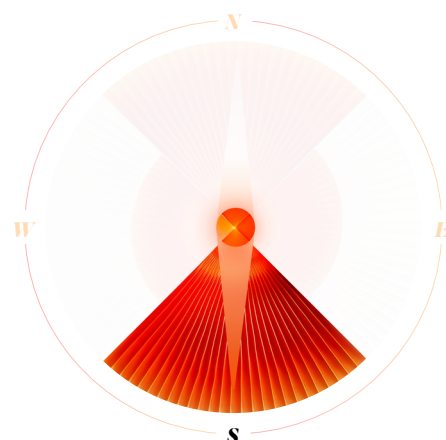
North

Scale AI for impact

→ **Moving beyond the Gen "hAIpe"**

→ **No Train, No Gain**

→ **Hack to the Future**

East

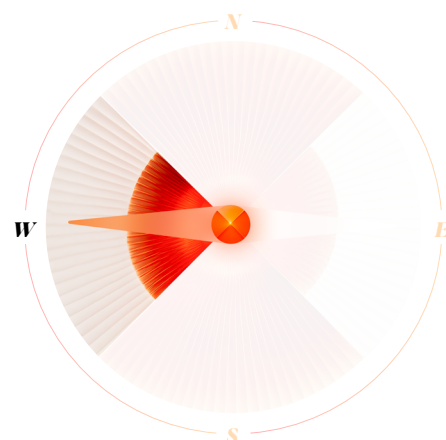### Build a data platform and governance aligned with the highest standards

→ **AI is nothing without control and purpose**

→ **Escaping the data maze**

→ **Innovation fusing digital and physical**

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→ **IT is Getting Smarter**

→ **Heads in the cloud, Feet on the ground**

West

Redefine how IT department performance is assessed

→ **the leaner the greener**

→ **Master New Performance and Cost Control Paradigm**

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driving *meaningful impact*

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