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The Rise of Business Stakeholders in AI Decision-making

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Abstract: The hype around AI transformation has infiltrated business lines across all areas of organizations, and with freely available generative AI (GenAI) technology, anyone can take the opportunity to explore AI's possibilities. Recent research by TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group closely examined the actions of formal stakeholders for AI initiatives today and reached some nuanced conclusions about who should be involved in these decisions and when.

Overview

As formal AI initiatives ramp up within businesses alongside rising attention outside of businesses, use cases are appearing across virtually all areas and teams. Stakeholders are taking it upon themselves to explore how to use the game-changing tech, especially with the rapidly expanding availability of GenAI platforms like ChatGPT. With more business users eager to find out about the capabilities of AI for themselves, they will increasingly use their team budgets to invest in AI technology without involving technical stakeholders until later in the buying process (if they involve them at all). While this situation introduces risk, business lines are likely to feel they cannot afford to wait to deploy these technologies without the greater risk of losing competitive advantage to rival companies.

To assess the evolving AI landscape and the infrastructure that supports it, TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group surveyed 375 data and IT professionals in North America (US and Canada) responsible for strategizing, evaluating, purchasing, and/or managing infrastructure specifically supporting AI initiatives for their organization.[1] As part of that research, these decision-makers were asked about the technical and business stakeholders involved in AI initiative decisions across their businesses. The research revealed that a range of personas are involved today and that these teams must find a balance between deploying the latest technology quickly to enable the business and maintaining a scope that targets each stakeholder's goals.
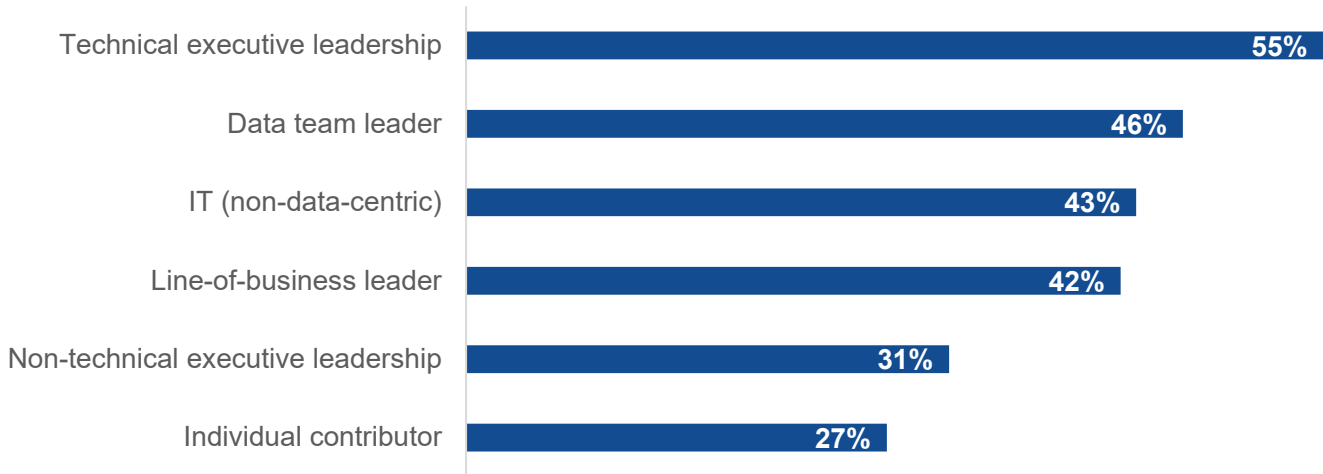
Analysis

This research highlights the broad range of stakeholders—from executives and technical experts to strategists and individual contributors—influencing decision-making for the implementation of infrastructure to support AI initiatives. When asked about the teams and individuals influencing such decisions, respondents most often cited technical executive leadership (55% of organizations), data team leaders (46%), and IT (43%) (see Figure 1). Notably, however, decision-making is spreading to non-technical roles on the business side, with almost half (42%) reporting that line-of-business leaders influence AI infrastructure implementation decisions and nearly a third (31%) saying non-technical executive leadership is involved. With decision-making now crossing business and technical teams, organizations are clearly attempting to align the right people and their perspectives to ensure AI initiatives get off the ground successfully.

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[1] Source: Enterprise Strategy Group Research Report, *Navigating the Evolving AI Infrastructure Landscape*, September 2023.

Figure 1. A Wide Gamut of Decision-makers Impact AI Infrastructure

Which of the following teams or individuals in your organization influence decision-making on implementing infrastructure to support AI initiatives? (Percent of respondents, N=375, multiple responses accepted)
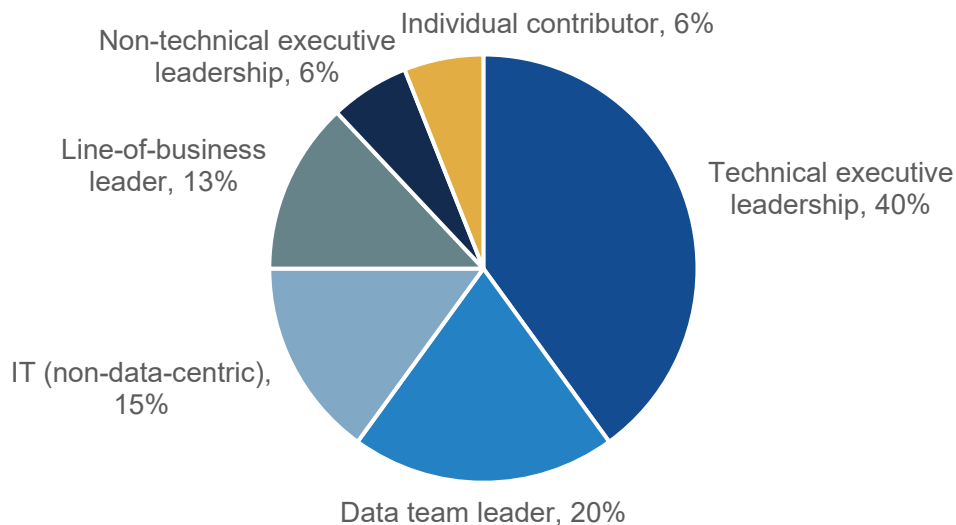
Category	Percent
Technical executive leadership	55%
Data team leader	46%
IT (non-data-centric)	43%
Line-of-business leader	42%
Non-technical executive leadership	31%
Individual contributor	27%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

But while IT is still heavily involved in influencing decision-making for AI infrastructure, the *final* decision sometimes does not come from the teams that will be responsible for deploying and managing it. According to Figure 2, 85% of organizations say that roles not exclusively aligned with day-to-day IT operations—or IT at all—have the most significant influence on final AI decisions.

Figure 2. Different Stakeholders Play a Role in Final AI Decisions

You indicated the following teams or individuals influence decision-making for AI initiatives in your organization. Which of these has the most significant influence on final decisions? (Percent of respondents, N=374)

- Non-technical executive leadership, 6%
- Individual contributor, 6%
- Line-of-business leader, 13%
- IT (non-data-centric), 15%
- Technical executive leadership, 40%
- Data team leader, 20%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

While business and technical roles within IT and data teams will generally own the decision-making, it's critical to recognize the importance of developers in AI implementations. However, communication and collaboration between AI experts and developers has significant room for improvement, with just 32% of organizations citing communication and collaboration happening on a frequent and ongoing basis between the two groups (see Figure 3). Developers build next-generation applications infused with AI and, as such, need access and support as they use AI infrastructure throughout both the development and deployment phases. And they'll need to work with data teams that are experimenting with data and building models to understand inputs and outputs.

Figure 3. Developers Play a Key Role in AI Infrastructure Operation

Which of the following best describes the communication or collaboration between your organization's developers and AI experts (e.g., data scientists)? (Percent of respondents, N=335)

Occasional, 7%

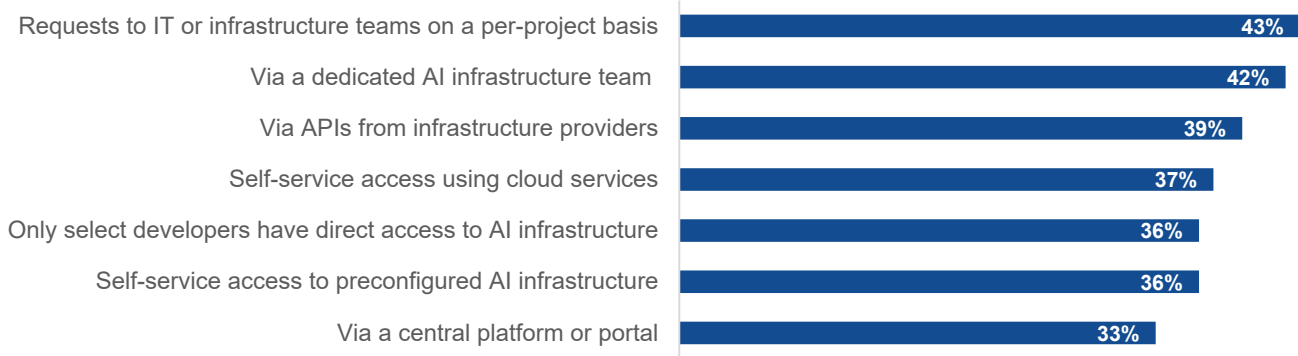Limited, 1%

Frequent and ongoing, 32%

Moderate, 60%
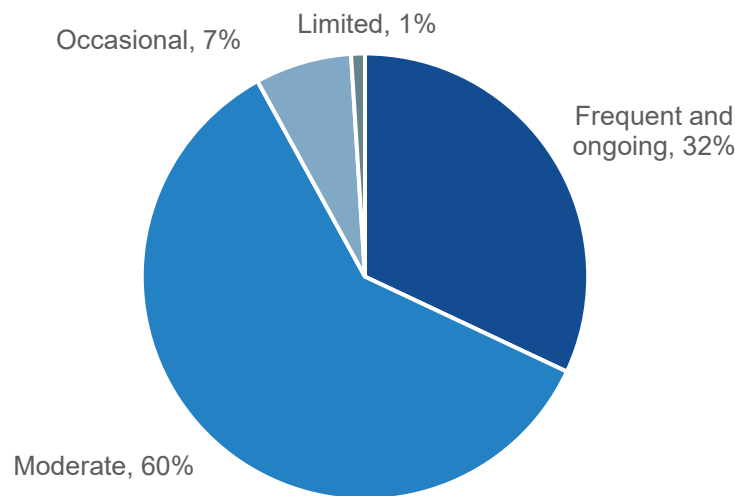
Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Developers also work with IT and operations teams responsible for resource allocation. The most common entry point for developers to access physical AI resources is through collaboration with infrastructure teams (43%), followed closely by using a dedicated AI infrastructure team (42%) (see Figure 4). APIs also play a crucial role (an access point for developers at 39% of organizations) by simplifying integration to allow developers to harness AI capabilities seamlessly.

An emerging theme broadening developer access to AI resources is the availability of dedicated labs, innovation hubs, centers of excellence, and cloud platforms. Coupled with self-service, these approaches are enabling direct and easy interactions with cutting-edge hardware, GPUs, and cloud resources.

Figure 4. Organizations Are Empowering Developers with Access to AI Resources

How are your organization's developers given access to AI infrastructure for their projects? (Percent of respondents, N=335, multiple responses accepted)

Requests to IT or infrastructure teams on a per-project basis	43%
Via a dedicated AI infrastructure team	42%
Via APIs from infrastructure providers	39%
Self-service access using cloud services	37%
Only select developers have direct access to AI infrastructure	36%
Self-service access to preconfigured AI infrastructure	36%
Via a central platform or portal	33%

Source: Enterprise Strategy Group, a division of TechTarget, Inc.

Conclusion

Increasingly, the collaboration of cross-functional teams is paramount to providing diverse perspectives on how AI should be built and applied within a business. Executives focus on balancing risk and reward as they seek to innovate and transform the overall business. LOB leaders prioritize the opportunities that may have the biggest impact in their specific domains. AI experts bring their specialized knowledge and skills to build and develop AI systems. IT is responsible for ensuring that AI systems are properly integrated into the existing IT infrastructure in a reliable and secure way. Developers build applications infused with AI to help with automation and decision-making. Compliance stakeholders identify risks and ensure AI is used responsibly and ethically. And legal experts make sure everything is done within the limits of the law.

By ensuring that a wide range of stakeholders are involved in AI decision-making and execution, businesses can help to ensure that AI is used in a responsible and ethical way to benefit all stakeholders while transforming the business for the better. Vendors in this space should prepare their solutions for use by a range of roles with differing backgrounds and comfort levels with technology to ensure they're the most attractive option to organizations using this holistic strategy for AI decision-making.

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