Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

By: Elise Quevedo

Meet a Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer (CAIO)

As a teenager, I remember sitting in a high school classroom and being asked that age-old question, "Where do you see yourself in five years?"

At the time, my answers ranged from being a tennis player (which I did for a few years) to being an actress (which I also dabbled in my 20s and early 30s) and writer (which I still am).

Never once did the letters "A-I" cross my lips because back then, a job in artificial intelligence didn't exist, let alone a seat at executive tables. Fast-forward to today, and the world is a different beast.

With Artificial Intelligence embedded in the apps we use, the cars we drive, and the systems that keep businesses running, we are living in a new evolution era that comes with a new kind of leadership, the Chief Artificial Intelligence Officer, also known as a CAIO.

The Real AI Conversation

Much of the public discussion around AI is still driven by fear. Fear of job loss. Fear of machines replacing humans. Fear of an unknown future.

But what we often forget is that the rise of AI is no different than any other new evolutionary era the world has gone through. It's inventing new roles that didn't exist before. Pure and simple.

Yes, some roles will be automated, but that automation will unlock the capacity for new roles to flourish, roles that require human intuition, creativity, ethics, and strategic thinking. The CAIO is a shining example of that.

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And right now, the most transformative of those roles sits at the top of the org chart. I see a story unfolding where AI becomes the most powerful collaborator we've ever had.

I remember a few months ago when I interviewed one of Burson's APAC Chief Digital Officers, and I asked if AI would take PR & Comms jobs away or create more hybrid jobs. He said we need to think of AI as a colleague. I have never forgotten that, and it fits this evolution perfectly.

What Does a CAIO Actually Do?

The CAIO is the strategic brain behind how a company leverages AI. They're responsible for integrating artificial intelligence into core business functions, identifying opportunities for AI-driven innovation, and ensuring ethical AI practices.

In short, they make sure that AI is a business multiplier. I also believe this role is still in development because AI is still evolving and will be for a long time.

CAIOs collaborate with CIOs, CTOs, and CMOs to align AI capabilities with business goals. They lead teams of data scientists, engineers, and ethicists.

> They serve as translators between tech and business

And perhaps most importantly, they serve as translators between tech and business, helping non-technical stakeholders understand the power and implications of AI. It is similar to translating from logic to emotion. It is not about choosing one or the other; it is about learning to combine both.

A strong CAIO brings a mix of technical fluency, visionary thinking, and people-first leadership. This leader is someone who shapes culture.

They ensure transparency in AI usage, address biases, and keep human values at the core of technological decisions.

Who's Leading the Pack?

Already, several top-tier companies have embraced this role, such as

INTEL recently appointed Sachin Katti as its new Chief Technology Officer and Chief AI Officer

DELL Technologies has Mei May Soo in that department

Ebay, evolving as a company, has Nitzan Mekel-Bobrow as CAIO

WPP, has Daniel Hulme as CAIO

These are global giants betting on AI to drive their future. And they understand that AI needs a leader, not just a lab.

Not every company is ready to create a new C-level position. But many are ready to appoint someone internally to act as a CAIO, whether formally titled or not.

Why Every Company Should Take Notice?

If you're a CEO or board member, now is the time to ask yourself, do we have the leadership in place to navigate the AI era? Waiting for competitors to prove the value of a CAIO is a losing strategy. By the time the results are in, it might be too late to catch up.

The CAIO is a vision role because there is no precedent here. They help companies innovate, mitigate risks, and create ethical AI frameworks.

> The CAIO needs to be ready to embrace the unknown

With regulations on the horizon and public scrutiny growing, the CAIO needs to be ready to embrace the unknown.

Much like the rise of the Chief Digital Officer a decade ago, those who embrace this role early will set the standard for what comes next.

Education Catches Up

And it's not just companies that are waking up to this need. Universities are moving fast to prepare the next generation of AI leaders. Here are three institutions leading the charge:

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Stanford University: With its Institute for Human-Centred Artificial Intelligence (HAI), Stanford offers interdisciplinary programmes focusing on ethical and effective AI leadership.

MIT: Their Sloan School of Management has launched executive education programmes targeting AI strategy and leadership.

Oxford University: Through its Oxford Internet Institute, it offers courses that blend AI policy, ethics, and corporate strategy.

These programmes are direct responses to industry demand, designed to cultivate CAIO-ready talent who understand both the code and the corporate boardroom.

The Human Side of AI Leadership

As much as AI is about machines, the CAIO is about people, guiding teams through uncertainty and the unknown, championing responsible innovation.

This role challenges the myth that tech is cold and disconnected. The CAIO is the person making sure we stay grounded in empathy, purpose, and social good. They ensure AI doesn't replicate the flaws of our past.

I believe in roles like the CAIO because they're transformative. They embody what leadership in the 21st century must look like.

> To business leaders, it's time to reimagine your C-suite to lead responsibly in the era of intelligent technology

If you fall under the category of those who fear technology, let me tell you, don't let fear write your future. Let curiosity and courage do that.

The jobs of tomorrow are being created today, and I cannot wait to see what other roles arise that we cannot even imagine.

And to business leaders, it's time to reimagine your C-suite to lead responsibly in the era of intelligent technology. The CAIO may be a new (or newish) role, but the impact it can have is timeless. Who else agrees?