



COMMUNICATING UP

Framework

A Practical Executive Communication Playbook for Technology Leaders

Executive Advisory | Communication | Getting the Message Across

Security Multipliers helps organizations strengthen cyber security maturity through strategic advisory, operating model transformation, AI governance, risk management, and executive level guidance. We work with enterprise leaders and boards to align cyber security capabilities with business priorities, improve operational resilience, and build practical programs that scale.





Executive Summary

One of the biggest challenges inside technology organizations is not a lack of technical capability.

It is the inability to communicate technical concepts in a way that executive leadership teams and boards can quickly understand, evaluate, and act upon.

Technical leaders often spend years developing deep expertise in infrastructure, cybersecurity, architecture, engineering, cloud platforms, AI, data, and operational technologies. The problem is that executive audiences typically do not make decisions based on technical depth.

They make decisions based on:

- Business impact
- Risk
- Cost
- Timing
- Operational exposure
- Customer impact
- Strategic alignment
- Regulatory implications
- Reputation
- Decision urgency

This creates a communication gap.

Technical teams frequently present information using:

- Technical terminology
- Detailed architecture discussions
- Excessive operational detail
- Technology centric explanations
- Long status updates
- Metrics and reporting without interpretation



Executives and boards often leave these discussions without a clear understanding of:

- What the actual issue is
- Why it matters to the business
- What the operational or financial impact could be
- What decision is required
- What risks exist if no action is taken
- What the recommended path forward should be

The result is frustration on both sides.

Technology teams feel leadership does not understand the complexity of the problem.

Executives feel they are receiving too much detail without enough clarity.

This white paper provides a practical framework for helping technology leaders communicate more effectively with executive and board level audiences.

The objective is not to oversimplify technical topics.

The objective is to translate technical complexity into business language that enables better decisions.

Why Communicating Up Matters

Technology organizations now influence nearly every critical business function.

Cybersecurity incidents can affect reputation, operations, legal exposure, customer trust, and shareholder confidence.

Infrastructure failures can disrupt revenue generating operations.

AI governance decisions can create compliance, privacy, and operational risks.

Cloud transformation initiatives can materially affect cost structures and business agility.

As technology becomes more strategically important, technology leaders are increasingly expected to communicate directly with:

- Executive leadership teams
- Boards of directors
- Audit committees



- Risk committees
- Regulators
- Customers
- Investors

The challenge is that these audiences do not typically consume information the same way technical teams do.

Boards and executive leaders generally operate at a different altitude.

They focus on:

- Enterprise risk
- Strategic priorities
- Financial exposure
- Business continuity
- Competitive positioning
- Operational resilience
- Governance
- Regulatory obligations

This means technical accuracy alone is not enough.

Technology leaders must also communicate:

- Why something matters
- What business impact exists
- What decisions are needed
- What tradeoffs are involved
- What risks are acceptable
- What outcomes leadership should expect

Strong communication becomes a leadership capability, not simply a presentation skill.



What Executives Actually Want From Technology Leaders

One of the most important communication shifts technology leaders can make is recognizing that executives are usually not looking for deep technical education.

They are looking for:

- Clarity
- Confidence
- Risk understanding
- Decision support
- Business alignment
- Execution confidence
- Predictability
- Recommended actions

Executives rarely expect technology leaders to eliminate all uncertainty or risk.

What they do expect is:

- Honest communication
- Clear prioritization
- Business context
- Practical recommendations
- Awareness of tradeoffs
- Confidence that the issue is understood and managed

Many communication breakdowns occur because technology leaders attempt to prove technical depth when leadership is actually seeking decision clarity.

Strong communicators recognize that executive trust is often built through:

- Simplicity
- Transparency
- Judgment
- Prioritization



- Communication discipline

Not through the amount of technical detail presented.

The Core Problem With Technical Communication

Most communication challenges do not occur because technical teams lack intelligence or expertise.

The issue is that many technology professionals communicate from the perspective of how the technology works rather than what the business needs to understand.

This is often referred to as the “curse of knowledge.”

Once individuals become deeply experienced in a technical domain, it becomes difficult to remember what information non-technical audiences do not already understand.

As a result, technology leaders may unintentionally:

- Skip important business context
- Assume shared understanding
- Use unexplained terminology
- Focus too heavily on implementation details
- Overestimate how much technical depth leadership actually needs

Strong communicators intentionally simplify concepts without assuming prior technical knowledge.

This often creates several common problems.

Too Much Technical Detail

Technical teams often provide large amounts of operational detail before explaining why the issue matters.

Examples include:

- Architecture diagrams
- Technical logs
- Product configurations
- Security control mappings
- Detailed process flows
- Engineering terminology



While this information may be accurate, it can overwhelm executive audiences before business context is established.

Leading With Technology Instead of Business Impact

Many presentations begin with the technology rather than the problem.

For example:

“We need to implement a new identity platform with improved federation and conditional access capabilities.”

An executive may immediately wonder:

- Why?
- What problem does this solve?
- What risk exists today?
- What happens if we do nothing?
- How urgent is this?

A more effective approach would be:

“Our current identity controls create elevated risk around unauthorized access and do not support several upcoming regulatory requirements. We are recommending modernization to reduce operational and security exposure.”

The technology discussion can come later.

Data Without Conclusions

Technology leaders frequently present large volumes of metrics without clearly explaining what leadership should conclude from the information.

Examples include:

- Vulnerability counts
- Security event volumes
- Uptime percentages
- Cloud utilization statistics
- Ticket closure metrics

Executives generally do not want raw data alone.

They want interpretation.



Good executive communication explains:

- What changed
- Why it matters
- Whether the trend is positive or negative
- What risk exists
- What action is recommended

Stop Reporting. Start Interpreting.

One of the most common communication mistakes technology leaders make is presenting information without interpretation.

Executives do not simply want operational reporting.

They want leadership insight.

Strong executive communication explains:

- What changed
- Why it changed
- Why it matters
- Whether leadership should be concerned
- What actions are recommended

For example:

Less effective:

"We experienced a 22% increase in phishing attempts this quarter."

More effective:

"Phishing activity increased significantly this quarter, reflecting broader industry trends. Existing controls prevented material impact, but continued increases may require additional investment in user awareness and email protection capabilities."

Executives generally value interpretation more than raw metrics.

Excessive Operational Context

Technical teams often feel compelled to explain every detail to establish credibility.

Ironically, this can reduce clarity.

Executive audiences usually care more about:

- Decision quality
- Business impact
- Confidence levels
- Risk management
- Execution readiness

Not every technical dependency or implementation detail.

The Communicating Up Framework

The Communicating Up Framework is designed to help technology leaders simplify complex topics without losing accuracy.

The framework focuses on translating technical information into executive decision making language.



Step 1: Start With the Business Issue

Do not begin with the technology.

Begin with:

- The business problem
- The operational risk
- The customer impact



- The financial exposure
- The regulatory issue
- The strategic implication

Example:

Instead of:

“We have identified several legacy infrastructure concerns involving unsupported operating systems.”

Say:

“Our current infrastructure creates elevated operational and cybersecurity risk because several critical systems are no longer supported by the vendor.”

This immediately establishes relevance.

Step 2: Translate Technical Risk Into Business Risk

Executives rarely think in terms of:

- CVSS scores
- Encryption standards
- API vulnerabilities
- Network segmentation
- Identity federation

They think in terms of:

- Operational disruption
- Financial loss
- Customer impact
- Legal exposure
- Reputational damage
- Regulatory consequences

Technology leaders should consistently translate technical issues into business implications.

Example:

Instead of:



"The application lacks multi-factor authentication."

Say:

"The application currently allows elevated risk of unauthorized access which could expose customer and operational data."

Step 3: Explain the Consequences of Inaction

One of the most important executive communication techniques is clearly explaining what happens if the organization chooses not to act.

This helps leadership understand:

- Risk tolerance
- Decision urgency
- Operational exposure
- Potential future costs

Example:

"If no action is taken, the organization may face increased operational instability, higher recovery costs during outages, and growing cybersecurity exposure over the next 12 to 18 months."

Executives need context to prioritize decisions. Technology leaders should also avoid minimizing or obscuring material risks in an effort to avoid creating concern.

Executives are generally better served by:

- Clear risk visibility
- Honest impact assessment
- Defined confidence levels
- Transparent tradeoffs

Strong executive communication does not create unnecessary alarm.

But it also does not hide meaningful operational, cybersecurity, regulatory, or financial exposure.

Step 4: Present Clear Options

Executives should not leave discussions unsure about the available choices.

Strong communication typically presents:

- Recommended option



- Alternative option
- Tradeoffs
- Cost considerations
- Risk implications
- Timing impacts

Example:

Option	Outcome	Risk	Cost
Modernize now	Reduces operational and security risk	Lower	Higher short term investment
Delay 12 months	Defers spending	Increased operational and security exposure	Lower short term cost

This allows leadership to make informed tradeoff decisions.

Step 5: State the Recommendation Clearly

Technology leaders sometimes avoid direct recommendations.

Executives expect leadership.

A strong recommendation should include:

- What you recommend
- Why you recommend it
- Expected outcome
- Timing considerations
- Key assumptions

Example:

“We recommend beginning phased modernization in Q3 to reduce operational and security exposure before the next hardware lifecycle expiration.”

Step 6: Keep Supporting Detail Available But Separate

Not every audience requires the same level of detail.

A useful approach is:

- Executive summary first



- Supporting technical detail second
- Deep technical appendices separately

This allows:

- Executives to stay focused on decisions
- Technical teams to retain accuracy
- Additional detail to remain available when needed

Communicating With Boards

Board communication requires even greater simplification and discipline.

Boards generally focus on:

- Enterprise risk
- Governance
- Regulatory exposure
- Financial impact
- Operational resilience
- Strategic alignment
- Reputation
- Leadership confidence

Boards usually do not want deep technical walkthroughs.

They want confidence that:

- Risks are understood
- Governance exists
- Leadership has a plan
- Appropriate controls are in place
- Significant issues are being managed proactively



What Boards Typically Want to Know

Technology leaders should assume board audiences are asking:

- What is the risk?
- How severe is it?
- How exposed are we?
- Are we improving or declining?
- What are peers doing?
- Are we adequately funded?
- What decisions are required?
- What could materially impact the organization?

Avoid Technical Overload

One of the most common mistakes in board presentations is overwhelming directors with technical terminology.

Avoid overusing:

- Acronyms
- Engineering terminology
- Product names
- Technical architecture discussions
- Security jargon

The objective is clarity, not technical sophistication.

Focus on Trends and Direction

Boards are often more interested in trends than isolated metrics.

For example:

Less effective:

“We identified 12,482 vulnerabilities this quarter.”

More effective:

“Critical vulnerabilities affecting externally facing systems decreased 37% over the last two quarters, reducing overall exposure.”



Context matters.

Know Your Audience

One of the most important executive communication skills is understanding that different leadership audiences evaluate information differently.

Technology leaders should adjust communication based on the priorities of the audience rather than delivering identical messaging to every stakeholder group.

Examples include:

CFO Audiences

CFOs often focus heavily on:

- Financial exposure
- Cost management
- Investment justification
- Operational efficiency
- Budget predictability
- Return on investment

Communication with financial leadership should clearly explain:

- Financial risk
- Cost implications
- Business justification
- Operational savings
- Resource requirements
- Long term financial impact

Legal and Compliance Audiences

Legal and compliance stakeholders often focus on:

- Regulatory exposure
- Contractual obligations
- Privacy concerns



- Governance
- Liability
- Auditability

Communication should emphasize:

- Compliance implications
- Governance controls
- Documentation
- Risk management
- Policy alignment

Operational Leadership

Operational leaders frequently prioritize:

- Service stability
- Execution risk
- Resource impact
- Customer disruption
- Recovery capabilities
- Operational dependencies

Communication should focus on:

- Business continuity
- Execution planning
- Operational resilience
- Timing considerations
- Service impact

Executive Leadership Teams

Executive leadership teams generally focus on:

- Strategic alignment
- Enterprise risk



- Competitive impact
- Organizational priorities
- Business outcomes
- Leadership confidence

Strong communicators adapt their messaging while maintaining consistency in facts, recommendations, and overall strategy.

Communication Modes and Content Design

One of the most overlooked executive communication skills is understanding that different communication methods require different levels of detail, formatting, and structure.

Technology leaders often reuse the same content across:

- Emails
- PowerPoint presentations
- Executive summaries
- Board materials
- Steering committee updates
- Status reports
- Pre-read documents
- Workshop sessions

This frequently creates communication problems. Technology leaders should also recognize that executive audiences often consume information under significant time constraints.

Executives may review:

- Large volumes of material
- Multiple competing priorities
- Board content
- Financial updates
- Operational issues
- Strategic initiatives



Sometimes within very limited time windows.

This makes communication clarity critically important.

If the core message is difficult to identify quickly, important information may be misunderstood, deprioritized, or ignored entirely.

Strong executive communication helps leadership understand the issue rapidly without requiring excessive interpretation.

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Strong executive communication helps leadership understand the issue rapidly without requiring excessive interpretation.

A document designed to be read independently should not be structured the same way as a presentation that will be verbally delivered.

Strong communicators adjust both the content and the level of detail based on:

- The communication method
- The audience
- The decision required
- Whether the presenter will be speaking live
- How much context the audience already has

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- Strategic initiatives

Understanding Pre-Read Versus Presentation Content

One of the most important distinctions is whether content will be:

- Read independently
- Presented live

This dramatically changes how material should be designed.

Pre-Read Documents

Pre-read documents must stand on their own.

The audience may:

- Read them without the presenter present
- Skim them quickly
- Forward them to other executives
- Use them later for reference

This means pre-read materials should contain:

- More explanatory context
- Clear summaries
- Supporting rationale
- Explicit recommendations
- Defined conclusions
- Enough detail to support independent understanding

Good pre-read documents are:

- Structured clearly
- Easy to scan
- Concise but complete
- Written in business language
- Focused on decisions and implications

Presentation and Pitch Decks

Presentation decks are different.

Slides should support the discussion, not become the discussion.

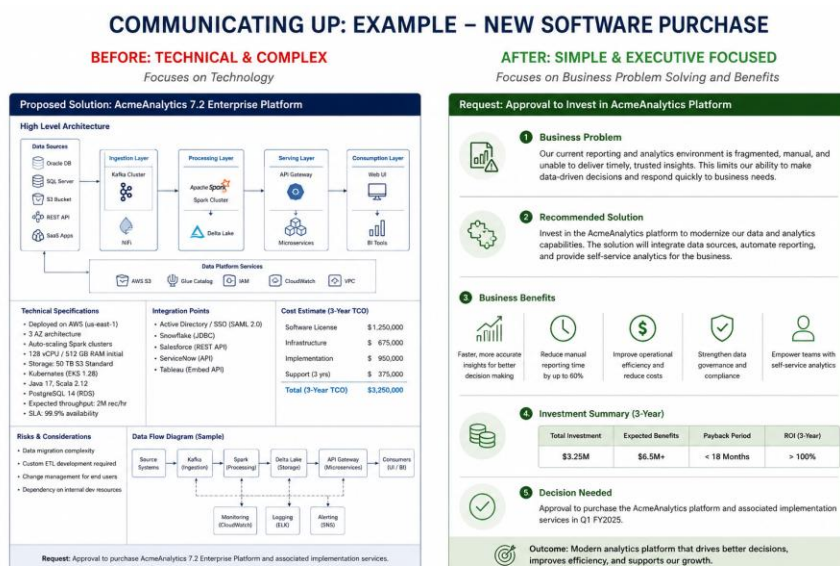
One of the most common mistakes technology leaders make is placing excessive text on slides and then reading the content aloud.

Strong presentation decks:

- Use fewer words
- Highlight key points
- Focus attention visually
- Support storytelling
- Reinforce decisions and recommendations
- Allow the presenter to provide verbal detail

A useful rule is:

If a slide requires the audience to stop listening in order to read paragraphs of text, the slide contains too much information.



Email Communication

Executive emails should prioritize:



- Clarity
- Brevity
- Decision focus
- Action orientation

A strong executive email typically answers:

- What happened?
- Why does it matter?
- What is the impact?
- What decision or action is needed?
- What is the recommendation?

Long technical explanations inside executive emails often reduce engagement and clarity.

If additional detail is required, include:

- A supporting attachment
- A short appendix
- A follow up discussion

Board Materials

Board materials should operate at the highest strategic level.

Board communication should focus primarily on:

- Enterprise risk
- Operational resilience
- Regulatory exposure
- Business impact
- Governance
- Trend direction
- Leadership confidence

Boards generally do not need:

- Deep technical architecture



- Product level discussion
- Engineering detail
- Operational troubleshooting

The goal is to create confidence that leadership understands the issue, has a plan, and is managing the associated risks appropriately.

Simplification Is Not Oversimplification

Many technology leaders worry that simplifying content reduces accuracy.

In reality, strong executive communication removes unnecessary complexity while preserving meaning.

The objective is not to eliminate technical depth.

The objective is to present the right level of detail for the audience and communication method.

In many cases:

- Fewer words create more clarity
- Simpler visuals improve understanding
- Shorter summaries increase engagement
- Clear recommendations improve decision making

Strong communicators understand that simplicity is often harder than complexity.

Practical Techniques That Improve Executive Communication

Lead With the Conclusion First

Many technology professionals communicate in the same sequence they used to analyze the problem.

Executives typically prefer the opposite approach.

Strong executive communication usually begins with:

- The conclusion
- The recommendation
- The business impact
- The required decision

Supporting detail comes afterward.

For example:



Less effective:

"We spent several weeks reviewing our infrastructure architecture and identified multiple operational dependencies that create elevated risk."

More effective:

"We identified elevated operational and cybersecurity risk within several critical infrastructure platforms and recommend phased modernization beginning this fiscal year."

Executives generally prefer:

- Conclusion first
- Supporting rationale second
- Technical detail last

This allows leadership to quickly understand the issue before diving into supporting information.

Use Executive Summaries

Every major communication should begin with:

- What the issue is
- Why it matters
- What the impact is
- What decision is needed
- What you recommend

This should ideally fit on one page.

Reduce Slide Density

Many technology presentations contain:

- Excessive text
- Dense architecture diagrams
- Too many charts
- Small unreadable tables

Executive communication should prioritize:

- Clarity
- Simplicity



- Readability
- Key takeaways

A useful executive communication test is:

Can the audience understand the core message of the slide in under 10 seconds?

If not, the slide likely contains:

- Too much text
- Too much detail
- Too many concepts
- Unclear messaging

Strong executive slides typically communicate one primary idea at a time.

Use Business Language

Translate technical terminology into operational language.

Examples:

Technical Language	Executive Language
Legacy infrastructure	Increased operational risk
Unsupported software	Elevated security and stability exposure
Identity federation issue	User access control weakness
Excessive technical debt	Increased cost and execution complexity
Insufficient segmentation	Elevated operational and cyber exposure

Common Phrases That Reduce Executive Clarity

Technology leaders should be cautious of language that creates ambiguity, weakens accountability, or obscures business impact.

Examples include:

Less effective:

- “There are some concerns”



- “We are looking into it”
- “The environment is complicated”
- “There may be risk”
- “The architecture is not ideal”
- “We have technical challenges”

More effective:

- “The current environment creates elevated operational risk”
- “Several dependencies could delay delivery timelines”
- “The platform no longer aligns with security requirements”
- “Operational resilience may degrade if modernization is delayed”
- “Additional investment is required to reduce risk exposure”

Executives generally respond better to clear, direct, business-oriented communication.

Explain Confidence Levels

Executives appreciate transparency.

It is acceptable to communicate:

- Assumptions
- Unknowns
- Dependencies
- Confidence levels
- Areas requiring additional validation

This builds credibility. When uncertainty exists, it is usually better to communicate it directly rather than avoid the topic.

Silence often creates assumptions.

Executives generally prefer:

- Transparent uncertainty
- Defined dependencies



- Known risks
- Clear assumptions

Over vague or incomplete communication.

Clear communication around uncertainty often increases leadership confidence rather than reducing it.

Use Visuals Carefully

Strong visuals simplify understanding.

Poor visuals create confusion.

Good executive visuals:

- Show relationships clearly
- Reduce unnecessary detail
- Highlight outcomes
- Focus attention on key decisions

Use Narrative Structure

Strong executive communication often follows a simple narrative flow:

- Current situation
- Emerging problem or opportunity
- Business impact
- Recommended response
- Expected outcome

This structure helps leadership process information more naturally and improves retention.

Technology leaders should avoid presenting disconnected facts without a clear storyline.

Even highly technical discussions benefit from structured narrative communication.

Common Mistakes Technology Leaders Make

Mistaking Detail for Credibility

More detail does not always create more confidence.



Clear thinking creates confidence.

Avoiding Direct Recommendations

Executives expect leaders to provide informed recommendations.

Not simply present information.

Strong recommendations should also include ownership and accountability.

For example:

Less effective:

“We recommend modernization.”

More effective:

“We recommend beginning phased modernization in Q3, led by the infrastructure and security teams, with quarterly progress reporting to executive leadership.”

Recommendations become significantly more actionable when accountability and execution ownership are clearly defined.

Overusing Technical Terminology

Communication should adapt to the audience.

The goal is understanding.

Assuming Executives Understand Technical Dependencies

Many operational dependencies that appear obvious to technology teams are not obvious to non-technical audiences.

Technology leaders should explain:

- Business implications
- Operational dependencies
- Timing impacts
- Resource implications
- Risk tradeoffs

Delivering Problems Without Solutions

Strong executive communication should include:

- Problem definition



- Impact explanation
- Recommended path forward
- Decision requirements

Example: Translating Technical Content for Executives

Technical Version

“Our legacy VPN concentrators lack sufficient throughput and do not support several newer identity and conditional access integrations. Additionally, unsupported firmware increases exposure to known vulnerabilities.”

Executive Version

“Our remote access environment creates increasing operational and cybersecurity risk due to aging infrastructure that no longer aligns with current security requirements or expected user demand. We recommend modernization to reduce exposure and improve resilience.”

Both statements are accurate.

One is significantly easier for executives to consume and act upon.

Building a Culture of Better Communication

Strong executive communication should not depend entirely on a few senior leaders.

Organizations should intentionally develop communication capabilities across:

- Technical managers
- Architects
- Security leaders
- Program managers
- Engineering leaders
- Operations teams

This improves:

- Decision quality



- Cross functional alignment
- Executive confidence
- Strategic execution
- Organizational maturity

Practical approaches include:

- Executive presentation coaching
- Communication standards
- Simplified reporting templates
- Peer review of executive materials
- Board presentation rehearsals
- Leadership mentoring

Organizations that communicate clearly generally execute more effectively.

Final Thoughts

As technology becomes increasingly central to business strategy, technology leaders must operate not only as technical experts, but also as business communicators.

The ability to communicate clearly with executive leadership teams and boards is now a critical leadership capability.

Organizations do not need technology leaders who simply understand complexity.

They need leaders who can translate complexity into:

- Business understanding
- Actionable decisions
- Operational clarity
- Strategic direction
- Risk awareness
- Executive confidence



The strongest technology leaders are often not the ones who communicate the greatest complexity. They are the leaders who can simplify complexity without losing meaning, align technology decisions to business outcomes, and create confidence at the executive level.

How Security Multipliers Can Help

Security Multipliers helps technology organizations improve executive communication, board engagement, and strategic technology leadership capabilities.

Areas of support may include:

- Executive communication coaching
- Board presentation development
- Cybersecurity reporting simplification
- Executive ready operating models
- Technology strategy messaging
- AI governance communication frameworks
- Risk communication improvement
- Leadership advisory services
- Executive workshop facilitation

Our approach focuses on helping technology leaders communicate with greater clarity, confidence, and business alignment.



About Security Multipliers

Security Multipliers provides strategic cyber security and technology advisory services focused on helping organizations mature their security capabilities, reduce operational risk, and improve executive decision making. Our experience spans cyber security strategy, AI governance, infrastructure modernization, operating models, risk management, and board level advisory.

Helping clients with their journey to true cyber security maturity

