



CIONET

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

TRANSFORMING THE IT OPERATING MODEL



Business

On 18 November 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 and opportunities presented by the transformation of IT operating models.



ARIANE BERCKMOES

Chief Digital Transformation Officer

Ethias: added value through partnership

Over the past year, insurance company Ethias has completely reshaped its relationship with its “in-house” IT integrator, NRB. Ethias is both a major customer and the main shareholder of NRB, a situation that has at times proved challenging for the company to navigate. “We mapped out a new strategy that is radically focused on collaboration,” says Ariane Berckmoes, Chief Digital Transformation Officer. “It can still be complex at times, but both parties now clearly see the added value of the partnership.”

At first glance, you would expect that having your “own” IT integrator would be a huge competitive advantage and quite ‘simple’. “In theory it’s the ideal position to be in,” says Ariane. “You have every conceivable IT service at your disposal, as well as all the business knowledge.”

In practice, however, things turned out to be a bit more complex. Historically, NRB’s strengths lay in mainframe services and managed staffing, evolving now towards a full service portfolio. “It turned out that Ethias was moving much faster than NRB towards a distributed IT approach,” says Ariane.

IN SEARCH OF TRUST

This tension came to a head when Ethias wanted to implement a packaged solution for the company’s complete insurance operations, thus effectively exiting an area in which NRB has historically grounded. After a long and difficult implementation, Ethias ended up implementing only the claims component in the new package and not the entire business as originally intended. “At that point, a new modernization strategy needed to be co-created by business and IT,” says Ariane, “and the decision was made to bring all of Ethias’s IT under NRB.”

Ironically, this created a disconnect between business and IT. “The business side still expected the same level of customer intimacy and knowledge from its ‘own’ IT integrator, while NRB, which was in the process of evolving towards a more full portfolio, was looking for scale and standardization and as trust had been hurt in the past, communication was not always easy.” For Ethias, the challenge was to rebuild loyalty and trust between the business and IT. This became especially urgent when Ethias saw other companies encroaching on its position as a digital innovator.

A TRUE CO-PILOT

To regain that ground, Ethias introduced a structured collaboration between business and IT, using data as the raw material. “The insurance business runs on a combination of risk – determined by historical and future data, money and people,” says Ariane. “You can’t do that without technology.” Ethias shaped this collaboration through a group strategy encompassing everything related to business and IT. “It boils down to us covering more than 80% of our IT needs internally through NRB.”

The company has also opted for a transversal transformation office: a transversal business unit that impacts all other departments, such as customer engagement, CRM, AI, and so on. “We’re putting IT forward as a true co-pilot,” says Ariane. “Think of the co-driver in a rally car – when the co-driver gives an instruction, the driver follows it without hesitation. There’s a deep mutual trust. That’s what we’re after here – trust enables the rapid adoption of innovation, such as the introduction of MS Copilot across the business.”

Ethias remains NRB’s largest client, and the organisations are growing closer in other ways too. For example, NRB is a key stakeholder in Ethias Ventures, which in turn is committed to innovation. “It’s still a complex situation,” concludes Ariane Berckmoes, “but the marriage counselling is working well, and mutual respect is growing. We’re learning a lot from each other, and we’re realising that staying together is really worth the effort – we’re not doing this just for the kids.”





PHILIP CAUWEL

CTO

Wyre: building the train while riding it

Wyre is the wholesale player that owns and operates the telecom network used by Orange and Telenet to offer services to end-users. Wyre was established in 2023 as a joint venture between Telenet and Fluvius. The company is overseeing the construction of the fibre network and its associated connections, at a cost of approximately €3 billion.

Wyre was originally created through a carve-out from the Telenet group. "We have a roadmap in place to separate ourselves from Telenet group's IT systems," says Philip Cauwel, CTO at Wyre. The transition will take at least five years because we're essentially building the train while riding it."

NEUTRAL SERVICE, NEUTRAL APPLICATIONS

The challenge lies in the fact that Telenet group's IT systems were developed for a vertically integrated telecom operator, a model that is incompatible with Wyre's approach. "We are primarily a network company, focused on building and maintaining that network," explains Philip. "But we're also a customer focused company, and Telenet group – as well as Orange and potentially Proximus – use the network as customers."

Wyre is currently in a transitional phase and, for example, operates on separate instances of Telenet group's systems. But a platform for a telecom service provider isn't what Wyre needs. "That's why we're charting our own course. The goal is to gradually move away from Telenet Group's systems and establish our own independent setup."

Wyre is aiming for an application environment that will allow it to serve its other customers in a neutral way, with no link to Telenet group. Initially, the company is assessing which applications it will rely on Telenet group for, which it will outsource to external partners, and which it will manage itself. "We're paying particular attention to keeping the digital twin of the physical network up to date," says Philip. "IT and OT alignment is essential for our business. Once we have that in order, a basic CRM is pretty much all we really need."

EFFICIENCY THROUGH AUTOMATION

Wyre is also working closely with the contractors who are installing fibre optic cables across the country. "Data exchange is key here. We're aiming for greater efficiency through automation. Until recently, patching was done manually when connecting equipment to the network. Now we've developed a robot to make patching faster, more efficient and more accurate, while simultaneously measuring every connection so we can cross-check that information against the digital twin."

Still, the biggest challenge remains moving off Telenet group's operator platform. "It's far too large and complex for what we do," Philip says. "But everything we do today runs on that platform, so simply replacing it isn't an option." Wyre is investigating whether agentic AI can deliver the necessary functionality, as an alternative to a traditional rules-based system. "We want to arrive at a model that's fit for purpose, but we understand that we still have a long way to go. Our ambition is to be fully independent within five years."

PERFORMING WHILE TRANSFORMING

The experiences of Ethias and Wyre resonated strongly with several participants in the debate and it was noted that government organisations often face additional complexity when they collaborate with one or more IT partners. It always comes down to carefully considering what you want, they said. For example, which functions do you want to retain in house and which ones would you prefer to outsource?

When the pendulum swings too far in one direction, for example by outsourcing virtually all aspects of IT to an external partner, an unhealthy relationship can develop. It creates a dependency that prevents the organisation from pursuing alternative paths. One way to avoid this is to organise IT as if it were an independent SME within the larger company – with its own HR, finance, communications, and so on. This provides considerable freedom, especially because IT no longer depends on corporate HR or finance to green-light every project.

In the end, the participants agreed that there's no such thing as an ideal operating model. IT's job is to support the business, and ideally the model will evolve with the needs of the business. It's not something you can set in stone, they felt, and in the long run, large, fixed models aren't the be-all and end-all. Technology changes rapidly, but it's important that people remain in control because, ultimately, everything hinges on leadership. If all the conditions are met, IT will succeed in achieving its ultimate goal: performing while transforming.



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.

cionet.com



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.

telenet.be/business