

20TH ALLIANCE AI ROUNDTABLE

How CEOs Are *Protecting Their Data* When Deploying AI

FEATURED CEO SPEAKER

Frik Botha

Airdocs Global, CEO

MODERATOR

Matthew Swanson

StaffAI, CEO; and Silicon
Valley Software Group,
Managing Partner

HOST

Paul Witkay

Alliance of Chief
Executives, Founder &
CEO

RECAP

Summary

This 20th Alliance AI Roundtable focused on one of the most pressing challenges facing CEOs today: how to capture the benefits of AI while protecting proprietary company data. Moderated by Matthew Swanson and featuring Airdocs Global CEO Frik Botha, the discussion explored practical approaches to AI governance, employee adoption, and data security.

Rather than framing AI as a technology problem, Frik positioned it as a leadership and governance challenge, one that requires clear policies, approved tools, employee training, and thoughtful controls. The session highlighted how organizations can accelerate AI adoption while minimizing the risk of exposing sensitive intellectual property, customer information, and business data.

“The opportunity is real, but in our environment, the controls matter as much as the use cases.”

FRIK BOTHA · CEO, AIRDOCS GLOBAL

THE DISCUSSION

Key Themes & Insights

01

AI Adoption Has Moved Beyond ROI to Risk Management

Matthew opened the discussion by noting that most organizations have already moved past the question of whether AI creates value. Alliance member companies are broadly adopting AI, and the focus has shifted from proving return on investment to managing the risks associated with widespread usage. As employees increasingly use tools like ChatGPT and Claude, often with or without formal approval, CEOs must understand where company data is going and how it is being protected.

Matthew cited examples of data leakage and emerging security vulnerabilities, arguing that data protection has become one of the top concerns among business leaders deploying AI at scale.

02

AI Governance is a Leadership Responsibility

Frik emphasized that AI governance cannot be delegated solely to IT teams. He described AI adoption as a leadership decision requiring executive oversight and clear organizational boundaries.

His realization came during an internal staff meeting when he recognized that employees would inevitably experiment with AI. The question was not whether AI would be used, but whether usage would emerge invisibly across the organization or be guided through governance, approved tools, and clear policies.

Rather than chasing every new AI use case, Airdocs chose to establish governance first and innovation second.

03

Start with Approved Platforms and Existing Ecosystems

Airdocs elected to standardize on Microsoft Copilot because it aligned with the company's existing Microsoft 365 environment. Frik argued that organizations should prioritize AI platforms that fit naturally within their existing technology stack and security framework.

This approach allowed the company to move quickly while maintaining visibility into how data was being accessed and used. Rather than evaluating dozens of standalone AI products, the team focused on a smaller set of approved tools with established governance controls.

04

Training Is as Important as Technology

One of the strongest themes of the discussion was the importance of employee education. Frik noted that policies alone do not change behavior.

To support adoption, Airdocs trained approximately 80% of its workforce on AI usage, helping employees understand both the opportunities and the boundaries. The objective was to ensure staff could confidently use AI while recognizing which data should never be shared and which tools were approved for business use.

The discussion reinforced that successful AI adoption depends as much on organizational readiness as technical implementation.

05

AI Is Most Valuable as a Thinking Partner

Frik shared a practical example of using AI to prepare for a high-stakes negotiation with a large U.S.-based partner. He created an AI agent trained on everything he knew about the organization and its key decision-makers, then used the agent to challenge his assumptions and pressure-test his strategy.

Importantly, the AI did not make decisions for him. Instead, it helped him think more critically, ask better questions, and focus on the issues most important to the negotiation.

This use case illustrated a broader point: AI often delivers its greatest value by improving executive judgment rather than replacing it.

06

Data Boundaries Must Be Defined Before Scale

Frik stressed the importance of defining clear data boundaries before expanding AI initiatives. Sensitive customer information, proprietary business knowledge, and confidential internal documents require different levels of protection.

Organizations that fail to establish these guardrails early risk exposing critical intellectual property as AI adoption expands across departments.

The discussion highlighted the need for CEOs to view AI governance as an ongoing process rather than a one-time implementation project.

FOR EXECUTIVE TEAMS

Suggested Action Items for CEOs & Executive Teams

- 01 Establish AI governance policies before scaling adoption across the organization.

- 02 Define clear data classifications and boundaries for what employees can and cannot share with AI tools.

- 03 Standardize on approved AI platforms that align with existing security and compliance requirements.

- 04 Invest in employee training to ensure responsible AI usage and awareness of data protection risks.

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- 05 Create a formal process for evaluating new AI tools before they are introduced into business workflows.

 - 06 Use AI as a strategic thinking partner for planning, analysis, and decision-making rather than solely as a productivity tool.

 - 07 Review current AI usage across teams to identify shadow AI activity and potential data exposure risks.

 - 08 Balance innovation with governance by enabling experimentation within approved guardrails.

IN CLOSING

Conclusion

The discussion made clear that the future challenge for CEOs is no longer whether to adopt AI, but how to deploy it responsibly. As AI becomes embedded throughout business operations, governance, training, and data protection must evolve alongside adoption. Frik Botha's experience demonstrates that organizations can embrace AI aggressively while maintaining control, provided they establish clear boundaries, approved tools, and a culture of responsible use.

Successful AI adoption requires balancing innovation with governance, ensuring organizations can unlock AI's value without compromising trust, security, or intellectual property.