Saros

CIO STRATEGY REPORT 2026



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Saros Consulting is a global leader in IT consulting and strategic project management. We partner with the world's most recognised brands to deliver complex, business-critical technology programmes.

We combine specialised knowledge, a vendor-agnostic approach and proven delivery excellence to help organisations navigate their most complex IT challenges.

Our vision is simple; we believe that great IT is transformational, driving business development and connecting people to their goals. Our approach is equally simple; we put our expertise to work in your best interests, we are part of your team, and on your side always. We will examine, explore and evaluate, doing so without fear or favour, in a manner that is clear and actionable. We provide the advice that empowers positive change. We transform IT from a mandatory business component into a vital engine powering simplicity and security, connectivity and control, all unified by our in-depth understanding. This is not about technology; this is about creating the springboard that drives business where it needs to go next. The Saros team are experienced hires with backgrounds in multinational environments, this experience married with their consulting prowess is our unique differentiator. Our team have been at the forefront of challenging and complex projects, this experience makes us better than the rest.

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About This Research

This report is based on survey research conducted by Censuswide on behalf of Saros among senior IT decision-makers in large organisations across Ireland. All respondents work in organisations with 250 or more employees.

Foreword

The Strategy Gap

We are living in a world where AI agents have their own social media platform. A world where 'employees' aren't necessarily humans, and where humans are hired by AI. We are in a truly changed world where organisations are only as good as their technology is. As businesses demand faster innovation and immediate AI capabilities, we see IT departments being put under immense pressure to deliver.

In that context, the question facing every technology leader across the globe is not if they should adapt; it is whether their approach to IT is structured to adapt at all. Beneath the confident talk of digital transformation and artificial intelligence, organisations in Ireland are operating without a coherent plan. Our inaugural CIO Strategy Report shows that while enterprises are spending on technology, they are not necessarily investing in it. With IT teams stretched to their limit, long-term strategic direction is getting neglected and new projects become siloed stabs in the dark.

Saros commissioned Censuswide to survey 200 senior IT decision-makers across organisations with 250+ employees in Ireland, to understand not just what technology they are deploying, but how purposefully they are doing it. And, by surveying the largest businesses in the country, we also gain insights into the multinational landscape. The results reveal a marketplace that is technically active, but strategically adrift.

Almost one-in-five large organisations in Ireland do not have an IT strategy at all. Of those who do, fewer than half consider it genuinely ambitious. Meanwhile, a significant proportion report that their leadership teams don't even know what the strategy contains. With no coordinated approach to technology, IT very quickly becomes a boat without a navigator. This is leading enterprises to, on average, waste more than €1.1 million each year on IT projects that are ultimately unusable – not because the technology failed, but because there was no clear map.

This doesn't show a lack of intent, but a lack of the structure required to turn intent into outcomes. It shows that a technology partner who can help build that structure by interrogating where an organisation is, define where it needs to go, and help it get there with discipline and in tandem with its business strategy, is now a necessity.

This report explores how organisations are approaching technology today. But more than that, it unveils what is happening – or not happening – around those technology decisions.



Ray Armstrong
Co CEO



Justin van der Spuy
Co CEO



Almost one-in-five large organisations in Ireland do not have an IT strategy at all

Key Findings

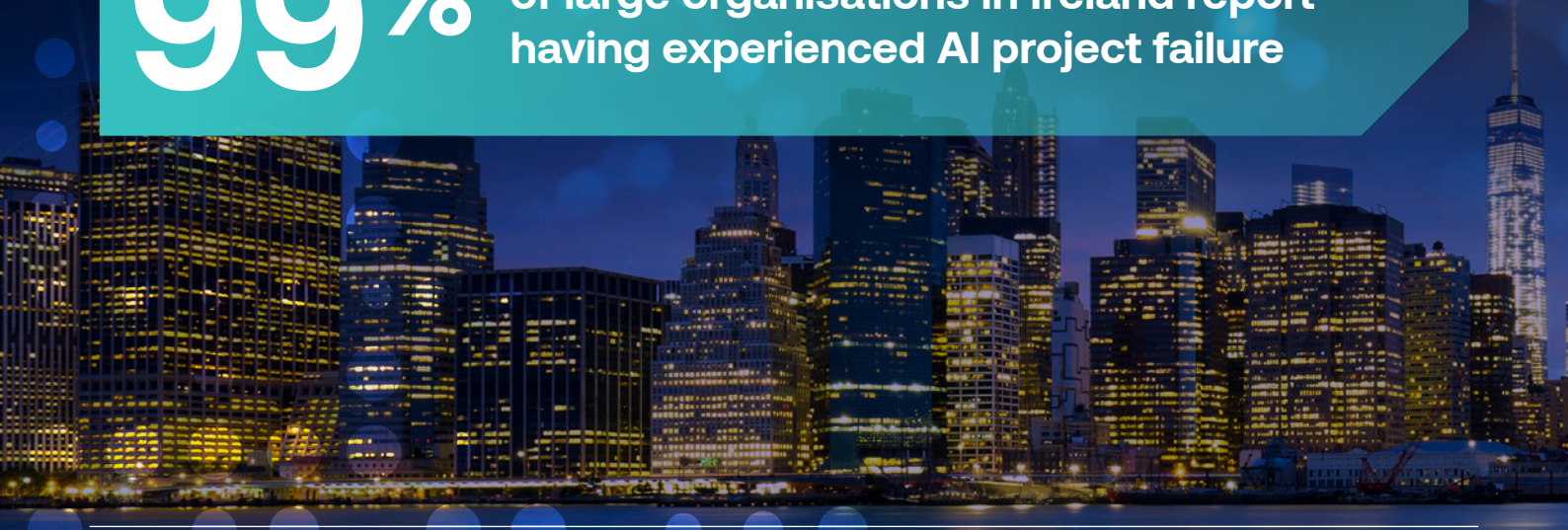
€1.1 Million
on average wasted on unusable IT projects annually

€775 K
on average wasted on AI project failure each year

€667K
on average spent on zombie projects annually

1 in 5
large organisations in Ireland do not have an IT strategy at all

99% of large organisations in Ireland report having experienced AI project failure





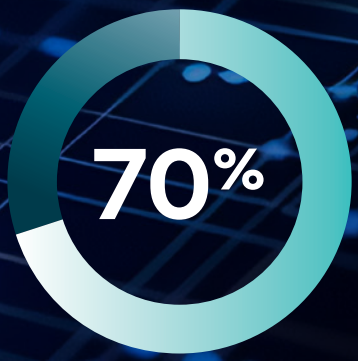
of enterprises in Ireland have spent more on **failed AI projects** than successful ones

53%

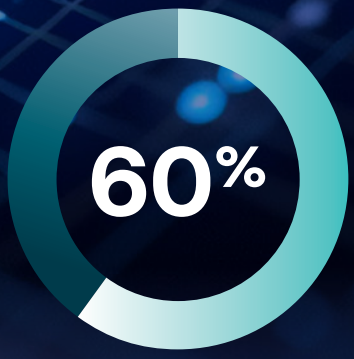
of organisations admit that they have implemented **AI that made decisions which they could not explain to customers**

94%

of large enterprises **delayed or paused** critical IT projects in the last 12 months due to budget uncertainty



of enterprises who have an IT strategy say it has at least **some degree of positive impact on business success**



of large enterprises in Ireland are seeing **stress or mental health issues** among IT workers

61%

of IT leaders say **scope creep** is a significant source of stress for IT and technical teams

1/4

of large businesses in Ireland reduced their cybersecurity budgets this year and only...

50%

are confident they can detect attackers before any damage is done

Failing to plan Ireland's most expensive IT problem

Ask most technology leaders if their organisation has an IT strategy and they will say 'yes'. Press them further – like asking whether it is up-to-date, is it ambitious, do senior leadership understand it? – and the picture changes considerably. This reflects a major organisational challenge facing global businesses today: they are attempting to move quickly with emerging technologies, particularly AI, but without a clearly defined strategic foundation to guide and ground them.

Saros's research found that almost one-in-five large organisations in Ireland have no IT strategy at all. But the more revealing finding is what is happening inside the organisations who do have one. Only half of IT decision-makers who have an IT strategy describe it as ambitious, while one-in-seven admit that it is not up-to-date. But, it's not just the plans themselves that are lacking; one-third of those who have an IT strategy are unsure if their leadership team actually knows of its existence, or understands it.



An IT strategy that exists in theory, but is effectively invisible to the most important stakeholders – including IT teams themselves – is no strategy at all. Instead, it is just another document; a tick-the-box compliance exercise rather than a navigational tool.

The consequences are extensive. Large enterprises in Ireland estimate that they are wasting, on average, €1.1 million annually on unusable IT projects. This is not because the technology failed, but the strategy. Projects commence without a clear connection to business outcomes, while investments are made in the wrong technologies because there was no framework to evaluate them.

Annual IT Waste per Organisation

€1.1M wasted on unusable IT projects annually

€775K wasted on failed AI initiatives

€667K wasted on zombie projects annually

Exacerbating these issues is the stark reality that 94% of large enterprises delayed or paused critical IT projects in the last 12 months due to budget uncertainty, while nearly a third delayed more than one. An IT strategy, properly constructed and actively maintained, exists precisely to protect organisations from this kind of reactive paralysis. IT strategies fundamentally have a flexibility that assumes fluctuating budgets. And, crucially, they provide a business rationale for prioritising some investments over others when conditions shift, and the confidence to hold course when they do.

Project Disruption per Organisation

94% delayed or paused critical IT projects

1/3 delayed more than one project

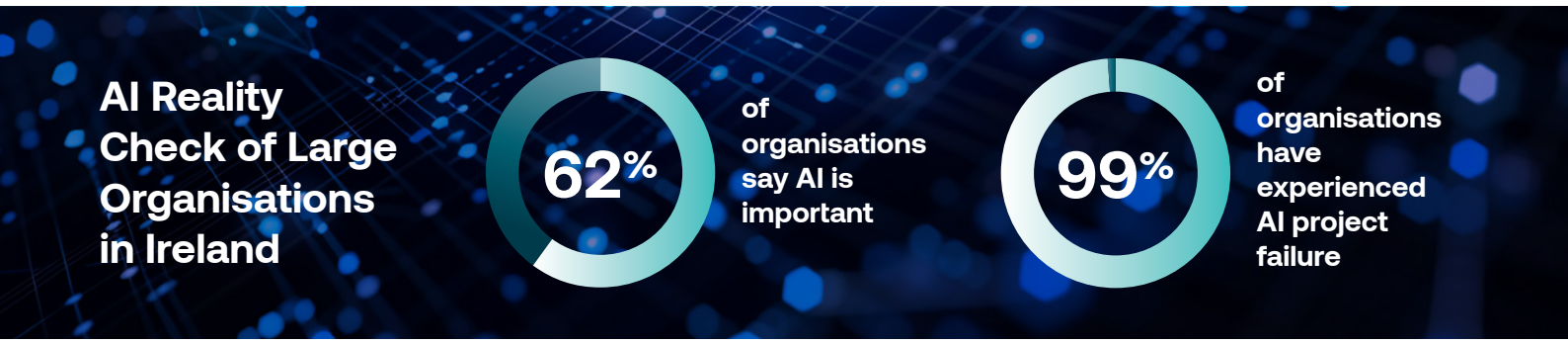
The research does confirm that, where strategy is working well, it is making a material difference. A significant 70% of enterprises who have an IT strategy say it has at least some degree of positive impact on business success. Additionally, 64% say it helps them avoid investing in the wrong technologies – although, as we have already seen, this benefit is far from guaranteed. Meanwhile, 61% say it supports better decision-making. These are critical benefits, but our research suggests that they are not being fully realised. This correlates with research from Gartner which shows that globally, just 17% of IT leaders believe their IT and business strategies are perfectly aligned[1]. In an environment where the cost of misguided investment is counted in seven figures, having a strategic framework that reduces the likelihood of guesswork is a quantifiable competitive advantage.

The challenge is that building such a strategy – one that is genuinely ambitious, understood by leadership and underpins business goals – requires a level of rigour that many IT teams, under pressure and under-resourced, struggle to sustain on their own. It requires objectivity about where the organisation currently is, clarity about where it needs to be, and the expertise to bridge the two.

1. IT strategy maps how technology will be used to support business goals and drive value. What are technology leaders doing to optimize and evolve their IT strategy?

Rationalising artificial intelligence

A UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report predicts that the global AI market will reach USD $4.8 trillion by 2033. With enterprises worldwide investing billions in the technology, it is surprising that still, only 62% of IT leaders in Ireland say AI adoption is important to the success of their business. The investment appetite may be clear. But less clear, and what this research explores, is whether that enthusiasm is matched by the strategic and governance structures needed to make AI work.



Evidently, enterprises are trying to adopt AI, but it is very much hit-and-miss. Almost all (99%) of large organisations in Ireland report to have experienced AI project failure. It is a problem that is costing organisations an average of €775,000 in wasted spend each year. In fact, more than half (57%) of enterprises in Ireland have spent more on failed AI projects than successful ones.

The primary barriers to AI implementation, according to respondents, are regulatory concerns (24%), budget constraints (24%) and, critically, a lack of AI governance (23%). These three factors are not unrelated. A lack of governance creates regulatory exposure, which in turn increases financial risk. The absence of a clear AI strategy, which only 58% of organisations have, means there is no framework within which to assess investments, manage risk or evaluate outcomes.

The governance deficit is particularly acute in how AI decisions are being made and explained. More than half (53%) of organisations admit that they have implemented AI that made decisions which they could not explain to customers. Similarly, 54% were unable to explain their AI's decision-making to regulators. An additional 53% of organisations have discovered AI they have implemented making biased or discriminatory decisions in the past 12 months. These are not edge cases; they represent a majority of large enterprises in Ireland. They are deploying AI in ways that expose them to serious reputational and regulatory risk, particularly as the EU AI Act's requirements start to bite with greater force.

This points to an overarching issue we are seeing in AI deployment: unpreparedness. With widespread use of AI still in its nascence, this should be expected. However, there is a misalignment within organisations when it comes to how prepared they are – and much of it is of their own making. With so much pressure from leadership regarding AI adoption, 63% of IT leaders admit that they hide their lack of preparedness.

As AI becomes increasingly important to business and IT outcomes, this creates fundamentally unstable ground from which to build. A mere appearance of readiness means businesses lose the ability to make honest assessments of where they are and where they need to get to. Instead, decision-making is based on inaccurate information, blind optimism and market pressure rather than any strategic imperative.

On top of this is a foundational infrastructure problem. Only 60% of organisations say they have the right infrastructure to fully exploit the benefits of AI. That leaves 40% of enterprises who are attempting to deploy AI on a foundation that may not adequately support it.

Enterprises who are seeing success with AI are not necessarily those with the largest budgets or the most aggressive deployment timelines. They are those who have done the foundational work: establishing an AI governance framework, aligning their AI investments to a broader IT strategy, and ensuring that leadership has realistic expectations of what their AI models can actually achieve – something only 58% of respondents say is currently the case.

Enterprises are in a rush to deploy AI, but they must be certain that it is in the name of efficiency, rather than a feeling of missing out. Racing to an undefined finish line is likely to cut governance corners to create unacceptable risk. The costs are measurable, the regulatory exposure is real, and the reputational consequences of unexplainable AI decisions are significant. Building the governance architecture around AI is therefore not a constraint on ambition, but a condition for it.



Weight of the past: legacy systems and technical debt

All organisations have them: the systems that everyone knows should be replaced, but never quite are, or the projects that have long since ceased to deliver value, but continue to consume budget and attention. In isolation, each one seems manageable. Collectively, they represent one of the greatest and under acknowledged drains on IT investment in Ireland's largest organisations.

Our research found that enterprises are spending €667,000 annually on zombie projects – projects which everyone knows should be cancelled, but are not. They are dedicating 30% of their IT budgets to the maintenance of systems that leadership acknowledges should be replaced. And, they are spending 28% of IT budgets on mandatory system upgrades that are largely reactive rather than strategic.

While all eyes are on the use of technology to steer business success, IT leaders are drowning in the massive technical debt that this issue creates and compounds, with very little budget to do truly innovative work. The majority (59%) believe their organisation is running too many legacy systems, and the same proportion say they are spending too much on maintaining them. According to analyst firm IDC, this is a worldwide problem and unmanaged technical debt can consume 20 to 40% of development time[2].

Is it any wonder, then, that 57% say legacy systems are actively holding back innovation? They represent a drag on an enterprise's ambitions to modernise, to adopt new technologies, and to respond to a market that is moving at pace. Perhaps most concerningly, though, is that 55% of IT leaders say legacy systems are increasing their cybersecurity risk.

In an environment where cyberattacks are becoming more sophisticated, more targeted and more costly, maintaining systems that create known security vulnerabilities cannot be justified in terms of cost or resources. Legacy infrastructure is, by definition, harder to patch, harder to monitor and harder to integrate with modern security software. Organisations who procrastinate are not just paying the direct cost of maintaining old technology – they are committing themselves to a much larger, and possibly existential, cost in the future.

Despite the drain these systems represent, replacing them is no easy feat. Retiring a core system requires executive commitment, project governance, change management and investment. It requires an open conversation about where an organisation's technology estate is now, versus where it needs to be – and a credible plan to bridge that gap. In the absence of an IT strategy that plots the technology roadmap clearly, it can often feel like the most efficient solution is to carry on and consume the technical debt.

2. Turning technical debt into an AI enabler

Where Large Organisations' IT Budget Goes



on legacy maintenance







on reactive upgrades



of remaining budget for innovation



The human cost when strategy is lacking

The consequences of strategic aimlessness are not merely confined to the business; they are felt by people, too. Saros's research finds that 60% of large enterprises in Ireland are seeing stress or mental health issues among IT workers, a figure that should prompt serious reflection about how IT teams are being run and under what expectations.

A significant 61% of IT leaders say scope creep is a significant source of stress for IT and technical teams, while the same proportion say their teams are working long hours due to IT talent shortages. These are the predictable consequences of organisations who are attempting to deliver more than their capacity, structure and planning will support. When there is no clear IT strategy to define boundaries and priorities, scope expands to fill the vacuum.

This is being compounded by prevailing talent shortages, which, while being a market issue, are also the result of insufficient planning. As a solution, enterprises in Ireland are resorting to large pay increases – a sign that we may be following the lead of big tech firms in Silicon Valley. In the last 12 months, some 59% of large enterprises in Ireland have given an IT or technical team member a pay increase of 50% or more to discourage them from leaving. But this is not strategic talent management; it is crisis management and a reactive response that does nothing to address the underlying cause.

Ireland's IT teams are being asked to run and maintain complex technology assets while simultaneously delivering transformation programmes, responding to AI demand and managing the fallout from





strategic decisions made without adequate consideration. The result is a workforce that is stretched, stressed and at risk of attrition at precisely the moment when organisations need stability.

Saros's research, however, shows that 24% of organisations are finding that outsourced IT project management has helped to reduce stress among technical team members. When delivery responsibility is shared with a capable external partner, internal teams can focus on what they do best, rather than carrying the full weight of programme governance alongside their day-to-day obligations.

The research found that outsourced IT project management also brings measurable delivery benefits. More than a third (35%) of enterprises who outsourced project management last year say it helped deliver more projects on or near budget, while 30% reported improved on-time delivery. The same proportion used external project management to demonstrate project value to senior leadership; a function that is critical in organisations where the relationship between IT investment and business outcome is not always visible to the executive team.

The human cost of strategic absence is real, and it is cumulative. Organisations who do not address the fundamental causes of IT team stress will find that the attrition problem they are managing today will evolve to become the thing they fear the most in the future: stagnation.

Enterprises who outsourced project management last year say it helped deliver more projects on or near budget

Governance: the weakest link in the chain?

We have seen how fully developed IT strategies support innovation and modernisation. It enables enterprises to become dynamic and deliberate with their technology. And, when it comes to cybersecurity, that dynamism is the only way to play it safe.

The relationship between IT strategy and cybersecurity is direct. Organisations with clear strategic frameworks make better, more consistent decisions about where to invest in security and how to respond when things go wrong. Without this, businesses tend to manage security reactively and our research suggests that Ireland's large enterprises are paying for that approach.

Saros's research found that a quarter of large businesses in Ireland reduced their cybersecurity budgets this year and only 50% are confident they can detect attackers before any damage is done. Despite this, just 51% have an incident response plan. In a threat environment that is becoming more sophisticated, these are not comfortable numbers.

The willingness of 30% of organisations to pay bounties to external experts who can expose vulnerabilities, and the 27% who have already done so, reflects a growing recognition that independent expertise is essential to understanding an organisation's true security profile. It is an acknowledgment that internal visibility has its limits and that the cost of finding vulnerabilities before attackers do is considerably lower than the cost of discovering them afterwards.



Conclusion

The CIO Strategy Report 2026 shows that technology leaders are confronting an impossible balancing act. They are investing in AI, navigating legacy technologies, managing under-resourced teams and attempting to deliver transformation – and all the while, keeping a watchful eye on economic uncertainty.

It is a complicated environment, and it is one that is unlikely to be a passing trend. Therefore, to respond without a strategy is to embark on a never-ending series of expensive experiments.

The path forward requires honest assessment that paves the way for a strategy that is ambitious, maintained and familiar to all key stakeholders. It requires governance that acts as a guide rather than a constraint, and a willingness to seek external expertise that can act as an impetus for change.

The enterprises who are most successful over the coming years will not necessarily be those with the largest technology budgets. They will be the ones who invest those budgets most purposefully, build strategies that are robust enough to guide decisions under pressure, and have the governance structures to ensure that the technology they deploy delivers what they intend it to deliver. That is what good strategy enables. And it is, as this research consistently shows, what too many large organisations are currently lacking.



Recommendations

1 Be guided by the business

The most important prerequisite for an effective ICT strategy is the presence of a well-developed and reality-based business strategy. However, too often we see that organisations are attempting to build technology strategies that are not aligned with the business – or even when the business strategy itself is unclear or incomplete.

Technology strategy cannot exist in isolation: it must follow and support the business strategy – and that requires buy-in from the broader executive team. Without a clear understanding of the organisation's goals, priorities and direction, any IT strategy risks becoming fragmented or tactical rather than truly strategic.

If working with a technology consultant, ensure you work together to first get clarity of business intent. Use this clarity to map out a practical, sequenced technology direction and challenge where strategy is missing or unrealistic.

2 Don't get stuck in delivery mode

Being a high-performance team is futile if the tactics you are adopting are not grounded in genuine strategic planning. CIOs and CTOs must ensure the goals they are setting for their teams are about business value, not volume. While avoiding unnecessary spending, working strategically rather than reactively to business pressures will also help to ease stress among IT teams, enabling them to get out of panic mode and focus on projects that have meaningful, usable outcomes.

IT leaders must work with the wider business to set expectations and educate them about the IT strategy. At Saros, we help IT leaders to reframe conversations with their board and illustrate the business sense behind the IT strategy. This is especially important as AI adoption accelerates, as it helps organisations to understand where AI actually creates value.

3 Keep AI in-check

While AI opens up a world of new possibilities for enterprises, it also exposes any existing weaknesses. Businesses must therefore ensure that they are implementing guardrails for innovation, particularly where AI is concerned. This should not cripple innovation; instead, it should enable IT teams to break ground with peace of mind.

Saros works with businesses to bring structure to AI adoption and define AI governance models that don't kill momentum. As AI becomes more regulated, this is a fundamental step to take now, or organisations risk their AI projects becoming unwieldy and, even worse, unexplainable.

4 Are you ready?

Our research shows that some organisations are simply not yet built for big AI and transformation projects. At Saros, we carry out AI readiness and maturity assessments to help businesses to understand their organisational capabilities, gaps and risks. This covers digital infrastructure, as well as team structure – such as roles and identifying decision-makers – to ensure they align with the overall IT strategy.

As an independent IT consultancy firm, Saros is not tied to any vendors, giving CIOs and CTOs assurance that as we help them to map out the journey ahead, it will always be with the best, unbiased advice.

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How Saros helps technology leaders move from intent to outcomes

Technology leaders don't lack ambition. They lack the structure, clarity and capacity to turn it into consistent outcomes.

Saros helps bridge that gap. We work with CIOs, CTOs and technology leaders to bring discipline to complexity through practical, independent guidance from strategy through execution.

As an independent consultancy, we're not tied to vendors. Every decision is grounded in our clients' business goals.

OUR CORE SERVICES

CIO Advisory Services

Supporting technology leaders to shape and execute IT strategies aligned to business goals, including strategic planning, board advisory and operating model design.

IT Strategy and Roadmapping

Creating clear, actionable strategies that guide decision making, prioritisation and measurable outcomes.

AI Strategy, Governance and Readiness

Helping organisations adopt AI with confidence through readiness assessments, use case definition and governance frameworks.

Digital Transformation and Modernisation

Guiding complex transformation programmes to ensure alignment, sequencing and long term value.

Technology Operating Model Design

Designing effective operating models with clear roles, governance and ways of working.

Managed Project Service

We take accountability for delivery, providing experienced leadership to ensure initiatives are executed on time, on budget and deliver measurable business value.

Technology Assessment and Optimisation

Identifying inefficiencies, technical debt and wasted spend to redirect investment toward higher value initiatives.

Cybersecurity and Risk Advisory

Strengthening governance and resilience while aligning security investment to real business risk.

Why Saros

We offer a better alternative to traditional consulting models. Our team brings the knowledge and capability to support leaders across complex IT landscapes, combining strategic thinking with hands on delivery and true independence in every decision.

Technology decisions shape business performance. We ensure they're made with clarity, confidence and measurable impact.

Start the conversation

If this reflects your challenges, now is the time to act. Whether you're defining your IT strategy, reassessing AI or navigating transformation, we're ready to help bring structure, clarity and momentum.

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