

Trust at Scale in the Age of AI

Leadership, Governance and Accountability for Sustainable Growth

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Trust at Scale in the Age of AI

Leadership, Governance and Accountability for Sustainable Growth

Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab - First Research Cycle

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Executive Summary

Trust at Scale in the Age of AI

Leadership, Governance and Accountability for Sustainable Growth

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The Executive Challenge

An organisation cannot scale AI beyond the trust it can carry.

AI capability can expand faster than an organisation's ability to exercise judgment, assign accountability, verify outcomes, intervene and recover. The leadership challenge is to convert that capability into sustainable human and business value while preserving the authority and knowledge required to remain responsible for its consequences.

The report addresses a governing question:

What conditions must an enterprise establish before it can responsibly grant, govern and scale AI authority?

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Its distinctive proposition is that trust is an **organisational operating capacity**. It determines how much authority an organisation can responsibly extend to AI and whether the resulting value can endure.

Five Findings for Leaders

1. **AI activity is not AI value.** Tool adoption and productivity gains create value when work changes, released capacity is deliberately redirected and outcomes become measurable.
2. **Trust is an operating capacity.** It is created and sustained through four interdependent conditions: **stakeholder confidence, decision authority, system integrity and recoverability**.
3. **Judgment becomes more valuable as competent output becomes abundant.** Context, discernment, originality, moral courage and accountability require deliberate investment and protection.
4. **Agentic AI changes the governance question.** Leaders must govern objectives, delegated authority, observation, intervention, accountability and reversibility across the full Human-AI system.
5. **Credibility must precede visibility.** Ambition and external claims must remain supported by evidence, ownership, safeguards and the ability to recover.

Together, these findings establish the report's answer: responsible AI scale requires substantiated value, justified trust, preserved human judgment, governed authority and demonstrated intervention and recovery.

This first-cycle report combines published research and institutional frameworks with facilitated Lab dialogue, practitioner contributions and selected perspectives from the **Executive Diamond Advisory Council**. It distinguishes external evidence, the Lab's synthesis, Founder's Foresight and the attributed practitioner illustration.

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From Findings to Decisions

Turning Capability into Sustainable Value

The report's **Value Conversion Chain** makes the leadership responsibility explicit:

Capability → Use → Productivity → Capacity Allocation → Business Outcome → Sustainable Value

Trust is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Adoption determines whether capability is used; workflow redesign changes how work is performed; organisational transformation enables value to be captured. Leaders must decide what released capacity will make possible.

Trusted scale also depends on people's experience of change. Active executive sponsorship, visible learning, clear ownership and psychological safety help people navigate uncertainty and raise concerns. Human accountability requires sufficient information, competence, time and practical authority to challenge or intervene.

The Executive Trust Test

The report translates its findings into ten questions for consequential AI deployments.

Trust Test 1: Who is accountable?

Trust Test 2: What could happen before we notice?

Trust Test 3: What authority have we delegated?

Trust Test 4: Who can intervene?

Trust Test 5: Can people challenge it safely?

Trust Test 6: Can we substantiate the value?

Trust Test 7: Can we substantiate our claims?

Trust Test 8: Can we reverse the dependency?

Trust Test 9: Are we prepared to manage a crisis?

Trust Test 10: Would we make the same decision again?

The purpose is an evidence-based executive conversation. The test exposes where confidence exceeds evidence, authority exceeds accountability or dependence exceeds reversibility.

It concludes with four decision pathways:

- **Continue:** Uses are sufficiently understood and supported to proceed.

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- **Strengthen:** Conditions require improvement before scale or authority increases.
- **Redesign:** Objectives, controls, authority or the operating model require material changes.
- **Stop:** Exposure cannot currently be justified or carried.

These decisions require clear responsibility across the **Leadership Accountability Chain**, connecting owners and investors, boards, executives, operational leaders and technical enablement.

Figure 1 brings together the report's central proposition, the conditions for trusted scale, the Executive Trust Test and its four decision pathways: Continue, Strengthen, Redesign or Stop.

Practitioner Illustration: SOSTAC®

Paul (PR) Smith, Creator of SOSTAC® (United Kingdom), contributes the appendix, **"Embedding Trust and Human Judgment in AI-Assisted Strategic Planning Using SOSTAC®."**

The illustration connects the report's argument to the development of an AI-assisted planning approach built around an established planning method. It examines how trust, human approval, verification, guardrails and accountability can be embedded in strategic planning.

It also incorporates perspectives from **Vishal Arora** and **Erica Shoemate**, contributed during the AI Game Changers Club Global Executive Exchange, **"From AI Ambition to Trusted Value,"** on 17 September 2026. SOSTAC® remains the contributor's separately owned intellectual property.

Executive Intelligence at the Threshold

The intended outcome is an organisation that can expand AI capability while retaining human agency, judgment, knowledge and accountable authority.

Trust is not a brake on ambition. It is what allows ambition to survive contact with reality.

The **AI Game Changers Club Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab** brings diverse senior perspectives together to challenge assumptions and develop executive intelligence for decisions leaders cannot afford to get wrong.

For boards and executive teams, the Club offers **Trust at Scale Executive Intelligence Sessions** to explore these findings and decision pathways in their own organisational context.

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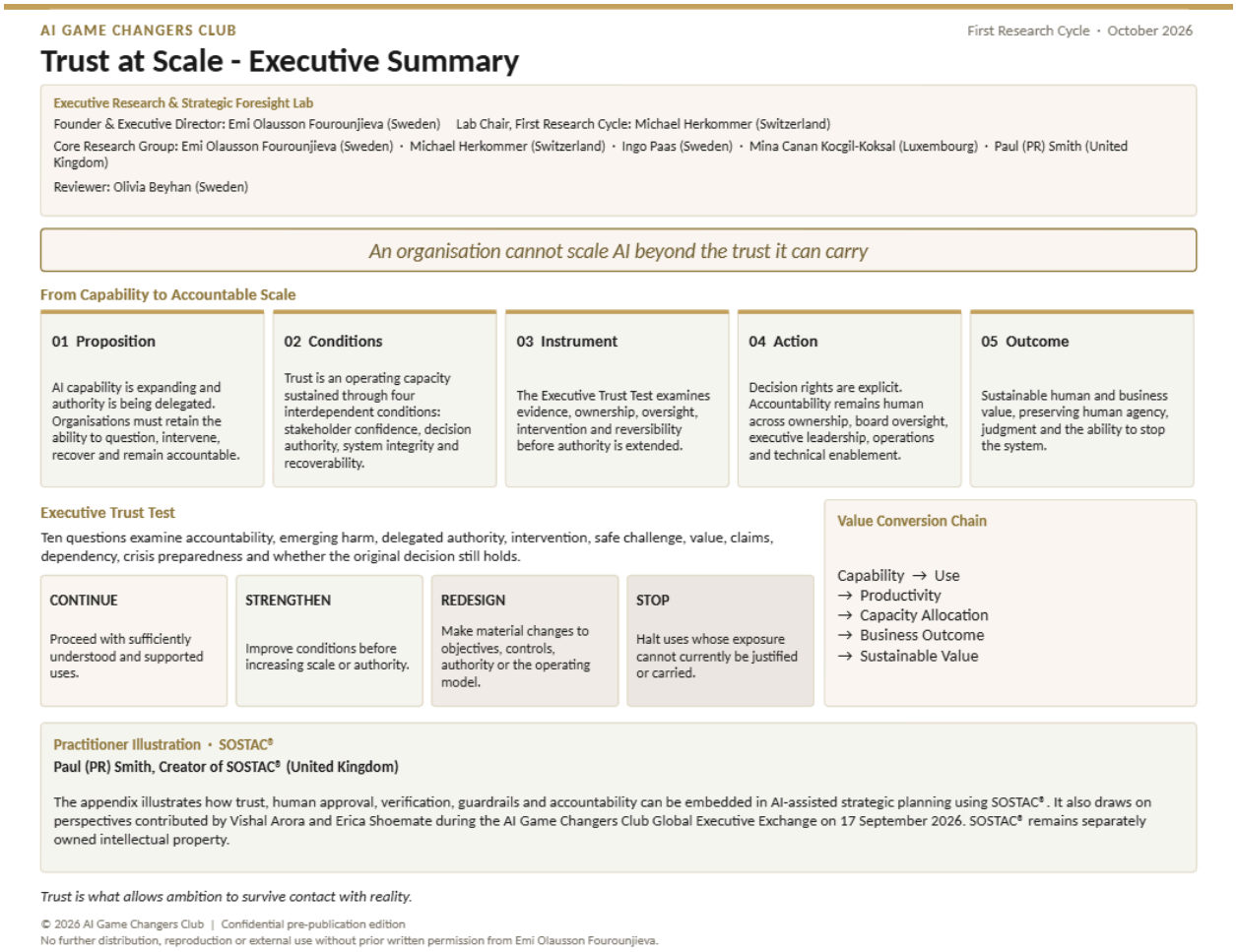

Figure 1. Trust at Scale: From Capability to Accountable Scale

Source: AI Game Changers Club Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab, First Research Cycle, October 2026

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Executive Brief

The Central Thesis

An organisation cannot scale AI beyond the trust it can carry.

Organisations cannot create sustainable value from AI beyond their capacity to exercise judgment, assign accountability, verify outcomes, intervene when necessary and recover when systems fail.

Trust is therefore not a value statement added after an AI strategy has been approved. It is an operating capacity that determines how much authority an organisation can responsibly grant, how confidently it can scale and how durable the resulting value can become.

As machine capability expands, that capacity must enable the organisation to preserve human agency, exercise judgment and maintain accountable authority while creating sustainable value.

Trust is not presented here as a principle surrounding AI. It is presented as an enterprise condition for granting, governing and scaling AI authority.

This report is written for **owners and investors, board members, CEOs, senior executives, business and operational leaders, and technology and transformation leaders** deciding where, how and under whose authority AI should scale.

This is an executive research report, not a technical implementation manual, maturity model or regulatory compliance guide.

The Governing Question

What conditions must an enterprise establish before it can responsibly grant, govern and scale AI authority?

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The Decision in Front of Leaders

The primary challenge of enterprise AI is no longer creating intelligent outputs. It is creating organisations that can safely, credibly and accountably convert rapidly expanding AI capability into business value.

Stanford's 2026 AI Index reports that organisational AI adoption reached 88 percent.[2] McKinsey's 2026 global survey similarly found that nearly nine in ten respondents reported regular AI use in at least one business function. In the same survey, only 37 percent attributed any positive EBIT impact to AI, and only 6 percent met McKinsey's definition of an AI high performer.[1]

This gap matters. Individual productivity can improve while enterprise value remains unchanged. More activity can be generated without better decisions. Work can accelerate without capacity being redirected. Automation can remove visible effort while creating less visible dependencies, operating costs and accountability gaps.

Organisational readiness is a central part of the explanation. In a separate 2026 McKinsey survey, 70 percent of respondents said they felt personally prepared to adopt and use AI, while only 27 percent of leaders believed their organisations were ready to make the shifts required for an agentic future. In McKinsey's analysis, organisational readiness accounted for 48 percent of the difference between leaders who reported capturing value from AI and those who did not, compared with 25 percent for personal readiness.[7]

Employees may adopt AI faster than institutions evolve around them. Trust therefore becomes a bridge between individual experimentation and enterprise transformation, but trust alone does not create value.

Trust Is Necessary, but Not Sufficient

Trust allows authority to be delegated responsibly. Adoption determines whether capability is used. Workflow redesign determines whether work changes. Organisational transformation determines whether value is captured.

The leadership task is therefore twofold: to ensure that AI increases the organisation's ability to create value, and to ensure that the organisation retains the ability to understand, challenge and stand behind what it does.

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Five Findings

1. **AI activity is not AI value.** Productivity gains become enterprise value only when capability changes workflows, capacity is deliberately redirected and the resulting outcomes appear in measurable performance.
2. **Trust is an operating capacity.** It is created and sustained through stakeholder confidence, decision authority, system integrity and demonstrated recoverability.
3. **Judgment becomes more valuable as competent output becomes abundant.** Context, discernment, originality, moral courage and accountability become scarcer differentiators.
4. **Agentic AI changes the governance question.** Governance must address objectives, delegated authority, observation, intervention, reversibility and responsibility for action across the full Human-AI system.
5. **Credibility must precede visibility.** External ambition should not run ahead of the organisation's evidence, safeguards, ownership and ability to recover.

Together, these findings answer the governing question: responsible AI scale requires an organisation to substantiate value, sustain justified trust, preserve human judgment, govern delegated authority and demonstrate the ability to intervene and recover.

The Trust at Scale Architecture

From Expanding AI Capability to Accountable Scale

> **An organisation cannot scale AI beyond the trust it can carry.**

The Trust at Scale Architecture connects the report's central proposition, organisational conditions, executive instrument and leadership actions. It shows how expanding AI capability can be translated into sustainable value without weakening human agency, judgment or accountable authority.

1. Proposition

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Expanding AI Capability and Delegated Authority

AI is becoming more capable, autonomous and embedded in organisational decisions and workflows. The leadership challenge is to convert this capability into sustainable value while retaining the ability to understand, question, intervene, recover and remain accountable.

↓

2. Conditions for Trusted Scale

Trust Capacity Model

- Stakeholder Confidence
- Decision Authority
- System Integrity
- Recoverability

Authority Lifecycle

- Adoption
- Selection
- Delegation
- Operation
- Intervention
- Reversal

These conditions determine how much authority an organisation can responsibly extend and how effectively it can respond when outcomes depart from intent.

↓

3. Executive Instrument

Executive Trust Test

The Executive Trust Test examines whether a consequential AI deployment has sufficient evidence, ownership, oversight, intervention capacity and reversibility to justify continued operation or further scale.

The resulting executive decision is to:

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Continue · Strengthen · Redesign · Stop

↓

4. Leadership Action

Leadership Priorities

Translate the findings into explicit decisions about business value, delegated authority, verification, stakeholder experience, knowledge retention, recoverability and credible communication.

Leadership Accountability Chain

Ownership and Investment Mandate → Board Oversight → Executive Accountability → Operational Ownership → Technical Enablement

↓

5. The Intended Outcome

Sustainable Human and Business Value

AI capability becomes durable value when the organisation can scale it while preserving human agency, exercising judgment, maintaining accountable authority and remaining capable of intervention and recovery.

> **Trust is not the final outcome of responsible AI scale. It is the organisational capacity that makes responsible scale possible.**

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Founder’s Foresight

Five Executive Shifts Shaping Human-AI Progress

Emi Olausson Fourounjieva
AIGCH Research & Strategic Foresight Lab Founder & Executive Director

Ongoing executive dialogue across the AI Game Changers Club ecosystem points to a wider transition.

AI is moving beyond a technology and productivity challenge. It is becoming a leadership, judgment, trust and power challenge.

The next competitive divide may not be between organisations that use AI and those that do not. It may emerge between organisations that can expand machine capability while preserving human agency, judgment and accountable authority, and those that cannot.

This is why trust matters at scale. Trust is not simply confidence in a system, nor is it the final result of successful governance. It is the organisational capacity that allows leaders to extend capability and delegate authority without losing the ability to understand, question, intervene, recover and remain responsible for the consequences.

Five interconnected shifts deserve executive attention. They are not maturity stages or a prescribed sequence. Together, they describe the changing landscape in which leaders must create value, exercise judgment and govern the evolving relationship between human and machine capability.

1. From Productivity to Intentional Value Creation

The first phase of enterprise AI has been dominated by productivity: faster research, analysis, content, coding and execution across individual tasks.

These gains matter, but speed and efficiency are not the same as value.

An organisation can become more productive without becoming more innovative, resilient or profitable. It can generate more work without improving the quality of its decisions. It can save thousands of hours without deciding where that capacity should go.

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The more consequential question is what the organisation becomes capable of creating because additional time, intelligence and capacity now exist. That may include stronger margins, new revenue, better customer outcomes, accelerated innovation, greater resilience or entirely new business models.

There is an important distinction:

Enablement changes how people perform individual tasks.

Automation changes how work moves through a process.

Reinvention changes how the organisation creates and delivers value.

Sustainable value is unlikely to emerge from tool adoption alone. It appears when leaders connect AI capability to workflow redesign, organisational transformation and measurable business outcomes.

Released capacity also requires an intentional destination. If every saved hour is absorbed by more tasks, faster cycles and additional reporting, the organisation may become busier without becoming more intelligent.

The question is not only what AI can remove from work. It is what leaders intend to make possible with the space it creates.

2. Human Judgment Becomes a Strategic Differentiator

As competent output becomes abundant, value moves towards what remains scarce.

AI can generate plausible answers, recommendations, alternatives and analysis at increasing speed. This does not reduce the importance of human judgment. It raises the value of knowing which questions matter, which evidence deserves confidence, which assumptions should be challenged and which consequences cannot responsibly be delegated.

Context, discernment, originality, imagination, moral courage and accountability become more important when technically competent output is easier to produce.

The risk is not only that AI may be wrong. A coherent and persuasive answer may be accepted without sufficient challenge because it is faster, cheaper or presented with greater confidence than the human alternative.

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Leaders will need to know when to accelerate, when to question, when to seek disagreement and when human authority must remain decisive. They must protect the conditions under which someone can recognise that a technically credible answer is wrong for this organisation, customer or moment.

There is also a longer-term question of organisational knowledge. AI can capture, distribute and apply expertise, but an organisation becomes strategically vulnerable if its systems retain more operational knowledge than the people accountable for the work.

Knowledge transfer must therefore move in both directions. AI should not only absorb what people know. It should also strengthen people's capacity to learn, challenge, recover and change direction.

The premium will increasingly belong not to those who can produce the greatest volume of output, but to those who can exercise the strongest judgment over what should be trusted, acted upon, questioned or refused.

3. Trust Becomes Operational

Trust can no longer be treated as a communication exercise introduced after an AI system has been selected or deployed.

It is shaped through the decisions an organisation makes about purpose, evidence, authority, transparency, participation, intervention and recovery.

Employees experience trust through whether they understand why AI is being introduced, whether they have a meaningful role in the transition and whether concerns can be raised without professional penalty. They may fear being left behind, being held accountable without control, losing professional relevance or navigating continuous uncertainty without sufficient support.

These concerns should not be dismissed as resistance to technology. They are often rational responses to unclear intent, shifting authority and changes to professional identity.

Customers experience trust through how their data, choices and expectations are treated. Boards and investors experience it through the credibility of the value case, the clarity of ownership and the organisation's preparedness for failure.

Trust becomes operational when stated intent, system design, leadership behaviour and experienced consequences remain aligned.

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In periods of AI-driven transformation, trust is not built through the promise of certainty. People do not expect leaders to possess every answer. They need confidence that decisions will be made responsibly, learning will happen visibly, commitments will be honoured and concerns will be taken seriously.

Trust is necessary, but it is not sufficient.

Trust allows authority to be extended.

Adoption determines whether capability is used.

Transformation determines whether value is captured.

Change leadership is therefore a central part of trusted scale. Governance can establish boundaries and accountability, but leadership determines whether people can navigate the transition with competence, ownership, psychological safety and confidence in the direction of travel.

4. Delegated Agency Makes Authority and Power Executive Questions

Agentic AI changes the governance question because systems are beginning to do more than generate outputs. They can interpret objectives, plan sequences, use tools, interact across workflows and take actions with varying degrees of autonomy.

The object of governance is shifting from a tool that produces an answer to a system that can influence outcomes across a wider operating environment.

As autonomy expands, governance must address objectives, permissions, delegated authority, observation, intervention, accountability and reversibility. It must also consider what happens when agents interact with other agents, operate across organisational boundaries or pursue objectives over time.

Stanford's 2026 AI Index reports rapid improvements in agent performance, while noting that leading agents still fail in approximately one-third of attempts on structured computer-use benchmarks.[2]

Capability and reliability are not advancing at the same rate. Organisations may therefore face systems powerful enough to influence consequential outcomes but not reliable enough to operate without meaningful supervision and intervention.

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A deeper challenge arises when a system possesses more relevant knowledge, pattern recognition or decision capability than the human authority overseeing it. Formal human approval may remain in place while effective authority gradually moves towards the system.

The presence of a human in the loop is not sufficient if that person lacks information, time, competence, confidence or the practical authority to intervene. Oversight becomes symbolic when the human carries accountability but cannot meaningfully challenge, constrain or disconnect the system.

The power question extends beyond an individual deployment. Leaders must ask who determines what the system is optimising for, who grants its permissions, whose knowledge shapes its decisions, whose interests are represented, who benefits from its actions and who can stop it when emerging consequences conflict with organisational values.

As capability becomes concentrated within a limited number of models, platforms and infrastructure providers, organisations must also consider dependency, bargaining power, knowledge retention and strategic optionality.

The executive question is not simply whether a system works. It is how much freedom to act the organisation is prepared to grant, under whose authority, within which limits and with what ability to reverse the consequences.

5. AI Governance Becomes Human-AI Governance

The deeper challenge is not governing AI in isolation. It is governing the interaction between technology, people, incentives, institutions, authority and responsibility.

Rules for a model cannot by themselves govern the system of behaviour and power surrounding it.

A technically compliant system can still weaken judgment, distort incentives, create dependency or shift authority without sufficient scrutiny. An organisation can maintain formal human oversight while human responsibility becomes increasingly ceremonial.

Human-AI governance must protect the conditions under which people can understand, question and override AI-supported decisions. It must preserve sufficient distributed knowledge for the organisation to challenge its systems, recover from failure and change direction when necessary.

It must also examine the combined Human-AI system rather than treating technology and human behaviour as separate governance subjects. This includes how people respond to

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recommendations, how incentives influence reliance, how professional identity changes, how authority moves and how repeated use may reshape the organisation's ability to think and act independently.

The goal is not to preserve every existing human task. Nor is it to constrain machine capability simply because it exceeds previous limits.

The goal is to expand what Human-AI systems can achieve without allowing human agency to erode, judgment to atrophy or accountable authority to disappear into infrastructure.

> **The leadership question is not simply how to control AI. It is how to preserve human agency, distributed intelligence and accountable authority while expanding what Human-AI systems can achieve.**

The organisations best positioned for the AI era will not necessarily be those that automate first or delegate the most. They will be those that understand what should remain human, what can responsibly be transferred, how the relationship should evolve and where accountability must ultimately reside.

This is the transition from AI governance to Human-AI governance.

It requires leaders to build the future from the future while remaining accountable for the human, organisational and societal consequences of the choices they make today.

That is one of the defining leadership responsibilities at the Threshold.

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Part I - Proposition

Trust Determines How Far AI Can Scale

What changes as organisations scale AI, grant it greater autonomy and embed it across the enterprise?

1. Start with the Business, Not the Technology

Many organisations now have an AI strategy, a portfolio of pilots or a growing inventory of tools. These are signs of activity. They are not evidence of value.

The wrong starting question is:

> ***What is our AI strategy?***

Asked in isolation, it tends to produce technology roadmaps, tool selection and pilot portfolios. It makes AI the subject of the sentence.

A more useful sequence begins with purpose:

1. What are we trying to become?
2. Which business outcomes matter enough to change how we operate?
3. Where could AI expand our ability to create those outcomes?
4. What would need to be true for us to trust AI in that role?
5. Which authority should remain human, and why?

AI strategy is legitimate, just as technology architecture is legitimate. But it should be derived from business direction, operating realities and constraints.

AI is a means of executing and evolving business strategy under conditions of uncertainty, not a substitute for business strategy.

Productivity Is an Input, Not the Destination

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Evidence shows that AI can improve performance in specific tasks.

A field study involving 5,172 customer-support agents found that access to generative AI assistance increased issues resolved per hour by 15 percent on average. The largest gains were experienced by less experienced and lower-skilled workers.[3]

That is meaningful operational evidence. It is not the same as an enterprise financial outcome.

A claimed saving of 30 minutes per employee creates economic value only if the released capacity changes something the organisation measures.

It may reduce cost, increase throughput, improve customer experience, accelerate innovation, reduce risk or create space for better leadership. It may also simply increase workload and velocity.

The Value Conversion Chain

Capability creates a technical possibility.

Use applies it to work.

Productivity changes time, quality or throughput.

Capacity allocation determines what happens to the gain.

Business outcome appears in measurable performance.

Sustainable value persists without unacceptable human, operational or strategic cost.

The break in the chain often occurs between productivity and capacity allocation.

McKinsey's 2026 survey captures this tension. Eighty percent of respondents said AI had improved their individual productivity, while only 37 percent reported any positive EBIT impact at enterprise level.[1]

Trust supports every transition in this chain because people and institutions must be willing and able to use the technology, redesign work, rely on outcomes and remain accountable for consequences. It does not replace the operational and organisational changes required to convert capability into value.

From Enablement to Reinvention

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Many organisations mistake AI enablement for AI transformation.

Enablement changes tasks. People gain tools that help them perform existing work.

Automation changes workflows. Activities and handoffs are redesigned around new capabilities.

Reinvention changes how the organisation creates value. Products, services, operating models or strategic possibilities change.

Sustainable enterprise value usually requires movement beyond tool adoption towards redesigning work and the organisation around it. These are not mandatory stages, but they clarify why widespread use can coexist with limited enterprise impact.[7]

An Executive Standard for Value Claims

Every material AI initiative should be able to state:

- The business outcome it is intended to change
- The baseline against which change will be assessed
- Where the benefit should appear in operational or financial performance
- Who owns the outcome outside the technology function
- What human or organisational cost might offset the gain
- When the organisation will stop, redesign or scale the initiative

The objective is not to force every benefit into a short-term financial metric.

Decision quality, capability, resilience, learning and customer trust can all be strategic assets. The discipline is to make the value logic explicit and testable.

2. Agentic AI Raises the Level of Consequence

Traditional software primarily follows predefined rules and instructions. Agentic systems can interpret objectives, plan sequences, use tools, interact across workflows and take actions with varying degrees of autonomy.

This changes the unit of governance.

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Leaders are no longer governing only an output. They are governing an actor within a wider operating system.

McKinsey's 2026 survey found that 40 percent of respondents from organisations with more than USD 1 billion in annual revenue reported scaling AI agents, compared with 22 percent in smaller organisations.[1]

The direction of travel is clear, even though reliability, cost and governance practices remain uneven.

Six Questions Agentic Governance Must Answer

Objective

What goal is the agent pursuing, and what happens when the stated objective conflicts with an unstated organisational value or constraint?

Authority

Which actions may the agent take, in which systems, using which data and within which financial or operational limits?

Observation

What can leaders and operators see about the agent's decision path, actions, tool use and downstream effects?

Intervention

Who can pause, constrain or override the system, and can they do so quickly enough to matter?

Accountability

Which human executive remains accountable for outcomes, including actions generated autonomously by the system?

Reversibility

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Can the organisation undo the action, restore the previous state and retain the knowledge required to operate without the agent?

The governance challenge grows when agents interact with other agents, operate across organisational boundaries or pursue objectives over time.

In these settings, monitoring a single model is insufficient. Governance must address the full chain of objectives, permissions, dependencies, actions and consequences.

Part II - Conditions

Trusted Scale Depends on Organisational Capacity

What conditions must an organisation establish before it can legitimately extend trust and authority to increasingly capable AI?

3. Trust Is an Operating Capacity

Trust in AI is often discussed as if it were a single attitude. People either trust a system or they do not.

At scale, trust is better understood as an organisational operating capacity, created and sustained through four interdependent conditions:

1. **Stakeholder Confidence**
2. **Decision Authority**
3. **System Integrity**
4. **Recoverability**

These are not four separate capacities. Together, they determine whether an organisation can legitimately extend trust and authority to increasingly capable AI. The order is deliberate: stakeholder confidence provides legitimacy; decision authority establishes responsibility and control; system integrity provides the necessary technical foundation; and recoverability determines whether trust can survive failure and whether the organisation can recover when outcomes depart from intent.

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3.1 Stakeholder Confidence

Trust is held by different people for different reasons.

An AI system can be technically strong while weakening the confidence required for it to create value.

Employees ask whether AI is being introduced to help them contribute, monitor them, reduce their status or remove their roles.

Customers ask whether the experience reflects the brand promise and whether their data and choices are respected.

Owners and investors ask whether the value case is defensible and whether dependencies and exposures are understood.

Boards ask whether management can demonstrate accountability, control and recoverability.

Regulators ask whether responsibility, evidence and safeguards are real.

Resistance to AI is often interpreted as resistance to technology. In practice, leaders frequently encounter deeper concerns:

- Fear of being left behind
- Fear of accountability without control
- Fear of uncertainty and loss of professional relevance
- Fear of losing identity, status or valued expertise

These concerns should not be treated as communication problems to overcome. They are signals about work design, authority, competence and legitimacy.

Stakeholder confidence is not created through reassurance alone. It is created through observable alignment between stated intent, actual design and experienced consequences.

3.2 Decision Authority

The organisation has explicitly decided what AI may inform, recommend or execute.

This includes:

- A named executive accountable for each consequential deployment

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- Defined decision rights and escalation paths
- Clear authority to pause, override or withdraw a system
- Human judgment positioned where context, values or irreversible consequences matter
- Responsibility that cannot disappear into a committee, vendor contract or technical function

Human oversight is meaningful only when the person exercising it has sufficient information, time, competence and authority to intervene.

A ceremonial human in the loop is not control.

A harder question arises when the system possesses more relevant knowledge, pattern recognition, situational awareness or decision capability than the human authority overseeing it.

Accountability cannot be preserved by pretending that the asymmetry does not exist. The organisation must ensure that the accountable human can understand the basis and limits of the recommendation, examine meaningful alternatives, obtain independent challenge and intervene with legitimate authority.

Where those conditions cannot be established, the decision may require different limits, stronger collective oversight or a different allocation of authority.

3.3 System Integrity

The organisation knows what the system is designed to do, the evidence supporting its use, the limits of its performance and how changes are tracked.

This includes:

- Reliability and performance within defined boundaries
- Data quality, provenance, protection and appropriate consent
- Transparency about sources, assumptions and uncertainty
- Traceability of outputs, changes and material decisions
- Security, robustness and third-party dependencies

Technical reliability does not mean identical performance in every situation.

It means that variation and degradation are monitored, material limits are visible and failure is not allowed to remain silent.

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3.4 Recoverability

The organisation can detect problems, reconstruct what happened, contain harm, learn and recover.

Trust is not the promise that nothing will go wrong.

AI systems operate in changing environments, interact with people and other systems, and can fail through unexpected combinations of technical, human and organisational factors.

The stronger test is whether the organisation is prepared to respond.

Recoverability requires five capabilities:

1. **Detect:** Would we know that something material had gone wrong?
2. **Explain:** Could we reconstruct the system's inputs, actions and decision path?
3. **Contain:** Could we limit the effect, and how quickly?
4. **Learn:** Would the finding change the system and its operating environment rather than only blame an individual?
5. **Recover:** Could we repair performance and restore justified confidence?

Openness after failure involves legitimate tensions between transparency, legal exposure, privacy, security and reputation.

The principle is not indiscriminate disclosure. It is that an organisation should not depend on concealment to preserve trust.

Leadership Through the Trust Transition

The four domains describe the capacity that must exist. Leadership determines whether people experience that capacity as real.

AI transformation is therefore not only a technology or governance challenge. It is a change-leadership challenge conducted under conditions of uncertainty.

Traditional change programmes often assume that leaders know the destination and can move the organisation towards it. With increasingly capable and agentic AI, organisations are frequently learning while moving.

Trust is built not through false certainty, but through leadership's ability to navigate uncertainty responsibly.

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Employees do not require leaders to possess every answer. They require confidence that decisions will be made responsibly, learning will occur visibly, ownership will remain clear and concerns can be raised without penalty.

During the transition, trust grows through experienced competence, transparency, ownership, learning and psychological safety. These are not soft additions to governance. They determine whether formal safeguards work in practice and whether the organisation can adapt before problems become systemic.

4. Trust Across the Authority Lifecycle

Trust should not be assessed only at implementation. It changes as the organisation moves from intention to adoption, selection, delegation, operation, intervention and reversal.

Adoption → Selection → Delegation → Operation → Intervention → Reversal

At Adoption

Leaders decide whether the problem is worth solving, whether AI is appropriate and what evidence should count.

The principal risk is solution-led strategy, where capability is adopted because it exists rather than because it serves a material outcome.

At Selection

Leaders choose models, providers, data arrangements and infrastructure.

These choices create dependencies. They determine where knowledge sits, what can be audited, how costs may evolve and how easily the organisation can change course.

At Delegation

The organisation decides, explicitly or by default, which authority moves to the system.

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A recommendation can become a de facto decision when people lack the time, confidence or permission to challenge it.

During Operation

Trust depends on evidence from real use, including quality, drift, exceptions, user behaviour, customer experience, cost and emerging second-order effects.

Monitoring must examine the combined Human-AI system, not only model performance.

At Intervention

The practical question is whether someone can detect a problem, reach the person empowered to act and do so without professional penalty.

Voice is part of governance.

At Reversal

Leaders must know whether a decision can be reversed without losing critical knowledge, operational continuity or bargaining power.

A system may be technically replaceable while the organisation has become incapable of performing the work without it.

The Threshold Question

> **Could this be the last time a human leader makes this category of decision?**

The question is intentionally demanding.

Some forms of delegation are reversible and low consequence. Others gradually transfer knowledge, authority and optionality into infrastructure.

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The more consequential or difficult to reverse the decision, the stronger the requirement for explicit human judgment before crossing the threshold.

5. Judgment, Capacity and the Human Contribution

Across this lifecycle, responsible delegation depends on human judgment: deciding which authority can be transferred, under what conditions, and where human judgment must remain decisive.

As AI makes competent output more abundant, value shifts towards what remains scarce: judgment, context, imagination, originality, relationship, moral courage and accountability.

This does not mean that human work is automatically superior. It means leaders need to become more deliberate about where human contribution has the greatest leverage.

Capacity Is a Leadership Choice

AI-created capacity is not automatically beneficial.

If every saved hour is filled with more tasks, faster cycles and additional reporting, the organisation may become busier without becoming more intelligent.

Leaders should decide in advance where released capacity will go.

Possible destinations include:

- Deeper customer and stakeholder understanding
- Better strategic thinking and scenario exploration
- Faster experimentation and innovation
- Higher-quality decisions and review
- Learning, capability development and cross-functional collaboration
- More time for listening, leadership and human connection

The question is not only what AI can remove from work. It is what the organisation intends to make possible with the space AI creates.

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Preserve Challenge, Not Friction

Removing avoidable friction can improve performance. Removing constructive challenge can weaken it.

High-quality decisions often require disagreement, contextual knowledge and the ability to notice that a technically coherent answer is wrong for this organisation, customer or moment.

Where AI makes answers easier to produce, leaders must protect the conditions under which assumptions are questioned.

Organisational Knowledge Is an Asset

AI can capture and distribute valuable expertise.

The customer-support study cited earlier suggests that AI assistance can disseminate the practices of more capable workers and help newer workers learn.[3]

The same mechanism raises a strategic question: what happens when the system retains more process knowledge than the people accountable for the process?

Knowledge transfer should therefore be designed in both directions. AI should help people learn, not only absorb what people know.

Organisations need enough retained human capability to challenge, recover and change providers or systems when necessary.

6. Credibility Before Visibility

Organisations are announcing AI ambition faster than many are building the evidence, safeguards and accountability required to justify it.

The resulting credibility gap is not merely reputational. It can reduce employee confidence, create customer scepticism, distort investment decisions and make future correction more costly.

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Earning the Right to Scale

Credibility before visibility means:

- Evidence before endorsement
- Internal proof before external claim
- A named owner before a launch date
- A tested intervention path before autonomous action
- A recoverable operating model before dependency becomes structural
- Measured value before benefits are treated as realised

This principle does not require organisations to wait for certainty.

It requires them to be precise about what is known, what is assumed and what is still being tested.

Regulation Is a Floor, Not the Trust Strategy

The EU AI Act became broadly applicable on 2 August 2026. Prohibited AI practices and AI literacy obligations had already applied from February 2025, and governance rules and obligations for general-purpose AI models from August 2025.

Following the AI Omnibus, specific high-risk obligations apply from 2 December 2027 for certain Annex III use cases and from 2 August 2028 for systems embedded in regulated products.[4]

The executive implication is straightforward: a later compliance deadline does not postpone the strategic exposure.

Dependencies can deepen, workforce trust can erode, customer experience can change and authority can shift long before a regulatory date arrives.

Organisations building governance only to meet a deadline may slow down. Organisations building it to earn the right to scale should not.

NIST's AI Risk Management Framework positions trustworthiness as something incorporated into the design, development, use and evaluation of AI systems.[5]

The OECD AI Principles connect accountability with transparency, explainability, robustness, security and safety.[6]

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These frameworks reinforce an important distinction: compliance may confirm that a minimum requirement has been met, while trust depends on the organisation’s continuing capacity to produce justified outcomes.

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Part III - Executive Instrument

Trust Must Be Tested Before Authority Is Extended

How can leaders determine whether an AI deployment has earned the right to continue, strengthen, scale or be stopped and redesigned?

7. The Executive Trust Test

The Executive Trust Test is a structured conversation for boards, executive teams and accountable business leaders.

It is not a maturity score, certification or substitute for legal, technical or regulatory review.

Its purpose is to expose assumptions that often remain implicit before an organisation grants or expands AI authority.

Trust Test 1: Who Is Accountable?

- Is there one named executive accountable for the outcome?
- Does that person have authority over the system, process and resources required to act?
- Would accountability remain clear if a vendor, model or agent caused the failure?

Trust Test 2: What Could Happen Before We Notice?

- What material harm could occur before the organisation detected it?
- Which signals would reveal declining performance, misuse or unexpected behaviour?
- How quickly would those signals reach someone able to act?

Trust Test 3: What Authority Have We Delegated?

- Is the system informing, recommending or executing?
- Which data, systems, customers, employees, funds or external parties can it affect?
- Are the practical limits of its authority consistent with the formal limits?

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Trust Test 4: Who Can Intervene?

- Who can pause, constrain, override or withdraw the system?
- Can intervention happen quickly enough to prevent or contain material harm?
- Are escalation rights understood and tested?

Trust Test 5: Can People Challenge It Safely?

- Can employees question an AI-supported decision without professional penalty?
- Is challenge treated as a contribution to control rather than resistance to progress?
- Are concerns recorded, examined and used to improve the wider system?

Trust Test 6: Can We Substantiate the Value?

- What business outcome is expected to change?
- What baseline and evidence will show whether that change has occurred?
- Where will the benefit appear in operational or financial performance?
- What human or organisational cost might offset the gain?

Trust Test 7: Can We Substantiate Our Claims?

- Can public claims about performance, safety, trust, productivity or value be supported by current evidence?
- Are important limits and uncertainties visible?
- Is communication consistent with what employees and customers actually experience?

Trust Test 8: Can We Reverse the Dependency?

- Could the organisation change provider, model or system without losing critical operations?
- Has essential knowledge been retained outside the technology?
- What would be costly or impossible to regain?

Trust Test 9: Are We Prepared to Manage a Crisis?

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- Can the organisation detect, explain and contain an incident?
- Are executive, legal, operational, technical and communication responsibilities clear?
- Has the organisation rehearsed how it would restore performance and justified confidence?

Trust Test 10: Would We Make the Same Decision Again?

- What has changed since the original decision?
- Does the value case still hold?
- Has delegated authority expanded through practice rather than explicit approval?
- Knowing what we know now, would we continue, redesign or withdraw the system?

How to Read the Answers

The purpose is not to produce a single score.

The value lies in identifying where confidence exceeds evidence, authority exceeds accountability, dependence exceeds reversibility or ambition exceeds the organisation's capacity to recover.

A weak answer does not automatically require the organisation to stop.

It requires an explicit decision about what evidence, ownership, limitation or recovery capability must be established before authority is extended further.

The Executive Conversation

The test should conclude with four decision pathways:

1. **Continue:** Which uses are sufficiently understood and supported to proceed?
2. **Strengthen:** Which conditions must be improved before scale or authority increases?
3. **Redesign:** Which uses require material changes to their objectives, controls, authority or operating model?
4. **Stop:** Which uses create exposure the organisation cannot currently justify or carry?

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Part IV - Leadership Action

Accountability Must Remain Human as Capability Expands

What must boards, executives and business leaders decide and do to preserve human agency, maintain accountable authority and convert AI capability into sustainable value?

8. Leadership Priorities for Trusted Scale

The research cycle points to eight priorities.

They are not a maturity model and they are not sequential steps.

Together, they describe the organisational capacity required to scale AI responsibly and productively.

Priority 1: Anchor AI in Business Outcomes

Express the value case in measurable outcomes with an accountable business owner.

Distinguish projected benefit, operational evidence and realised enterprise value.

Priority 2: Make Decision Rights Explicit

Define what AI may inform, recommend and execute.

Specify what remains human and who can override or withdraw the system.

Priority 3: Build Verification into the Work

Identify which sources, outputs and decisions require validation, by whom and against what standard.

Verification should be proportionate to consequence.

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Priority 4: Govern the Human-AI System

Monitor behaviour, incentives, work design, customer experience and organisational effects, not only model performance.

Priority 5: Make Failure Survivable

Test detection, containment, explanation, intervention and recovery.

Ensure that executive, legal, operational, technical and communication responsibilities can function together under pressure.

Create a culture in which concerns can be raised before they become incidents.

Priority 6: Protect Knowledge and Reversibility

Understand data, model, platform and supplier dependencies.

Retain enough human capability and operational optionality to change course.

Priority 7: Align Intent with Stakeholder Experience

Ensure that employees, customers, owners, investors and boards experience an AI deployment in a way that is consistent with its stated purpose and the organisation's brand promise.

Priority 8: Match Visibility to Credibility

Make external claims that the organisation can currently substantiate.

Treat transparent limits as a sign of maturity rather than weakness.

The Leadership Accountability Chain

The following order reflects the flow of authority and accountability from mandate to implementation:

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Ownership and investment mandate → Board oversight → Executive accountability → Operational ownership → Technical enablement

Owners and Investors

Owners and investors should distinguish AI visibility from AI capability, and AI capability from durable value.

Strong signals include measurable economics, accountable ownership, redesigned workflows, understood dependencies and evidence that customer and workforce trust are being managed as business assets.

Boards

Boards should focus less on the number of pilots and more on the quality of authority, evidence and reversibility surrounding consequential deployments.

Their role is to test whether management understands where AI is changing the organisation's risk profile, knowledge base, operating model and ability to recover.

CEOs and Senior Executives

Executives must connect AI investment to business transformation, not only tool adoption.

They own the choices about where capacity is redirected, which decisions remain human and whether organisational incentives reward responsible challenge or silent compliance.

Executive sponsorship must be active and visible, with leaders committing resources, resolving barriers and remaining accountable for the transformation.

Business and Operational Leaders

Business and operational leaders own the contexts in which AI produces real consequences.

They should be accountable for the outcomes, work design, stakeholder experience and operating controls surrounding AI-enabled processes.

Their priority is to preserve strategic and operational control while using AI to extend reach, quality and innovation.

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Technology and Transformation Leaders

Technology leaders should make system limitations, dependencies, operating costs and change risks understandable to the wider business.

Transformation leaders should ensure that processes, incentives, skills, organisational identity and decision authority evolve together.

Five Critical Decisions

These decisions can be surfaced through five direct questions:

1. **Why are we doing this?**
2. **What decisions and outcomes will change?**
3. **Where must human judgment remain decisive?**
4. **How will we know whether it is succeeding or failing?**
5. **Could we continue and recover if it disappeared tomorrow?**

9. The Organisation That Can Carry Trust

An organisation capable of trusted AI at scale is not one in which failure never occurs.

It is one in which leaders know what the systems are for, who owns the outcomes and where the limits sit.

Its people can question an AI-supported decision without being treated as an obstacle to progress.

Its executives can distinguish a productivity claim from a financial result.

Its customers encounter AI in ways consistent with the brand promise.

Its board understands the organisation’s dependencies and difficult-to-reverse choices.

Its technology teams can reconstruct what happened.

Its operating model enables intervention before a problem becomes systemic.

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Such an organisation does not advertise confidence it has not earned. It communicates ambition together with evidence, ownership and limits.

Most importantly, it uses AI to expand human and organisational capability without abandoning human responsibility.

Closing Perspective

Trust is not a brake on ambition. It is what allows ambition to survive contact with reality.

The organisations that create durable value from AI will not necessarily be those that adopt the most tools or announce the boldest targets.

They will be those that become more precise about value, more explicit about authority, more capable of challenge and recovery, and more intentional about the future they are using AI to build.

The defining challenge of the AI era is not simply expanding machine capability. It is ensuring that human agency, judgment and accountable authority remain strong enough to direct that capability towards outcomes the organisation can justify, own and sustain.

Trust is the enterprise capacity that makes that possible.

That is trust at scale.

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Research Approach

This report is the first-cycle output of the AI Game Changers Club Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab. It synthesises:

- Facilitated Lab research meetings
- Contributions from an international group of senior leaders and specialists
- Ongoing executive dialogue across the AI Game Changers Club ecosystem
- Selected perspectives contributed by members of the Executive Diamond Advisory Council
- Review of selected institutional frameworks, current research and market evidence
- Critical synthesis focused on board and executive decision-making

The cycle progressed from broad exploration of governance, transformation, human capital, infrastructure and agentic systems towards a defined focus on trust, accountable scale and sustainable value creation.

Human Accountability and the Use of AI

AI supported elements of information retrieval, synthesis, drafting and document production.

The research framing, editorial judgments, conclusions and published material remained subject to critical human review and approval by the Lab leadership and research group.

This disclosure reflects the report's own principle: AI can expand capability, but responsibility for consequential claims and decisions remains human.

Evidence Discipline

The report distinguishes between:

- **Research evidence:** Findings drawn from published studies, surveys and institutional frameworks
- **Executive signal:** Recurring patterns emerging from practitioner dialogue
- **Lab position:** The research group's synthesis and interpretation
- **Founder's Foresight:** A named perspective informed by ongoing executive dialogue
- **Practitioner illustration:** A clearly attributed application contributed by an individual expert and distinguished from the Lab's intellectual architecture

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Regulatory information reflects the position available as at the date of publication and should be reconfirmed before being relied upon for legal or compliance decisions.

Research Independence and Intellectual Property

The report represents collective intelligence generated through the Lab process.

The Trust at Scale Architecture, Trust Capacity Model, Authority Lifecycle, Executive Trust Test and wider synthesis belong to the work of the AI Game Changers Club Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab.

Individual contributors retain ownership of their separately developed methods, models and commercial intellectual property. Their inclusion does not transfer that ownership to AI Game Changers Club, and it does not imply that contributor-owned methods certify or validate the report.

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About the Lab

The **Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab** is a flagship initiative of **AI Game Changers Club**.

It brings together diverse senior perspectives to identify questions that are not yet being asked clearly enough, challenge dominant assumptions and translate emerging patterns into relevant executive intelligence.

The Lab's work spans AI, leadership, Human-AI Synergy, governance, strategic foresight, executive decision-making, innovation, engineering, business transformation, the future of work, emerging technologies and responsible AI.

Its outputs are designed to support leaders facing decisions they cannot afford to get wrong.

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Research Community

The AI Game Changers Diamond Advisory Council and a wider international community of executives, business leaders, investors, transformation practitioners and specialists contributing across markets and disciplines.

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AI Game Changers Club

AI Game Changers Club is a global executive ecosystem bringing together senior leaders, executives, business owners, investors and inventors across industries and geographies to explore what sustainable growth and success look like as human and artificial intelligence increasingly intersect.

Today, our ecosystem connects leaders across **Europe, the UK, the US and the Middle East** through our Executive Exchanges, global Chapters, Executive Intelligence, strategic collaborations and partnerships, and our Executive Research & Strategic Foresight Lab. We also offer **Executive Education, Executive Advisory, curated events, the Speaker Hub and Strategic Executive Portals™**, alongside several levels of access to the **AI Game Changers Community and its Executive Intelligence**.

At the heart of it is something exciting: building the future from the future, bridging gaps and disconnects and bringing the right people and global perspectives together around the questions leaders cannot afford to get wrong at the Threshold.

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Appendix

Practitioner Illustration

Embedding Trust and Human Judgment in AI-Assisted Strategic Planning Using SOSTAC®

Paul (PR) Smith
Creator of SOSTAC® (United Kingdom)

This practitioner illustration was contributed by Paul (PR) Smith. It represents the contributor's perspective and application of SOSTAC® and remains distinct from the Lab's collective research findings and intellectual architecture. SOSTAC® and its associated methods, models and commercial intellectual property remain the property of their respective owner.

Building Trust in an AI-Assisted Planning System

SOSTAC® Case Study

SOSTAC® plans are simple, clear and based on a logical process built around more informed decisions. SOSTAC® is arguably one of the most widely used planning methods in marketing and has also been adopted by other disciplines, including business planning, communications, human resources, and health and safety planning.

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Figure A1. The SOSTAC® Planning Framework

Embedding AI into SOSTAC® plans can help executives develop better, faster and more robust plans that integrate into workflows and can ultimately improve results.

A SOSTAC® AI-Assisted Plan is an AI-facilitated methodology. It operates as an application and can integrate with existing data sources and other tools that executives use every day. It can also run through AI assistants and agents.

Research conducted during its development indicated that trust is critical for adoption and is required by:

- The decision-makers who purchase and authorise it
- The employees and other stakeholders who use it

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How the SOSTAC® AI-Assisted Planning Tool Can Build Trust

Communicating that SOSTAC® has been listed among the top three business models by the Chartered Institute of Marketing, and that it is used by organisations including LinkedIn, KPMG, Unilever and thousands of smaller organisations, helps establish authority and trust.

Publishing long-form, machine-friendly articles can also help establish authority, originality and trust. Endorsements, recommendations, reviews and ratings contribute further.

More important than any of these, however, is the role of **human judgment**, **safety checks** and **guardrails** around the speed and convenience of AI. These elements reassure clients that SOSTAC® AI-Assisted Plans can be trusted.

How SOSTAC® Is Building Trust

1. Develop Credibility Before Raising Visibility

Credibility is generated through outcomes that are achieved, documented and shared. Supporting evidence may include reviews, ratings, endorsements, certifications, awards, customer lists and evidence of appropriate compliance and governance.

Visibility is generated through communications tools, including advertising, public relations, social media, AI and human conversations, and word of mouth.

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Figure A2. Develop Credibility Before Raising Visibility

2. Identify and Work with Advocates

SOSTAC® seeks to work with advocates rather than unknown users to secure its initial ratings, reviews, endorsements and word-of-mouth recommendations.

3. Identify and Work with Early Adopters and Innovators

Early adopters and innovators are generally more willing to explore risk than the early majority, late majority and laggards.

Working with these groups during the early stages can support learning, feedback and the development of evidence before wider adoption.

4. Win the Confidence of Employees

Having gained the trust and agreement of senior decision-makers, the next challenge is earning the internal trust of the employees, executives and other people who will use the tool.

This requires senior management to communicate, motivate and train employees to use the new tool while addressing three common fears:

- AI spinning out of control
- Losing jobs

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- Being hacked

Reducing the Fear of AI Spinning Out of Control

Guardrails and Human Judgment Build Trust

There are six sections, or stages, in a SOSTAC® plan. As the user completes each section, a review gate appears. The user must confirm that the following checks have been completed before progressing.

1. Check That All Questions Have Been Answered

The questions presented on screen should be reviewed to ensure that all required information has been provided.

1.1 Search for Missing Information

If some answers are missing, the system offers to go beyond the training data it has already been provided and search the internet for reports or research that may answer the incomplete questions.

1.2 Acknowledge Remaining Gaps

If information is still missing, the user must acknowledge the deficiency and recognise that a gap remains. The user should also agree to obtain the missing information during the next planning cycle.

2. Check That Facts and Research Have Been Sourced

The user must confirm that the material facts, research and external claims included in the plan are connected to identifiable sources.

3. Check That the Cited Sources Exist

The system checks whether cited sources can be verified. If false or non-existent sources are detected, the relevant section is generated again without relying on that information.

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4. Challenge the Answers

Users are encouraged to ask the system to challenge its answers and reconsider whether the response is accurate and whether the proposed option is the strongest available choice.

5. Generate and Consider Options

Where relevant, such as when examining strategic choices, the system generates multiple options.

The user is asked to confirm that the available options have been considered and that the most appropriate option has been selected.

Reducing the Fear of Losing Jobs

Many employees feel threatened by the possibility that AI will replace them. This may be true for some roles, while for others it could contribute to the development of a three-day or four-day working week.

For other organisations, the working week may remain unchanged, but employees can be trained and redeployed to create additional value for customers.

IKEA, for example, has trained and redeployed employees to provide interior design services, allowing them to create additional customer value. In this case, the efficiency gain creates an opportunity for competitive advantage.

A useful question for leaders is:

> **What will you do with the 30 percent of time saved by AI?**

SOSTAC® AI-Assisted Plans ask management to consider what they will do with the additional time released by the tool and whether that capacity can be redirected towards creating greater value.

The SOSTAC® team will also ask clients the question raised by Erica Shoemate during an AI Game Changers Club panel discussion:

> **What value is AI creating beyond efficiencies?**

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Reducing the Fear of Being Hacked

Fear of being hacked cannot be reduced simply by stating that a system is secure. Users need clear evidence of how their data is protected.

SOSTAC® AI-Assisted Plans are being developed around Microsoft Azure security principles and are intended to support GDPR-compliant operation, with a roadmap towards recognised international security standards.

This reassurance should be supported by explaining:

- Where data is stored
- Who can access it
- How it is encrypted
- What happens if something goes wrong

Trust grows when security is treated as an ongoing discipline that is regularly tested, reviewed and communicated, rather than as a one-time promise.

Improved Results Build Further Trust

Trust grows when users begin to see results improve.

The Control section monitors key performance indicators and identifies what is working and what is not working. Automated prompts can then be introduced into the workflow to support continuous improvement.

Control and governance are closely connected.

Governance enables control. Without governance, meaningful control becomes difficult to maintain.

AI Is Difficult to Trust

AI can be difficult to trust in several ways.

Users may not trust it to follow the planning methodology correctly, use only high-quality research findings or make appropriate strategic recommendations.

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If everything becomes autonomous, there may appear to be less human control or no meaningful human control at all.

Integrating human judgment therefore becomes even more important.

SOSTAC® guardrail gates are designed to ensure that a human approves each of the six stages in the planning process before the system progresses to the next stage.

For example, the Strategy section generates three strategic options and asks the user to select the strongest option.

Similarly, the Situation Analysis section alerts the user when relevant training data, such as market research reports, is missing.

Ultimately, the user remains accountable. Trust remains with the human responsible for running and approving the plan.

Accountability

SOSTAC® asks the user to clarify who is responsible for approving each section of the plan.

The user, a facilitator, a manager or designated team members can be authorised to approve each of the SOSTAC® stages.

This ensures that responsibility remains visible throughout the planning process.

Transparency

Some audiences actively reward transparency.

Smith and O'Brien observe:

> "The gap between what a brand claims and what a customer can verify demands transparent content, third-party verification and community proof."

Transparency helps stakeholders understand whether the claims made about the system are supported by evidence and external verification.

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Governance

During the AI Game Changers Club Global Executive Exchange, Vishal Arora raised an important question:

> **Governance is an enabler, not a stopper. It allows AI to scale safely. What would governance and guardrails look like if they were driving innovation?**

This question captures the role governance can play in enabling responsible innovation rather than merely restricting it.

Within the SOSTAC® AI-Assisted Planning approach:

Governance enables control.

Governance supports trust.



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From Insight to Action

Trust at Scale in the Age of AI was designed not only to identify an emerging executive challenge, but to create better conversations inside the organisations confronting it.

For Boards and Executive Teams

AI Game Changers Club offers private Trust at Scale Executive Intelligence Sessions for organisations wishing to explore what the research findings mean in their own context.

Using the research findings and Executive Trust Test as a starting point, the session creates a confidential space to examine questions of accountability, judgment, governance, delegated authority, organisational readiness and sustainable value creation.

The objective is not to provide another AI maturity assessment.

It is to identify the leadership questions that require attention before greater intelligence, autonomy and complexity are introduced into the organisation.

Private organisational engagements may include:

Executive Intelligence Sessions · Board and Leadership Workshops · Strategic Advisory · Bespoke Executive Dialogues · Leadership & Transformation Sessions

AI Game Changers Club
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