The Role of CPOs in the Inevitable and Uncertain AI Future

A PRODUCTS THAT COUNT CPO PLAYBOOK, PRESENTED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CAPGEMINI AND MICROSOFT

PRODUCTS THAT COUNT

Capgemini

Microsoft

Foreword by Capgemini

At Capgemini, we are honored to have contributed to this timely Playbook and the CPO Roundtable series from which its insights were derived. What follows is an essential guide for Chief Product Officers and product leaders navigating a transformational era increasingly defined by AI.

As a global leader in software product and platform engineering, we work every day with visionary product executives, technical leaders, and innovation teams across industries. Through thousands of conversations and interactions, we know this much is true: **AI is not simply another technology trend.** It is an entirely new frontier in the ways businesses can shape or create markets and bring positive impact to the world.

In this revolutionary journey, **CPOs are at the epicenter.** This Playbook is the result of **rich, honest, and forward-thinking conversations with award-winning CPOs** who are pioneering new product practices and principles in real time. Their voices reflect the challenges, successes, and uncertainties faced by CPOs across industries today. They represent the best of what modern product leadership should be: bold, customer-obsessed, data-informed, and deeply human.

What struck us most in these discussions is not just the speed of AI, but the scope of reinvention it demands. Product leaders are not merely custodians of feature roadmaps. They are stewards of trust, orchestrators of intelligence, visionaries of the software-driven business models of the future. In this context, AI becomes both a powerful enabler and a profound responsibility.

The contents herein cover a range of practical themes—from experimentation and organizational design to AI agents, trust, governance, and ROI. It doesn't prescribe a single blueprint but instead offers tested insights, cautionary lessons, and inspiration. Above all, it reminds us that **doing nothing is the only wrong move.**

At Capgemini, we believe AI innovation must be human-centric, responsible, ethical, trustworthy and value-driven. **The future belongs to those who act boldly, learn rapidly, and build responsibly.** Lean into the uncertainty. Ask the big questions. Reimagine what's possible.

The AI era isn't coming. It's here, and CPOs are uniquely positioned to shape it.We hope this Playbook helps you do exactly that.



KEITH GLENDON
Global Offering Leader
– Digital Product Software
Capgemini Engineering

A Message from Renée Niemi

At the end of last year, I hosted a series of roundtables with top Chief Product Officers on the subject of AI. I wanted to cut through the noise, find out what's really working, and build a solid framework for how CPOs should be approaching AI right now.

What I got was so much more than I expected! In my capacity as the Resident CPO at Products That Count, I have the privilege of interacting with the best of the best in product management. Every time I speak with a group of CPOs, I am blown away by their blend of tech expertise, business acumen, and deep empathy for their customers. This set of conversations was no different.

I'm thrilled to share with you the roundtable insights in this playbook. I know you'll have your own takeaways, but here are a few key themes that resonate with me:

AI Is Here (and CPOs Are Leading the Charge): The age of AI is transforming products as well as organizations. CPOs are stepping up to guide AI initiatives, empowering and organizing their teams to solve complex customer challenges while streamlining workflows.

Flexibility & Collaboration Are Key: To stay competitive, CPOs need flexible organizational structures and strategic collaborations across tech, sales, and marketing. Balancing centralized support with decentralized innovation is the winning formula.

Trust is Earned, Not Given: Customer adoption hinges on trust. CPOs must proactively address potential mistrust with transparent data policies, tailored experiences for different generations, and a commitment to human oversight where it matters most.

Build, Partner, and Scale Responsibly: The best approach is to build core AI capabilities in-house while partnering for foundational models. Start small, scale thoughtfully, and always prioritize responsible AI implementation.

Data Policies & IP Matter: Robust data policies and careful consideration of intellectual property are essential. Building a foundation of data quality, privacy, and compliance is key to earning and keeping customer trust.

I hope this playbook sparks new ideas and helps you navigate the exciting – and sometimes daunting – world of AI in product development. Now, let's dive in and explore the insights from these incredible CPOs!



RENÉE NIEMI
Resident CPO
Products That Count

Kickoff: What the Super Bowl taught us about the State of AI

On February 9th, 2025, the Philadelphia Eagles squared off against the Kansas City Chiefs in the Super Bowl. But this annual football game is only partially about the sport itself. There are the stars in attendance. The halftime show spectacle. And then, of course, there are the ads.

This year, in addition to the usual suspects – beer, car, and snack companies – there was a new contingent: **artificial intelligence products**. Indeed, in the 2025 Super Bowl, AI companies large and small ran multiple ads showcasing their latest innovations.

This year, in addition to the usual suspects – beer, car, and snack companies – there was a new contingent: **artificial intelligence products**

Google, Meta, Salesforce, and GoDaddy all highlighted AI-powered features, from chatbot job interview prep to smart glasses and website builders. Perhaps the most prescient ad came from ChatGPT. Comparing AI to human achievements like the wheel, electricity, and air travel, the one-minute spot ended with the slogan: “All progress has a starting point.”

> But how close are we to **realizing that promise and potential**?
> And how are **businesses structuring teams** to prepare for the AI future?
> How are they **navigating the significant challenges** this technology brings, especially in the realm of trust?

These ads suggest two key facts about AI in 2025. **First, companies see revenue potential in AI**; otherwise, they wouldn’t be spending big money on Super Bowl ads (at a going rate of $8 million per 30 seconds). **And second, the promise of AI is still somewhere off in the distance.**

To answer these questions, we spent months conducting roundtables with the top Chief Product Officers in business today. This resulting playbook offers insights into how CPOs apply AI within their organizations. In the pages below, we share where CPOs are seeing value and what challenges they’re facing.

Proprietary and Confidential. Source: Products That Count, Winter 2025. Public company benchmark sample n=43.

Just like the Super Bowl, there is a lot of hype around AI. This playbook cuts through all of that, sharing the "Xs and Os" of AI in product organizations. This is the reality on the ground, as seen through the words of top CPOs across industries today.

Part 1: Doing Nothing Is Not an Option

While there is no consensus on a single "best way forward" with AI, **CPOs all agree that doing nothing is not an option.** Experimentation is their preferred methodology. CPOs understand that it is essential to learn and test – and keep the failures contained. As one product leader summed it up:

> "**Our approach is learn, learn, learn.** It's okay if we trip, but keep it small so the trips aren't too big. Keep it secure, private, transparent, and legal. We're not putting a lot of measurement on end value. For now the value is learning and understanding."

Even with an emphasis on learning, the pressure is on. CPOs must continue to produce great products while also answering to shareholders about how they are leveraging the power of AI. Experimentation can buy time while also positioning teams for the coming AI breakthroughs expected by all.

ORGANIZATION

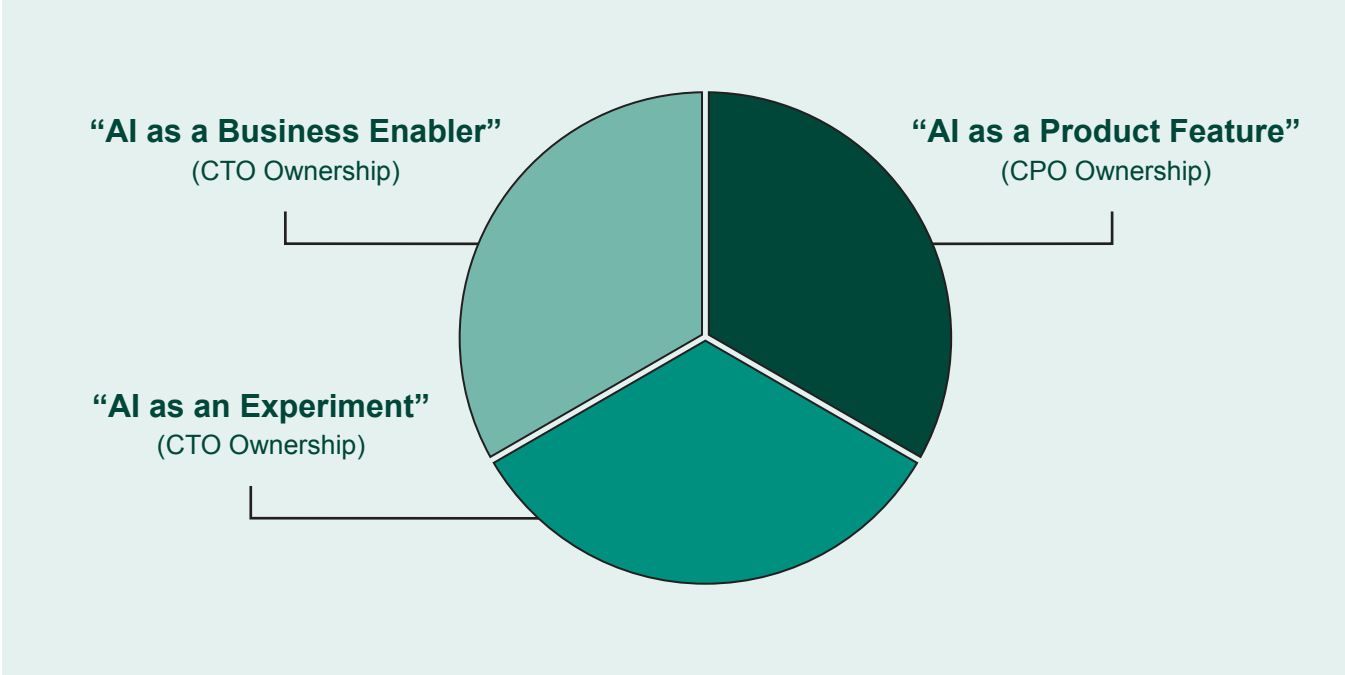
Our roundtable participants believe that the CPO needs to be the driving force behind the strategy to meet customer and business needs. But only ⅓ of the CPOs in the roundtable were leading the effort for their respective companies. For about two-thirds, AI ownership lies with the Chief Technology Officer. Indeed, we were surprised to learn that AI was frequently being treated as a new technology, led out of the CTO office. These teams approached AI with a **technology experimentation mindset**.

One segment of our research pool saw AI as an opportunity to create entirely new businesses, adopting an incubator model. In this approach, small teams were created out of core product functions to incubate ideas and test them in a holistic way. Rather than treating AI as a technology or product, this group sees **AI as an enabler of new businesses.** Common here

was an emphasis on small opportunities and quick wins; learn fast and repeat.

Others took the approach of integrating **AI as a high-impact feature.** These teams are structuring the new opportunities under the CPO. They view AI as a new capability while maintaining established frameworks for prioritization and measurement. This group is treating resourcing and prioritization in the context of the broader roadmap and customer needs.

Despite these varied organizing structures and strategies, **nearly all of the participants had pivoted at least once in the past year** as they refined their approach to implementing AI.



AGENTIC FUTURE

The "agentic future" was a key theme in our discussions. When it comes to AI agents – software systems that can not only interact but take actions on the part of users – CPOs are both excited and keenly aware of the rapid pace of progress. As one participant noted, today's conversation might seem "cute and quaint" in just a few years – the future may be here sooner than we think.

Participants acknowledged the potential for AI agents to drive efficiency and cost savings, particularly in reducing technical debt and maintaining legacy systems. Others believe that AI agents are the new interface, unlocking impactful capabilities of their software otherwise buried and largely unused. The consensus was clear: **AI agents are inevitable, and organizations**

that fail to prepare for this shift risk falling behind.

Experts believe that AI agents will increasingly understand and respond to users with greater accuracy. They will mimic human language, inquiry patterns, and even personality traits. This shift could **create a flywheel effect**: as these agents become more widespread, they will set a new standard for both ease of use as well as how efficiently we get things done. On the other hand, CPOs have concerns about how AI agents are beginning to manage and communicate with one another. As this trend increases, how can proper oversight of inter-agentic communications be ensured?

In many ways, this agentic future is already here. Most consumers have already experienced their effectiveness in e-commerce. If you have a problem with a damaged or missing package, a chat agent can record and resolve your problem – putting money back in your account – typically much faster than a human agent, and with little to no wait time.

As nonhuman agents deliver increasingly better experiences compared to human agents, they may very quickly become the preferred option for users. These agents may (and in some cases already do) provide better outcomes by having greater programmatic access to systems, enabling faster and more effective problem-solving.

This shift could create a flywheel effect: as these agents become more widespread, they will set a new standard for both ease of use as well as how efficiently we get things done.

OPTIMIZING FOR SPEED

As AI agents make clear, the innovation cycles of generative AI are **speeding up**. One product leader said, “In a lot of cases, we’re ahead of the curve. What once took months or years can now be done in a week with a custom LLM.”

Approaches vary when it comes to optimizing for speed. Some CPOs have organized small, empowered teams that are flexible enough to quickly change course. Some use biannual “hackathons” focused on AI innovation. But all CPOs we spoke with feel the urgency of AI.

Because doing nothing is not an option, the CPOs at our roundtables outlined the following best practices to navigate experimentation, organization, and the rapid pace of innovation.

Proprietary and Confidential. Source: Products That Count, Winter 2025. Public company benchmark sample n=43.

BEST PRACTICES

In order to navigate the uncertainty and imperative of AI, follow the advice of top CPOs:

01 Fail small, learn big

- Prioritize experimentation over immediate ROI
- Keep failures small, secure, private, and legal while iterating rapidly

02 Don't fear the pivot!

- Choose an AI adoption model that fits company objectives with experimentation, incubators, or feature integration
- Keep refining approaches based on learnings

03 Optimize for speed

- Organize small, flexible teams to adapt quickly to AI advancements
- Use innovation sprints, hackathons, or dedicated AI task forces to stay ahead of the curve

Part 2: Prioritizing AI

Forward thinkers envision AI as the new infrastructure layer that enables entirely new ecosystems of products, tools, and user experiences. In this conception, AI is no longer just a feature to be added. Instead, it represents a complete foundational shift, a platform capability on which future innovations will be built. This expected evolution raises the stakes: organizations are tasked with not just building new AI products, but also rethinking what existing products can become in an AI-native future.

Considering this potential of AI, it's no surprise that a key tension point in our roundtable discussions was this: how do you stack rank AI against everything else on your roadmap in a way that accurately reflects customer input?

Product teams know AI as well as anyone, as many teams have already been using machine learning for years. But prioritizing generative AI is the new question mark, and the results are

far from settled. As one product leader stated, **"With Gen AI, people are still figuring out where it's going to add value, how good it is, and where it can be used."**

Leading companies are taking different approaches to integration. Some, like CONA Services, are building on past ML successes, developing AI assistants to complement existing data-driven solutions. Others, like a leading financial services provider, are decentralizing their AI strategy, empowering business units to drive initiatives tailored to their specific needs and focusing on augmenting human employees with AI-powered tools. Still others, like a global IT consulting firm, embrace a flexible, experimental approach, prioritizing low-risk experimentation and AI-driven user assistants for the Healthcare products portfolio, focusing on areas where the need for accuracy is not as great.

There are two viable AI paths. One is using AI to make teams more efficient. Another is finding ways to add value to customers through current products

There are two viable AI paths. One is using AI to make teams more efficient. Another is finding ways to add value to customers through current products and services. In the latter case, CPOs must carefully consider the strategic fit and ROI of AI initiatives. One CPO said the key questions are, **"Does it roll up to a specific OKR, and does it have more value versus costs and other bets we're making?"** Positive answers to this question would result in prioritization, but according to this CPO, nothing has met the minimum qualifications. Bottom line: if it adds value to the customer and improves their outcomes, it should be prioritized and stacked against the other features on the roadmap.

Even if AI can't be tied to a key metric or profitability, CPOs noted another reason to add AI to a roadmap: if a senior executive designates it as a "strategic bet." As one CPO explained, "If we do carve out space in our roadmap this coming year, it's going to be for strategic reasons."

> "I want to put this on a t-shirt: **'AI is not the product.'**
>
> 
>
> **G. SHAH**
> Healthcare services CPO

AI IS NOT THE PRODUCT

We heard some debate about what AI is: a product, a technology, a business strategy. But healthcare services CPO G. Shah is clear that AI is not the product itself, but rather a means to achieving better outcomes: "It rolls back to the ability of the product to deliver the outcome at the right cost."

The primary considerations should be faster time to market and greater customer engagement. The CPOs in our roundtables discussed the need to cut through the hype to see if AI truly delivers on these tangible benefits. They noted that customers do not appear to gravitate more toward products because of AI integration. As one product executive explained, **"When we market a product as 'AI-powered,' we don't see a difference in customer uptake. If anything, AI can make some customers wary. The real value comes from what AI enables, not the fact that it's AI."**

ROI OF AI

CPOs see immense long-term potential in AI, while realizing that its value may take several iterations. Each project should begin with clear hypotheses and a sharp focus on customer impact. Not every experiment will succeed, which is why **rapid testing** and **customer value** as the north star are essential.

But a consistent theme in our roundtables was uncertainty: CPOs are not sure how expensive their AI initiatives will ultimately be, how long ROI will take, or how to even measure progress—especially as the landscape evolves too rapidly for traditional, quarterly-based assessments.

At present, AI monetization remains murky. This is true among companies dabbling in generative AI as well as the big household names. For example, in January 2025, Sam Altman posted on X that **his company is losing money on its Pro subscriptions**, which are priced at a hefty $200 per month. According to The Information, OpenAI won't be profitable until 2030; it lost $5 billion last year. Anthropic lost billions as well.

As one executive at a massive healthcare company asked, "**Where in the world do you monetize AI? We're doing a lot of experimentation, and I'm just not certain how that is going to frame out."** Indeed, many CPOs see AI's primary impact in cost savings rather than direct revenue generation. Additionally, CPOs posit that B2B SaaS has better potential than consumer applications, but such notions are largely theoretical.

CPOs are optimistic about AI, but with uncertainty about costs and paths to profitability, **standard product principles are as important as ever**. Is AI solving problems for customers? Is it making products better, less expensive, or more delightful? Each initiative must start with a clear, value-driven hypothesis. By testing quickly and measuring impact against customer value, product leaders can navigate this evolving space with clarity and purpose.

Proprietary and Confidential. Source: Products That Count, Winter 2025. Public company benchmark sample n=43.

BEST PRACTICES

Keep AI grounded in real business impact to ensure it is a meaningful addition to your roadmap, and not just a shiny distraction:

01 No business outcome, no AI

- Test quickly, measuring impact against customer value
- Only prioritize AI projects that align with key business goals and deliver measurable value
- Weigh costs against benefits; AI for AI's sake doesn't cut it

02 AI is more sidekick than main character

- AI is not the product, so use it to enhance your offerings
- Customers care about results, not hype
- Focus on speed, efficiency, and engagement rather than just adding AI for novelty

Part 3: CPOs must build the guardrails for AI-enabled product businesses

AI is here, and every product now integrates AI in some way. While AI promises transformation, its impact remains uncertain—especially in industries where trust, compliance, and high-stakes decisions are critical. CPOs, positioned at the intersection of innovation and customer experience, must lead AI adoption while mitigating risks.

The uncertainty is real. Consumer-facing industries worry about brand trust, while regulated sectors like finance and healthcare face legal and ethical stakes. Large language models (LLMs) are probabilistic. When the stakes are a child's life or a retirement fund, is 90% accuracy good enough?

At Products That Count, we have documented for years the way that CPOs are increasingly owning business outcomes, because of the way they are situated at the

intersection of technological innovation and customer satisfaction. With increased ownership of the bottom line, CPOs must ensure that any new products or technical rollouts do not lead to negative experiences that could harm the business – or, worse, that could harm customers and users.

Because of the CPOs' unique vantage point, they are best positioned to safeguard the company and its customers. If AI is a Mack truck barreling down the highway, CPOs are the leaders building the guardrails to keep the business from going off the road.

Because of the CPOs' unique vantage point, they are best positioned to safeguard the company and its customers. If AI is a Mack truck barreling down the highway, CPOs are the leaders building the guardrails to keep the business from going off the road.

TRUST THROUGH "FARM-TO-TABLE" CONTENT

How does AI product adoption relate to farmers' markets? Consider the following.

When it comes to food production, the undeniable trend in the late 20th and early 21st centuries was industrial globalization.

A surprising consequence of that, in recent years, has been a trend in localization. Farmers markets, CSAs (community-supported agriculture), and farm-to-table restaurants have all exploded. It turns out that many consumers are willing to pay a premium for high-quality ingredients over efficiency.

In a similar way, some businesses envision AI agents autonomously managing workflows, akin to job offshoring for cost savings. Still others are doubling down on human-generated content, like Glassdoor CPO Andy Chen.

> **We can easily use AI to summarize reviews on a specific company.** But we think there's an element to humans wanting to hear directly what another human said. We believe that our main users are always going to want content that is farm-to-table, which is direct from the source.



ANDY CHEN
Glassdoor CPO
Leader for Digital Product Software

In healthcare, finance, and reviews, trust matters. Another CPO raised concerns about AI quality control: **“If AI agents interact autonomously, where is the oversight? How do we know that the right thing is being done?”**

These concerns highlight why AI isn’t just a technological decision – it’s a business decision.

TRUST IN REGULATED INDUSTRIES

Regulated industries face higher stakes. When it comes to your healthcare, would you prefer an AI that is 95% accurate, or a human that is 80% accurate? AI-assisted intubation tools are more precise, yet **insurers require human verification – slowing adoption despite AI’s superiority.**

At the same time, CPOs told us that healthcare patients are often more honest when speaking with machines than they are with humans. This can be a thorny issue, it should be noted, quickly approaching the question of replacing doctors with machines.

In the end, the CPOs we spoke with in regulated industries were very cautious about AI adoption, but not necessarily more so than in so-called “non-regulated” businesses. Whether concerned about safety, brand reputation, or legality, the main sentiment we heard from all CPOs had more to do with Greek philosopher Hypocrites than Mark Zuckerberg. Instead of “Move fast and break things,” with AI, **CPOs across all industries are pledging to “Do no harm.”**

> **The best companies in this space have clear guiding principles around responsible AI.** And if you’re building, if you’re a newer company, go and look at the best companies that are building AI products. Read their guiding principles, because those guiding principles are exceptionally powerful in helping every single person on the team understand what a good answer looks like – and what is not tolerable.



MONICA UGWI
Microsoft General Manager,
Copilot + Agents, Manufacturing & Mobility

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR AI GUARDRAILS

To ensure responsible AI adoption, CPOs must establish:

Security

- Protect AI from breaches, adversarial attacks, and unauthorized access.
- Conduct regular security testing and implement real-time monitoring.

IP Management

- Define ownership of AI-generated content, particularly when using third-party data.
- Address potential copyright conflicts and prevent unauthorized content replication.

Data Management & Policies

- Regulated Industries (Healthcare, Finance, Legal)
  - Ensure compliance with HIPAA, GDPR, and industry-specific laws.
  - Limit AI access to sensitive data and require audit trails for explainability.
- Non-Regulated Industries (Retail, Consumer Tech, Marketing)
  - Adopt ethical data practices for collection, storage, and transparency.
  - Audit AI for bias, accuracy, and fairness in decision-making.

Regulatory Compliance

- Stay updated on regional AI privacy laws (e.g., GDPR, CCPA, PIPEDA).
- Implement privacy-by-design (e.g., anonymization, user consent).
- Work with legal teams to ensure compliance with evolving regulations.

Trust Management

- Ensure AI transparency by explaining decisions clearly.
- Regularly audit AI models for bias, fairness, and accountability.
- Use AI to enhance, not replace, human interactions in trust-critical areas.

The generational component of AI adoption.

When it comes to adopting AI healthcare tools, it should surprise nobody that Generation X healthcare consumers (b. 1965-1980) seem the most skeptical. (This is, of course, the generation of Nirvana.) In comparison, younger healthcare consumers are much less concerned about sharing personal data with an algorithm. Perhaps more surprising is that older generations, Baby Boomers and above, are also quite receptive to AI health solutions.

Proprietary and Confidential. Source: Products That Count, Winter 2025. Public company benchmark sample n=43.

BEST PRACTICES FOR NAVIGATING TRUST

Navigate the complexities of trust while integrating AI responsibly into your products and services:

01 Data and intellectual property (IP) governance

- Set clear policies for AI data use and ownership
- Follow strict privacy and compliance standards

02 No bias, no blinders

- Regularly audit AI models to detect bias and ensure fairness
- Use diverse training data and enforce ethical AI standards

03 Farm-to-table is your friend

- Use AI to enhance, not replace, human-driven content that fosters connection and belonging

04 "Do no harm" over "Move fast and break things"

- Human oversight is essential in high-risk industries
- Align AI adoption with safety, legality, and brand reputation

ACT NOW TO STAY AHEAD

The AI revolution is moving fast. Organizations that delay setting up guardrails risk compliance failures, reputational damage, and missed opportunities. **By establishing responsible AI frameworks now, CPOs wil lead adoption in a way that safeguards both business success and customer trust.**

Overtime: Navigating the Future of AI in Product Development

As OpenAI noted in its Super Bowl ad, "All progress has a starting point." When it comes to the

integration of AI in product businesses, the current moment definitely feels like the beginning. As far as AI has come, its full potential is still on the horizon.

While that potential becomes more incorporated into tech businesses, there are many key insights from our roundtables. First, **basic product principles always apply.** Don't launch a product unless it truly solves a customer problem. Thoughtful use of AI can enhance user experience, drive cost efficiency, and deliver better results – but only if the underlying problem is real and addressed effectively.

Second, the **AI strategy should be driven by the Chief Product Officer.** The oversight of AI initiatives is too significant to be relegated solely to the CTO's domain; it's a broader business challenge that demands product leadership. CPOs: you need to own this.

Finally, **companies must build a platform – not just a tech platform, but a set of guardrails for AI implementation.** This framework will guide how AI is deployed, ensuring it remains aligned with core business objectives and creates lasting value.

AI is an unstoppable force. How that force is directed will be determined by business leaders with a 360-degree view of the customer, technological innovation, and the business bottom line. In our view, there is only one role poised to assume this crucial responsibility: the Chief Product Officer.

Proprietary and Confidential. Source: Products That Count, Winter 2025. Public company benchmark sample n=43.

About Products That Count

Products That Count is the world's largest nonprofit community, engaging 500,000+ product managers and Chief Product Officers (CPOs) united by a mission: to empower everyone to build products that truly count.

In a world flooded with products, only a few ignite passion, deliver value at scale, and transform lives. Behind those exceptional products are visionary CPOs and high-performing product teams driving innovation at the most bleeding-edge companies.

We recognize these trailblazers through our coveted Awards, accelerate careers from PM to the C-suite and beyond through daily best practices, and serve as the trusted advisor to nearly all Fortune 1000 CPOs.

Our Corporate Alliance includes Walmart, Ford, Cisco, Johnson & Johnson, Amplitude, and more. The most admired product leaders across industries serve on our Advisory Council, guiding the future of product leadership.

Together, we're shaping a future where every product counts. Learn more at productsthatcount.org

PRODUCTS THAT COUNT

Capgemini

Microsoft

SELECT ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

