DATA | AI | CLOUD | CYBERSECURITY

DIGITAL EDGE

March26 » » » » » » » » Issue007

Exclusive Interview:

GREG STEEL

Data Leadership in Global Banking

PLUS:

Exclusive Joint Interview:

REZA SADIQ

Digital Transformation Leader

CRAIG FARLEY

AI & CX Strategist at IP Integration

Exclusive Content: Michelle Conway - Pete Williams - David Bruce - *Plus all our Regular Features*

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Editors Notes

Let's be honest. There is no shortage of noise in the data and AI market. Open your Linkedin feed on any given day and there it is, in your face, the latest in shiny new AI products and platforms to revolutionise your business. But who can we actually trust behind the scenes to ensure that this innovative and, quite potentially, earth shattering new technology is safe, compliant and regulated?

Issue 07 steps away from the headlines and the hype to focus on something more enduring: execution. What does it actually take to scale data and AI inside complex, highly regulated organisations? Why do heavily funded programmes still stall at proof-of-concept? And how are fundamentals such as semantics, architecture, and governance quietly reasserting their importance?

In our exclusive interview with Greg Steel, he offers an unvarnished perspective on these questions. Our discussion avoided easy optimism. Instead, we explored the structural realities of driving change across multi-layered enterprises — where durable value depends less on tooling and more on clarity, discipline, and leadership resolve.

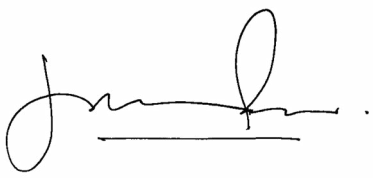
We also hear from Michelle Conway in our new regular feature Our Voice – in partnership with Women in Data® and proudly sponsored by The Data Literacy Academy. Michelle's journey into data and AI was never about trend-chasing. Grounded in mathematics, sharpened through statistics, and shaped within one of the UK's most regulated institutions, her perspective reflects a measured and principled approach to leadership in complex environments.

We are also joined by contributor insights from seasoned data leaders Pete Williams and David Bruce, each offering practical reflections drawn from experience rather than theory. Read their intriguing, insightful and independent views in our brand new contributor feature - The Cutting Edge.

Data also takes centre stage in our lifestyle section, where we review the Str8bat Sensor, examining performance analytics in professional Cricket. As a keen amateur and prolific opening bowler for my local village side, batting was never my strength - but there is no doubting the ability of this bit of kit to help any one struggling with their cover drives.

Meanwhile, Reza Sadiq partners with Craig Farley to explore what it means for the redefinition of human roles inside intelligent enterprises. The CTO at Verizon Business, teams up with the innovative providers of contact centre, cloud and connectivity services and solutions, to discuss the future of Agentic AI in customer-services and solutions.

Issue 07 is about substance. About foundations. About leadership. Forget the hype. Ignore the noise. Read Digital Edge Magazine.



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FRONT COVER:

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A Fireside Chat with

Greg Steel

Senior Chief Data Officer and Technology Leader

Scaling beyond isolated successes

There are interviews that feel transactional, and then there are conversations that feel earned. This one falls firmly into the latter. Greg Steel isn't just an observer; he's spent years embedded in complex, highly regulated enterprises where data is a structural dependency, the very bedrock of operations.

Our discussion sidestepped the latest AI hype cycle. Instead, we drilled into the persistent failures: Why do heavily invested organisations still struggle to scale? Why does proof-of-concept success rarely translate into durable enterprise value? And why are foundational elements like semantics, architecture, and governance reasserting their critical importance?

I sat down with Greg to unpack these challenges. What emerged was a rare, unvarnished look at what it truly takes to drive change and lead teams within the multi-layered structures of highly regulated organisations.

Q: What most consistently prevents large organisations from scaling data and AI beyond isolated successes, even after significant investment?

I have seen this play out repeatedly in large organisations. Individual data and AI initiatives succeed because they have strong sponsorship, a clear problem to solve, and a focused team. The problem arises when people assume those successes will somehow add up to enterprise-wide value. They rarely do, because incentive structures and operating practices have not been adjusted. Teams are still set up, funded, and rewarded to deliver for their own area, not to build things others can safely reuse.

This is often misread as an argument for greater centralisation. It is not. The issue is not the use of different tools or software solutions, but by allowing teams to redefine data meaning, controls, and data contracts independently. When that happens, local success quickly becomes enterprise fragility.
AI accelerates this by surfacing inconsistencies far faster than traditional reporting ever did.

What scales in practice is disciplined decentralisation, clear, shared foundations and architectural guardrails, combined with local freedom to execute and innovate above them.

Data provisioning vs analytics delivery

Q: Why do enterprises often struggle when data provisioning and analytics delivery are treated as the same problem, and what breaks as a result?

Organisations often bundle these together believing it reduces cost and allows rapid delivery, and in the short term it works. Dashboards get built, insights flow, and there is a sense of progress.

Over time, however, data is shaped to answer specific questions rather than to represent something stable about the business. Every outcome requires dedicated data resources. Cost rises and bottlenecks appear. Controls are added late and inconsistently.

"GENERATIVE AI SIMPLY MAKES WEAK FOUNDATIONS IMPOSSIBLE TO IGNORE."

As soon as other parts of the organisation try to use and ultimately rely on that data i.e. Risk, Finance, or Operations, the cracks appear. Separating enterprise data provisioning does not slow teams down, it protects both speed and trust. Generative AI simply makes weak foundations impossible to ignore.

Shared semantic models

Q: How important are shared semantic models in building trust and reuse across risk, finance, operations, and commercial teams?

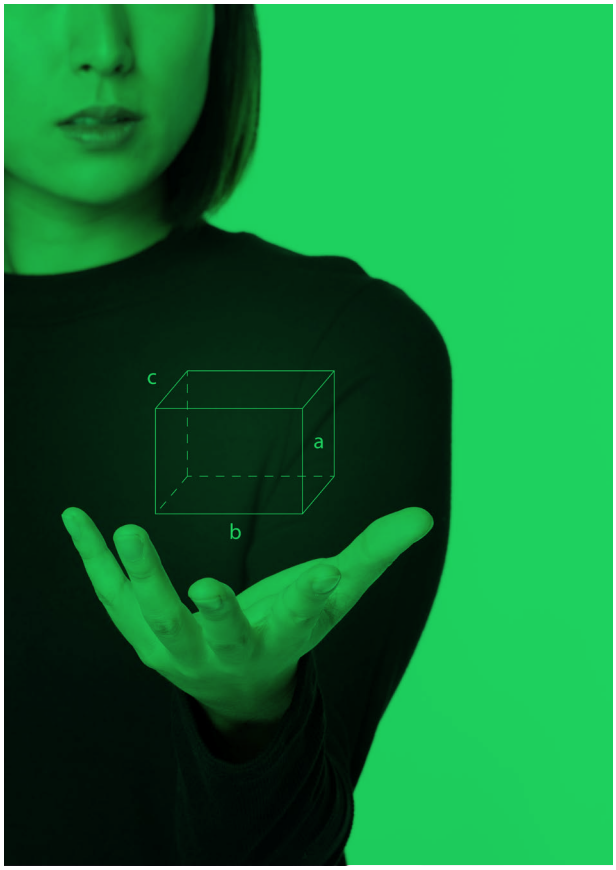
This sounds abstract until you see the consequences up close. I have spent time in organisations where everyone thinks they are talking about the same thing, until it becomes clear they are not. Even then, there is a reluctance to change due to the uncertain costs of doing so.

Shared semantic models create a common language. They do not constrain how teams work, but they do stop divergence at the level of meaning. That clarity removes friction, enables reuse, and becomes essential for Generative AI which at a minimum we know does not cope well with ambiguity.

There are a raft of new and emerging data technologies that are suddenly focused on Semantics. emphasising its criticality. I have been particularly impressed by a platform from Stratio, which treat semantic models as

a core architectural layer rather than as documentation or metadata sitting off to the side. They were delivering this to tier one financial services organisations before Generative AI was around. What they have achieved with it at scale is notable.

When meaning is built into the platform itself, reuse and governance stop being optional behaviours and start becoming the default.



Durable AI value

Q: Where does AI deliver its most durable value when embedded into core data platforms rather than deployed as standalone use cases?

The AI use cases that scale most effectively are those embedded into data operations rather than isolated decision engines. Improving data quality, reconciliation, monitoring, and audit evidence all strengthen trust in the underlying data.

By contrast, AI used purely to automate decisions often struggles to survive scrutiny because weaknesses in the data foundations are exposed very quickly.

Why AI stalls at proof-of-concept

Q: Many AI initiatives stall at the proof-of-concept stage. What distinguishes the few that scale from the many that don't?

Most proofs-of-concept are designed to demonstrate that something is possible, not that it is sustainable. Speed and technical performance are prioritised, while ownership, lineage, and explainability are deferred.

When audit or regulatory scrutiny arrives, those gaps become obvious. The initiatives that scale design for governance from day one and embed models into platforms rather than one-off solutions.

Buy vs build

Q: How should senior leaders approach buy-versus-build decisions for data and AI platforms when the pace of AI innovation is accelerating so quickly?

Buy versus build is often framed as a technology or procurement debate. In practice, it is a leadership question about where you want your best people spending their time.

I have seen teams spend years building platforms only to find the market or

> Buy versus build is often framed as a technology or procurement debate. In practice, it is a leadership question about where you want your best people spending their time.

STRATIO

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Starts wit

AI can only perform accurately when
control are at the forefront. Speed is
but governance is what makes them

Explore AI built for enterprise control

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s essential for enterprise decisions,
n sustainable.

the business itself has moved on. There is often a lot of concern around losing control when you buy. However, control comes from architecture, shared meaning, and integration, not from owning every component. AI makes this mismatch even more visible.

This is also where external platforms can make a lot of sense when they are built around clear architectural principles. A platform like Stratio provides a strong enterprise data foundation, while more specialist vendors such as eXate focus deeply on specific problems like data privacy controls within the network. The problems these capabilities address sit at the heart of many enterprise data challenges. Both are examples of buying capabilities that would be extremely expensive and slow to recreate internally, without giving up architectural control. Business leaders must ensure the right choices are being made.

Metadata and governance

Q: Metadata and governance are perennial priorities yet often fail to deliver sustained value. What is missing in how organisations approach them today?

Metadata and governance are widely acknowledged as important, but often quietly ignored. The reason is that manual curation does not scale and quickly becomes outdated.

They deliver value when automated and embedded into day-to-day delivery, so they stay current and actionable rather than becoming a compliance exercise.

Privacy is a good example of this. Solutions like eXate work precisely because privacy controls are built directly into data flows within the network, rather than being enforced afterwards. That kind of built-in control scales far better than policies or manual checks, and it is not something most organisations should try to engineer from scratch.

Future leadership

Q: Looking ahead, what capabilities beyond pure technical depth will define effective data and AI leadership over the next decade?

Future data and AI leaders will be defined less by technical depth and more by architectural and organisational fluency.

They will need to understand how data, AI, risk, and incentives interact, and be able to centralise what must be shared while decentralising what can vary. That balance will matter more than any individual technology choice.

Global Tech Briefing

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SAP doubles down on AI-driven procurement orchestration

SAP has accelerated the rollout of AI capabilities across SAP Ariba and S/4HANA, focusing on predictive sourcing, supplier risk scoring, and demand-driven purchasing.

The shift is notable not for the models themselves, but for how tightly they are embedded into transactional workflows. This signals SAP's view that AI must live inside core procurement systems, not alongside them.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

AI adoption follows ERP gravity. If it's not embedded, it won't scale.

Walmart applies real-time AI to supplier performance at global scale

Walmart has expanded its use of AI-driven analytics to monitor supplier performance across thousands of vendors, blending demand signals, logistics data, and historical compliance

The result is faster renegotiation cycles, fewer stockouts, and improved leverage with underperforming suppliers, without expanding procurement headcount.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

Scale amplifies AI value when data quality is already solved.

Unilever uses AI to expose hidden supplier risk

Unilever has deployed AI-based risk intelligence across its extended supplier ecosystem, identifying sub-tier exposure previously invisible to central procurement teams.

This includes geopolitical risk, ESG compliance, and logistics chokepoints, moving supplier risk from quarterly reporting to continuous monitoring.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

Visibility below Tier-1 is now a board-level expectation.

AI & Data in Procurement and Supply Chain. What Actually Moved the Needle. From boardrooms to factory floors, AI in procurement and supply chain is no longer experimental. The past 12 months have delivered tangible wins, costly missteps, and a growing gap between organisations that invested in data foundations and those that chased tools. Here are ten developments shaping enterprise strategy right now.

Amazon operationalises AI forecasting beyond retail

While best known for retail logistics, Amazon has quietly expanded AI forecasting tools across its enterprise supply operations, using machine learning to optimise inbound freight, warehouse capacity, and procurement timing.

The models adapt in near real time to demand volatility, a capability many enterprises still lack.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

Forecasting advantage compounds when AI meets operational autonomy.

Generative AI pilots stall without clean procurement data

Across multiple global enterprises, GenAI pilots in procurement have failed to progress beyond proof of concept. The reason is consistent. Fragmented spend data, inconsistent supplier records, and weak master data governance.

Several organisations have paused GenAI rollouts entirely, redirecting investment back into data foundations.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

GenAI does not fix broken data. It exposes it.

Siemens applies AI to supplier resilience, not cost alone

Siemens has shifted its AI focus from cost reduction to resilience modelling, simulating supplier disruption scenarios across energy, manufacturing, and infrastructure programmes.

The approach prioritises continuity of supply over short-term savings, reflecting a post-pandemic procurement mindset.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

Resilience has overtaken cost as the primary optimisation goal.

Global Tech Briefing

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AI-driven sourcing delivers measurable savings at Nestlé

Nestlé has reported measurable procurement savings through AI-supported sourcing decisions, combining historical pricing, demand forecasting, and supplier performance data.

Crucially, procurement teams retained decision authority. AI augmented judgement rather than replacing it.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

Human in the loop is still the winning model.

UK public sector struggles to scale AI procurement initiatives

Several UK public sector bodies have launched AI-led procurement initiatives, but progress remains uneven. Legacy systems, procurement frameworks, and risk aversion have slowed deployment compared to private sector peers.

The contrast highlights how governance models can either enable or suppress AI value.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

Operating model matters as much as technology.

ESG data pressure reshapes supplier analytics

Enterprise procurement teams are increasingly integrating ESG and sustainability data into supplier scoring models. AI is being used to reconcile inconsistent disclosures, external risk data, and internal audits.

The challenge remains standardisation, but momentum is clear.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

ESG has moved from reporting to decision-making.

AI & Data in Procurement and Supply Chain. What Actually Moved the Needle. From boardrooms to factory floors, AI in procurement and supply chain is no longer experimental. The past 12 months have delivered tangible wins, costly missteps, and a growing gap between organisations that invested in data foundations and those that chased tools. Here are ten developments shaping enterprise strategy right now.

The procurement AI gap widens inside organisations

Perhaps the most telling trend is this. Procurement professionals are often ready to move faster than their organisations allow. Teams understand the value of AI-driven insights, but governance, IT backlogs, and risk controls slow execution.

The result is an internal AI velocity gap. Not between vendors, but within enterprises themselves.

THE EDGE TAKEAWAY:

The constraint is rarely capability. It's permission.

FINAL WORD:

AI in procurement and supply chain has entered a pragmatic phase. The winners are not chasing the most advanced models. They are fixing data, embedding intelligence into workflows, and aligning governance with operational reality.

For enterprise leaders, the message is clear. Strategy now matters more than tools.

The Decisions We Hand To Machines

By David Bruce

I was in the car this morning, driving my youngest child to primary school. Country roads. Quiet. All very familiar. Ahead, a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) pulled out to overtake a slower-moving tractor. I saw two oncoming vehicles appearing in the distance, heading straight towards me. For a split-second, scenarios unfolded in my mind that caused that hot, prickly sensation down my spine. My grip tightened on the wheel and I quickly began to assess my next move, my brain on high alert. Fortunately, the vehicles passed safely. The tractor continued on its way and as quickly as the danger appeared, it was gone. But the mind of a parent does not remain calm for long after such a moment. What if there wasn't enough time to react? What if this happened around a blind bend just as the HGV committed to the manoeuvre? Do I brake? Do I swerve? Do I rely on instinct or on training? The moment passed uneventfully, yet the thought lingered.

Contributor article by

David Bruce

Chief Data Officer, Financial Ombudsman Service

Later that day, reflecting again, my mind jumped to a conversation about Artificial Intelligence and ethics—a thought experiment we half-jokingly called the "Bruce Trolley Problem"

THE HYPOTHETICAL SCENARIO:

Imagine you are a principal software engineer responsible for designing the core decision logic of a fully autonomous self-driving vehicle. A heavy vehicle is approaching at speed on a narrow carriageway. A devastating collision is unavoidable. **You must choose which logic to encode:**

Option One. The vehicle continues on its current trajectory. The impact is catastrophic and the probabilistic outcome is that no occupants survive.

Option Two. The system initiates an aggressive evasive manoeuvre. This reduces the severity of the collision. Most occupants survive, but one will not.

On paper this may seem like a technical optimisation. In reality, it is a profound moral and ethical dilemma.Introducing the Human Element

Inside the vehicle are: Two adults in the front. A younger adult in the rear seat, An elderly passenger beside them. Pause and consider the implications.

HOW SHOULD THE SYSTEM DECIDE?

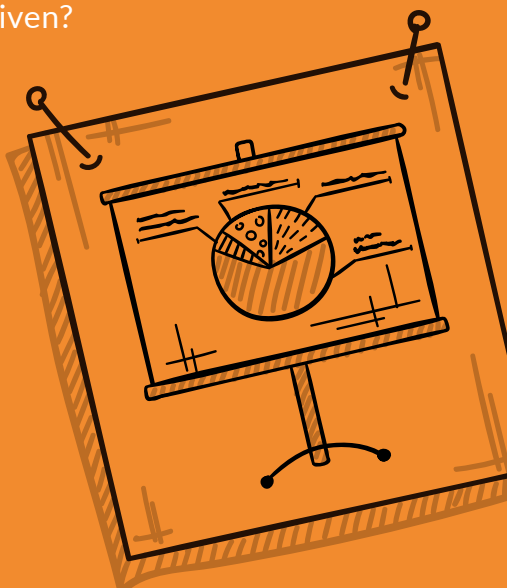
Do you: Minimise overall harm, knowing this requires the sacrifice of one life? Or avoid intervention, accepting the worst outcome for all occupants because it spares the system from making a value-laden choice?

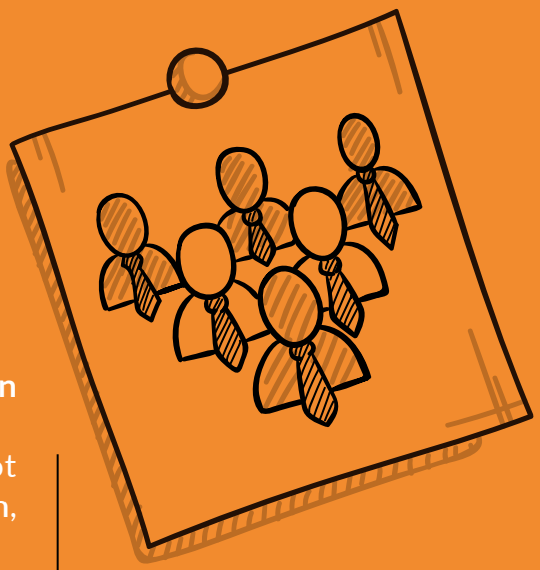
And the questions grow more uncomfortable:

If the system can infer age, vulnerability or survival likelihood, should it use that data?

Whose values determine how such sensitive data is weighted?

And who bears moral and legal responsibility? The developer? The corporation? The regulator? The machine that simply executes the logic it was given?





THE REAL ISSUE WITH AI

This is where AI discussions often fail.

We treat them as: Technical optimisation challenges. Questions of data quality, Model performance issues, but this is not a data problem. It is an inherently human, moral problem.

Data can tell us what is. It cannot tell us what ought to be done.

Every automated decision system reflects human judgements and values—whether acknowledged or not. As these systems operate at immense speed and scale, human value-judgements become embedded, invisible and difficult to challenge or audit.

This is the true hidden risk. The danger is not that machines will make all our decisions. It is that we stop owning the ethical decisions we've already handed over to them.

THE CRITICAL QUESTION:

Senior leaders and policymakers should not ask whether AI can make life-or-death choices. They must ask:

Are we prepared to be clear, honest and accountable for the human values we encode into autonomous systems?

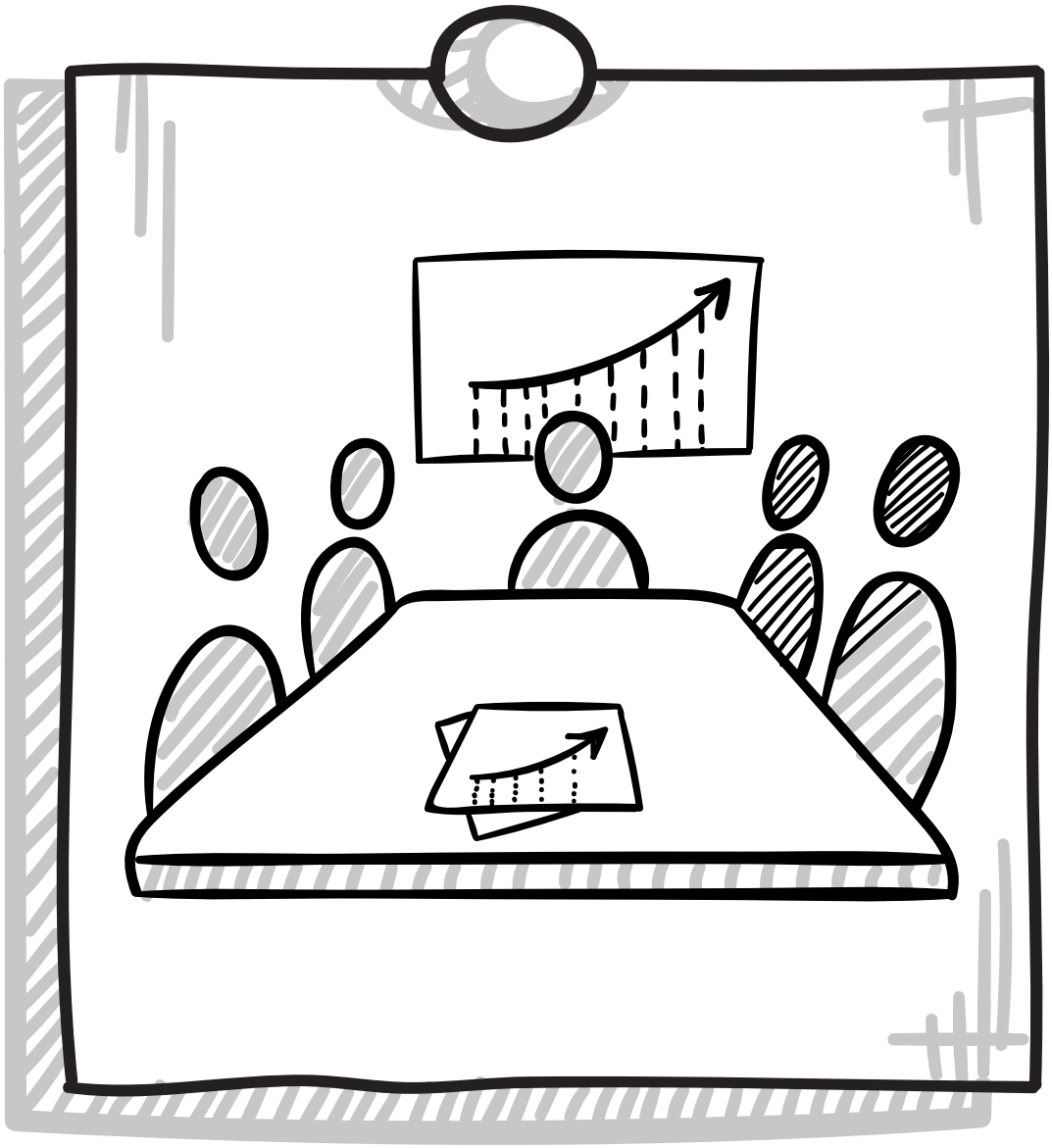
Because those values will guide the machine when the critical moment comes.

A QUESTION FOR YOU:

What would be your personal choice?

And more importantly, who should ultimately be held accountable when the machine executes that choice?

I am genuinely curious. Let us discuss the implications.



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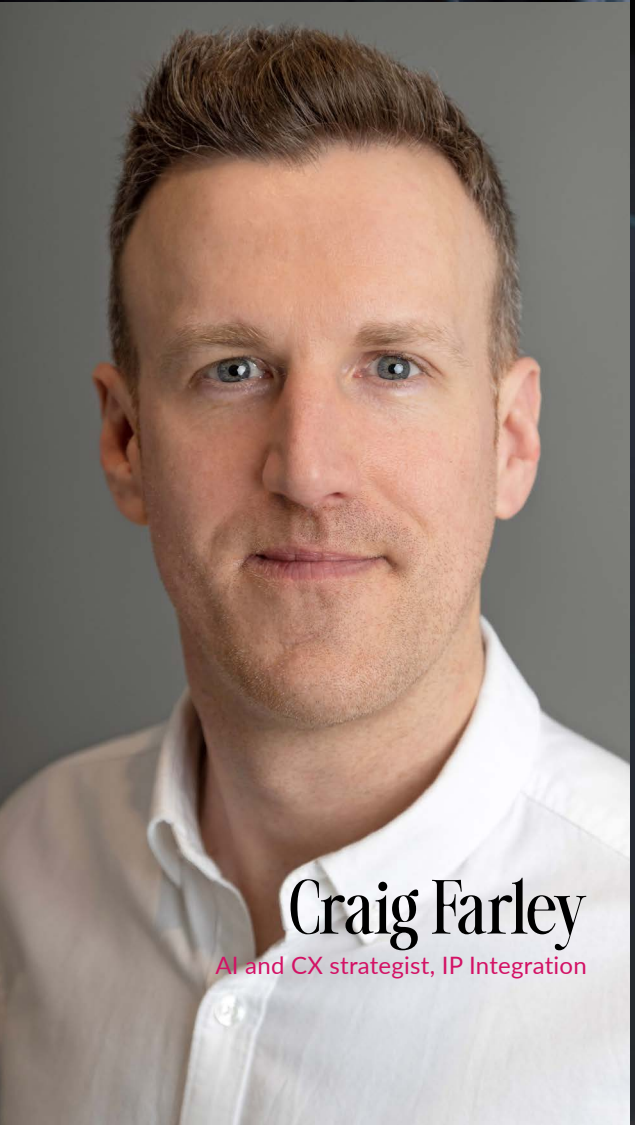
Reza Sadiq
CTO, Verizon Business



Craig Farley
AI and CX strategist, IP Integration

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW » » » »

Agentic AI: I
Human Role

With AI evolving beyond Large Language Models, can businesses progress beyond chatbots and towards agentic AI to transform how customer experience is delivered? What opportunities does this create for improved service, and how does this impact human roles?

We're excited to be discussing these points and more with Reza and Craig, who each bring their own perspectives. Reza as a CTO of a large telco, where he leads initiatives that harness AI, CX UC and Cloud technologies to pioneer data-driven business models. And Craig as a strategist who empowers businesses to harness cutting-edge technology and supports contact centres to deliver exceptional customer experiences.

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Redefining
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"This will mean AI will perform some of the repetitive tasks that humans used to do. And following on from that, they’ll move into prediction, as Reza calls it, The exciting stuff. "

From automation to autonomy?

We began our conversation with a discussion about where agentic AI is at and the expectations versus reality moments some businesses may face when turning to it.

From Verizon's vantage point, Reza tells us that much of what is currently labelled as agentic AI is an evolution of AI and experimentation with automation and orchestration, rather than new capability.

But, he tells us, "What is new this time is the context that we use. We have more confidence that we want to do this in an artificial intelligence approach, so how do we add the tools to help humans do their job better?"

They've already done a lot of work on their data fabric, which is no small job, "Being a big telco, we come across lots of data from our customers. From that, we can use AI to analyse and make historical and real-time decisions. That allows you to dig a bit deeper before you make decisions and action on them. The next phase is using agentic-type systems which work alongside humans, but humans are very much in control."

This will mean AI will perform some of the repetitive tasks that humans used to do. And following on from that, they'll move into prediction, as Reza calls it, "The exciting stuff.

"Can we, from what we've known before and what we're seeing in real time, predict what's coming? So, it's not just a tool, it's being built across the architecture, it's closing decisions between data and then execution. It's more of an advanced set of tools that help us in our job, that's what we're seeing at the moment."

From a delivery perspective, Craig at IP Integration thinks that 'true' agentic is being achieved more in back-office processes than front office, customer-facing ones. He also notes that most organisations are still evolving from rule-based automations and chatbots towards systems that can make very bounded and guardrail decisions.

Craig notices a nervousness about agentic AI in some organisations. And what they expect to immediately achieve with it may also differ from what's practical, "I think when people talk about agentic AI, they often imagine systems acting completely independently across the customer journey. But in reality, most organisations are still evolving from those rule-based automations and chatbots towards systems that can make very bounded and guardrail-defined decisions.

"The leap isn't from IVR or a single chat bot to full autonomy. It's a progression. And that progression at this stage is as much about organisations and consumers building trust as it is developing skills or dedicating time to the build itself."

For Craig, the move towards agentic AI typically starts by looking at the foundations and the readiness of the organisation for it – because AI agents need access to systems and resources, just as human advisors do.

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He remarks, “It's easy to think, if everyone's talking about AI agents doing amazing things, ‘I just need to turn one on and it will go away and do all this’. But if it doesn't have the tools to do the job – integrations, knowledge, data – then it can't do its job. It's not going to be much use.”

For him, it’s often about getting these building blocks in place first before introducing agentic AI, “Then it's building up and adding the LLM capabilities to improve understanding, improve the conversational aspects and join things together.”

We wondered if there’s sometimes a resistance to doing this foundational work if organisations are expecting an easier route to switching on the potential power of agentic AI? He acknowledges that a proportion would like to jump straight to it, “But that's not really our style at IP Integration. We'll always try and bring it back to making sure you're ready operationally, consultatively approaching it and looking for a reason for adopting the AI: what challenges have you got? Where would AI add value? And then coming up with the cool AI stuff.”

Combining human and artificial intelligence

Craig is in a position to see how copilot and human-in-the-loop models are delivering value as he sees how service teams actually work day-to-day.

He tells us, “We're seeing quite a bit of traction in the agent assist and copilot-type technologies for advisors, supervisors and quality analysts – so surfacing knowledge, summarising interactions, guiding next best actions.

“Going back to what Reza was saying, actually these models work because they respect the complexity of the human

interactions. The human is there to give empathy, context, govern the risk – that all is still very important.

“It's not AI replacing agents, it's AI reshaping where the human judgment adds most value. The copilot is reducing cognitive load, it's improving consistency and it's freeing up agents to focus on exceptions and customer relationship building.”

Craig considers this important because it starts to build trust for generative AI internally before rolling it out externally, where the perceived risk is higher.

Redefining human roles

From what Craig is saying, agentic AI has the potential to make human agent roles almost more human – with a focus on an increased use of the skills that are key to us and less of the repetitive work.

This is also something that Reza expects to see at Verizon as they think about redefining the role of human agents when AI is able to take on more of the reasoning, recommendation and orchestration tasks.

Reza explains, “What we're seeing, it's not about replacing humans in any way. It's about redefining what humans actually do and where we add value. So, it's more about getting the laborious stuff done by AI, supervised by humans. The real decisions are still tested and quality checked by humans – there’s frequent checking, there's approval, there are escalation paths to get to a human being on that conversation.

“And it's about a little bit of experimentation but building that trust and safety for governance. Over time, as the models mature and we can see that confidence in AI decision making, we can see that they do more and more of the automated routine decisions and then humans step in only when

there's something of question, or risk, or exception."

Reza points out that this is happening across all industries and so, for Verizon, there is a question of economics. In their wireline operations, after an order is submitted they currently spend 74 cents in the dollar just on tracking, troubleshooting and coordination.

He continues, "Being a big telco, we've got lots of silos, lots of human hand offs. Agentic workflows help to streamline, help to automate and reduce that cost. It's something we can't stop, and we need to work with it and help the economic process by adopting these technologies."

Risks, governance and deployment

While there's potential for economic advantage and more rewarding roles, front-office agentic AI in customer-facing environments is a different challenge from back-office deployment.

When we talk about this, Reza points out that the risks depends on the industry sector, with some, such as banking, having regulatory rules on what an agent can answer back to a customer, "Craig mentioned guardrails earlier on. Those safety mechanisms need to be stopping AI from saying the wrong thing in a very strict industry.

"On the other hand, you might have other industries where you can have a little bit more leeway; I'll just say retail, but they also have their governance. So, it is a bit about testing out the system. We've been doing this with automated Q and A's for many years where the exact answer given out by the agent is protected.

"It's to do with industry and then working with that industry and the rules that they have to navigate."

Reza reflects that the difference between back office and front is that back office is more about getting tasks done through the automation, whereas the front office is where there are there are legal and regulatory rules to navigate, "Both have their own issues. You've got HR process in the back office, in the front side you've got the government framework, so you've got to go case-by-case and work with the industry specialists in developing your AI facing technologies."

Craig picks up on the governance theme, sharing his viewpoint that this is not only critical for brand reputation and trust, but also for building trust internally within organisations. He tells us, "That's often just as important if you're about to embark on a big cultural change within the business to adopt AI. In many ways, consumers are actually quite used to using AI, even if past experiences might not always have been great, whereas employees are probably a bit more sceptical because they see the news stories about layoffs, they might be fearful for their own jobs.

"It's easy for me to come and talk to a senior leader about how AI might make their business more efficient, but without starting with why you're adopting AI and what it's going to mean for them, they can be resistant to change. This isn't new for AI, this is just change management 101 for a technology project."

In Craig's experience, before approaching AI implementation, organisations need to be clear about why they're doing this, the outcomes they want, as well as what challenges they're trying to solve or benefits they're aiming for, "It should tie into where your company is heading strategically, with that kind of senior sponsorship. This will help prioritise time and investment.

"It's going to avoid lots of unknown science experiments going on all over the place, so you maintain control, and it will help you understand whether something's working later down the line, and whether you've been successful faster, with less waste."

> **"It's to do with industry and then working with that industry and the rules that they have to navigate.**

Alongside this, he sees a need for an internal programme to increase general agnostic AI literacy – covering what it is, how it works, how it can help – to try and remove some of the fear and preconceptions and open up new development paths to use the tools.

Reza agrees that employee training on AI is important, "We have to take a certain level of training and readjustment to this new world. We should take that as a positive thing. AI is there to help, rather than maybe people are fearful that their jobs will change or go."

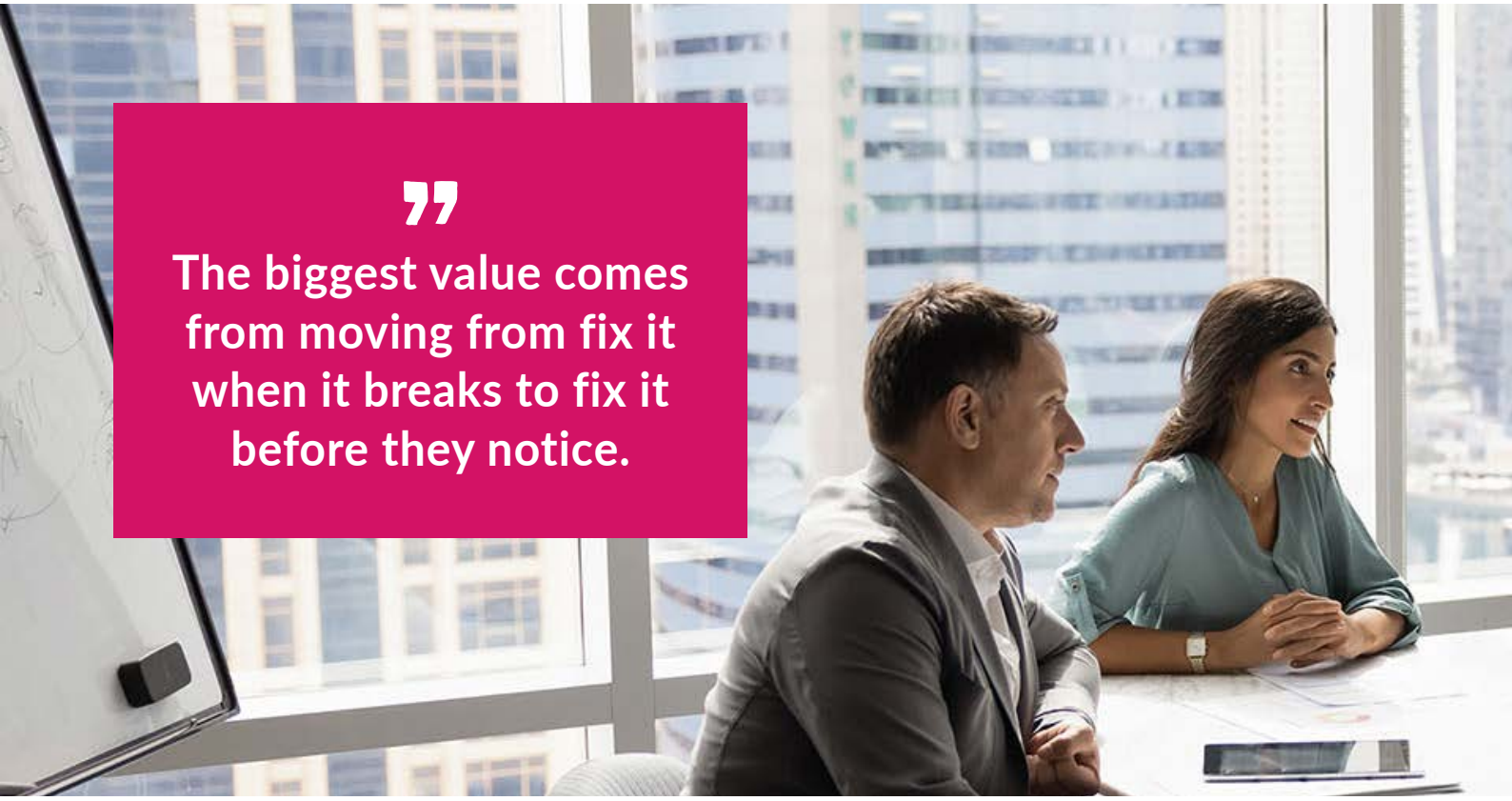
Craig comments that while there are often stories about job losses due to AI, there will also be new opportunities, "It's never a case of just turning AI on and letting it do its job. You've got to have people to tune it, tweak it, improve it, monitor it."

When it does come to deployment, building in guardrails is vital to determine what AI can and can't do, "You're ensuring that compliance is met, you're secure, it's acting within its brand guidelines."

As is carrying out a pilot on a small scale so you can iterate from it, "You'll normally get good findings from that which will help improve the process."

Craig continues, "When you do roll it out, make sure that it's someone's responsibility to check performance, check the outcomes, because for things like virtual agents, we often look for a high containment rate – if they're simple interactions, we want the agent to be containing customers within that process and not passing them on to our more expensive human resource.

"But if all that bot is doing is looping the customer around, or it's not providing the outcome they want, then that customer's just going to call in anyway or, worse, they're going to call your competitor. So, it's not just the surface level metrics, someone needs to pay close attention to it."



> The biggest value comes from moving from fix it when it breaks to fix it before they notice.

Creating a smoother customer experience

If organisations aren't ready for agentic AI in live chat or voice, we wondered where they could still improve customer experience using AI-driven assistance and orchestration?

For the team at IP Integration, AI isn't always the answer to a better customer experience, but where it is, they often recommend a process of Observe, Assist, Optimise, Act. This helps build trust and improve the experience iteratively.

Craig talks us through this, staring with the Observe part of the process, "You can turn on things like speech and text analytics to observe what's going on in your contact centre. Once you've got voice transcription or you've got web messenger's interactions, you've got a lot of data that you can start analysing with AI in a very low-risk manner to understand what your call types are about, what your chats are about, where there's friction, where there's process failure further up the chain – which is normally more expensive than the £5 or whatever it is to actually take the call. And then you can use that as a starting point.

"You've also got 'Assist', which is any kind of agent-assistive technology, and other things like automated quality as well, so that's a big area of benefit.

"Then you can start Optimising your more external-facing processes, using AI to orchestrate workflows, predictively routing interactions through the best path based on their history or what it is that they're contacting about, and triggering discrete processes that can be automated.

"And then the last one, 'Act', is where things start to get a bit more agentic, so putting together all of that toolkit that you've built and everything you've learned and building the more agentic autonomous processes as well.

Reza sees an opportunity for more autonomous AI emerging in proactive service. He tells us, “Near-term, autonomy delivers high value in proactive services, predicting things and resolving them before customers are impacted. That protects the brand, it builds trust, it reduces the inbound core volume.

“If you fix problems before people have noticed, hopefully they're not going to call in and complain. It allows agents to focus on the more high-value interactions, rather than dealing with routine troubleshooting and problem solving.

“The biggest value comes from moving from fix it when it breaks to fix it before they notice.”

“The autonomy delivers this customer an economic impact. There's a change in the customer satisfaction as they're more likely to stay with you because they're happy and it's a reliable service.”

Reza talks us through how this could work, “You’ve got to first of all Predict. And this isn't easy because this is about building those models and learning from the data before something happens. We've done this in things like predictive maintenance in other industries for many years. We’ve now got some new tools in AI – a different approach because we're using data to guide us.

“Then we've got to Prevent these things from happening by saying ‘Where are those pain points?’ In a telco, for example, there are lots and lots of systems that work together to provide a global service. AI helps us to get to the root cause a lot faster because of that data and the analytics. Then it removes the likelihood of an outage because you're dealing with it as a proactive service.”

Reza continues the process, coming to Personalised, “We talked earlier about augmentation where, if a fault or an outage does occur, you've got the right information available to the agent in

real time while they're dealing with the customer, they're not having to give updates further along the line. It reduces frustration, improves customer service and helps a better understanding with the customer.

Talking operational transformation and ROI

For businesses wondering which processes are the strongest candidates for more autonomous AI, Craig will quite often start on internal initiatives to build trust and ROI, “That then helps fund that self-fulfilling cycle of innovation. You make those efficiency gains, you gain the insights that help you improve processes, and that can be done fairly safely behind the scenes.”

He tells us there will be many organisations that haven't adopted AI yet or that are struggling to get traction, “They might hit a stumbling block that they haven't considered, and usually that's something around operational readiness, such as the data, the technology or the integrations, or involving compliance teams, where there's a lot of nervousness.

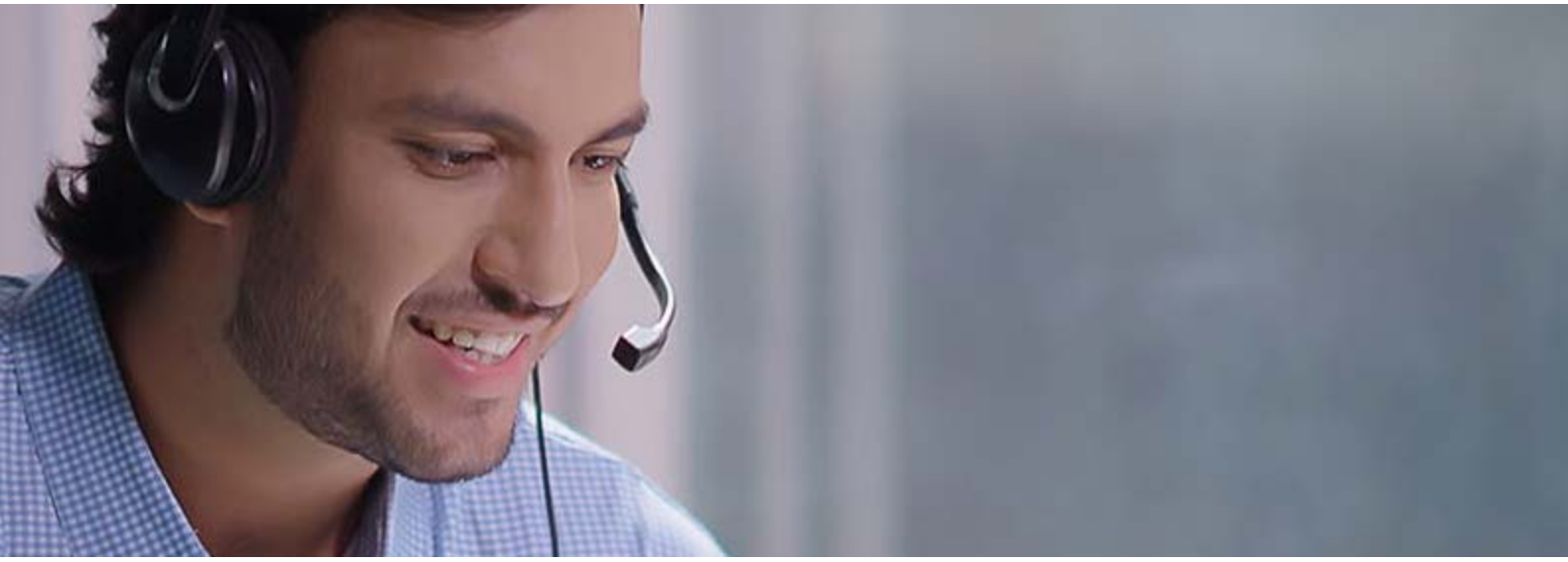
“These systems aren't always stuff that you can just turn on and leave running. It's best to have someone getting the most out of it for you.

He advises, “The more you can consider those elements early on, the faster you'll get to that ROI, the transformation and the success later. Then make sure that you've got some good use cases and good reasons for adopting the AI that's going to give you the benefits and the outcomes you want.”

This may seem daunting to some businesses who are doing this for the first time and who don’t have people in their team with experience of having deployed AI before. That’s where partners come in, as Craig references, “I would recommend working with a partner because they're going to have the experience of having done this multiple times.”

Looking at it from an executive level, we wanted to know what signals that AI, whether agentic or not, is actually transforming service operations as opposed to simply shifting cost or complexity elsewhere.

For Reza at Verizon, the key signal in back-end systems is reducing structural complexity, “We deal with cloud. They've got many accumulated layers of complexity



over the years and those systems are needed to keep our global customer services running. They're dependent on lots of subsystems, hand off between teams and systems, and complexity means it's also expensive to run.

“Where AI changes it is because you're transforming those service operations and then making them hopefully more automated and simpler.”

Reza refers back to when he talked about the post-order cost reducing. If AI can cut troubleshooting and coordinating between teams and silos through automation, this reduces friction and reduces costs in the business.

As well as back-office systems, they also look to see better customer service through augmentation helping the agent, “So from a top level all the way down, you've got front end and back end improvements using AI.

“And then of course the third part of that is improving the service that we give to our customers, providing the right answer, keeping customers updated and keeping them interacting with the business in a more sort of efficient way.”

Reza concludes, “These improvements are very important to modernise and restructure and become a future-facing business.

“AI is not just simplifying and reducing costs, it's improving outcomes, it's improving customer service – it’s a complete renovation of the whole business.”

Craig agrees with Reza on this, “Efficiency is table stakes, that's what you expect with AI. But it's also vital to use it for increasing service, improving consistency, reducing risk.”

Reza reflects, “We're both in technology, but we're seeing that AI is being applied throughout the business. There's some improvement that will affect and hopefully positively change every part of the business, from the front to the back, customer service to HR to legal.

“Everyone's getting benefit out of this because there's a new tool to help us to do our jobs better. It is important in keeping our customers happy. This is actually modernising and improving our workplace, and it's better to see it in a positive light in my personal point of view, rather than be fearful of it.”

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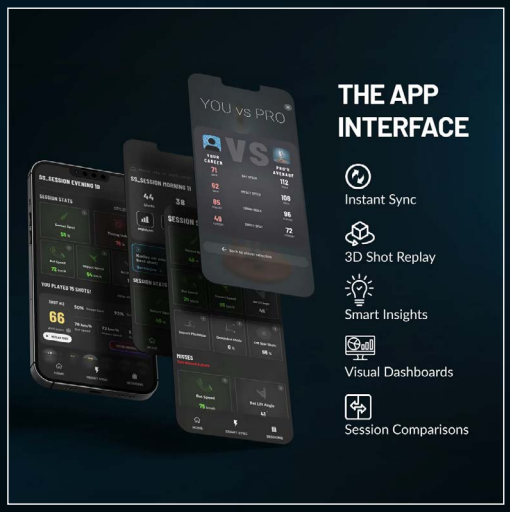

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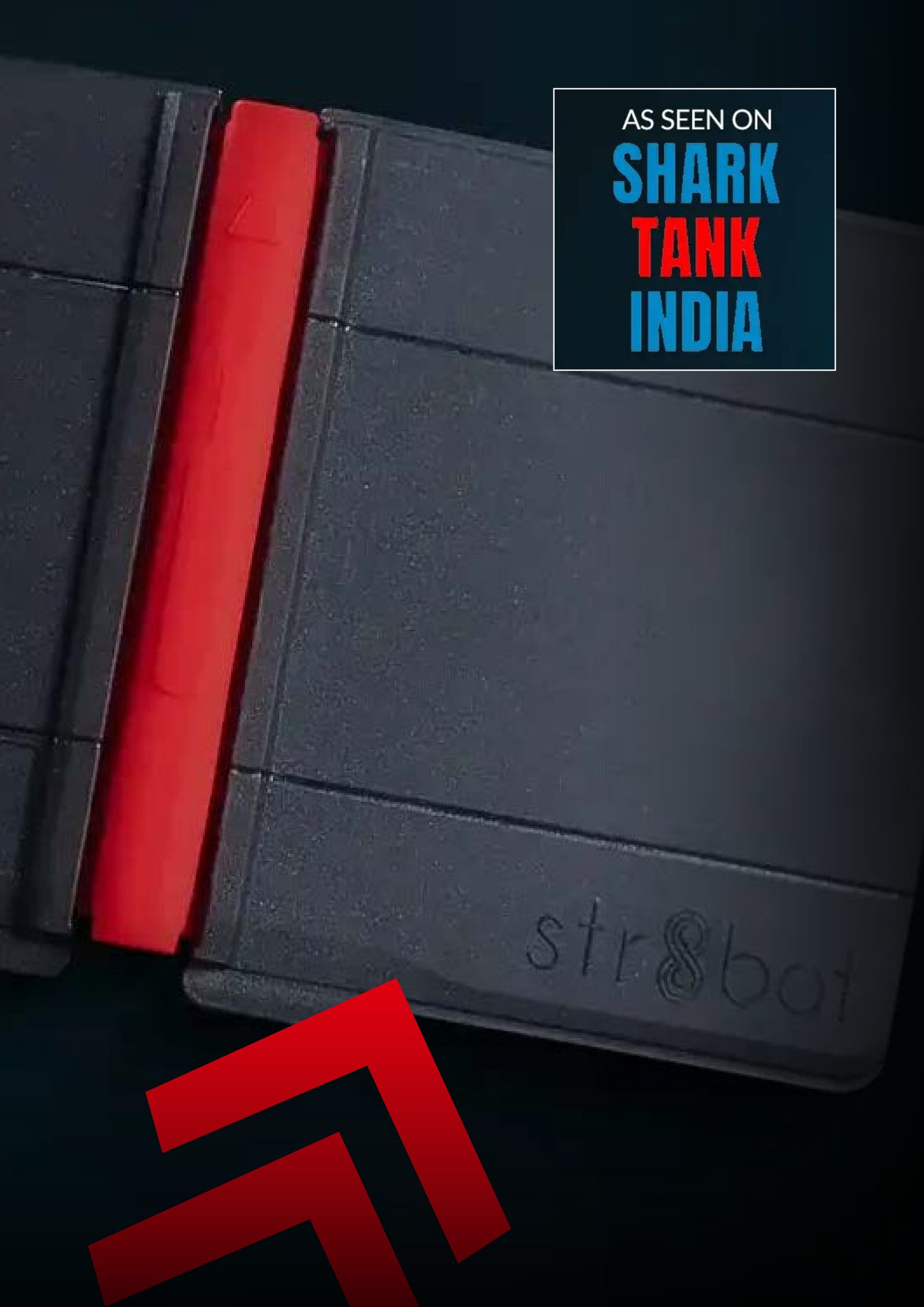
AS SEEN ON
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Str8bat and the Quiet Intelligence of Data-Driven Sport

The application of data and AI in sport often focuses on elite performance and televised analytics. Str8bat represents a more instructive trend: the quiet embedding of intelligence into everyday recreation. This IoT-enabled cricket bat sensor system is a compelling example of a disciplined, effective approach to data.

Str8bat is not attempting to reinvent cricket; it is simply measuring it.

The system captures detailed performance data during play, recording metrics such as bat speed, timing, shot type, and consistency. This data is surfaced via a mobile platform, giving players a clear, quantifiable view of how they actually play—a distinction that is fundamental for improvement.

The core value of Str8bat is its purpose: to close the gap between perception and reality using reliable, contextual data. Its strength lies not in the novelty of its sensors, but in the restraint and precision of their application. The system focuses on metrics that are meaningful and actionable for players at every level, from juniors to professional academies. Data only creates value when it is trusted, relevant, and integrated into daily behaviour.

18,000+	60,00,000+	350+	5+
Cricketers using str8bat	Shots recorded and counting	Cities across india	Countries and growing

The technology is embedded directly into the activity—it is not an afterthought. Data capture occurs naturally during play, and the resulting insights support reflection and coaching without distracting from the sport itself. Crucially, the platform prioritises precision and repeatability over scale. Inconsistent data rapidly erodes confidence; by narrowing its scope and excelling at fewer things, Str8bat builds credibility with its user base.

The sensor is only one component of the system. The real value emerges through longitudinal data: patterns over time, progression curves, and the ability to compare sessions and outcomes. The power of IoT is not in single data points, but in sustained measurement and closed feedback loops. Str8bat demonstrates this can be achieved effectively without requiring professional infrastructure or specialist analysts.

Str8bat will not dominate headlines like professional sports analytics platforms, and that is perhaps its greatest strength. It represents a form of applied IoT that is grounded, human, and quietly effective—a reminder that meaningful innovation often begins by paying closer attention to the fundamentals.

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Our Voice is a new monthly feature from Digital Edge Magazine, created in partnership with Women in Data®, to celebrate the individuals and organisations driving meaningful progress in equity, inclusion, and diversity (EID) across the data and technology landscape.

Each month, Our Voice will shine a light on those breaking barriers, redefining leadership, and proving that diversity isn't just good ethics — it's good business. We'll share real stories of transformation, real action being taken inside organisations, and the real change emerging as a result.

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Because the most powerful change doesn't come from algorithms — it comes from people with purpose.

Our Voice

REAL STORIES, REAL ACTION, REAL CHANGE

Some careers are mapped out early. Others reveal themselves gradually through curiosity, depth and persistence.

women in data

MICHELLE CONWAY

Lead Data & AI Scientist, Lloyds Banking Group

Michelle Conway's path into data and AI was never about following fashion. It began with mathematics, sharpened through statistics and matured into leadership inside one of the UK's most regulated institutions.

This is not a conversation about hype. It is about resilience, technical credibility, rejection, reinvention and what it really means to build AI at national scale.

Being the only woman in the room

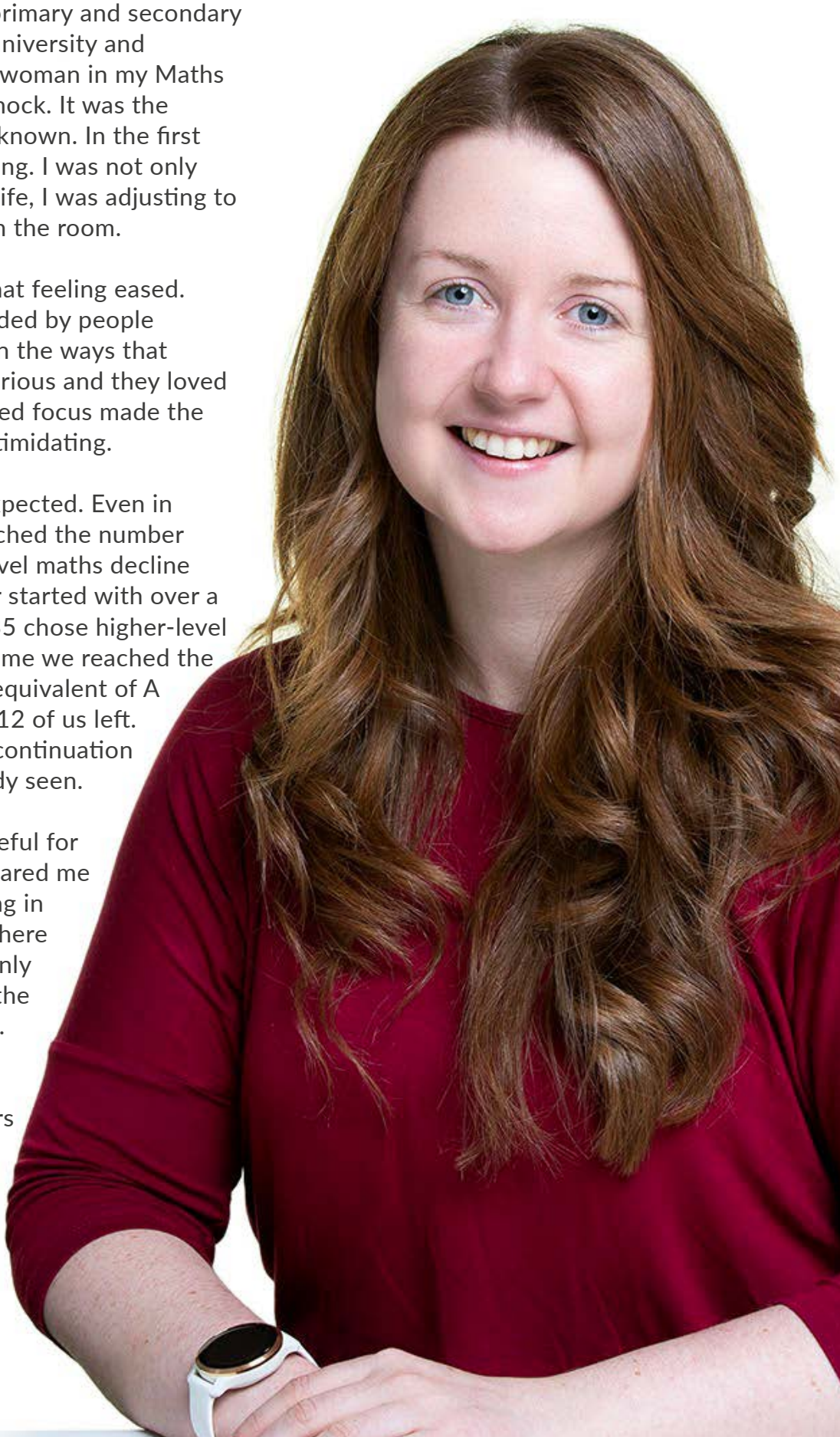
JP: You were the only woman in your Maths Science degree at Dublin University. That is not just a headline, it is a lived experience. What did that feel like at the time, and how has it shaped the way you operate in data and technology today?

MC: I went to all-girls primary and secondary schools, so arriving at university and realising I was the only woman in my Maths Science course was a shock. It was the opposite of what I had known. In the first few weeks it felt daunting. I was not only adjusting to university life, I was adjusting to being visibly different in the room.

Very quickly, though, that feeling eased. I realised I was surrounded by people who were just like me in the ways that mattered. They were curious and they loved mathematics. That shared focus made the environment far less intimidating.

It was not entirely unexpected. Even in secondary school I watched the number of girls taking higher-level maths decline year after year. My year started with over a hundred girls. Around 35 chose higher-level maths initially. By the time we reached the Leaving Cert, the Irish equivalent of A Levels, there were just 12 of us left. University felt like the continuation of a pattern I had already seen.

Looking back, I am grateful for that experience. It prepared me for the reality of working in data and technology, where I have often been the only woman in the room or the only woman presenting. University taught me something simple and important. What matters is not who else is in the room, but whether everyone is there to solve problems and move the work forward.



Discovering statistics and the logic behind the noise

JP: You have said your move into data came from genuine interest rather than a fixed career plan. When did it become clear that statistics was your direction? What drew you in?

MC: I studied Mathematical Science for four years and from the start I gravitated towards the statistical modules. By my final year, the choice felt obvious. Around 80 per cent of my courses focused on data analysis, data mining, modelling and statistical methods. I enjoyed every part of it.

What captured me was not just the numbers but the explanation behind them. I liked taking something abstract such as a distribution, a model or an algorithm and turning it into something that could be understood and applied. Statistics sits at the intersection of mathematical theory and structured communication.

I enjoyed presenting complex ideas and breaking them down so others could see how the models related to real behaviour. Whether exploring Bayesian distributions or the mechanics of linear regression, I was fascinated by how these tools could explain patterns that otherwise felt random. It felt like uncovering structure beneath apparent chaos.

At that stage I did not have a clear job title in mind. It was my professors who pointed me towards analytics roles in industry. At the time it was called analytics. Today we refer to it as data science, but the core principles remain the same.

From individual contributor to leadership

JP: Your move from delivery into leadership was not rushed. What were the decisions that pushed you forward, and were there moments when you questioned whether you belonged at a more senior level?

MC: The transition was gradual. I spent many years as an individual contributor because I wanted technical depth. I enjoyed being hands-on and staying close to the technology.

I moved deliberately across industries, from investment banking to insurance, then Amazon, BT and later data consulting. Each move expanded my perspective and exposed me to different operating models.

The real turning point came when I decided to deepen my engineering capability. I did not want to be seen solely as a statistician. I returned to study for an MSc in Data Science so I could build stronger foundations in Python, software engineering and DevOps. That shift allowed me to operate more confidently in end-to-end data science roles.

After more than a decade in the field, I became increasingly interested in leadership. Not because of status, but because of the opportunity to shape direction and support others' growth.

I also faced rejection. I applied for senior roles and was not successful the first time, or the second, or the third. It took seven applications before I progressed. Each rejection was difficult, but each

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one strengthened my resilience. Senior leadership demands persistence. That lesson has stayed with me.

The years spent as an individual contributor now inform my leadership decisions. Technical credibility matters. It creates trust with teams and stakeholders. Although I am still early in my formal leadership journey, I value the balance between depth and direction that those years provided.

Learning leadership properly

JP: You have spoken about the shock of moving into management without formal preparation. What did you misunderstand at the start, and what do you know now that you did not then?

MC: Initially, I believed technical expertise would carry me. I thought leadership meant having the answers and being the most capable person in the room.

It quickly became clear that this was not enough. Leadership is less about technical precision and more about understanding people. Emotional intelligence is critical. You need to understand what motivates different individuals, what blocks them, how they respond to pressure and what they need from you. That awareness does not come from a programming manual.

I had to learn to adjust my communication style. Some team members need clarity and structure. Others need autonomy. Some need reassurance. Others need to be challenged. Listening became more important than speaking.

I also learned the importance of psychological safety. Teams perform best when they feel safe to raise concerns, suggest ideas and admit uncertainty.

A colleague once said that progression requires a PhD in psychology rather than a PhD in STEM. At the time it felt exaggerated. Now I understand exactly what she meant.

Building with Gemini

JP: Lloyds is working with Google Cloud and Gemini as part of its strategy. Setting aside corporate language, what are you actually building and why does it matter?

MC: Lloyds Banking Group works with Google Cloud as a major cloud provider, and Gemini plays an important role in our generative AI strategy.

Across the Group we combine build and buy approaches. On the buy side we use tools such as Microsoft M365 Copilot and GitHub Copilot. On the build side, engineering teams use Gemini APIs to create tailored generative AI products that operate securely on customer datasets.

These are not generic deployments. They are controlled, tested and deployed through rigorous MLOps frameworks so they can operate safely in production. That distinction is important in a regulated bank.

I cannot share commercially sensitive detail, but the impact is practical. We are seeing measurable improvements in speed and productivity. Processes that once took months can now be delivered in days. Repetitive, manual work can be automated or augmented.

The value is not simply efficiency. It is about releasing capacity for higher-value thinking and decision-making.

AI in a regulated environment

JP: There is a significant gap between the media narrative around AI and the reality inside a regulated UK bank. What does that reality look like in Consumer Lending?

MC: The media narrative focuses on speed and disruption. In a heavily regulated bank, the emphasis is different.

We work with sensitive financial data and operate under regulatory oversight. That changes the risk calculus. There is no appetite for uncontrolled experimentation. Everything must be explainable, fair, secure and robust.

That means structured experimentation, ring-fenced testing, strong governance and comprehensive security controls. It does slow development. But the reason is simple. When something is deployed at Lloyds, it must operate reliably for more than 30 million customers.

The scrutiny is high and the tolerance for error is low.

> The pace may be measured, but the scale of impact is significant. When you deploy at national scale, responsibility increases. So does the opportunity to create meaningful change.

This isn't just another tech roundup. **Top 10** is your curated journey through the most compelling stories in technology today, handpicked for their potential to transform industries, challenge conventional thinking, or simply blow your mind.

TOP 10 Supply Chain Decisions That Now Depend on Data Maturity

Supply chains are no longer optimised by instinct, experience, or historical averages alone. Volatility, geopolitics, climate disruption, labour shortages, and AI-driven competition have shifted the centre of gravity.

The defining question for leaders is no longer what decision should we make, but do we have the data maturity to make it with confidence?

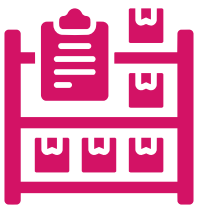
Across enterprise organisations, the following ten decisions increasingly separate resilient supply chains from fragile ones.

01

Demand Forecasting Confidence

Forecasting has moved beyond volume prediction to probability modelling Organisations with mature data capabilities can model demand volatility across regions, channels, and time horizons. Those without still debate which spreadsheet is "most accurate." The decision is not the forecast itself, but whether leadership trusts it enough to act.

02



Inventory Positioning & Safety Stock

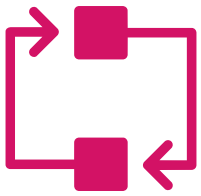
Holding too much inventory destroys cash. Holding too little destroys service. Data-mature organisations dynamically adjust safety stock based on demand signals, supplier reliability, lead-time variability, and real-time sales data. Less mature teams default to static buffers and gut feel. Inventory is no longer a warehouse decision. It is a data decision.

03

Supplier Selection Beyond Cost

Lowest cost is no longer lowest risk. Enterprises with strong data foundations assess suppliers on delivery performance, financial resilience, ESG exposure, geopolitical risk, and historical disruption patterns. Those without rely on procurement folklore and quarterly scorecards. Supplier choice has become a multi-dimensional data problem.

04



Make vs Buy Trade-offs

Reshoring, nearshoring, and hybrid manufacturing strategies demand deeper insight than ever. Data maturity determines whether organisations can model total landed cost, disruption exposure, capacity constraints, and time-to-recover. Without that visibility, make vs buy becomes reactive rather than strategic.

05

Network Design & Footprint Decisions

Warehouse locations, production sites, and distribution hubs are now long-term risk decisions, not just logistics optimisations. Advanced organisations simulate network scenarios using demand elasticity, transport volatility, and carbon impact. Others are locked into legacy footprints optimised for a world that no longer exists.

06

Response to Disruption

When disruption hits, time matters more than perfection. Data-mature supply chains have real-time visibility, predefined playbooks, and scenario models ready to activate. Less mature ones scramble to assemble information while competitors are already rerouting supply. The decision is not whether disruption will occur, but how fast leaders can see and respond.

07

Automation & AI Deployment

AI does not fail because the algorithms are weak. It fails because the data is. Organisations with strong data governance, lineage, and quality can deploy AI across forecasting, planning, and logistics with measurable impact. Others struggle to move beyond pilots. The decision to automate is inseparable from the organisation's data foundations.

08

ESG & Regulatory Compliance

Sustainability reporting is now operational, not cosmetic. Data maturity determines whether organisations can trace materials, validate supplier claims, and respond to regulatory scrutiny with confidence. Manual reporting and assumptions are increasingly exposed. Compliance has become a data engineering challenge.

09

Customer Promise & Service Levels

What can you confidently promise customers today? Organisations with integrated data across sales, supply, and logistics can offer dynamic lead times and reliable delivery commitments. Those without rely on optimistic promises and firefighting. Customer trust is now built on data accuracy.

10

Investment Prioritisation

Where should the next pound be spent? Data-led supply chains can quantify the ROI of resilience, technology, and process change. Less mature ones chase trends or respond to the loudest internal voice. Capital allocation increasingly reflects data clarity, not persuasion

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The Edge Takeaway

Supply chain leaders are not being judged on efficiency alone. They are being judged on resilience, confidence, and speed of decision-making.

Across every major decision, data maturity now determines whether leaders are acting with insight or assumption.

In the next phase of enterprise supply chains, competitive advantage will belong to those who invest not just in systems, but in the data foundations that make those systems meaningful.

The Organisational Void Between Data and Decisions

by Pete Williams
Chief Data Officer

If we can't tell the difference between a good decision and a lucky outcome, we can't learn, and we definitely shouldn't automate.

Over the last decade, organisations have invested heavily in data platforms, analytics teams and, more recently, AI. The intent has been consistent and well-meaning: to help leaders make better, faster decisions.

Yet, in practice, many organisations find themselves asking an uncomfortable question - often directed at the CDO. With more data, more dashboards and more sophisticated tooling than ever before, decisions ought to be easier and more informed. So, why aren't we seeing tangible business value?

I've come to believe the issue isn't technology, talent or even data quality.


DARBY'S

It's something more structural and harder to see. We have learned how to build data platforms. We have not learned to capture how decisions are made.

In many organisations, data now sits in a void - positioned between technology and the business, expected to influence outcomes but rarely empowered to shape how decisions are formed, evaluated or learned from.

This article explores how we ended up here, why so many well-intentioned efforts stall, and what this gap means as organisations rush to automate decisions they don't yet fully understand.

How we got here: when data became too technical

A useful place to start is "the quants" of the 1980s. When it was proven that purely quantitative, algorithmic approaches could generate extraordinary returns in trading firms, they became a secret, competitive advantage. Soon, every major investment bank and hedge fund was building quant teams. The advantage was in the skilled people, not the empowering technology.

Organisations sought to scale quant-style thinking outside domains where outcomes were directly attributable. Processing billions of rows of data started to become financially accessible, and code libraries offered tempting models that could be quickly deployed to deliver returns across many industries. But, in scaling the quants, they misunderstood the decisive ingredient, increasingly replacing human judgement with scaled technology.

Vendors and consultants keenly leant into this race for competitive advantage through technology platforms and transformations. Their natural C-suite partner was the CIO or CTO who already owned the infrastructure, ERP and other systems of record where transactions were created and stored.

Abstracting these into a platform configured for analysis and decision support, therefore, became a business case value assessment aligned to technology-style metrics: volume of data processed, number of dashboards built, time saved or efficiency gains. Nobody ever measured the quants on such metrics.

Bridging Judgement and Technology

This abstraction was essentially data warehousing, and specialist modelling techniques made the data more usable, in granular context or for trends over time. Graphical data visualisation tools made presenting these insights increasingly informative and engaging. Defining suitable models and styles of presentation required specialist attention and connection to business decision-makers.

Because the CIO rarely needs such commercial business relationships or success metrics, a common response to handle these challenges is to implement a dedicated data function, run by a Chief Data Officer (or similar title). With this dedicated team creating what seems like insightful information, it feels aligned to decision making. But this structure is now creaking.

Despite the expectation of decision support – applied judgement – the data function, as a subset of the CIO, has often inherited technology-style success metrics.

The CDO role was introduced as a response to growing investment in data, with an explicit expectation for delivering business value. Its P&L influence is exercised indirectly, through platforms and pipelines, governance and literacy.

All of these are structured to provide better information for business decision-makers who own the outcomes that generate revenue, remove cost or change operational processes and structures.

The void is clear. The CDO is using platforms that are typically in the CIO's budget and building capabilities that others may use to hit their own targets. Consequently, the data function ends up being judged on outcomes it cannot control and constrained by structures designed for processes owned by someone else.

If the CDO is held to CIO-style metrics and never gets the chance to influence how decisions are made, they will constantly be walking the tightrope over the void.

> **That tension is a permanent feature, never a bug that resolves itself.**
>
> - Pete Williams

Learning requires reasoning, not just end results – it requires us to ask why, and not just what.

Decisions create, or destroy value

Data has no value until a decision is made using this superior input. Featuring in better Business Intelligence (BI) is helpful, but merely reporting on past performance does not meet the investment expectations of appointing a CDO.

Decisions feature applied judgement, acceptance of trade-offs, consideration of other options, assumptions and the expected level of success against given metrics.

Unless we're sifting intent from good fortune, we won't learn what a good decision is. Learning requires reasoning, not just end results – it requires us to ask why, and not just what.

As a CDO, when those decisions go well the P&L function gets the credit. When they don't, the data investment can be questioned. It's an uncomfortable, political and fragile position. Yet the CDO is rarely positioned with the authority and accountability to challenge how decisions are made.

It's tempting to assume this gap exists because organisations haven't yet built the right tools or processes.

A more reasonable explanation could be that organisational performance systems reward outcomes, not explanation. Senior business leaders feel they are in place because of their acquired expertise. They are not rewarded on the "why" of a decision, only for demonstrating the "what" based outcomes of their successful leadership. Making decision reasoning explicit feels difficult

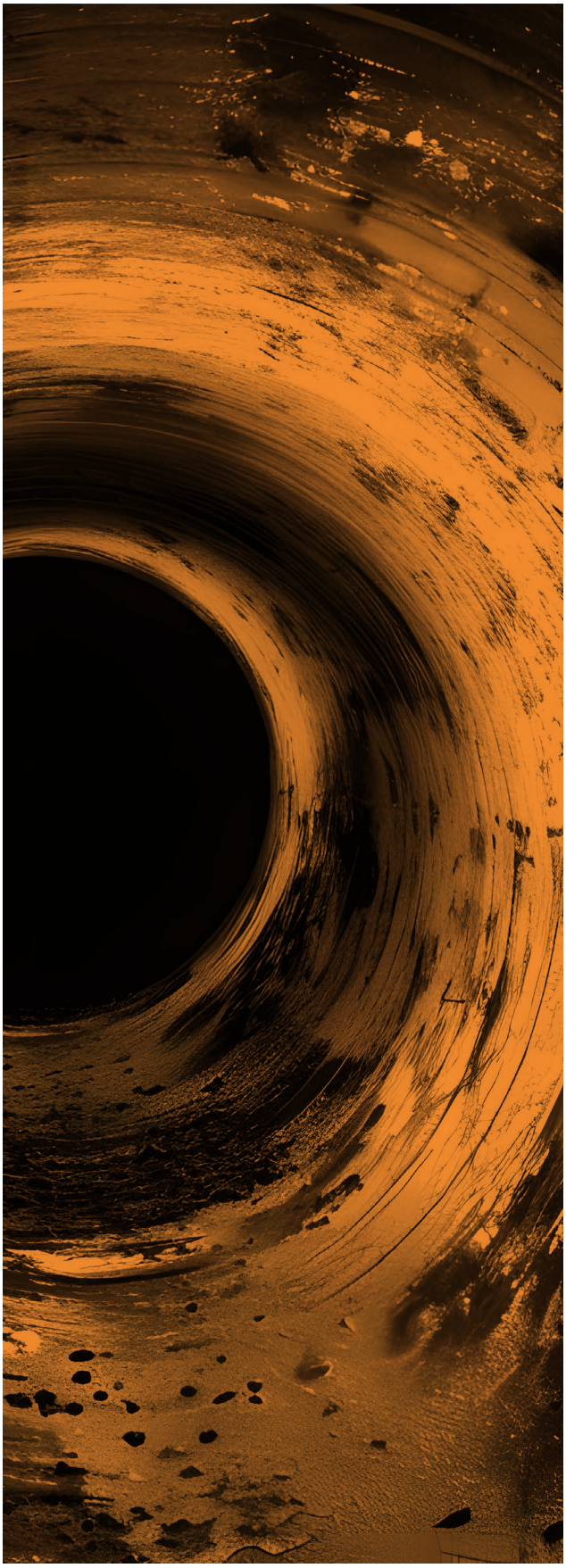
and time-consuming when you're operating at speed. To them, it must seem like unnecessary bureaucracy and oversight without an obvious return.

In that context, it's hardly surprising that judgement remains implicit. The absence of decision reasoning isn't an oversight; it's a by-product of structures designed to demonstrate and protect experienced authority, not to interrogate it.

But, if we can't tell the difference between a good decision and a lucky outcome, we can't learn - and we definitely should not automate.

This problem is now manifesting through the innovations in AI and the urge to implement automation. There's a strange parallel to the rush to invest in data infrastructure 20 years ago. Then, we devalued the importance of human judgement applied by the quants and focused on technological scale. Now, we're tasking AI with interpreting decisions we made by looking only at gathered historical data when we haven't ourselves considered or captured why and how they were made. Who can tell if AI has correctly inferred what we did, and will apply the same judgement going forward?

To use a simple marketing example: an AI trained on historical pricing decisions may not distinguish between "we made this level of discount for this lapsed customer segment to ensure they came back" from "we had some money available and passed it back to customers in cheaper prices". But the outcomes of inferring the wrong intent and automating at scale could wipe out the promotional budget with no realisable customer impact. Suddenly, the thinking that



> **Before your organisation automates another decision, pause and ask: can you articulate why you made that decision the last 10 times?**

led to the "why we're deciding to do this" has become as important as the demonstrable "what happened" outcome. But it's context we often don't have available. Before your organisation automates another decision, pause and ask: can you articulate why you made that decision the last 10 times? If not, you're just scaling ambiguity at machine speed.

Correctly identifying the void

The uncomfortable implication is this: the CDO stepped into a void that was framed as a data problem, when the real gap lay in how decisions are made, justified and learned from. The role was never given authority over that terrain, only the expectation to influence it from the side.

Now, as organisations rush to automate decisions through AI, a second void is opening with the same characteristics: high expectation, unclear ownership, and little appetite to make reasoning explicit. Where the barrier to entry is human language and a prompt box, the barrier to entry for AI tools is so much lower than the data platform, exacerbating the peril of the void for the unwary organisation.

For CDOs, this raises a more fundamental question than tools, platforms or maturity models. Not how to deliver more data but how, or whether, they are positioned to influence the decisions that data is supposed to inform.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