
# The IT Leader's AI Adoption Checklist

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# 7 Reasons Your Team Isn't Using AI — And What the Best Leaders Do Differently

For IT and Digital Transformation Leaders | By Jason St. Gelais, John Maxwell Certified Leadership Coach.

This ebook is a practical, human-centered field guide for IT executives and program owners who have invested in AI but aren't seeing meaningful adoption. You've secured leadership buy-in, selected tools, scoped timelines, and executed the rollout. By traditional IT delivery metrics, you shipped successfully. Yet usage is lower than projected, the initial excitement has cooled, and the promise of transformation feels just out of reach. This guide reframes AI adoption as a people challenge first and a technology challenge second, and it offers a structured way to diagnose and fix what's blocking progress.

Before you start, consider this: Deploying AI is an IT challenge. Getting people to adopt it is a human one. Most of us were never formally trained to lead the human side of change. McKinsey research indicates that roughly 70% of large-scale transformation programs fail to meet their goals — not because of technology, but because of human and organizational resistance.[1] When adoption lags, the answer is rarely more features or more licenses; it's better leadership, clearer purpose, and safer, simpler pathways to early wins.

Use this self-assessment to reflect honestly on your last or current rollout: Did your team understand why this change was happening in terms that mattered to their daily work? Did you identify champions and equip them before launch — or train everyone identically? Were senior leaders visibly using the tools, or was usage merely expected of frontline contributors? Did people feel safe to experiment and fail, or were performance signals tied to getting it right quickly? Did you set up a tight feedback loop, and did people see their input change something tangible? These aren't trick questions; they are the difference between a compliant rollout and a compounding adoption engine.

This checklist will walk you through seven leadership principles that determine whether AI adoption thrives or stalls. Each principle includes why it matters, a cautionary "when it goes wrong" example, a contrasting "when it's done right" vignette, and a decisive coaching question for you to answer. Read it, be honest with yourself, and then act. Your organization's return on AI will not be determined by tool selection alone but by leadership behaviors that turn access into applied value.

# Before You Start: The Human Side of AI Change

If you're reading this, you're already ahead of most. You secured investment, aligned stakeholders, selected the right tools, and provided access. Yet adoption still lags. The reason is almost never that people are lazy or the tech is bad. It's that humans resist change that feels arbitrary and sprint toward change that solves a problem they personally feel. To lead AI adoption well, ground every message, every training, and every metric in how people's daily work will improve. When that connection is absent, AI is perceived as yet another system to feed — a compliance obligation rather than a capability upgrade.

Before your next rollout — or as you reassess your current one — ask yourself honestly: Did your team know why this change was happening in terms that connect to their daily work? Did you have champions in place before launch, or did you train everyone the same way at the same time? Were leaders visibly using the tools, or was adoption expected only of the team? Did people feel safe to experiment and make mistakes, or did performance pressure push them to avoid trying? Did you create a feedback loop, and did people actually see their input drive visible changes? These are not rhetorical prompts; they are operational levers you can pull this month.

This guide is not a technology manual; it is a leadership operating system for AI adoption. It is built around seven principles: purpose clarity, champion strategy, leadership modeling, cognitive load management, psychological safety, feedback loops, and measurement that reflects value rather than vanity. As you read, mark the passages that sting a bit; those are your fastest paths to value recovery. Small, human-centered interventions — a tighter narrative, a single, well-chosen starter use case, a public weekly demo of leader usage — can unlock compounding gains that no license expansion can buy.

Read it. Be honest with yourself. Then do something about it. The rest of this ebook offers examples, contrasts, and coach-style questions to translate reflection into execution. As you move forward, remember: adoption is not an event but a behavior you must design for. The following principles provide the scaffolding.

# Principle 1:

# Adoption doesn't fail because the tool is hard to use.
# It fails because nobody explained why it matters.

## Why This Matters

Human beings are purpose-driven. We resist change that feels arbitrary and run toward change that connects to something we care about. When leaders deploy AI tools without clearly answering “what does this mean for me and my work,” they’re asking people to trust a black box. That trust almost never comes. The gap is not in capability; it is in clarity. If you cannot articulate the concrete pain your AI addresses — time spent on manual reporting, tedious documentation, repetitive status updates — your team will default to existing habits.

# When It Goes Wrong

A mid-sized healthcare IT team gets access to an AI documentation tool. Training happens on a Tuesday. By Friday, usage is at 12%. Why? Because the rollout message was “this will improve efficiency.” Nobody told the team their documentation burden would drop by 40%. Nobody made it personal. The technology wasn’t the problem — the communication was. Without an explicit link to their lived pain — late nights closing tickets because notes take forever — the tool looked like extra work.

# When It’s Done Right

A regional financial services firm tied every AI use case directly to a known pain point — hours lost to manual reporting. They reframed the rollout: “We’re not adopting a tool; we’re giving you back your Fridays.” Adoption hit 74% within 60 days. Same tool. Different message. The difference was purpose translated into personal benefit, stated in plain language and reinforced in team meetings. That narrative made experimentation feel worthwhile and made early wins visible.

# Your Coaching Question

Have you connected AI to their daily frustrations — not just the organization’s KPIs? If your team cannot repeat the “why” in two sentences, your message is not yet clear enough. Equip managers with a one-page purpose brief that maps top pains to specific AI use cases and the metric that improves. Then communicate it repeatedly.


① Project
FUNDING
DESIGN
TEST
TEAM
EQUILITY
A/B TEST
MARKETIN
ASIA
US
NY
France
Germany
Spain
UK
Italy
SALES
100%

# Principle 2: Every Team Has Champions and Resistors — Know Who's Who

## Why This Matters

Change doesn't spread evenly. Every team has early adopters who can't wait to try new workflows, quiet skeptics who need evidence from peers, and active resistors with "this won't work here" stories. Which group you invest in first determines everything. Gartner research attributes 28% of transformation failures directly to resistance and lack of stakeholder alignment.[2] If you train everyone identically, you miss the network effect of peer influence and allow negative narratives to dominate informal channels.

## When It Goes Wrong

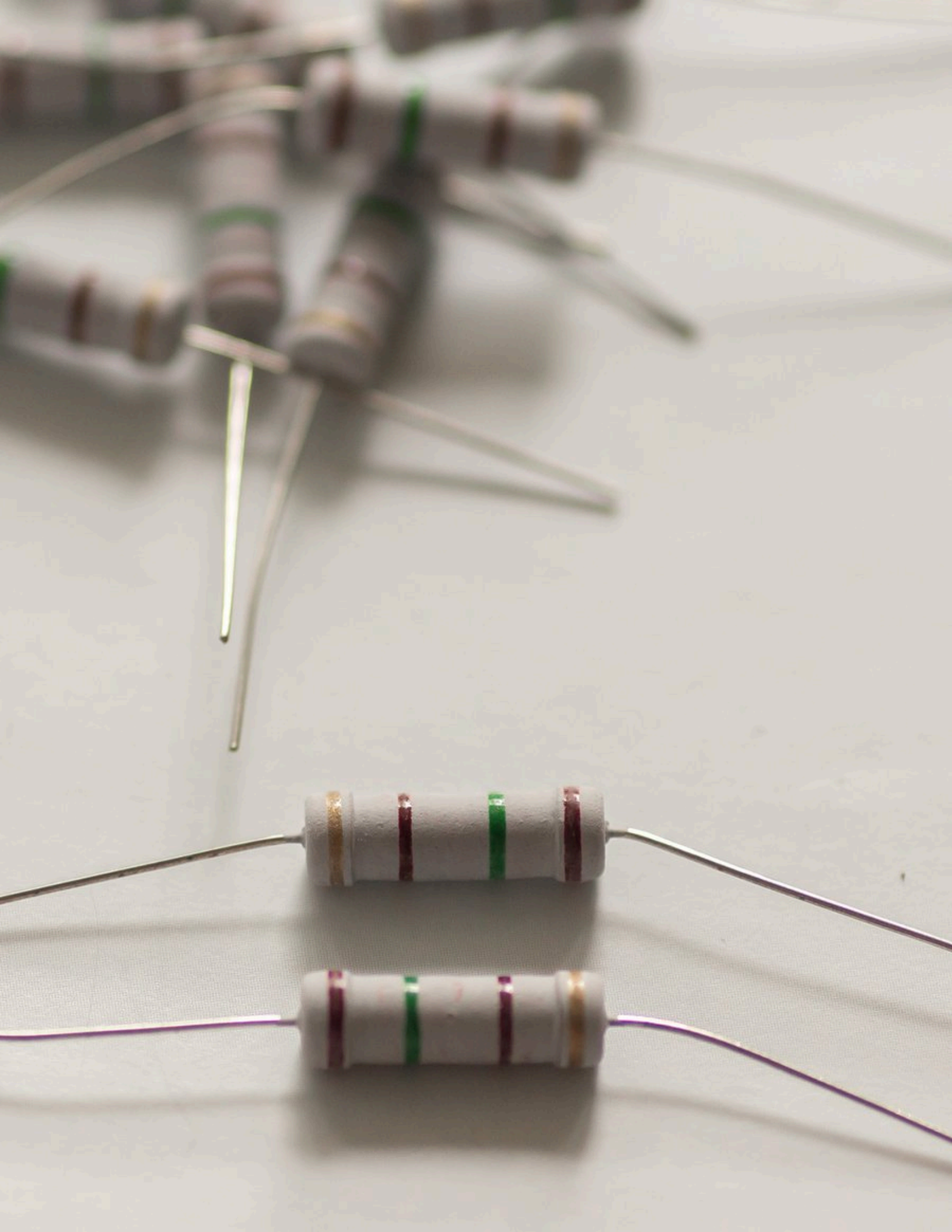
A large logistics company rolled out an AI scheduling tool to 200 employees simultaneously. Same training, same timeline, same expectations. Within 90 days, 160 people were using it inconsistently and 40 had found workarounds to avoid it entirely. The 40 became the loudest voices. Skepticism spread, usage flatlined, and the project was quietly shelved eight months in at a cost of $340,000. Uniform enablement without a champion strategy allowed resistance to set the cultural tone.

## When It's Done Right

A tech company identified ten credible champions across functions, gave them early access, and showcased their workflows in short demos. When resistors raised concerns, it wasn't the director defending the tool — it was a trusted colleague saying, "Here's how I use it to close my queue faster." Peer-led proof beat top-down push. Adoption reached 81% in 45 days because success was social and specific.

## Your Coaching Question

Can you name your top three champions and your top three resistors right now? Map them. Equip champions with enablement kits and recurring forums to share wins. Engage resistors privately to understand risks and co-design guardrails. Influence moves fastest through trust, not titles.



# Principle 3: Leaders Who Don’t Model Behavior Don’t Get Adoption

## Why This Matters

Leadership is a behavior, not a title. Teams watch what leaders do far more than what they say. If a VP announces an AI initiative and then never uses it in meetings or decisions, the unspoken message is clear: this doesn’t really matter. Gartner HR Research found that only 45% of employees report actually achieving their organization’s change goals — a gap driven largely by leaders not modeling expected behaviors.[5] When executives demonstrate real usage in context, teams follow — not because of mandates, but because the behavior becomes normal.

## When It Goes Wrong

A government IT department mandated AI-assisted report generation for all directors. The CIO sent one email, attended one training, and never touched the tool again. Within a month, the unspoken rule solidified: the tool was for compliance on paper, not real work. An audit six months later showed 94% of reports were still generated manually. The organization paid $180K per year in licensing with negligible value extracted.

## When It’s Done Right

The CTO of a professional services firm opened every Monday standup with a 60-second demo of how he used AI that week — drafting client follow-ups, summarizing risk logs, refactoring snippets. Two months later, directors mirrored the ritual with their teams. Usage grew organically by 210% in a quarter because modeling lowered the social cost of trying and created a cadence for sharing wins.

## Your Coaching Question

When did you last visibly use AI in front of your team? Put a recurring “show your work” moment on the calendar. Visibility is the adoption accelerant leaders control.

# Principle 4: Overwhelm Kills Adoption Before It Starts

## Why This Matters

IT teams operate under pressure. When a new platform demands rethinking entire workflows, cognitive load triggers avoidance. The antidote is not more training; it's a smaller starting point — one use case, one win, one reason to come back. Success compounds when the first step is obvious and achievable. Your early design decision is to pick the highest-frequency, lowest-risk task with the clearest time savings and standardize it for two to four weeks.

## When It Goes Wrong

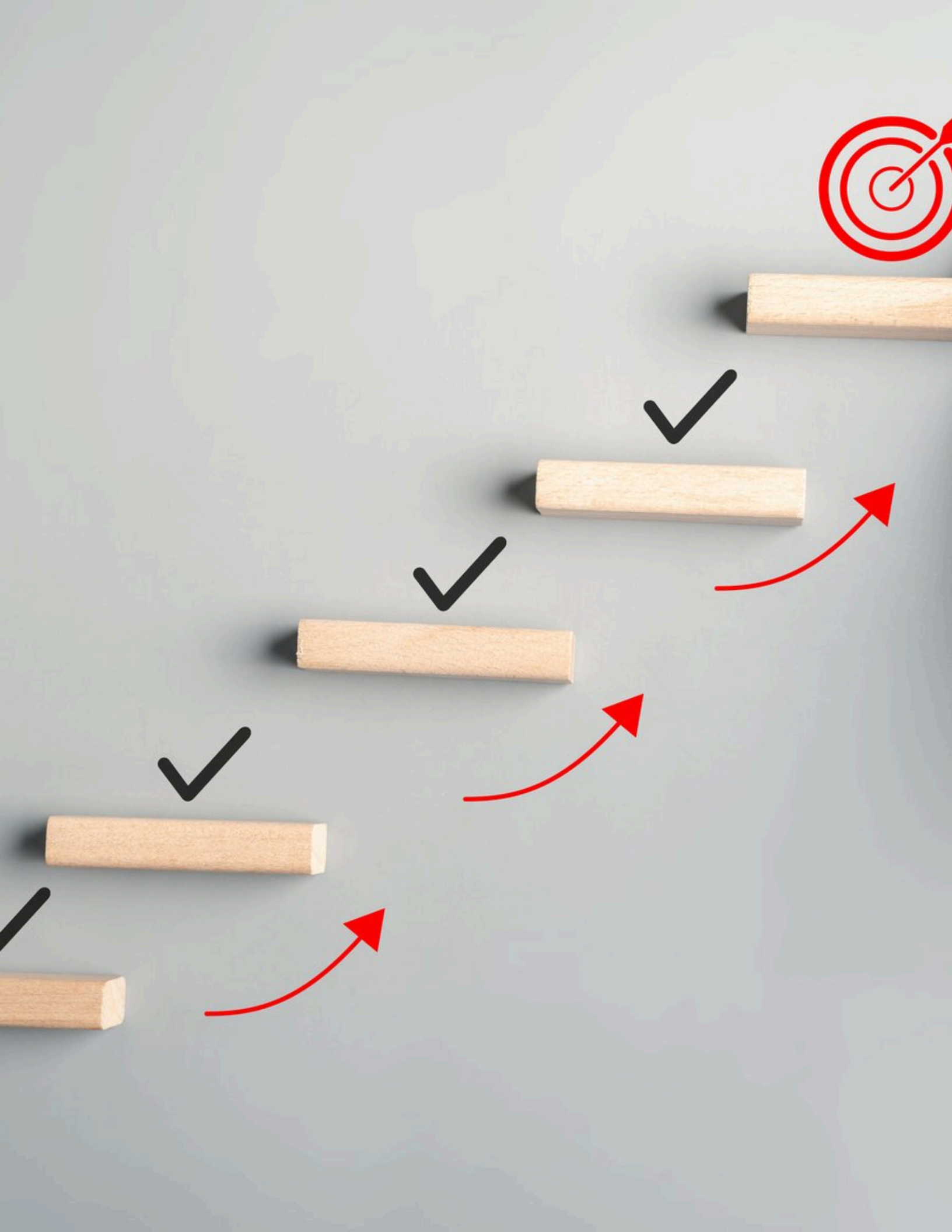
A manufacturing company deployed a full AI operations suite — 14 integrated modules — and trained the IT team on all of them in a two-day bootcamp. Intent: be comprehensive. Result: paralysis. Six months later, only two modules saw regular use, and depth of use was shallow. The team described the rollout as "too much at once." A $2.1M implementation delivered 14% utilization because the starting line felt like a mountain.

## When It's Done Right

A retail IT team was told: "For the next 21 days, use AI only to draft and tighten stakeholder emails." That was it. By week three, emails were finished in a quarter of the time. By week five, the team started asking what else they could automate. Curiosity is what momentum feels like — and it starts with one small, obvious win that builds confidence and habit.

## Your Coaching Question

Have you given your team exactly one use case to start with — or did you give them everything at once? Publish a 30-day "single-use-case" playbook and measure only that workflow until proficiency is visible.



# Principle 5: Without Psychological Safety, Experimentation Dies

## Why This Matters

Learning new technology requires mistakes. That's not a problem — it's the process. If people sense that errors will be penalized, they'll stick to what they know they can do correctly. Innovation requires explicit permission to fail, signaled repeatedly by leadership. Without that, reported usage may rise while meaningful adoption stays flat, as people "play it safe" and only log activity.

## When It Goes Wrong

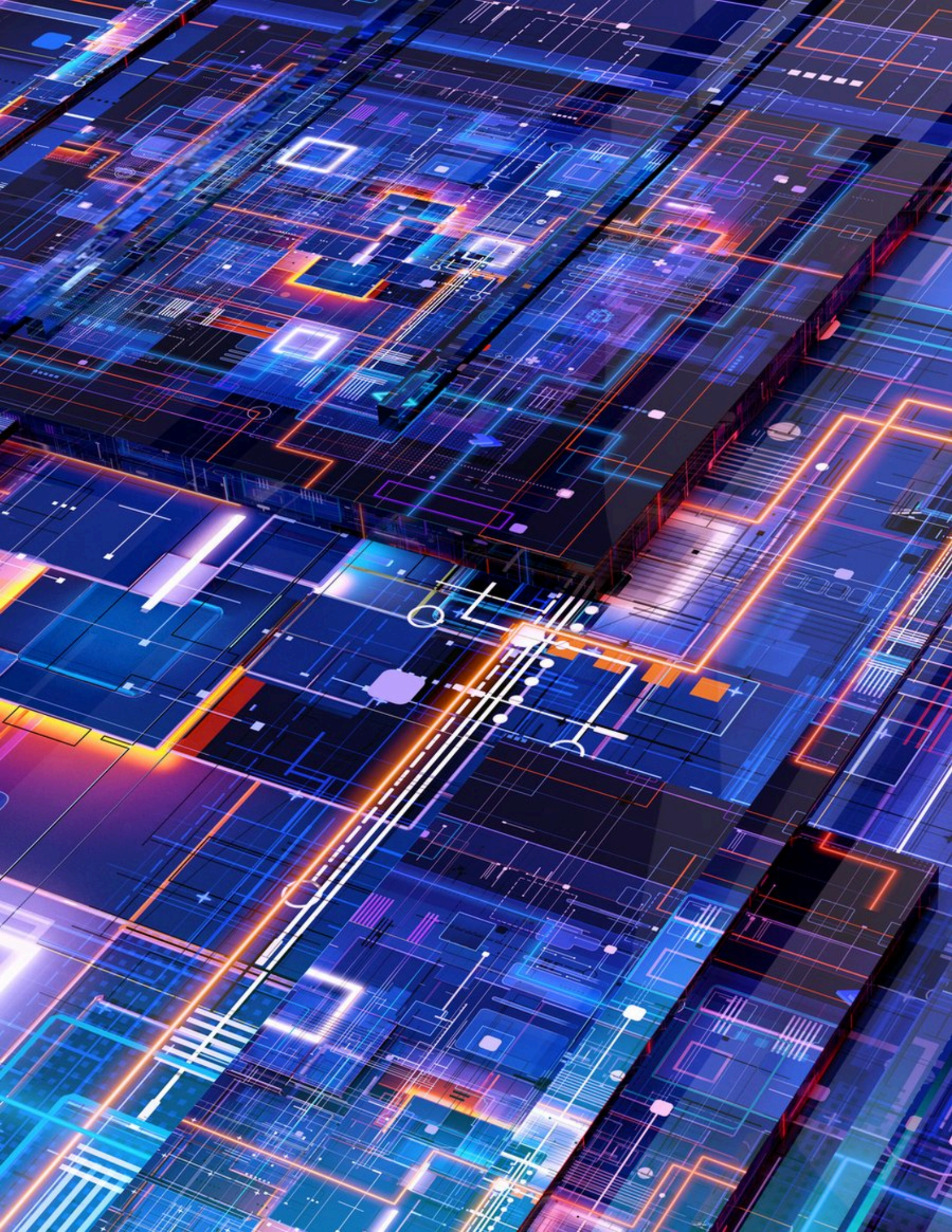
An IT director at a financial firm tracked AI tool usage at the individual level and referenced it in quarterly reviews: "We've noticed your AI activity is below average." The intention was accountability; the outcome was fear. Employees began opening the tool to log activity without using it meaningfully. Reported usage looked healthy, but real adoption was near zero. In anonymous interviews, employees said they were afraid to make mistakes in a monitored tool.

## When It's Done Right

A healthcare IT leader opened a team meeting by sharing her worst AI failure of the month and what she learned. She laughed about it. The room exhaled. In the two weeks that followed, three team members brought their own experiments — some wins, some flops — and she celebrated both. Within a quarter, that team generated more novel AI use cases than any other department because safety fueled exploration.

## Your Coaching Question

Have you explicitly given your team permission to fail with AI — out loud, in a meeting? Institutionalize "failure postcards" and treat them as learning artifacts. Reward thoughtful risk-taking that improves the playbook.



# Principle 6: No Feedback Loop Means No Course Correction

## Why This Matters

Every AI rollout encounters friction — prompts that don't land, integrations that block, and uneven support needs. The difference between programs that recover and those that collapse is whether leaders collect real feedback and act on it visibly. Deloitte reports that organizations with structured bottom-up feedback mechanisms are 3.5x more likely to implement change successfully than those relying solely on top-down directives.[3] When teams see their input alter configurations, training, or policy, they invest more. When feedback disappears, engagement decays.

## When It Goes Wrong

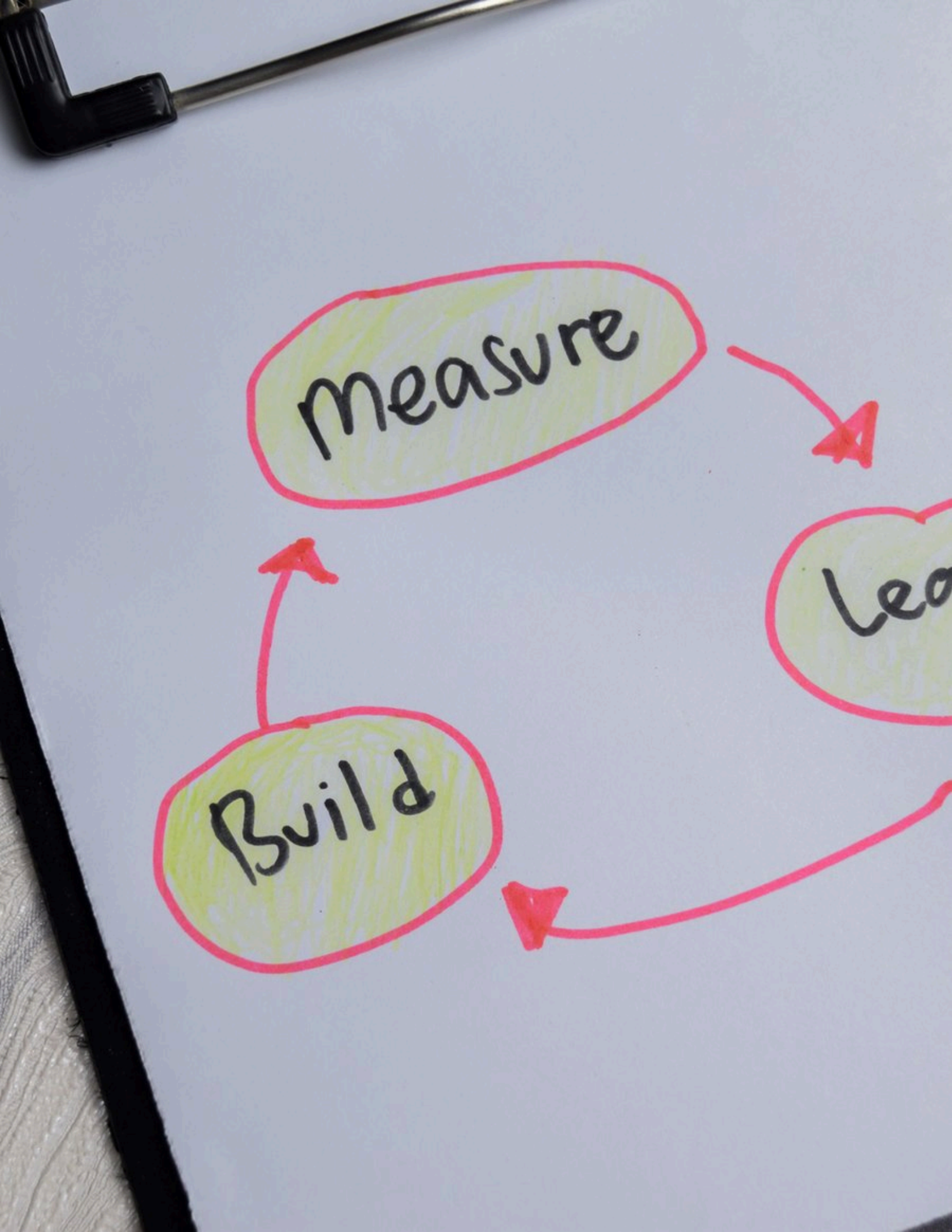
A telecom IT team completed a 30-day feedback survey. Sixty-seven responses went to senior leadership and were never heard about again. Six months later, when someone asked what became of the results, nobody knew. The unintentional message: your feedback doesn't matter here. Participation in office hours dropped, and usage eroded month over month.

## When It's Done Right

A software company created a #ai-wins-and-blockers Slack channel. Anyone could post. The IT leader reviewed it every Friday, acknowledged each blocker, and documented what would change by when. In three months, 847 posts surfaced patterns that led to two configuration fixes, increasing tool effectiveness by 33%. The channel became the department's most active space because the loop was tight and visible.

## Your Coaching Question

How are you collecting feedback — and what did you visibly change because of it? Publish a monthly "You said, we did" note with three changes and their impact. Close the loop relentlessly.


Measure
Lea
Build

# Principle 7: Measure Adoption, Not Just Access

## Why This Matters

License counts and logins are vanity metrics. They show who can access the tool — not who extracts value or how deeply behaviors change. Measure workflow penetration (which tasks use AI), depth of use (steps per task automated), and value captured (hours saved, error rates reduced, cycle time compressed). Microsoft's 2024 Work Trend Index found that 60% of business leaders already worry their organization is adopting AI without clear productivity gains — a signal to upgrade measurement from access to impact.

## When It Goes Wrong

An enterprise IT department reported "87% AI adoption" to its board based on monthly active logins. The board was impressed — until a workflow audit showed the average employee used AI less than four minutes per day, mostly autocomplete. The platform could automate up to six hours of weekly work per person. The delta between reported adoption and realized value cost an estimated $1.4M in unrealized productivity annually.

## When It's Done Right

A regional bank shifted to outcome metrics: percentage of reconciliations completed with AI assistance, average prompt-to-output cycle time, and hours returned per function. The CIO publicly reported these measures and funded teams that demonstrated the highest value per license. Within a quarter, the bank's AI value extraction ranked among the highest in its peer set — not because it held the most licenses, but because it measured what mattered and managed to the signal.

## Your Coaching Question

What are you measuring — and does it prove that AI is changing how your team works? Replace "MAU" vanity with workflow- and value-centric KPIs and review them in leadership forums monthly.


Real Time
Strategic Panel
Alternate Metrics
Executive View
Heatmap
Notifications
Tech Performance
Performance Insights Across Infrastructure and Applications
Latency (ms)
Error Rate (%)
Deploys
Product Usage & Engagement
Understanding Drop-Off Points in the User Engagement Funnel
Daily Active Users
Weekly Active Users
Monthly Active Users
User Spend Distribution
Spread, median, and outliers in monthly spend
Growth Velocity
Multi-metric performance tracking
New Users
MRR
Signups
Viral Coefficient
Churn Risk & Health
Identifying Engagement Drop-Offs That Signal Churn Risk
ACTUAL CHURN
11.8%
TARGET CHURN
6.6%
vs target
PERFORMANCE
At Risk
5.2% diff
Core Metrics Radar
Performance, Quality, Efficiency & Growth
3.2x
LTV/CAC
15%
CHURN

# What Happens Next: From Insight to Action

If you reached this point and found yourself nodding at the failure stories more than the success ones — that's not a bad sign. It means you're telling yourself the truth. Honest leaders fix things. The teams that win at AI adoption aren't led by the loudest evangelists or the biggest budgets; they're led by people who treat adoption as a human challenge and who are willing to do the work of leading people through change — not just deploying tools at them. This is the inflection point where clarity becomes a plan: tighten your purpose narrative, identify and equip champions, model usage publicly, shrink scope to a single starter workflow, create explicit psychological safety, operationalize a feedback loop, and upgrade measurement to value.

Here is a simple 30–60–90 action scaffold you can adapt immediately. Days 1–30: Publish a two-sentence "why now" linked to three daily pains; appoint five cross-functional champions; choose one starter workflow; create a weekly leader demo ritual; launch #ai-wins-and-blockers; define three value metrics. Days 31–60: Share early wins; resolve top two blockers; expand to a second workflow for ready teams; run office hours; publish "you said, we did." Days 61–90: Standardize prompts and templates; integrate metrics into QBRs; recognize champions; plan the next wave deliberately. Each activity is small by design; together, they reset momentu

This is the work I do with IT leaders — not theory, but a concrete plan tailored to your context and constraints. If you want a sounding board, the next step is a free 20-minute strategy call. No pitch, no pressure. We'll diagnose where your team is stuck and define the first move. Whether we work together or not, you'll leave with clarity and a starting point. Book your free strategy call at calendly.com/jasonstgelais.

Jason St. Gelais is a John Maxwell Certified Leadership Coach helping IT leaders build the growth and change principles that carry teams through digital transformation — without burnout, resistance, or wasted investment.

# Footnotes & Citations

[1] McKinsey & Company. Research widely cited since 2018 and reaffirmed through 2024 indicates that approximately 70% of large-scale transformation programs fail to meet goals, driven largely by human and organizational resistance rather than technology shortfalls. Visit mckinsey.com to locate the latest phrasing and datasets before publishing. [2] Gartner, Inc. 2024 research attributes 28% of transformation failures to resistance and stakeholder misalignment, with an additional share tied to unclear objectives. Verify exact wording on gartner.com. [3] Deloitte Insights, “The Human Side of Transformation,” 2023. Organizations with systematic bottom-up feedback mechanisms are 3.5x more likely to implement change successfully. See deloitte.com. [4] Microsoft Work Trend Index 2024. Survey of 31,000 knowledge workers across 31 countries; leaders are concerned about adopting AI without clear productivity gains. Visit microsoft.com/worklab. [5] Gartner HR Research, October 2025 press release references that only 45% of employees report achieving change goals. Confirm the latest public citation at gartner.com/en/newsroom. [6] Boston Consulting Group, 2020 analysis of 900+ transformation programs: only 30% deliver sustainable value; data-driven, insight-led transformations are 1.8x more likely to succeed. See bcg.com. Note: Before publishing, visit each source directly to pull the exact quote and confirm the statistic to protect your professional credibility and ensure accuracy.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