

NTT's Chief AI Officer and the rise of agentic AI



Introduction: AI enters the C-suite

Artificial intelligence is reshaping business models, value chains and the nature of work. The last two years have seen an explosion in generative AI, and organizations are now exploring **agentic AI**—networks of autonomous, goal-driven software agents that learn from feedback and collaborate with humans to execute complex tasks. As AI becomes central to strategy rather than a technical afterthought, a new leadership role has emerged: the **chief AI officer (CAIO)**. This report examines the appointment of Abhijit Dubey as CEO and CAIO of NTT DATA and explains why the CAIO role is becoming a strategic imperative for companies across industries.

Abhijit Dubey's appointment and NTT's vision

- **Dual role:** On **3 September 2025** Abhijit Dubey announced that he would serve both as **CEO** and **chief AI officer** of NTT DATA. He views AI as the core of the company's identity: "AI is not a side initiative. It is the core of our identity and the engine of our future" ¹. Dubey argues that every CEO should consider themselves a CAIO and that AI should be embedded in every strategic decision ².
- **Purpose of the role:** Dubey outlined five reasons why a CEO should lead the AI agenda: (1) AI strategy is business strategy; (2) clients need confidence that AI delivers lasting value; (3) adoption at scale requires top-down leadership; (4) AI transformation is also a cultural and talent transformation; and (5) responsible AI demands executive-level governance ³. He emphasises that AI must be deployed ethically and sustainably and invites employees and clients to co-create the future ⁴.

- **Agentic AI vision:** NTT DATA describes **agentic AI** as the next transformative wave—AI agents that take initiative, make decisions and collaborate with humans to achieve outcomes ⁵. Dubey notes that agentic AI will impact every sector and will enable a human-machine hybrid workplace ⁶.

Abhijit Dubey's background

- Dubey is **President, CEO and CAIO** of NTT DATA and sits on the advisory board of NTT Venture Capital ⁷. Prior to leading NTT DATA, he was **CEO of NTT Ltd.**, which merged with NTT DATA to form a \$30 billion business and technology services company ⁸.
- He joined NTT in February 2021 after more than **20 years at McKinsey & Company**, where he was a **Senior Partner** and core leader of the Global Tech, Media and Telecom practice ⁹. At McKinsey he advised technology companies on strategy, go-to-market transformation, product development and mergers and acquisitions, founded the firm's cloud practice and co-founded its internal venture organisation ¹⁰.
- Before McKinsey he worked at **Schlumberger** in the oil-field services business, and he holds an M.S. in industrial engineering from **Stanford University** and a B.Tech. in mechanical engineering from **IIT Bombay** ¹¹.

The emerging Chief AI Officer role

Rapid growth of CAIO positions

- A LinkedIn search for "chief AI officer" returned **≈1,800 profiles** in April 2025, spanning organisations from NASA to L'Oréal and national oil companies ¹². The number of CAIOs worldwide surpassed **1,000 in 2024**, up from about 250 in 2022, mirroring the earlier rise of chief digital and chief data officers ¹³. The first CAIO summit held in Boston attracted about **500 CAIOs**, most from technology companies ¹⁴.
- **Government mandate:** In March 2024 the U.S. Office of Management and Budget directed every federal agency to **designate a chief AI officer within 60 days** ¹⁵. CAIOs are tasked with coordinating AI use, promoting innovation, managing risks and ensuring compliance with laws and ethics ¹⁶. The MIT Sloan Management Review notes that 11 % of midsize to large companies already had a CAIO in 2023, and another 21 % were actively hiring one ¹⁷.
- **Corporate adoption:** Gartner predicts that **35 % of large enterprises will have a CAIO by 2025**, and the Beyond Chiefs article reports that **45 % of AI executives already hold the title** and that **77 % of Fortune 500 companies with CAIOs achieved at least 2 % growth in 2023**. These statistics suggest that CAIOs are becoming a staple of corporate leadership rather than a niche role.

Why organisations need a CAIO

- **Strategic alignment and scale:** MIT SMR argues that a dedicated CAIO reduces fragmentation of AI projects and ensures that AI initiatives align with business objectives; without executive oversight, AI investments can become a "mishmash of fragmented and overlapping projects" ¹⁸.

- **Governance and ethics:** Dataiku's overview stresses that CAIOs establish **responsible AI practices**, addressing bias, transparency and privacy ¹⁹. The U.S. federal memo lists responsibilities such as instituting governance processes, maintaining AI inventories, developing AI strategies, promoting equity and inclusion and managing safety-impacting AI risks ²⁰.
- **Talent and culture:** CAIOs bridge technical and non-technical teams, attract top AI talent and foster a culture of innovation ²¹. Dubey highlights the importance of culture and talent transformation, noting that AI requires upskilling, new ways of working and an AI-first mindset ²².
- **Cross-functional coordination:** Because AI touches all functions—products, operations, finance, HR and customer experience—the CAIO provides a unified view across the organization. Without this coordination, AI initiatives may be siloed in technical departments and fail to scale ²³.

Challenges and power dynamics

- Dataiku warns that CAIO duties can overlap with those of the CIO and chief data officer, leading to power struggles over who owns AI; clear role definitions and collaboration are necessary ²⁴.
- Title inflation is a concern; Brunswick notes that many LinkedIn profiles using the CAIO title are unqualified or no longer in the role, and that some organizations merely rename generative-AI leads to “chief AI officer” ²⁵. This makes it imperative that companies ensure CAIOs possess deep experience in deploying AI, leading teams and ensuring responsible AI ²⁶.

Impact beyond technology providers

- The rise of CAIOs extends far beyond technology firms. Brunswick's list of CAIOs spans **NASA, L'Oréal and national oil companies**, showing adoption in aerospace, consumer goods and energy ²⁷. Government agencies now require CAIOs ¹⁵, and surveys show that many traditional industries are hiring or seeking CAIOs ¹⁷.
- Studies indicate that companies with CAIOs achieve higher growth and outperform peers, suggesting that AI leadership delivers measurable business benefits. Organisations that fail to appoint AI leadership risk falling behind in innovation, governance and talent acquisition.

Conclusion: CAIO as a strategic imperative

Abhijit Dubey's decision to combine the CEO and CAIO roles sends a clear signal that **AI is now a board-level priority**. His emphasis on agentic AI suggests that organisations will soon manage networks of autonomous agents working alongside humans, which will transform workflows and create new value ²⁸. The rapid proliferation of CAIO roles across government and the private sector, and projections that a significant share of large enterprises will have CAIOs within a few years, indicate that this role is no longer optional. Companies across industries—whether technology providers, manufacturers, retailers or government agencies—should **prepare to appoint a chief AI officer** to unify their AI strategy, embed ethical and responsible practices, cultivate talent and lead the next era of human-machine collaboration.

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