

Sam Altman's return ushers in new era at OpenAI

November 22 2023, by Daniel AVIS in Washington with Glenn Chapman in San Francisco



Altman announced late Tuesday that he would be returning to the helm of the ChatGPT creator.

Sam Altman's shock return as chief executive of OpenAI late

Tuesday—days after being sacked—caps a chaotic period that highlighted deep tensions at the heart of the Artificial Intelligence community.

The board that fired Altman from his role as CEO of the ChatGPT creator has been almost entirely replaced following a rebellion by employees, cementing his position at the helm of the firm.

The sole survivor in the boardroom in the new Altman era is Adam D'Angelo, the CEO of question-and-answer site Quora.

He will be joined by ex-Salesforce co-CEO Bret Taylor and by former US Treasury Secretary and president of Harvard University, Larry Summers.

In Summers, Altman will find a seasoned economist and well-known figure in Washington, who has spoken of both the dangers and opportunities of ChatGPT for the "cognitive classes."

"ChatGPT is gonna replace what doctors do, hearing symptoms and making diagnoses, before it changes what nurses do," Summers told Bloomberg News earlier this year.

Neither Altman nor OpenAI co-founder Greg Brockman—who quit as company president following Altman's sacking—will return to the board, which could soon have as many as six additional members, the Wall Street Journal reported.

"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," Altman wrote in a social media post late Tuesday on X, formerly Twitter.

Disputes over departure

The five-day saga began on Friday, when Altman was abruptly sacked by the board for reasons that are still unclear.

The board said in a statement that it had sacked Altman because "he was not consistently candid in his communications with the board," without elaborating further.

It strongly resisted attempts to bring him back, cycling through two new chief executives over the weekend, before three of its four remaining members were sacked on Tuesday to pave the way for Altman's dramatic return.

Some [media outlets](#) reported that there had been concerns that OpenAI was moving quickly away from its stated mission of "building safe and beneficial artificial general intelligence for the benefit of humanity," for commercial gain.

However, OpenAI's interim CEO Emmett Shear, said in a [social media](#) post that he had been assured "The board did *not* remove Sam over any specific disagreement on safety," without elaborating on why Altman had been sacked.

Fears over AI governance

Altman's return reaffirms his position as a leader in the rapidly-evolving field of generative-AI.

But the agreement also highlights the growing power that Microsoft now wields over the future of OpenAI.

During his five days in the wilderness, Altman briefly took up a position at the tech giant, which has poured billions of dollars into OpenAI and

helped launch ChatGPT, whose success sparked a multi-billion-dollar global race in AI research and development.

In an X post confirming his return, Altman cited "satya's support," in his decision to return to OpenAI, a reference to Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella.

"I'm looking forward to returning to openai, and building on our strong partnership with msft," Altman added, an apparent reference to Microsoft.

While OpenAI's ChatGPT is the most widely known large language model—or LLM—many of the other big tech firms, including Google and Facebook parent Meta, have invested heavily in the powerful AI technology—raising concerns about its governance.

Earlier this month, Western governments and [tech companies](#) agreed to a new safety testing regime to allay concerns at the pace at which AI is growing, and at the lack of global safeguards in place to control it.

The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the conference in London that the world was "playing catch-up" in efforts to regulate AI, which had "possible long-term negative consequences" on everything from jobs to culture.

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