# MAKERS

# BUILDING AN AI-FIRST TEAM

## INTRODUCTION

We often come across companies that buy an enterprise AI solution and are surprised that uptake is 20% or less. To us, this is not surprising. Buying the enterprise AI solution is phase 0 of deployment. What makes the difference to success or failure is the ability and willingness of the team to use the solution as intended. In fact our view is that a team's Learning Quotient - ability to adapt and learn - is the key predictor of success for an AI-first company. In this article we explore why this is a blindspot for companies and what they can do about it.

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# WHO WINS IN AI

**AI is not static; it evolves at an astonishing pace. In 2023, discussions centred around privacy and intellectual property. In 2024, workflow optimisation dominated the conversation. Now, in 2025, the focus is on agent deployment. Who knows what 2026 will bring?**

In this context, teams must adapt and adopt continuously. As some experts argue, the pace of technological evolution means companies can no longer rely on top-down mandates for each wave of adoption—it's simply too slow. Instead, success requires employees who proactively lead the adoption curve. QuantumBlack has highlighted the importance of fostering decentralised, self-motivated learning cultures to stay ahead.[1]

Organisations that deploy enterprise AI solutions only to see 20% adoption rates are fundamentally missing the point. Launching technology is merely phase zero.

> The real work lies in preparing and empowering people to embrace it. Without this focus, even the most advanced AI investments will fail to deliver results.

# BUILDING LEARNING QUOTIENT

**The most important winning capability in the new world of AI is Learning Quotient (LQ). Learning Quotient is learning intelligence. We define this as: the ability to learn and adapt.**

In a world of rapid technological change, this form of intelligence has become more important than traditional metrics like IQ or EQ.

**THE PROBLEM: LEARNING IS HARD**

We talk about learning casually, but consider this: when was the last time you genuinely learnt something new? True learning requires:

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| **Humility:** To start at square one and embrace being a beginner again. | **Insight:** To distinguish between difficult tasks and those that are just novel. | **Courage:** To persist in the face of challenges and potential failure. |

Unfortunately, society often discourages this kind of learning. Ancient survival instincts equated failure with danger. Today, social media amplifies the pressure to project perfection, making failure—a natural part of learning—feel even riskier. Consider Winston Churchill, who learned from the disastrous Gallipoli campaign before leading Britain to victory in World War II. Such monumental acts of learning are increasingly rare in today's hyper-critical world.

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[1] QuantumBlack research on learning cultures and AI adoption.

The tech industry offers a unique environment where learning is built in. Tech professionals are accustomed to regular upheavals as technologies evolve. This can lead to a disconnect: those from tech backgrounds often underestimate how challenging it is for people in other functions to embrace a learning culture. Many non-tech professions are structured around applying knowledge gained earlier in life, with incremental improvements in expertise over time. Creating a culture of continuous learning in these environments requires intentional effort.

Learning Quotient can be hired for or developed. Teams can be taught to develop the learning muscle by: trying new things on a regular and structured basis, taking on challenges, developing the emotional resilience to persevere, managing and celebrating certain kinds of failure. But not enough invest in this.

# CHANGING ROUTINE

Adopting AI requires employees to fundamentally change their daily routines. This is no small ask. For many, their workday habits—what they do first after their morning coffee, how they structure their tasks—have been established over years or even decades. Disrupting these routines can be deeply unsettling.

> This disruption involves more than logistics; it taps into profound emotional and mental challenges. Many people experience grief or loss as they abandon familiar ways of working. The energy required to reshape routines can feel overwhelming.

Employers must address this challenge head-on by:

- **Providing coaching and emotional support:** Ensure employees have someone to turn to when the transition feels difficult.

- **Celebrating small wins:** Remind teams that each successful adaptation strengthens their learning muscle, making future changes easier.

This human-centred support is critical because nearly every worker—from junior employees to seasoned professionals—will see their routines disrupted. Whether the change is minor (e.g., altering workflows) or monumental (e.g., retraining for a new role), organisations must offer guidance to help employees navigate this journey.

## INGREDIENT 3
# FINDING THE PLEASURE IN WORK

AI fundamentally alters how people experience their work. Consider two types of roles: customer-oriented and creative.

### CUSTOMER-ORIENTED ROLES

In customer-oriented roles—from call centres to healthcare—AI can automate administrative tasks. For example, AI can:

- **Analyse data before customer interactions to identify problems and solutions.**

- **Automate post-interaction notes, contributing to better data foundations.**

This allows employees to focus on what makes them human: empathising with customers, solving problems, and ensuring satisfaction. However, there's a potential downside: removing administrative tasks eliminates what can feel like valuable moments of peace or mental downtime. Organisations must carefully assess how these changes impact employees' experience of their work and address any unintended consequences.

### CREATIVE ROLES

Creative roles face an even greater shift. For writers, designers, and developers, AI increasingly shifts the nature of work from creation to prompting and refining. Many professionals who take pride in longhand creation may struggle to embrace this new paradigm.[2] Over time, the role of humans may evolve into managing AI agents, with logic and strategy becoming the most valued skills.

Organisations must consider the pleasure impact of these changes. How do they affect job satisfaction? Are less experienced workers who take less pleasure and pride in their expertise more adaptable, with the potential of a two-speed economy of adopters and resistors? Addressing these questions will be crucial to fostering widespread adoption.



[2] Example: The shift from traditional video editing to AI-enhanced tools like Adobe Sensei.

## INGREDIENT 4
# MAKING IT RELEVANT

In our paper, '*Prompt Engineering Your AI Strategy*', we emphasise that deploying AI effectively begins with a clear understanding of where the most significant gains can be made. The simplest and most impactful approach is to target areas that represent the greatest source of costs or the highest potential for revenue growth—classic Strategy 101. This clarity provides much-needed relief, helping people grasp the 'why' behind the AI excitement. The same logic applies to deploying AI tools: focusing employees on specific opportunities or encouraging them to consider their own profit and loss (P&L) in the context of these opportunities fosters both engagement and adoption. It transforms abstract innovation into tangible value creation.

## INGREDIENT 5
# CREATING AN OFFRAMP

For many employees, adopting AI brings an uncomfortable realisation: their jobs may no longer exist in the same form. Productivity gains achieved through AI can leave workers wondering what's next for them. Companies must tackle this challenge with transparency and empathy by:

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| **Offering reskilling programmes:** Help employees transition to new roles within the organisation. | **Identifying growth areas:** Clearly communicate which parts of the business are expanding as others contract. | **Engaging in open conversations:** Address employees' concerns about job security and provide clear pathways forward. |

Without these measures, fear and uncertainty can undermine even the best AI implementation strategies.

By proactively addressing these challenges, organisations can ensure employees feel valued and supported.

# WINNERS AND LOSERS

The shift to an AI-driven economy raises profound questions about inequality. Who will thrive, and who will struggle? Emerging trends suggest troubling patterns:

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| **Gender gaps:** Harvard research shows a significant disparity in the adoption of AI tools between men and women, with some cohorts exhibiting a 75/25 split.[3] | **Industry differences:** Workers in tech are accustomed to change, while those in more linear fields may struggle to adapt. | **Experience paradox:** Those with the most expertise may resist new ways of working, while younger or less experienced workers embrace them more quickly. |

These disparities highlight the risk of a two-speed economy, where certain groups are left behind. Addressing these gaps will require coordinated efforts from businesses, governments, and society at large.

# CONCLUSION AND WHAT NEXT

The role of companies in this brave new world is clear. To win with AI, organisations must invest in their people. This means fostering Learning Quotient, supporting routine changes, understanding the pleasure impact of work transformations, and creating transparent offramps for those affected by AI-driven productivity gains.

Government has an equally critical role to play. Left unaddressed, the transition to AI could create new fractures of disadvantage, particularly for small businesses and individuals who struggle to adapt. By investing in reskilling initiatives and providing targeted support, governments can help ensure the benefits of AI are widely shared.

**Ultimately, winning with AI isn't just about technology—it's about people. By prioritising adaptability, empathy, and inclusion, we can build a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.**

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