HR DIRECTOR / PEOPLE LEADER

The HR Leader's Guide to Genuine AI Adoption

The human conditions that determine whether AI investment succeeds.

Brynley Knight | Research & Advisory

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The HR Leader's Guide to Genuine AI Adoption

Most organisations are spending significant money on AI adoption and seeing disappointing returns. The gap is not the technology. The technology, broadly, works. The gap is in the human conditions that determine whether people can actually use it well. Those conditions are where HR leadership is most needed.

ManpowerGroup's 2026 Global Talent Barometer captures this precisely: AI adoption jumped 13% in the past year, with 45% of workers now regularly using AI at work. Yet confidence in using the technology fell 18% over the same period. More people are using AI. Fewer feel equipped to use it well. The conclusion is direct: the limiting factor is not the technology. It is organisational readiness and the human conditions that support genuine capability.

This guide gives HR leaders a clear, research-grounded framework for what actually needs to happen. It is not a generic overview of AI in the workplace. The first half sets out the evidence: what the research shows about why AI adoption fails and what determines whether it succeeds. The second half translates that into action: a practical framework, key diagnostic questions, and a 90-day implementation roadmap designed to be used, not filed.

What this guide covers
Why training alone will not produce genuine AI adoption, and what needs to happen instead
The professional identity crisis your most experienced people are experiencing right now
How to build the psychological safety conditions that make genuine AI learning possible
The evidence from organisations that have got this right, including Unilever and Microsoft Frontier Firms
Your EU AI Act literacy compliance obligation and how to meet it
A practical three-track framework, diagnostic questions, and a 90-day action plan

Research basis: This guide draws on the Brynley Knight Intellectual Framework, which synthesises peer-reviewed psychology and organisational behaviour research with current industry data. Where the guide references academic studies, this is noted as such. Where it references consulting surveys, workforce reports, and industry data, these are treated as directional evidence rather than causal proof. All claims are sourced; full references appear at the end.

SECTION 1

The Challenge Facing HR Leaders

AI has created a moment that HR has never faced before. Not because the technology is unprecedented (every generation of leaders has faced transformative technology) but because of three specific compounding factors that make this moment categorically different.

What makes this different

First, the speed. Previous workplace technology transitions took years or decades to reach full deployment. AI is being deployed at a scale and pace that makes it impossible for organisations to absorb gradually. The time between introduction and expected proficiency has compressed dramatically.

Second, what it disrupts. Previous workplace technology replaced tools. AI participates in tacit reasoning. MIT economist David Autor (2024) identified this precisely: prior computing was strong on procedural tasks and weak on tacit knowledge. AI's capabilities are precisely the inverse. This means AI is not displacing the routine aspects of professional work. It is absorbing the cognitive work that previously defined professional expertise.

Third, what it does to people. When technology disrupts identity rather than just workflow, the change management challenge is categorically harder. People can adapt their processes. Adapting their professional sense of self requires something different.

What HR is facing right now

McKinsey's State of AI 2025 found that while 88% of organisations now use AI in at least one function, only 39% report any EBIT impact attributable to AI investment, and nearly two-thirds have not yet begun scaling AI across the enterprise. BCG found that 74% of companies struggle to achieve and scale AI value. The gap is consistent, large, and not a technology gap. The organisations seeing genuine returns are the ones that have managed the human dimensions of adoption, and those dimensions are precisely where HR expertise is most needed.

45% of workers now regularly use AI at work	**-18% technology confidence fell over the same period**	**39% only this share report any EBIT impact from AI**

Sources: ManpowerGroup Global Talent Barometer (2026); McKinsey State of AI (2025); BCG AI at Work (2025, n=10,635)

Why HR is best placed to lead

Korn Ferry research found that 40% of CHROs say the biggest obstacle to AI adoption is insufficient AI knowledge within HR teams. This creates a specific challenge: the function responsible for job architecture, capability frameworks, and organisational culture is itself under-prepared for the most significant workforce transformation of the current era.

The CIPD's own analysis adds urgency. CIPD Future of Workforce Reporting (2025) found that only 13% of FTSE 100 firms have referenced AI skills training for staff, and only 14% have an AI governance policy or strategy. This is not a gap in intent. It is a gap in execution, and it is precisely the domain where HR expertise makes the difference.

HR itself is not insulated from this challenge. CIPD analysis of occupational AI exposure found that HR administrative roles are in the top 20 most AI-exposed occupations in the UK, and training and development specialists have the highest potential for AI augmentation of any HR role at 68%. The people profession must lead the human dimensions of AI adoption while simultaneously navigating its own exposure to AI-driven change.

> *"Adoption is ultimately where success is measured. You need to design that in from the get-go. And that is much less about technology, much more about understanding the practice it will actually serve."*

Roy Jakobs, President and CEO, Royal Philips, World Economic Forum Annual Meeting, Davos 2026

This guide is designed to equip HR leaders with the framework to close that gap.

SECTION 2

Why Training Alone Will Never Be Enough

The dominant response to failed AI adoption is more training. If people are not using the tools, the assumption runs, they need to be taught how. This assumption is wrong, and the research has demonstrated it to be wrong across technology change management for decades.

The Adoption Gap Model

The Adoption Gap Model, developed by Brynley Knight, synthesises three bodies of psychological research into a single practical framework. It identifies three conditions that must be met simultaneously for genuine AI adoption to occur. Most organisations are meeting only one.

Layer	What it means	What happens without it
CAPABILITY	Employees can use AI tools effectively and critically evaluate outputs, not just operate them.	People use AI superficially or avoid it entirely. Training investment produces no behaviour change.
MOTIVATION	Employees genuinely want to use AI, independently of any instruction to do so.	Compliance without adoption. Usage metrics look fine. Genuine integration never occurs.
PERMISSION	Both psychological safety (safe to try, fail and challenge) AND governance clarity (knowing what is actually permitted).	People perform adoption rather than engage in it. Errors propagate unchallenged. Shadow adoption or paralysis.

Source: Adoption Gap Model, Brynley Knight (2026), synthesising Davis (1989), Ryan & Deci (2000), Edmondson (1999)

What this means for HR leaders

Training programmes address capability. They do not address motivation or permission. An organisation can have a technically competent workforce that is psychologically unsafe to challenge AI outputs, unclear on what is permitted, and fundamentally unpersuaded that AI adoption serves them. That organisation will produce excellent usage metrics and poor real-world returns.

Genuine AI adoption is a behaviour change challenge, not a skills challenge. The opportunity for HR is to design the conditions under which all three layers are present simultaneously.

The AI fluency gap

Capability must be distinguished from procedural skill. Anthropic's AI Fluency Index (2026) found that only 30% of users direct their AI interactions deliberately. The majority receive output passively, accepting what the AI produces without evaluating whether it is accurate, biased, or appropriate. This is not a training failure. It is an AI fluency failure.

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index quantifies the scale of the gap: 67% of leaders report familiarity with AI agents, compared to only 40% of employees. 79% of leaders believe AI will accelerate their careers, but only 67% of employees share that optimism. LinkedIn data from the same report identifies AI literacy as the most in-demand skill of 2025. Closing both gaps is where HR's expertise and reach are most valuable.

> *"An employee can know how to submit a prompt without having the critical evaluation skills to assess whether the output is accurate, biased, or incomplete. Procedural skill without evaluative fluency produces automation bias, not genuine adoption."*

Brynley Knight Intellectual Framework, Proposition 2

SECTION 3

The Identity Crisis Nobody Is Talking About

When AI does what a professional does, something happens that no standard change management framework currently addresses. Not to the workflow. To the person. Their sense of professional self, the identity built over years of developing expertise, is threatened in a way that is psychologically real even when no job has been lost.

What the research shows

A 2025 study published in the International Journal of Hospitality Management (two-wave survey, 500 employees) found that AI disruption threat is directly associated with technology insecurity, which in turn reduces thriving at work and lowers self-esteem in the domains of competence and authenticity, even when the AI is performing accurately. The threat is not rational error-identification. It is existential: the confirmation that what you do can be done without you.

Shonhe and Min (2025), publishing in AI and Society, confirmed this in a structural equation modelling study of 413 professionals: AI-induced professional identity threat reduces willingness to adopt AI further, creating a negative cycle where identity threat becomes its own adoption barrier. The study found that making AI transparent and explainable, allowing people to understand what AI can and cannot do, was one of the most effective interventions for reducing identity threat.

Ibarra's research on working identity (2003) provides the framework: professional identity is not a fixed state but an ongoing construction, maintained through the tasks we perform. When AI disrupts those tasks, it disrupts the confirming practices through which identity is maintained.

BCG's 2025 global survey (n=10,635) found that 46% of employees at organisations undergoing comprehensive AI-driven redesign worry about job security, compared to 34% at less-advanced companies. This is the measurable surface of a much deeper psychological dynamic.

Who is most at risk

Counterintuitively, the employees most at risk are often the most experienced, not the least. These are the people whose professional identity is most deeply built on the cognitive work that AI now performs. The senior lawyer. The experienced analyst. The specialist consultant.

McKinsey's 2025 data is direct: 80% of organisations are deploying AI but only 20% have rebuilt processes around it. The people in the roles most disrupted by AI are being asked to change how they work without any support for reconstructing what their work means.

The Identity Resilience Model

The Identity Resilience Model (Brynley Knight, 2026) identifies three components that protect professional identity during AI transition. This is the framework that equips HR to lead the most underaddressed dimension of AI adoption.

Component	What it means	How HR can help
Expertise Anchoring	The ability to clearly articulate what one does that AI cannot, in specific terms relevant to the role. Not vague qualities like creativity, but concrete role-specific human capabilities.	Create structured conversations that help employees identify and name their distinctively human contributions. This cannot be left to individuals.
Contribution Reframing	The ability to define professional value in terms of judgment and relationship rather than task execution. The shift from "I produce X" to "I ensure X is good."	Redesign job descriptions, performance frameworks, and capability models to reflect the new shape of contribution. This is overdue in most organisations.
Narrative Agency	The ability to construct and own a coherent story about one's professional role in an AI-enabled world. People who cannot tell this story about themselves are the ones who disengage.	Provide structured space for this work. Workshops, coaching, team conversations. The narrative does not emerge on its own.

Source: Identity Resilience Model, Brynley Knight (2026), synthesising Ibarra (2003), Wrzesniewski & Dutton (2001), Ashforth & Mael (1989)

SECTION 4

Building the Cultural Conditions for Genuine Adoption

AI adoption is a learning challenge disguised as a technology challenge. Learning, at scale, in a professional context, requires psychological safety. Without it, people perform adoption rather than engaging in it.

Kim and Lee's 2025 study (Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 381 employees, three-wave methodology) provided empirical confirmation: AI adoption has a significant negative impact on psychological safety, which in turn increases depression. Organisations that deploy AI without addressing psychological safety are actively eroding the conditions required for genuine adoption.

What Edmondson's research tells us

Professor Amy Edmondson of Harvard Business School, the world's leading researcher on psychological safety, has been direct about AI's implications: "AI is creating generalised anxiety in workplaces. People worry about their roles, relevance, and future in ways that can undermine psychological safety if left unaddressed. The only way to help address that generalised anxiety and strengthen psychological safety is by making it discussable."

The BCG data

BCG's 2025 global survey (n=10,635, 11 countries, third consecutive annual study) found that when leaders demonstrate strong support for AI, positive employee sentiment rises from 15% to 55% and regular AI usage rises from 41% to 82%. Only 25% of frontline employees say they currently receive that support. This is a 41-percentage-point gap in regular usage, driven entirely by a human factor that sits within HR's capability to influence.

A 2025 study by BCG and Columbia Business School adds the most striking finding in the dataset: in their survey of organisations across multiple sectors, employee centricity explained 36% of the variance in AI maturity. That is more than industry sector (14%), department (12%), or company size (5%) combined. This is not a soft-skills finding. It is the single strongest statistical predictor in the study of whether an organisation's AI investment produces genuine returns.

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index (31,000 workers across 31 countries) adds a finding that should prompt reflection in every people team: 17% of workers say they turn to AI rather than a colleague specifically because of fear of human judgment. This is not a productivity finding. It is a culture finding. When employees use AI to avoid being seen to ask a question, admit

uncertainty, or seek help, the absence of psychological safety is actively shaping unhealthy patterns of AI use. People are not just disengaging from AI. They are disengaging from each other.

15% **55%**	Positive employee sentiment when leaders demonstrate genuine AI support. BCG (2025)	**41%** **82%**	Regular AI usage with strong leadership support vs without. BCG (2025)

The four safety conditions HR needs to build

The Brynley Knight AI Safety Culture Framework identifies four specific conditions that must be present for genuine AI learning to occur. Each of these conditions is within HR's capability to design and build.

01 **Permission to be a beginner**

No shame in not knowing. Employees must feel safe to learn AI in public without fear of judgement about their competence. This means leaders must model their own learning visibly, including their mistakes.

02 **Permission to challenge AI**

It must be safe to say the AI is wrong. In organisations where questioning AI output is seen as obstructive or disloyal to the technology strategy, errors will propagate unchallenged. This is the pattern most likely to produce consequential failures.

03 **Permission to opt out selectively**

Some tasks should remain human for legitimate professional reasons. This must be respected, not treated as non-compliance. Forced AI use produces compliance, not genuine adoption.

04 **Permission to experiment**

Trying and failing with AI must be valued, not penalised. Without this condition, genuine learning cannot occur and the feedback loops that produce real capability never form.

Source: AI Safety Culture Framework, Brynley Knight (2026)

SECTION 5

When HR Gets This Right: Evidence and Examples

The argument that the human dimensions of AI adoption are the primary determinant of return on investment is not theoretical. The evidence from organisations that have invested in their people alongside their technology is both clear and compelling.

The CIPD Good Work Index 2025

The CIPD's annual benchmark of job quality in the UK found that 16% of employees have had tasks automated using AI. Of those, 85% say AI adoption has improved their performance, and these individuals are more likely to be satisfied with their jobs and to experience positive effects of work on their mental health.

This is the most important number in the CIPD's 2025 data: 85% of employees whose work has been touched by AI say it has made them better at their jobs. That is not the headline most organisations have internalised. Most leaders assume AI creates anxiety and resistance. The data shows that when AI is implemented in a way that genuinely supports the employee, the majority experience it as a positive development.

The CIPD's conclusion is direct: "When used responsibly, AI has the potential to enhance job quality, particularly when it frees up time for more meaningful work." The condition is the critical word. The 15% who do not report improvement are almost certainly in organisations where the human conditions described in this guide are absent.

The Unilever example

Unilever is one of the most instructive available examples of what happens when AI deployment is explicitly paired with investment in human capability. By the end of 2024, the company had trained 23,000 employees in AI usage, not as a compliance exercise, but as a deliberate capability development programme combining technical AI training with soft skills enhancement.

The results reported through the WEF and McKinsey Frontline Talent of the Future programme are exceptional. At the Kilbourn facility in the US, combining AI with focused human talent development produced a 16% improvement in Overall Equipment Effectiveness, a 42% reduction in waste, and a 60% reduction in absenteeism between 2021 and 2024. At the Poznan facility in Poland, employee engagement increased by 79% over the same period. At Tianjin in China, the engagement score reached 98% in 2024.

Patrick Hull, Vice President of Future of Work at Unilever, described the logic directly: "An engaged workforce empowered by technology can truly achieve remarkable results. It is only when teams and technology are working in harmony that we can achieve the optimised productivity we are aiming for."

Unilever's voluntary AI tool return rate is 80%: eight in ten employees who are given access to AI tools choose to use them again. This is the signature of genuine adoption, not mandated compliance. It is the direct consequence of having invested in the human conditions before and alongside the technology.

Unilever: Human + Technology Investment Results (2021-2024)
Kilbourn, US: 16% OEE improvement | 42% waste reduction | 60% reduction in absenteeism
Poznan, Poland: 79% increase in employee engagement over 3 years
Tianjin, China: 98% employee engagement score in 2024
Company-wide: 23,000 employees trained in AI usage by end of 2024
Voluntary return rate: 80% of AI tool users choose to continue using them

Source: Unilever / WEF McKinsey Frontline Talent of the Future Programme (2025); Unilever Digital Transformation Report (2025)

What Microsoft's Frontier Firms reveal

Microsoft's 2025 Work Trend Index identifies a category of organisations it calls Frontier Firms: those with organisation-wide AI deployment, high AI maturity scores, and active use of AI agents. The human outcomes at these organisations are striking. 71% of Frontier Firm workers report their company is thriving, compared to 37% globally. Only 21% express concern that AI will take their jobs, compared to 38% globally. 90% report having opportunities for meaningful work, versus 73% globally.

The mechanism is not that these organisations have better technology. It is that deep AI integration, done properly, reduces the anxiety that shallow or poorly-supported AI deployment creates. Employees who understand AI, who work in organisations with genuine governance clarity, and who have been supported through the identity and capability transitions, are less anxious about AI than those in organisations that have deployed tools without the human infrastructure.

Microsoft also notes a finding with direct strategic implications for HR: as organisations mature in AI deployment, Sales, Finance, and Operations evolve toward agent-led functions, while HR and Strategy remain explicitly human-first. The organisations that will lead the next era of work are the ones whose HR functions have built the conditions that make AI work for people.

SECTION 6

Your EU AI Act Compliance Obligation

The EU AI Act entered force in August 2024 and is being phased in through to 2027. For HR leaders, the most immediately relevant provision is already active.

An AI literacy obligation has applied since February 2025, requiring businesses to ensure that staff operating or using AI systems are sufficiently AI literate. The obligation applies most stringently to providers and deployers of high-risk AI systems, but the underlying principle — that those working with AI should understand what it is and what it can and cannot do — applies broadly to any organisation deploying AI at meaningful scale.

What this means for UK businesses

The EU AI Act is extraterritorial in scope. The direct analogy is GDPR. UK businesses making AI systems available on the EU market, or whose AI outputs affect individuals in the EU, are within scope regardless of where the provider is located. UK businesses that believe Brexit placed them outside this framework are mistaken.

For UK organisations not strictly in scope, the Act functions as a global de facto standard. PwC notes that it is the global reference point for AI governance. Voluntary alignment builds internal governance infrastructure regardless of strict legal obligation.

What HR needs to do

The AI literacy obligation is not satisfied by a one-day training course. It requires demonstrable, sustained AI literacy across the workforce. HR needs to:

- Map which roles involve operating or using AI systems and at what level
- Define what AI literacy means for each role category, beyond basic tool operation
- Design and deliver structured literacy development that produces measurable outcomes
- Create a record of AI literacy provision that demonstrates compliance
- Build ongoing refreshment as AI capability and organisational AI use evolves

The literacy obligation is also an opportunity. Building genuine AI literacy across the workforce is the same work that produces genuine adoption. Framing compliance work as capability building creates aligned incentives across HR, legal, and operations.

SECTION 7

A Practical Framework for HR Leaders

The following framework translates the research in this guide into a structured programme of work. It is not a sequential checklist. The three tracks should run in parallel.

Track A: Build the conditions	
Assess baseline psychological safety	Use the Human-AI Readiness Diagnostic to establish where your organisation currently sits across the six human dimensions. Understand the gaps before designing interventions.
Establish visible leader learning	Work with senior leadership to create structured, public AI learning moments. BCG data shows this is the single highest-leverage intervention available: the sentiment gap between organisations with and without this is 40 percentage points.
Create governance clarity	Work with legal and IT to develop clear, role-specific guidance on sanctioned tools, permitted data inputs, and consequences. Policy documents are not enough. People need specific, operationalised answers to the question: what am I actually allowed to do?
Build the four safety conditions	Design team-level practices that make it safe to be a beginner, challenge AI outputs, opt out for professional reasons, and experiment. This is cultural design work, not a workshop.

Track B: Develop genuine capability	
Redesign AI training around fluency, not operation	Shift the focus from how to use the tools to how to evaluate the outputs. The 70% of users who passively accept AI outputs are a capability risk, not a capability asset.
Build metacognitive practice into work	Create structured moments for people to reflect on how they are using AI and what it is doing to their thinking. This is the capability dimension that no training programme currently addresses.

Implement the Identity Resilience Model	Create structured conversations around expertise anchoring, contribution reframing, and narrative agency. Prioritise your most experienced people. They are the ones most at risk.
Develop AI literacy systematically	Design a role-specific literacy programme that meets the EU AI Act obligation while genuinely building capability. Map outcomes, measure progress, refresh regularly.

Track C: Measure what matters

Extend your people metrics to include AI dimensions	Standard engagement surveys predate AI deployment and cannot capture AI-specific wellbeing, confidence, or identity impacts. Build AI-specific questions into your people data.
Monitor cognitive health indicators	Track whether people can perform tasks unassisted that they could perform six months ago. This is the deskilling indicator that organisations are currently not measuring.
Assess adoption quality, not just usage	Usage statistics measure compliance. They do not measure genuine adoption. Use the Human-AI Readiness Diagnostic to track the quality dimensions that predict long-term returns.

SECTION 8

Key Questions to Ask Your Organisation

Use these questions in leadership conversations, board discussions, and HR planning sessions. They are designed to surface the gaps most organisations have not yet examined.

On adoption

- Do we know the difference between AI usage and genuine AI adoption in our organisation?
- What does our AI training programme address? Capability only, or motivation and permission as well?
- Can our people articulate where AI is unreliable, or do they assume it is reliable by default?

On identity and wellbeing

- Are our most experienced people the most supported through AI transition, or the most overlooked?
- Have we monitored whether AI adoption is affecting employee stress, confidence, or professional self-worth?
- When did we last ask our people what AI is doing to how they think, not just what they produce?

On culture

- Is it genuinely safe in our organisation to say when AI has produced wrong or poor-quality output?
- Does our leadership visibly model AI learning, including their uncertainty and mistakes?
- Do people feel they have genuine choice about whether to use AI for a particular task?

On governance

- Do our people know specifically which AI tools are approved for use in their work?
- Do they know what data is and is not permitted to be entered into AI tools, with specific examples?
- If someone made an error using AI today, would they know what to do and who to tell?

On compliance

- Have we mapped which roles involve operating or using AI systems under the EU AI Act definition?
- Do we have a demonstrable AI literacy programme that meets the February 2025 obligation?
- What is our current gap between stated AI policies and how AI is actually being used?

SECTION 9

From Insight to Action: Your 90-Day Roadmap

The research in this guide points to a consistent pattern: organisations that invest in the human conditions of AI adoption see better returns than those that invest in technology alone. This section translates that into a practical sequence of actions. None of these require significant budget. Most require leadership attention and HR credibility.

Three things you can do this week, before anything else: 1. Read your current AI policy as if you were a line manager encountering it for the first time. Ask whether it answers the question: what am I actually allowed to do? 2. Have one honest conversation with a senior leader about whether your organisation is measuring AI usage or genuine AI adoption. 3. Identify your three most experienced people in AI-disrupted roles. Ask yourself whether they have had any structured support for the identity dimensions of this transition.

Days 1 to 30	Understand where you actually are
Run a baseline diagnostic	Use the Human-AI Readiness Diagnostic or your own equivalent. Assess psychological safety, governance clarity, capability confidence, and identity resilience across a representative sample. Do not rely on usage data. Usage tells you how many people are complying. It does not tell you whether genuine adoption is occurring.
Audit your current AI training	Map what your training provision actually addresses against the three-layer Adoption Gap Model. Most programmes address capability only. Identify explicitly what you are doing, if anything, about motivation and permission. The honest answer in most organisations is: nothing yet.

Map your AI Act exposure	Identify which roles involve operating or using AI systems at scale. This is the starting point for the February 2025 literacy obligation and provides the foundation for any capability framework you subsequently build.
Hold three diagnostic conversations	One with your most AI-engaged employee. One with your most resistant. One with a senior leader who has not yet publicly engaged with AI in their own work. Listen for the identity and safety signals, not just the capability ones.

Days 31 to 60 — Build the foundations

Brief your leadership team on what the data actually shows	Present the BCG finding: leader visible support drives a 41-percentage-point difference in adoption rates. Make this concrete. The ask is not that leaders become AI experts. The ask is that they model learning in public, including uncertainty and mistakes.
Create a structured conversation about AI anxiety	Not a workshop. A properly facilitated team-level conversation that makes AI concerns discussable. Edmondson's research is specific: generalised anxiety undermines psychological safety, and the only remedy is making it discussable. Design this conversation, do not assume it will happen organically.
Run one expertise anchoring session	Take a team in a role facing significant AI disruption. Run a structured conversation using the Identity Resilience Model: what do you do that AI cannot, in specific terms relevant to this role? Help people name their distinctively human contribution. This is low-cost, high-impact, and immediately differentiates your AI support offer.
Review and clarify governance	Confirm that employees know specifically which tools are sanctioned, what data cannot be entered, and what to do if AI produces an error in their work. If you cannot answer these questions confidently, neither can your people. Over 54% of employees say they would use AI tools without approval if proper access were unavailable. Governance clarity reduces both risk and anxiety simultaneously.

Days 61 to 90 — Activate and measure

Design and run one structured experiment	Identify a team, a specific AI tool, and a specific use case. Run it with a human review cycle built in from the start. Debrief what worked, what did not, and what the experience revealed about the team's psychological safety and capability. This is the lowest-cost way to generate real learning and visible leadership engagement.
Add AI dimensions to your people data	Standard engagement surveys predate AI deployment and cannot capture AI-specific wellbeing, confidence, or identity impacts. Add three to five AI-specific questions to your next pulse survey. Ask whether people feel supported through AI transition, not just whether they are using the tools.
Build your first AI literacy record	Document what training has been provided, to whom, and what it covered. This is the beginning of your compliance record under the EU AI Act literacy obligation and your internal evidence base for future investment conversations.
Present a 90-day review to leadership	What has changed. What has not. Where the resistance still sits and why. What the data from your diagnostic now shows compared to the baseline. Frame this as an ongoing programme, not a project with an end date. Genuine AI adoption is a multi-year change management challenge.

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Identity Resilience Model (Brynley Knight, 2026). Synthesises Ibarra (2003), Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001), Ashforth and Mael (1989). Three components: expertise anchoring, contribution reframing, narrative agency.

ABOUT BRYNLEY KNIGHT

The Human Side of AI.

Brynley Knight is a research and advisory practice focused on the human psychology of AI adoption. The practice does not advise on technology selection, implementation architecture, or technical AI strategy.

It advises on the human conditions that determine whether AI investment produces genuine capability or expensive compliance theatre.

Founder Michael Wakeham brings 20 years of senior operational leadership (COO and transformation director roles across nine sectors) and an MSc in Psychology to every engagement. The practice is research-led, with active collaboration with BCU PsyNet.

If this guide resonated, let's have a conversation.

The first call is always free. No pitch deck. No proposal before you're ready.

A direct conversation about what the human dimensions of AI mean for your people.

Book a free 30-minute discovery call:

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