AI:
ALL IN:

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<inside the corporate
arms-race to appoint
global AI leadership>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The global boom in AI investment has fuelled a spike in hiring Chief Artificial Intelligence Officers (CAIO) or equivalent roles, as companies look to harness and govern the Technology available to them

- 48% of the FTSE 100 now have a designated CAIO or equivalent

- Of these, 67% have been appointed in the last 2 years, with 42% having been hired in the past 12 months alone

- Debate continues as to both the content of the role and its future, with recent anecdotal evidence suggesting CEO is a realistic option for role progression
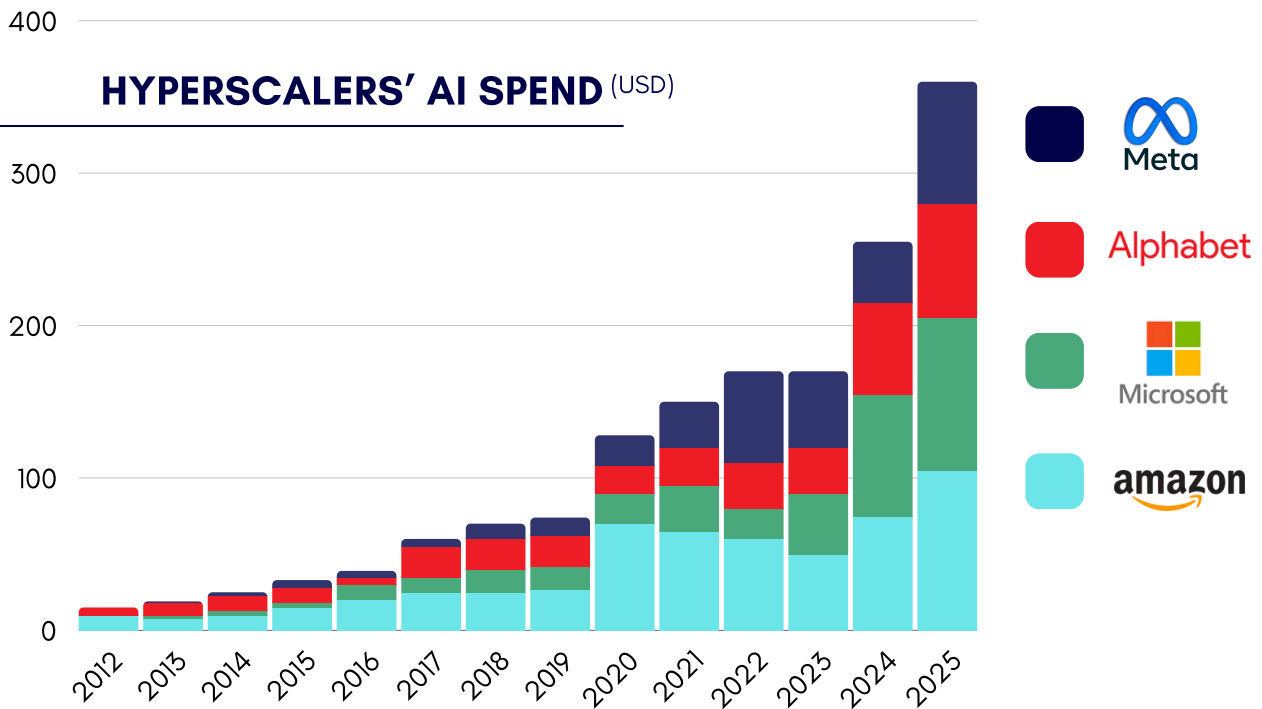
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INTRODUCTION

Along with Brazilian soccer players, single-name recognition is a rare honour bestowed on a select group of global business leaders, and the most recent inductee to this cadre is the CEO of Nvidia, joining his mononymous peers "Jeff", "Elon", "Satya", "Sundar" and others. In short, these days *everyone* knows who Jensen Huang is. His company has both driven and ridden the AI wave, with his firm's GPU chips a critical piece of the architecture that builds on the early work of the "deep learning trio" Yoshua Bengo, Yann LeCun and Geoffrey Hinton. Whilst the land-grab for his chips among Big Tech has driven an Nvidia share-price growth approaching 2000% over 5 years, the rest of the business world is engaged in a land-grab of its own – for Talent, in the shape of the creation and appointment of Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer (CAIO) roles.

THE 5TH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION (5IR)

You would be correct in feeling that it was only yesterday that we were talking about the 4th Industrial Revolution, but the pace of change in AI and the increasing interconnectedness with humans mean that most experts now cite this as the beginning of the 5th. Whether the end of the 4th, or beginning of the 5th, we can agree that this feels like a moment in time, with investment in AI at a record high, and at the time of writing* "The Magnificent Seven" (Apple, Alphabet, Amazon, Meta, Microsoft, Nvidia & Tesla) represent nearly 1/3 of the entire value of the S&P 500 – and all this is before we have fully entered the era of "Superintelligence", wherein AI becomes faster, more knowledgeable and more creative than any human.

Market capitalizations as to 20 Feb '25

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HYPERSCALERS' AI SPEND (USD)

Chart legend: Meta, Alphabet, Microsoft, amazon

Source: The Times 2025

THE CAIO: *This season's must-have*

The 2010's were bookended by the explosion in Chief Information Security Officers (CISO) and Chief Digital Officer (CDO) hiring respectively, and whilst most accept the CISO is here to stay, in some instances the prevalence of the CDO has dissipated as Digital adoption has spread within companies and the work has been subsumed by the CIO/CTO organization. In fact, the CDO acronym is now far widely associated with the Chief Data Officer role, another relative newcomer to the C-Suite and natural bedfellow to the CAIO. Over the past year, however, only one role has grabbed the limelight.

Eye-catching appointments by global organizations on both sides of the Atlantic such as Pfizer (Berta Rodriguez-Hervas, from Stellantis, Aug'24), Lloyds (Rohit Dhawan, from Amazon, Aug'24) Eli Lilly (Thomas Fuchs, from Paige, Oct'24) and Goldman Sachs (Daniel Marcu, from Amazon, Jan'25) indicate that the CAIO is firmly on the priority list for CEOs and their leadership teams. Despite this, in only a handful of cases is the CAIO a direct report of the CEO (such as Walter Sun at SAP, Sep'23, Nasser Ali Khasawneh at Eversheds, Dec'23 and Ed Keisling at Progress, Feb'25), with the majority of the appointments reporting to the Technology organization via the CIO/CTO or into the Chief Data Officer.

In terms of background, there seems to be 3 main routes into the CAIO seat; Software Engineering, Data or Consulting.

THE CAIO CURVE
AI Leadership adoption in Global Firms
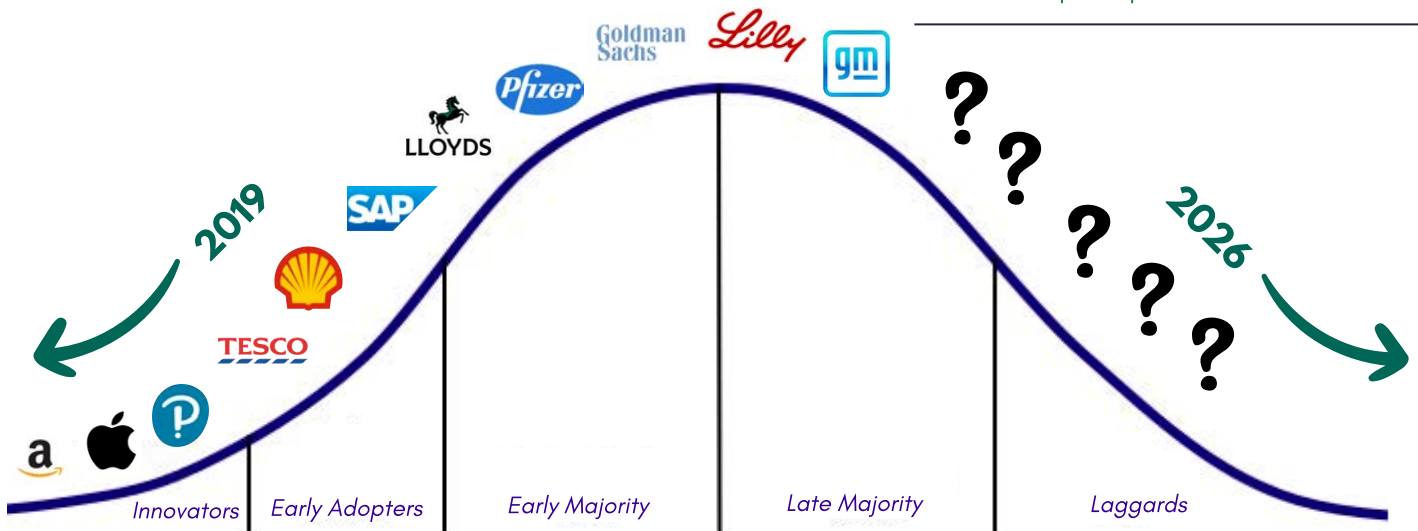
Source: *FTSE/S&P / pltfrm elevations*

SAVANT, SHEPHERD,
<or a bit of both?>

Whilst companies scramble to find the Talent, of equal importance is defining the function, and two distinct interpretations of the role have emerged. Perhaps our natural first inclination is to see the CAIO as the AI savant – the tech visionary pushing the boundaries, developing new models, and ensuring companies aren't left in the digital dust.

AI LEADERSHIP IN THE FTSE 100

Source: *pltfrm elevations. CAIO or equivalent title. Data accurate to Feb'25*

AI Heads

48%

FTSE 100

Appointed since

42%

Jan 24

Of which:

Appointed since

65%

Jan 23
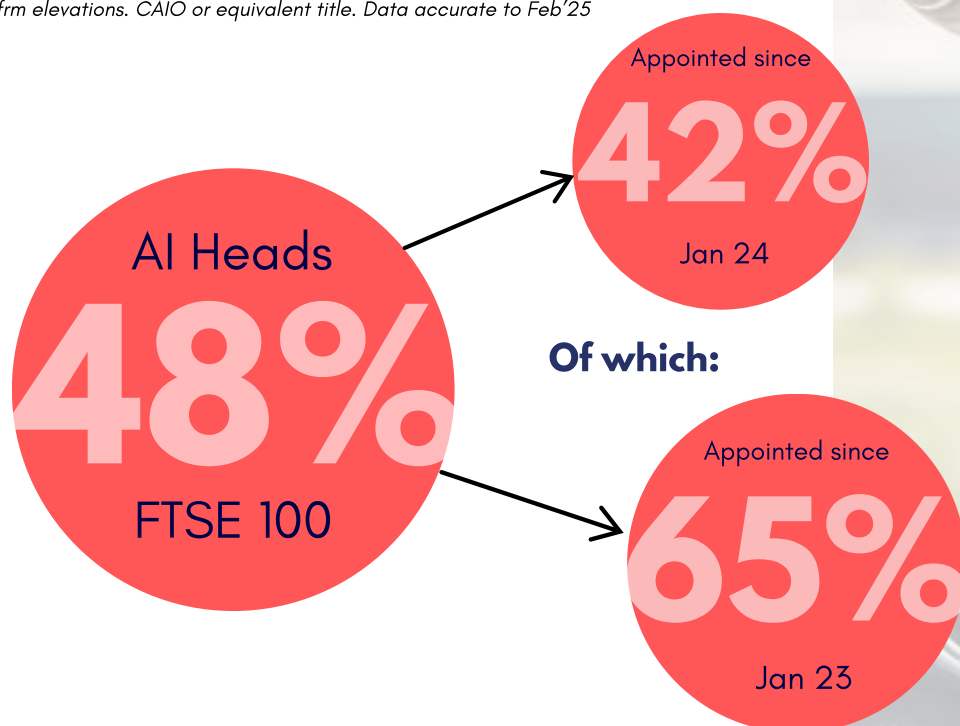
Headline-grabbing examples of AI deployment in firms such as Unilever (designing the Lynx AI body spray, derived from 3.5million scent combinations), WPP (AI-driven creative campaigns including the female-driven campaign for the Iran Democracy Council) and Schroders Capital (the deployment of their Generative AI Investment Analyst (GAiiA) platform, a proprietary tool that accelerates data analysis and enhances the decision-making process for private equity investments) fuel the public perception of what AI is and what it can be, whilst simultaneously piling the pressure on the CAIO to **"show us your next trick"**.

SAVANT, SHEPHERD,
<or a bit of both?>

Then there is the other side of the spectrum – the need to shepherd, steward and supervise the army of **"enthusiastic amateurs"** in the company who are keen to harness the next Grok, Deepseek or Perplexity to make life for them and their colleagues easier.
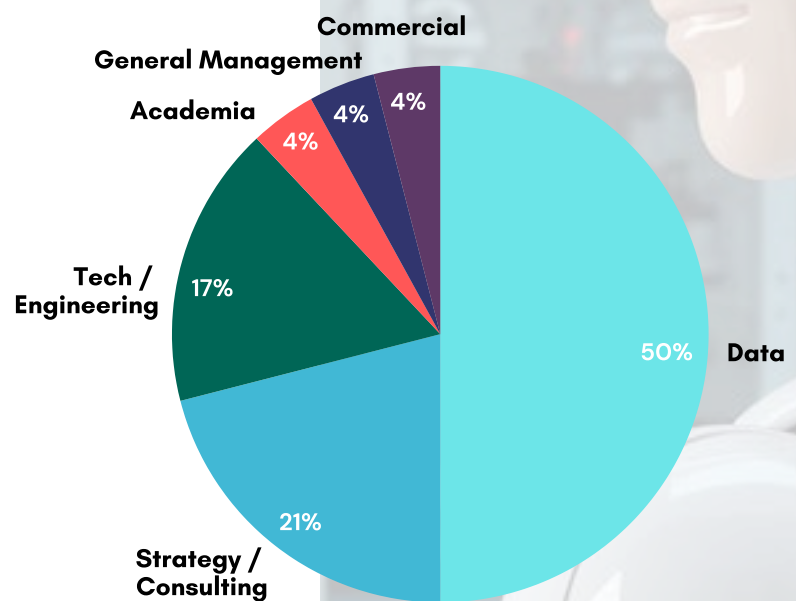
Here the CAIO isn't building the next rocket; they're making sure it doesn't crash on launch. Their job? To manage AI related risks (such as ethics), as well as adopt, scale and integrate systems responsibly. With regulation, such as the EU AI Act, setting strict compliance requirements (banning high-risk AI deployments such as social scoring, and enforcing transparency obligations for AI interactions), CAIOs are having to navigate an increasingly complex regulatory landscape. The Act's risk-based approach forces companies to think carefully about how AI is developed and deployed, making the CAIO's role in governance pivotal.

DNA OF FTSE AI LEADERS

Source: *FTSE/S&P / pltfrm elevations*

Commercial 4%
General Management 4%
Academia 4%
Tech / Engineering 17%
Data 50%
Strategy / Consulting 21%

The intersectionality and relationship with the CISO, Compliance and broader Data organizations will be critical to progress here.

The reality is that most CAIOs will require a mix of both offense and defence. With AI usage on a seemingly inexorable rise, it's crucial for companies to hire CAIOs who can both 'dream big' and rein the firm in when necessary. In the AI race, you can neither afford to be left behind nor too reckless and it all boils down to finding the perfect balance between innovation and control.

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NEXT STOP: CEO?
<or "Where are they now?>

So, what happens after the screaming stops? If we revisit the data in 5 years, will we find more, less or no CAIOs? There is certainly a world in which the latter is a distinct possibility – whereby AI is so pervasive and embedded within the organization that it is driven and managed by the Technology Organization (coming full circle within this article, Jensen Huang is on record as predicting that the Technology Organization will become "the HR department of AI agents") and the CAIO goes the way of the lesser-spotted and perhaps slightly-too-nebulous Chief Innovation Officer or Chief Culture Officer and into the **corporate** *"Where are they now?"* **file**.

For the moment however, the race-to-hire shows no signs of abating. As with anything fast, new and nascent, there will also be mis-steps and at the likes of BT and Wipro, there have already been examples where the CAIO has not made it to the 2-year anniversary mark.

However, we should also consider the question *"What if it goes right?"* for CAIOs? In February 2025, Justin Hotard, Head of AI at Intel, was named CEO of Nokia, replacing the long-serving incumbent, Pekka Lundmark. If we accept that AI will become integral to business success moving forward, **could the current and pending cadre of CAIOs be CEOs-in-waiting? Time will tell.**

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be pltfrm

be resourceful

Relish the challenge. Great ideas can come from anyone and anywhere. Think laterally. There is always an answer. Find the angle that others have not.

be relevant

Embrace technology and new ideas. Stay close to our markets and our clients' interests. Have a perspective.

be reliable

Do what we say we will do. Action every follow-up. Stay committed. Consistency always wins.

be real

Leave our egos at the door. Be positive & relatable but be honest & objective. Contribute to culture. Own mistakes and putting them right.

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