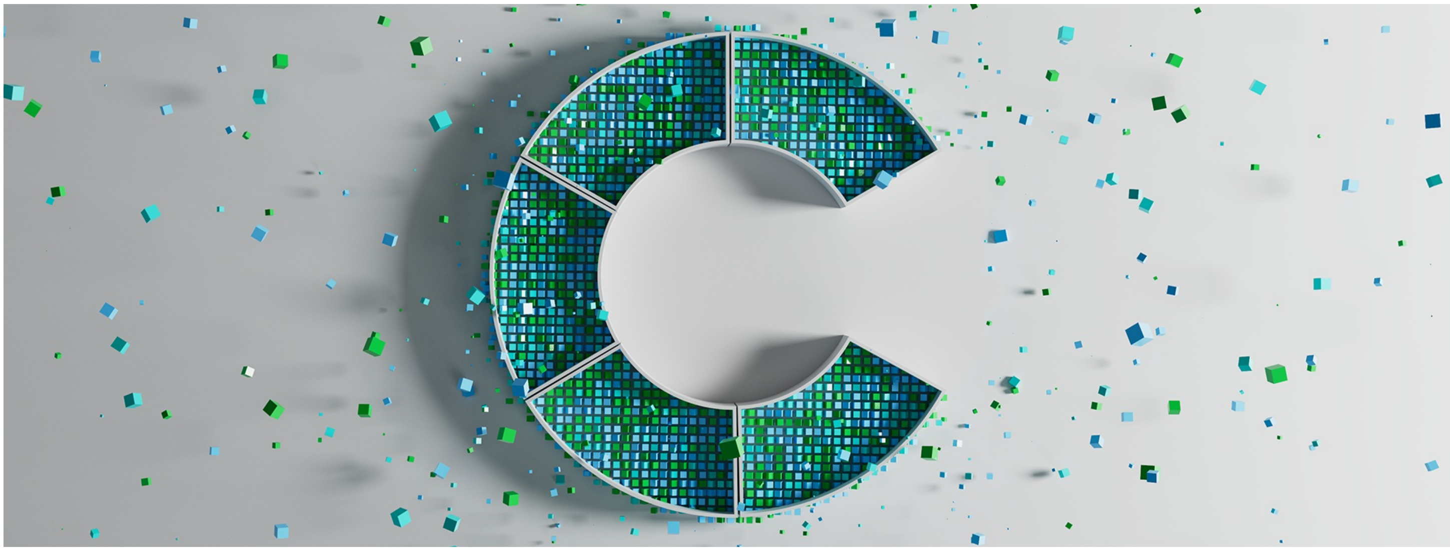
IBM Study: Middle East and Africa Chief Data Officers Redefine Strategies as AI Ambitions Outpace Readiness

- 77% of Chief Data Officers surveyed prioritize investments that accelerate AI capabilities and initiatives.

- 67% of surveyed leaders cite leveraging proprietary data is a top strategic objective to differentiate their organization in the market.

- 54% respondents identify advanced data skills as a top challenge – rising from 28% in 2023.



DUBAI, UAE, November 13, 2025 – A new global study by the IBM (NYSE: IBM) Institute for Business Value reveals enterprise data strategies are rapidly evolving as organizations race to scale AI across their business. The findings suggest that while Chief Data Officers (CDOs) are at the helm of this transformation, many say their data is still not ready to unlock AI's full potential.

Based on insights from 1,700 CDOs worldwide, the study* highlights a widening gap between AI ambition and readiness. Although 76% of surveyed Middle East and Africa (MEA) CDOs report their organization's data strategy is integrated with its technology roadmap and infrastructure investments -- compared to 55% in 2023 -- only 25% are confident their data can support new AI-enabled revenue streams. In addition, barriers such as data accessibility, completeness, integrity, accuracy, and consistency are preventing organizations from fully leveraging enterprise data for AI.

"Across the Middle East and Africa, leaders are moving fast from AI pilots to business outcomes, and the winning organizations are the ones intentionally powering AI with trusted, accessible data," said Saad Toma, General Manager, IBM Middle East and Africa. "The path forward is a modern, open data foundation that brings AI to the data, not the other way around, with strong governance, clear measures of value, and a culture that empowers teams to leverage data every day. At IBM, we're helping clients across the region build this foundation so they can move faster, make better decisions, and create new AI-enabled revenue streams with confidence."

Key findings include:

The CDO role is shifting from data custodian to business strategist as proving data’s value remains a challenge

- The majority (90%) of MEA CDOs surveyed say they must focus on business outcomes to succeed in their role.

- Yet, slightly less than one-third (28%) of MEA respondents strongly agree they can clearly convey how data facilitates business results, and just 27% have clear measures to determine the value of data-driven business outcomes.

- Deploying data for competitive advantage is now the top priority for MEA CDOs, ahead of governance and generating actionable insights as core responsibilities.

- 78% of MEA CDOs surveyed say their unique data products have already provided significant competitive advantages, and 67% cite leveraging proprietary data as a top strategic objective to differentiate their organization in the market.

AI ambitions remain high amid AI-data gap

- 77% of MEA CDOs surveyed prioritize investments that accelerate AI capabilities and initiatives.

- Yet, only 27% of MEA CDOs surveyed are confident their organization can use unstructured data in a way that delivers business value.

- To help close this gap, 75% of MEA CDOs surveyed say they bring AI to data rather than centralizing it.

- While 68% of surveyed MEA leaders have started developing diverse datasets to train AI agents, 79% admit being early in the process of defining how to scale and govern them.

- Despite these challenges, 75% of MEA respondents believe the potential benefits of deploying AI agents outweigh the risks, and 70% are comfortable with their organization relying on outcomes from AI agents.

A data-driven culture is viewed as essential, but talent gaps may slow progress

- 64% of MEA CDOs surveyed say data is wasted if their organization isn’t giving people access to it, and 72% say data democratization helps their organization move faster.

- While 70% of MEA respondents actively promote a culture of data stewardship among employees, fostering a data-driven culture remains a top strategic challenge for those surveyed.

- At the same time, 54% of MEA CDOs surveyed now say attracting, developing and retaining talent with advanced data skills is a top challenge – nearly doubling from 28% in 2023.

- 79% of surveyed MEA leaders are struggling to fill key data roles, and only 51% say recruiting and retention efforts deliver the skills and experience needed – down from 66% in 2024.

To view the full study, visit: https://www.ibm.com/thought-leadership/institute-business-value/en-us/report/2025-cdo

*Study Methodology

The IBM Institute for Business Value, in cooperation with Oxford Economics, surveyed 1,700 senior data and analytics leaders holding titles such as Chief Data Officer, Chief Data and Analytics Officer, Chief Analytics Officer, Chief AI Officer and other senior roles. The survey was conducted across 27 geographies and 19 industries between July and September 2025 and September 2025. Survey topics included data strategy, data standards, quality, and integrity, data governance, data readiness for AI, talent, and organizational culture.

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