

New board of directors restores Sam Altman as CEO of OpenAI

Kevin Reed

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Late Tuesday, Sam Altman was reinstated as CEO of the artificial intelligence technology company OpenAI, the firm behind the massively popular chatbot called ChatGPT.

As part of the arrangements to bring Altman back, OpenAI agreed to replace three of four members of the board of directors. These measures took place following the demand made by more than 90 percent of the OpenAI staff in an open letter signed on Monday that they would quit and go to work for Microsoft unless Altman was brought back as CEO and the entire board resigned.

In a post on X (formerly Twitter), OpenAI wrote, “We have reached an agreement in principle for Sam to return to OpenAI as CEO with a new initial board of Bret Taylor (Chair), Larry Summers, and Adam D’Angelo. We are collaborating to figure out the details. Thank you so much for your patience through this.”

OpenAI’s President Greg Brockman also agreed to return after having previously resigned in solidarity with Altman. Brockman is no longer on the board and another member, Ilya Sutskever, who is the chief research scientist at OpenAI and was involved in the initial removal of Altman, has also left the board.

In his own post on X, Altman wrote, “I love openai, and everything i’ve done over the past few days has been in service of keeping this team and its mission together,” adding that he was looking forward to returning to the company and “building on our strong partnership” with Microsoft, its biggest investor.

For its part, Microsoft also endorsed the OpenAI leadership moves. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella statement on X said, “We are encouraged by the changes to the OpenAI board. We believe this is a first essential step on a path to more stable, well-informed, and effective governance.”

Nadella added that Microsoft, which has a \$2.8 trillion Wall Street market value, is likewise looking forward “to building on our strong partnership and delivering the value of this next generation of AI to our customers and partners.”

In a press statement, Thrive Capital, a venture capital firm and major shareholder that recently estimated the value of the artificial intelligence company at \$90 billion, said of the restoration Altman and Brockman, “OpenAI has the potential to be one of the most consequential companies in the history of

computing. Sam and Greg (Brockman) possess a profound commitment to the company’s integrity, and an unmatched ability to inspire and lead. ... We believe this is the best outcome for the company, its employees, those who build on their technologies, and the world at large.”

The leadership crisis at OpenAI erupted one week ago when the company announced that Altman “would depart as CEO and leave the board of directors” because he had not been “consistently candid in his communications with the board.” An official company statement did not provide details about the reasons for the decision other than to say that the board “no longer had confidence” that Altman could lead OpenAI.

The new appointments to the board—Taylor, a former Google, Facebook, Twitter and Salesforce.com executive and Summers, the former Treasury secretary under Barack Obama and president of Harvard University (2001-2006)—along with the retention of D’Angelo, the current CEO of the question and answer site Quora, were part of the negotiations to bring Altman back as CEO of OpenAI.

According to a report in the *New York Times* based on comments from two unnamed people who were “in touch with the board,” D’Angelo led the arrangements which were “in place by late Sunday.” The *Times* said, “Determining the composition of the board slowed down the decision to bring Mr. Altman back,” and “OpenAI called the new board its ‘initial’ board, indicating it could expand.”

The *Times* also reported that “a person close to the board’s deliberations on Tuesday” said that D’Angelo and two other former board members, Tasha McCauley and Helen Toner, had pressed for unspecified concessions from Altman that included “an independent investigation into his leadership of OpenAI.” In the end, however, McCauley and Toner were forced to step down while D’Angelo was retained, and Altman and Brockman were also blocked from returning to the board.

Clearly, the appointment of Summers to the OpenAI board with the backing of Microsoft indicates that the ruling establishment is inserting a trusted representative of US financial, political and national security interests into the leadership turmoil at the world’s most influential AI company.

The release of the preview edition of the OpenAI text-based human conversation simulator called ChatGPT almost exactly

one year ago led to the fastest mass adoption of a new technology in the history of the computer and information age. Within a few months more than 100 million people signed up for free online access to ChatGPT, which can automate the process of scientific research, create various forms of technical, legal and journalism writing, software development, language translation and solve complicated math problems, just to name a few uses.

Following the popular response to ChatGPT, numerous other consumer and business tools have been released that create images, photos, drawings or paintings based on a text description (Dall-E 2), create royalty-free music based on various inputs such as genre, instruments, mood and length of time (Soundraw), and generate new video content based on text and video input (Gen-1).

While many of these AI tools have been made available to individual users, Wall Street corporate and financial interests anticipate the greatest impact of artificial intelligence to be derived from increases in accuracy and productivity that will drive significant cost reductions across industry.

The automation of intellectual labor represented by artificial intelligence has the potential to eliminate much workplace drudgery and reduce necessary working time significantly, freeing people to engage many other forms of activity. But under capitalism, such developments in the productive forces are used to intensify exploitation, drive down the conditions of life for workers and amass even greater profits for the capitalist class.

The impact of AI on the healthcare, finance, transportation, manufacturing, entertainment and retail industries is expected to drive up capitalist profits by streamlining processes, automating decision-making, and, above all, eliminating jobs through automation derived from accessing vast stores of information and data.

According to a study published by Goldman Sachs Research in April, as the latest wave of generative AI technologies “work their way into businesses and society,” they could “drive a 7% (or almost \$7 trillion) increase in global GDP and lift productivity growth by 1.5 percentage points over a 10-year period.”

Furthermore, the authors of the Goldman Sachs report, economists Joseph Briggs and Devesh Kodnani, wrote, “Despite significant uncertainty around the potential for generative AI, its ability to generate content that is indistinguishable from human-created output and to break down communication barriers between humans and machines reflects a major advancement with potentially large macroeconomic effects.”

Goldman Sachs, a multinational investment bank and financial services company with \$2.55 trillion in global assets under management, says that the impact of AI on labor productivity depends on the specific application and speed of adoption. In general, however, Briggs and Kodnani project that

“Shifts in workflows triggered by these advances could expose the equivalent of 300 million full-time jobs to automation.”

Meanwhile, the US military deployment of autonomous weapons and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) is moving ahead rapidly to integrate artificial intelligence tools into its present proxy war operations in Ukraine against Russia and in the preparations for war with China.

A report by Associated Press in January said that the use of drones in Ukraine has accelerated the trend toward deploying “the world’s first fully autonomous fighting robots to the battlefield, inaugurating a new age of warfare.”

The Pentagon is on a quest to develop drones that can “identify, select and attack targets without help from humans,” and this would “mark a revolution in military technology as profound as the introduction of the machine gun,” first introduced in 1884 and used widely in the imperialist slaughter of World War I.

The race to be the first to develop, in the next few years, lethal autonomous weapons (LAWs) is a top priority of the US military. In a program called Replicator, the AP report says the Pentagon “is intent on fielding multiple thousands of relatively inexpensive, expendable AI-enabled autonomous vehicles by 2026 to keep pace with China.”

AP also quoted the statements of Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks last August that the Replicator initiative seeks to “galvanize progress in the too-slow shift of U.S. military innovation to leverage platforms that are small, smart, cheap, and many.”

This is the corporate and military context within which the leadership crisis at OpenAI has erupted and no matter what political, philosophical or business differences led to Sam Altman’s firing and subsequent rehiring, the turmoil was the result of a ferocious struggle within the ruling class over who will be in control of these revolutionary technologies and what they will be used for.



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