KEYNOTE

The Future-Facing CDAO

Leading with vision, velocity, and data-driven impact

Mir Ali

Head of Enterprise Data & Analytics, The Hershey Company

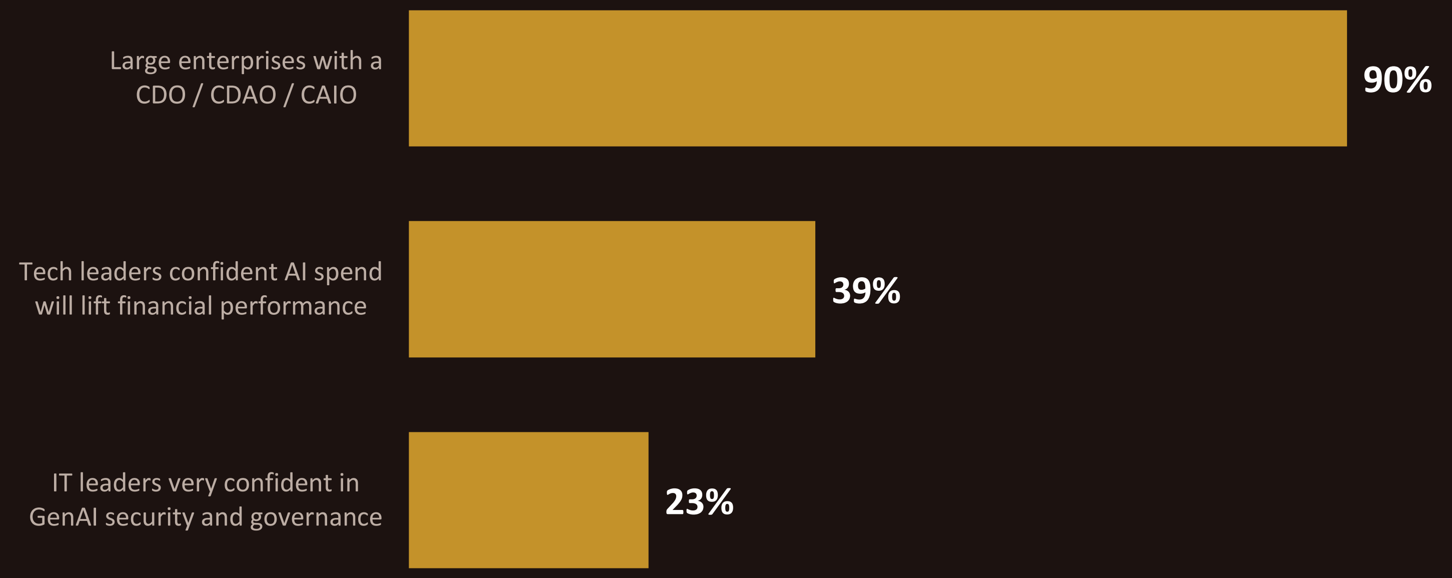
Views expressed are my own.

[Conference name] | [Date]

THE STARTING POINT

The Role Is Established. The Mandate Is Not.

Nine in ten large enterprises now have a data and analytics chief. Far fewer have conviction that the money behind the role is working.



The seat is no longer the achievement. Holding it is.

The gap between the top bar and the two below it is where CDAO tenure gets decided. Closing it is a leadership problem before it is an architecture problem.

Sources: AI & Data Leadership Executive Benchmark Survey 2026; Gartner survey of 353 D&A and AI leaders, Nov-Dec 2025; Gartner survey of 360 IT leaders, Q2 2025.

CONTEXT

What We Built, in the Order We Built It

An enterprise data and analytics organization inside a global consumer packaged goods business, built across five pillars. The order mattered more than any single decision inside it.

FIRST

Foundation

A cloud lakehouse with a unified catalog, governed access, and a self-service consumption layer. Deliberately unglamorous, and the hardest thing to fund.

THEN

Operating model

Five pillars with one accountability line each, so every request has exactly one owner. Structure followed the platform, not the reverse.

THEN

External data operations

Bringing sourcing, contracting, and production operations for external data under a single owner.

NOW

AI governance

Single intake and risk tiering on the workflow platform the company already uses. In flight, not finished.

Three questions we will work through: does the data strategy survive contact with the business plan, can we move fast without governance becoming the brake, and can we prove value in language the C-suite already uses. By the end you will have three things to take away and three to do Monday.

01

Vision

Strategy is the set of things you are willing to not do.

VISION

Vision Is Not a Document. It Is Four Forced Choices.

If your strategy has no named tradeoff, it has not been made yet. Here are the four we have had to make, and what each one costs.

01 **Foundation first, or use cases that fund the foundation**

We chose foundation first.

Cost: eighteen months explaining why the visible wins were smaller than the invoice.

02 **One platform, or best of breed per function**

We chose one platform with governed extension points.

Cost: some functions get eighty percent fit instead of a perfect tool.

03 **Central delivery, or federated products on central standards**

We chose federated products on central standards.

Cost: real investment in enablement before any speed shows up.

04 **Breadth of coverage, or depth in the domains that move the P&L**

We chose depth in supply chain and commercial.

Cost: telling credible internal customers to wait.

VISION

Anchor Strategy to the Business Calendar, Not the Tech Roadmap

If a milestone does not map to a decision someone is already accountable for, it will not survive the first budget cut. Re-test the mapping every two quarters, not every reorg.

A business objective

Owned by a named executive, already in the operating plan. Not invented by the data team.

The recurring decision that moves it

Who decides, how often, on what evidence today, and what they get wrong when the evidence is thin.

The data product that serves that decision

One owner, a service level, a defined consumer, and a retirement date if the decision changes.

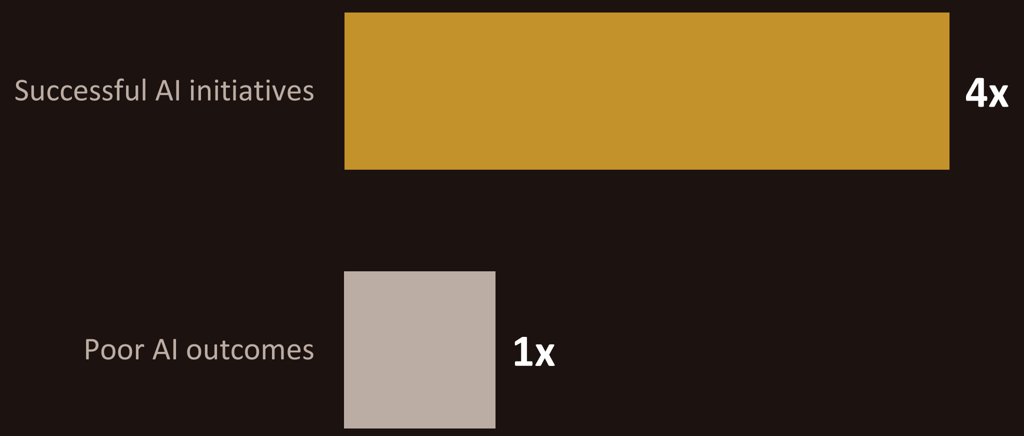
Illustrative walkthrough

Protect on-shelf availability, to the weekly replenishment call made today on lagging shipment data, to one governed model joining retailer point-of-sale to shipments, owned by a named product manager with a stated refresh SLA.

VISION

On GenAI, the Foundation Is the Strategy

Gartner found that organizations reporting successful AI initiatives invest up to four times more of revenue in data quality, governance, AI-ready people, and change management than those with poor AI outcomes.



Foundational investment as a share of revenue, indexed to the poor-outcome group

Context is the product now.

Semantics, lineage, and shared definitions are what agents actually consume. That work is not preparation for the AI program. It is the AI program.

The unlock is not the model.

It is whether the same question gets the same answer twice. Every model on the market can be swapped in a quarter. Your definitions cannot.

Pilots rarely fail on accuracy.

They fail because nobody owned the decision the pilot was meant to change, so there was nothing for a good answer to land in.

Source: Gartner, April 2026, based on a global survey of 353 data and analytics and AI leaders conducted November to December 2025.

WHAT WE GOT WRONG

Lesson One: We Built the Platform Before We Built the Demand for It

Going live is not adoption. If your senior stakeholders cannot describe what you built in one sentence, it is not live to them.

WHAT WE OPTIMIZED FOR

- Technical milestones and a credible go-live date
- Architecture that would hold for the next five years
- Proving the team could deliver at enterprise scale

WHAT WE UNDER-INVESTED IN

- A plain-language description of what the platform does for a non-technical leader
- Naming the first three teams whose work would visibly change
- Treating evangelism as an engineering deliverable, not marketing overhead

02

Velocity

Speed is a property of the operating model, not the pipeline.

The Structure We Run: Five Pillars, One Accountability Line Each

The Gartner CDAO agenda survey found 85 percent of data and analytics practices are not architected for scale. Structure is most of that. The test is not whether the boxes look tidy, it is whether any request has exactly one owner on day one.

Governance & Enablement

Owns the definitions, the policy, and whether the organization can use what we build.

Data Operations

Owns how external and internal data is sourced, contracted, and run in production.

Platform Engineering

Owns the lakehouse, the catalog, and the access model. Everything else builds on it.

Data Products

Owns the governed models and the analytical products the business consumes.

Portfolio & Delivery

Owns intake, sequencing, and the honest answer on what is not getting done.

The one rule that made it work: no shared ownership. Two names on an outcome means nobody is accountable for it, and the request sits until someone escalates.

Source: Gartner CDAO agenda survey, presented at the Gartner Data & Analytics Summit, London, May 2026.

VELOCITY

Governance Buys Velocity When It Is Tiered, Not Uniform

This is the model we are standing up, not a finished system. Two rules: risk decides scrutiny, and every control has to name the business value it protects or it gets removed.

TIER	WHAT LANDS HERE	WHAT IT TAKES TO PROCEED	TIME TO YES
Explore	Sandboxed data, no production decision, no customer or personal data.	Lightweight registration, automated checks.	**Same day**
Adopt	Real data, a named business owner, a decision that affects one function.	Standard controls, automated checks, lightweight review.	**Days**
Scale	Enterprise decision, regulated data, or an agent acting without a human in the loop.	Full review: risk, legal, privacy, and a named accountable executive.	**Weeks, deliberately**

Only 23 percent of IT leaders say they are very confident in their ability to manage security and governance when deploying GenAI tools. Uniform gates are a large part of why. Source: Gartner survey of 360 IT leaders, Q2 2025.

VELOCITY

In a Plant, You Do Not Fail Fast. You Fail Safe.

Most agile advice is written for software companies. If your analytics touches a production line, the default playbook is the wrong one.

Fail fast is a luxury of environments where failure is cheap. On a line it is neither cheap nor reversible.

01 **Validate somewhere that is not production**

Digital twins, non-critical lines, and simulated environments are where experimentation belongs. The experiment still happens. It just does not happen on the line making product.

02 **Govern the IT and OT boundary as one thing**

Analytics embedded in production systems sits across two governance regimes built separately. In food manufacturing that seam carries the highest compliance stakes you own.

03 **Speed comes from the safe path being the easy path**

If the validated route is slower than the shortcut, people take the shortcut. Making the sanctioned environment fast is a velocity investment, not a compliance one.

Hershey, Augusta County

WHAT WE GOT WRONG

Lesson Two: Governance Failed When We Ran It as a Committee, Not a Workflow

Policy that lives in a document gets discussed. Policy that lives in the intake form gets followed.

THE COMMITTEE VERSION

- A standing forum, a policy deck, and a distribution list
- Compliance depends on whether someone remembers the forum exists
- Shadow AI grows in the gap between the request and the next meeting

THE WORKFLOW VERSION

- Intake sits on the platform people already use to request everything else
- Risk tier is assigned at submission, so routing is automatic
- The path of least resistance and the compliant path become the same path

03

Impact

Nobody in the C-suite is buying analytics. They are buying three things.

IMPACT

Embed Analytics in the Operation. Do Not Deliver It to the Operation.

The difference is not technical. It is where the accountability for the outcome sits.

	DELIVERY MODEL	EMBEDDED MODEL
How it starts	A request arrives with a specification	**We sit in the operating forum where the decision is made**
What we hand over	A dashboard and a training session	**A model wired into the workflow, with the old process retired**
Who owns the outcome	The business, once we have delivered	**Shared, with our product manager in the room when results are reviewed**
Who is accountable for using it	Nobody's job description changed	**Analytics accountability written into the role, with the training to match**
How it ends	Usage decays quietly and nobody tells us	**The product changes when the decision changes, or we retire it**

IMPACT

The C-Suite Buys Three Currencies, Not Analytics

Pick the one your CFO already uses in the quarterly review, and report in that unit every time.

Decisions changed

The strongest and the hardest. Name the decision, what it was before, what it is now, and who signed off.

Goes wrong: claiming credit for a decision the business would have reached anyway.

Cost avoided

Duplicate contracts consolidated, manual effort retired, licences reclaimed. Finance can verify it, which is why it travels.

Goes wrong: counting the same avoided cost in two different programs.

Revenue enabled

The one executives care about most and the one you can least often prove alone. Claim it jointly with the business owner.

Goes wrong: attributing a commercial result to the dashboard rather than the decision.

BEFORE WE CLOSE

No Version of This Journey Runs Clean. Four Things Worth Watching For.

Not the mistakes specific to us. These are four traps that look structural, and most of you will meet at least two of them.

01 **The foundation gets funded once**

You get one honest window to build unglamorous infrastructure. After the first credible AI demo lands, every dollar arrives with a use case already attached.

02 **The first three teams set the reputation**

A platform is judged by who touched it first, not by its architecture. Choose them deliberately, or you get the ones with the most unusual requirements.

03 **Governance you have to remember is already leaking**

If compliance depends on somebody recalling a forum exists, it is not a control. It is a hope.

04 **The single-person dependency is the last risk you see**

It looks exactly like high performance until that person's calendar becomes the constraint. By then it is a retention problem, not a staffing one.

And the one we have not solved: proving revenue enabled without borrowing the business owner's number. We have a defensible answer for cost and for decisions changed. We do not have one for revenue, and we are not convinced anyone does.

WHAT WE WANT YOU TO LEAVE WITH

Three Things to Take Away

Foundations decide AI outcomes.

The unglamorous work is the strategy, not the prerequisite for it. Anyone can buy the model. Nobody can buy your definitions.

Governance earns speed when it is tiered and lives in the workflow.

Uniform gates at the end are the reason delivery is slow. Risk should decide scrutiny, and the compliant path has to be the easy one.

Value is only real in the unit your CFO already uses.

Decisions changed, cost avoided, revenue enabled. Report in one of those three every time, and bank only what you can defend.

If you keep one sentence from today, keep the second one.

CLOSING

Three Things You Can Do Monday

01

Trace one decision end to end.

Pick a single recurring business decision. Follow it from source system to the moment someone acts. Publish where it breaks.

02

Move your AI intake onto the system people already use.

Not a new portal. The one your organization already opens every day. Assign the risk tier at submission so routing happens without a meeting.

03

If you do not run the data function, ask the person who does one question.

Which recurring business decision did we change last quarter, and who signed off. If the answer is a list of dashboards, you have found the gap.

Thank you

The seat is not the achievement.
What you do with it is.

Mir Ali
Head of Enterprise Data & Analytics, The Hershey Company
[LinkedIn / email]

The work behind this is my team's. The mistakes are mine.

QUESTIONS

Backup

Held for questions: velocity symptoms, operating metrics, the funding model, and risk ownership.

Most Data Organizations Are Fast at the Wrong Layer

85%

of data and analytics practices are not architected for scale, according to Gartner's annual CDAO agenda survey.

Pipelines run in minutes. Answers take weeks.

The latency is in the queue in front of the platform, not the platform.

Every request is bespoke.

Every new question restarts the discovery, the modeling, and the trust conversation.

One person is the dependency.

A single individual as the only path to a domain means that domain moves at the speed of one calendar.

Governance is a single gate at the end.

Uniform review means the lowest-risk request waits behind the highest-risk one.

Source: Gartner CDAO agenda survey, presented at the Gartner Data & Analytics Summit, London, May 2026.

Measure Time to Decision, Not Time to Dashboard

Four measures we use inside the leadership team. Directional operating metrics, not published benchmarks.

01 **Time to first governed answer**

From request intake to an answer someone will act on, with a named owner behind it.

02 **Share of decisions with a named data product**

Recurring business decisions served by something we own, versus a spreadsheet nobody maintains.

03 **Rework rate**

How often a delivered product gets rebuilt within two quarters. High rework means the requirement was never a decision.

04 **Single points of failure**

Domains where exactly one person can answer. The one we watch most closely.

Fund the Portfolio in Three Buckets. Let the CFO Set the Ratio.

The mix between them is a business decision, not a data decision. Making that explicit changed how our budget conversations go more than any business case we have written.

Utility

Keeps the estate running and takes cost out. Consolidation, retirement, licence rationalization.

Defend it on efficiency. Never on ambition.

Enabler

Runs the core operation. The governed models and products the business depends on daily.

Defend it on continuity and operational risk.

Driver

Creates capability the company does not have today. New forecasting, new decision automation.

Defend it on growth. Expect it to be cut first.

Two funding mechanics worth negotiating: outcome-based funding for driver investments, tied to a business metric both sides agree on before the work starts, and consumption-based charging for platform services, so the teams that use the most carry the most. A fixed annual budget is the easiest line in the company to cut.

Risk Moved Into the CDAO Job Description While We Were Busy Building

Four exposures that now sit with the data function whether or not anyone formally assigned them.

01 **Model and agent inventory**

You cannot govern what you cannot enumerate. Most organizations discover the true count during an audit rather than before one.

02 **Third-party data rights**

What your contracts permit for AI training and derived works. Older agreements were not written with this in mind.

03 **Explainability where decisions are regulated**

Pricing, promotion, credit, and employment decisions need a defensible account of how the answer was produced.

04 **Data residency and sovereignty**

Where data physically sits and whose rules follow it. Harder every time you add a region or a vendor.

Third-party data rights is where we would start. Least glamorous, most contractually binding, most likely to already be a problem.