

Enabling Critical Relevance in Digital and Technology Executive Appointments

The increasing business integration of digital technologies is leading to greater differentiation of executive roles to co-lead transformations with their executive colleagues.

A key area of current demand is for executives experienced in digital transformation, particularly for business-savvy Chief Technology Officers, Chief Digital Officers and Chief Information Officers. The titles vary, but we are focused on C-suite executives and direct reports to the CEO in organizations with a significant change agenda. Competitive pressures and customer expectations can drive that agenda, or a desire to lead, or at a minimum, be on par with industry expectations.

Today these agendas tend to rely on the shaping and implementation of significant technology investments and the enhanced use of data and business intelligence. Alongside technology investments, and integral to gaining business value, is the concurrent investment in reworking business and operating models, overhauling or streamlining processes, and the critical shift or uplift in people's capabilities.

The Nature of Business Experience and Expertise Matter more than Technology Experience

In the executive searches for these business-savvy technology executives, we realized that even though the position briefs can look similar, there might be absolutely no overlap in their candidate pools.

Our learning is as digital and technology developments grow increasingly integral to organizations, it is the nature of the business and its transformation challenge, the totality of a candidate's experience, and the kind of transformation experience candidates have driven that is the most important. Just finding candidates with excellent knowledge in business technology and a digital background is not enough.

We illustrate with three organizations, each in different industries, where each organization was consumer-facing with a strong loyalty base amongst their customers. The first search was for an insurance company, the second in healthcare, and the third provided scientifically based services to businesses and consumers. Each client had particular requirements, and all were value-based organizations where cultural fit mattered a great deal, required a strong understanding of technology and the digital space, and a high amount of business knowledge. Each role was a direct report to the CEO. The functions had similar titles, and for this paper, we will refer to them as Group Executives Technology and Digital.

The Organizations and Transformation Challenges

Case 1- Our client was a midsize insurance firm providing specialized insurance coverage for businesses and individuals in a specific industry. The challenge was to continue the development of their digitally enabled platform and to deploy it in a competitive environment. They sought to maintain their innovative approach and be a leader in financial services in their chosen markets.

Case 2 – Our client was a large not-for-profit healthcare provider, including hospitals, home nursing, and social outreach services. They needed a visionary and experienced digital leader to lead, develop, and execute the organization's digital agenda, including an implementable digital strategy that would support their ability to deliver excellent healthcare.

Case 3 - Our client was a globally recognized major scientific and geoscience service provider, staffed by highly qualified scientists and data scientists. It provided a wide range of commercial products and services to support informed decision-making by governments, emergency services, industry, and the community. The transformation challenge was to renew the technology base to ensure our client would be well prepared for the new world of digital services and this would encompass both bespoke scientific technologies and emerging AI and data science opportunities.

The Group Executives Technology and Digital Need and Search Challenge

Case 1 – Our client required that the incoming executive would have a strong track record as a successful CIO or Senior IT executive in the digital space, and, because the role would also oversee the finance function, have a background in finance. They needed an executive innovative in technology, an influential people leader with the ability to drive and support business innovation, and a change agenda using collaboration and agile work approaches. The search challenge was to find someone with experience in these areas (digital and finance) and who wanted to work in a midsize company.

Case 2 – The healthcare provider sought an executive who could lead a multi-skilled team and work closely with their executive peers to shape and deliver applications, infrastructure, and digital services aligned with the organization’s strategic priorities. The candidates needed to understand the healthcare sector, have driven meaningful change for an organization, experience working in a regulated environment, and a value-set that matched the client’s focus. A proven track record of delivering transformational change was critical as the organization previously had had a disappointing experience. The role was national in scope, but the headquarters location was one of the smaller cities which generally did not have a deep pool of candidates in the technology healthcare sector.

Case 3 – The Group Executive Technology and Digital function at the services provider was accountable for almost half of the organization’s staff. This included all data scientists and IT technology personnel, those individuals who delivered the data, infrastructure and systems that underpinned operations and client services. They needed an executive who could work effectively with brilliant scientists and data scientists and who could work in a high-achieving environment. The candidates would need the ability to readily gain credibility in an environment with a high percentage of PhDs. Additionally, they would need to work effectively in a very ambiguous environment with multiple stakeholders. Our search candidate targets included individuals who had backgrounds in a consulting and research organization, pharmaceutical industry, or a mixture of industries.

The Candidates and Outcomes

Case 1 – The candidate appointed had a background in companies of varied sizes with a strong track record of innovation. They had worked in financial and the telecommunication industries and had strong academic qualifications in change management. In relation to functional background, they had experience in project management and their finance experience included having reworked the financial model of an organization with over \$1.5bn in annual technology investments.

Case 2 – Our search process identified five strong candidates that we presented to the client. The candidate appointed had a mixed background across industries. This included health and human services, technology services, and the retail sector. As part of the selection process both the CEO and board members on the selection team were satisfied that this candidate had delivered significant transformations in constrained financial circumstances.

Case 3 - The candidate appointed by our client had a strong affinity with the scientific base of the organization and was a regular consumer of the organization’s services. They had a mixed background, were used to working with well-credentialed colleagues through their time on the staff of a university and had good strategic and operational experience in both financial services and emergency services. Recent experience in a major consulting firm had further developed diagnostic and influencing skills.

Our NGS Global Value-Add

- Informed understanding of the different flavors of technology and digital technology roles, with no cross-over of candidates.
- Performed original and cold research to identify and meet client's expectation for the right type of backgrounds and values.
- Brought a range of candidates to each client, where we demonstrated our ability to identify candidates with close or relevant backgrounds, diverse experiences, with strong diagnostic, stakeholder engagement and influencing skills.
- Executed quality candidate assessment and development needs identification.
- Verified the transformation and change experience of candidates, along with significant organizational culture and values alignment.