

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF

AI Adoption at Work

FROM RESISTANCE TO RESULTS



Gleb Tsipursky, PhD

FOREWORD BY NICK BLOOM

Advance Praise for *The Psychology of AI Adoption at Work*

“Finally, a lucid, human-centered guide to business use of generative AI that serves as a valuable playbook for integrating GenAI into everyday business projects. The book is packed with meaningful examples that guide readers to use generative AI in their daily work to improve efficiency and deliver innovative ideas to support products and services. The author’s experience working with companies shines through with his insight-filled analyses of when and how to use GenAI.”

—Ben Shneiderman, emeritus distinguished university professor
of computer science, University of Maryland; founding director,
Human-Computer Interaction Lab

“An essential guide for leaders who understand that AI adoption is ultimately human adoption. Tsipursky cuts through both hype and fear to reveal what really determines whether GenAI succeeds inside organizations: trust, culture, and the meaning people make of the tools they use. This book shows—with clarity and compassion—how to build AI-enabled workplaces where human experience, creativity, and judgment scale alongside technological capability.”

—Kate O’Neill, founder and chief tech humanist, KO Insights,
and author of *What Matters Next*

“Gleb Tsipursky effectively captures the critical yet overlooked human side of generative AI adoption—unveiling why psychological barriers often overshadow technological hurdles. Rich with practical strategies, insightful research, and real-world wisdom, this book is a must-read for anyone serious about not just adopting AI but mastering it to transform their organizations and careers.”

—Jerry Kaplan, founder of four Silicon Valley startups, bestselling author
of *Generative Artificial Intelligence: What Everyone Needs to Know*

“This book makes the case that taking a safe, ethical, and human-centered approach to developing and deploying AI is not just a nice idea but essential for businesses to be successful—and offers great guidelines for how to do it.”

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Professor for the Physics of Information, UC Santa Cruz

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and clearly written book full of practical tips and compelling stories, and you'll be amazed by how much your AI transformation accelerates. Highly recommended."

—Scott D. Anthony, clinical professor of strategy, Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth, and author of *Epic Disruptions*

"*The Psychology of AI Adoption at Work* tackles the biggest barrier to AI success: people. Tsipursky shows, with data and real-world stories, how to earn trust, defuse job-loss fears, and align AI with strategic goals. Leaders who apply these principles will accelerate past today's hype cycle and seize tomorrow's exponential growth curves before their competitors even see them coming."

—Daniel Burrus, *New York Times*–bestselling author of seven books, serial entrepreneur, and technology futurist

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TO RESULTS

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Contents

Foreword by Nick Bloom ix

Introduction xiii

1. Exploring Gen AI and Business Innovation 1
2. Psychological Barriers to Adoption 19
3. Navigating the Technical and Structural Roadblocks to Adoption 29
4. Understanding Risks in Adoption 40
5. Psychographic Profiles of Middle-Manager Attitudes
Toward Gen AI 55
6. Psychographic Profiles of Employee Attitudes Toward Gen AI 67
7. Laying the Foundation for Employee Engagement 82
8. Cultivating Gen AI Champions from Early Adopters 98
9. Scaling Employee Engagement Through Strategic
Communication and Collaboration 109
10. Continuous Learning as the Cornerstone of Adoption 123
11. Innovating with Gen AI 139
12. Ethical Stewardship, Governance, and Risk Management 151
13. Measuring and Optimizing Successful Adoption 166
14. Leading in a Gen AI World, Inside and Outside the
Organization 181

15. A Human-Centric Playbook for Visionary

Gen AI Integration 203

Acknowledgments 209

Notes 211

Selected Bibliography 247

Index 251

About the Author 259

Introduction

An e-commerce company with about two hundred staff in the Northwest integrated Generative AI (Gen AI) so smoothly that employees now treat it like a reliable teammate rather than a futuristic novelty. In marketing, campaign strategists begin their day by brainstorming alongside a Gen AI engine that sifts through product history and target demographics—yet each strategist still has the final say, infusing the human flair AI cannot replicate. Across the hall, product developers consult an “idea engine” that studies past successes and known customer trends, igniting lively debates rather than quashing creative thinking. Meanwhile, an AI-enabled chatbot handles routine support inquiries, freeing service reps to address more complex or relationship-focused problems. Further up the chain, managers lean on rapid-fire AI summaries to pinpoint untapped opportunities in sales data, never losing sight that people—not algorithms—ultimately drive strategic direction. Moreover, such AI tools came from an empowerment approach, meaning, through no-code/low-code tools, equipping employees to design, adapt, and own Gen AI solutions so value creation compounds inside the enterprise, not with vendors. Step by step, this e-commerce company has fashioned a near-frictionless Gen AI environment, where AI consistently saves time, inspires innovative ideas, and nurtures a collaborative culture while using a methodology that increased employee agency, decreased resistance, and built internal AI capacity.

OVERCOMING RELUCTANCE AND BUILDING REAL BUY-IN

Reaching that state demanded considerable resources, patience, and effort. Leadership fought for budgets, and mid-level managers spent weeks testing pilot programs while fielding employees’ unease. Communication channels opened so staff could voice concerns over job impact or black-box outputs, and executives highlighted each small “win” to prove how AI truly

improved day-to-day tasks. They did not pretend that installing new software alone would magically revolutionize operations. Instead, they viewed Gen AI adoption as an incremental process, confident that employees would embrace AI once they experienced it as practical, not threatening.

Imagine your organization cultivating a similarly symbiotic bond with Gen AI—one that streamlines mundane tasks and amplifies the depth and quality of human output. Such a future sits within reach, though it rarely emerges without deliberate effort. Early on, even this e-commerce company noticed that promising AI initiatives can stall if employees question the payoff. Some staff worried that AI would overshadow roles they'd spent years perfecting; others feared that if AI could draft half their emails or process mountains of data, management might downsize the team. When these concerns go unaddressed—whether about job security or AI's reliability—they can derail even the most sophisticated systems.

In my work with the company's leadership, I stressed that emotional and cultural barriers often loom larger than technical ones. A business can buy top-tier algorithms yet still stumble if people feel threatened or assume that "AI efficiency" signals impending layoffs. Only by tackling such worries openly, demonstrating real benefits, and actively involving staff can leaders spark genuine AI acceptance.

It might sound like the e-commerce company sits pretty far on the Gen AI maturity curve. Yet in reality, no such curve exists, at least with a defined ending. Gen AI never settles into a final stage; it evolves continuously. Leaders who chase a finish line set themselves up for frustration. Instead, treat Gen AI as an adaptive capability that demands constant renewal. This book sets that expectation upfront. I show you how to progress from cautious pilots into scaled enablement, then into institutional transformation. The long horizon sets direction; the near-term playbooks create momentum.

That near-term scaling of Gen AI across an enterprise represents much more of a large-scale, continuous change management project than a routine software upgrade. The tasks at stake—composing memos, brainstorming product ideas, engaging customers, interpreting strategic data—commonly form the backbone of employees' professional identities. Seeing AI handle them in seconds naturally raises the question, "Does this undercut my value?" Leaders who dismiss these anxieties as "mere resistance" miss an

INTRODUCTION

xv

opportunity to show how AI can enhance rather than displace people's roles, as do those who simply procure black-box vendor-built AI rather than empowering their employees to build their own AI tools.

Instead, a meaningful buy-in strategy extends beyond ROI figures. Employees first need a compelling vision showing how AI offloads busywork to free up time for creativity or strategic thinking. Next, leadership must foster a sense of psychological safety. If an AI chatbot yields a misguided response, staff should feel encouraged to refine its prompt, not abandon the tool altogether. Finally, managers need clarity on how their leadership role evolves once AI boosts their team's capabilities. When they realize AI elevates rather than negates their value, they often become its strongest advocates.

Progress hinges on cultural transformation rather than mere technical installations. Traditional machine learning (ML) might handle basic tasks like automated replies or data summarization, while Gen AI digs deeper into areas employees consider uniquely human, such as drafting campaign proposals or generating design concepts. Leaders who view these moments—where automation brushes identity—as opportunities to reinforce trust typically see smoother adoption. A marketing staffer may treat AI-generated copy as a creative springboard, not a challenge to their writing talent. A supply chain supervisor may welcome AI's flagged risks while relying on personal judgment for the final call. With the right approach, friction recedes.

The e-commerce company tackled early skepticism through pilot programs, transparent communication, and grassroots engagement. Pilot teams demonstrated AI's fast data processing while emphasizing that humans reviewed all final outputs. Leadership spotlighted these early successes, defeating the notion that AI was a top-down mandate. Managers addressed subtler dissent, where employees saw every AI glitch as proof it would fail or threaten jobs. Over time, training sessions, open handling of AI errors, and consistent reminders of AI's supportive role eroded doubt. The firm also built a feedback loop for staff to report skewed data or puzzling AI behaviors, confident leadership wanted candid input. Eventually, "AI as a tool" replaced "AI as adversary."

Naturally, not every project succeeded, and a subset of employees persisted in resisting. Yet executives refused to see AI as a tool for cutting

headcount, although they did slow hiring and let attrition reduce headcount, especially of some employees who refused to learn and use Gen AI tools effectively. Instead, they underscored how automating repetitive tasks freed employees for innovation, relationship-building, and high-level problem-solving. Through sustained messaging, that vision took hold. Individuals once stuck in routines shifted into roles like AI prompt engineering, advanced data interpretation, or AI risk management. By reframing “efficiency” as “enrichment,” the company dispelled the idea that AI’s productivity gains must undermine career trajectories.

THERE’S NO GEN AI MATURITY

Whether you oversee a lean start-up or a multidivision corporation, the core challenge remains constant: Your workforce must engage with Gen AI voluntarily and intelligently. Use cases vary—from marketing copy and supply chain analytics to product innovation—but the emotional journey follows a similar pattern. Staff want confidence that they’re not ceding their worth to a machine, and they want to see how AI’s strengths interlock with their own. Each AI slip or “hallucination” tests leadership’s ability to build a learning culture rather than assign blame. By turning errors into shared lessons, that Northwest e-commerce enterprise refined its processes and elevated trust in AI, encouraging employees to try more ambitious applications and produce stronger outcomes.

Eventually, you might see a Gen AI ecosystem in your own organization that matches the e-commerce company’s achievement. Different teams exchange ideas on how AI accelerates tasks or expands creative possibilities, freeing up hours for higher-order thinking. Middle managers, who initially feared losing control, now appreciate how AI spots subtle trends or handles simpler tasks. Senior leaders speak of the “AI advantage” as a strategic lever that demands oversight, not a magic bullet. In that environment, Gen AI morphs into a dependable ally and a source of sustained growth.

Yet it’s crucial to recognize that after these early successes—what some might call “Gen AI maturity”—the next wave of complexities emerges. As an example, the e-commerce company now finds itself charting the next frontier: integrating agentic Gen AI tools capable of making near-autonomous decisions on everything from reordering inventory to testing

INTRODUCTION

xvii

promotional strategies with minimal human input. The firm sees exciting potential for speed and innovation but wrestles with heightened oversight concerns; employees worry about “machine-led” experiments running off course, and managers question how best to guide or override an AI that learns in real time.

I see parallel developments among my clients in manufacturing, logistics, and retail, where they are piloting pairing Gen AI with adaptive robotics and Internet of Things (IoT) platforms. In these pilots, their warehouse robots no longer follow rigid scripts; they respond to on-the-fly changes in inventory and shipping demands. IoT sensors supply constant data to AI models that tweak production schedules moment by moment, and other businesses place IoT devices in office buildings to track human presence and optimize resources.

While these innovations offer unprecedented efficiency and insight, they also pose bigger moral, ethical, and strategic stakes. Leaders can’t simply halt after “achieving AI maturity,” because technology advances relentlessly. Agentic AI, real-time robotics, and Gen AI in IoT call for fresh thinking on guardrails, accountability, and how employees can work with near-autonomous systems. Fortunately, the e-commerce company already leans on the same empathy, transparency, and careful risk management that enabled its initial Gen AI rollout, now channeling those principles into pilot initiatives where AI may act without explicit human sign-off but never without human-minded checks.

A PEOPLE-FIRST ROAD MAP FOR GEN AI

The chapters ahead illustrate how you, too, can adopt a people-focused, iterative approach—mixing cultural readiness, risk control, pilot design, workforce engagement, and leadership tactics, which fit both current and future Gen AI developments. You’ll read about how to classify employees by psychological profiles, from “AI Alarmists” to “Evangelists,” and tailor communication to each. The chapters describe frameworks for Gen AI training, pilot deployment that doesn’t alienate intended end users, and practical methods for handling AI glitches or biased outputs. Throughout, you’ll recognize how even a top-performing Gen AI tool inevitably flounders if staff mistrust or sideline it.

My insights draw on diverse sources: peer-reviewed academic studies, industry reports, and over thirty detailed interviews with leaders who tackled Gen AI's thorniest hurdles. Many hail from major organizations—Microsoft, Uber, Experian, EY, SHRM, Micron, JLL, Logitech, Vistage, Upwork—while others represent midsize companies and other organizations. You'll find these voices quoted across the book, with links to their full interviews on my *Wise Decision Maker Show* podcast. In addition, my own consulting experiences, including with this e-commerce enterprise, revealed how people deal with trust, communication gaps, and new roles. Media accounts of AI's public triumphs and stumbles further highlight how external perception can sway internal priorities. Together, these perspectives shape a research-informed toolkit to help you thrive in Gen AI's ever-evolving landscape.

Ultimately, the e-commerce company shows how empathy, strong organization, and transparent communication can quell the fears that otherwise undermine AI. Cutting-edge tech may grab headlines, but employees—whether they embrace AI or reject it—ultimately decide if adoption thrives. By the book's end, you'll hold a practical playbook for converting apprehension, hope, and bias into a secure footing for Gen AI success.

This playbook speaks to anyone leading or experiencing digital transformation. C-suite executives will learn to align AI with company-wide goals, handle regulatory demands, and build a culture that welcomes innovation, based on my experience advising firms on future-of-work initiatives (which inspired *The New York Times* to call me the “Office Whisperer”). Mid-level managers handling efficiency drives or technology rollouts can reduce push-back and translate high-level AI directives into daily workflows. Tech professionals—be they AI experts, data scientists, or IT leads—will see how to align AI solutions with business targets and communicate in a way that persuades executives. Consultants and advisors can harness my twenty-five-plus years of frameworks to support client engagements. Entrepreneurs stand to glean strategic tips for scaling AI solutions and remaking markets. Finally, academics and students gain a blend of rigorous studies and practical insights, revealing how Gen AI reconfigures entire industries while respecting organizational realities.

This book urges you to treat Gen AI not just as “the next wave of automation” but as a suite of transformative tools that reimagines how people

INTRODUCTION

xix

collaborate. Of course, AI can generate text, images, code, and sophisticated models. But its deeper strength lies in acting as a creative ally, sparking debate, and multiplying human capacity—provided employees trust its presence. If you aspire to that integrated Gen AI future—where marketing, operations, product development, and customer support hum in unison—you’ll need to tackle AI’s human dimensions as zealously as its technical ones. Leaders who champion empathy, let teams experiment safely, and anchor transparency at every level stand the best chance of shaping workplaces where AI evolves into a powerful ally rather than an unsettling intruder.

No single blueprint fits all organizational cultures, yet the central principle remains: Frame Gen AI as a collaborative force that pairs human insight with algorithmic power. By acknowledging legitimate fears, spotlighting clear gains, and recognizing employees’ expertise, you position AI to drive engagement and performance, not stand in the shadows. If you’re prepared to unite empathetic leadership, bold strategy, and data-driven action, you will recreate—and perhaps even surpass—the e-commerce firm’s success, uncovering new possibilities as Gen AI continues its rapid evolution. Your journey toward a people-centric Gen AI future starts right here.

BOOK ROAD MAP

This book offers a blueprint for leaders who want business results, not buzz. The core premise is simple and powerful: Treat Gen AI as an assistant to humans so you elevate judgment, compress cycle time, and compound learning. You will move from proving value on the ground to governing at scale, all while building a culture where people own the tools they use. Read straight through for a full transformation arc, or use the quick paths below to target immediate wins while laying the foundations for scale.

If you are a senior leader, read the “What You’ll Learn” and introduction of each chapter, skim any sections of interest, then read the conclusion and consider the “Questions to Ask When You Implement This Chapter” to drive near-term decisions without losing the strategic thread. If you are a functional leader or program owner, work chapter by chapter and build the artifacts as you go: your adoption plan, guardrail map, learning loop, KPI dashboard, and operating cadence. If you are standing up a central enablement group,

assemble the cross-functional governance in Chapter 12 and wire measurement from Chapter 13 into your weekly business reviews.

CEOs and P&L owners can pair Chapter 1's economic logic with Chapter 13's measurement to set targets, then use Chapter 7's transparency model to narrate workforce impacts credibly. CIOs and CTOs can combine Chapter 3's technical prerequisites with Chapter 12's controls to accelerate safe delivery while lowering vendor dependency. CHROs and People leaders can anchor engagement in Chapters 5 and 6, then convert time saved into capability growth using Chapter 10's learning flywheel. Risk, legal, and compliance can operationalize Chapter 4's risk awareness and Chapter 12's governance without stalling innovation by adopting Chapter 11's boundary conditions. Program managers can orchestrate Chapters 7 through 10 to mobilize champions, communicate clearly, and scale what works.

Regarding the structure of the book, foundations (Chapters 1–4) establish the “why,” the economics, the human psychology, and the safety scaffolding. People and roles (Chapters 5–6) ensure managers and employees have the mindsets and playbooks to use assistants wisely. Mobilize and scale (Chapters 7–10) engage the organization, enlist champions, communicate with precision, and build the learning loop that compounds value. Innovate and safeguard (Chapters 11–12) deliberately push the frontier while keeping systems safe and the enterprise in control. Prove and sustain (Chapters 13–15) measure outcomes, stage your enterprise road map, and align incentives and accountability so results persist beyond the first wave of enthusiasm. The conclusion translates lessons into decisive next steps.

For companion tools and resources, such as the “AI Adoption Readiness Assessment” to help you determine your action steps for optimizing your own AI adoption, visit <https://disasteravoidanceexperts.com/aibook>.

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Contents

Foreword by Nick Bloom ix

Introduction xiii

1. Exploring Gen AI and Business Innovation 1
2. Psychological Barriers to Adoption 19
3. Navigating the Technical and Structural Roadblocks to Adoption 29
4. Understanding Risks in Adoption 40
5. Psychographic Profiles of Middle-Manager Attitudes
Toward Gen AI 55
6. Psychographic Profiles of Employee Attitudes Toward Gen AI 67
7. Laying the Foundation for Employee Engagement 82
8. Cultivating Gen AI Champions from Early Adopters 98
9. Scaling Employee Engagement Through Strategic
Communication and Collaboration 109
10. Continuous Learning as the Cornerstone of Adoption 123
11. Innovating with Gen AI 139
12. Ethical Stewardship, Governance, and Risk Management 151
13. Measuring and Optimizing Successful Adoption 166
14. Leading in a Gen AI World, Inside and Outside the
Organization 181

15. A Human-Centric Playbook for Visionary

Gen AI Integration 203

Acknowledgments 209

Notes 211

Selected Bibliography 247

Index 251

About the Author 259

7

Laying the Foundation for Employee Engagement

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- Understand why and how engaging employees from the start—through surveys, focus groups, and transparent updates—prevents stealth resistance.
- Discover how customizing communication to each psychographic profile can transform wariness into collaboration.
- Link AI adoption to career development, showing employees the real payoff of investing in new skills and mindsets.

In Chapter 6, we explored how employees' psychographic profiles critically shape whether Gen AI succeeds or stalls. Simply knowing these diverse attitudes will not, on its own, ensure meaningful adoption. Early employee engagement provides the cornerstone of a sustainable Gen AI rollout.¹ Yet such engagement faces challenges due to employee concerns, especially given research showing that initial low levels of Gen AI usage increases anxiety.²

Chapter 2 on psychological barriers emphasized how unaddressed fears—including loss aversion or distrust of opaque algorithms—can harden into resistance.³ Meanwhile, Chapter 6 highlighted how employees occupy very different positions on the acceptance spectrum: AI Alarmists fear job displacement, Pragmatic Resisters need (lots and lots) of proof, and Observers or Bystanders wait for compelling evidence before committing. If managers attempt to implement Gen AI without involving employees early, they risk quiet noncompliance or deeper opposition, with Observers or

Bystanders even moving into the Pragmatic Resister camp. Organizations must develop a strategy of proactive and thorough early engagement to reassure skeptics, energize enthusiasts, and guide the majority of employees who fall between these extremes.⁴ Transparency around motives—whether cost savings, improved workflows, or staying competitive—grounds the initiative in a clear organizational mission rather than hype.

This chapter offers a road map for creating a robust early engagement foundation.⁵ By learning how to tailor approaches to employees' psychographic profiles, open lines of communication, and clearly link Gen AI to career growth and job enhancement, leaders gain the tools to transform technology-driven change from a source of anxiety into a shared opportunity.⁶

GATHERING INSIGHTS THROUGH SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Leaders who invest in engagement from the beginning create conditions that make employees feel included rather than coerced. Early engagement therefore builds trust and paves the way for genuine collaboration on Gen AI-based solutions. Surveys and focus groups reveal which tensions and hopes drive the workforce, laying the groundwork for targeted communication and training.⁷

A comprehensive early engagement effort starts by gauging employees' sentiments with thoughtfully designed surveys. This quantitative view prevents reliance on loud voices or unrepresentative anecdotes. Anonymous surveys uncover employees' familiarity with Gen AI tools, their enthusiasm or anxiety, and whether they engage in shadow Gen AI usage. Surveys need to pose questions about perceived job threats, skill needs, and readiness to experiment with AI in daily tasks, customized to the specific needs of each organization.

Focus groups then contribute qualitative depth by going in-depth into the results of the survey to explore how and why employees might resist or embrace Gen AI. Small, moderated sessions of four to eight participants encourage people to voice concerns, whether they distrust black-box algorithms, resent possible data privacy issues, or simply question the technology's value. Facilitators, ideally external advisors with experience on Gen AI adoption, need to ask questions informed by the surveys, such as "Based

on the survey answers, some folks expressed concerns over how Gen AI might impact their workflows. Can you tell me more about your thoughts on that topic?”

Turn listening into building. Close each session by asking for volunteers for a small pilot team to co-create a low-risk AI tool in a sanctioned sandbox, then publish the results. When people help shape the fix, they champion the rollout.

Organizers demonstrate respect for employees’ perspectives by listening carefully. Leaders also gain practical insights to shape subsequent communication and pilot programs. This approach replaces guesswork with real feedback on emotional barriers and practical obstacles. As highlighted by Kevin Oakes, CEO of The Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp), a leading global research firm dedicated to discovering and advancing next practices in human capital, leaders need to “enlist the help of employees to provide insight into what they believe should be automated about their role.”⁸

These dual methods—surveys for breadth, focus groups for depth—help management map employees to the psychographic profiles from the prior chapter. Rather than assuming certain groups exist, they discover exactly how many Alarmists or Pragmatic Resisters they employ. By beginning the process with open ears, organizations show that employees’ anxieties and hopes matter, setting a positive tone for the entire rollout.

Listening represents only the first half of early engagement. The second half involves acting with and empowering employees, not just for them, by turning their input into small, safe builds that they can see, shape, and improve in the flow of work.

THE EMPOWERMENT PROCESS: FIVE STAGES TO BUILD INTERNAL CAPABILITY

Organizations that listen well earn the right to build internal AI capacity, rather than outsourcing their AI future and spend to external vendors, by empowering their employees. The empowerment process offers a pragmatic way to convert what employees say in surveys and focus groups into visible progress at the desk. It unfolds in five stages that keep governance intact while teaching teams to design, adapt, and own lightweight Gen AI solutions that serve their real work.

Stage 1: Foundation Building (Weeks 1–2)

Start by identifying a small cohort of credible, curious employees in high-leverage roles as champions; then select one or two visible, low-risk use cases that remove friction in daily work. An external expert facilitator works with them to use no-code/low-code tools to build the first AI tool on their real data, inside a sanctioned environment, so the value is immediate, the safeguards are clear, and the stakes are contained. The aim is confidence, not complexity: One useful assist beats a dozen hypothetical features.

Stage 2: Demonstration and Demystification (Weeks 3–4)

The facilitator lifts the hood, walking the cohort through how the tool was assembled with no-code or low-code building blocks, where the data flows, and what the guardrails do. The point is to make the mechanism visible so the “black box” becomes glass; once people see the parts and limits, they trust faster, use better, and spot opportunities the facilitator missed.

Stage 3: Guided Co-Creation (Weeks 5–8)

Now the cohort builds the next tool themselves, with the facilitator’s guidance and coaching. They pick their own pain points; shape prompts, hand-offs, and backend instructions and knowledge base for a custom GPT agent; and document what works. Coaching focuses on fit-for-purpose, safe patterns and measurable time saved. This is where ownership takes hold and where anxiety gives way to agency.

Stage 4: Independent Innovation (Weeks 9–12)

With a few wins behind them, teams iterate with minimal guidance and start sharing patterns across roles. Cross-functional groups trade components, adapt them to adjacent workflows, and harden the few that deserve wider reuse. Governance remains light but present: small peer reviews for anything touching sensitive data and a quick approval lane to keep speed and safety in balance.

Stage 5: Sustainable Self-Sufficiency (Ongoing)

Institutionalize what works. Stand up a small champions' network with protected time, a shared library for vetted prompts, micro-workflows, and custom GPT agents, with simple rules for versioning and retirement. Keep publishing what changed and why, and track capability and outcome metrics—tools built by employees, owner-builders per priority workflow, idea-to-MVP cycle time, vendor spend avoided—so leaders can see capacity compounding alongside business results.

Empowerment Case Study: A Custom GPT Agent Helps a Midwest Roofer Win the Insurance Conversation

A Midwest roofing company with eighteen branches across six states faced a familiar bottleneck: Customers dreaded dealing with insurance carriers after hail and wind events, adjusters pushed for partial repairs, and claim cycles dragged on. Sales reps spent hours crafting estimates, hunting down policy language, and emailing back and forth with adjusters. Competitors showed up with lower bids, promised quick fixes, and left money on the table. The leadership team's goal was simple: Make the insurance process fast, fair, and transparent for homeowners while giving reps a repeatable way to win full-roof replacements when warranted by code and policy language. External vendors offered tools ranging from \$80K to \$140K per year to help the roofing company address this problem. Yet the leadership decided to adopt an empowerment approach that both controlled vendor spending while building their internal AI capacity, decreasing employee resistance and anxiety and boosting engagement in the process.

To achieve this goal, the leadership team asked me to help them facilitate the processing of creating a private, custom GPT AI agent that acted as a "claims concierge" for sales teams and homeowners. The agent ingested local building codes, manufacturer installation requirements, code upgrade allowances common in the region, internal estimating guidelines, approved photo checklists, and anonymized, representative excerpts from policies and carrier playbooks supplied by customers. Inside a secure, no-code environment, the agent produced three assets in minutes: a claim package that assembled adjuster-friendly evidence; policy-and-code language that justified

line items, upgrades, and full-roof scope where appropriate; and a homeowner communications module that generated clear, accurate updates and next-step emails. Guardrails enforced citations to the uploaded sources, inserted required disclaimers, and forced human sign-off before anything went to a customer or carrier.

We started with a narrow, high-friction use case—wind-lift shingle claims—and built the first version for two pilot territories focusing on the most prominent insurance carrier in the region. In short “show-how” sessions, I lifted the hood: Reps saw exactly how the agent mapped photos to scope items, pulled code passages, and drafted adjuster notes. Within two weeks, reps and office coordinators were improving prompts, checklists, backend instructions, and localization language and knowledge bases themselves. By week 5, a small “builder circle” met every Friday to tune prompts, add new carriers’ phrasing, and publish micro-updates to the shared library. IT and compliance served as coaches rather than gatekeepers, reviewing changes that touched sensitive data and keeping the approval lane fast but safe. Because the people closest to the work shaped the tool, adoption rose without mandates, and feedback loops tightened.

So, what did the AI agent actually do? On the first visit, reps captured structured photos via a checklist the agent generated from the service address and storm date. Back at the truck, or in the kitchen, the agent assembled a draft scope with line items, quantities, and annotations, then proposed supporting language that cited uploaded code provisions, manufacturer specs, and the customer’s policy excerpts. For borderline cases, the agent suggested “evidence to obtain” rather than overconfident claims. It also produced adjuster call outlines, homeowner update emails, and a clean “difference table” explaining why replacement, not patching, was warranted when code, safety, or aesthetic matching rules applied. Every output required one-click human approval, with all sources visible.

The company ran the agent in their private tenant; prompts and documents were thus not used to train any external model. Personally identifiable information was redacted automatically, and the system refused to offer “insurance advice,” instead generating compliant, plain-English explanations with citations to the customer’s own documents. Anything touching policy language or public claims went through a lightweight peer review by a trained champion. A short audit trail captured who approved what, when, and why.

Within six months, the roofing company saw measurable gains. Average claim cycle time, from first visit to adjuster agreement, fell from twenty-seven days to twelve. Close rates on insurance-driven opportunities rose from 39 percent to 53 percent, largely because the agent standardized high-quality claim packages and eliminated delays. Average revenue per signed job increased by 24 percent as the mix shifted toward full-roof replacements when code and policy supported that scope, rather than patch repairs. The share of insurance jobs resulting in a full replacement moved from 46 percent to 69 percent, with clear documentation and code citations removing friction. Territory revenue grew 31 percent year over year in the branches that adopted first, while gross margin held steady due to better estimating discipline and fewer missed line items. Customer referrals increased as homeowners received faster updates, clearer explanations, and visibly fair outcomes.

It also helped the company compete with others. Most roofers promise to “help with insurance,” then hand customers a business card of a public adjuster. This company offered a transparent, documented claims concierge experience. Reps arrived with code-aware checklists, assembled evidence packages the same day, and spoke the adjuster’s language. Homeowners saw progress, not paperwork. Competitors could underbid, but they could not match the speed, clarity, or confidence of a well-supported claim. The company stopped competing solely on price and started winning on certainty, speed, and professionalism. Moreover, instead of costing the company \$80K to \$140K, it cost the company about \$32K in my consulting time, as a one-time cost instead of an ongoing annual expense.

Once the first agent proved its value, staff began shipping their own tools inside the same guardrails. At first, these tools involved expanding the scope of the insurance concierge, but soon they moved on to different domains. Office coordinators built a “permit packet assembler” that auto-filled municipal forms, attached stamped drawings when required, and tracked status. Warehouse leads created a “materials and lead-time estimator” that synced supplier price sheets, suggested substitutions, and flagged delivery risks after large storms. Field supervisors built a “drone photo annotator” that labeled hail impacts and wind creases with consistent criteria, reducing back and forth with adjusters. Canvassing teams made a “route and script planner” that prioritized neighborhoods by storm footprint, generated block-by-block talk tracks, and scheduled follow-ups. Customer care created

a “post-install closeout” workflow that registered manufacturer warranties, sent maintenance tips, and asked for reviews at the right moment. Each tool was small, practical, and owned by the team that needed it, with quick peer review when data sensitivity rose. I was called on for guidance and coaching but not actual build time, with the cost for each tool ranging from 0 to \$5K.

To facilitate this process, leaders reserved a sliver of weekly “builder time,” recognized shipped patterns in Monday huddles, and kept the approval lane light. A two-person enablement cell maintained the shared prompt library, backend instructions, and knowledge base; they also handled versioning and trained new champions. Metrics included claim cycle time, close rate on insurance leads, percentage of replacements where warranted, average revenue per job, and number of employee-built workflows in active use. The result wasn’t a single “AI project” but a compounding capability that turned a complex, carrier-driven process into a differentiated customer experience—and a durable edge in a crowded market.

TAILORING EARLY ENGAGEMENT TO EMPLOYEE PSYCHOGRAPHIC PROFILES

Keeping in mind the prior chapter on psychographic profiles, leaders need to take a customized approach to each group.⁹ Alarmists who worry about job loss benefit from direct reassurance that Gen AI will augment—rather than replace—their roles, to the extent that accurately reflects your policies. Pragmatic Resisters need proof of efficiency gains or error reduction, so leaders can offer data from short pilot studies. Observers and Bystanders respond better to gentle nudges showing how Gen AI addresses mundane tasks they dislike. For an example of appealing to such personality types, consider this framing from my interview with Katrina Williams, VP of Sales, ITS and Capability and Engagement at CDW: “I try to encourage people to think about what they could do if more repetitive work, things humans don’t love doing, could be handled by AI. What would you fill that time with?”¹⁰ Meanwhile, enthusiastic Efficiency Seekers and Evangelists thrive on opportunities to test new tools and share successes with colleagues.

This customization validates employees’ concerns and matches their motivational triggers. Alarmists want frank conversations about job security and skill development. Pragmatic Resisters want tangible demonstrations of

Gen AI's value and reliability. Bystanders might assume AI does not affect them, so managers must highlight small but relevant cases—maybe automated email drafting or data summarizing—to illustrate immediate benefits. Reluctant Adopters already sense that learning AI skills will help their careers, but they need training and coaching on how to do so most effectively. Evangelists, eager for advanced exploration, crave an official platform to champion ideas. By attuning each tactic to a group's mindset, organizations tackle many of the cognitive biases noted in Chapter 2, such as status quo bias or automation anxiety, in a constructive, individualized way.

TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION TO COUNTER AUTOMATION ANXIETY AND MISTRUST

Consistent, transparent messaging about Gen AI's purpose and progress plays a vital role in reducing mistrust. As detailed in Chapter 2, skeptical and resistant employees who lack clear, consistent information often assume worst-case scenarios, whether it involves widespread layoffs or fears about AI-driven surveillance. If left unaddressed, these anxieties harden into resistance and antagonism.

To proactively mitigate these anxieties, leaders must communicate transparently about the practical limits and genuine strengths of Gen AI. Employees need to hear clearly that Gen AI systems occasionally produce incorrect outputs, underscoring why human oversight remains indispensable. As Brooke Johnson, Chief Legal Counsel at Ivanti, told me when we spoke: “You can’t just flip on AI in a tool without security, privacy, and legal review—so we spent a lot of time socializing that intake process with employees.”¹¹

Regular updates, which include honest disclosures about both successes and setbacks from pilot projects, reinforce employees' confidence that leadership understands the technology's limitations and remains committed to human oversight. As an example of such a message, Joe Whittinghill, the recently retired Chief Learning Officer at Microsoft, told me in our interview: “Much anxiety arises because employees don’t feel they have the skills for current roles, let alone future roles. But human judgment will be more important than ever.”¹²

Two-way communication channels, such as dedicated intranet forums, town hall discussions, or open Q&A sessions, offer critical platforms for

employees to express their concerns and receive candid responses. This openness transforms apprehension into cautious optimism or even curiosity. Beyond addressing immediate concerns, leadership should consistently reinforce a compelling organizational vision for Gen AI, clearly articulating goals such as enhanced customer experiences, stronger market competitiveness, or reducing routine administrative burdens. For an example of the latter, Ramona Agrela, Chancellor of Human Resources at UC Irvine, said in her interview with me: “I want AI to clear away the transactional work—writing memos, posting jobs—so my teams can focus on strategic workforce planning and development.”¹³ When employees understand the tangible purpose behind Gen AI integration, they perceive it as a meaningful transformation, not an opaque tech experiment, that effectively quiets fears and dismantles the rumor mill.

ADDRESSING JOB SECURITY DIRECTLY: A COMMITMENT TO HUMAN-CENTERED GEN AI ADOPTION

While it’s important to communicate that Gen AI complements human labor rather than replaces it, leaders must recognize that this statement alone may not allay fears entirely. After all, “complementing” tasks can still imply that fewer employees might be needed. Transparency on job security requires direct, unambiguous messaging. As an example, in my interview with Greg Donaca, CEO of Delta Dental of Idaho, he told me he repeatedly emphasizes that “Culture is very important. We’re not looking to lay people off; we’re looking at a better experience for employees, stakeholders, and reducing costs going forward.”¹⁴

A widely used strategy involves explicitly committing to a strategy that emphasizes workforce stability. For instance, a straightforward and often effective approach involves guaranteeing no layoffs resulting specifically from Gen AI adoption. As an example, consider the approach adopted by Michael Alicea, CHRO of Trellicx, a cybersecurity firm with forty thousand clients, which he described in our interview: “It doesn’t mean that I let people go. What it means is that . . . I can actually retrain folks for higher-level work.”¹⁵ Or this one from Shri Santhanam, EVP & GM of Platforms, Software, and AI at Experian, a Fortune 500 data company: “Our messaging to employees has been that this is about amplification rather than replacement.”¹⁶

Instead, leaders can openly communicate plans to gradually slow future hiring, favoring internal mobility and robust upskilling programs to align workforce growth with the adoption of Gen AI tools. In my experience consulting with various clients, making this clear, explicit commitment substantially reduces employee anxiety, fostering greater buy-in and cooperation.

An alternative strategy emphasizes personal agency in career security: Leaders should clearly state that employees who learn and master Gen AI tools effectively will secure their roles within the organization. Framing the situation as an opportunity, as in “You will keep your job and advance if you proficiently use Gen AI,” motivates employees to embrace learning and adaptation proactively, and I find it helps lower resistance. Others prefer more direct language: “You’re not going to lose your job to AI; you’re going to lose your job to someone who is better at using AI than you,” according to my interview with Joe Galvin, Chief Research Officer at Vistage.¹⁷

Above all, honesty remains paramount. Short-term comfort gained from vague assurances will never justify the long-term costs of broken trust. Organizations must candidly share their strategic thinking about workforce planning and consistently provide clear pathways for employees to maintain or enhance their value through ongoing learning and skill development. This commitment to transparent, action-oriented communication around job security, combined with concrete strategies for upskilling, will position employees—and the organization itself—for lasting success in the Gen AI-enhanced workplace.

Moreover, such honest career conversations have the potential to transform AI Alarmists into Pragmatic Resisters or even Reluctant Adopters. If you convince them, through repeated and consistent messaging, that they have the power to address their career fears by using Gen AI instead of resisting it, at least a fraction will come around, mostly those who still plan on sticking around for a few years. Some will instead take early retirement, or leave for a less progressive, technologically savvy company. In any case, the outcome will involve removing their resistance and alarmism from the scene, removing a source of toxicity and making the change management process much easier.¹⁸

Be explicit about which path you are pursuing, and define what transparency means in each scenario. For example, if you pursue a headcount-neutral via attrition approach, state the “no layoffs for AI” horizon, slow

hiring, and show how saved time is reinvested into higher-value work. Publish quarterly stats. If you pursue redeployment with reskilling, announce targeted upskilling, the roles employees can grow into, and the support they will receive. Track learning participation, certification, and internal mobility. If you choose planned reductions with dignified off-ramps, communicate criteria, timelines, severance, and placement support early. Measure and report outcomes to preserve trust. In all cases, pair transparency with measurement: adoption rates, capability badges, redeployment numbers, and well-being metrics. Leaders should clarify and measure how to repurpose time saved; without this, employees and even managers may squander it.

LINKING GEN AI ADOPTION TO EMPLOYEE MOTIVATIONS

Employees often approach new technology with the question, “What’s in it for me?” By linking Gen AI use to career advancement and meaningful work, leadership reframes adoption as an empowering step and helps ensure broad rather than uneven adoption across the enterprise.¹⁹ Many Observers and Bystanders, for instance, shift from trepidation or apathy to willingness if they see how Gen AI fluency broadens their future job prospects. Others appreciate the idea of giving grunt tasks to AI, enabling them to focus on higher-level or more creative work.

I’ve seen success for companies that integrate Gen AI skills into formal performance reviews or internal job postings, showing employees that the organization values AI proficiency. When managers emphasize how employees using Gen AI cultivate new capabilities and refine their career opportunities—rather than just meet the firm’s efficiency goals—they position Gen AI as a personally beneficial tool. This motivation extends to daily tasks as well. If a marketing specialist discovers that AI cuts email writing in half, that specialist feels less burdened and more inclined to further experimentation.

Leaders also build motivation by recognizing employees who discover clever AI-based solutions. A callout in a team meeting or a short feature in an internal newsletter underscores that the organization rewards initiative. Because employees fear layoffs when they see “automation,” managers need to replace that fear with the promise of new career paths, skill-building, and

even enjoyment of more fulfilling responsibilities. When employees realize that Gen AI helps them become more effective, they stop viewing it as an adversary.

LEADERSHIP MODELING OF GEN AI TO REDUCE FEARS AND INSPIRE ADOPTION

Leaders at all levels must actively use Gen AI in their own work if they expect widespread uptake.²⁰ Employees frequently watch and follow the predispositions of executive. I've lost count of the times I've seen executives claim to champion AI but never actually incorporate AI tools into their routines, which naturally causes employees to perceive hypocrisy. When leaders publicly discuss the ways they used an AI system—perhaps to draft a preliminary speech or parse an extensive dataset—they show employees that it is both safe and worthwhile to do the same. And leaders often find surprising benefits from using it: As Tammy Kenber, the CHRO of UC Davis, told me in our interview about starting to use Gen AI, she thought: “I’m like, wow, this is just really good. It’s way better than I expected it to be.”²¹

Middle managers, highlighted in Chapter 5, also exert crucial influence. Their stance often determines whether a department tries a pilot project or dismisses Gen AI as executive-level chatter. Managers who experiment with, and learn from, generative tools support their direct reports’ learning while encouraging adoption at the ground level. They might set aside time for “Gen AI experimentation hours” each week or celebrate staffers who find time-saving applications. By doing so, they display a hands-on commitment rather than offering lip-service endorsements.

These visible acts of leadership modeling at all levels instill confidence and demystify the technology. If a senior leader openly admits that the Gen AI tool produced a flawed answer and explains how they corrected it, employees no longer interpret occasional AI errors as catastrophic. They see that the organization recognizes potential pitfalls and values human judgment as a safeguard. Leaders thus fulfill a dual role: They drive adoption by normalizing usage, and they protect employees by insisting on ethical guardrails, such as reviewing outputs for bias or disclosing data usage policies.²² Employees then grasp that adopting Gen AI does not equate to blind trust in an algorithm but a collaborative partnership between human expertise and machine capabilities.

CLIENT CASE STUDY: A 350-EMPLOYEE E-COMMERCE COMPANY'S ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

Consider how a midsize US e-commerce firm with 350 employees put early engagement principles into practice. Facing strong online competition, the leadership team believed Gen AI could strengthen marketing outreach, accelerate customer service, and optimize forecasting. They also recognized that employees might fear layoffs or see AI as an alien incursion. Unlike Klarna, whose CEO famously said in 2025 that Gen AI has the potential to do any job at his company, and whose headcount fell by 22 percent over 2024, this e-commerce firm took a different route.²³ Instead of declaring a broad “Gen AI takeover,” they decided to work with me to help ensure effective employee engagement.

We began by collecting baseline attitudes. An employee survey showed that 15 percent felt “very comfortable” with Gen AI, 30 percent expressed anxiety about job security, and the rest sat somewhere in between. Focus groups confirmed that older employees felt especially vulnerable, while younger staff saw potential but wanted thorough training.

The CEO and COO launched the adoption plan with an all-hands meeting that explained Gen AI’s relevance to the company’s objectives. The COO demonstrated how ChatGPT-like tools helped him draft weekly project summaries, saving at least an hour each time. This acknowledgment convinced employees that leadership did not push them to experiment with something leaders themselves refused to touch. The CEO helped address concerns about job security. She stated that their primary goal involved expanding and innovating, not cutting staff, with a priority on upskilling staff as tasks shifted, although with an intention of slowing down the previously blistering pace of hiring.

Part of the launch involved an opt-in half-day “Gen AI Hackathon,” where cross-functional teams prototyped Gen AI tools, such as automated chat replies for routine customer questions or an AI feature that analyzed buyer trends. The event featured a supportive atmosphere of psychological safety, meaning an environment welcoming of experimentation and accepting mistakes for the sake of learning, which helped set the stage for the broader rollout.²⁴ Senior leaders joined as participants, modeling a “learn and iterate” attitude. After the hackathon, the firm recognized early adopters’

efforts in a company-wide newsletter, motivating others who had not joined to consider future involvement.

Then I worked with the e-commerce HR and IT departments to tailor training sessions. We developed “Gen AI 101” for novices, intermediate sessions on advanced prompt engineering, and specialized tutorials for technical employees. We also introduced a Microsoft Teams channel for staff to seek help, share interesting use cases, or ask about privacy concerns. Encouraged by management’s involvement, many employees attended the sessions and tried the recommended exercises. Some discovered that Gen AI’s ability to generate quick product descriptions or routine email replies saved them significant time each week.

Over several months, adoption spread. Customer service times fell as staff used AI to handle repetitive inquiries, leaving them free to address complex issues. The marketing department rapidly tested new promotional copy by leveraging generative text tools. Overall trust in AI rose, thanks to leadership modeling, clear training, and tangible success stories. Even some Pragmatic Resisters began to see that the AI freed them from dull tasks, although Alarmists still opposed this tool.

Conclusion

Early engagement fundamentally shapes whether Gen AI triggers enthusiasm or deep skepticism among employees. The employee psychographic profiles in Chapter 6 illustrate the varied emotions and motivations employees bring to the table, but organizations must transform that knowledge into action. Surveys and focus groups help leaders gauge the real landscape of fear, curiosity, and hope. Leaders then need to align communication, training, and pilot activities with each group’s distinct concerns and aspirations. Transparent communication demystifies Gen AI’s purpose, addresses anxieties about job loss or data misuse, and assures employees that human judgment remains crucial. Linking the technology to personal benefits, like career growth or reduced busywork, reframes the AI initiative as an opportunity rather than a threat. Leadership modeling, meanwhile, validates the shift by showing that managers and executives themselves use and refine Gen AI tools, not simply imposing them on others.

When a firm invests deeply in early engagement, it replaces rumor and suspicion with facts and open dialogue. Employees see how their roles might evolve rather than disappear, and they recognize that the company supports them in acquiring new skills. In turn, the organization reaps more than just a successful launch; it cultivates an adaptive culture, fosters cross-functional innovation, and taps Gen AI's potential more swiftly. In Chapter 8, we'll turn to perhaps the most important element of successful employee engagement, namely cultivating, motivating, and channeling the energies of early adopters to turn them into true Gen AI champions.

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN YOU IMPLEMENT THIS CHAPTER

- Have you designed surveys specific enough to capture genuine employee attitudes, fears, and aspirations related to Gen AI, including job security, perceived skill gaps, and readiness to adopt new tools?
- Which specific platforms (town halls, Q&A sessions, intranet forums) will you establish to facilitate ongoing dialogue about Gen AI's integration and employees' evolving reactions?
- How will you clearly and consistently reassure employees that their proactive engagement with Gen AI directly enhances their career stability and opportunities within the organization?
- How will you concretely integrate Gen AI proficiency into career advancement pathways, performance reviews, and internal recognition to visibly reward and incentivize employee engagement?
- How will executives and middle managers visibly demonstrate their own active use and mastery of Gen AI tools, reinforcing authenticity and credibility among employees?
- What small-scale pilots or low-risk experiments will you undertake initially to quickly generate tangible proof of Gen AI's value to skeptical employees and even managers?