An Executive Guide to Generative AI

What Every C-Suite Leader Needs to Know



Introduction

For C-suite leaders, from finance and HR to marketing and IT, generative AI offers an unprecedented ability to support their work.

By using foundation models trained on large volumes of data, generative AI transforms everyday tasks. This includes creating new, contextually relevant information, writing code, and automating processes. The technology could make it easier, say, to produce the next blockbuster film, design parts for next-generation vehicles, or develop life-saving medicines.

70%

of organizations wordwide are already exploring generative AI in some form. Where the pilot projects begin depends on an organization's biggest needs and may start within a single department. Over time, though, generative AI use proliferates as more employees recognize its benefits.

41%

of employees in Canada see AI as a way to take on routine and repetitive processes. It also helps them stay organized and focused: 37% cited summarizing meetings, documents, and emails as a benefit of AI. They are also looking to the C-suite to lead the change that generative AI will bring. More than half (57%) anticipate getting more training and education in AI at work.

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Adopting technology in a piecemeal, haphazard fashion is never a good idea. Generative AI calls for a more cohesive approach. The C-suite therefore needs to come together and begin a process to:

- **Deepen the collective understanding of department-specific and cross-functional use cases**
- **Identify and plan for generative AI adoption with an eye toward avoiding or mitigating risks**
- **Secure employee buy-in and foster greater collaboration as process changes unfold**

There are obvious differences in what preoccupies a CFO, CMO, or CIO. In all cases, though, generative AI can deliver greater productivity, efficiency, and cost optimization opportunities. Using the technology strategically will also promote greater data-driven decision-making across the organization. Use this guide to help champion a unified approach to generative AI among your peers. And if you're the CEO, this is your playbook for leading everyone to a win.

Generative AI for CFOs

CONTEXT

Finance leaders are under greater pressure to turn the numbers into something meaningful. Organizations are counting on them to determine how best to allocate resources amid ongoing economic headwinds. They're juggling limited capital with an ever-growing number of expenses and organizational demands. Most of all, CFOs are looking for new sources of long-term growth and value.

STATE OF GENERATIVE AI ADOPTION

88%

of CFOs are either using generative AI or exploring use cases. They're focused on managing costs and increasing profitability and, in some cases, grappling with the need to reduce headcount.



TOP USE CASES FOR FINANCE

- **Improving insight into budget and forecast variances**
  CFOs need to build greater trust in the data that they provide to the rest of the organization. That's not easy when the actuals turn out to be much different than expected. Generative AI can comb through multiple sources to explain variances. It can also pinpoint how to control spending while improving the bottom line.
- **Summarizing financial statements and reports**
  Once finance teams close the books, they need to educate senior leadership on what happened and why. They can use generative AI and simple prompts to draft those kinds of reports much more quickly.
- **Reducing errors in contracts and documents**
  Finance teams spend a lot of time reviewing important files. With generative AI, they can simplify the process of double-checking terms and conditions and create helpful summaries for other organizational functions. They can also use the technology to help interpret documents and assist with regulatory compliance.

OPTIMIZING FOR GENERATIVE AI SUCCESS IN FINANCE

1. **Prioritize digital transformation**
   If you're still among the CFOs whose teams are mired in static spreadsheets, now is the time to shift toward cloud-based tools. Invest in automated solutions for FP&A, consolidation, close, and reporting. This will provide a better set of core systems on which you can layer generative AI.
2. **Establish strong data foundations:**
   Finance departments have to consider how they handle multiple currencies, complex transactions like M&As, and non-financial data. Talk to your IT team and trusted partners about how to ensure datasets are accurate, up to date, and able to integrate from ERP and other legacy systems.
3. **Strive for finance-led processes**
   CFOs and their teams have often leaned on IT departments to perform analytical queries and other ad hoc requests as they analyze the numbers. Generative AI should be part of a transition to finance teams' owning and leading these processes themselves. With greater autonomy will come greater opportunities to glean more from the data that they collect and manage.



Generative AI for CHROs or CPOs

CONTEXT

Trends like “The Great Resignation” and “quiet quitting” are forcing organizations to pay greater attention to employee experiences. For chief HR officers (CHROs) or chief people officers (CPOs), this means not only finding the best hires but also enhancing their journey from the moment they join an organization until the time they move on. CHROs and CPOs are dealing with all this as they help their organizations adapt to hybrid work models and increased expectations around professional development and long-term career support.

STATE OF GENERATIVE AI ADOPTION

A lack of formalized policies and education about AI have put many HR leaders in catchup mode.

25%

of CHROs are using or planning to use generative AI, and 66% admit they need to learn more about it.

TOP USE CASES FOR HR

- **Discovering and attracting top talent**
  CHROs and CPOs would rather their teams spend more time engaging with quality candidates than writing job descriptions. Generative AI can assist with creating postings as well as suggesting tailored interview questions. Even scheduling meetings becomes more fluid when generative AI can sift through calendar applications and suggest ideal times.
- **Optimizing employee onboarding**
  New hires shouldn't be spending their first days on the job filling out paper forms. CHROs can use generative AI to streamline these processes with templates and tools that make it easier for employees to provide key information. HR teams can also use generative AI to scan onboarding documents for errors and omissions.
- **Enhancing engagement**
  Employees notoriously hate having to search through HR portals for information about their benefits. A generative AI–powered chatbot makes it easy for employees to get answers quickly and to redefine the way that they use learning and development programs to improve their skill set.

OPTIMIZING FOR GENERATIVE AI SUCCESS IN HR

1. **Pilot based on professional growth opportunities**
   Start with use cases that free up HR staff from time-consuming and manual admin work. Pair the use of generative AI with goal-setting that allows the team to bring their most strategic decision-making capabilities to the forefront.
2. **Monitor adoption outside HR and look for opportunity**
   CHROs and CPOs need to be cautious and pragmatic about generative AI and yet avoid having their team be perceived as an organizational silo that's falling behind. Stay close to pilot projects and experiments in other departments to look for best practices as they emerge.
3. **Leave room for further policy development**
   Initial HR policies for generative AI will likely focus on proper employee usage and measures to limit bias. However, this should be an ongoing task that recognizes a rapidly evolving set of governance, risk, and workforce readiness considerations.

Generative AI for CIOs

CONTEXT

IT leaders have been trying to shift their role from “keeping the lights on” to fostering innovation for more than a decade. Their efforts have included upgrading legacy infrastructure and applications to the cloud, as well as helping organizations embrace digital channels. What hasn’t changed is the pressure to continue looking for ways to do more with less, and to empower employees while keeping data secure.

STATE OF GENERATIVE AI ADOPTION

Generative AI is one of a handful of technologies that CEOs tend to ask their CIOs to explore and adopt in a proactive way.

55%

of CIOs plan to adopt the technology over the next two years. Just as significant, 70% of CIOs consider generative AI to be a game-changing innovation.



TOP USE CASES FOR IT

- **Making IT operations more intelligent**
  Should IT staff really be helping employees with routine tasks such as password resets at this point? This is another area where generative AI–powered chatbots could usher in a host of self-service opportunities that reduce the burden on help desks. A similar approach could enhance customer service operations, where generative AI assists agents by helping them search knowledge bases or summarize contact centre call transcripts.
- **Streamlining data transformation**
  Classifying, synthesizing, and cleansing data is critical for generative AI use across organizations. IT leaders and their teams can use the same technology to help with tagging content, spotting errors and omissions, and conducting analysis and consolidation.
- **Accelerating app development**
  CIOs have long been told that they need to align with organizational needs. There's no better way to do that than by using generative AI that lets employees take a no-code approach to designing their own apps. For more advanced applications, generative AI can save hours of developers' time that's normally spent on basic coding.

OPTIMIZING FOR GENERATIVE AI SUCCESS IN IT

1. **Lead the educational effort**
   Other organizational functions may not fully understand the nuances between generative AI developed with industry-specific foundation models and the more broadly available, generic consumer-oriented tools. Provide a realistic vision of what's possible as well as potential trade-offs and risks that will need to be addressed.
2. **Make modernization a priority**
   Double down on efforts to set up data and technical architectures that are free of technical debt. A cloud-first approach will ease the transition to generative AI processes across other departments and functions.
3. **Train and hire for the right roles**
   Organizations adopting generative AI technology need people with skills in areas like machine learning and data engineering. Manual effort and rote tasks in IT should already be on the way out.



Generative AI for CMOs

CONTEXT

As traditional advertising channels decline and social media, influencer, and embedded marketing continue to grow, CMOs are rejigging what was once dubbed the “marketing mix” of channels where budgets get spent. Many brands are also bringing some marketing activities in-house, but without the resources of a full ad agency. Whatever their approach, marketing leaders are increasingly expected to personalize experiences at scale and reinforce customer loyalty.

STATE OF GENERATIVE AI ADOPTION

The technology initially attracted the public’s attention based on its abilities to assist with content creation, so it’s not surprising that marketing departments are among the biggest adopters.

70%

of CMOs say their organization is using generative AI, and another 19% are testing it.

TOP USE CASES FOR MARKETING

- **Making segmentation smarter**
  Yes, generative AI can help you write draft copy for display ads and social media posts, but it can also match that content with the right personas. By poring through market research such as customer surveys and account profiles, generative AI allows marketers to segment their audience for precision messaging.
- **Obtaining AdOps insights**
  Generative AI's summarization capabilities can comb datasets to determine the best-performing channels based on campaign objectives. This includes real-time analysis of trending customer behaviours, thus allowing ad spending to achieve a higher ROI.
- **Customer-centric engagement**
  Marketers can finally deliver on personalization objectives by using generative AI to recommend products, customize promotions, and offer content that reflects customers' preferences. The technology also makes it easier to offer multilingual content as brands expand into new audience segments and geographies.

OPTIMIZING FOR GENERATIVE AI SUCCESS IN MARKETING

1. **Develop a generative AI marketing roadmap**
   There are more publicly discussed generative AI use cases for CMOs than almost any other function. You won't be able to change all your processes at once. Create a task force within your team to identify all the potential areas where the technology could bring value and then begin setting priorities and dates.
2. **Benchmark against the best**
   Many brands have already gained traction with generative AI. Case studies, market research, and other resources are widely available online and often free. Start compiling examples of the most proven approaches and catch up with industry leaders.
3. **Impress the sales team**
   CMOs and sales leaders have historically worked in silos. Beyond tracking generative AI's positive impact on key marketing metrics, look for opportunities to align better with sales teams. Use generative AI to speed up lead generation, create sales enablement assets, and more.

Generative AI for COOs

CONTEXT

Well-managed operations, like a streamlined contact centre or optimized supply chain, can lift an organization's revenue and its reputation. As the executives who usually serve as the CEO's second-in-command, chief operating officers (COOs) need to drive strong communication across organizations to improve operations while balancing efficiencies and costs.

STATE OF GENERATIVE AI ADOPTION

"Operations" is a broad area, and little research on COOs' attitudes toward generative AI has been conducted so far.

79%

of CEOs believe generative AI will increase efficiencies, and 52% believe it will increase growth opportunities. This will set the agenda for COOs now and in the future.



TOP USE CASES FOR OPERATIONS

- **Strengthening production planning**
  Generative AI's ability to summarize and classify data makes it an ideal tool for estimating production capacities, scheduling work, and allocating resources for maximum yield. COOs can also use it to get insights into sourcing, demand forecasting, and managing contracts to enhance the entire supply chain.
- **Designing processes and policies**
  Improving how an organization runs starts with the complex job of breaking down processes into the ideal steps. Generative AI can work much faster than humans to transform technical documents and data into easy-to-follow training assets for all employees. This includes the ability to develop risk scenarios that educate team members on why it's important that they adhere to operational standards.
- **Optimizing cost on a continuous basis**
  Instead of stepping back on a quarterly or annual basis to review spending, generative AI can spot savings opportunities in real time. The technology's conversational capabilities mean that COOs and their teams can ask a chatbot for recommendations on resource distribution, reallocation trade-offs, and operational impacts of cost-cutting.

OPTIMIZING FOR GENERATIVE AI SUCCESS IN OPERATIONS

1. **Plan for long-term iteration and augmentation**
   Fine-tuning operations with generative AI will involve some trial and error. Determine where human decision-making will continue to play a critical role, and use the technology to augment employees' skills.
2. **Tighten cybersecurity controls**
   Operations-related data is most organizations' most critical asset. Identify vulnerabilities and assess the impacts. Set the appropriate authorization and access permissions for those using generative AI tools. Have a well-tested incident response plan in the event of an emergency.
3. **Choose the right KPIs**
   Generative AI works best with a clear goal in mind. Pick use cases and plan deployments that are based on desired improvements in areas such as resource utilization, cycle time, and operating cash flow.

ALL TOGETHER NOW

Where C-Suite Leaders Should Collaborate on Generative AI Adoption

There are many C-suite roles that we haven't touched on here. Chief revenue officers (CROs) are becoming a force within many startups. Chief customer officers (CCOs) are pioneering new approaches in user experience design. Chief data officers (CDOs) and chief technology officers (CTOs) build upon what CIOs do in some organizations.

Regardless of your job title, the same thinking applies. Look for available data on how quickly generative AI is becoming a standard part of your organizational function. Find the top use cases. Develop a strategy that will balance the risks and rewards.

The C-suite also need to work collectively with their CEOs to adopt generative AI with a consistent approach to improving both customer and employee experiences:



Build upon grassroots efforts

Most likely, employees are already using generative AI in their work. Instead of treating this as "shadow IT," actively solicit input from team members across every function on what's already working and what challenges they are facing. Use this to develop consultative generative AI strategies that encourage greater adoption.



Share the hallucinations and inaccuracies

Generative AI can create false or misleading outputs (sometimes called "hallucinations"). These can be mitigated by selecting the best model for the use case, providing high quality data and prompts to the models, and implementing guardrails for safety. Document and learn from these across every organizational function to drive greater contextual results.



Self-regulate while regulations are developed

Don't wait for governments and other authorities to stipulate the right way to use generative AI. Discuss and agree on policies that will address the most common customer and employee concerns around privacy and responsible and ethical use, and clearly communicate your approach to everyone who needs to know.



Train your people along with the data

Generative AI will change the way employees work, which means training and development will have to evolve in lockstep. Look for areas where key skills in machine learning or even data management can be cross-pollinated among multiple departments.



Keep organizational transformation as the core objective

Generative AI use cases should be contributing to an overall quest to make the organization more data-driven, productive, efficient, and customer-centric.

There's a role for every kind of C-suite leader to make a positive difference with generative AI that affects their organization's entire ecosystem—and to do so with a truly collaborative leadership mindset.

About AWS

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AWS offers the easiest way to build and scale generative AI applications, grounded in model choice and flexibility, making it possible for builders of all skill levels and organizations of all sizes to transform their business. Built on over 20 years of AI experience at Amazon, AWS has helped enterprises, start-ups, and non-profits unlock the value of all their data with AI across every line of business, with end-to-end security, privacy, and AI governance.

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