



July 2024

Cognizant CMT Chief Data Officer Forum

Seven CMT data leaders met virtually to share leading practices and discuss topics of mutual interest based on an agenda created through advance interviews. The discussion centered on the evolving CDO role, the convergence of data and other areas of the business, and artificial intelligence.

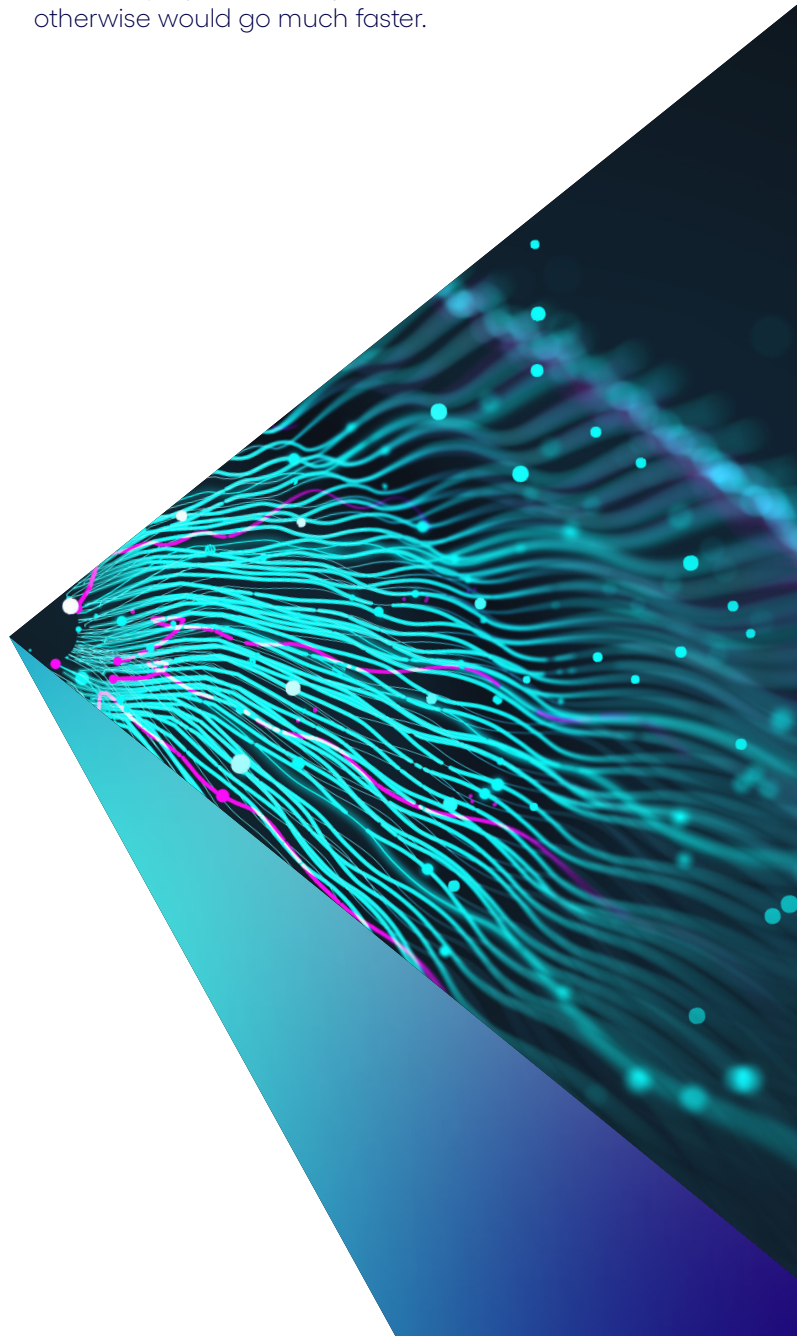


The evolving CDO role

Key takeaways

“There is an expansion of adding the AI hat on top of the data hat. But it’s not one-size-fits-all. I can see that there are still variations.”

- Cognizant’s Badhri Krishnamoorthy opened the conversation around the evolution of the CMT CDO role and the convergence of data and GenAI. The role of the CMT CDO continues to change as officers take on additional responsibilities and play a key part in their organizations’ pursuit of AI. Data officers are “partners in crime” with other functions developing AI solutions, and the focus for many is on operationalizing and accelerating AI as well as establishing guardrails and governance.
- One participant noted that their role has swayed between governance around GDPR, strategy around a large cloud migration, and compliance with the explosion of LLMs. The traditional compliance role seems to be moving down the organization and falling to the data office as data plays a more integral part of compliance at every level of the enterprise.
- Even when AI is being added to their duties, CMT CDOs retain responsibility for their core mandates around data governance, data analytics and data engineering. As these core responsibilities are leveraged in service of other functions, the line between different areas is increasingly blurred, especially between the engineering and enterprise worlds. The data office’s involvement across functions makes CMT CDOs uniquely positioned to serve as “North Stars”, guiding the efforts on both sides of the line.
- The “wall” between product and operations is primarily due to different mentalities, according to one leader. The product mentality is focused on building something unique every time with nothing but internal smarts. The operations mentality wants to buy, leverage and build as fast as possible. Sometimes these opposing sides can merge if there is a good leader in place, but it can depend heavily on internal politics.
- Similar contradictions exist between software development and data. “Everyone thinks they can do data,” according to one participant, a trend often seen in software developers attempts to take over data. However, processes between the two are often so different that a seamless interaction is difficult. Participants agreed that if walls between team and functions could come down, deployment of any solution, AI or otherwise would go much faster.



Structuring around AI

Key takeaways

“On the AI side, it’s sort of like everyone wants to do it, but they don’t know how to do it well yet. And so there hasn’t emerged a governing body behind it. There’s not a leader behind it yet either.”

- Companies generally are adding tasks, especially around AI, to the plates of data officers, but organizational structures differ. In one example, a new AI role has been created at the C-suite level, but the data office resides within the digital organization, which is under the CTO. At another organization there is no chief data officer yet, and the data function is split between technology components and business components, with AI being separate at the moment. Yet another organization has data housed under the CIO and responsible for internal AI initiatives, but not the product side of AI, which is under the CPO.
- AI at one organization is split into three areas. First, anything product related is entirely independent and run by engineers developing software for customers. Second, the data team heads up all ingestion for AI which included modeling and optimization of data for AI, but internal developers are the ones actually writing the end models (e.g., chat bots, etc.) Finally, any machine learning, predictive analytics and prescriptive analytics fall to the data team.
- Given the newness of AI and its potential to touch all areas of an enterprise, governance of AI is not usually left up to one function. Even amidst the “politics” that many CMT CDOs are seeing at their organizations (i.e., everyone wants to own AI), responsibility is typically shared across offices. For example, at one company, the AI stakeholder committee includes product leaders, the CTOs of each product, data, Legal, and enterprise security. Even though AI responsibility is often shared at the moment, there is a sense that a dedicated AI role may be necessary to bring everything together.

AI adoption and success

Key takeaways

“It’s like any big project, you need to look at what it is you’re trying to do, and how it impacts the company before you launch on it. Asking about ROI after the fact is never going to net you a good result, you need to have those conversations going in.”

- As they explore areas where AI can actually solve business problems, members are finding compelling use cases. Document analysis is a prominent example where AI can bring efficiency to a cumbersome task, especially when it involves queries across different formats and tools. Natural language queries of reporting data is another area of AI success, though its strength lies in searching the data, not understanding it.
- One organization has had success using AI to query customer comments to quickly parse out the main issues customers are having, which can then be passed to engineering teams. They are using an AI chat bot to assist CS agents in quickly finding answers for customer questions and have added AI to their customer-facing website to help customers find the right products. To ensure better ROI, one member’s team only chooses projects they can deliver quickly and which relate to a specific business problem. Further, they trend towards projects that have established metrics which make proving the value and selling the projects much easier.
- Cognizant’s Krishnamoorthy observed that many senior leaders view generative AI as the solution to all problems, even if engineers say otherwise. Data leaders are seeing this type of pressure as well (e.g., a business executive reads an article on AI and wants the company to go a certain route). In response, participants are finding that they must manage expectations and educate other leaders on the technical side of AI. At times, there is less enthusiasm for AI when leaders realize what other headaches it might entail (e.g., IP infringement, data privacy considerations, etc.)
- In some cases, a definition of GenAI must be established before conversations around applications can occur. The group agreed that AI is on a continuum of analytics and automation, and, often, GenAI is not the solution to problems that can already be solved by established analytics. Even when education steers people away from GenAI, it can serve as an opportunity to put more focus on the importance of data governance.
- Cognizant’s Krishnamoorthy remarked on the shift in AI focus. Initially, initiatives targeted increasing productivity and efficiency and finding new use cases to bring those advantages. Now, the focus is on revenue generation and monetization of AI on the product side. More recently, companies that have had some success in productivity and monetization areas are focused on the ROI of AI investments, especially as organizations begin to recognize the high costs of AI implementation. A year ago, people anticipated large budget cuts due to productivity gains, but now some are wondering if they will be able to keep the same budget going into 2025.
- Leaders have found that success leads to more success, with viable use cases generating demand for further AI solutions. One participant noted that the appetite is not solely for AI—they have been able to “ride the GenAI wave” to help them advance standard analytics and machine learning. They observed that pessimism around data (e.g., predictive and prescriptive analytics) has shifted to optimism based on the promise of AI, making people much more willing to pilot solutions that aren’t truly GenAI.

Cognizant CMT Chief Data Officer Forum Host: Badhrinath (Badhri) Krishnamoorthy leads one of the Global Strategic Business Unit for CMT industries at Cognizant. A passionate leader, Badhri partners with client executives achieve their transformation goals by leveraging Customer Experience, AI & Data, and Digital & Technology solutions. He's a strong industry advocate, fostering connections through forums and sharing valuable insights with the community. He can be reached at Badhrinath.Krishnamoorthy@cognizant.com.

Cognizant CMT Chief Data Officer Forum: Cognizant's CMT Chief Data Officer Forum was established in Q4 2000 to bring Data & Analytics executives across leading Communications, Media, and Technology companies to share best practices, exchange insights, learn from one another, and navigate these unprecedented times. The group gets together on a quarterly basis for an hour to discuss various topics of mutual interest. Members decide the exchange agendas; interactions focus on the questions and interests of the members.

Profitable ideas exchange (PIE): PIE brings together communities of Fortune 500 executives from across the globe to connect, collaborate and learn from one another. PIE stands out for its ability to bring diverse voices to the table and facilitate ongoing high-value conversations. Two key components of PIE's practice are pre-interviewing participants to build relevant agendas, and a time-efficient format (virtual as well as in person) to allow for executives to convene.



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