

Thoughtworks Global CIO Survey 2026: Who governs enterprise AI?

United Kingdom: Senior leadership influence is strong, boundaries remain unsettled

Executive summary

UK responses place AI decision-making relatively high in the organization. The CEO is the most frequently cited source of greatest influence and the UK records the highest figure in the survey for the board of directors.

At the same time, our survey shows no settled model for how the CIO and CAIO should relate, while CIOs overwhelmingly see their remit extending into workforce design.

Key findings

AI decision-making is strongly anchored in senior leadership. 33% cite the CEO as having the greatest influence over AI decisions and 17% cite the board of directors, the highest board figure across the markets surveyed. Central IT is referenced by 13%.

The CIO remit extends well beyond core IT.

92% agree the CIO is now more responsible for redesigning workforce workflows and labor models than for managing core IT infrastructure. 92% also agree AI adoption is happening faster than governance structures can adapt.

CAIO adoption is lower than the global figure, but further hiring is widespread. 63% say their organization has already hired a CAIO and 36% say they are looking to hire one. Among those describing the CIO/CAIO relationship, responses are almost evenly split: 34% say the CAIO acts or will act as an extension of CIO/CTO strategy, 34% cite friction or unclear boundaries and 31% say the CAIO operates or will operate independently with equal or greater influence.

Large enterprises show an especially strong leadership shift.

Among UK respondents from organizations with more than 1,000 employees, 91% cite the CEO as having the greatest influence over AI decisions. Only 7% report an existing CAIO, while 93% say they are looking to hire one and 91% plan to expand the CIO's enterprise-wide AI remit.

What this suggests

UK data demonstrates significant senior-level attention to AI, but not a simple centralized model. How CEO, board, CIO and emerging AI leadership responsibilities fit together is evolving as the CIO becomes more involved in the design of work itself.