



AI LEADERS PODCAST ROLE OF THE CHIEF DATA AND ANALYTICS OFFICER AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Julia Westland [00:00:00] The really the best chief data and analytics officers are the ones that are building these bridges across the entire organization and are able to build for the long term by delivering in the short term.

Joe Depa [00:00:19] Greetings. Thank you all for joining us on today's AI Leaders podcast. This is Joe Depa. I lead our European Applied Intelligence Practice. I'm joined by Julia Westland. She's the co-lead for Spencer Stewart data analytics practice. And today, we're going to discuss the role of chief Data analytics officer and how it's evolved over the last decade and even the last 12 months. So, thank you very much, Julia, for joining us today. Do you want to share it just a bit about your background and some of the work you're doing in working with CEOs and chief data and analytics officers?

Julia Westland [00:00:49] Yeah, Thanks, Joe. You know, we work across the entire data and analytics leadership spectrum. So, from CDAO all the way through to data science, data engineering, ML to data product, and also those data foundations across governance and platform roles, we're pretty unique in that, like where my colleagues and I, we're pretty specialized in this space. So, we really focus here and it's kind of a core thing we know, and we have really nice solid networks, but we work across all industries and from growth stage businesses to established ones too. So, we work you know have historically worked

a lot in financial institutions, which is one of the first sectors to bring about kind of core data, chief data officer role. And now that's evolved a lot into Chief Data and analytics officer and other sectors. We've seen, for example, telco, retail in consumer and more recently health care and to some extent industrial kind of coming on more and more.

Joe Depa [00:01:46] Very good. And in terms of the role of the CDAO and CDO, right? Chief Data Officer and Chief Data and Analytics Officer, what has been your experience over the last, let's call it 3 to 5 years and what's the growth in the role? And are you seeing the role skillset required changed by your clients, whether they're CEOs or boards?

Julia Westland [00:02:04] I mean, is great question. Like we've really seen a real uptick in our work. I guess having recently looked at some of the work we did, you know, we've seen like a ten X increase in the data and analytics leadership role specifically in Europe in the last five years alone. In the U.S., the increase is more like five X, but that's because the role is so much more established in the U.S., and they have been really early adopters in taking on that role at very senior levels. As I mentioned, like the big drivers initially came from financial services because, you know, post regulation in the post financial crisis, regulation mandated that every bank needed to have a chief data officer, and it was the regulators seeing that as being really mission critical to the success. But this was like a



helpful catalyst for us all. And it started as data focused, you know, really started, and helped us focus on the agenda, making data an important part of the boardroom conversation. But the topic has broadened so much beyond this. And the thing that I think is great is like the very name of your podcast now, right? We've moved from beyond data, like the core elements into now thinking about what's AI going to do and the real challenge, thinking about you know the role and how it's adopting and what are the new skills needed is really about that more strategic side being able to think about how is AI going to supercharge the business strategy? And this is a real gap we're still seeing in terms of skills that are evolving. You know, really here is it's about having the right kind of strategic mindset and being able to speak to the business in terms that they understand. in the everyday challenge set that the executive team sits down and discusses, you want that data leader to be a participant in that flow of discussion, catching those problems and the ways that they're described, but then kind of having a spin around, how could AI help to support it? And you know, data governance and data management we all know is protection, that those are like critical enabling foundations that you've got to get right. But those aren't the things that the boardroom really wants to talk about. And so actually it's about finding ways to deliver those capabilities but embedded in that business value kind of conversation about what's the impact that's going to be had and that's how executive teams want to hear about it. So, what we used to see about these leaders asking for things like what were their credentials around data governance? Where had they understood you know the criticality of the elements or the platforms, for example, and then kind of hiring the right people? You know, now the conversation is much more about, well, tell us the proof points that you've had or yes, okay, it's great that you've built those pilots, but how did you scale those pilots and how did you embed data products and make that an ongoing capability? And that's really where A.I. has helped to accelerate that conversation. But I'm really curious from your side, Joe, like you're in all this every day.

What are you seeing like with your kind of clients? We're the ones that are doing this the best. What are they doing and how they think about using AI?

Joe Depa [00:04:59] Yeah, absolutely. Julie and I agree with you that the role of the Chief Data Officer and the Chief data and analytics officer has become increasingly important. What we're seeing happen in the industry is our CEOs and our boards are asking us, look, we've made all these investments in technology and cloud adoption has become critical and in fact, it's enabled a lot of different data methods and data and analytics methods that have never been enabled before. So now the key question that our clients are asking today, CDAOs are how do I get value out of this investment? I've spent the money and how do I drive the value? So, I think the successful chief data officers that we have today has spent time understanding three components. One is around tracking to the business value that they're driving. Right. And enabling that organization along those lines. The second is around the platform and the foundational components with data governance, data management, machine learning models, analytics. And the third, really important and becoming even more important is around talent and culture. Because what we've seen is the ability for a CDO to come in, it's really important for them to enable the rest of the organization, whether they enable it through acquisitions, right, or whether they enable it through hiring or they enable it through transferring talent and cross-training talent. It's really important that for a CDO to be successful, they've got to enable the rest of the organization or else we've seen some CDOs not be successful. So, I think those are the key messages that we're seeing from our clients today. Julie And I think what's really important for today's CDO is you can't do it all, but you do need to make some incremental progress along the way.



Julia Westland [00:06:30] Well, I'm always glad to hear that, like, talent is kind of a key part of the of the agenda, and it's part of why I'm really passionate about what I do, because I think that you can have the right strategy and the right set up But actually without the right person in the role, the organization doesn't move forward. So, you know, definitely what I'm seeing is those best leaders being able to build great, strong partnerships and talk about all those different elements, the agenda that you so rightly point out as being the key ones. And it's really hard to get the talent right, I think, in this space, you know, because it's a whole new set of career paths that hasn't existed really for most organizations You know. how do you have like what are the different career paths around data science? How is it different around machine learning and data engineering? And there are so many different handshakes with other parts of the organization because actually these data practitioners can't operate like in their own island. They have to beconnected to the rest of the organization. I mean, Joe in some of your clients, like what have you seen around the ones that do it best? How do they connect broadly across the whole organization?

Joe Depa [00:07:32] Yeah, you're right on. I think that the key is that you've got to both be a critical champion of data and analytics, but you also need to understand the business priorities. And so, for most of the CDOs that we're working with that the successful ones have been able to harness the existing culture, right. And make sure that they are applying some disruptive methods but not being too disruptive. Right. Because that usually leads to failure. But if they harness the existing culture and they enable the organization, those are usually the most successful data officers. The other thing that we're seeing our teams do, and that's some of the chief data officers do more successfully, is if they focus right. So often I talk to clients about you can't have 300 different high priority items because you're just not going to get them done right. So, what are the tell me the top five things that are most important to your organization that you're enabling with data? And if you can get to focus, then what it does is it allows your team to

focus it allows your data management governance process to focus and allows your cloud platform to focus. And so, I think the key is very early on chief data officer has to understand what are those critical focus areas for him or her to be successful? How about you? How about you? What are some of the skills that you think are really important to today's Chief data officer?

Julia Westland [00:08:44] It's a great question. It's a really difficult role because it's one that goes across everything. And so, they have to find a way to be both very strategic but also very kind of connected into the here and now to deliver the value. Because if a chief data and analytics officer is talking too much about what's going to happen in three years time, but there isn't enough proof of value in the here and now, actually the executive team in the rest of the organization gets a little bit tired of hearing about what could happen, and they want to see a lot more about what is happening, what's different in my role and at my every day in our organization with respect to the here and now. So finding a way to leverage as existing governance models, existing projects to be able to amplify them with the use of you know AI or other techniques to be able to deliver value in a way that an organization is already set up to deliver projects and program so that they can change something, have some impact, and really have some quick wins to be able to prove and point to say, listen, this is something I did really well and then be able to connect those things that they do in those incremental way towards a bigger picture. So, the really the best chief data and analytics officers are the ones that are building these bridges across the entire organization and are able to build for the long term by delivering in the short term. And so have a clear vision about what is good going to look like or how will we be different in the long term but can break up that long term vision into very clear value drops in the short term. And then they can build partnerships with like actually other leaders in



the organization who, believe it or the best ones are the ones who can turn around the naysayers into believers. Right? By showing some great value that was delivered in the other org in another area of the organization. And then those naysayers turning around and saying, Listen, actually that's really cool. I want some of that too, in my organization. And then those leaders going proactively to like the head of data and analytics and saying, hey, how can we do something together? The best ones also have the skill of being amazingly humble because actually their success is not really their success. It's like shared success with another area of the organization. And that's hard for most executives, right, who are accustomed to owning PNL and being able to prove to like my team and I did this. But actually, the best ones are very, very happy to almost be in the background, you know, not named on the front page, but actually everybody in the room knows that those things wouldn't have been possible without that. Like, you know, the glue that those chief data and analytics officers who are really exceptional are able to bring. And the other one is being able to elevate the subject area to a board and executive team level conversation because I think if you keep it at some of those foundational, enabling capabilities, it can be hard to prove the value. But if you find a way to elevate it to a board level conversation, what you start to get is the organization operating at these multiple speeds. So, there's always something interesting going on at the grassroots level. And how do you make that happen and how do you find ways to like make those messages kind of go across and then the best ones are able to bring the strategic perspective by either being invited to meetings or ideally have, you know, are part of that team themselves and so are able to connect those dots. I think that part is really important. So, yeah, I mean, what do you...I mean, we talk a lot about culture, someone who can I love how you said harness the existing culture. It's a phrase we use a lot too, because we did this partnership with the Return on AI Institute and found that like changing the culture of

an organization, especially some of these large ones, is very, very, very slow-moving thing. So, the best leaders can come in and harness the existing culture. What do you see in terms of culture? Like how do you what are some of the leaders doing to change or enable that culture to be more data and analytics?

Joe Depa [00:12:33] Like yeah, I think it's... We did a study with MIT last year and we talked about some of today's top challenges for C levels and in CDOs. And what we learned was that the number one challenge was actually around culture and the number two was actually around talent. So, it was quite relevant for this discussion because being a change agent, frankly, I think is probably the number one role for today's CDO. And how do you become a change agent? You mentioned driving what I would consider mutual outcomes is really, really important. So how do you make the business successful? How do you make IT successful? How do you make finance successful? How do you make HR successful? Leveraging data. And to your point, I like your I like your comment on humility because most CDOs that we know they have to serve in the enablement function. And if they're in the enablement function and the business is successful or HR is successful or finance is successful or IT is successful, then what happens is the whole benefit, the whole benefit goes back into the organization and then therefore the CDO tends to be successful. So, I think that becoming a change agent is really about enabling the rest of the organization. We've seen some clients experiment with pods or squads and I like the intent of those, whatever you want to call it. It depends on the day. But let's take a pod that has somebody from finance, somebody from IT and somebody from business and the chief data officer is orchestrating. These people don't necessarily report to her or him, but they're orchestrating this pod. And what it does is it enables that cross collaboration and



that cross collaboration tied to mutual outcomes, tied to a governance process so that everybody across the organization understands what outcomes are being driven by data I think is really, really critical to managing the change. We've also seen some fun stuff, Julia, with gamification, right? And so particularly in some of our what I consider more distributed industries like consumer-packaged goods, where usually you have a small central core team and then you have global teams across and then market units. What we've seen work really well is gamification, where you play games with other market units in other business units, so that their adoption of certain tools and technology and certain data elements, they get sort of prizes and things of that nature. So, we've seen some things I like that actually work really well with the larger organizations. We're also seeing banking clients start to start to use those as well.

Julia Westland [00:14:46] I love that. So, like one of the things, we've done is we are starting to build out this education offering and we're using gamification too, because actually it's that CEO board level, you know, exact team level kind of comfort fluency with A.I. just kind of isn't there. Because when they been coming through the ranks, they didn't have exposure to these techniques because the tech was too expensive. You know, we all know the AI hasn't really changed since the days of Alan Turing. But what's really changed is the prevalence and the affordability of the technology and the speed at which it can do and how it can process you know. And so, what we have now been doing is we've developed this education, which like boards and CEOs go through and we gamify, and it gives this experience around AI which helps leaders to build their fluency. And so, they can have more. Like we want them develop AI Intuition is really our objective because if they haven't got this feeling about where should they be using AI to enable their strategy? It's a really big barrier to getting the value. And as you said, the kind of two major things are getting the value and having the right talent. And we're seeing it from the talent. So, the best talent is there, but they're not able to help the organization harness the value from

it. So, we're seeing a lot of opportunity around gamification to just make take learning to the next level and make it really fun.

Joe Depa [00:16:06] Absolutely. So, I'm thinking about the future now. So, if we look at if we if you look a year into the future in the role of the CDO, what would you think is going to change between now and then? For example, right what we're seeing in the industry is that some of the macroeconomic conditions are changing. We have a lot of uncertainty in today's environment. We have wage inflation. We have we also have geopolitical tensions that we didn't have in the past. And so, today's CDOs, is tasked with a new set of problems around supply chain sustainability, cyber security. So, my question to you is, how do you see the role changing over the next 12 months to 24 months?

Julia Westland [00:16:41] Well, I'd say the actually chief data and analytics officers had a great road test with COVID because the conversations I had with those leaders, men, and women all over the world at that period of time was actually my CEO turning to me all the time to say, what should we do next? What can we do next? Where are my people? What's safe for us to attempt? What isn't safe? What are the boundaries? You know, how are my people feeling? And these leaders were in touch with almost every element of the organization in a way that I don't think any other role was really able to have them And IT leaders really had a lot of the hotseat, I think, during the very early days of COVID. And so, you're right, we're moving into this very unstable time where things are not known. But that really plays into the hands, I think, of these leaders who are very comfortable with experimentation. They know that the parameters change, and they build models that really bring in new elements of information all of the time to try and improve decision making. And that shapes a little bit how they operate. So, I see this role really kind of continuing to evolve in an ever



more strategic role. So less you know, kind of rearview mirror type reporting and the much more forward-looking scenario analysis-based planning, which, you know, a lot of organizations still do their annual plan and they kind of look at what's the budget and they just sort of estimate going forward. Well, now with AI you can do so much more advanced approaches. And I think that these leaders are able to plug into that. I see these leaders in the future having PNL ownership, you know, very much brought in as a result of some experimentation that they will do, you know, testing new business models, trying new areas, partnering with digital or new strategic initiatives that for whatever reason, it makes sense for their organization to attempt and to lead as well as kind of moving into a strategic or even a more digital type role you know in the future. So, kind of head of strategy and AI, we see that already. Levi's has that title, for instance, and there are other organizations that already have it. The pairing we've seen for a long time with this role kind of close enter reporting into CIO or CTO or kind of chief product officer. I think for some organizations that will continue to make sense and I believe in the future we will see that kind of shift away as this becomes more of a like...and the CIO and CTO and digital roles are also very strategic but of a very different nature. You know, this role, if done right, can kind of be helping to direct the entire organization. And so being able to bring the leader in the position to make some of those decisions is where we see some of this heading.

Joe Depa [00:19:24] I agree. I think that what we saw with COVID was that when there's uncertainty, the one way that you can solve for uncertainty is to use data and analytics to make more informed decisions, to make faster decisions. And having visibility to make those decisions was critical. And I believe that what we're seeing our clients do now in today's uncertain world is actually invest more within the chief data officer role and also

invest more in those organizations, because with uncertainty, we know that they can actually make more informed decisions. So, with that, I think that is all we have for today. Julia, I wanted to thank you so much for your time and we look forward to the next one.

Julia Westland [00:20:00] Thanks so much, Joe. Been a great chat.

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