KPMG

Voice of the CDAO

A recurring conversation with CDAOs on the modern data-driven enterprise

July 2025

CDAOs focus on data for AI readiness to drive business growth

As organizations accelerate their artificial intelligence (AI) strategies, chief data and AI officers (CDAOs) are emerging as key architects of enterprise readiness. Across industries, CDAOs are reimagining data management to ensure data is secure, compliant, and usable—laying the foundation for AI-driven innovation. They are tackling challenges with diverse data types, such as call center transcripts and invoice files, and are leveraging trusted platforms, tagging, and archiving tools to streamline access and usability.

Governance is a central focus, with CDAOs shaping how users interact with data products and ensuring responsible data stewardship. Their efforts often center on preparing data for AI, including building robust data catalogs, consolidating platforms, and optimizing data sets for AI applications. Ultimately, success is measured by adoption—whether through enterprise knowledge management, high engagement with data tools, or growing influence in the C-suite.

On the CDAO agenda

Managing and curating data

Ensuring data is secure, compliant, and usable

Enterprise knowledge management

Leveraging tools like tagging and archiving

Integrating AI and process transformation

Data optimized for AI capabilities

Managing and curating data

Ensuring data is secure, compliant, and usable

CDAOs are focused on ensuring that both structured and unstructured data are secure, compliant, and usable. This herculean task is supporting by federated governance, whereby the business actively participates in curating and managing data.

"From an AI readiness standpoint, we're seeing a data quality renaissance and a return to the basics," observes Danielle Beringer of KPMG, who served as a chief data officer for six years.

Quality data is the backbone of AI, ensuring models are accurate, fair, efficient, and trusted. Even hyper scalers are adding data science agents, data engineering agents, and data quality agents. The quality imperative on data amounts to table stakes. CDAOs have other priorities in terms of access and availability.

"We want to make more unstructured data available for AI use, but it's challenged by sensitive customer information like recorded calls into the call center or internal documents like agent notes," explains the CDAO of a financial services company. "We're starting to work on ensuring this data is more easily structured and consumed."

The key is to make data like invoices, manuals, and internal documentation more structured and consumable while assuring compliance with data privacy regulations.

For some, the challenge is grappling with data when moving from proof of concept to enterprise deployment.

"The whole data side kicks in when a use case matures," notes the CDAO. "With structured and unstructured data scattered across the firm, I'm a big believer in taking baby steps."

For other leading firms, the answer to the explosion in data is federated governance. Human resources, finance, and other departments are treated as domains with their own data responsibilities. Other companies are leveraging technology solutions that include data governance or eying potential cost savings.

"We went from 37 data platforms down to 5, which cut costs, and adopted a curated data catalog," explains the CDAO of a technology company. Platform consolidation has helped create a cleaner, more manageable data ecosystem, while the catalog supports governance. If a tenant or agent on the network doesn't use data from the catalog for their AI initiative, then they receive what's jokingly referred to as an "eviction notice."

"Unifying data and AI governance under a single framework enables organizations to accelerate innovation, reduce risk, and ensure consistent, transparent oversight."

—Matteo Colombo, KPMG, Global Leader for Cloud, Data & AI

Enterprise knowledge management

Leveraging tools like tagging and archiving

Consistent tagging and categorization ensure that data is uniformly organized, which is essential for maintaining data integrity. As data grows, tagging and categorization make it easier to manage and scale. Without a structured system, managing large volumes of data can become chaotic and inefficient.

Some organizations are building data marketplaces to give users a clear starting point. As the CDAO of a retail company describes, "We created a data marketplace for business users to discover the data products that they can consume directly or build on top of to meet requirements."

Having a tagging program for unstructured data is a good idea. An even better idea is also building an archival program that can retain data cost-effectively long term with search and retrieval functionality. For industries like finance, healthcare, and government, keep abreast of data retention policies.

Unfortunately, many organizations struggle with a lack of discipline around document management. There simply isn't a way to police all the data created by an organization. A potential workaround has surfaced called enterprise document management that is best illustrated by the experience of a CDAO with a technology company.

"We analyze tens of millions of documents and tag them dynamically with rules that the business side can verify. We also scan and tag with rules all documents across all repositories. It's not just domains but rather a whole taxonomy."

Transforming at the domain level impacts business processes across departments. It's no longer a use case here, there, or everywhere. It's a value stream with capabilities like reusable agents that can be dynamically accessed based on criteria like security permissions.

This is a differentiator that only the CDAO can truly articulate: "Our enterprise knowledge management program enables domain-specific vectorized data at massive scale. That's how we're creating value."

What made the difference wasn't just the data or the technology—it was the CDAO's strong relationship with leadership, grounded in a deep understanding of both the technical landscape and its strategic implications.

"Large language models are a lot better with unstructured data."

—Automotive CDAO

Integrating AI and process transformation

Data optimized for AI capabilities

Data that is optimized for AI meets the standard for security, compliance, and usability. In fact, AI can be enlisted in core data management practices, such as automated labeling and classification, thus improving the visibility and utility of the data.

AI unleased in this manner can do more. For example, by integrating AI into existing processes, there is the potential for AI to autonomously rewire processes. It starts with exceptional process documentation. Such documentation ensures AI systems are secure and compliant with regulatory requirements. Specific risks are identified and managed while additional requirements apply to transparency and human oversight. Finally, documentation fuels efficiency, accuracy, and continuous improvement.

For a financial services CDAO, before AI can be unleashed, data must do its thing. "Getting structured data to a place where it is trusted and easy to find has taken years. With unstructured data, we started with a narrow set of use cases that is being made more and more available."

An automotive CDAO has a similar, albeit slightly different, data challenge. "We spent most of our careers trying to structure data because computers work better with it. Now, large language models are a lot better with unstructured data."

Interestingly, the challenge for this company relates to structured data and adding more descriptive metadata. With text descriptions, underlying data models can talk to the database rather than query it.

For CDAOs, the goal is to enable users to interact with data in a more intuitive and meaningful way. A semantic layer abstracts the complexities of underlying data structures and provides a user-friendly interface for querying and reporting. This is typified by the experience of a CDAO with a top automaker.

"We're building out a more business-friendly semantic search for the data catalog internally."

Danielle Beringer, a KPMG principal, knows data inside and out and has a perspective on data catalogs.

"Everyone should think of it as a catalog of catalogs but enriched with a social and data utility aspect. That's becoming extremely important, particularly with agents that data supports."

Ultimately, that is where data is headed, supporting AI agents that carry out process activities.

"The presence of technology does not equal success. However, adoption does."

—Danielle Beringer, KPMG, Principal, Advisory

Key considerations

- Find technology that supports the journey
- Adopt a curated data catalog
- Talk up data to the c-suite

Additional resources

Unlocking value with data products

Beyond the hype: GenAI is delivering, new KPMG survey shows

The perfect fit: Unlocking new value with GenAI

KPMG 2025 Futures Report

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