

Beyond AI Anxiety:

Leading organizational change that works for people and business

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National Press Foundation Fellows

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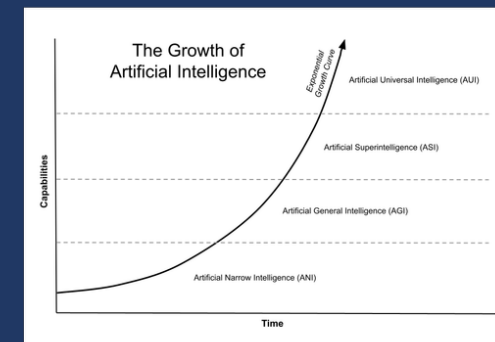
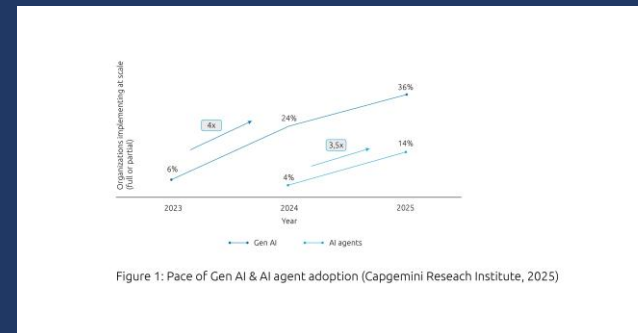
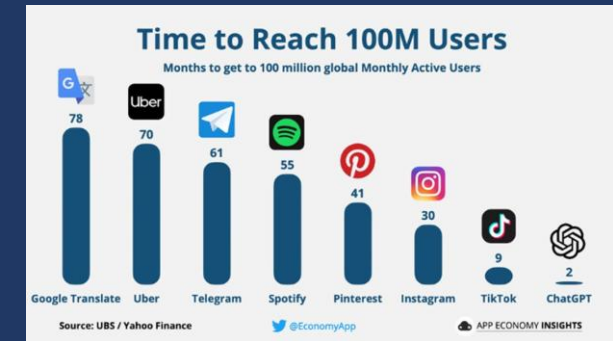
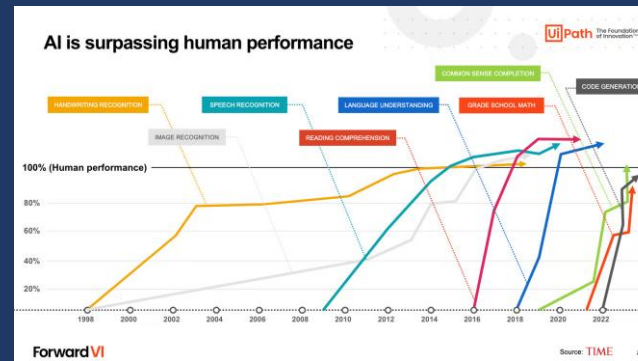
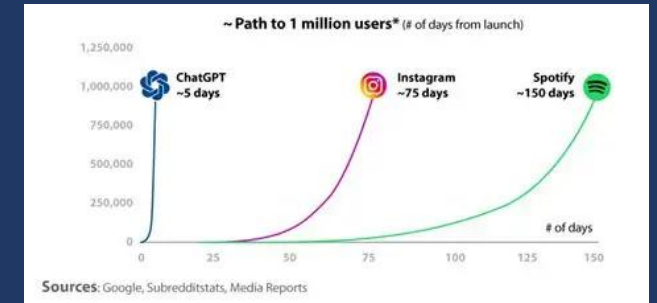
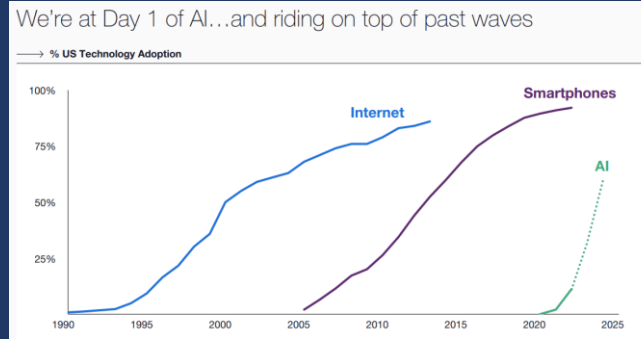
AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION



A new moment... again

The internet. The Great Recession. COVID-19. Each one reshuffled what work means and what workers need. AI transformation will drive even larger changes.

"The ground is no longer shifting incrementally. The volcano has begun to erupt."
 — Leadership Fusion Project (Paese & Cook, 2026)



MY BACKGROUND:

Scientist

- Ph. D., Industrial and Organizational (I-O) Psychology
- Focus 1: Assessment of leadership capability
- Focus 2: Technology-based assessment

Practitioner

- Government
- Fortune 500
- Boards & C-Suite advisory
- Consulting leadership
- Product development

Technologist

- Designed early work on technology-based assessment and hiring systems
- Led department of 130+ software and IT professionals
- Managed enterprise rollout of AI tools (MS Copilot)

Select Publications

- Reynolds & Weiner (2009). *Online Recruiting and Selection*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Scott & Reynolds (2010). *Handbook of workplace assessment*. Jossey-Bass.
- Scott, Bartram, Reynolds (2018). *Next Generation Technology-Enhanced Assessment*. Cambridge
- Kantrowitz, Reynolds, Scott (2023). *Talent Assessment*. Oxford.
- Jacobs & Reynolds (2025). *Case Studies in I-O Psychology*. Oxford.

I-O PSYCHOLOGY: THREE LENSES

A different kind of psychologist

Industrial-Organizational (I-O) Psychology studies *people in systems at work*.

Organization — culture, org design, strategy, job design

Team — leadership, team dynamics, change management

Individual — performance, engagement, well-being



Key Outcomes of Interest: Organizational growth, unit performance, cultural strength, team agility, individual performance, engagement, commitment, satisfaction, workplace health, attrition, tenure, etc.

AI: A QUICK TUTORIAL

Hip, hip, _____.

“AI is starting to sort the truly good leaders from the bad ones.”

— Board Director, *Fusion Project* Participant

AI MATURITY MODEL LANGUAGE

EVALUATION COMMUNICATION STRATEGY VALUE
ACCOUNTABILITY LEADERSHIP SCALING RISK VISION
RESPONSIBLE AI OPERATING MODEL MEASUREMENT
CULTURE TRUST CHANGE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY OUTCOMES
RELATIONSHIPS TALENT UPSKILLING RESKILLING INCENTIVES
DATA QUALITY DATA LIFECYCLE ARCHITECTURE EMPATHY MLOps
DATA LITERACY MODEL MONITORING TRANSFORMATION FEEDBACK LOOPS
USE CASES PORTFOLIO ETHICS OPERATIONALIZATION INTEGRATION
MEANING PROGRAMS ENTERPRISE-WIDE SCALABILITY RELIABILITY
COMPLIANCE PRIVACY SECURITY TRANSPARENCY EXPLAINABILITY FAIRNESS
HUMAN-IN-THE-LOOP OVERSIGHT GUARDRAILS STEWARDSHIP OPENNESS
EXPERIMENTATION LEARNING CULTURE CURIOSITY ADAPTATION
CROSS-FUNCTIONAL GOVERNANCE COLLABORATION PRODUCT/PROCESS REDESIGN
BENEFIT REALIZATION COST/EFFICIENCY INNOVATION PIPELINE ROI
GEN AI PROMPT GOVERNANCE CONTENT SAFETY IP RISK
ORGANIZATIONAL DESIGN OPERATING RHYTHMS OWNERSHIP & ROLES
ROADMAPS PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS

WORDS PROMINENT IN ALL MODELS

EVALUATION COMMUNICATION **STRATEGY** VALUE
ACCOUNTABILITY **LEADERSHIP** SCALING RISK VISION
RESPONSIBLE AI OPERATING MODEL **MEASUREMENT**
CULTURE TRUST CHANGE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY OUTCOMES
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ROADMAPS PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS

WORDS PROMINENT IN ONLY 1-2 MODELS

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ROADMAPS **PSYCHOLOGICAL READINESS**

THE LEADERSHIP FUSION PROJECT

32 interviews representing...

- 58 organizations
- 52 boards
- 25 board directors
- 15 CEOs
- 10 board chairs
- 3 lead directors
- 8 C-suite executives

Industries:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Pharma▪ Tech▪ Mining▪ Manufacturing▪ Food Services▪ Retail▪ Automotive▪ Agribusiness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Semiconductors▪ Healthcare▪ Insurance▪ Financial Services▪ Energy▪ Consumer Products▪ Professional Services |
|---|---|

THE AI CHALLENGE AT THREE LEVELS

The Organization — Can we stay competitive with AI without losing our culture?

The Leaders — Can we lead a change we don't fully understand?

The Individual — Does my work still matter? Do I still matter?



Foundational Premise: AI expertise will be sub-optimized if not coupled with strong leadership to create the change required to optimize AI innovations.

WHAT LEADERS ARE SAYING...

Organization Level — Uncomfortable truths about leadership readiness and insecurity regarding the direction.

"There is a tremendous amount of insecurity among board members, but you won't hear many people admit it."

-- Health Sector Board Member

Leader/Team Level — Challenges of leading when the direction is unclear and feels risky

"I could explain what the technology was doing and why it made sense, but when I tried to describe what this meant for our people... – I realized I didn't have a clear story."

-- Health Sector CEO

Individual Level — Worker anxiety, ambiguity, and risk of loss in the face of rapid, unpredictable change.

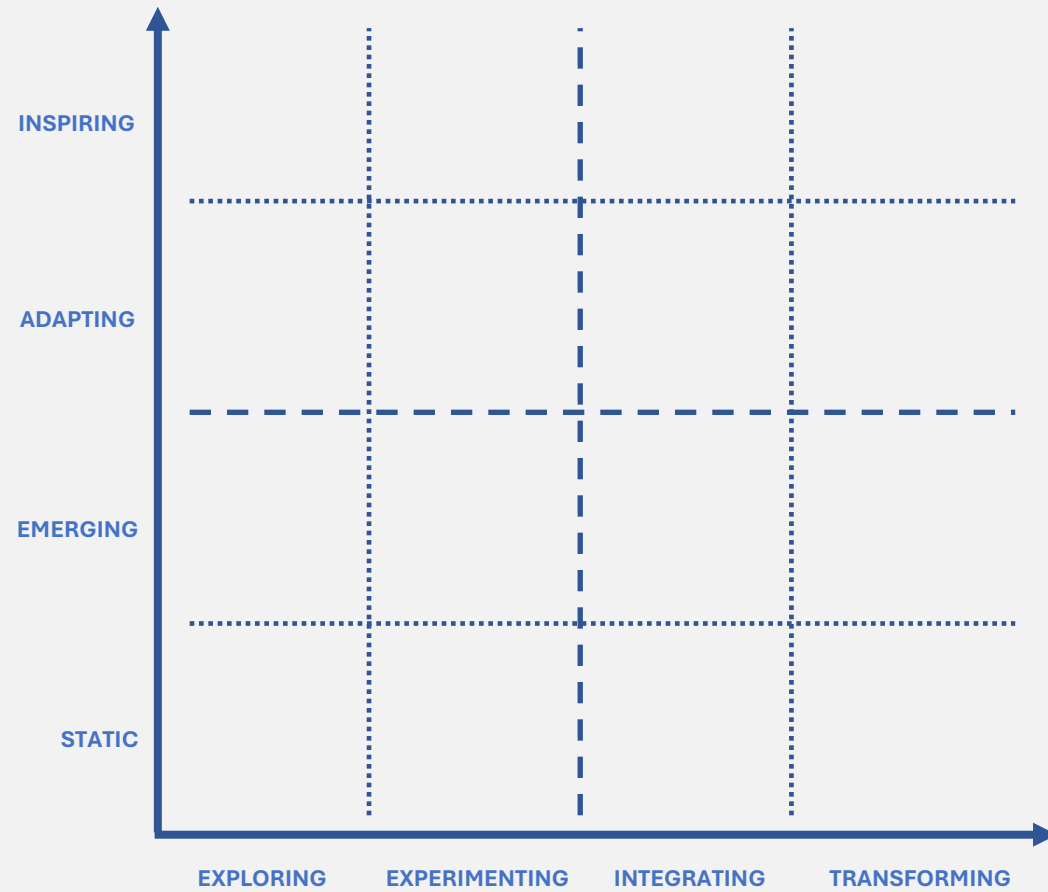
"I'm getting too old for this, and I'm not kidding."

-- Mining Sector Board Member

Directional Guidance: Expose vulnerability, increase mastery, deepen involvement, create meaning

LEADERSHIP FLUENCY

(AI Fluency + Change Fluency)

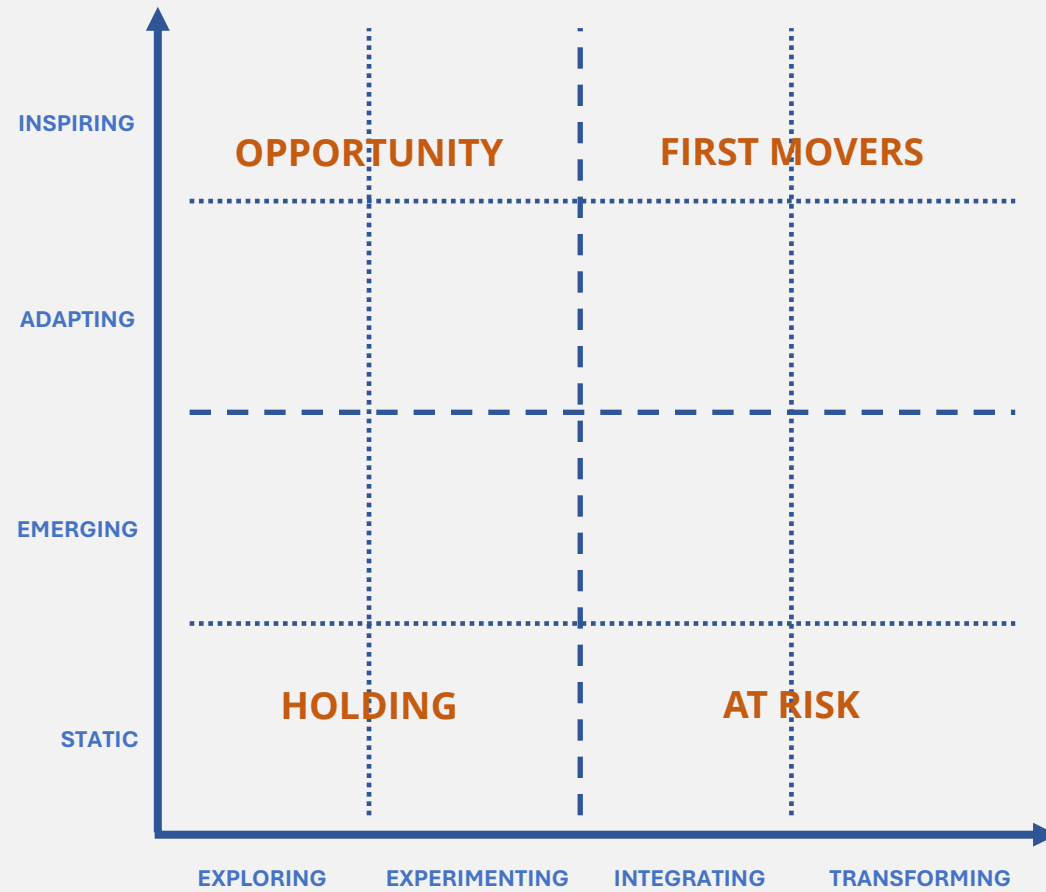


AI ADOPTION VELOCITY

(speed and scale of AI proliferation)

LEADERSHIP FLUENCY

(AI Fluency + Change Fluency)

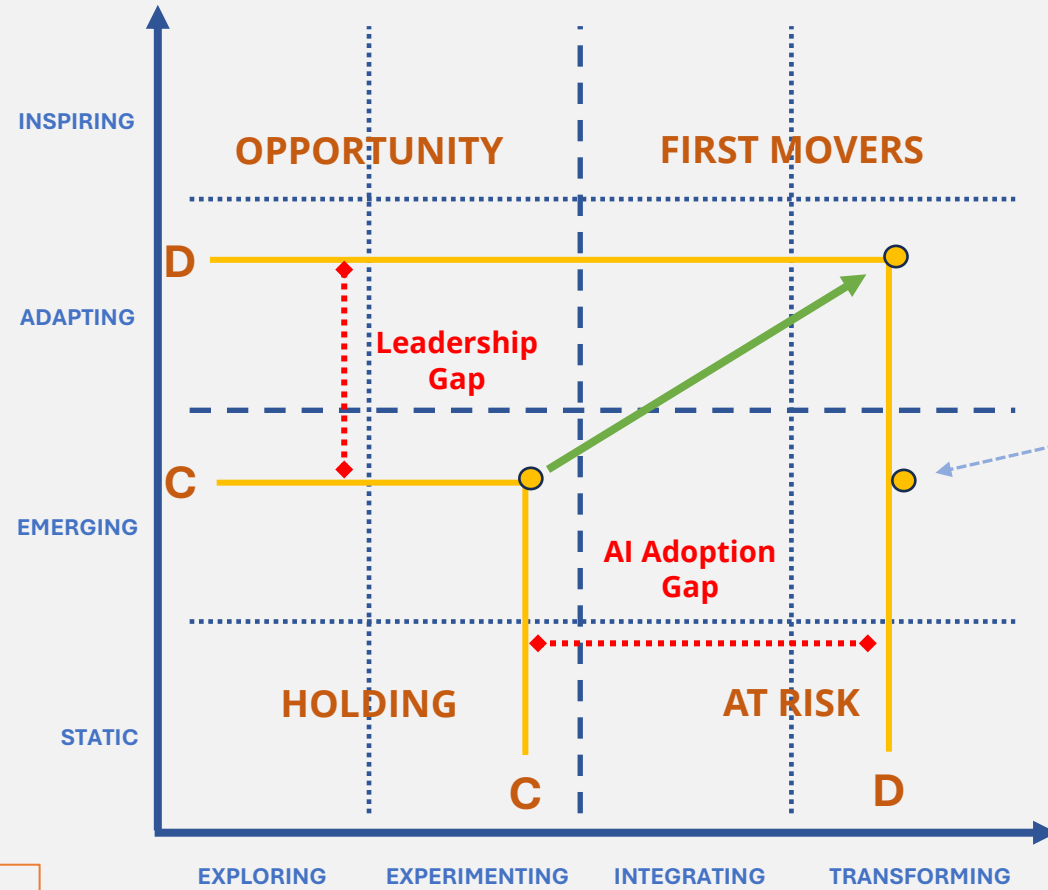


AI ADOPTION VELOCITY

(speed and scale of AI proliferation)

LEADERSHIP FLUENCY

(AI Fluency + Change Fluency)



C = Current
D = Desired

AI ADOPTION VELOCITY

(speed and scale of AI proliferation)

AI Adoption Gap closed, still at risk

Are these consequences inevitable, or are they the result of choices organizations are making?

How can we steer toward better outcomes?

What does the science tell us?

Does it matter how organizations introduce AI?

Outcomes are determined by choices, not by the technology itself

- AI's impacts on worker health and performance are "*neither inherent nor inevitable*," they are products of design decisions, governance structures, and implementation choices (*Probst et al., 2026*)
- Leaders who visibly and *authentically* embrace AI create psychological permission for workers to adapt. Employees become proactive, reshape their own roles, and engage rather than resist. Leaders who fake enthusiasm without genuine engagement produce no such effect (*He et al., 2023*)
- The AI technology deployed at work produced outcomes nearly *three times larger* for high-skilled workers than low-skilled workers; not because of the technology, but because of how work was redesigned around it (*Jia et al., 2024*)

Management actions are central to the effectiveness of AI deployments.

What goes wrong? Trust Breakdown

Trust doesn't erode gradually.

- Workers trust AI management substantially less than human management, not due to competence, but due perception that it lacks genuine care; 83% of workers assigned an AI manager switched to a human when given the option (Li & Bitterly, 2024)
- When coworkers know a colleague used AI to complete a task, they perceive that person as less ethical and are less willing to help them when needed. Identical behavior with conventional technology triggers no such response (Zhou et al., 2025)
- Organizations that deploy AI without clear norms about appropriate use may inadvertently make their most AI-engaged employees socially suspect in the eyes of peers, cutting them off from informal collaboration (Zhou et al., 2025)

Trust breakdown is directed toward AI and coworkers.

What goes wrong? Individual Costs

Implications don't stay at the office

- Employees who interact heavily with AI at work experience loneliness, sleep disruption, and increased after-work stress (Tang et al., 2023)
- Algorithmic management (surveillance) shows no effect on productivity while generating psychological harm: faster expectations, real-time schedule changes, reduced autonomy, and predictable safety failures (Probst et al., 2026)
- Lower skilled workers found redesigned jobs to be more taxing (Jia et al., 2024)

"It's like putting a doctor who only sees outpatients in the ICU."

— Worker description of AI-driven job redesign (Jia et al., 2024)

When routine tasks are automated, work becomes more difficult.

What's needed to get AI Transformation Right?



Skills

- Access to AI tools alone is insufficient. Only workers with strong self-regulatory and reflective thinking skills show meaningful creativity gains from AI.
- Among all workers with AI access, only 26% report improved creativity in practice (Sun et al., 2025)



Design

- AI-driven job redesign can amplify existing advantages
- Organizations that invest in AI without investing in workforce development are widening internal capability gaps, not closing them (Jia et al., 2024)



Capacity

- The capacities that predict who thrives are not all fixed traits (e.g., resilience, self-efficacy, adaptability, and optimism)
- Training, leadership behavior, and organizational support may improve capacity (Luthans et al., 2015)

Workers need individualized approaches to maximize the benefits of AI

What's the path forward for AI transformation?

Leadership Readiness:

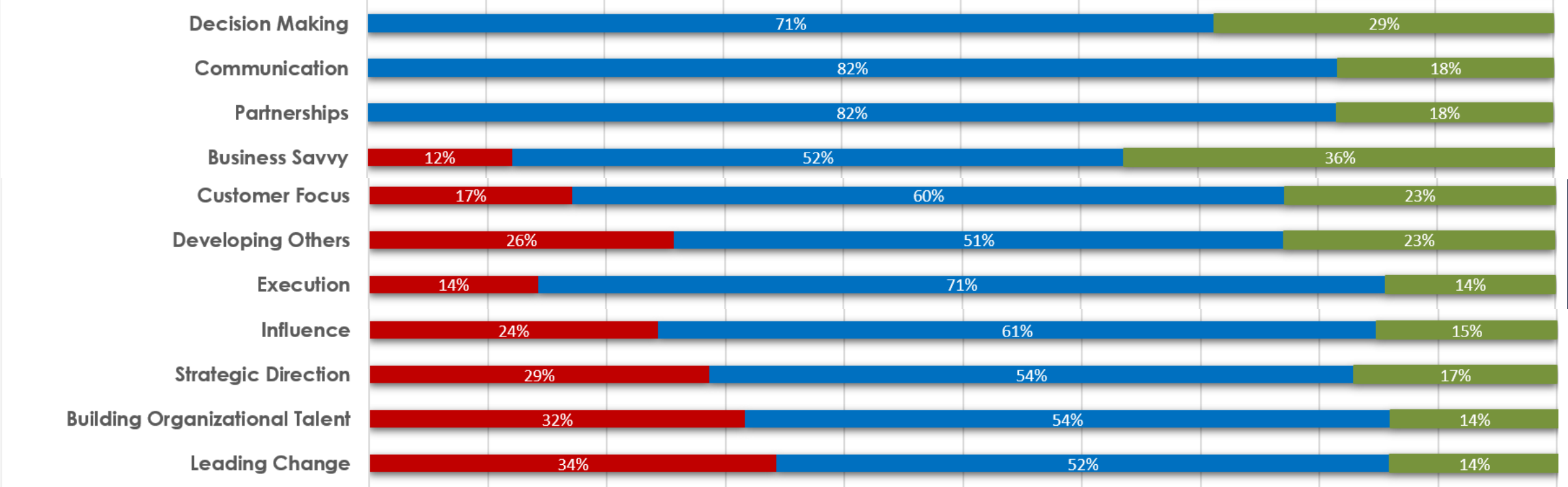
How should organizations advance with AI while recognizing the leadership gap?

Job Design and Workforce Planning:

If jobs are going to change, how should this be done?

Who should be involved?

HOW DO EXECS STACK UP?



CAPABILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR LEADERS

IDENTIFIED BY INTERVIEWEES IN THE LEADERSHIP FUSION PROJECT

Leadership Capabilities

- **Compelling Vision** – Creating a clear, believable, human-centered story of the future
- **Courage & Conviction** – Acting decisively without complete clarity
- **Human Connection** – Leading with empathy, vulnerability, and trust
- **Self-Insight** – Examining and adapting one's own thinking and tendencies

Team Capabilities

- **Fast, Integrative Processing** – Combining technical, operational, and strategic perspectives
- **Candid Dialogue** – Surfacing uncertainty, challenge, and disagreement openly
- **Fluid Influence** – Shifting authority based on expertise, not hierarchy
- **Aligned Direction** – Converting insight into clear, coordinated action

"I think it's fair to say that none of us have ever faced a challenge quite like this."

-- Insurance Sector Board Chair

WHAT SHOULD BETTER LOOK LIKE?

Suggestions from enterprise leaders:

- More multi-level leadership decision forums (particularly re: AI initiatives)
- More cross-functional operational outreach
- Better feedback for leaders, faster, for sharper self insight
- Coaching across levels on how to position and advance change



What's the path forward for AI transformation?

Leadership Readiness:

How should organizations advance with AI while recognizing the leadership gap?

Job Design and Workforce Planning: :

If jobs are going to change, how should this be done?

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REFRAMING THE ISSUE

"Which jobs will AI eliminate?"



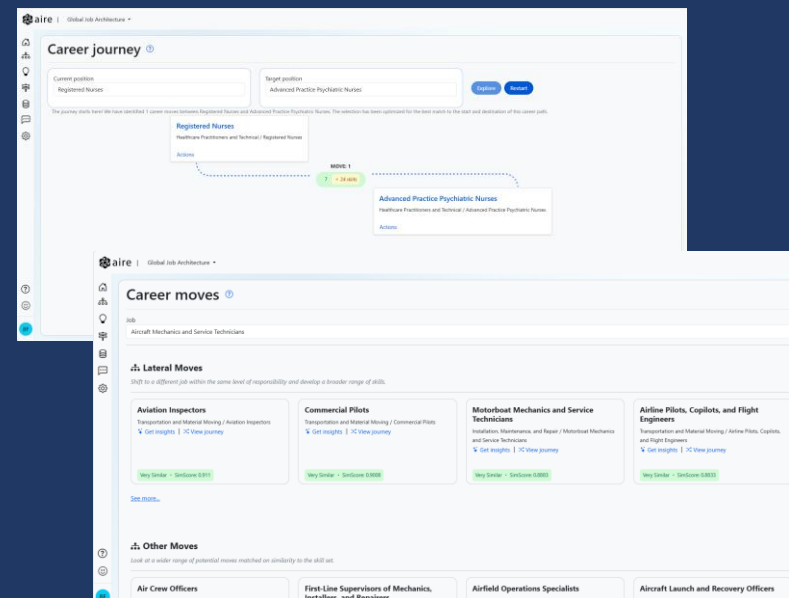
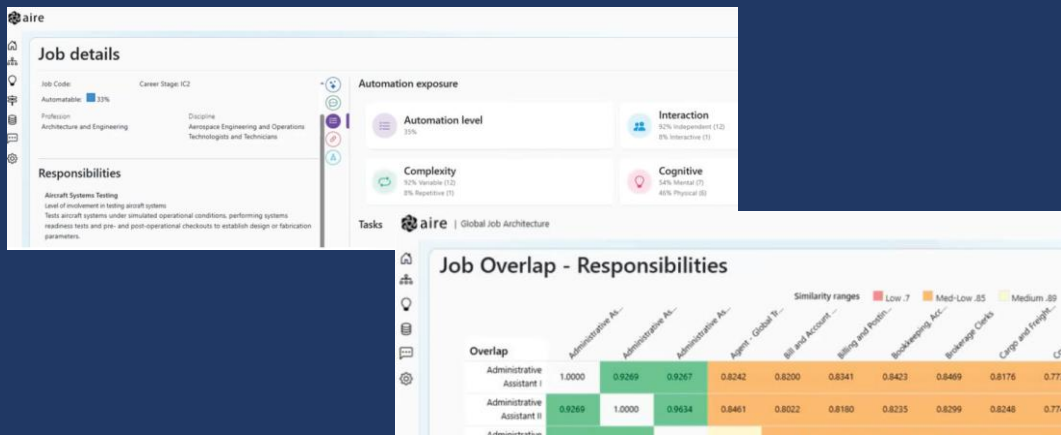
"What does the remaining human work look like and how should we design it?"



JOB ANALYSIS & DESIGN, ASSUMING AI

Requests from clients:

- Analyze job tasks by “automatability”
- Group jobs by similarity of non-automatable work
- Clarify adjacent jobs
- Define career ladders
- Evaluate roles and equate to compensation structures



WHAT REMAINS AFTER AUTOMATION

Five Archetypes

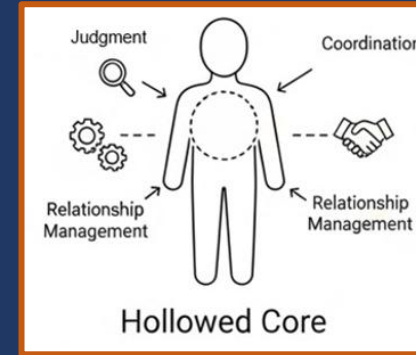
Hollowed Core *The job still exists. But the parts that made it interesting are gone.*

Judgment-Heavy Remnant *AI handles the routine. Everything left requires human wisdom, and incumbents aren't prepared people for the shift.*

Workflow Orchestrator *The worker no longer does the task. They direct the AI that does — a new kind of expertise most job descriptions haven't caught up to.*

Fragmented Residual *What remains after automation is disconnected and unsustainable without deliberate redesign.*

Resilient Human-Led *These roles depend on what AI cannot replicate: trust, judgment, creativity, and human connection. The goal of good redesign is to produce more of these.*



SCIENCE-INFORMED, HUMAN-CENTRIC JOB DESIGN

Design Principle

Creativity and problem solving: roles designed around judgment, discovery, and contribution to a larger goal

Cognitive challenge: especially for those predicted to thrive with AI

Informal human connection: roles designed to preserve reciprocity, collaboration, and trust

Professional agency: workers define their contribution, not just what AI needs to work

Intentional design with target job characteristics: variety, identity, significance, autonomy, feedback

Impact

Understanding of roles and why they matter; role clarity

Stronger engagement and lower resistance to AI adoption

Sustainable productivity gains

Adaptation as AI continues to evolve

Meaningful work and elevated work motivation

QUESTIONS RAISED, BUT UNADDRESSED



Organizational level:

- When job cuts are announced due to AI, what's being done to address the likely leadership gap required to steer through change?
- Is change planned, or is the organization just "moving fast and breaking things?"

Leadership/Team level:

- What guidance is provided to mid-level leaders about how to manage change in their functions?
- Do leaders model intellectual humility about AI or fake confidence in the face of changes that are not well understood?

Individual level:

- How are changes to jobs that remain after AI implementation being designed?
- What's the experience of the workers in AI-enabled roles?
- Are there unique individual benefits and challenges to redesigned roles?
- When jobs are redesigned around AI, who decides what the remaining human work looks like? What role do job incumbents play?
- What is happening to the informal social connections in AI-heavy workplaces?

"I wasn't worried about the strategy. I was worried that I couldn't yet make the future feel coherent or worth moving toward."

— Health Sector CEO

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THANK YOU

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