FOUNDERS REDEFINING MIDLIFE

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LEADERS IN CONVERSATION



COVER STORY

JAMES AND CLAIRE DAVIS

Rewriting the midlife story

CO-FOUNDERS, THE MIDLIFE MENTORS

FROM THE EDITORS

Editor's note

Founders Redefining Midlife

Titles say little about how a leader actually works. That is why we spent this edition with James and Claire Davis, Co-founders at The Midlife Mentors.

The co-founders of The Midlife Mentors argue that many of the lows of midlife are not life sentences, and have built a coaching business around proving it.

Our cover story follows James through the choices that shaped the work, from the early years to the decisions being made now, and asks what other leaders can take from them.

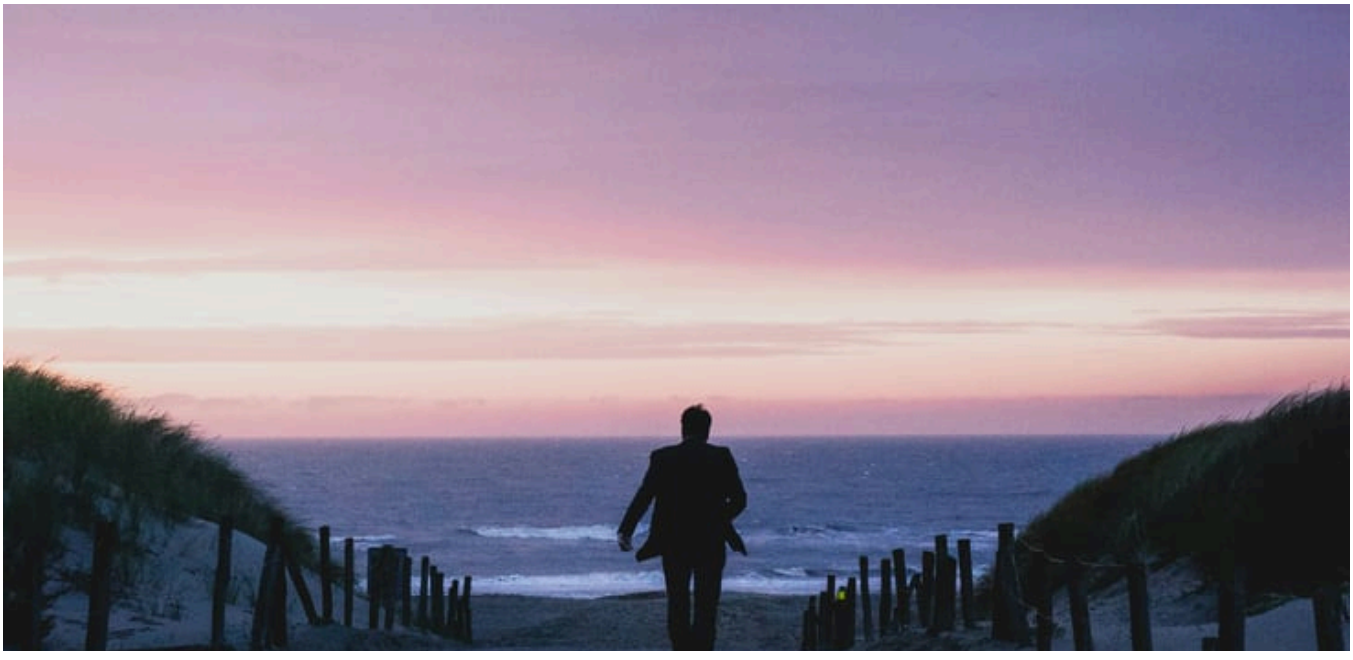
Also in this edition: Midlife is where workforce plans quietly lose talent. Ageing populations will make employers more dependent on people in their fifties and sixties. Too many organisations still design jobs, health support and careers as if those workers were on their way out.

Then: Data residency in the Gulf: what technology leaders should plan for. The question has moved from where data sits to who can reach it, and under which law. Four decisions to make this year, and the questions to put to every supplier.

And: Jensen Huang and the long bet behind NVIDIA. NVIDIA spent more than a decade building software for a market that did not yet exist. What its co-founder's patience teaches about funding the platform, not just the product.

We hope you find something here worth taking into your next meeting. ■

The Editors



THE CIO TABLE

In this edition



06

COVER STORY

James and Claire Davis

Rewriting the midlife story



13

ANALYSIS

Midlife is where workforce plans quietly lose talent

Ageing populations will make employers more dependent on people in their fifties and sixties. Too...



18

ANALYSIS

Data residency in the Gulf: what technology leaders should plan for

The question has moved from where data sits to who can reach it, and under which law. Four decisions...



22

LEADERS IN FOCUS

Jensen Huang and the long bet behind NVIDIA

NVIDIA spent more than a decade building software for a market that did not yet exist. What its...

Editor's note **02** *Read every edition* **27**

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COVER STORY

James and Claire Davis

Rewriting the midlife story

CO-FOUNDERS, THE MIDLIFE MENTORS

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James and Claire Davis

CO-FOUNDERS, THE MIDLIFE MENTORS

Photo: courtesy of themidlifementors.com

At a glance

- Top 1.5% of podcasts worldwide, where The Midlife Mentors began
- 10 days: the length of Midlife Boost, their new programme in the app
- Weekly live calls where they coach clients through whatever is holding them back

It isn't all downhill

Ask a room of forty-somethings how they feel about midlife and you will hear a familiar list. Thicker waistlines. Thinner patience. Careers that seem to have plateaued, and a creeping sense that the exciting part of life happened to someone younger.

James and Claire Davis have heard every item on that list, and they do not buy it. As co-founders of The Midlife Mentors, they help people see that many of the lows of this stage are not life sentences. A surprising number turn out to be mental blocks, and blocks can be moved.

Midlife does bring real change, they are quick to say. Hormones shift, so do neurotransmitters, and with them our energy, our mood and even the way we think. Yet it is also the first time most of us hold decades of experience in our hands. Pair that experience with a clear understanding of what is happening in the body and the mind, add the right tools, and this stretch of life can become a period of genuine transformation.

Their outlook is refreshingly practical. You can work with your hormones rather than against them. You can rebuild strength and fitness, reignite your libido and retrain the way you think. And if all of that is possible, they ask, why settle for anything less than the best version of these years?

Where it all began

Their paths first crossed in Ibiza, at the transformational retreats James was running at the time. The connection was personal and professional at once, and before long they had founded The Midlife Mentors together.

They started with a podcast of the same name, which climbed into the top 1.5 percent of podcasts worldwide. Listener demand led to an evidence-based transformation programme that has since changed hundreds of lives and collected several awards along the way.

The programme is never finished, they admit. They keep refining it, partly because they love the work: helping clients through it still gives them a genuine buzz.

What they offer

- The Midlife Mentors podcast: where it all started, now among the top 1.5% worldwide
- Transformation programme: evidence-based, award-winning and delivered through their app
- One-to-one coaching: personal support for individual goals
- Retreats: time away to reset body and mind
- Workplace programmes: menopause, andropause, stress, communication and relationships

A partnership built in Ibiza

Building a business with your spouse is not for everyone, and the Davises are candid that it took practice. Working together, they admit, was an education in itself. The early days had their friction. Over time they learned exactly where each of them shines, and the partnership now runs smoothly.

Claire is the planner, meticulous with detail and relentless about execution. James is the ideas person, the one who brings connections and technology to the table. They spark off each other, and they make a point of enjoying it.

That chemistry shows up in their coaching. Clients often say they value hearing both a male and a female perspective, backed by real life experience and an honest way of talking about health, hormones and relationships that many have never been offered before.

Why midlife can feel so heavy

When we are young, the couple point out, midlife looks like the summit. We picture ourselves at the peak of our careers, financially secure and settled in a strong relationship. Sometimes that is exactly how it turns out. Often it also arrives with a quieter weight.

Is this really what I wanted? Am I where I hoped to be? What comes next? Those questions tend to land at the same moment as ageing parents, children who still need parenting, careers that demand more rather than less, strained relationships and money worries.

Many people then pile shame on top, scolding themselves for not feeling happier or more grateful. The Davises push back firmly on that. Self-compassion sits at the centre of their approach.

So does a simple reassurance. Plenty of people believe they are the only ones struggling at midlife. They are not, there is no shame in feeling what they feel, and in the Davises' experience the best years are still ahead.

Start with what you believe

Awareness is where the Davises begin. Hormonal shifts can change how we feel and how sharply we think, and simply knowing that can be a huge relief. Their message, roughly, is this: the low mood or the foggy afternoon may not be a flaw in your character. It may be your hormones. Once you see it that way, you can meet it with compassion and make a plan.

Their aim is to inform, to support and to give people a practical framework for embracing what they call the second act of life with real joy. Just as important, they want clients to feel listened to and genuinely understood, inside a community that encourages positive action.

Beyond the quick fix

Most people, they have noticed, reach first for an external fix: a new diet, a tougher workout. Those help for a while. Lasting change usually means looking underneath, at the beliefs we hold and the patterns we repeat.

Everything is connected. What we eat affects our gut, our gut affects our mood, and our mood shapes what we crave. Once you understand how the pieces fit together, the job becomes a series of small, manageable changes across several areas, and those small changes add up to a big result.

That is why the couple take a psychology-first approach. James holds a master's degree in applied psychology, alongside qualifications that include NLP coaching. Claire is qualified in stress management and life coaching, among other disciplines.

When people examine their beliefs and consciously adopt new ones, built around the person they want to become, behaviour starts to follow and the path gets easier. Momentum builds further once every part is pulling the same way: moving the body, eating well, caring for gut health and practising gratitude.

That low mood may not be a flaw in your character. It may be your hormones.

The whole-person toolkit

- Hormone awareness: understanding what is changing in the body, and why it matters
- Mindset and beliefs: spotting the stories that keep people stuck, then rewriting them
- Movement: training that rebuilds strength, energy and confidence
- Nutrition and gut health: food that supports a steadier mood and better energy


Photo: Tom Wheatley / Unsplash

- Habits: small daily actions that compound into big results
- Gratitude and community: support that keeps people going when motivation dips

What clients actually get

Plenty of clients first get in touch because they want to lose weight. Dig a little deeper, the Davises say, and the real goal is almost always to feel happier and more confident.

By the end of the programme most people have their physical results. What tends to surprise them is everything else: new habits, new beliefs, a brighter outlook and an eye for opportunity. That ripple effect is the heart of the work. Clients have gone on to leave jobs that drained them, win promotions, launch businesses and start families.

A coach in your pocket

The Midlife Reset programme runs through the couple's own app. Building it was a big project, they admit, but it transformed the client experience. Everything is scheduled. Information and prompts arrive little by little, helping new beliefs and behaviours take root through unconscious learning. Around that sit in-depth workshops, movement programmes, nutrition coaching and mindset coaching.

The human touch stays. James and Claire join live calls with clients every week, using them to dig into whatever is blocking progress and coach people through it. Clients come away feeling connected to the couple, and to each other.

Client story: from sidelined to summit

One client in her sixties was unhappy with her weight, and injuries were keeping her from the outdoor adventures she loved sharing with her partner. After the programme she was climbing mountains, joining cycling expeditions and even performing at one of the UK's big music festivals.

Client story: back behind the drum kit

Another client, who runs an international company as its chief executive, had almost no energy and a shoulder injury that had dogged his drumming for years. He became stronger, leaner and more

energetic, the injury cleared, and he now plays gigs as a drummer on a regular basis.

Ask what they are proudest of and they talk about reach: so many clients, and so many profound transformations. They have also taken their workshops into organisations including KPMG, Citibank, NBCUniversal and Soho House, opening up conversations about midlife that many workplaces have never had.

The stories keep coming. Clients who once battled chronic fatigue now run 5k and more. People who struggled to conceive have become parents. Others have launched businesses or moved into new careers. Watching someone stop believing that life peaked long ago, and start seeing how much is still to come, is, for James and Claire, simply the best feeling there is.

What makes a good mentor

What makes a great midlife mentor? Living through midlife yourself helps, the couple say. So does a working knowledge of several disciplines at once, from hormones and psychology to physical training and nutrition, because the approach only holds together when it treats the whole person.

Then come the human qualities: caring genuinely about each client's success, and empathy. Above everything else, though, they name discipline. The discipline to push on through the hard stretches and stay on course toward your goals is something they call a superpower, one that builds success in any area of life. It is also the quality they work on most with clients.

Coming next: Midlife Boost

A new ten-day programme in The Midlife Mentors app, designed as a short, sharp introduction to the couple's approach. It includes a midlife-specific exercise plan, nutrition coaching, and mindset and habit coaching. The name is the promise: by day ten, people should see and feel the difference.

Life outside the programme

Unsurprisingly, the couple practise what they preach. They work out side by side, in the gym and out running, and they swim outdoors all year round, including winter mornings when the ice on the pond has to be broken first. Less predictably, they also DJ together, playing classic house.

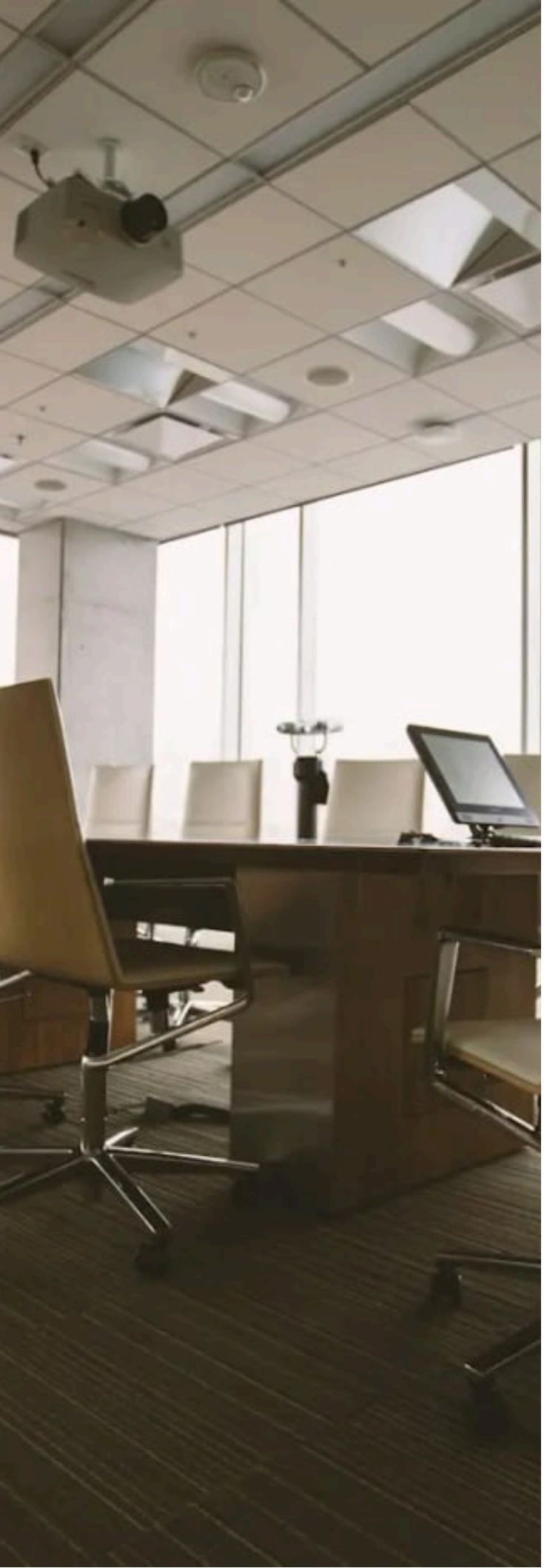
Asked for a memorable moment outside work, they mention their wedding day, and then a road trip through the southern United States. It was their first proper holiday since getting together: just the two of them, a hire car, endless highway and no itinerary. They met inspiring people, fell for the country and rediscovered each other, along with what matters most to them.

A message to readers

The Midlife Mentors grew out of watching friends hit midlife and decide it was all downhill from there: no more career progress, an expanding waistline, low energy, fading desire. James and Claire Davis believe the opposite. Midlife can be an exciting, positive time. Ask yourself what your dreams and goals are, then go after them, and look after yourself physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually along the way. Wherever you are starting from, they say, transformation is possible. ■



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ANALYSIS

Midlife is where workforce plans quietly lose talent

Ageing populations will make employers more dependent on people in their fifties and sixties. Too many organisations still design jobs, health support and careers as if those workers were on their way out.

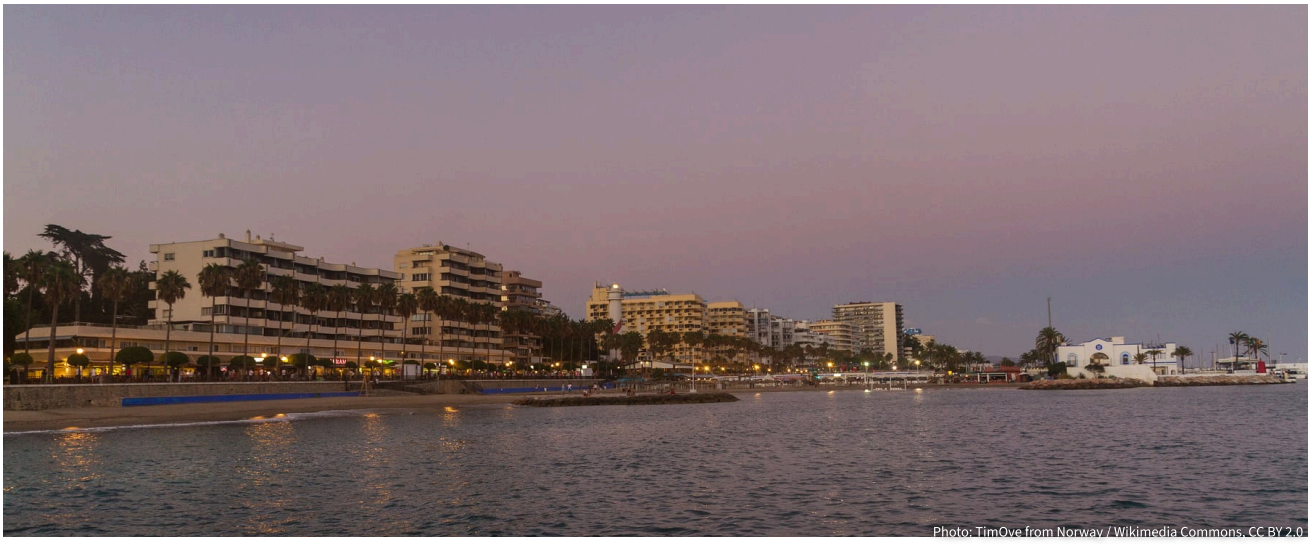


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Demography is the most predictable force in business planning, and one of the most neglected. The World Health Organization projects that by 2030 one in six people in the world will be aged 60 or over, and that the number of people aged 60 and older will double to 2.1 billion by 2050. Across OECD countries, the old-age dependency ratio rose from 19% in 1980 to 31% in 2023 and is projected to reach 52% by 2060.

For employers this is not a distant pensions question. It is a question of who will do the work. The OECD's Employment Outlook 2025 projected that growth in GDP per head across its member countries would slow by about 40%, to 0.6% a year between 2024 and 2060, as working-age populations shrink, and said older workers will need to delay retirement.

The leak at 50

Yet many people leave the workforce long before state pension age. UK government figures for 2026 show 3.4 million people aged 50 to 64 economically inactive, a rate of 25.7%. The largest single reason is sickness, injury or disability, cited by 43.8% of that group, ahead of retirement at 31.1%. Around 585,000 of them say they would be willing to work.

The pattern is not evenly spread. Women aged 50 to 64 have an inactivity rate of 29%,

against 22.2% for men, and inactive women are more than twice as likely as inactive men to give looking after home or family as the main reason. The Fawcett Society found that one in ten women who worked through the menopause had left a job because of their symptoms. Eight in ten said their employer had not shared information about menopause, trained staff or put an absence policy in place.

Each of those exits takes experience, client relationships and institutional memory with it, often without anyone recording why. Some are unavoidable. Many turn on whether a job can bend around a health condition or a caring responsibility, and whether anyone asks before the resignation letter arrives.

A market as well as a workforce

There is a commercial case too. AARP's Global Longevity Economy Outlook, produced with Economist Impact, estimated that people aged 50 and over generated about 34% of global GDP in 2020, some $45 trillion, while making up 24% of the world's population. It projects that share will reach 39% by 2050.

The same group accounted for half of global consumer spending, about $35 trillion, and through that spending supported around a third of the world's jobs. Businesses that sell to that market without people of the same age in their product, service and leadership teams are designing for customers they may understand less well than they think.

Longer working lives are arriving anyway. In the UK, the share of people still employed at 65 has risen to 46.6%, from 28.2% in 2016. The gap in employment rates between people aged 35 to 49 and those aged 50 to 64 has narrowed to 12.9 percentage points, from 14.1 a year earlier. Employers can shape that trend or absorb its consequences.

What a midlife strategy looks like

Start with a structured mid-career review, offered around 50, that covers skills, health, finances and ambitions in one conversation. It gives people a moment to plan a change of role, pace or direction inside the organisation rather than outside it.

Treat health support as a retention tool. Occupational health, musculoskeletal and mental health provision, and menopause support should be judged by how many people they keep in work, not by take-up rates. Line

BY THE NUMBERS

3.4m

UK adults aged 50 to 64 economically inactive in 2026

Department for Work and Pensions, 2026

34%

Share of global GDP generated by people aged 50-plus, 2020

AARP, 2022

One in six

People worldwide expected to be aged 60 or over by 2030

World Health Organization, 2025

managers need the training and the authority to agree adjustments quickly.

Make flexibility predictable. Phased retirement, part-time senior roles and job shares let people reduce hours without leaving. Caring responsibilities, which fall more heavily on women in this age group, are easier to manage with agreed patterns than with informal favours.

Open development to every age. The OECD has called for more lifelong learning, especially for older workers, so that they have greater opportunity to stay productive for longer. Reskilling programmes should be offered to staff in their fifties as deliberately as to graduates.

Recruit for it, too. In the UK alone, those 585,000 people in their fifties and early sixties who are out of work but willing to work are an obvious pool. Returner programmes, age-neutral job adverts and assessments that give credit for experience are the routes to them.

Finally, measure it. Track exits, promotions and training by age band, and ask leavers over 50 why they went. Age belongs in the same board pack as gender and ethnicity data.

Midlife used to mark the start of a slow exit. With growth slowing and populations ageing, it is better treated as the start of a second career inside the business.

Sources: who.int; gov.uk; aarp.org; irishtimes.com; fawcettsociety.org.uk. ■

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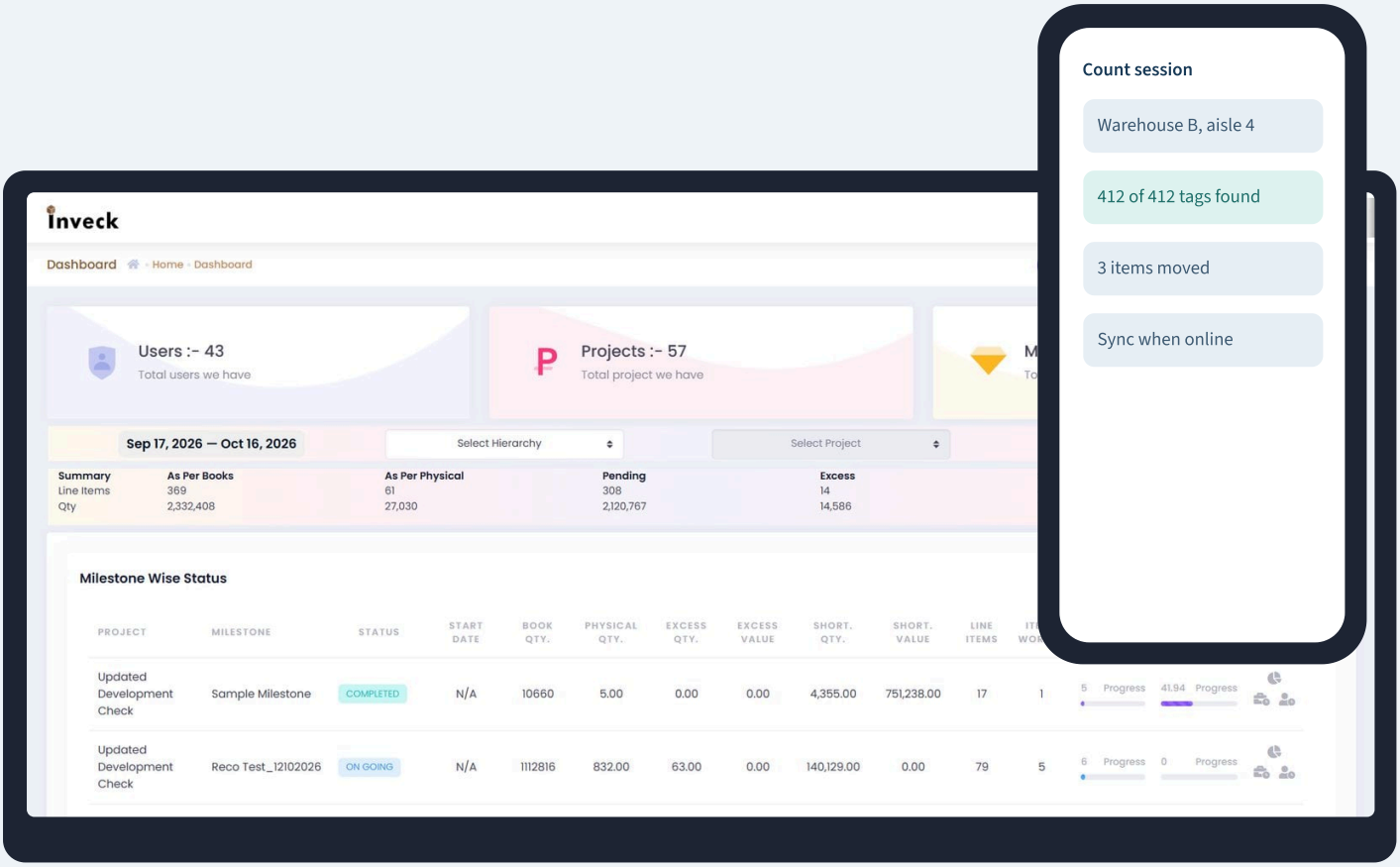
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ANALYSIS

Data residency in the Gulf: what technology leaders should plan for

The question has moved from where data sits to who can reach it, and under which law. Four decisions to make this year, and the questions to put to every supplier.

For most of the past decade, data residency in the Gulf was treated as a question of geography. Where is the server? Is it in the country? Procurement asked, the supplier answered, and a contract clause closed the matter.

That question is no longer enough. Regulators, auditors and, increasingly, boards ask something harder: who can reach the data, and under which law. A database hosted in Riyadh or Abu Dhabi by a provider headquartered abroad may still sit within reach of a foreign court order. A support engineer overseas with administrative rights is, in practice, a point of cross-border access.

What changed

The legal ground has filled in quickly. Saudi Arabia's Personal Data Protection Law has been enforced since September 2024, after a one-year grace period, under the supervision of the Saudi Data and Artificial Intelligence Authority, and its implementing rules set conditions for transferring personal data out of the kingdom. The UAE's Federal Decree-Law No. 45 of 2021 sets a general regime for personal data but excludes government data, health and banking data where separate legislation applies, and free zones with their own regimes. The Dubai International Financial Centre and Abu Dhabi Global Market each have their own data protection law and regulator. Qatar, Bahrain and Oman have national laws, and other states are building theirs.

Sector rules sit on top. Government data is commonly subject to classification schemes and in-country hosting. Central banks expect to be consulted, and sometimes to approve, before regulated firms move material workloads to the cloud or offshore. Health data carries

the strictest expectations; the UAE's federal law on health information generally requires such data to stay in the country.

The supply side has moved too. The large cloud providers now operate regions in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Bahrain, and several offer sovereign or government variants run by local staff. That removes an old excuse without settling the question of jurisdiction.

Why it reaches the board

Three reasons. First, the exposure is real: regulators can impose fines, and in licensed sectors the sanction that matters is a restriction on operating. Second, the decisions are long-lived. A choice of provider, region and key management model shapes the architecture for years. Third, the regimes overlap. A group with customers on the UAE mainland, in the DIFC and in Saudi Arabia may hold one customer record governed by three sets of rules. Somebody has to own the reconciliation, and directors will be asked whether they knew where sensitive data sat and who could open it.

Four decisions to make this year

Classify the data. Build an inventory that tags each data set by type (personal, sensitive, government, financial, health), by the regime that governs it and by who needs access. Without it, every hosting debate is opinion.

Choose regions by data class, not by application. Some data must stay in the country. Some can be stored locally and replicated elsewhere for resilience. Some can sit anywhere. Check that the services each class depends on are available in the local region; newer services, including some AI tools, often reach smaller regions later.

Settle the transfer basis. Group reporting, shared service centres, round-the-clock support and analytics all move data across borders. For each flow, record the legal mechanism under every regime that applies (contractual clauses, intra-group rules, consent or regulatory approval). Then make the contracts match: data location, subprocessors, notice of government requests, audit rights and exit.

Control the keys. Customer-managed encryption keys, held in hardware under the organisation's control or with a local custodian, are the most direct answer to "who can access it?" A provider that cannot decrypt cannot hand over readable data. The trade-off: the organisation takes on key management, and some managed services work less well, or not at all, with external keys.

Questions for suppliers

- Which of your staff, in which countries, can access our data or the systems holding it, and how is that access approved and logged?
- If a foreign authority demands our data, what will you do, and will you tell us?
- Can we hold our encryption keys outside your platform, and which services stop working if we do?
- Which of the services we plan to use run entirely in the in-country region today?
- Where do backups, logs, telemetry and support tickets go?
- At exit, how will you return our data and prove it has been deleted?

Ask for the answers in writing and attach them to the contract. The fifth question is the one most often skipped: the primary data may stay in the country while the diagnostic data describing it leaves every night. ■

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Jensen Huang and the long bet behind NVIDIA

NVIDIA spent more than a decade building software for a market that did not yet exist. What its co-founder's patience teaches about funding the platform, not just the product.

NVIDIA is often described as an overnight success of the AI era. It is closer to the opposite: a company that spent more than a decade building tools for a market that did not yet exist, led throughout by the engineer who co-founded it in 1993. Jensen Huang's story is a case study in patience, and in the discipline of paying for the future while the present still pays the bills.

From graphics cards to a platform

Huang, born in Taiwan and educated in the United States, co-founded NVIDIA with Chris Malachowsky and Curtis Priem to build graphics chips for personal computers. For years the company's fortunes rose and fell with video games. The decisive step came in the mid-2000s with CUDA, a programming platform that let developers use graphics processors for general computing. It cost a great deal, it slowed margins, and for several years few customers used it.

Then researchers discovered that the same parallel processors were ideal for training neural networks. When deep learning took off in the early 2010s, NVIDIA's hardware and, crucially, its software ecosystem were already in place. Competitors could build fast chips; they could not easily replace years of developer habits, libraries and tools.

Running a giant like a start-up

Huang is known for an unusually flat organisation, with a large number of senior leaders reporting directly to him, and for sharing information widely rather than through layers of management. The aim is speed: fewer hand-offs between the person who knows and the person who decides. By the mid-2020s NVIDIA's data-centre business, selling complete systems for AI rather than single chips, had made it one of the most valuable companies in the world.

What other leaders can take from it

- Fund the platform, not just the product. CUDA looked like a cost centre for years. It became the moat.
- Be early, then be ready. NVIDIA did not predict exactly when AI would arrive; it made sure it was prepared when it did.
- Shorten the distance between information and decision. Flat structures are hard to run, but they move faster than hierarchies that filter bad news.



Jensen Huang

CO-FOUNDER AND CEO, NVIDIA

Photograph: Anders Eidesvik, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 4.0

For technology leaders, the question to take back to the budget meeting is simple: which of today's unglamorous investments will look obvious in ten years, and who is protecting it until then? ■

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