

xcede

EVENT REPORT

SPEED
DATA-ING

INTRODUCTION



We have been hosting in-person Data networking events since 2014, typically featuring industry-leading talks aimed at individual contributors. However, after our recent smaller, more intimate CDO roundtable dinners, we recognised the need for events where senior Data leaders can discuss their unique challenges.

This inspired us to innovate our events by combining the roundtable format with a speed-dating twist, enabling focused discussions and debates among a larger group of industry leaders. Our goal was to create a platform where department Heads, Directors, VPs, and C-suite executives could connect with like-minded individuals, share insights, and find common ground across diverse industry backgrounds, commercial experiences, and skill sets, including Data Engineering, BI and Analytics, Data Science, and Machine Learning.

The recent widespread public adoption of AI has placed economic pressure on our daily work, and we believe it is crucial for Data leaders to discuss issues, exchange ideas, and walk away with valuable insights. By bringing together such a diverse group, we aim to spark innovative conversations that will drive the industry forward. We would also like to thank Trainline for hosting this event. Their support and hospitality were instrumental in making it a success.



MATTHEW JONES
Sales Director



ABOUT THE EVENT

In preparation for this event, we held several discussions with our expert chairs and requested input from the participants to determine the 3 most critical pain points that would form the focal points of the evening's discussions:

1. Effectively demonstrating value and ROI from Data and AI teams and initiatives:

In today's strained economic market, profit and loss statements are scrutinised closely. Senior Data leaders are increasingly tasked with demonstrating how their teams deliver and showcase value. This responsibility has become a substantial part of their job descriptions, especially regarding AI initiatives.

2. Career Progression for Senior Data Leaders:

As the field of Data continuously develops, so do the career paths of Data professionals. While there are clearer paths for entry-level and senior roles, the progression for those at the Head, Director, or VP levels remains less defined. Options include advancing to Chief Data Officer (CDO) roles, transitioning to other C-suite positions, starting their own businesses, or moving into consulting. This is an ongoing conversation as the industry matures.

3. Ensuring that AI initiatives Remain Ethical and are in line with Regulations:

The importance of maintaining ethical standards and complying with legislation in AI initiatives is a hot topic. The main question is how concerned we should be about AI ethics and governance and what the best practices are to ensure compliance and ethical behaviour.

The following report breaks down some of the key insights and takeaways from each topic.

THE CHAIRS



Adam Nagus
Founder of Digimasters



Angela Livingstone
CDO at Dataly



Angie Ma
Co-founder of Faculty



David Ellis
Co-founder of Station10



Henry Brown
CDO at Ascent



Ian Thomas
Former CDO at Credera



John Wyllie
MD at DataSparq



Julian Elliott
Chief Data Scientist at Chambers



Karine Serfaty
Former CDO at The Economist



Mike Seville
CDO at Beauty Pie



Penelope Bellegarde
Founder of The Data Touch



Piers Stobbs
VP Science at Deliveroo



Neil Mason
Founder at Applied Insights



Soroush Lajevardi
Expert Associate Partner at Bain & Co

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EVENT VIDEO [HERE](#)



TOPIC 1:

EFFECTIVELY DEMONSTRATING VALUE AND ROI FROM DATA AND AI TEAMS AND INITIATIVES



Track ROI using quantifiable metrics: Overcome challenges in tracking ROI by defining clear metrics, finding a number that represents success, and starting from the end of a project and working backwards. We saw that the success metric varied substantially between industries with digital and B2C companies valuing return and MVP customers, whereas product, SAAS and B2B organisations frequently valued customer satisfaction ratings.



Gain C-Suite Support: Educate and gain support from C-suite executives by defining clear objectives and agreeing on measurable outcomes. Notably, a leader from the insurance industry stated that their relationship with the CPO was valuable, utilising Data to produce innovative and well-received products.



Manage Upwards and Upsell: Secure support from higher management and demonstrate the benefits of Data initiatives to help further upsell within the organisation. A participant from the Media industry stressed the importance of impressing senior stakeholders within one section of their organisation with tangible results, enabling them to upsell to that individual stakeholder and then, in turn, securing further support from the finance and marketing departments.



Champion Use Cases: Business representatives should champion successful use cases to promote the benefits of Data and AI initiatives within the organisation. Interestingly, one Data leader within the Gaming industry spoke about how he utilised use cases from rival organisations to demonstrate the value of ROI from Data.



Build an Experimentation Team: Have a dedicated team to focus on ROI across various domains, such as marketing campaigns and product sales. A participant from a leading digital B2C company highlighted the benefits of having an experimentation unit in tandem with the Data Science team to ensure that at all times they were testing the best solution for ROI.

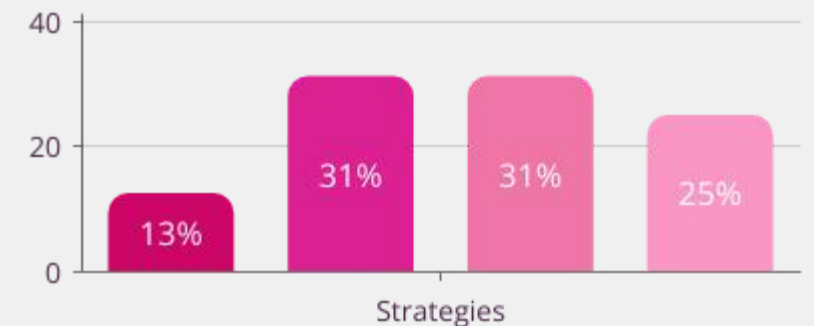


Embedded Analytics Models: Implement embedded models for default analytics teams to streamline processes and demonstrate value. An individual from a leading financial company emphasised the importance of embedding analytics models to ensure that everybody understood the value of Data as if it were their own project.



Use Generative AI to adapt to rapid changes: Identify gaps and present improvements to the board to enhance ROI. Stay flexible and adapt to rapid technological changes, especially with modern AI and LLMs, to avoid redundant efforts. A leader from a renowned tech organisation mentioned that they were able to build an entirely automated customer experience suite, saving costs and headcount issues.

What strategies have been most effective in gaining executive support for Data and AI projects?



- Presenting case studies and success stories
- Demonstrating quick wins and short-term gains
- Aligning projects with strategic business goals
- Quantifying potential ROI before project initiation

TOPIC 2:

CAREER PROGRESSION FOR SENIOR DATA LEADERS

Career progression for Senior Data Leaders remains varied, with no set structure, across different industries based on the company's goals and vision. However, there were several aspects that our participants felt were important to highlight.

Navigating non-linear career paths:

Career progression at this level often means more autonomy and influence rather than a straightforward step up in job title. It is also important to note that titles in data roles are not linear, and positions are often tailored to individuals, adding a level of complexity to career paths. Internal coaches and mentors are critical, especially those who can sponsor careers; being in the right place at the right time can significantly influence career trajectories.

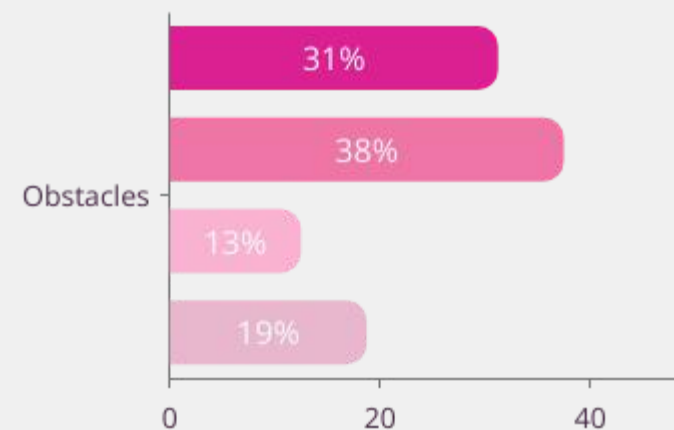
The importance of developing soft skills:

Despite a consensus on the restrictions in current roles limiting their value addition, data remains a key component across C-suite roles, keeping career paths versatile. For instance, those in engineering companies often face limitations staying in pure data science roles, emphasising the importance of developing your soft skills. Leadership, personality, and navigating internal politics will prove invaluable as you transition from technical roles to team leads and, ultimately, to business leadership positions. Another essential skill is communication, which is universal across several industries, from innovation labs that need product sponsors to academia to product-related roles in consumer or B2B divisions. Embedding yourself into the company culture, understanding the "so what" of your role, and continuously articulating the commercial value is crucial to career advancement.

Reflecting on career aspirations and organisational alignment:

A recent trend has been over-promotion, which has led to an inflation of skillsets to retain key talent. Our survey indicated that while 47% of our attendees see themselves in the role of Chief Data Officer (CDO) in the next 5 years, not all senior data leaders aspire to this role with 14% of participants looking to be in another C-suite role such as Chief Product Officer (CPO), Chief Customer Officer (CCO), or Chief Operating Officer (COO). Therefore, it is vital to take the time to reflect on whether the company's trajectory and career growth offerings align with your personal and professional goals. Those who aspire to the CDO role may prefer this to the CEO role as a CDO maintains control over the data environment and makes practical, data-driven decisions, which may contrast with the risk-taking nature often required of a CEO.

What has been the biggest obstacle in your career progression as a senior Data leader?



- Limited opportunities for advancement
- Lack of mentorship or guidance
- Keeping up with rapidly changing technology
- Balancing technical and managerial responsibilities

TOPIC 3:

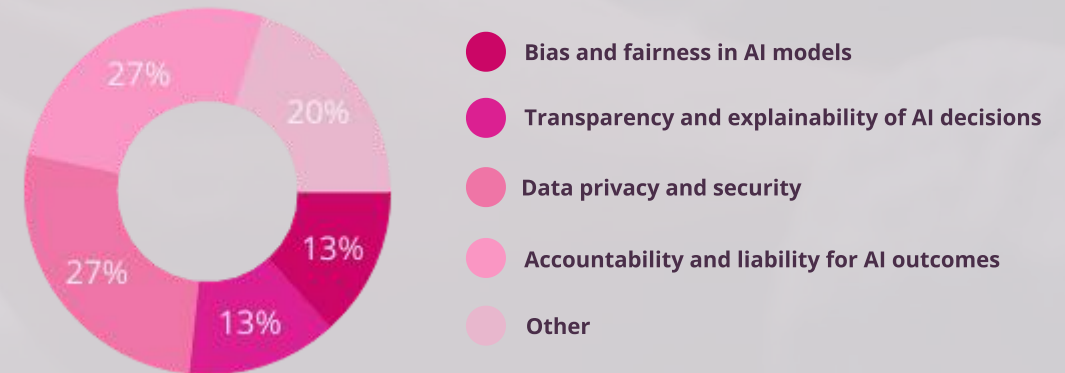
ENSURING THAT AI INITIATIVES REMAIN ETHICAL AND ARE IN LINE WITH REGULATIONS

The recent widespread usage of AI has raised concerns about its ethics and regulation. The Finance and Healthcare industries already have rigorous compliance standards that extend to AI initiatives, though many others lack guidelines. Companies often default to general Data protection laws like GDPR, which overlook the broader ethical implications of AI use. The lack of ongoing control after the launch of an AI product also raises a significant issue. Ensuring continuous monitoring and updates is crucial to mitigating increased risks, such as biases, which can be deeply embedded in language models. Additionally, the global trend towards data privacy, such as the right to forget, conflicts with AI's need for continuous data input. Balancing data privacy with the need for data to train and improve AI systems makes implementing regulations more difficult. There is also no clear accountability for AI usage within organisations, which means that teams using AI products operate with great autonomy, leading to inconsistent ethical considerations.

It must be noted that implementing AI regulations will be no easy feat and comes with several challenges. AI is currently used mostly for internal purposes, and therefore, the discourse arises with regard to ethical considerations, which vary by company and cultural context, making standardisation difficult. Companies must define what is ethical for them and who decides these standards. However, general ethical frameworks will be needed as external use grows. Having a varied customer base that requires customised AI solutions to meet diverse needs without compromising ethics can prove difficult. Regulation can also hinder innovation; however, it is necessary to ensure AI remains on the right side of legal and ethical standards.

Chief Risk Officers (CROs) and Data Privacy Officers (DPOs) have been game-changers for data privacy and will play critical roles in forming AI regulations, overseeing AI ethics, and ensuring compliance. However, these concerns have created a need for specialised roles that combine ethical, legal, and technical understanding to address AI-specific issues. Establishing AI ethics policies will require collaborative efforts to effectively manage the overlap between government regulations and private sector practices. As AI systems continue to develop, it is important that AI governance groups are formed to evaluate AI vendors and assess risks to ensure the most up-to-date best practices.

What is the most significant ethical concern related to AI that your organisation faces?



EVENT TESTIMONIALS



"It's just a lovely occasion. Frankly, it's so hard to interact with your peers and senior people working in different places and different organisations. It's quite rare to actually get everyone in the same room and really talk about fundamental things, like the challenges to what we do, so it's really lovely to have the opportunity."

- Piers Stobbs | VP Science | Deliveroo

"The topic I liked and felt was more relevant to me at this point in time was the ethical side of AI. That was a very good discussion, very thought-provoking, with propositions and ideas from all the different members of the table. I don't think we reached an agreement, or I don't think there's a proper solution, but still, it was a very nice debate."

- Pedro Cosa | CDO | Centrica



"Great conversation, good pizza and drinks as well, and this is the kind of thing we need more of. It's about getting that outside perspective, getting a window into how other companies are doing things, and getting ideas on how we can improve things for ourselves and our companies."

- Reda Kechouri | Head of ML | Trainline

"I have taken away that all the leaders here have very different problems, but also great experiences, solutions, and learnings. So I've learned a bit from everyone and can hopefully apply these learnings to my challenges in this field, which is very fast moving."

- Angie Ma | Co-Founder | Faculty



CONTACT US

We have a proven track record of delivering tailored talent solutions for diverse short and long-term projects worldwide. Through our long-standing time in the industry, we have built a reputation as a reliable talent acquisition partner. Our high-quality service delivery of top Technology talent to our clients' projects has led us to where we are today.

If you are hiring across Data, AI & Machine Learning, Product, Software, Cloud, or Cyber, get in touch with us today at info@xcede.com

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