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4. Relentless Collaboration

They also recognised the criticality of broad collaboration to maximise adoption.

"From day one, we engaged with a lot of people. We started piloting, workshopping, and brainstorming with engagement squads, which consisted of digital leads and champions, experts and early adopters, continuous improvement leads, and change leads."

They also re-engaged with leaders to prepare them to support adoption.

"We spent a lot of time explaining what we wanted to do and what it would mean for their groups, for their teams, for their people. We even had custom-tailored upskilling sessions with them, going through concepts of machine learning and data management and showing them examples."

Results

Results

The outcomes of Syngenta's Digital Growth Academy highlight the success of their strategy.

1. High Adoption Rates

To date, the academy has engaged approximately 2,000 active learners and saw 1,600 completions of the Data Fundamentals course, despite it not being mandatory.

2. Cross-Functional Adoption

Other business units within Syngenta have adopted and repackaged the academy's content for their own use, indicating the programme's broad applicability and success.

3. Increased Employee Engagement

R&D groups have independently organised digital upskilling events, underlining the programme's close alignment with the organisational culture.

4. Shift in Data Perception

Enhanced recognition of data's importance, evidenced by requests from business units to appoint data governance leads and establish data asset owners.

5. Senior Leadership Support

There has also been strong endorsement and involvement from senior leaders, who have participated in tailored upskilling sessions and promoted the academy's initiatives.

CASE STUDY

BAE Systems' Ambitious Data-Engagement Programme

BAE Systems' approach to improving their level of data engagement follows a similar approach. They initially began their programme by focusing on catering to the training needs of specialists, including data owners and stewards, before identifying natural data enthusiasts. Here, the approach has been to equip them with content that supports them to advocate for and demonstrate the value of data and analytics to their peers.

This approach has enabled them to reach over 1,600 employees. However, the target is much more ambitious:

"Our target is everyone: 100,000 employees," says Samir Patel, going on to call it an "outrageously high target, but just challenging the business to reach it, I think we'll get close. If we get to 70%, I'll be delighted, but if we tell people we're aiming for that, the first thing they will do is try and make a case for why they're in the 30% that doesn't need to do it."

Like Papadatos, BAE Systems is now building a Digital Academy following many of the same core principles including avoiding gimmicks and top-down mandates. Patel also adds that healthy competition has been a great way to maintain engagement. Finally, he stresses the importance of focusing on real-life applications and upskilling the data team so, when working with business users, they are able to "talk to each other rather than past each other."

CONCLUSION

The insights shared by Guild contributors reveal that CDOs are arriving at a significant inflexion point. In 2023, generative AI was creating ripples in organisations. In the elapsing twelve months, the floodgates have opened, and we're seeing CDOs managing the impact. However, they are not all in the same boat.

The key revelation has been the impact CDOs in more mature organisations are now generating by stealthily moving beyond proof-of-concept to successfully scaling AI technologies, both generative and general-purpose.

The transformation that has been largely theoretical in previous years is materialising, although not without its challenges. The technological challenges are universal, and CDOs will work together as a community to overcome them.

The true differentiation will come through the application of AI at scale. As explored in this report, this requires organisations to rely much more heavily on the business acumen and leadership qualities of their CDOs, who must be able to deeply understand today's business objectives and processes, reimagine their future and galvanise stakeholders in order to orchestrate its transformation. Critically, they must continue to support the efforts to build a data-engaged organisation as Paola Cagliani, EU Chief Data and Analytics Officer, Admiral Group, underlines:

"Training and organisation on AI is essential for maximising the value and the impact of artificial intelligence, fostering a culture of innovation and learning. Otherwise, the risk is that the organisation itself becomes the blocker, not the technology, ethics or compliance."

Given the complexities and unknowns of even the proximate future, companies will need to urgently recognise the strategic importance of the CDO role and trust their counsel. In organisations where data and analytics are still playing on the sidelines of business strategy, they must be integrated as soon as possible, starting with key strategic programmes.

As we explored in Chapter One, data and AI are not just the drivers of a more unpredictable future but also a critical part of the solution. Already, a core group of Data Leaders' members are working together to tackle one of the key contributors to uncertainty: climate change, through the Data-Enabled Sustainability Initiative.

It's a step in the direction that a growing number of data leaders believe the CDO is heading towards, even seeing them as the next generation of CEOs:

"I have a very strong conviction that the next evolution of the CDO is a person who pays attention to the business performance of the company, thinking not only about the gross margin or revenue, but also about people and the planet."

Didier Mamma, Decathlon.

Whatever the predictions, one certainty is that the CDO role will continue to evolve in line with its growing criticality as CEOs commit to making data and AI the core competency of the organisation. Whether that will be as CDO, CDAO, CDAIO, or a new title remains to be seen.
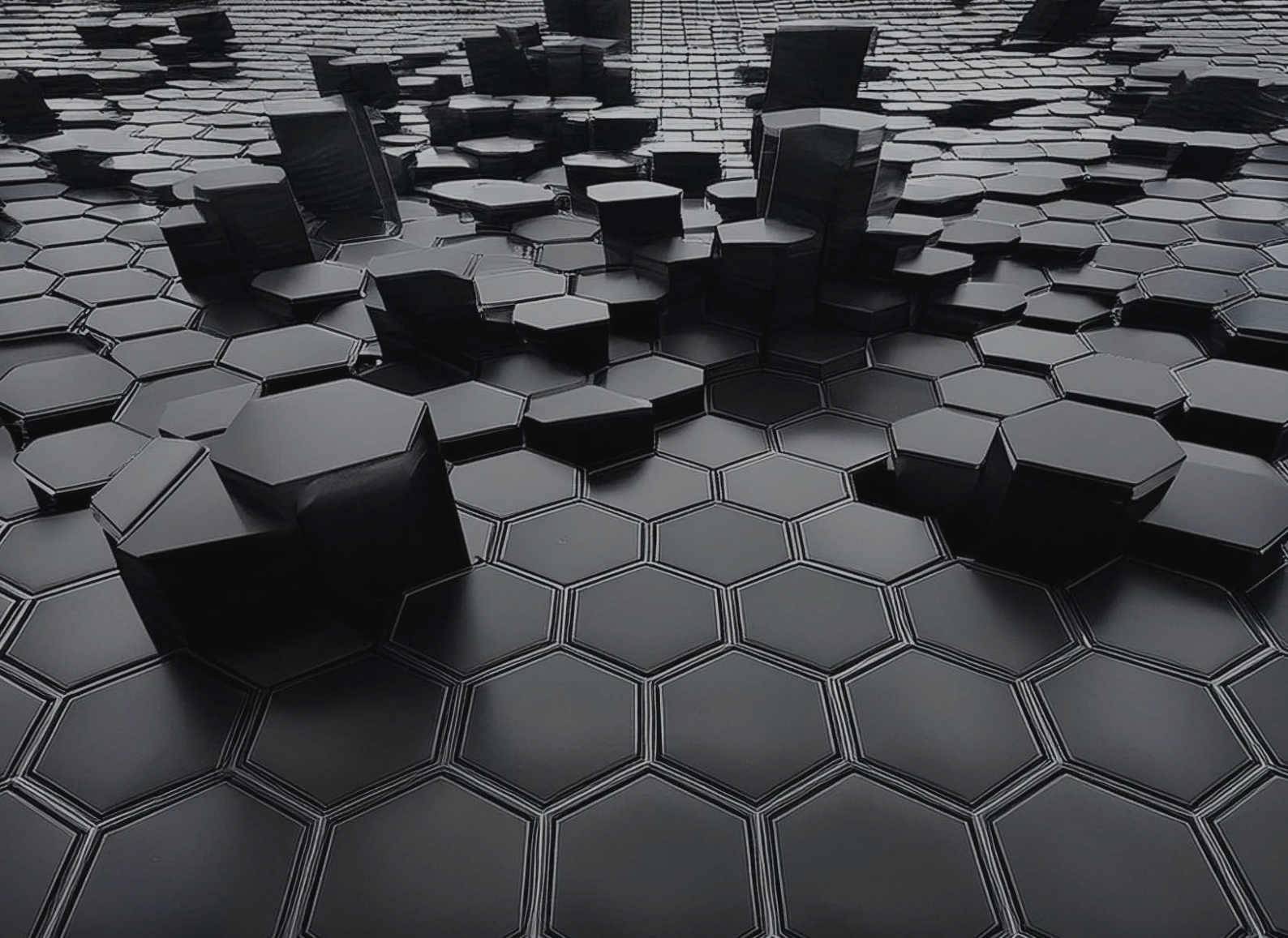
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