CIOs navigate gap between AI hype and reality, new diginomica network research reveals

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Exclusive research from intimate discussions from enterprise technology leaders at major global organizations exposes the disconnect between AI expectations and ROI reality

London, November 17, 2025 – New research from the diginomica network provides rare, unfiltered insights into the AI adoption challenges facing enterprise organizations, drawn from direct conversations with 35 CIOs and CTOs responsible for technology decisions at some of the world's leading companies. Unlike survey-based research, this report captures the authentic experiences and concerns of technology leaders through facilitated debates, offering verifiable, first-hand perspectives from an exclusive community representing billions in technology spend.

The research found that 93% of diginomica network members describe AI as a reality in their organizations, with implementations ranging from website chatbots and process automation to drug discovery and predictive algorithms. However, a significant gap exists between boardroom expectations and actual returns, with high-profile use cases—including Microsoft Copilot, automated bid tools, and headcount reduction initiatives—delivering disappointing results.

Key Findings:

• **Over three quarters of organizations report AI success rates exceeding 50%**, yet technology leaders consistently cite that AI has failed to meet the elevated expectations placed upon it by boards and executive teams

• **The rapid pace of AI advancement creates unique challenges**: proof of concepts that failed nine months ago are now viable, making it difficult for CIOs to manage stakeholder expectations and maintain trust

• **Data quality and change management—not technology—are the primary barriers** to AI value realization, with organizations capturing as little as 10% of potential benefits due to poor adoption strategies

"There is so much hype, and it is our job to temper that enthusiasm with a healthy dose of reality," said Ian Cohen, one of the UK's most experienced CIOs, who has led technology at Lloyds, the Financial Times, and Addison Lee. Cohen notes that CIOs must move beyond being "order takers" to become strategic advisors who guide business leaders on what to realistically expect from AI investments.

The report identifies several critical barriers to successful AI adoption: poor data quality, insufficient change management, legacy system constraints, and fundamental misunderstanding of AI capabilities across the C-suite. Many organizations conflate different AI technologies, with agentic AI, generative AI, and robotics commonly confused.

The research emphasizes that change management cannot be an afterthought. Without proper adoption strategies, organizations risk repeating past technology implementation failures. Cohen warns: "We used to say that people only see a 10-20% benefit or improvement in productivity through technology solutions because they only understand or use the basic features. This is because we never properly drive education and adoption. We risk the same happening with AI."

Mark Chillingworth, author of the research and diginomica network facilitator said:

“Our community of CIOs and CTOs shows the business reality of AI - it is complicated and there are a host of business challenges to be addressed. I’d like to thank the community for sharing their experiences with us.”

Click here to download the full report "CIOs navigate AI's weight of expectation and explore opportunities”.

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About diginomica network The diginomica network is a curated, invitation-only forum of over 400 CIOs and CTOs from leading global organizations who participate in confidential dialogues about strategic technology challenges. The network provides a trusted environment for technology leaders to share experiences, challenges, and solutions away from vendor influence, facilitating peer-to-peer learning and collaboration among enterprise technology leadership.

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Company Contact:

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diginomica

T. 07795555451
E. Derek@diginomica.com
W. https://diginomica.com

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