



# Using AI to Create Innovation and Collaboration

BY JASON DOWNIE

# When planning to implement AI and create a culture of innovation, start now because you will never be finished.

Enterprise AI adoption is on the rise. As quickly as tools such as ChatGPT and Bard hit the mainstream, executives began asking how AI could be leveraged within their businesses to automate tasks, streamline processes, and create efficiencies. But while using AI tools is generally an intuitive process, integrating AI tools into a company's culture and infrastructure is much more complicated—but it isn't impossible. In fact, we are nearing a precipice where this will be an essential part of doing business, and those who don't embrace the tech will be left behind.

Before diving into how AI can be implemented into a company's culture, it would be helpful to identify some of the initial hurdles of AI implementation.

For one, security is generally the most pressing concern and is associated with the biggest risk. While companies are drafting policies to ensure employees know what they can and cannot do or access regarding AI, management is responsible for enforcing the parameters. However, this evolving technology does not have finite best practices, nor do all the platforms have safeguards in place. Therefore, treading lightly in highly sensitive verticals is advised, and ensuring security is a top priority. This requires an initial deep dive and ongoing communications between the IT team, management, and representatives from all departments.

The other top concern is knowledge and education across the organization. While some people may have surface-level knowledge of AI, others may be greatly educated and already elbow-deep in AI activations. So, with varying levels of understanding, policies and counsel must meet employees where they are to ensure there is comprehension and cohesion across all business functions. In addition, it is likely that some people may feel threatened by the technology (and widespread predictions) and concerned about job security. In short, robots and technology cannot replace human intelligence, but the fear that they can is a highly contagious mindset.

Now, onto culture...

## CHECK THE COMPANY'S DNA

To gain perspective on how easy or challenging it may be to implement AI into an existing culture, start by checking the company's DNA. Where is the company right now in terms of maturity and talent? Where does the business want to go, and what is the roadmap to get there? Are innovation and agility currently intertwined within the threads of the existing business structure?

Answering these initial questions will provide a pulse of the current environment. Understanding the DNA and the

general tone of acceptance or resistance to change will help identify transformation paths and potential friction along the way. Essentially, understanding the current DNA will shape organizational planning at the outset and lead to effective strategies for guiding AI implementation.

For a company culture to successfully embrace new technologies, it must be flexible and agile and instill a philosophy that supports experimentation, learning, and innovation. These attributes really come down to the three Ps of any successful business—people, process, and platforms—and set the foundation. Without alignment within the trifecta, rolling out AI will likely be a struggle met with resistance, which will extend the timeline and increase the need for additional resources.

## LET'S START WITH THE PEOPLE

It is essential to have the right teams with the right skills in the right places. If the right people are on board but lack some skills or education, offer continuous learning opportunities and upskill those individuals at the very beginning. This initial group will likely become the "go-to" experts and internal advocates. They should be provided with an arsenal of resources, educational materials, and data to guide decision making.

If some of the people involved in the process are seasoned professionals, they may be more likely to show signs of resistance and may need a bit more support to encourage them to embrace change. This is often done by reinforcing or even creating (although it takes quite a bit of time and a lot of focus if this doesn't exist) a culture of psychological safety. Psychological safety is when employees feel safe enough to take interpersonal risks, speak up, openly disagree, and speak their minds without fear of negative consequences. In a corporate environment, this is about encouraging all to share their concerns without fear of being reprimanded or losing their job simply for speaking their mind (if, of course, it is done so with respect).

In all cases, leadership must empower teams and encourage them to demonstrate a willingness to try new things. This will require alleviating doubts and fears and showing the shared benefits to all of a successful rollout.

As mentioned, some may be concerned that AI will take their job. It is the leadership's responsibility to remind everyone that AI does not replace humans. Instead, AI is a tool that can create efficiencies and streamline processes, which can elevate the organization as a whole. In some circumstances, AI may help employees improve their own performance and remove menial tasks from their to-do lists. And, of course, each person within an organization is responsible for their own career. Since AI is here to stay, they might as well learn to live with the tech and

make the most of the benefits rather than resisting or being paralyzed or demotivated by a fear of the unknown.

One more thing from the leadership perspective: Being able to clearly and succinctly communicate the goals and objectives of the implementation—through various media—is an essential part of the implementation strategy. This communication must be ongoing to be effective and accompanied by educational materials, shared successes, and challenges that may arise along the way. Keeping everyone informed will keep the goals top of mind and push everyone to continue moving in the same forward direction.

## IDENTIFY THE PROCESSES

Preparing for AI adoption may require the organization to refine existing processes and create new ones. This begins with an assessment and understanding of all processes that may be impacted and the interconnections and dependencies within. Then the adjustments and new requirements can be identified.

A healthy 360-degree view of an organization's infrastructure is a perfect starting point. Identifying systems, integrations, and how information and data flow will reveal any inefficiencies, breaks, or the potential for errors. Giving all teams involved with processes a voice in this conversation is the only way to truly understand the various perspectives and how everything works in tandem.

For most organizations, the most critical process to review and refine will be risk management. Risk management regarding AI ensures brand safety, addresses AI hallucinations, and pinpoints additional functions within processes that would benefit from a human-in-the-loop. Addressing brand safety and AI hallucinations really is where humans can be required as a fail-safe and to provide an extra layer of protection against misinformation. Making everyone aware of these risks and how they are mitigated can provide a sense of security.

Throughout the review and refinement of processes, maintaining agility and integrating change management practices will support a smoother transition and, hopefully, garner support and internal buy-in.

## ADOPT AND ACTIVATE THE RIGHT PLATFORMS (AND PARTNERS)

The last part of the three Ps is platforms, and let's also throw partners into the discussion. The philosophy and tools that power the organization's infrastructure and platforms will determine the success of AI and innovation, and the right partners will be able to support these initiatives.

Culture and the current environment drive the philosophy behind platform and partner decision making. The company's vision and values should be within the DNA and transcend into choosing (or adjusting) the right platforms and partners. Using the DNA as a compass will help narrow the options and result in a more cohesive organization overall.

When evaluating platforms, cloud-based solutions provide ownership of the tools and data required to power AI tech. In addition, the flexibility and scalability of cloud-based tools make it an ideal foundation to support AI and its changing capabilities as the technology matures. However, deployed cloud solutions must be secure and rigorously tested to ensure efficacy. This needs to be addressed when evaluating risk and crafting business continuity plans, and all business units involved should be invited to contribute to security and contingency planning.

So, what are the determining factors for embracing and implementing AI?

In short, here is a non-exhaustive list of three requirements companies need to own to embrace and implement AI across an organization. Take this as the starting point, and remember, everything must align with the bigger business objectives for it to actually work.

**Test and learn philosophy.** Providing the space and safety for testing and learning shows that mistakes are possible but taking calculated risks is embraced as long as the outcomes and resulting learnings are not lost in the process. This mentality shows that everyone, at every level, is capable of making mistakes but also willing to embrace and apply the lessons.

**Ongoing communication and collaboration.** Keep the lines of communication open and encourage cross-company collaboration to troubleshoot, solve new problems, and identify new, smarter ways of doing things.

**Education driven by purpose.** Rather than offering random workshops or ad hoc opportunities to upskill, offer role-specific training and educational tools and resources with a specific function. Invite individuals to participate and explain how the skills and resources can help their performance.

When planning to implement AI and create a culture of innovation, here is the bottom line: Start now because you will never be finished. AI and other technologies will always be evolving, shifting, and impacting every business function, from procurement to marketing. And since culture is driven by humans who are also continually changing, everything must remain flexible while continuing to push ahead.

Rather than pushing back due to the fear of the unknown, aversion to risk, or lack of education, take small steps (and sometimes it's two forward and one back). If you don't move forward, you will be faced with the challenge of falling behind sooner rather than later.

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