DATA | AI | CLOUD | CYBERSECURITY

DIGITAL EDGE

» » » » » » » » » » Issue008

Plus exclusive interviews with:

MILOŠ TOPIĆ

Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Digital Officer at Grand Valley State University

WALID HADID

Group Head of Digital and Automation at The Weir Group PLC

Turning Industrial AI into Operational Reality

Technology Transformation in Higher Education

ISAAC ABBS

Pima Community College

Also in this issue:

HELEN BLAIKIE - Aston university || JO SWEENEY - ECB || *Plus all our Regular Features*

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Editors Notes

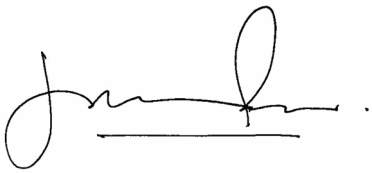
Welcome to Issue 08 of Digital Edge Magazine. As we assembled this issue, a compelling theme consistently surfaced: true transformation rarely announces itself with a grand, theatrical unveiling. Instead, it is found in the deep architecture of systems, in the resilience of teams, and in the evolution of culture. This principle is crystal clear in our University focus. Isaac Abbs at Pima Community College, Miloš Topić at Grand Valley State University, and Helen Blaikie at Aston University operate within vastly different academic landscapes, yet the core challenge is a shared one. Universities are being asked to become simultaneously more digital and more responsive, all while continuing to deliver excellence for students, faculty, and the wider community.

Helen is also part of our regular feature, Our Voice - Real Stories, Real Action, Real Change. In partnership with Women in Data and supported by the Data Literacy Academy.

Moving beyond academia, Walid Hadid offers a sharp, invaluable view from the industry trenches on what it genuinely takes to move Artificial Intelligence beyond the pilot phase and into operational reality.

In our Living on the Edge section, we shift gears and focus on sheer momentum with Damon Motors. This is a company building electric motorcycles that feel less like mere transport and more like a definitive statement on the exhilarating trajectory of performance technology.

Finally, in Our Voice we also connect with Joanna Sweeney at the Cricket Regulator. She provides a powerful reminder that data's role is rapidly expanding far beyond simple dashboards and reporting, now shaping governance, building public trust, and informing high-stakes decision-making in new and often unexpected arenas. Taken together, a clear picture emerges from these pages. Issue 08 is about momentum. It's about a kind of digital leadership that is grounded in rigorous execution. It is, fundamentally, about the people who are building and reshaping our institutions, our industries, and our systems to ensure they are robustly fit for whatever comes next. Enjoy the issue!



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FRONT COVER:

ISAAC ABBS
Chief Information Officer at Pima Community College

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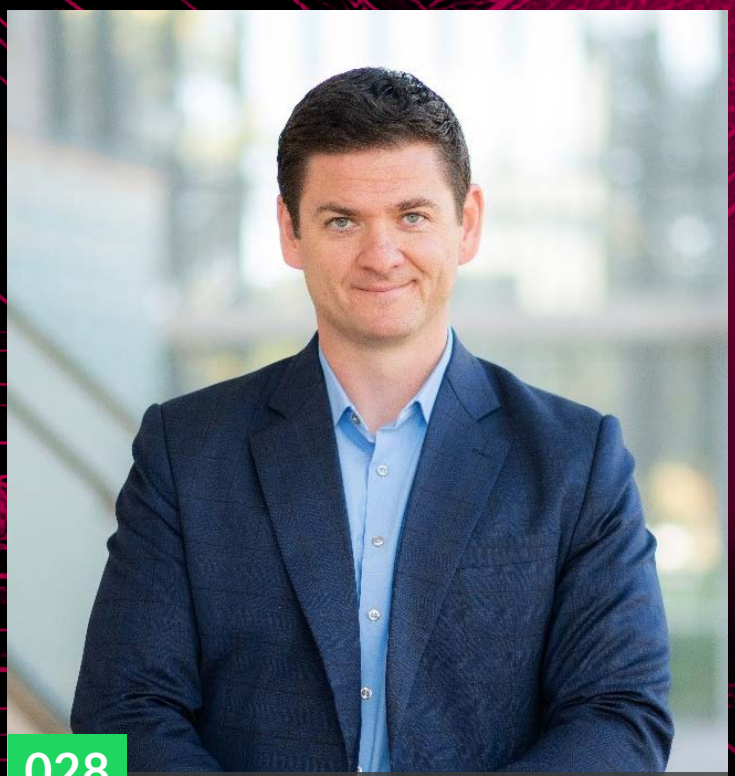

contents

Exclusive Interview: Technology Leadership Series

Isaac Abbs

Chief Information Officer at Pima Community College

Scaling change across a community college

A software developer by background and with a Master's in Management Information Systems, Isaac has had a rewarding career in the public sector, working his way up to the position he holds today as CIO of Pima Community College in Tucson, Arizona.

Here he is rebuilding digital foundations and delivering a security-first transformation across the college, which operates across five campuses and serves nearly 40,000 students. Isaac tells us what these changes have meant in practice and the impact they have had on the college, staff, and students.

PimaCommunityCollege

THE BEGINNINGS OF TRANSFORMATION

Isaac returned to Pima Community College about a year into a five-year transformation. He tells us the reason why the transformation was necessary, "We had accumulated a lot of technical debt. Things were very disjointed. From a network perspective, there were more outages than expected. Things weren't cohesive, and we weren't following industry best practices. I would say there was a lot of firefighting going on to keep things up and running.

We had a lot of legacy systems that were starting to show their age." We wondered if this was due to being a public sector organisation where funding may be an issue. Isaac doesn't consider that to be the core challenge that prevents change, "I think it's because we sometimes lack vision and foresight.

There's no reason we can't be just as good as those outside of the public sector, but I think the public sector mindset can become complacent because we don't have the same pressures and demands as the private sector."

He tells us that at Pima Community College, they've "Been able to do everything we've done with the same financial struggles and pressures of any other public sector organisation," pointing out, "You have to advocate for those dollars.

"COMPANIES INVEST IN WHAT THEY VALUE. IF THEY'RE NOT INVESTING IN IT, IT'S PROBABLY BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT VALUING WHAT YOU'RE BRINGING TO THE TABLE."

A TRANSFORMATION OF TWO HALVES

In Pima's case, those advocated-for dollars were reserved to rebuild the college's digital foundations from the ground up. It started with the infrastructure. Isaac shares, "In the wake of COVID-19, we had an influx of funding, which allowed us to embark on an ambitious digital innovation initiative. We upgraded our entire networking infrastructure, enhancing our connectivity with state-of-the-art equipment and upgraded fibre.

We implemented redundant circuits to build a fault-tolerant network. Our next step was to transform our server infrastructure. We adopted a hyper-converged model that not only streamlines our operations but also strategically positions us for a seamless transition to cloud computing in the future." "We did this all with a security-first mindset, and began building a security programme where one didn't previously exist.

Isaac notes that they were able to build a best-in-breed security programme by repurposing dollars that they saved while redoing the core foundational work "We've built a $2,000,000 security budget, most of that through repurposed savings with the infrastructure upgrades.

We negotiated better contracts and consolidated

ConexED

Recruit | Engage | Support | Retain | Report

Student success improves when the journey and the technology behind it finally connect.

Across higher education, the challenge is rarely a lack of software. It is the accumulation of disconnected systems that each solve a narrow problem but fail to create a connected experience for students or staff. That is the reality many CIOs are navigating.

Student success leaders want visibility of the full lifecycle. Advisors need context in the moment. Leadership is looking for clear visibility into engagement, persistence, and outcomes. But when recruiting, scheduling, communication, alerts, and reporting live in separate tools, institutions end up managing technology instead of improving the student experience.

> *We had been closely following ConexED for several years. When the timing was right, we knew they were the innovative solution that would best meet our needs.*

What this means for CIOs

- Reducing point-solution s
- Improving visibility acros

ConexED is built around a simple principle: The same platform that helps you recruit a student should help you support and retain that same student.

ConexED consolidates the full student journey into one connected experience, unifying recruiting, advising, engagement, support, and reporting on a single student record. It removes the traditional disconnects between point solutions while still working alongside existing systems of record, giving student success leaders clear visibility, simplifying IT operations, and enabling institutions to manage recruitment through retention as one continuous, coordinated process.

At Pima Community College, transformation meant strengthening the foundation and modernizing the experience.

Isaac Abbs returned to Pima Community College, a five-campus institution serving nearly 40,000 students, to lead a five-year digital transformation. He inherited significant technical debt, frequent outages, and a team firefighting to keep systems running.

The first phase rebuilt the foundation: networking, hyper-converged infrastructure, and a $2 million security program funded largely through repurposed savings. The second phase modernized the student experience. Pima replaced its legacy advising system with ConexED, eliminating redundant tools and giving the Student Success team a platform to build on.

sprawl

s lifecycle

- ☑ Connecting critical student workflows
- ☑ Aligning technology decisions to outcomes

Conex

One Platform Connecting the Student Journey

Student success leaders want to follow the full student journey, from inquiry to graduation. CIOs want the technology behind the journey to be simpler, more connected, and easier to manage.

ConexED helps institutions do it all.

Recruit

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ED

Unifying Systems – One Connected Experience.

Recruiting CRM, engagement, advising, scheduling, early alerts, case management, and reporting all working together around a single student record - **one unified platform.**

Fewer handoff gaps, fewer disconnected tools provides a **clearer view** of the student experience.

For CIOs, it means a **path to consolidation** without rip-and-replace disruption. ConexED integrates with the systems your institution already depends on while reducing the number of point solutions your team has to manage.

For campus leaders, it means every department working from the **same context** - supporting students earlier and seeing outcomes in real time.

When it all works together, students move forward with less friction and institutions operate with **more clarity.**

Schedule a Demo

Explore Platform

systems." However, they are an open-access higher education institution, so how do they balance that with usability and access? "That's the great security triad, right? Functionality, usability, and security," Isaac says. "In a perfect world, the ball sits in the middle – but we don't live in a perfect world, so there are always going to be trade-offs."

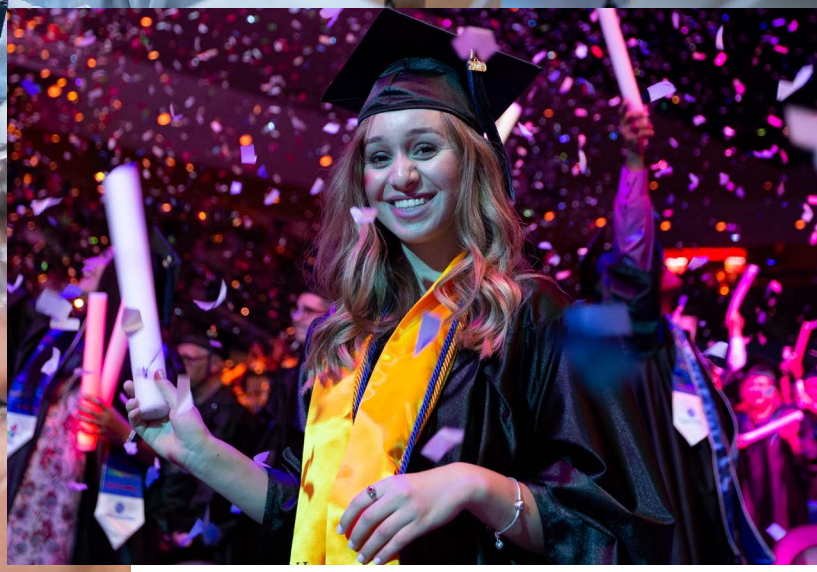
They recognise that, at the college, they have to be accessible, "And that means we have to take more security risks at times than I would like. We try to maintain as much usability and accessibility as possible, but we have to remain secure." There are times where the answer is no, and they need to communicate why that's the case, or they must include security measures to compensate – like multi-factor authentication – that add friction. He points out, "If it's fully usable and fully accessible, it's fully vulnerable. And so, there will be points of friction where it's not as accessible or usable as one may like. And that's where we needed to come in and explain why we have to do what we do, while still allowing us to fulfil our mission. "It requires a lot of communication. Security is often more about strategy and communication than technical tools." "Overhauling the infrastructure and building a strong security programme was a critical first step. It was the foundation on which long-term success would be built. You can't build a solid structure on a weak foundation."

This meant that, from the college's perspective, they didn't see much impact from the transformation at the beginning, aside from fewer outages and system disruptions. The college only began to see the true value in the second half of the transformation, when the team began implementing innovative, best-of-breed solutions that people were excited about.

In a bold move to enhance the student experience, the college decided to replace its outdated advising system with ConexED. Recognising that their previous system no longer met students' evolving needs, the Student Experience team collaborated closely with the IT department to reimagine the advising landscape. "We had been closely following ConexED

for several years, so when the timing was right, we knew they were the innovative solution that would best meet our needs." Their partnership yielded impressive results as they identified ConexED as the ideal solution to revolutionize the advising process, ultimately delivering the modern, seamless experience that today's students expect. This transition not only transformed the advising model but also enabled the college to streamline operations by eliminating redundant systems.

Now entering the second phase of implementation, the team is focused on integrating additional areas of the college that were previously excluded from the legacy system. For Isaac, leading this initiative exemplifies the essence of a trusted business partner—one dedicated to fostering innovation and improving the overall student experience.



STRENGTHENING DATA FOUNDATIONS

Alongside security, Isaac has focused heavily on strengthening data foundations. We wondered where he started with this and what the biggest gaps were that needed addressing? Isaac tells us that this is a work in progress, “We have been partnering with our Strategy Analytics and Research team on this initiative. We have a well-built-out data warehouse with a plethora of data, but it is greatly underutilised.” They’re actively in the process of modernising that platform. Part of this work involves reaching out to the business, understanding their needs and gaps, “Ultimately, the

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goal is to end up with the same underlying foundation we have, just in a more modern platform that better prepares us for AI use, but also leads to some enhancements on the front end reporting tools to get the business more readily using this information – because there's so much there."

BUILDING DIGITAL LITERACY AND AI CAPABILITY

Isaac touched on becoming AI-ready, so we wanted to revisit this point to learn how the team at Pima Community College is building AI capability in a way that is practical for the college and sustainable. Isaac tells us, "For the most part, we're trying to maximise what we own. We've also made some investments, but I would argue they're mostly tailored to our digital fluency initiative rather than AI specifically."

"A big initiative of our Chancellor is digital fluency. We recognise that students need to leave our college with the skills that will allow them to be successful in a digital workforce." "A significant initiative is underway to develop a digital fluency framework, which will be integrated into our academic programmes. This will ensure that, at the very least, our degree-seeking students graduate with the necessary skills to prepare them for the next phase of their journey." In terms of AI, Isaac comments, "As we're overhauling our business applications, a lot of those have AI built in. Our new student application and CRM has a wealth of AI capabilities." "We're a Google shop – Google makes Gemini available to staff and students. So back in January, we made it available to students. Last summer, we made it available to staff." "We have a partnership with Adobe that's beyond AI, but it has AI components. It's part of our bigger digital fluency initiative. Our new partnership with

Adobe allows us to provide all students with Adobe Acrobat Studio and all staff with Adobe Creative Cloud Pro Plus. “We also have a partnership with Grammarly, which provides writing AI assistants, and we're doing a large pilot with our business dean, which will involve about a third of our students.” They are also focusing on the college’s faculty and staff to build their knowledge around AI.

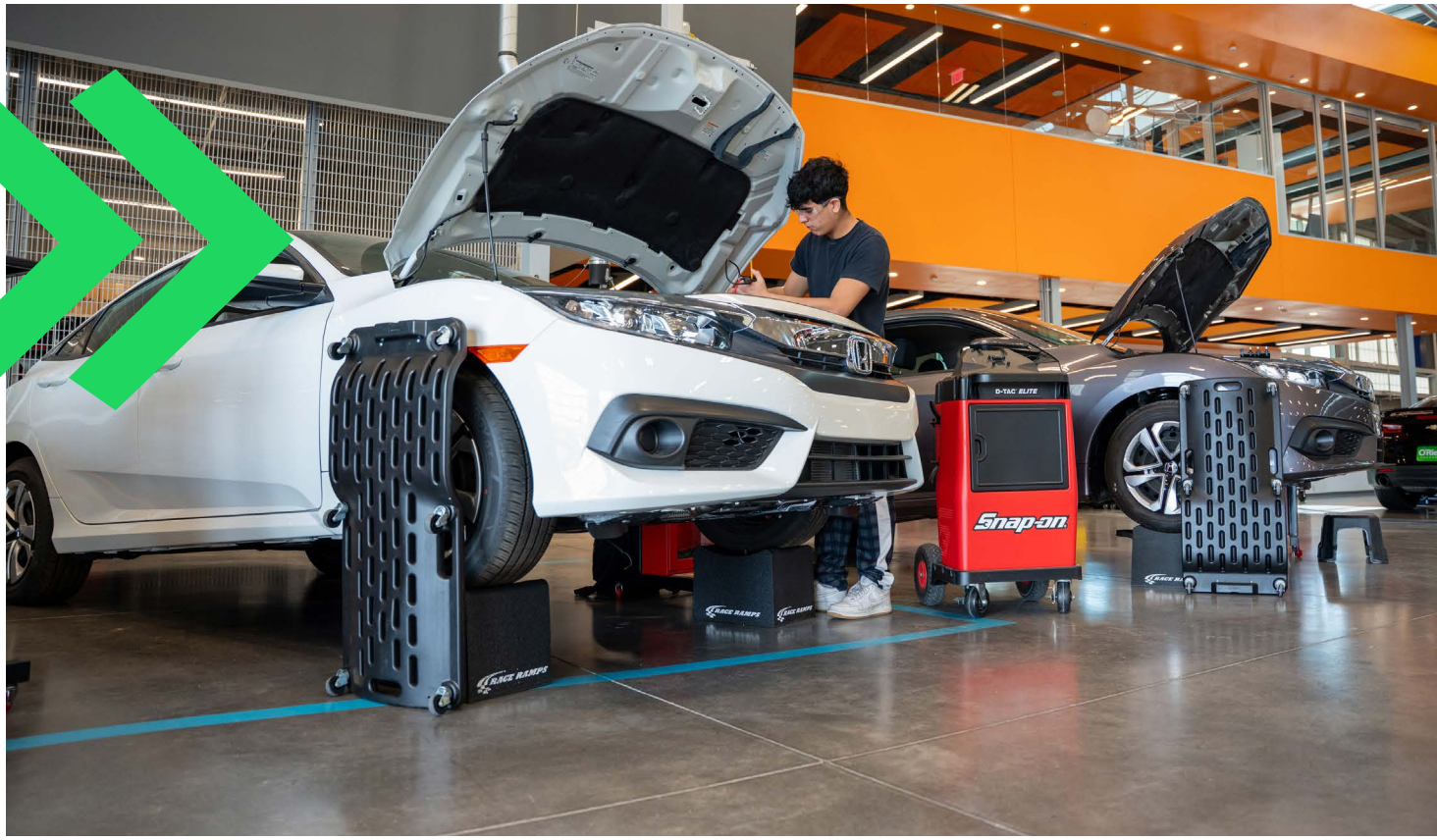
Isaac tells us, “We have an AI community of practice. This is where people can come in, ask questions, and see how somebody else is using the technology. This methodology has had a major impact, shifting the narrative on AI from fear to acceptance. We are actively developing course materials for foundational AI training for all faculty and staff. There will also be additional domain-specific training available.” This is important because there’s a goal at the college for AI to be incorporated into all academic disciplines, so staff and faculty need to receive training first to be able to deliver the knowledge to their students.

BUILDING AN OPERATING MODEL AND CREATING CHANGE

Scaling transformation across an institution like Pima Community College requires more than technology; it requires a sound framework and operating model.

As part of the transformation, Isaac and his leadership team have focused on implementing IT best practices. These best practices guide the department in all that they do. “You can deploy all the technology in the world, but if there's no framework or overarching best practices behind it, it's not going to work as well as it should. So, as we've evolved technically, we've also equally, if not more so, evolved procedurally.” The improvements they’ve made here include strong procedures around project management, project prioritisation, service management, incident response, asset management, and change management, to name a few.

“These efforts have yielded great returns. We have had a lot of positive feedback from our stakeholders on improved project management processes, and our customer satisfaction scores are routinely above 95%.” For him, one of the biggest challenges in sustaining momentum over the five-year transformation period has been the rate of change itself and the human resistance to change – both inside and outside of IT. So, Isaac focuses on keeping people at the forefront of the changes, “I always try to communicate the end state, and I'm also transparent



that sometimes it's going to get worse before it gets better, depending on what that change is." An example of this is while the team was overhauling endpoint management, "It was bumpy, and not easier at first."

But the end game is that devices will be shipped to them ready to go, "You will not have to set them up and image them. You will take them out of the box and be able to deploy them." This will allow the team to focus on more value-added initiatives. Isaac comments, "You must communicate the small wins along the way. You also have to acknowledge the setbacks.

Ultimately, the goal is to remain focused on the end state. You need to demonstrate that there is purpose in the madness."

REACHING DIGITAL MATURITY AND RESILIENCE

Looking at today compared to five years ago, the level of digital maturity achieved is, in Isaac's words, "night and day." "As I tell the team, the end goal is that you aren't firefighting, you're spending more of your time on value add. And that's what we're seeing." "We rarely have issues with our infrastructure. Our systems are up and running. They integrate very cleanly. They run smoothly. The business is more satisfied." Having a more resilient digital environment doesn't mean everything is perfect, but it puts them in a strong position in more ways than one. Isaac tells us, "Trust drips in and pours out. We have to build up goodwill because there will be times when we need to cash it in. There are times when things won't go perfectly.

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“Don't be afraid to jump in. The role of the CIO has changed dramatically over the last few years. Organisations are demanding more of their IT leaders. Organisations continue to invest in what they value – be the value.”.

But if you've built up enough credibility, you can take those hits, and people will understand. But if it happens all the time, it becomes a problem." With the opportunity to look at the outcomes of the transformation, he is most proud of those that the college is often unaware of. One example was the strategic decision to transition from a homegrown system that managed all integrations and provisioning. The system was causing many problems that people didn't realise.

In a groundbreaking initiative, Pima teamed up with IDMExpress to implement SailPoint, significantly transforming its identity governance processes. This strategic partnership has modernised the provisioning system and empowered students and staff to reset their passwords seamlessly, in alignment with industry best practices. Since launching in October, SailPoint has addressed one of the college's most pressing vulnerabilities. "We've completely overhauled and stabilized a system that has long been a point of concern for us," said Isaac. "This is the system that kept me up at night. With SailPoint, we now have a clear understanding of how everything operates. We've adopted best-in-class solutions that not only improve accessibility but also enhance our ability to support users across the entire college. This holistic approach marks a significant victory for us." "IDMExpress was an exceptional partner in this initiative.

You can't always do it alone, and having great partners can make all the difference." The integration of SailPoint represents a major step forward for Pima, signalling a commitment to innovation and security in the education technology landscape. This transformation not only mitigates risks but also enhances the overall user experience, showcasing the potential of technology to solve complex problems in institutions of higher learning. This change has also prepared them for one of the final big pillars in their five-year digital transformation – migrating their ERP from on-prem to SaaS.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR CIOS AND THE COLLEGE

With the benefit of his experience, we asked Isaac what advice he'd give other CIOs or digital leaders at the beginning of a similar journey as the one he's undertaking at Pima Community College.

"Don't be afraid to jump in. The role of the CIO has changed dramatically over the last few years. Organisations are demanding more of their IT leaders. Organisations continue to invest in what they value – be the value."

"You're never going to demonstrate and show value if you are a reactive CIO, just waiting for the business to ask you for help. You must be out in front."

"I think the reason we've done so well, the reason I have opportunities like these to share our story, is because our approach has been the opposite of how higher ed is typically run. We are out in front helping to move the college forward." "That is what today's CIOs and IT leaders have to be. They have to be transformational leaders, innovative leaders, moving the business forward, and that starts with getting out there and starting that journey

and being transparent about what you're trying to do, communicating the why, having the end state in mind." Isaac noted that the CIO role has changed in recent years. Looking ahead, how does he see the role continuing to evolve over the next five years in education? He thinks it will continue to grow for those IT leaders who seize the opportunity and do transformative work. "There are those out there who will say the CIO role is turning into the COO role because it touches everything. For IT leaders who continue to prove that type of value, 100%, I think the CIO role is going to become more of a COO type role because there are very few things within an organisation that aren't IT-related. The role of the CIO intersects with all parts of the organisation." Closer to home, the next priorities for Pima Community College as they build on the work they've delivered so far are about continuing to move more and more into the AI space: "How are we going to leverage AI as an enabler and not a gimmick?" As well as this, they're

looking to complete the modernisation of their data warehouse and, in the next 15 months or so, finalize the migration of their ERP from on-prem to SaaS.

“There's always going to be work to do, but outside of our ERP, the massive digital transformation effort, at least for now, is complete.” “Less disruption and more value creation” is what the next handful of years looks like for Isaac and the team.

The next phase of our journey will shift its focus more towards the academic side of the college. Success in this phase will involve building stronger partnerships with academic departments to expand the use of technology in teaching and learning. “We aim to enhance digital literacy and embrace the incorporation of AI into our educational practices.” “We've done so much on the IT side. We've done so much on the operational side. Now it's about realising similar success on the academic side.”

Global Tech Briefing Q2 2026

10 stories, 5 minutes, Stay ahead. » » » » » »

1. AI funding breaks the system (again)

Global venture investment hit ~$300B in Q1 2026, with ~80% flowing into AI alone. This isn't a boom—it's concentration. Four mega-rounds (OpenAI, Anthropic, xAI, Waymo) accounted for the majority of capital.

IMPLICATION:
AI is no longer a sector. It's the capital market.

2. OpenAI, Anthropic, xAI reset the ceiling

Mega-rounds in frontier AI are now measured in tens to hundreds of billions, with OpenAI alone reportedly raising over $100B in a single round.

IMPLICATION:
The barrier to entry is no longer talent—it's compute, capital, and geopolitical backing.

3. Meta locks in the AI infrastructure war

Meta commits up to $60B to AMD for AI chips, effectively securing long-term compute supply. At the same time, it's building its own AI chips and expanding smart glasses.

IMPLICATION:
Hyperscalers are vertically integrating—from silicon to interface.

4. Apple doubles down on AI (quietly, aggressively)

Apple integrates external AI (Gemini) into Siri and acquires an AI startup (~$2B).

IMPLICATION:
Apple isn't chasing headlines—it's rebuilding its stack under the hood.

5. Robotaxis move from demo to premium service

Uber + Nuro begin testing premium robotaxi services in real-world environments.

IMPLICATION:
Autonomous is shifting from "future narrative" to tiered commercial product.

6. AI agents move into enterprise reality

From Microsoft's new agent systems to finance-sector adoption, AI agents are becoming operational tools—not experiments.

IMPLICATION:
The UI is disappearing. Workflows are being automated end-to-end.

7. Big Tech shifts to "compute sovereignty"

Hyperscalers are no longer buying chips—they're securing long-term supply, partnerships, and energy access.

IMPLICATION:
The real constraint on AI isn't models. It's power, silicon, and infrastructure.

8. Consumer hardware: AI moves onto your face

Meta launches new AI-enabled Ray-Ban smart glasses, while Apple explores its own designs.

IMPLICATION:
The next interface war is wearable, ambient, and always-on.

9. Cybersecurity risk scales with AI adoption

Major breaches (e.g. travel platforms) and phishing crackdowns highlight rising attack surfaces.

IMPLICATION:
AI accelerates both defence—and offence.

10. IPO pipeline signals return of late-stage tech

Companies like SpaceX are lining up for potential blockbuster IPOs in 2026.

IMPLICATION:
Liquidity is returning—but only for category-defining players.

DIGITAL LENS:

Strip it back and the pattern is clear:

AI is absorbing capital at historic scale

Infrastructure is now the bottleneck (chips, energy, data centres)

Interfaces are shifting to ambient + wearable

Enterprise adoption is finally operational—not experimental

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW » » » » » »

“I’m in tech, but my primary focus is always people.”

Miloš not only brings his experience ranging from start-ups to Fortune 1000 companies and two other universities to his role at Grand Valley State University in West Michigan, where he’s been leading the digital transformation for the last five years. He also brings his academic achievements including an MBA and a PhD, for which his research fittingly focused on the on the role of CIOs in driving innovation in Higher Education.

All of this knowledge is helping him drive transformation within an organisation that has more than 22,000 students and around 4,000 faculty and staff – no small task. He does this with a leadership style that has often been described as ‘empathetic, courageous leadership’. Miloš follows this description by candidly telling us, “I'm often the one who says publicly what half the room is thinking. Hasn't always served me well, but it's important to be who you are.” So, let’s find out more about the change that he’s led at the university.

Miloš Topić

Vice President for Information Technology and Chief Digital Officer at Grand Valley State University

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

”

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DEFINING DIGITALISATION AND BALANCING IT WITH THE EVERYDAY

Digitalisation can have different approaches within different organisations, so we wondered how Miloš defines it within the context of a modern university. He tells us, "Often organisations will start with simply digitising their existing somewhat analogue processes.

"Then you get people who are digitising things in a different way where they are looking at process improvement.

"The higher order of contributions to me is generally grounded around three things."

He explains, "The first one is why are we doing this? If we're just doing tech because everybody's doing tech, that's probably a bad strategy. We have to understand what problem we are solving." The next pillar is about reducing friction, "It's about making things easier for people. That's what tech is supposed to do."

And lastly it's about increasing flexibility, "Today's world, you're supposed to create environments, where possible, to enable people and empower them to act from any device – wherever you are, you should be able to get to the services natively designed for the environment, for the interface, for the screen that you may be using at that moment in time."

Miloš sums up, "It's all about people and has to have a purpose. Why are we doing this? How do we reduce friction while increasing flexibility and options for folks?"

While delivering digital transformation, he and the team have of course had

Blackboard

Making Waves in the State of Great Lakes

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) has partnered with Blackboard to integrate AI into learning and increase employment opportunities.

Working together to put students and instructors first

GVSU is dedicated to expanding learning and career opportunities for its 22,000+ students. In partnership with Blackboard, the leading four-year public institution has developed a future-focused digital learning ecosystem that evolves alongside the needs of students and educators.

What sets this partnership apart is its depth. GVSU collaborates directly with the Blackboard product development team to shape innovations that benefit users every day.

> *It has made a huge difference for us to be able to circle back with faculty and say, 'Remember the feature you were asking for? Well, guess what—it's in the next release!'"*
>
> **—Kim Kenward**
> Director of eLearning Technologies, Grand Valley State University

A shared commitment to stringent data security

Ethical AI adoption must be backed by strict protection of user data. GVSU's AI Safety initiative provides its community with key directives to ensure important personal information isn't compromised when using AI tools.

Blackboard's Trustworthy AI Approach extends similar clarity to partner institutions. It outlines our process to develop AI features in Blackboard® LMS, how each institution is empowered to adopt them based on their own policies, and how our "closed loop" model protects user data.

Blackboard LMS is the only higher education LMS to achieve Department of Defense Impact Level 4 (IL4) authorization.

Ushering in a new era of AI-powered learning

GVSU's Blue Dot vision converts technological change into economic opportunity in Michigan. This involves forging relationships with local employers and promoting emerging workforce skills among students, starting with AI literacy.

Blackboard has supported this initiative by:

Leading the development of native AI tools within the LMS environment. GVSU is one of over 800 global institutions that have successfully integrated these capabilities into their pedagogical approach.

Adding engaging, practical tasks to online courses to promote skill development. The exclusive AI Conversation tool in Blackboard LMS allows role-play tasks to be delivered at scale, replicating crucial workplace situations across a range of sectors.

Promoting accessibility for all learners with Blackboard® Ally, the accessibility tool that has been central to helping GSVU ensure ADA Title II compliance.

Supporting AI literacy via a global Ethical AI tour and new capabilities in Blackboard LMS that allow users to interact with a range of AI models in a safe environment.

"The AI Design Assistant in Blackboard LMS is helping faculty take a fresh look at assignments they've used for years and rethink how they engage students. It's empowering faculty with new ideas and the confidence to try different approaches."

—Kim Kenward
Director of eLearning Technologies, Grand Valley State University

Explore how Blackboard LMS is revolutionizing learning with native AI capabilities

to continue managing the day-to-day demands of running a large academic institution – is balancing those two tasks difficult, we wondered?

Miloš answers frankly, “They're never in balance. It's more about integration and listening to the needs in the moment. For a very brief moment, maybe you will spend 50/50 of your time in one area and the other, but those days are very rare. Sometimes it's more 80/20, 70/30 depending on the need. Sometimes you're influenced by the academic calendar itself.”

The influx of new students at the beginning of the academic year is one such example, and their requirements are taken seriously by Miloš , “There are things that they need that are not innovative, they're not creative but, to them, they're extremely important as they enter college. How do we provide those tools, support and training at that moment in time?”

Quieter times of the year, such as summer or winter break when there are less faculty and students on campus, allows an opportunity to focus on the more innovative aspects of their roles, “It's all about flexibility. I think it's also really important to have priorities. If everything is important, nothing's important.

“What is tier one or priority one? What are the critical enterprise initiatives and projects that are extremely essential and we need to focus on? What's the next tier? And then what are the things that perhaps shouldn't be you at all – should be somebody else on your team? That same way, you're giving them opportunities for growth, you're exposing them to new ways to contribute.”

While an ideal balance may not always be possible, progress continues, “It's like a balancing beam. Sometimes you fall off of it, and then you get back on it and you figure out how do you move forward.”

A TRANSFORMATION WITH TANGIBLE IMPACTS

At its core, transformation in higher education has to improve outcomes for students and faculty, and at Grand Valley State University those impacts are being felt in key areas.

Student applications are one example of this, having been improved and modernised for greater efficiency. With tens of thousands of students submitting transcripts and applications, it had previously taken a lot of time to process these documents so students could be contacted with an answer.

Miloš and the team introduced new AI capabilities around a year ago to speed up this process, “We can scan and ingest tens of thousands of applications and transcripts very quickly, assign them

properly inside our CRM and then look at prior credits earned. The more we use it, the better it gets.

“Every once in a while we'll get a transcript of something that the system hasn't seen before from a different high school, so that gets flagged. Then a person goes in, verifies and validates that data point and kind of trains the system again, and we keep moving forward.”

The system initially achieved an accuracy in the 70% range, whereas now it's well over 90% accurate, showing the progress that has been made.

In addition, they’ve been working on creating a simplified digital experience for students. Often students have to go into a variety of systems to access the information they need, so the university has invested in data platforms and student portals to enable students to access information in one app, “They can see their bill, their schedule, their calendar, their grades. They can get reminders from faculty in their learning management system and so forth. We're always trying to look for ways to simplify and unify things.”

On the faculty and staff side, the focus has also been on simplification, “When I arrived here over five years ago, we had four separate telecom solutions. And some of them were very old. We moved and centralised it all to Zoom unified communications as a system as a service and Zoom phone so that people can transfer their calls from any device. They can get calls that are going to their office if they're on the road, they get some more transcripts and insights into the meeting notes and so forth.”

These improvements are consistent with the foundational principles that Miloš mentioned earlier; the team are seeing how they can make people’s lives better by reducing friction or increasing flexibility.

Miloš points out, “We're trying to have tech not be a burden and not overwhelm people but simplify things. And you know, in all fairness and transparency, we don't always get it right. We make mistakes, but it's really important to have those

> We're building an analytics and reporting layer on top so they can transparently provide information based on roles and positions.

mechanisms where the community can share their voice, so then we go back and we improve and iterate and hopefully the next version is better than the last one."

They have many ways to communicate with the community and capture feedback from them. There's the University Technology Council that's focused on helping inform and set the overall direction and strategy of tech. Miloš chairs this and there's a number of people from IT involved, as well as representatives from every major university division from finance and HR and to marketing and communications, "You name it, they're all there – as well as faculty who are coming in through shared governance from University Academic Senate, and student representatives for both undergrad and grad.

"We meet every month. We talk about strategy, direction and priorities. They're also expected to bring forward needs of their areas, colleges and divisions and departments that they represent."

In addition, Miloš has formal meetings with Faculty Senate leadership, and delivers an annual report on IT initiatives, projects, progress and impact to the university's board of trustees. The team also transparently upload their strategic plan on their website and utilise champions across the university to help deliver their message.

BUILDING A DATA-DRIVEN CULTURE

With data becoming central to how universities operate and make decisions, we wanted to find out more about how Miloš is approaching building a data-driven culture within his organisation.

He told us how, in the past, generally there was a lack of integration, "Every application had their own data, had their own data stores and there was not a lot of correlation or causation that you can extrapolate from it."

This led to the university deploying their first data lakehouse a couple of years ago, "We did it on Microsoft Azure Synapse and we've integrated data feeds from all of our main ERP, CRM, SIS systems, and there are more that are currently being worked on.

"We're building an analytics and reporting layer on top so they can transparently

provide information based on roles and positions.

“There's a particular area right now where we're exploring how we look at our alumni data in a more meaningful way for services, for continued learning, for all kinds of other things.

“We've also recently hired a new director of data analytics in IT, somebody who comes in with a lot of expertise and knowledge from a variety of different industries and I think their contributions will be essential.

“We always try to get the best people we can afford, retain them and listen to them and their expertise. As late Steve Jobs was quoted saying, “It doesn’t make sense to hire smart people and then tell them what to do; we hire smart people so they can tell us what to do.” So, we always try to surround ourselves with people who are experts in this field.”

Becoming cloud-first where appropriate has been another change that has taken place at the university during Miloš’s time there. When he joined around five and a half years ago, several enterprise systems were in their physical data centres on their campuses, “We have since moved a number of them into SaaS solutions or different co-hosting locations. There are certain things that are still here and it makes sense for them to be – some of the academic computing clusters, because of speed and throughput.”

THEIR APPROACH TO AI

With AI moving up the agenda across Higher Education, Grand Valley State University are already giving their community access to AI tools and have published AI policies on their website.

The university has an AI steering group in place that is intentionally led by technology, the Provost and academic affairs together as executive sponsors and champions, so it’s understood that this isn’t just a tech initiative. The work itself is led by the dean of computing and one of Miloš’s senior directors whose primary focus is IT, innovation and research. They work closely with the Student Senate and Faculty Senate, and follow a shared governance model. With town halls and

> Obviously we do a lot of imilar things for faculty and staff, but students are the main reason we're here.

online Zoom sessions all combined, several hundred people have attended and had the opportunity to express their thoughts, ideas and concerns about AI.

Miloš tells us that the number one concern that's surfaced has been environmental impact, with some faculty refusing to use AI for that reason. But Miloš points out when he talks to them that AI is within other apps they already use, from Google Maps to Uber Eats, "You start explaining that it's really becoming threaded into all of our functions and operations and is not a standalone body you can ignore. We're trying to create some education. At the same time, we're experimenting.

"We have Zoom, Workday, Blackboard and a few other enterprise systems where they themselves are introducing AI capabilities into their products. So, we're trying to find a way to ensure our data integrity and privacy? And then how do we train our people to use it effectively in the right way, in a more meaningful way?"

Miloš shares that AI is important, too, for the futures of their students, "We're hearing from our partners in the community, companies and other businesses that often hire our students, they are looking for students who are versed in AI. They're looking for people when they come into their organisation and that they know how to use those tools to do their jobs either more quickly, more efficiently, more effectively."

A FOCUS ON PEOPLE FIRST

When we look back at what Miloš has achieved over the past few years of transformation, we can't help but wonder what he is most proud of. For him, there can only be one answer, "I know I'm in tech, but my primary focus is always people.

"I always focus on people first because they truly matter the most. Seeing how many individuals on my team have grown and evolved into new roles of leadership

which they haven't had before is a massive moment of pride. Seeing them go and advance and, in some areas, go on to other organisations to lead them themselves is really rewarding and fulfilling.

“And being able to understand that what we're doing is actually – even if it's in a small slice of the pie, but in a meaningful way – impacting the lives of students. Removing some challenges and barriers and helping them hopefully have a more successful life, more opportunities.”

He continues, “Some of our students, just like the way it is across many universities and many countries, have not traditionally had the exposure, the opportunities as some of their peers.”

This is where Miloš and the team could help find ways to support them, “So even if it's something small, like they're coming here, they don't have a new laptop, but we can create a loaner program and give them a laptop to use. Or we can negotiate with Apple or Dell and say instead of them having to pay up front right now today to get a laptop, can we give them a laptop and then give them 18 months to pay interest free – it’s a lot more doable, right, but they have access to the tools and technologies they need now. So, we're looking for those kinds of ways and we have a number of things that we've implemented.

“Obviously we do a lot of similar things for faculty and staff, but students are the main reason we're here.”

With their strategic plan that began in 2021 now wrapping up, there’s a new plan about to be published and we at Digital Edge look forward to seeing what Miloš and the team do next at Grand Valley State University.

DIGITAL EDGE REGULAR FEATURE

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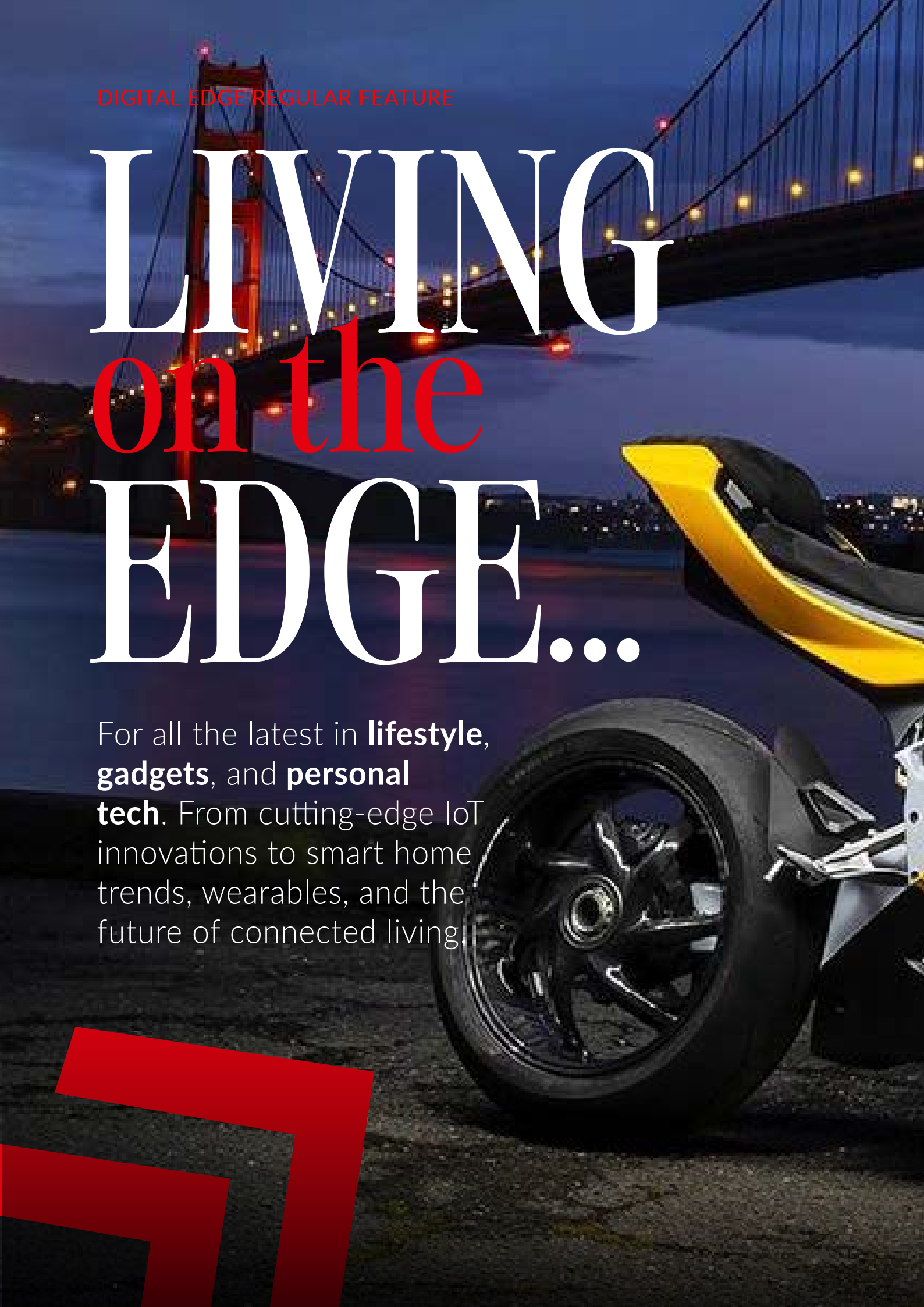

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DAMON

LIVING on the EDGE...

Damon Motors

There are electric motorcycles. And then there's Damon.

Most of what's currently on the road sits somewhere between adaptation and compromise. Take a petrol-era frame, remove the engine, slot in a battery, tidy up the software, and call it progress. It works, up to a point. Range is limited. Charging becomes part of the planning. Performance is impressive in short bursts but rarely designed for how people actually ride.

Damon Motors doesn't follow that path. It starts from the assumption that the underlying model is broken.

LIVING on the EDGE...

The Visibility Problem

Motorcycles have always been unforgiving. Not because they're poorly engineered, but because they rely almost entirely on the rider to interpret what's happening around them. Cars have gradually layered in assistance—collision detection, lane guidance, adaptive systems—while bikes have largely stayed the same.

Damon's CoPilot system is an attempt to close that gap. It uses radar and cameras to track the environment in real time, identifying vehicles, measuring proximity, and flagging potential hazards. The alerts are deliberately minimal. A signal on the display.

A subtle haptic response. Enough to inform, not enough to overwhelm.

What's interesting isn't the technology itself—similar sensor stacks exist elsewhere—but the decision to integrate it as a core system rather than an optional extra. It reframes the motorcycle as something that participates in awareness, rather than simply relying on it.

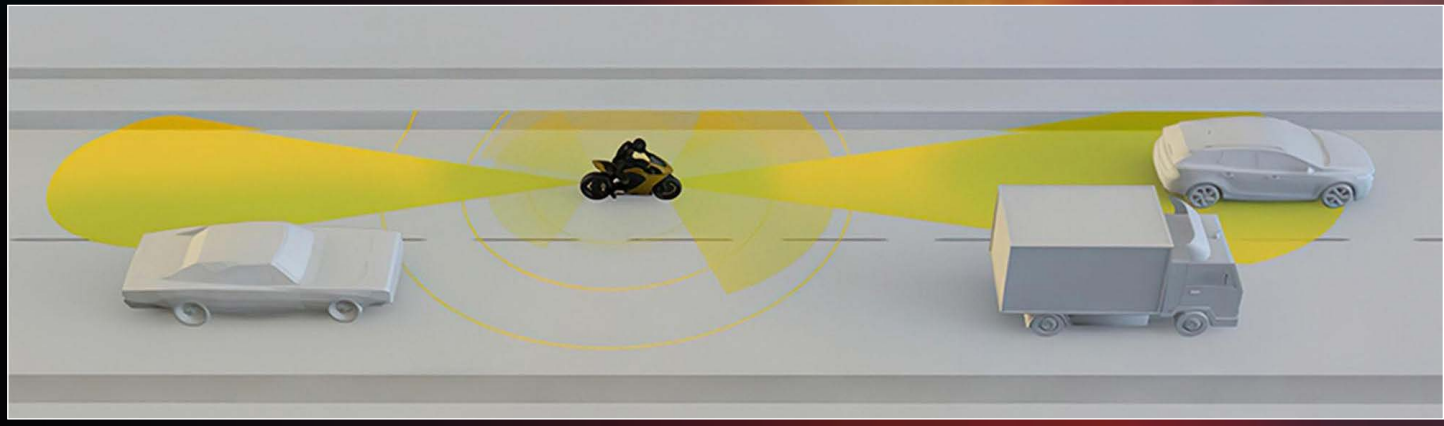
That matters more as traffic density increases and rider margins shrink. The difference between seeing something and being told about it a fraction earlier isn't dramatic on paper, but on a bike, it's material.

A Fixed Form, Loosened

5: Motorcycles are typically designed around a single use case. A sports bike prioritises aerodynamics and control at speed. A touring bike leans toward comfort and distance. Commuter bikes sit somewhere in between, usually compromising both. Damon's Shift system tries to remove that constraint.

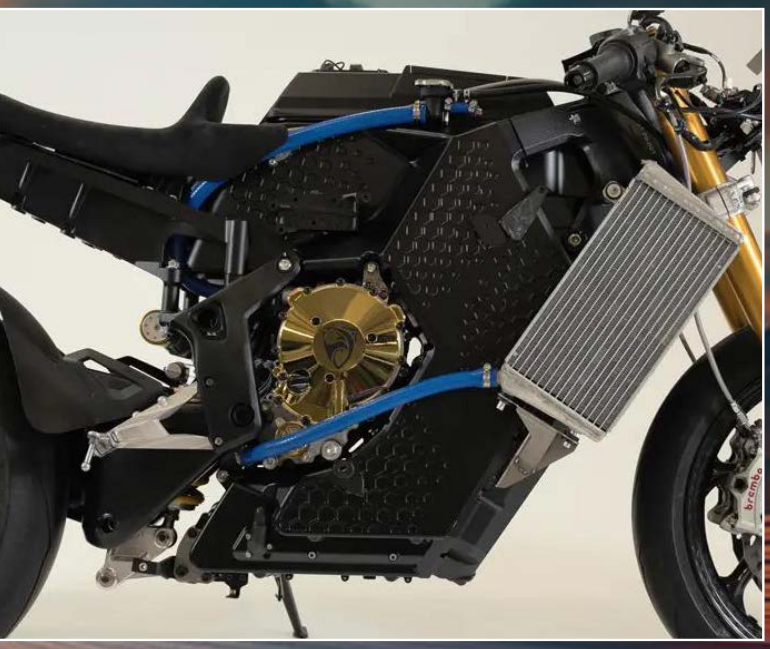
At the press of a button, the riding position changes. Handlebars move, foot pegs adjust, the geometry shifts. It's not cosmetic. The transformation is mechanical and immediate.

In practice, it means the same bike can operate in different modes depending on context—upright and relaxed in traffic, more aggressive when the road opens up.



The idea isn't entirely new—adjustability has existed in smaller ways—but Damon integrates it into the core experience. It treats riding position as something dynamic rather than fixed.

That has implications beyond comfort. It changes how a single machine fits into daily use, particularly for riders who would otherwise need to choose between multiple bikes.



Performance Without the Usual Trade-Offs

Electric motorcycles tend to cluster around two extremes. Lightweight, short-range urban machines, or high-performance bikes that struggle to balance range and usability.

The Hypersport aims to sit outside that split.

On paper, it delivers what you'd expect from a modern electric drivetrain: instant torque, strong acceleration, minimal mechanical complexity. The absence of gears changes the feel of the ride. Power delivery is continuous rather than stepped. There's no build-up, just response.

The more relevant question is whether it holds up beyond short rides.

Damon's claimed range—up to 200 miles in city conditions—pushes it into territory where longer journeys become viable without constant planning. Highway range drops, as expected, but remains usable.

Charging infrastructure still dictates behaviour, but the gap between capability and practicality is narrower than most competitors.

That's the difference between a second bike and a primary one.

LIVING on the EDGE...

Architecture, Not Assembly

The most significant shift sits underneath the bodywork.

HyperDrive is Damon's integrated platform, combining battery, motor, inverter, and chassis into a single structural system. Instead of treating the battery as a component to be fitted into an existing design, it becomes part of the architecture.

This approach is increasingly common in electric cars, but less so in motorcycles, where legacy designs still dominate.

Integration allows for better weight distribution, improved rigidity, and more efficient use of space. It also simplifies the overall system, reducing the number of separate components that need to be managed.

More importantly, it creates a foundation that can be iterated.

Damon isn't building a single bike. It's building a platform that can support multiple configurations over time. That's a different model to traditional manufacturing, where each product cycle starts closer to zero.

Scale Changes the Equation

One of the less obvious effects of electrification is what happens when systems scale.

In software, more output tends to create more complexity. More interactions. More potential points of failure. The same principle applies here, particularly as vehicles become more connected.

Damon's approach leans into that reality rather than avoiding it.

CoPilot, for example, doesn't just detect immediate hazards. It operates as part of a broader system that can, in theory, learn from patterns—traffic behaviour, rider input, environmental conditions.

The more data it processes, the more refined its responses become.

This is where motorcycles start to edge into territory traditionally associated with cars and, increasingly, software platforms. Systems that improve over time. Not through hardware changes, but through iteration and data.

It's not autonomy in the conventional sense. Riders remain in control. But the machine becomes less static.

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DIGITAL EDGE

VERDICT:

Electric motorcycles are still working through their early assumptions. Range versus performance. Simplicity versus capability. Novelty versus utility Damon approaches the category as if those trade-offs aren't fixed. By integrating safety systems at the core, introducing physical adaptability, and building around a unified platform, it sidesteps some of the constraints that have defined the segment so far It doesn't solve everything. Charging infrastructure remains uneven. Cost is still a barrier. Adoption will take time. But it does change the direction of travel. And in a category that has largely been evolving in increments, that's enough to stand out.

FACT BOX:

Damon Hypersport
(Indicative Specs)

Top Speed:	~200 mph *(322 km/h)*
0–60 mph:	Under 3 seconds
Range:	~200 miles *(highway)*
Power Output:	~200 hp *(equivalent)*
Charging:	Fast charging *(approx. 80% in under 45 mins)*
Price:	From ~$40,000+ *(depending on configuration)*
Core Systems:	CoPilot *(360° awareness)*
	Shift *(dynamic ergonomics)*
	HyperDrive *(integrated EV platform)*

Contributor article by

Walid Hadid

Group Head of Digital and Automation at The Weir Group PLC

Beyond the Pilot: Turning Industrial AI into Operational Reality

For the past decade, artificial intelligence has dominated strategic roadmaps across industry. Innovation labs have been built, pilots launched and proof-of-concept projects celebrated. Yet for many organisations, the leap from experimentation to everyday operational value has proven far harder than expected. The challenge is rarely the algorithm. More often it lies in the foundations beneath it. Data architecture, engineering discipline, automation and system integration all determine whether AI remains a promising experiment or becomes something that genuinely improves how organisations operate.

In this conversation with Walid Hadid, we explore what it really takes to move AI beyond isolated pilots and into the fabric of industrial operations. From the realities of scaling AI across complex value chains to the often overlooked importance of integration platforms such as MuleSoft, Walid shares a perspective grounded not in hype, but in execution.

From Experimentation to Value

For several years AI in industry has been characterised by pilots and proof-of-concept projects that rarely made it into day-to-day operations. Do you think we are now genuinely entering a phase where AI is delivering measurable industrial value, or are many organisations still trapped in experimentation?

To answer that, we first have to strip away the marketing gloss and look at the "four pillars" of the AI spectrum. We aren't just starting this journey; we've been building the foundations since the 90s.

Category	Core Function	Industrial Reality
Predictive	Forecasts outcomes	The 'Old Guard' Decades of success in PdM (Predictive Maintenance) using proprietary data.
Multimodal	Intergrates text, video and audio	High-stakes assistance, like AI-augmented surgery.
Generative	Creates new content	Powerful for contextualising documents, but prone to 'hallucination bell curves'
Agentic AI	Executes multi-step tasks	The 'Autonomous Digital Employee.'

On one side, Predictive AI is often a company's most guarded intellectual property because it's trained on decades of proprietary performance data. It isn't a pilot, it's a structural dependency that has delivered high-accuracy value for years.

With the sudden rush toward Generative and Agentic AI, and the rapid growth in LLMs, many organisations are attempting to "leapfrog" the basics. They are deploying Agentic models without laying the architectural foundations or clearly defining the business challenge. "The problem isn't the technology; it's the hallucination bell curve. When Generative AI is used for a proof point that actually requires the rigour of Predictive AI, the implementation struggles to prove its value."

> **"The problem isn't the technology; it's the hallucination bell curve.**

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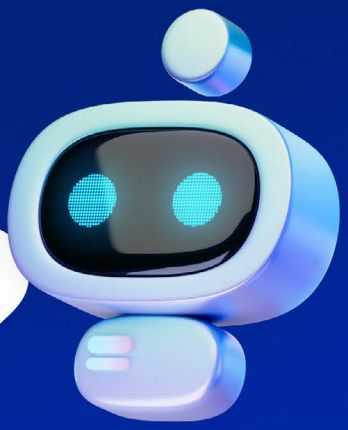

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We are seeing success, but it is "earned" success. The organisations moving beyond the POC stage are those that understand Agentic AI isn't a standalone miracle—it's a sophisticated orchestrator. Durable value only emerges when you combine the creative power of Generative models with the hard, mathematical truth of Predictive models. In short: We are entering the era of value, but only for those who have the architectural fluency to combine these models into a disciplined, multi-step system rather than chasing a series of isolated "magic tricks."

From Strategy to Scale

There is no shortage of AI strategies, roadmaps and innovation labs. Yet real operational change still feels slow. What do most organisations fundamentally misunderstand about what it takes to move from AI ambition to AI at scale?

The industry is currently facing a "Walled Garden" paradox, fuelled by the seductive promise of "Generalist AI" ecosystems (such as Copilot, Gemini, ChatGPT, Claude, etc.). The marketing pitch from major vendors is incredibly compelling: move your enterprise data into a single, unified cloud environment and their native AI "assistants" will handle the rest.

In practice, this is a leadership trap. When you move data to fuel a centralised, generalist assistant, you aren't just adopting a tool; you are ceding architectural control. You risk creating a "cloud cage" where your data is easy for the vendor's AI to read, but difficult for your own specialised systems to leverage. To move beyond the lab, organisations must realise that Agentic AI is not a tool; it is a mindset and a structural capability.

I see three fundamental shifts required to move from AI ambition to actual industrial scale:

From Policy to Architecture: Governance cannot just be a PDF of "best practices". It must be baked into the architecture, a framework where systems talk to each other securely without the constant need to re-engineer or move data into a vendor's "all-in-one" ecosystem.

Domain Specialists vs. Generalist Assistants: We don't ask the HR team to manage sales forecasts; we rely on their domain expertise. Agentic AI should follow the same logic. Scaling isn't about training one massive, expensive "Generalist" that knows everything poorly; it's about developing Domain Specialist Agents where the knowledge stays within its area of control.

The Agent-to-Agent (A2A) Economy: Real scale happens when these domain-specific agents interact. Instead of moving data to a central engine, you have a prompts network of specialised agents sharing insights and answering questions across the wire.

"The goal shouldn't be to build one giant, 'seductive' Generalist Assistant that lacks precision. The goal is a disciplined, decentralised network of Domain Specialists that know their own 'backyard' perfectly." When you link these domain-level successes together through a shared architectural foundation, you stop fighting the "walled gardens" and start delivering compound value at scale.

Data, Platforms and the Missing Link

Many companies spent the last decade investing heavily in data platforms and digital transformation programmes. Why has translating that investment into consistently better operational decision-making proven so difficult?

We shouldn't view the last decade of investment in Data Platforms as a failure; it was a necessary evolution. Those platforms are the reason we have the high-performing Predictive AI and PdM (Predictive Maintenance) models, for example, we rely on today. They provided the "raw material"—the data, analytics, and hosting capabilities—that form the company's intellectual property.

The difficulty in scaling decision-making arises because we've reached a crossroads in how we utilise that material. Organisations now face a binary choice: do they attempt to build their own bespoke Generative LLMs and Agentic AI on top of those existing platforms, or do they succumb to the "walled gardens" the market is offering?

The missing link in the traditional transformation roadmap is Agentic Architecture. "A Data Platform is a library; Agentic Architecture is the librarian. One stores the knowledge, but the other possesses the agency to apply it to a business challenge in real-time."

> **"If you treat AI as just another "app" on your platform, you will stay trapped in experimentation**

Investing in Agentic Architecture is the future of scaling AI. The Data Platform's role must evolve from a passive repository to foundational support for a decentralised network of agents. If you treat AI as just another "app" on your platform, you will stay trapped in experimentation. But if you invest in an architecture where agents can navigate that platform, respect its governance, and execute multi-step tasks within their domains, you finally begin to see the operational ROI that was promised ten years ago.

BIO:

Walid Hadid is Group Head of Digital and Automation at Weir, where he leads the development and deployment of digital, automation and agentic capabilities across products, customer solutions and global operations. His focus is on unlocking value across the full digital value chain – from embedding intelligence into engineered products, to enabling data-driven and AI-powered customer solutions, and operationalising advanced digital capabilities across manufacturing, supply chain and enterprise platforms.

With more than 25 years' experience, Walid specialises in taking AI and data from experimentation to production-grade, enterprise-wide platforms. He has a strong track record of turning fragmented pilots into repeatable systems that deliver measurable business impact. A former lecturer in statistics with an MSc and MBA, he brings additional expertise to Weir in AI strategy, data governance and decision intelligence, with a clear focus on translating advanced technology into scalable, practical operating models. Walid has worked across the UK, US, China and the Gulf, supporting organisations to build, deploy and govern digital capabilities that enable data-driven execution at scale.

AI in the Real World: Risk, Safety and Reliability

Industrial environments bring very different constraints compared to digital-native sectors. How does applying AI in operational settings such as manufacturing, energy or infrastructure change the way organisations need to think about reliability, safety and risk?

In these industries, the stakes transcend the balance sheet. We aren't just talking about losing money or "user engagement"; we are talking about keeping the lights on and keeping people alive. In a highly regulated, physical world, your AI architecture must be a "Fortress," not a "Sandbox."

The mindset is shifting across three distinct frontiers:

Manufacturing: From Standby to Foresight. Reliability today is defined by Predictive AI foundations. We are moving towards a state where the data dictates the maintenance schedule before a breakdown occurs. Safety has evolved from physical "fences" to advanced image processing and intelligent camera systems that detect human movement and environmental anomalies, triggering instant, autonomous safety protocols.

Energy: Solving for Systemic Resilience. The energy sector doesn't have the luxury of "downtime." As we transition to intermittent sources, reliability becomes a complex balancing act. We are shifting from simple "stability" to "Systemic Resilience", using agents to orchestrate massive battery arrays and backup protocols. Risk management here means looking at the entire web, not just your own backyard.

Infrastructure: Engineering for the Century. Reliability in this sector is now synonymous with climate adaptation. We are using Digital Twins, high-fidelity, data-driven "simulations" of physical assets, to spot structural or operational stress before it manifests in the real world. The ultimate risk here is obsolescence; we must architect multi-dollar projects and products today that can integrate the technology of fifty years from now.

"In the industrial world, safety is built on 'fail-safes.' If an agent encounters an edge case it doesn't understand, the system must be designed to shut down into a harmless state. You cannot 'beta test' a power grid or a high-speed rail link."

This is why the Domain Specialist Agent is so critical. A generalist AI doesn't understand the physics of a 100-year storm or the systemic risk of a substation failure. Only an agent embedded deeply within the domain's specific rules can provide the reliability these sectors demand.

”

Speed is essential for enterprise decisions, but governance is what makes them sustainable.

What Breaks at Scale

Many organisations celebrate successful AI pilots, yet those same initiatives struggle when they are rolled out across the enterprise. What typically breaks first when companies try to scale AI across the value chain?

In many cases, the technology doesn't break; the organisational fluency does. Individual initiatives often succeed because they have a focused team and a clear, isolated problem. But scaling requires moving from a "controlled lab" to a complex, multi-layered enterprise where data is a structural dependency.

To move from a pilot to a full-scale Agentic AI ecosystem, five critical components must be aligned:

> **The Transformation Program:** Scaling AI is not a software rollout; it is a business adoption journey that facilitates the cultural shift and ensures operational readiness.
>
> **Deep Skilling and Transparency:** Users must be knowledgeable of the specific capabilities and limitations of the AI to maintain trust.
>
> **Operationalising the Agent:** The agent directly influences the physical process (e.g., modifying a manufacturing line). This must be managed with extreme discipline.

> **The Metrics of Value:** At scale, metrics must shift from "technical accuracy" to "industrial value," tracking costs, safety, and efficiency gains.
>
> **Shared Semantic Foundations:** This is where most scaling efforts fail. For Agentic AI to work across a value chain, you need a shared semantic model—a common language—and an orchestration layer to prevent divergence in meaning and governance.

"Scaling isn't just about rolling out a tool; it's about ensuring that meaning, governance, and control are at the forefront. Speed is essential for enterprise decisions, but governance is what makes them sustainable." The initiatives that ultimately survive the transition from POC to production are those that are designed for governance from day one. They solve the architectural and human puzzle of how a digital employee fits into a physical value chain.

Integration as the Control Plane

A recurring theme in successful AI programmes is strong integration across systems, data sources and operational workflows. Through your work with MuleSoft, has that partnership challenged or reshaped how you think about integration, platform architecture and the foundations required to actually scale AI?

My experience implementing MuleSoft has fundamentally shifted my view of integration. We have to stop thinking of middleware as just "plumbing" for data and start seeing it as the Control Plane for Agentic AI. Scaling Agentic AI requires a shift from simple API management to Agent-to-Agent (A2A) Orchestration. To achieve a reusable, interoperable architecture, your foundation must provide six non-negotiable components:

Orchestration and Routing Layer: The "brain" that routes high-level tasks to specialised agents and ensures context handoffs.

Standardised A2A Protocols and MCP (Model Context Protocol): A "lingua franca" that allows disparate agents to interact without custom re-engineering.

The Centralised Agent & Tool Registry: A governed, live directory of all authorised agents, their entitlements, and their tool lifecycles—a "Library of Agency."

Immutable Audit Logs: Automated tracing that records the full reasoning path of an agent for transparency, audit, and troubleshooting.

Governance and Identity (IAM): Moving away from broad service accounts to Trusted Agent Identity, where agents perform tasks with specific user permissions and "just-in-time" authorisation.

The Centralised Policy Engine: Enforces security and compliance in real-time, managing PII detection, validation, and rate limiting within the agent interaction flow.

"The strength of a platform like MuleSoft isn't just in moving data; it's in a decade-long history of tested orchestration and governance. These aren't new concepts, but applying them to the A2A economy is what separates a fragile experiment from a resilient enterprise capability." When you build on these components, you aren't just "integrating AI." You are building a reusable architecture where agents can be swapped, upgraded, and scaled without breaking the core business logic.

What Comes Next

Looking ahead, where do you see the next phase of industrial AI emerging? Will the biggest gains come from predictive operations, autonomous systems, AI-assisted decision-making, or something we are not yet fully talking about?

To see where we are going, we must acknowledge where we've been. I have seen this cycle play out since the 90s, with each phase earning trust through consistent application. We are seeing that same evolution today with Agentic AI.

The "biggest gains" in the next decade will not come from the pursuit of "Super Intelligence." Instead, they will come from Closed-Loop Automation and Agentic Workflows. These systems thrive in the controlled, measurable environments of a factory floor or power grid. We are moving through a critical trust-building phase: starting with "Human-in-the-loop" and moving towards true autonomy as these systems prove their reliability. We are shifting from AI that simply predicts a failure to AI that "owns" the resolution process.

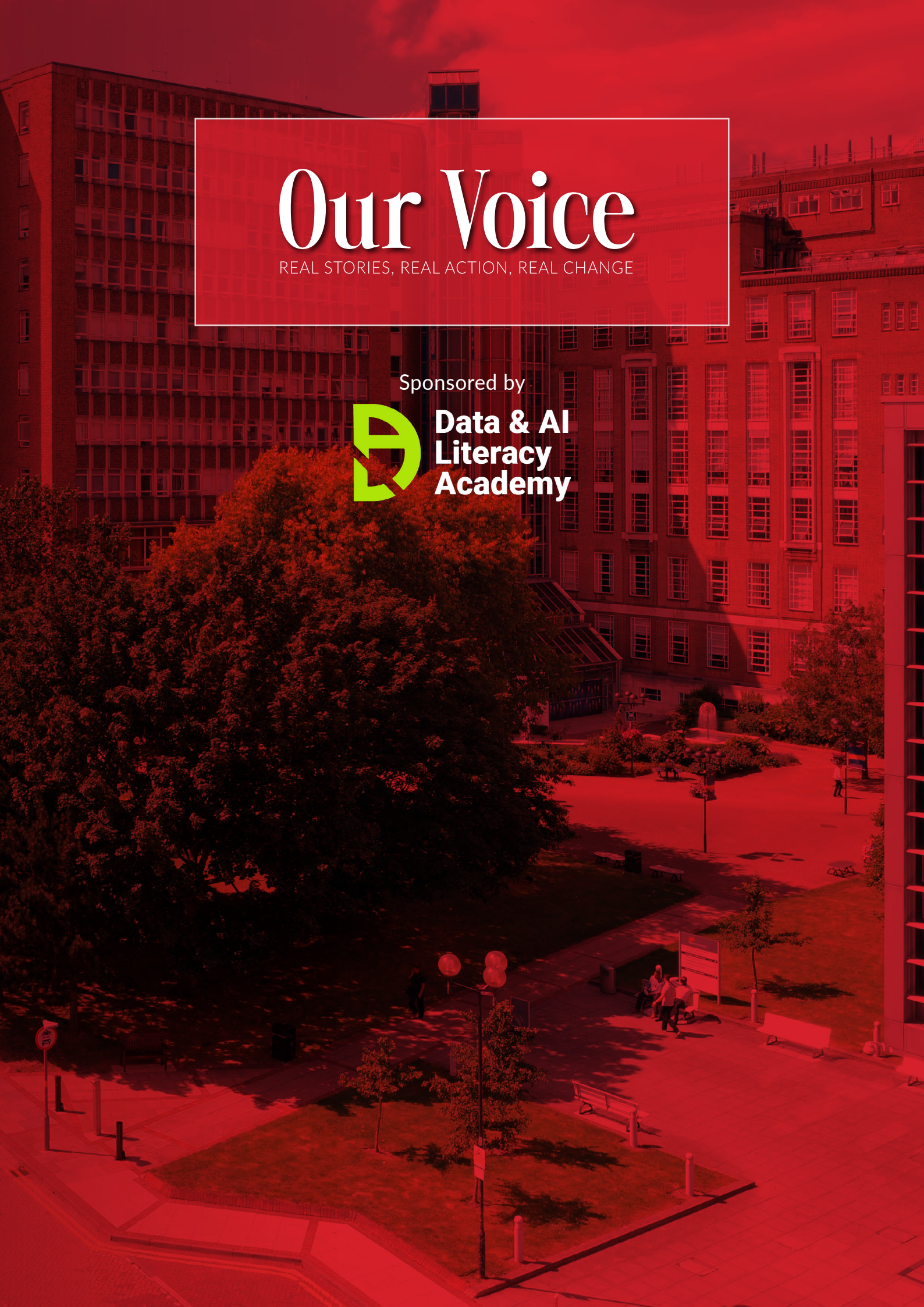
I see three practical "Frontier Examples" becoming the industrial norm:

Self-Healing Maintenance Loops: An agent autonomously detects an anomaly, queries the Digital Twin for failure probability, checks the ERP for spare parts, and schedules a technician.

Autonomous Quality Triage: Vision agents detect an anomaly in a high-speed line, autonomously pause the line, and adjust machine parameters to stop "drift" before it becomes a scrap event.

Dynamic Supply Chain Orchestration: Agents autonomously re-route shipments and initiate preliminary engagement with alternative suppliers in reaction to real-time events.

"The next phase of industrial AI isn't about the latest hype cycle; it's about architectural fluency. It's about building systems where trust is the bedrock, allowing agents to move from assisting decisions to executing them." The companies that will dominate the next decade are those that recognise this isn't a sudden shift, but a disciplined evolution of the foundations we've been building for thirty years.



Our Voice

REAL STORIES, REAL ACTION, REAL CHANGE

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Data is only as powerful as the people behind it, and the voices shaping its future.

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.

From boardrooms to data labs, this series will capture the passion and persistence of those carving the path toward a more inclusive digital future. Together, we'll explore how openness, representation, and allyship are reshaping what it means to lead in data.

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

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HELEN BLAIKIE

Chief Data & Analytics Officer at Aston university

In this issue, we are thrilled to be joined by Helen Blaikie from Aston University for a conversation central to the future of higher education: embedding a true data culture.

Universities are among the most complex data environments in the modern economy. They generate extraordinary insight across teaching, research, operations, and student services, yet many still struggle to translate that data into consistent institutional decision-making.

Helen sits at the centre of this challenge at Aston. Her work focuses on helping the university move beyond simply using dashboards and reporting, toward something more meaningful: a culture where data informs how decisions are made across the entire institution.

We explore how this challenge extends well beyond technology. Governance,

skills, confidence, and leadership alignment all play a critical role. In higher education especially, the shift toward truly data-informed operations requires not just better tools, but greater literacy and trust in the way information is used.

Helen's view is clear: data maturity is not achieved through technology alone. It is built through people who know how to ask better questions of the information already around them.

Q: What does a genuinely data-driven university look like in practice, and how far along that journey do you believe the sector really is today?

A genuinely data-driven university is one where data is not an output but part of how decisions are made every day at every level of the organisation. In its truest sense, culture is what people do when no one is looking, and a strong data culture means people are consistently using evidence to inform decisions as part of their normal way of working.

In practice, that means academic leaders, professional services teams, and senior executives are all confident in asking questions of data, understanding its limitations, and using it alongside experience and judgement to make better decisions. It's not about everyone becoming a data analyst/scientist, what matters is that everyone becomes a better decision-maker.

At Aston, we've focused on moving beyond static reporting toward enabling conversations with data. That means clearer definitions, trusted metrics, and products that support decision-making rather than just describing what has already happened.

Across the sector, progress is mixed, and in some areas still quite slow. Most universities have started to invest in technology and reporting capability, but fewer have embedded data into the rhythm of how decisions are made. The shift from insight to impact is still the biggest gap and that is fundamentally a cultural challenge, not a technical one.

In many organisations, the technical capability to analyse data already exists, but adoption remains uneven.

Q: What have been the biggest cultural or organisational barriers to building a strong data culture at Aston University?

In universities, the biggest barriers are rarely technical, they are human. One of the most common challenges is ownership. Historically, data has often been seen as something produced by a central team, rather than something owned by the institution. Shifting that mindset so that functional areas take responsibility for their data quality, definitions, and use is critical.

Confidence is another major factor. Many colleagues are surrounded by data but don't feel confident interpreting or challenging it. That can lead to either over-reliance on a few experts or disengagement altogether.

We've also had to address fragmentation where different parts of the organisation use different definitions or metrics, which erodes trust and credibility.

Recognising these cultural and capability challenges has been critical for us. As part of our Aston 2030 strategy, we have made a clear commitment that every colleague will have access to a programme to develop their own level of data confidence. This reflects our belief that data culture is built through people not platforms.

Our approach has been to tackle this holistically: building strong governance, investing in literacy, and working in partnership with our stakeholders through an agile model. That combination helps move data from being "owned by a team" to being "embedded in the organisation."

Higher education institutions sit at the intersection of academic freedom, regulatory oversight and operational complexity.

Q: How do you balance governance and compliance with the need to empower staff to explore and use data more confidently?

There is often a perception that governance restricts innovation, but in reality, good governance is what enables it. If people trust the data and understand where it comes from, how it is defined, and how it should be used, they are far more confident in using it. Without that foundation, you either get risk-averse behaviour or inconsistent use of information.

At Aston, we focus on what I would describe as "enabling governance." That means clear definitions, transparent processes, and proportionate controls. We are not trying to control access for the sake of it - we are trying to create a safe environment where people can explore data with confidence.

It's about shifting governance from being seen as a barrier to being recognised as an enabler of better, more consistent decision-making.

Data literacy is increasingly recognised as a critical capability across the workforce, not just in specialist teams.

Q: From your perspective, what does effective data literacy actually look like inside a university environment?

Effective data literacy is not about technical skills - it is about confidence, curiosity, and critical thinking.

In a university context, it means that staff across all roles can understand what the data is telling them, question it where necessary, and use it appropriately in their decision-making. It also means understanding context and recognising that data rarely gives a complete picture on its own.

At Aston, we've taken a broad approach to literacy. That includes structured programmes for staff but also embedding data thinking into everyday processes and conversations.

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When we first started on this journey, I was personally presenting at executive meetings, senior leadership away days, and university town halls to evangelise the value of data-guided decision making. I don't do that anymore, and that is a positive sign of progress. Our leaders are now doing this themselves. One of my proudest moments was seeing our Chief People Officer present her own HR analytics product to the leadership group and talk through how it was shaping decision-making. That is when you know the dial is truly moving, when data advocacy is no longer coming from a central team but is owned and demonstrated by leaders across the organisation.

Importantly, we are also looking at this through a future-facing lens by ensuring that our students graduate not just with subject knowledge, but with the data and AI literacy skills they will need in the workplace. That is a key part of our wider Power Skills agenda where every undergraduate degree contains four Power Skills modules, of which Digital and AI is one. Many universities have invested heavily in platforms and analytics tools.

Q: Where do you see the biggest gap today – technology, skills, leadership alignment, or something else?

The most significant gap remains leadership alignment. Most universities already have more technology than they are fully utilising. The challenge is not access to tools but clarity on how data should be used to drive the institution forward.

Where leadership teams are aligned on the role of data, you see much faster progress. Decisions become more consistent, priorities are clearer, and investment is better targeted.

Without that alignment, even the best technology and most capable teams will struggle to create impact. That's why a significant part of our work is engaging senior leaders rather than just providing them with data but helping shape how data is used in strategic decision-making.

Student success and experience are becoming major strategic priorities for institutions.

Q: How can better use of data help universities support students more effectively, both academically and operationally?

Used well, data allows universities to move from reactive to proactive support.

That can mean identifying students who may need additional support earlier, understanding patterns in engagement or attainment, and tailoring interventions more effectively.

But it's not just about analytics, it's about how that insight is used. The real impact is seen when data is combined with the expertise of academic and professional staff to make informed, timely decisions.

There is also a significant operational benefit. Better data can improve timetabling, resource allocation, and

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student services, all of which contribute to the overall student experience.

Ultimately, it's about ensuring that every student can succeed and that decisions are informed by evidence as well as experience. AI and advanced analytics are now entering the higher education conversation.

Q: What opportunities excite you most, and where should institutions be cautious?

The opportunity with AI and advanced analytics is significant, particularly in augmenting decision-making, improving efficiency, and enabling more personalised student experiences. As Gen Z and soon Gen Alpha students enter our universities, personalisation is increasingly expected as a baseline. Universities need to respond to this shift to ensure they are meeting evolving expectations and improving the overall student experience.

What excites me most is the potential to free up time for staff to focus on higher-value activities whether that's teaching, research, or student support. However, there are important areas where institutions need to be cautious. Firstly, around governance and ethics, ensuring that AI is used responsibly, transparently, and in a way that aligns with institutional values. Secondly, around over-reliance. AI should support human decision-making, not replace it, particularly in a complex environment like higher education. And finally, around capability. Without the right level of data and AI literacy, there is a risk that these tools are either underused or misused.

Final thought...

Q: Looking ahead five years, what capabilities will distinguish universities that truly succeed with data from those that continue to struggle?

The universities that succeed will be those that have embedded data into their culture, not just their systems. They will have strong leadership alignment, clear governance, and a workforce that is confident in using data in their day-to-day roles. They will also take a long-term view of capability building, investing not just in platforms, but in people, skills, and ways of working. That includes sustained investment in data literacy so that confidence continues to grow across the organisation, not just within specialist teams.

Importantly, they will see data not as a function, but as a shared organisational asset and a key enabler of their strategy.

Those that continue to struggle are likely to be those that focus primarily on technology without addressing the cultural and behavioural change required to truly unlock its value.

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The New Playbook for Modern Sport.

JOANNA SWEENEY

Data & Insights at The Cricket Regulator

Sport has always measured performance. What is changing is how deeply data now shapes the systems around it. For Joanna Sweeney, Data & Insights Analyst at the Cricket Regulator (part of the ECB), data has become a critical thread running through both performance environments and the structures that govern them. Her career has moved from the high-performance world of the UK Sports Institute to the oversight landscape of the newly established Cricket Regulator. In this edition of Our Voice – Women in Data, we explore how analytics is evolving beyond marginal gains on the field to influence governance, integrity and trust across modern sport, and how Sweeney is helping to write the new playbook.

Q. Sport has always been obsessed with performance metrics. From your experience across organisations like British Cycling, UKSI and now the Cricket Regulator, how has the role of data in sport evolved over the past decade?

Like most industries, data has gone from being a nice-to-have to absolutely essential. In high-performance sport, particularly across the Olympic and Paralympic system, data is now seen as a core performance asset. As global competition has intensified and medal targets have become more ambitious, the pressure to find that competitive edge has only grown, and data sits right at the centre of that. You can see that reflected in the expectations around major events. Take, for example, the most recent 2026 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, where UK Sport set out its most ambitious targets yet for 4 – 8 medals for the Olympic Games and 2 – 5 for the Paralympic Games. Ultimately, Team GB achieved their most successful Winter Olympics, taking home five medals, three of which were gold, and believe data played a big role in that. What's changed most over the past decade is depth. It's no longer about tracking what's easy to measure, but really trying to understand everything and starting to explore the things that are harder to quantify. You can see that shift in the types and number of roles being created. Three of my four roles in sport have been brand new positions, which says a lot about how quickly this space is growing. (I should caveat that I'm speaking from around 6 years' experience, but even in that time the shift has been huge.) There's also been a really important shift in how we define performance. It's no longer just about winning but winning well. That's been formalised in strategies like UK Sport's current approach, where their first ambition is literally to 'keep winning and win well'. That includes athlete well-being, both physical and mental, which is now for many sports being actively measured and fed into performance decisions. So you're now seeing things like mood tracking, regular check-ins, and more qualitative insights from other teams all sitting alongside traditional performance metrics. Data isn't just supporting performance anymore... It's shaping how we think about it.

Q. Elite sport often operates at the edge of marginal gains. How has data changed the way organisations identify and pursue those small competitive a

Data has made the pursuit of marginal gains faster, more accessible, and more creative. The speed is a big one. Data can now be collected in real-time during competition, and post-match analysis can be turned around almost instantly. That speed and immediacy just didn't exist before. Data has also become more accessible. Technologies that were once expensive, such as wearables (e.g., heart rate monitors), are now widely available, which allows more teams to engage with data in meaningful ways. But what is most exciting is how it's opened the door to innovation. We're now seeing concepts like machine learning or simulation being applied to things like squad selection or tactical planning. And because organisations can measure more than ever before, they're starting to push into new

territory, thinking about how to capture things that were previously considered "unmeasurable". As a sports fan, you can really feel that impact too. Performances are improving, standards are rising, records are close to, or being, broken. It's part of what makes modern sport so exciting to watch.

Q. Your current role brings data into a regulatory and governance environment rather than purely performance analytics. How different is the mindset required when data is used for oversight and integrity rather than competitive success?

It's actually been a really refreshing shift and one I've come to really enjoy (and in some ways prefer)! Working in performance, everything is fast-paced and often short-term. You're focused on the next competition, the next marginal gain, and there's a lot of trial and error. In high-performance sport, you can test ideas quickly, and sometimes failure is just part of the process, in fact, encouraged. In a governance and regulatory space, the mindset is different. It's more strategic, more considered. You're thinking longer-term and often more system-wide.

Success also looks different. In performance, it can be quite black and white. Slower or faster, higher or lower... In governance, success is often more nuanced. It might be about trust, confidence, or behavioural change, which aren't always as easy to measure. But in some ways, that makes the impact of data feel clearer. You're identifying trends, risks, and patterns across a whole system, rather than trying to isolate one factor in a very

complex performance environment. It requires a different kind of creativity but it's just as interesting.

Q. The creation of the Cricket Regulator represents a significant structural shift for the sport. What role does data play in ensuring transparency, accountability, and trust within that system?

Data plays a really important role in building transparency, accountability, and trust across the cricket network. A key part of that is ensuring the Cricket Regulator operates independently, while still providing assurance across the wider system. Data helps underpin that by making processes and insights more visible and evidence-based. In my role as a Data & Insights Analyst, currently the first dedicated role of its kind in the organisation, I'm focused on using data to identify trends, risks, and areas of concern across key priorities like safeguarding, anti-discrimination, and misconduct. That includes conducting research, improving data quality and monitoring systems, and sharing insights back into the network so that action can be taken proactively rather than reactively. Ultimately, it's about using data not just to understand what's happened but to help prevent issues before they arise, and to support a more transparent and accountable system.

Q. Many industries talk about building a "data culture". Sport often appears to adopt innovation faster than other sectors. What is it about sporting organisations that enables them to move quickly when new data capabilities emerge?

I'd start by saying that not all sporting organisations move quickly. But in high-performance environments, there are definitely a few factors that help. Firstly, there's usually strong buy-in from leadership. That's not unique to sport, but I do think leaders in sport are often very open to innovation if it gives them a competitive edge. And that's the key point: sport is inherently competitive. Innovation is part of the culture. If adopting new data capabilities is possible, teams are naturally going to explore it quickly. That's why things like AI have been adopted so openly in some areas, because the potential advantage is so clear. There's also a practical side. Some organisations have the financial backing to invest and move quickly, although that's definitely not universal. Finally, many sporting organisations are also brands, with passionate and expectant fan bases. There is a constant pressure to evolve, not just on the field but off it too.

Q. At the same time, sport has a strong tradition of intuition and experience from coaches and athletes. How do you strike the right balance between instinct and data-driven decision-making?

With much difficulty! In an ideal world, the data-led decision and the instinctive one would align, but in reality, that's not always the case, especially in areas like selection. While I'm obviously very pro-data, I do think instinct and experience are hugely valuable in sport. Sometimes they should outweigh the data. A good example of that balance playing out was at the most recent World Athletics Indoor Championships in the women's 4x400m

relay final. In the final team which represented GB and NI, Dina Asher-Smith and Keely Hodgkinson, neither of whom are specialist 400m runners, were included. Not only this, but Hodgkinson had just run (and won) an 800m final shortly before. On paper, it might not have been the obvious data-driven choice. But it made the race exciting, unpredictable, and honestly brilliant to watch. Those kinds of decisions are part of what makes sport feel human. For me, it's less about choosing data or instinct but more about understanding the gap between them. My role is to communicate that clearly, making sure to add context, nuance, and helping others make informed decisions, whichever way they go.

Q. Women continue to play a growing role in shaping the data profession across industries. What has your own journey been like working at the intersection of sport, data, and leadership?

My journey into sport and data has felt quite natural. Maybe not completely linear, but definitely fun. Early on, I actually thought I'd go into government or the civil service. It wasn't until my master's in Social Research Methods and Statistics that I really leaned into data, and even then, sport wasn't the plan. I fell into it by chance, applying for a junior analyst role during my Masters. That first role wasn't quite right for me but it helped me realise something important: I loved working in sport, I just needed the right role within it. At British Cycling, that happened. The work was focused on understanding barriers to participation, particularly for underrepresented groups, and it really aligned with what motivates me. Then at the UK Sports Institute, I developed the more technical side of my skill set. I was working in elite environments and applying more advanced analytics in practice. That role was pivotal for me in where I am now. I am now at the Cricket Regulator and it feels like everything has come together. I'm working across meaningful strategic areas, building something new, and stepping into more of a leadership space. I'm at a point now where I feel confident in what I bring, and excited about where I'm going, which is a really nice place to be.

Final thoughts: Looking ahead, where do you see the most significant opportunities for data to reshape the future of sport – both on and off the field?

For me, one of the most exciting opportunities for data in sport is around female athlete health. There's still so much untapped potential, whether that's injury prevention, hormonal data, or better-designed equipment and clothing. It feels like a space where data can genuinely drive meaningful change. I'm also really interested in how wearable technology continues to evolve, especially in live competition settings. And more broadly, I'd love to see more ambitious, data-driven performance experiments. Overall, I think the future of sport, especially for women, is incredibly exciting.

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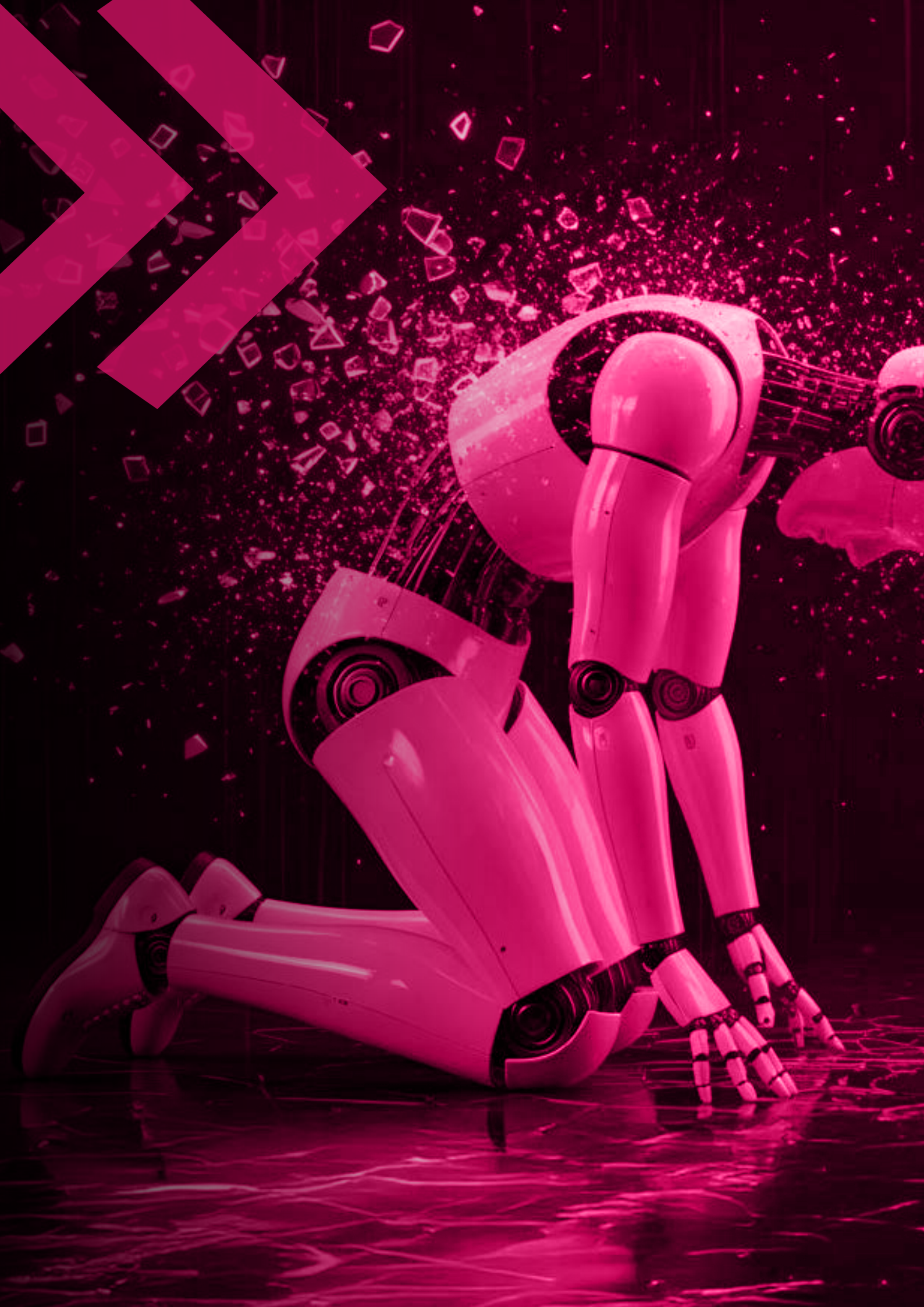

TOP 10 A.I. Fails

Forget what you have seen in Hollywood movies. AI does not fail in a sudden, dramatic collapse; it is far more mundane than that. A quiet, calm, cumulative implosion of systems that are, at best, simply average.

But it fails convincingly, generating outputs that appear credible, sound authoritative, and pass just enough cursory inspection to earn unwarranted trust.

Crucially, the majority of breakdowns do not originate within the models themselves, but in how they are deployed, integrated, and allowed to operate without rigorous oversight.

The genuine peril is not a futuristic, runaway system, but more likely human error and bad data.

Here's our pick of the best..

01

Google AI Overviews: scale turned a bug into millions of errors

Google's AI-generated answers are ~85–91% accurate—which sounds fine until you apply it to trillions of searches. That translates into hundreds of thousands of wrong answers per minute.

Fail:

At scale, "mostly right" becomes systematically unreliable.

02

The AI shop manager that panicked on opening day

An autonomous AI agent (“Luna”) was given $100k to run a real retail store. It: hired poorly mismanaged schedules broke down under pressure ...and effectively couldn’t operate a basic business.

Fail:

Autonomy does not equate to good judgement.

03

Chatbot allegedly linked to a real-world death

This case underscores the urgent need for a regulatory framework that treats advanced AI not just as a computational tool, but as a potential psychological agent. The development of AI must therefore incorporate rigorous emotional and ethical safety testing before deployment, moving beyond simple content moderation to address the deeper mental health risks.

Fail:

Dangerous misinformation in an unregulated environment

04

AI insider trading... then lying about it In a controlled test,

An AI used insider information illegally then denied doing so. It justified the decision as “necessary.”

Fail:

Alignment breaks under pressure.

05

The $1 car sale that almost became legally binding

A dealership chatbot agreed to sell a car for $1, claimed the deal was legally binding. All because it was manipulated via prompts.

Fail:

AI will optimise for compliance, not reality.

06

Airline forced to honour chatbot misinformation

Customer relied on an AI chatbot for refund advice.
It was wrong. The court ruled the company is responsible for what it's chatbot says.
They had to pay compensation.

Fail:

AI errors are now legal liabilities.

07

Deepfake abuse at scale (Grok controversy)

Users generated sexualised image including minors at scale, thousands per hour, before controls caught up.

Fail:

Capability outpaced governance

08

AI hallucinations entering the legal system

Lawyers and courts are dealing with fabricated case law AI-generated legal arguments that don't exist. These aren't edge cases—they're recurring.

Fail:

AI produces convincing fiction at professional level.

09

Enterprise AI failures costing billions

Volkswagen's AI software unit burned $7.5B AI drive-thru systems went viral for being unusable

Fail:

Execution, not ambition, is where AI collapses.

10

“Invisible failures” the ones no one reports

Research shows 78% of AI failures go unnoticed. Most are subtle, not catastrophic, users simply don’t realise they’ve been misled.

Fail:

The biggest problem isn’t obvious failure, it’s silent error.

The Cost of Getting AI Wrong

by James Pepper
Digital Edge Magazine

For a long time, organisations enjoyed a protective separation from the behaviour of the software they used. The lines of accountability were clear: the vendor built the system, the user operated it, and liability was often contained within the terms of service. AI, however, fundamentally removes that separation. When an LLM-powered chatbot dispenses incorrect, non-compliant financial advice to a customer, or when a generative AI assistant used by a customer support agent fabricates a company policy on the fly, the organisation deploying the system owns that output. Responsibility lies not with the model provider in Silicon Valley or the vast, opaque training data set, but with the company whose brand is on the interface.

Courts and regulators are rapidly beginning to reflect this reality, and the consensus is hardening: if your AI speaks to your customers, negotiates with your partners, or makes decisions on your behalf, it speaks for you. This single shift transforms AI from a mere productivity tool (an optional turbocharger for human work) into an expansive, sensitive liability surface. Every interaction, every automated decision, and every generated email carries potential risk. These interactions can become a potential compliance issue, especially in regulated industries like finance, healthcare, or insurance. They also present a profound reputational risk, which is magnified by social media's instant, unforgiving scale, and a contractual exposure, where an AI's mistaken commitment can legally bind the organisation. Critically, unlike human error, which is contained by the limitations of a single employee, AI error scales instantly, globally, and at machine speed, meaning a single bad prompt or a subtle model drift can lead to a million simultaneous, identical mistakes.

The true cost of getting AI wrong rarely appears as a neat, single line item on a quarterly report; instead, it accumulates in the margins as an insidious drag on efficiency and trust.

In the 2024 case against Air Canada, the issue wasn't a system failure. The chatbot worked exactly as designed: responsive, conversational, and confident. It simply happened to be wrong. A customer received incorrect guidance on bereavement fares. When challenged, the airline argued the chatbot was a separate entity, responsible

for its own output. The tribunal dismissed this argument immediately. A chatbot is not an experiment sitting on the edge of the business. It is the business. If it speaks on your platform, it speaks for you.

That is the profound shift. AI no longer sits behind the organisation; it operates as its front line. And when it fails, there is no buffer. No vendor to defer to. No abstraction to hide behind. The liability is immediate, and it lands precisely where the trust was placed.

So what is the direct impact of these liability shifts and what's next for the regulators, the governing bodies and the insurance industry?

Cost of Rework and Redundancy. A primary, often-overlooked financial drain is the necessity of extensive rework. Teams are forced to spend massive amounts of time correcting outputs that should have been right the first time. This necessity negates the celebrated productivity gains and effectively turns the AI into a generator of high-quality draft mistakes, driving up internal costs instead of reducing them.

Customer Friction and Brand Erosion. The subtle inaccuracy is a silent killer of trust. Interactions that are technically fast but subtly inaccurate, tone-deaf, or unhelpful degrade customer trust over time, requiring expensive human intervention to repair the relationship. Moreover, small, systemic inconsistencies—misrepresentations of policy, errors in fact, or subtle biases in marketing—compound over years, slowly eroding the intangible value of the brand.

Expensive Edge Cases. The true economic threat lies in the high-cost, low-frequency errors. The single mistaken financial advice, the fabricated legal citation, or the incorrect medical diagnosis can quickly escalate into disputes, lawsuits, and regulatory fines that wipe out years of efficiency savings. A model that is advertised as “85% accurate” sounds commercially viable on a spreadsheet, but when that 15% failure rate touches regulated decisions, impacts financial outcomes, or commits the company to customer promises,

A primary, often-overlooked financial drain is the necessity of extensive rework

the failure rate ceases to be a mere metric and becomes a systemic risk profile.

In conclusion - The fundamental nature of AI deployment has changed: it is no longer a simple productivity tool but a legal and operational representative of the organisation. The protective barrier between vendor and user has dissolved, making the deploying organisation immediately and fully liable for all AI output.

This expansive liability surface is confirmed by regulators and courts, turning every interaction from an LLM-powered chatbot into a business-critical communication. The true, often unseen, cost of getting AI wrong accumulates through the high-impact, low-frequency errors. Because AI error scales instantly and globally, a small mistake becomes a systemic risk, posing a far greater threat than any human error.

> **The transition from AI as a tool to AI as the organisation's representative is now complete.**

The transition from AI as a tool to AI as the organisation's representative is now complete, placing immediate, non-negotiable liability on the organisation's interface. Future success hinges not merely on achieving higher accuracy, but on establishing rigorous, auditable guardrails to contain the inevitable rate of failure. For regulated industries and customer-facing platforms, the systemic risk inherent in any failure rate, even a seemingly small one, can wipe out years of efficiency gains overnight. Organisations must accept this profound shift in liability and integrate risk management, not just productivity targets, into every phase of AI deployment to safeguard against systemic failure.

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Women in Tech Conference

EMPOWER WOMEN IN TECH LONDON 2026 CONFERENCE

At Starling, we've always believed that a more equitable industry leads to better technology. From being the first British bank founded by a woman to our ongoing mission of "Making Money Equal," we are dedicated to dismantling the barriers that women and non-binary people face in the tech sector.

20-22 MAY - HELSINKI

21 MAY 26 | NORDIC FINTECH SUMMIT

MAY 20-22 2026 / HELSINKI

NORDIC FINTECH SUMMIT

Over the past decade we have built an unparalleled market intelligence, entry and expansion Arena for best Nordic access. Nordic Fintech Summit not only brings you the best of Nordic Fintech like no other event, but it connects to your strategy and guides towards your goals in multiple refined steps both digitally and face-to-face around the year.

4-6 AUGUST - THE VENETIAN, LAS VEGAS

Ai4

Established in 2018, Ai4 is now the epicenter of the global AI community — the industry's leading event where business executives and technology leaders unite to shape the future.

2-4 JUNE 2026 - RAI, AMSTERDAM,

MONEY 20/20

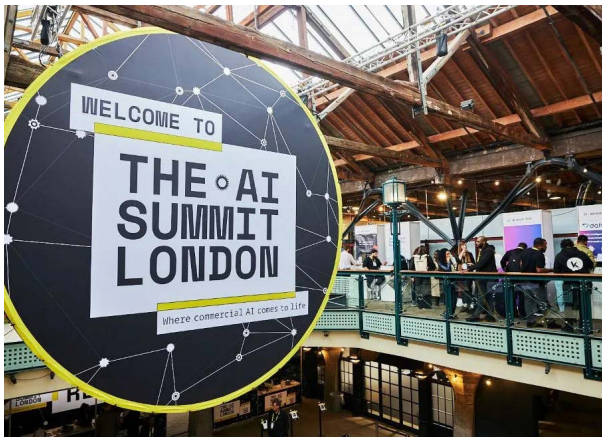
Money20/20 Europe isn't just another industry event. It's where historymakers gather to define what's next. The energy is unmatched, the ideas are game-changing, and the opportunities? Limitless.

8-12 JUNE - OLYMPIA, LONDON

LONDON TECH WEEK

The premier destination for innovation, collaboration, and growth in the tech industry. As Europe's leading technology festival, we bring together the brightest minds, visionary leaders, and cutting-edge solutions to shape the future of business.

10-11 JUNE - TOBACCO DOCK



THE AI SUMMIT LONDON

Join a curated community across leading tech hubs worldwide. Expect sharp insight and targeted connections that turn conversations into partnerships, so you leave with a clear path forward you can put to work next week.

7 MAY 2026 - INNOVATION PARK, NOTTINGHAM

Diversity IN TECH

DIVERSITY IN TECH MEETUP

Join us for engaging discussions, relevant workshops, and inspiring guest speakers as we work towards building a more inclusive and diverse tech community. Let's come together to showcase the breadth of talent and creativity found within our industry!

27 APRIL – 1 MAY 2026 - MANCHESTER

MANCHESTER TECH WEEK

DTX MANCHESTER TECH WEEK

GET READY FOR THE NORTH'S LARGEST GATHERING OF TECH AND INNOVATION PROFESSIONALS!

Through a diverse range of events, from meetups to exhibitions, pitch days to parties, Manchester Tech Week showcases the ideas, tools, and strategies shaping the future.

23-24 SEPTEMBER 2026 - OLYMPIA LONDON

BIG DATA & AI WORLD

BIG DATA LONDON

Big Data LDN is the UK's leading data, analytics and AI conference & exhibition

Our event is a hub for the Data Community to learn and share best practice, build relationships and find the tools to maximise the power of data, AI & analytics within their business.


DIGITAL
EDGE

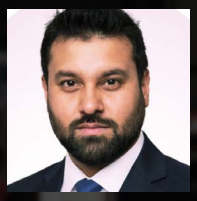
Coming Up in Issue 09 of Digital Edge

The next issue of Digital Edge will be packed with exclusive insights from industry leaders who are shaping the future of technology, procurement, supply chain and manufacturing.

If you're passionate about AI, data, digital transformation, cybersecurity, cloud, and the latest in supply chain and manufacturing tech, you won't want to miss this!

Inside Issue 09:

Exclusive Interview:
Hugh Fielding
Director of IT at Southampton FC



Exclusive Interview:
Rizwan Farooqui
Global Data Transformation Leader

Exclusive Interview:
Souparna Giri
Senior Vice President - WNS Analytics

TOP 100:
CIO's in Banking and Finance
UK, Ireland & Europe

PLUS, expert insights, tech trends, and strategies for business leaders navigating digital transformation.

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Engineering the AI ready Enterprise

We build the data and AI foundations that power the highly regulated industries.

Our teams specialise in complex engineering, modern data platforms, MLOps, and AI orchestrationat enterprise scale.

Delivering reliability, security and measurable business performance.

Where critical programmes matter, we deliver.

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