SG | STRATFIELD GROUP

STRATFIELD MONITOR 2026 · AI IN THE SDAX

Where AI stands in the SDAX

How far has AI taken hold within German companies' organisational structures? Five findings from a Stratfield Group analysis of 28 SDAX-listed companies.

AS OF 29 AUGUST 2026 · 28 COMPANIES · 236 AI ROLES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

AI HAS ARRIVED IN THE SDAX

27 of the 28 companies examined have at least one clearly identifiable AI role. Yet in the typical company there is just one AI role per roughly 1,200 employees.

AI IS NOT YET A C-LEVEL JOB

In 21 of 28 companies, the most senior AI role identified sits at director or head-of-function level or below. Only six companies assign responsibility for AI at a more senior level.

TECHNICAL ROLES DOMINATE

49 percent of all 236 AI roles recorded are technical in nature. Leadership and strategy account for 18 percent, product for 10 percent.

AI DENSITY VARIES SHARPLY BY SECTOR

Digitally driven companies have one AI role per 317 employees. In manufacturing it is one per 1,511, in retail just one per 2,319.

01 · DENSITY

Roughly one AI role per 1,200 employees

AI is no longer a topic only for the large DAX corporations: it has arrived in the SDAX too. AI roles nevertheless remain scarce: among the 27 companies with at least one AI role, the median is one AI role per **1,200** employees.

At the same time, the differences are enormous: the range runs from **1 in 106** to **1 in 7,455** employees, a factor of 70. For one of the 28 companies, no AI role could be identified on LinkedIn despite a workforce of almost 1,000.

EMPLOYEES PER AI ROLE · 27 COMPANIES · LOGARITHMIC SCALE

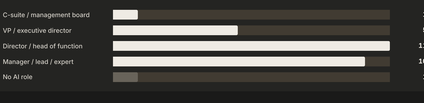


02 · SENIORITY

AI rarely sits at the very top

In **21** of **28** companies, the most senior AI role identified goes no higher than director or head-of-function level. In more than a third, the topic sits only at manager, lead or expert level. Just six companies assign responsibility for AI at a more senior level: five at VP or executive director level, and one in the C-suite or on the management board.

MOST SENIOR AI ROLE IDENTIFIED PER COMPANY · NUMBER OF COMPANIES PER LEVEL

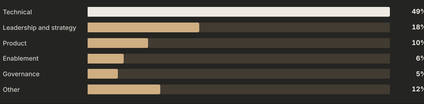


03 · ORIENTATION

AI remains technology-led

Almost half of the **236** AI roles recorded are technical in nature. Leadership and strategy account for just **18 percent**, product for **10 percent**. The distribution of roles suggests that in many companies, AI is still organised around the technology, far less often around practical use cases in day-to-day operations.

ROLE GROUPS · SHARE OF ALL 236 AI ROLES



04 · DATA

AI is still too closely tied to the data function

Almost a third of all AI roles are data scientists or AI/ML engineers. This close link is also evident in the most senior roles: in **7** of **27** companies, the most senior AI roles carry both data and AI in their title, and in all seven, data comes before AI. Across all 38 roles with both terms in the title, this holds in **87 percent** of cases. These titles suggest that AI is largely being developed within existing data functions.

SELECTED SENIOR POSITIONS WITH DATA AND AI IN THE SAME TITLE

Wüstenrot	Chief Data & AI Officer
Redcare	Executive Director Data & AI
Douglas	Director Data Strategy, AI & Data Science
SCHOTT	Head of Global Data & AI Engineering and Delivery
tonies	Head of Data Platform & AI
secunet	Team Lead Data Science & AI

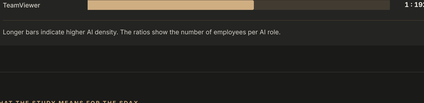
05 · SECTOR

AI density differs massively by sector

Among digitally driven companies, the median ratio is one AI role per **317** employees. In other sectors, AI density is markedly lower: in manufacturing there is **one AI role per 1,511 employees**, in retail just **one per 2,319**. That is a fivefold to sevenfold difference.

The gap is most striking at the front-runner, Redcare Pharmacy: with one AI role per 106 employees, the company has the highest AI density in the study.

THE THREE AI FRONT-RUNNERS AMONG THE 28 COMPANIES EXAMINED · AI ROLES PER EMPLOYEE



Longer bars indicate higher AI density. The ratios show the number of employees per AI role.

WHAT THE STUDY MEANS FOR THE SDAX

AI MUST BE APPROACHED FROM THE PROBLEM, NOT THE TECHNOLOGY

Almost half of the AI roles recorded are technical in nature. The risk is considerable: if companies locate AI wherever the technology happens to sit, they can easily end up solving the wrong problem. Value is created only in day-to-day business: when sales closes more deals, production runs more efficiently or service resolves problems faster.

BUSINESS LEADERS MUST TAKE OWNERSHIP

IT and data science are enablers, not owners of the solution. Real change requires management ownership. The business must therefore own the problem, the use case and the success metric. Roles such as an AI Business Partner for Sales, an AI Lead for Operations or an AI Product Owner for Customer Service anchor that responsibility where the economic value is created.

AI NEEDS TO BE CLOSER TO MANAGEMENT

In 21 of 28 companies, the most senior AI role identified sits at director or head-of-function level or below. Only one company places the topic in the C-suite. If AI is to transform processes, productivity and business models, it cannot sit too far from management in the organisation. Companies that do not establish a Chief AI Officer should therefore ensure that the person with overall responsibility for AI reports directly to the CEO.

STRATFIELD VERDICT

AI is not a technology project, yet all too often it is still treated as one. Technology enables the solution; the business creates the value. Lasting change requires management support and accountability. This applies to AI just as it does to any other transformation programme.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on 28 SDAX companies with a combined workforce of 265,953 employees, selected from the full index of 70 companies; this corresponds to 40 percent of index members. For each company, the positions visible on LinkedIn were systematically captured through a structured search and reviewed individually, more than 1,800 profiles in total.

A position counts as an AI role if its job title contains AI, KI or a spelled-out form, or names machine learning, data science, deep learning, NLP, computer vision or LLM. Classification is based solely on the current position listed on LinkedIn; previous roles, skills and certifications do not count. This left 602 people with a verified company affiliation, 236 of whom held positions meeting the study's definition of an AI role.

The denominator is the headcount from each company's most recent annual report, not the number of employees registered on LinkedIn. The reason: the share of staff on LinkedIn varies considerably between companies, and a weak LinkedIn presence would otherwise artificially inflate the density.

AUTHORS
Patrick Schomaker, Laurens Mauquoi

SG | STRATFIELD GROUP