CIONET

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

LEGACY & LIFECYCLE MANAGEMENT

Business

On 1 October 2025, the Telenet Business Leadership Circle, organised and moderated by CIONET and Hendrik Deckers at the invitation of Telenet Business, took an in-depth look at the challenges of managing and replacing legacy technologies.

There are many reasons to transition away from legacy systems: a cyber incident, an acquisition, the need for new functionality, or a lack of knowledge and skills. Likewise there's no single, fixed path to an environment without (or with less) legacy. However, cloud and SaaS solutions often emerge as essential elements of that transition.

That said, moving away from legacy isn't always the ultimate goal. Legacy can also represent value. By definition it is technology that has proven its worth by delivering what's needed, often for decades, and has yielded a strong return on investment.

At the same time, legacy systems can present serious challenges, and sticking with them often isn't an option. They are the products of a different era, and today's landscape demands greater flexibility, security and integration. These issues only become more pronounced as the pool of experts familiar with the older technologies dwindles.

A typical risk is that in-house expertise gradually fades as experienced staff retire or move on, increasing dependence on external service providers. This can lead to a precarious situation when the need to modernise becomes critical but the budget cannot stretch to meet it.

No fixed scenario

The experiences shared by Digipolis, Nationale Loterij and Telenet Group, followed by a lively debate , demonstrate that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing legacy. However, a common thread emerges: a move away from custom-built systems in favour of cloud platforms and SaaS solutions. In practice, however, hybrid environments often persist. The share of legacy systems typically decreases, but rarely falls to zero.

Some IT departments employ creative strategies to discourage the maintenance of legacy systems. For example, never prioritising change requests for legacy applications, or applying a "technical debt" charge for updates to old technology while waiving it for newer systems.

This demonstrates that managing legacy isn't merely a technical or financial challenge – it also requires specific leadership skills. Leaders must keep the business on board throughout the change process, but they must also get buy-in from the IT team. The case studies below illustrate how three different organisations approached legacy management in completely different contexts and in very distinct ways.

YOURI SEGERS
CDIO Digipolis

Digipolis: cyber incident sharpens attitude toward legacy

In 2022, the City of Antwerp's IT department, Digipolis, oversaw approximately 1,300 applications. A scan revealed potential issues related to both external and internal vulnerabilities. "And that was just the known systems," says Youri Segers, CIO and CDO at Digipolis. "So we had a huge amount of legacy in-house, creating a high risk of a cyber incident. It was an accident waiting to happen."

That accident ultimately occurred on 6 December 2022, when the city's entire IT system was brought down by a cyberattack. The incident triggered a fundamental strategic overhaul. Under the new policy, all technology must comply with security-by-design and privacy-by-design principles, alongside a structured approach to lifecycle management (LCM). "But to redesign all 1,300 applications in that way, we were looking at a lead time of 10 to 15 years. Completely unfeasible," says Youri.

THREE STANDARDS

So Digipolis decided to completely abandon custom-built software. Instead three standard platforms were introduced: Microsoft for the office environment, SAP for organisational management, and Salesforce for CRM and workflow management. If these platforms couldn't provide the necessary functionality, off-the-shelf SaaS was chosen. "This was a major cultural shift," says Youri. "Now, only when there's no SaaS solution available do we opt for customisation."

After the cyberattack, approximately 700 applications were unavailable for a year. "That was the perfect incentive to look for alternatives through standard platforms or SaaS." Within about 18 months, 250 legacy applications had been phased out.

Digipolis also ramped up its investment in maintenance and security to make 267 applications cybersecure by 2027, under NIS2 requirements. This new approach allows Digipolis to focus on the remaining component: strict lifecycle management for the remaining custom-built legacy. "It's a big change, but it's wonderful to see how the mindset – within the team and the business – is evolving step by step. The incident ultimately created a great opportunity, even though it was a drastic and challenging process."

PIET VAN PETEGEM
CTIO Nationale Loterij

Nationale Loterij: quick action and concrete interventions eliminate legacy

Nationale Loterij is Belgium's largest e-commerce platform and manages the data of 2 million registered players. Of its annual revenue, €200 million supports a wide range of charities, while €145 million flows back to the government as lottery interest. Two government commissioners are responsible for strict oversight of the public company's activities.

Until about eight years ago, the Nationale Loterij had virtually no IT of its own. Each project was handled through a separate government contract. The result was an IT landscape that had developed organically, making a broad overview of applications, databases and so on increasingly difficult. "That's why we decided to radically simplify the IT environment," says CIO Piet Van Petegem. "We opted for four platforms and several clear strategic principles."

VISIBLE IMPACT

The chosen platforms are Adobe (for experience management), SAP (for finance and supply chain), Brightstar Lottery (for lottery solutions), SAP S/4Hana (for finance and supply chain) and Microsoft Dynamics 365 (for CRM for retail). The guiding principles are: business-oriented (to restore the relationship between business and IT), cloud first, smartphone first, and security-by-design.

"We opted for a very practical approach," says Piet. "So we didn't go to the board with a three-year plan. Instead, we started delivering concrete solutions very quickly." This had an immediate visible impact and gave the new approach the necessary traction within both business and IT. "The choice of Adobe, in particular, made a big difference. All sorts of SaaS applications are available on the Adobe platform, including the ones we use to set up promotions for players."

The final step of the process was to choose a new lottery platform. "That market has long been dominated by a few major players," says Piet. "But we decided to partner with a challenger. That was a big decision, because we're the first national lottery to use the platform for both online and offline operations." But ultimately it was the logical choice for the Nationale Loterij. "We wanted a 360-degree view of our players on a single system. As the new software is fully cloud-based on AWS, we are effectively implementing a hybrid cloud model, because all our other systems are standardised on Azure."

TRUST

It's crucial for such a radical strategic shift that the IT department can count on the business's buy-in. "We don't do that through PowerPoint presentations but by delivering results quickly and helping the business generate more revenue in a very concrete way," concludes Piet.

KATE ENGELS
Director Enterprise Architecture Telenet

Telenet: legacy is everyone's responsibility

Today, Telenet Group is widely recognised as a leading provider of telecom and IT services. Yet, its origins trace back to mixed intermunicipal partnerships, collaborations between municipalities and private companies to deliver essential services.

When Telenet Group was first established, it focused primarily on telephony. As technology evolved, the company expanded into internet and television services, achieving remarkable growth along the way. This success was fueled in part by a series of acquisitions, each bringing valuable assets, but also layers of legacy software.

"The acquisition of BASE was a real wake-up call," says Kate Engels, Director of Enterprise Architecture at Telenet Group. "We suddenly realised we had two versions of many applications."

Instead of simply choosing between existing systems, Telenet Group made a bold strategic move, to start fresh with a greenfield platform. "We wanted to be ready to support a multi-brand environment," says Kate. From the start, the goal was clear: leverage out-of-the-box functionality as much as possible, limiting custom development to just 15%, overseen by a dedicated customisation board.

The transformation took five years and came with challenges, a "perfect storm" of overlapping initiatives and dependencies during migration. "The biggest lesson we learned," Kate notes, "is the importance of rigorous preparation and clear accountability amongst the different parties when moving from legacy to greenfield."

BUSINESS AND IT ALIGNED THROUGH A DECENTRALISED IT ORGANISATION

The experience became a catalyst for deep organisational change. Telenet Group redefined its IT structure and partnerships, moving away from a centralised model. "We've deliberately opted for decentralised IT," explains Kate. "Commercial teams are now responsible for delivering their own customer value propositions, while customer operations manages the contact centre and its related applications."

To prevent duplication and maintain alignment across the organisation, a single enterprise architecture layer now provides oversight and coherence. Using SAP LeanIX, Telenet Group keeps a firm grip on its application portfolio, ensuring transparency and efficiency. "Decentralised IT has made us stronger," concludes Kate. "Business and IT are now fully intertwined and that collaboration empowers everyone to deliver greater value."

About CIONET

CIONET is the leading community of more than 10,000 digital leaders in 20+ countries across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Through this global presence CIONET orchestrates peer-to-peer interactions focused on the most important business and technology issues of the day. CIONET members join over a thousand international and regional live and virtual events annually, ranging from roundtables, programs for peer-to-peer exchange of expertise, community networking events, to large international gatherings. Its members testify that CIONET is an impartial and value adding platform that helps them use the wisdom of the (IT) crowd, to acquire expertise, advance their professional development, analyse and solve IT issues, and accelerate beneficial outcomes within their organisation.

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About Telenet Business

Telenet Business, part of the Telenet Group, is so much more than connectivity. As a managed service provider they help Belgian companies turn their digital challenges into business opportunities. They support and unburden, large and medium-sized enterprises as well as small entrepreneurs. You can count on them for high-quality managed services such as internet, telephony, solutions to collaborate and communicate digitally, cybersecurity and smart displays.

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