



CIONET

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

**PROVING
TECHNOLOGY
VALUE IN THE AGE
OF AI**



It's Value
an improven company

Enterprise organisations appear increasingly willing to sanction meaningful budgets on projects led by cloud transformation, platform modernisation, and – most notably – artificial intelligence (AI). That’s the good news. But with financial commitment comes greater accountability and more and more difficult questions. Among the questions are these: When your board asks what AI is actually costing, do you have a credible answer? And can you identify the value that is likely to follow?

These are difficult questions to answer for two key reasons. Firstly, AI – certainly in its generative and agentic modes – remains an emerging technology, its prospective return on investment (ROI) largely unproven. Secondly, confidence in IT’s financial data is falling at exactly the moment it needs to be at its highest.

It is in the context that CIONET and It’s Value hosted an executive roundtable earlier this year. Bringing together a small group of senior peers, the mid-May event allowed for discussion on how to build the financial intelligence that earns executive trust.

Here are some of the main takeaways the evening’s conversation.

The search for transparency (part one)

Setting the scene for the night’s discussion, a senior finance leader shared his story of working for one of the UK’s largest financial services firms. He said that on starting in post, his first task was not to review the effectiveness of technology spend but to identify how much the organisation spent in the first place. This type of knowledge gap is far from unique. It was acknowledged by most attendees around the table, and is the product, in many cases, of a sprawling IT estate, the growth of autonomous technology projects run outside the IT department, and a lack of systems and processes that allow for ongoing scrutiny.

Only once costs can be identified can value be applied. And this is where Technology Business Management (TBM) comes in. TBM is a strategic framework that gives finance and technology leaders a standardised approach to managing the cost, quality and value of IT investments. By connecting technology spend to measurable business outcomes, TBM creates greater transparency between IT and finance functions. This allows organisations to position IT not just as a cost centre, but as a strategic partner that drives business value and performance.

As such, said the senior finance leader, it is a key means of unlocking understanding of both cost and value. Another attendee invoked the words of investor Warren Buffett: "Price is what you pay; value is what you get."

The search for transparency (part two)

Offering a challenge to these efforts to shine a light on spending, one voice around the table asked: "Transparency, to what end?". Her argument was that clarity was no guarantee of good decision making. Mistakes continue to be made regardless of how much information is available. What matter most, she insisted, was strategy.

Accepting the premise of the argument others argued, however, that transparency was not an end itself. Rather it was a means to making – and facilitator of – better decisions. For example, it allows an organisation to "better leverage its scale" by identifying, and ultimately eliminating, "duplicate data platforms often even present within the same division." To this extent, visibility matters because it effects change. To measure is to know.

The ubiquity (and ambiguity) of AI

Tools up and down the technology stack are increasingly infused with AI. From productivity apps to cyber security suites, from financial management platforms to code building and beyond, virtually every piece of software – as-a-service and standalone – comes with AI "bells and whistles".

The ubiquity of AI in these tools presents an accounting challenge, however. How much of its cost should you attribute to AI? And how much of the subsequent value should you attribute to AI?

On the one hand, attendees argued, this didn't matter very much so long implementation is driving efficiencies and other additional benefits. It's the outcome that counts. On the other hand, it matters a great deal if organisations aren't able to properly understand the impact – or otherwise – of adoption. How can an organisation evaluate the return if it is unable to pinpoint the initial investment? This ambiguity allows, too, for some organisations – keen to be seen at the vanguard of AI adoption – to tell misleading stories, attributing far too much credit to the most marketable technology of the moment.

FinOps and cloud clarity

Described as an integral component of TBM, FinOps (financial operations) is a framework designed to provide financial accountability when assessing the trade-offs inherent in cloud implementation. Most enterprise organisations are operating in a hybrid world where on-premise infrastructure exists alongside cloud, both public and private. Assessing the relative benefits of the latter – speed, cost, and performance – is not a simple task, certainly not without a frame to guide assessment. FinOps can prove a useful aid in that respect.

For a number of organisations represented around the table, cloud has proved less cost-effective than hoped. In part this is down to “credit card syndrome” where departments spin up cloud instances without IT's say-so. The operating cost model that underpins cloud is no barrier for those – engineers among them – that want to move fast. The result? IT soon loses control. And in part it's down to a false impression of ongoing cloud costs. As one attendee pointed out, our job is to change the mindset of the user so that they learn to “use what they need rather than what they want.”

Cloud conversations take other forms, too, especially when you consider that value comes in many forms. If, for example, value is partly a measure of an organisation's contribution to environmental sustainability, then that organisation might choose to keep their technology close.

It might decide that it is easier to measure and control carbon emissions from an on-premise data centre than it is when outsourcing much of that infrastructure to a public cloud provider where access to total emissions numbers often proves elusive. Once again, the debate around cost and value comes back to transparency.

Proving Technology Value in the Age of AI – a CIONET executive roundtable in association with It's Value – took place on Wednesday 13 May 2026 at Vintry and Mercer, London.



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.