CHIEF DISRUPTOR

LEADERSHIP INSIGHTS ON EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIES



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FOREWORD FROM THE FOUNDER

Welcome to our Chief Disruptor's Leadership Insights on Emerging Technologies and Transformation Strategies Report; a summary of the key insights from a year of Chief Disruptor monthly Insights polls. The acronym VUCA is a term that's popped up more than a few times at Chief Disruptor activities this year. As many of you will know it stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, so I think we can understand why it perfectly describes the current business environment. In a VUCA world, constant change is the new norm, and in this shifting landscape, leaders must juggle multiple strategic priorities, assess threats and opportunities, and face incredible pressure to make the right decisions.

At the beginning of 2024, Chief Disruptor launched our **'Insights with Impact'** newsletter, to bring our members timely, concise, insights on the disruptive trends and technologies that shape the decisions leaders need to make every day. Our goal was to condense and share the very latest opinion from members on need-to-know issues, alongside useful commentary, to help supercharge decision-making. Over the course of 12 monthly newsletters, many members have shared their valuable tips and strategies to help others navigate these challenges and capture these opportunities. Viewed together as a 'year of insights' it provides a fascinating picture of the reality of leadership in a volatile world. I'd like to thank all the Chief Disruptor members who supported us this year either by taking part in polls or adding their valuable perspectives.

We've shared the results of this year's polls below on themes covering leadership strategies, data, culture, and disruptive technologies including AI, alongside fascinating commentary from members and experts. Our Director of Research, Caroline Boyd, has written some reflections on the impact of the trends we've seen this year, from both live activities and research. She also highlights some of the key priorities for successful business leaders in 2025, alongside our new forward schedule of activities, to help members achieve these goals. If you haven't already subscribed to Chief Disruptor Insights you can do so by **clicking here.**

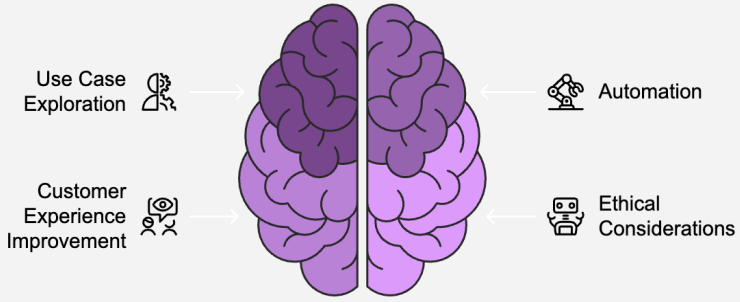
In a year of monumental change and upheaval, the **Chief Disruptor Community** has continued to help its fellow members navigate the threats and opportunities of disruptive trends and technologies. Leaders will continue to face complex challenges and opportunities in 2025, so the safe space of a dedicated community will be more important than ever. We hope you will continue to join us in 2025 at our breakfast clubs, dinners and forums. If you are not already a member you can **join here**.

Emma Taylor, Founder and Managing Director, Chief Disruptor

INSIGHTS WITH IMPACT

Things have moved incredibly fast in the AI space since the beginning of 2024, and the impact has been felt in every sector and in many aspects of our daily lives. In a continuation of what we saw in the media throughout 2023, 2024 kicked off with more headlines and hype celebrating the transformational potential of AI. But with the technology evolving at such a rapid pace, and announcements on advancements refining AI capabilities taking place almost daily, it was tricky for leaders to know where to start. With such pressure from boards to get on the AI gravy train quickly, the real danger was forgetting to address the fundamental question of, ***'What is the actual problem we want to solve?'*** (Read more about aligning AI to strategic problems here).

Fig. 1 Navigating AI's Rapid Evolution



The first of our AI polls in February set out to get beyond the hype to understand how well-integrated AI actually was in organisations (🔎See poll results here). We asked, **'How would you describe the status of your Gen AI project?' "Exploring use cases"**, **"Experimenting/Developing a prototype"**, and **"Scaling/Enterprise deployment"**. Our poll revealed that most organisations were still exploring use cases for Generative AI, highlighting the fact that there is often a gap between what is presented in the media and what is happening in reality. It would be interesting to repeat that question next year and see how responses have changed. (March Insights: The State of Gen AI Implementation)

Our second poll on AI, in July, focused on the important issue of AI use cases and asked members to select between, *'automation'*, *'improving customer experience'*, *'delivering new insights'*, and *'boosting security and resilience.'* **'Automation'** was the top response in the poll, unsurprising when you consider the relentless pressure on leaders for increased productivity and efficiency. The second highest-rated response to that poll was *'to improve customer experience.'* (August Insights: Top AI Use Cases) The application of AI for customer experience is far-reaching, encompassing everything from customer support and sales to marketing initiatives. We know that personalisation is at the heart of delivering customer experience excellence, and AI facilitates this through a variety of tools, including predictive analytics, natural language processing, and Generative AI.

With AI expanding at such an astonishing pace, we felt it important to consider the long-term implications for humanity of these rapid developments. In October, we asked, ***'What is the most important principle for ethical AI?'*** Feedback from Chief Disruptor members at our activities pointed to four main areas that organisations need to factor into their AI strategies to engender trust:

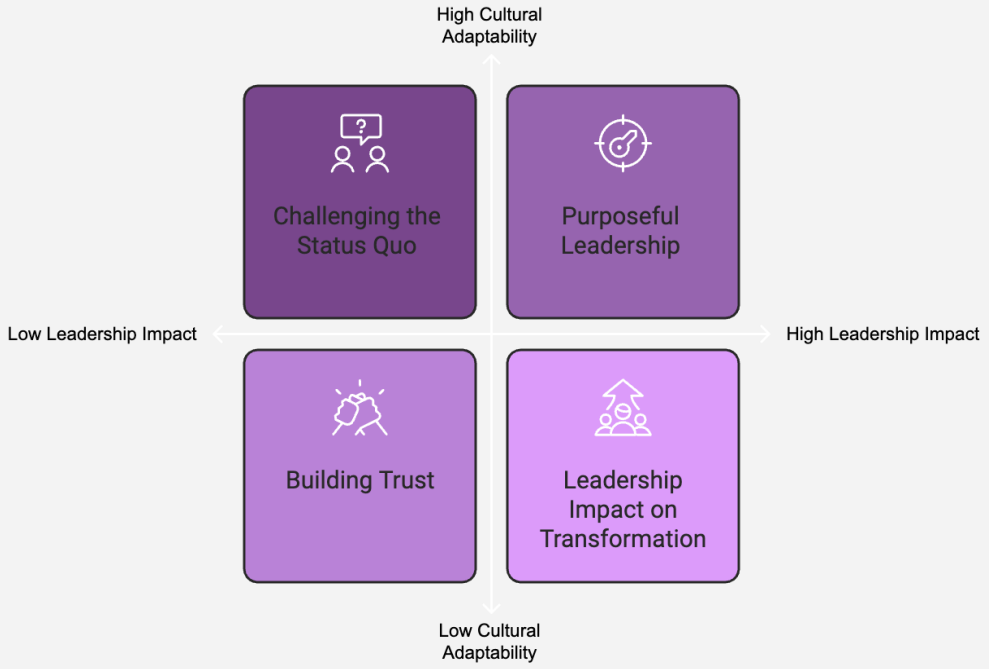
- Transparency about how AI is being built and operated
- Concerns about the potential for bias in data leading to discriminatory outcomes
- Accountability and redress for mistakes
- Privacy concerns about how data is captured and stored

The most selected response to this question was *'Transparency'*, followed by *'removing bias.'* (**Insights: Ethical AI in Practice**)

In October, we held the Chief Disruptor ***"Forum: Delivering Tangible Results with AI"***, joined by Natalia Konstantinova, Lead Architect in AI, BP, Carl Dalby, Group Head of AI/Digital, His Majesty's Government and All-Party Parliamentary Group on AI, and Guest Lecturer, University of Aberdeen, and Dominic Wellington, Enterprise Architect, SnapLogic. (**Watch webinar highlights**)

INSIGHTS ON STRATEGY, LEADERSHIP, AND CULTURE

Fig. 2 Leadership and Cultural Dynamics in Business Transformation



Strategy, leadership and culture are at the heart of business transformation success. A winning strategy aligns people and technology to goals and activities. An adaptive culture will help the business adapt to change. But in an uncertain, volatile world, arguably leadership has the greatest impact on success; engaging people, building trust and helping teams adapt to the change. In January 2024, our first Insights with Impact poll was, **'Which of the following leadership trends is your top priority for achieving your goals in 2024?' 'Purposeful Leadership'** emerged narrowly as the top choice. Purpose creates meaning during uncertain times and leaders who can harness a purpose-driven culture find that employees are energised and engaged behind this **'north star'**. (📖**Read more on purposeful leadership**)

In June we explored the leadership traits central to a disruptive mindset, with **"challenging the status quo"** emerging as a defining characteristic. This approach is crucial for breaking free from legacy constraints and unlocking new opportunities. Embracing change, accepting risk, and fostering innovation complement this mindset but hinge on leaders' ability to question ingrained practices. Leaders who successfully challenge norms set the stage for meaningful transformation, aligning their teams with strategic goals and empowering them to navigate uncertainty while fostering innovation and long-term success. (**Explore Disruptive Mindset for Maximum Business Impact**)

We spoke with Jemma Ashley, AVP of Strategy at LexisNexis UK about how to foster a culture of excellence, innovation, inclusion, and customer focus. She provided fascinating insights on how to build a culture of trust, which she views as essential for unlocking innovative ideas. She also discussed how to harness the power of a disruptive mindset and shared strategies for translating this mindset into behaviours that drive business success. (**Jemma Ashley on Building a Culture of Trust**)

Our March poll also focused on **'leadership impact'**, asking **'Which leadership action would have the greatest impact on business transformation success?'.** The clear winners in this poll were **'focusing teams on the why'** and **'transparency, empathy and openness'.**

INSIGHTS ON DATA

2024 was the year when organisations aspired to become an ‘intelligent enterprise’; leveraging data assets through technology faster, and with less risk, and providing highly personalised experiences. But you can’t have hyper-personalisation without clean data and seamless data flows, and organisations need modern data management techniques to support new AI tools.

In July, we asked members, ***‘What’s your greatest concern about your data?’***

"Data quality" emerged as the top concern among leaders navigating the AI age. Poor-quality data can harm customer trust and brand reputation, while high-quality data ensures better AI outcomes and decision-making.

One respondent emphasised the need for a risk-aware approach:

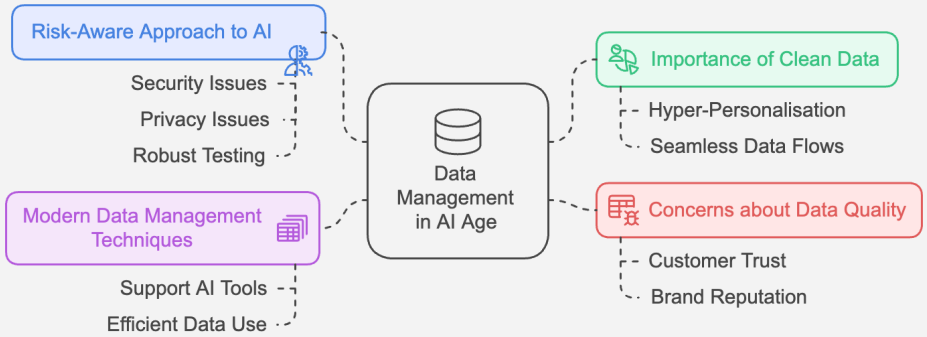
> ***"It’s important not to rush in. Security and privacy issues around AI must be paramount if you’re going to win the trust of stakeholders and, above all, protect your data. However much you want to advance your AI initiatives, it would be unwise to entrust your data to a LLM provider; that’s your IP and it’s too precious. A risk-aware approach is to build a secure environment where you can try out AI applications, and carry out robust testing so you can show your stakeholders—your users, your customers, and your partners—that you’re responsibly deploying this technology.”***

In March, Roddy Barnes, Director, Group Head of Technology Strategy & Transformation, Bupa, shared his insights during a fireside chat with Caroline Boyd, our Director of Research and Strategic Development, at Chief Disruptor LIVE. He said:

> ***"In today's market, investment is crucial. Many clients face the same challenges, and only recently have we been able to deliver exceptional digital experiences for customers. But it's incredibly difficult."***

> ***"In businesses, there's significant value in using data to make predictions. It's about understanding the data deeply and making accurate predictions in new ways."***

Fig. 3 Data Management in the AI Age



INSIGHTS ON CYBER SECURITY & RESILIENCE

The final months of 2024 have shown no sign of a reduction in the cybersecurity threat around the world. Following the events in Syria and the Middle East, geopolitical instability has reached a new high. Inside organisations, leaders are grappling with an increasing range of threats, including internal data breaches, state-sponsored attacks, and the rise of AI-enhanced cyber risks.

Despite headlines focusing on AI and large-scale incidents, many leaders still see internal breaches as the greatest concern, driven by human error and lack of vigilance. In September, we asked Chief Disruptor members, **"Which of the following cybersecurity threats poses the greatest threat to your organisation?"** The highest response was 'internal data breach', highlighting the ongoing importance of fostering awareness and vigilance among employees to mitigate mistakes that can compromise sensitive information.

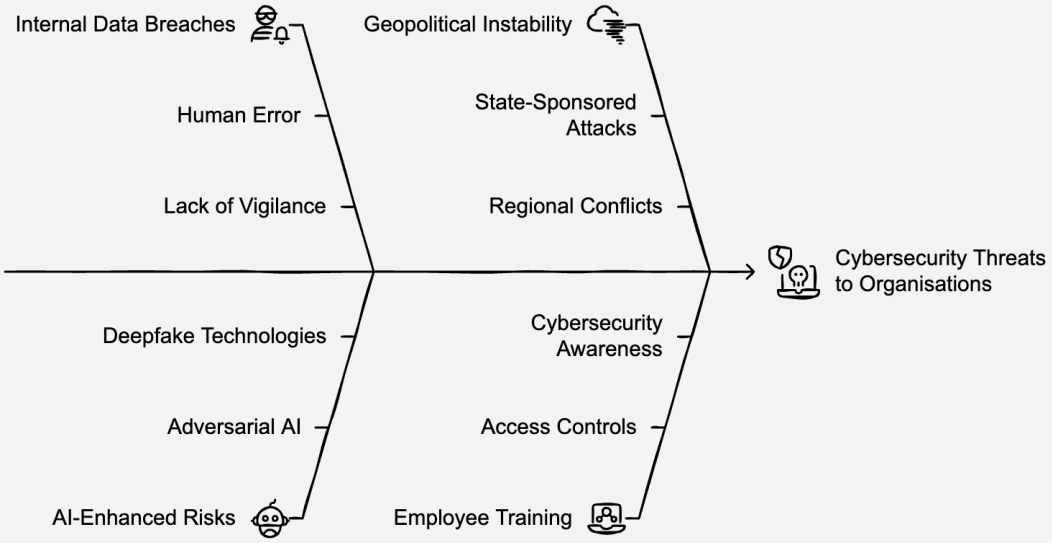
Demonstrating that these challenges are common to all sectors, they were considered in depth at both the Chief Disruptor Army Counter Intelligence and Security Conference in February and the Chief Disruptor RAF Counter-Intelligence & Security Conference in October. At the Army conference it was highlighted that security culture is a cornerstone of security, and that fostering vigilance and awareness amongst employees is paramount. Organisations must embed secure-by-design principles and promote collaboration with external partners in order to stay resilient against evolving cybersecurity challenges (read more on the Army Counter Intelligence and Security blog) Similarly, at the RAF conference, the cyber threat was a central focus, as were security culture and then need for resilient systems and infrastructure, with insights shared into techniques for strengthening incident response and operational adaptability.

In September, at our Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club on **"Leveraging the Power of Big Data Analytics"**, leaders discussed

the growing importance of proactive cybersecurity practices in today's fast-evolving digital landscape. Many emphasised that **internal data breaches** remain a top concern, with a key focus on employee training and access controls. They stressed that human error continues to be one of the most significant risks, calling for organisations to take a more comprehensive approach to mitigating this threat by promoting cybersecurity awareness throughout the workforce.

Leaders also discussed the dual role of **AI** in cybersecurity—while AI tools are enhancing security, they are also contributing to new challenges, such as **adversarial AI** and **deepfake** technologies. In this context, leaders agreed on the importance of building resilience through continuous improvements in incident response strategies and defences, alongside an evolving cybersecurity approach.

Fig. 4 Cybersecurity Threats to Organisations



"Given the rapid nature of adversarial AI attacks, a continuously evolving and strong incident response strategy, along with a robust backup and recovery plan, are essential for effective defence. It is not just organisations but individuals who have to adopt these cybersecurity best practices, in all seriousness. The cost of loopholes in cyber hygiene is much higher in the age of exploitative AI models."

— Soumyadeep Roy Chowdhury, Senior Industry Analyst, Frost & Sullivan

INSIGHTS ON DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Over the years, Chief Disruptor members have connected to share strategies on the impact of disruptive technologies on their industries and business models. But with rapidly evolving advancements in AI, robotics, and automation, that conversation has evolved and expanded to focus also on the wider impact of disruptive technologies on jobs, roles, and human experiences in the workplace. Disruptive

technologies such as AI are reshaping roles and experiences at work, sparking debate in the media on their impact.

However, in our **April poll** which asked, **'Will disruptive technologies augment and elevate human experiences, replace humans, or innovate and create new jobs?'**, 100% of respondents took an optimistic stance, viewing these technologies as tools to augment human capabilities or create new jobs rather than as a threat. Lee Fulmer, Chairman of the Reporting and Data Standards Transformation Board at the Bank of England, predicts that the Industrial Revolution, AI will transform jobs rather than replace them entirely. He states,

> ***"What I predict in 2024 through to 2026 is a situation where we see human-augmented AI. We will use algorithms to refine, look for anomalies, and sift through mountains of information to help you specialise in the things you're good at."***

In **September**, we set out to tackle an age-old struggle for many business and technology leaders, looking at **'Why organisations struggle to get ROI from technology'.** Organisations face persistent challenges in achieving ROI from new technologies, particularly with AI adoption. The leading barrier, highlighted by Chief Disruptor members in our poll, is workforce cultural inertia, where resistance to change undermines adoption.

Legacy infrastructure, integration complexities, and insufficient data quality further hinder progress. Additionally, the **digital skills gap** exacerbates these issues, costing the UK economy billions annually. Joanne Roxburgh, COO of Skilled Education, emphasises that,

> ***"The real competitive edge for companies comes not from training more people in technical skills, but from cultivating human skills. Companies that focus on tech alone may find themselves outpaced by companies that invest in critical thinking, adaptability, and resilience."***

Addressing these gaps requires not only technical upskilling but also fostering critical human skills like adaptability and ethical reasoning to align technology use with strategic goals.

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2025: WINNING THE BATTLE FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

Following a year of momentous transformation, what can we expect in 2025? We can be sure that demand for digital services and greater personalisation will only increase in 2025. As will the sophistication and frequency of cyber attacks. And we can expect that technological innovation and global integration will continue to drive change exponentially. It's highly likely that in 2025, it will be the organisations that can adapt quickly to harness innovative tools like AI, ML and automation that will win the battle for competitive advantage. But to fully achieve their business goals, leaders will need to simultaneously transform business models, data strategies and ways of working, while keeping the organisation safe.

So how will business leaders balance these multiple priorities next year? Our last 2024 poll in December set out to answer this question with respondents asked to complete the statement: **'Competitive advantage in 2025 will be achieved by: Accelerating innovation, Driving transformation, Modernising data and legacy, Strengthening resilience'**. The result was incredibly close, emphasising perhaps the enormous challenge of juggling multiple priorities. Businesses choose to transform for a number of reasons, but fundamentally to stay ahead in a competitive marketplace. Technology is often a major driver for transformation, enabling organisations to streamline processes, reduce costs or anticipate evolving customer preferences. In reality, leaders often discover that the execution of transformation is fraught with challenges, many of which are rooted in the fundamentals of behavioural change.

'Modernising data and legacy' also came out as a high strategic priority in our poll and is an important part of business transformation. The ambition for leaders in 2025 should be to build an **'intelligent enterprise'**, leveraging data assets through technology faster, and with less risk. This will deliver deeper insights into customer preferences and behaviour which can be channelled into providing highly personalised experiences. However, you can't have hyper-personalisation without seamless data flows or clean data, so organisations will need modern data management techniques to support new AI tools. That's why in 2025 many organisations will be continuing to move data from legacy systems to a modern, cloud-based ecosystem to make data more accessible and reduce silos. Legacy applications are also notoriously vulnerable to cyber threats, whereas a modern, upgraded robust legacy system will be the foundation for resilient secure systems.

Join our community for disruptive business and tech leaders Chief Disruptor is the membership community for business and tech leaders with a shared purpose to transform disruption into opportunity. Like us, our members believe that disruption is a catalyst for business transformation. Together, we unravel some of the knottiest disruptive challenges facing organisations today; from disruptive business models and mindsets to the emerging technologies shaping how we live and work.

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FORTHCOMING ACTIVITIES

JANUARY: **Hyperautomation and the Intelligent Enterprise** (Friday 10 January 2025 | 08:45-10:00 | Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club, Virtual)

FEBRUARY: **Agile Leadership, Planning and Decision-Making in a Complex Operating Environment** (Friday 7 February 2025 | 08:45-10:00 | Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club, Virtual)**, DAIC Connect 2025** (Tuesday 25 February 2025 | 0815 - 1850 | Central London)

MARCH: **Transforming Customer Experience: Harnessing The Latest Trends And Emerging Technologies For Competitive Advantage** (Friday 7 March 2025 | 08:45-10:00 | Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club, Virtual)

APRIL: **Scaling AI: Beyond Prototype To Adoption For Maximum Impact** (Friday 4 April 2025 | 08:45-10:00 GMT | Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club, Virtual)

MAY: **Data-Driven Innovation: Optimise Decision-Making in a Volatile World** (Friday 2 May 2025 | 08:45-10:00 GMT | Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club, Virtual)

JUNE: **Cyber Resilience 2025: Prepare, Defend, Respond** (Friday 6 June 2025 | 08:45-10:00 GMT | Chief Disruptor Breakfast Club, Virtual)

