Stop Adopting AI

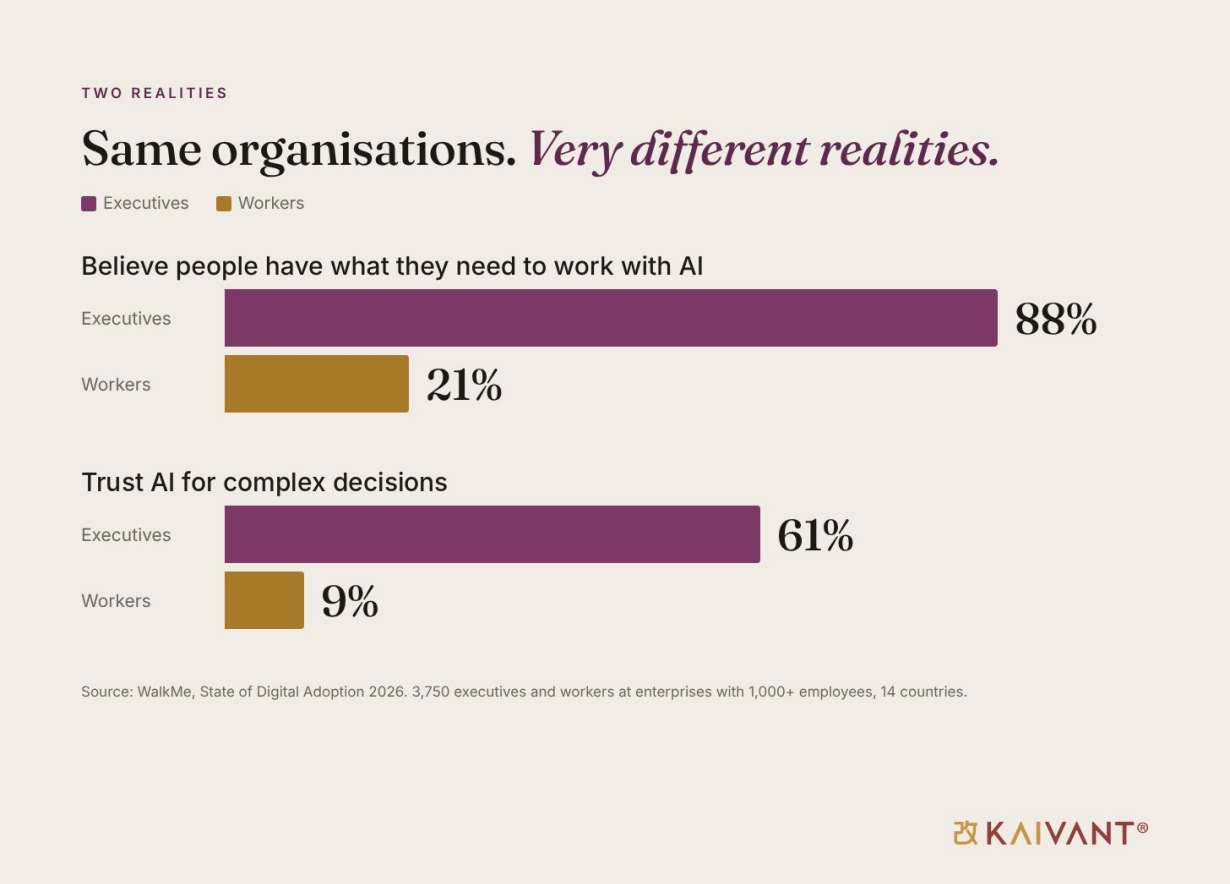
It's already there, but do you know what it's doing?

1. Summary

AI is no longer something outside, waiting for an enterprise rollout. It has already arrived across your workforce through personal browsers, mobile apps, and unmonitored consumer accounts. However, most executive leadership teams operate under an illusion of control, tracking software licences and active logins while remaining blind to how employees actually interact with AI.

Enterprise Data Metric	Strategic HR & Leadership Implication
88% vs. 21% Readiness Gap (Large Enterprises)	88% of executives believe staff have what they need for AI, but only 21% of workers agree. HR and L&D must bridge this acute alignment divide.
57% Hide Their AI Use (Global 47-Country Benchmark)	Over half of employees hide their AI use and present AI output as their own work. Policing increases secrecy; psychological safety unlocks transparency.
54% Bypassed the AI They Were Given (Enterprise Software Friction)	Over half of workers bypassed the AI they were given at least once in the past month and did the work by hand instead. Separately, 45% used unapproved AI.
36% Feel Adequately Trained (Global L&D Benchmark)	Only 36% of workers feel they received adequate AI training. L&D must shift from teaching software features to cultivating critical thinking and output verification.

The Primary Mandate for HR & L&D Leaders: Stop treating AI as a procurement project or a software compliance mandate. The goal is not to force logins or audit employee activity, but to establish psychological safety, redesign daily workflows, and build cognitive capability so workers can critically evaluate and verify AI-generated output.



Two realities: executives and workers

Same organisations, very different realities. Source: WalkMe, State of Digital Adoption 2026, 14 countries.

2. **Stop Adopting AI**

It's already there, but do you know what it's doing?



Stop Adopting AI

We keep talking about adopting AI. As if it is something outside the organisation, waiting to be brought in.

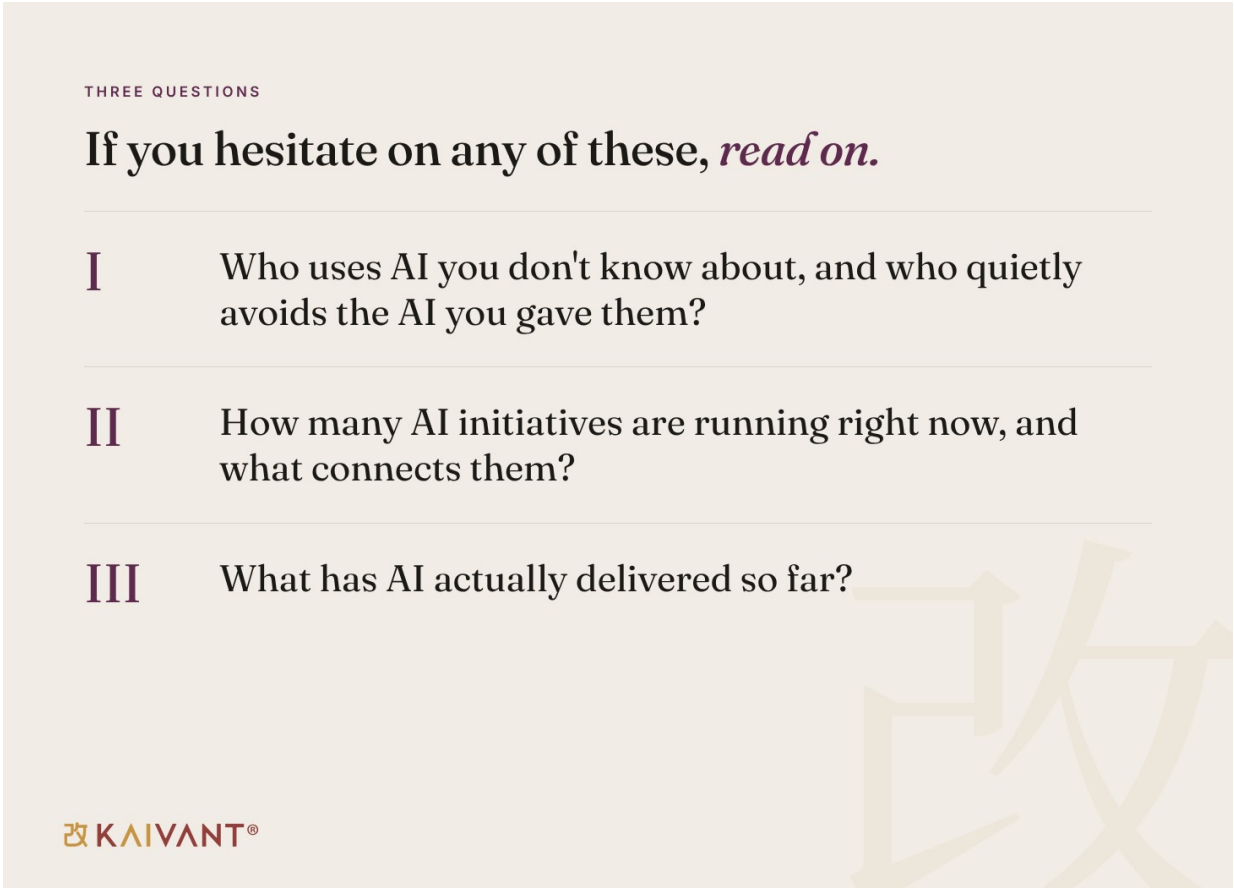
But you can only adopt something that is not there yet. In most organisations, AI arrived long ago. Nobody asked permission. It came in through phones, browsers and personal accounts. It came in through licences that were bought but never really used. And it came in through pilots that started with energy and slowly faded.

So let me ask you three questions.

> *Who in your organisation uses AI that you don't know about, and who quietly avoids the AI you gave them?*
>
> *How many AI initiatives are running right now, and what connects them?*
>
> *And what has AI actually delivered so far?*

If you hesitate on any of these, you are not alone. Across 47 countries, more than half of workers say they hide their AI use and present the output as their own work. In large companies, more than half of workers bypassed the AI they were given at least once in the past month. And more than half of CEOs have not yet seen a real financial benefit from AI.

The problem is not that AI hasn't arrived. The problem is that most organisations don't know how it is living inside them. And you cannot take a good next step from a picture you don't have.



Three questions

If you hesitate on any of these, read on.

What could AI be doing in your organisation right now?

Here is what we see in organisations. Read it slowly. Count how many you recognise.

Waiting. AI is on hold until legal, budget or “the plan” is ready. Meanwhile, people use it anyway.

Working in secret. People use AI but don't say so. Globally, more than half of workers hide their AI use and present the output as their own.

Being quietly avoided. People were given AI and don't use it. In large companies, more than half of workers bypassed it at least once in the past month and did the work by hand.

Being ticked off. AI became mandatory, so people use it to show they use it. Logins go up. Nothing else changes.

Piloting forever. Pilots start with energy and fade before they ever go live.

Living on islands. IT has its AI, marketing has its own, and a few champions have theirs. Nothing connects.

Filling a shopping list. The AI strategy is a list of software to buy. Three in four executives in one survey admitted their AI strategy is more for show than real guidance.

Keeping everyone busy. Usage is high, but the value is unclear. More than half of CEOs have not yet seen a real financial benefit.

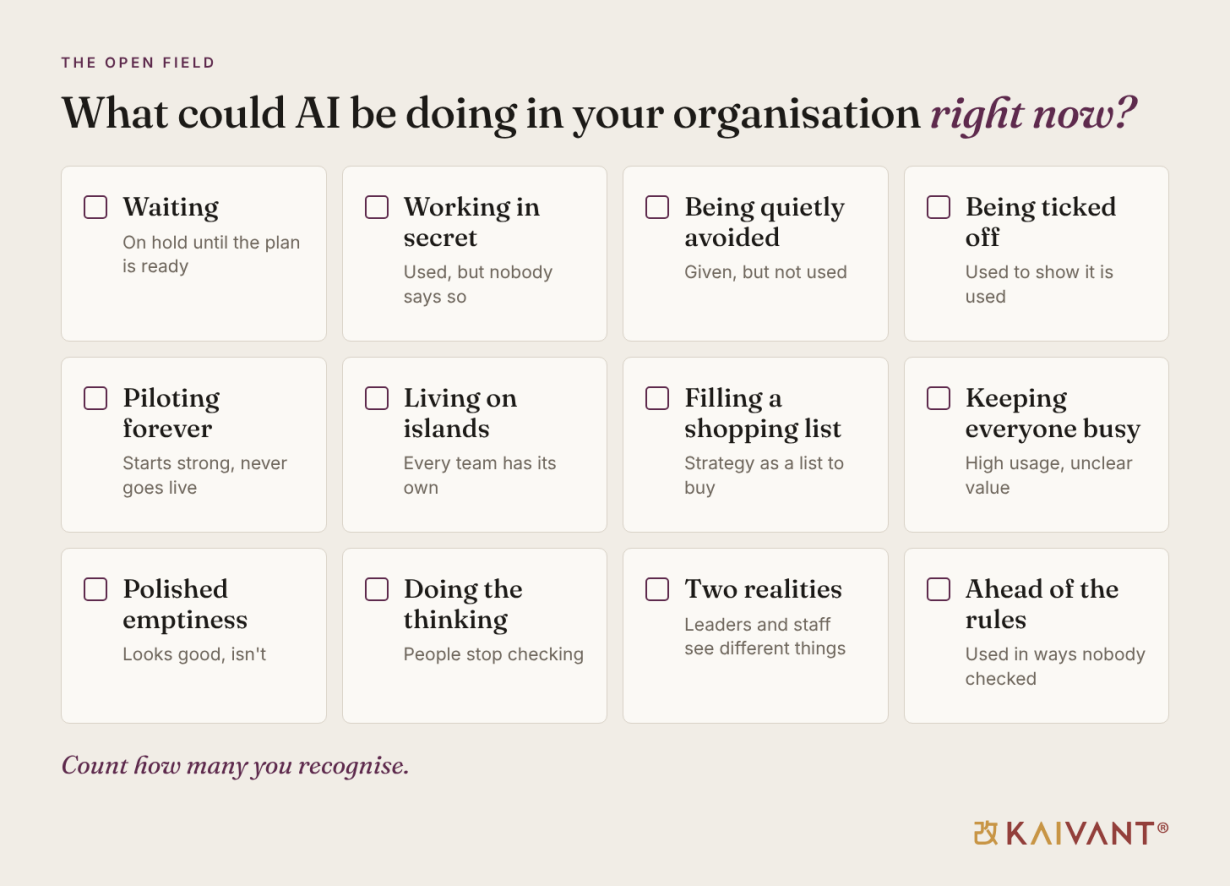
Producing polished emptiness. The work looks good but isn't. In one US study, four in ten workers received it in the past month, and each piece took almost two hours to fix.

Doing the thinking. People stop checking. Research shows that the more people trust AI, the less critically they think about its answers.

Creating two realities. Leaders see progress, while their people see pressure. 61% of executives trust AI for complex decisions. Only 9% of workers do.

Running ahead of the rules. AI is used in ways nobody checked. One consulting firm had to refund part of a government fee after its report contained references to research that does not exist.

How many did you count? Most leaders recognise several. Some they only see once they ask their people.



The open field: twelve things AI could be doing in your organisation

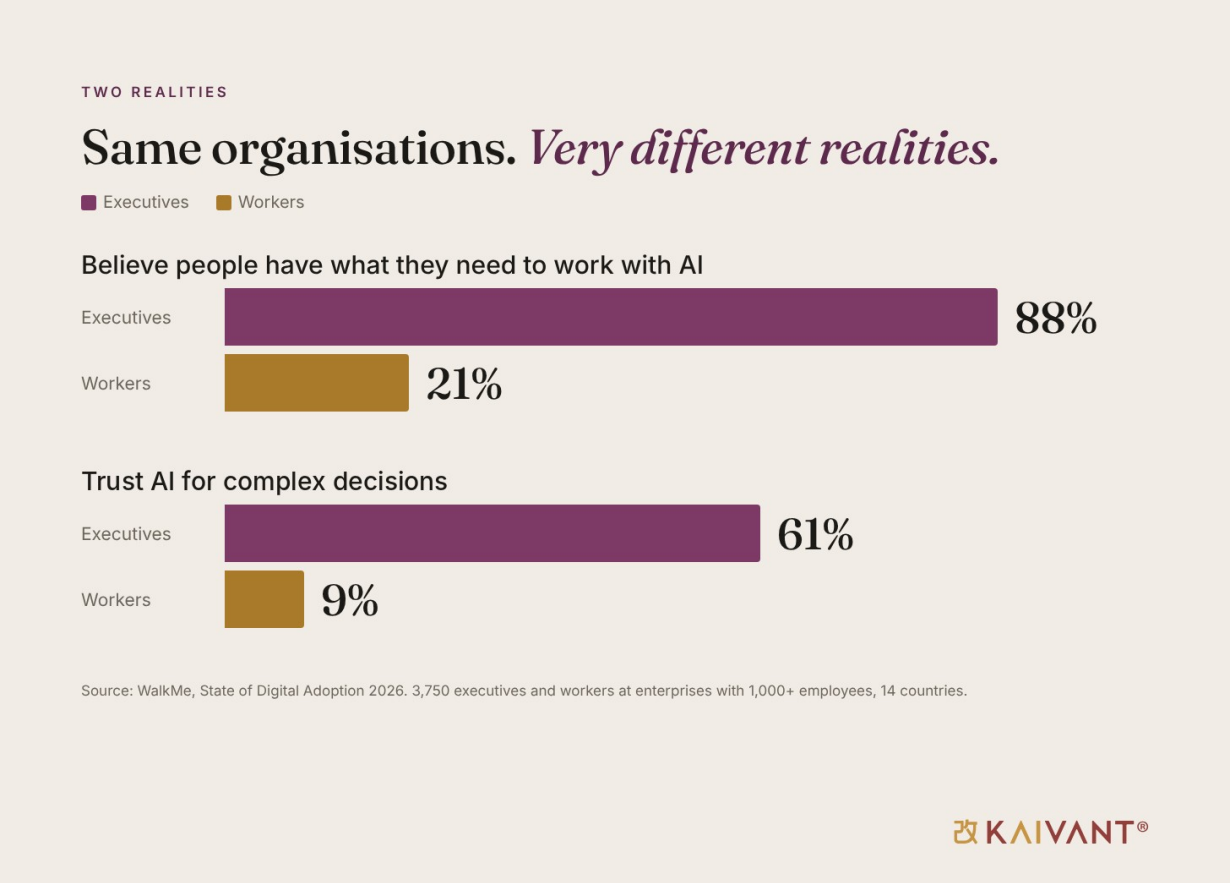
Count how many you recognise.

Why you can't see it from where you sit

Most leaders look at AI through reports. Licences, logins, active users, projects started. Those numbers are real. But they show what AI is supposed to be doing, not what it is actually doing.

Look at the field again. Secret use doesn't show up in a usage report. Neither does quiet avoidance. Polished but empty work looks like productivity. And two realities only become visible when you ask both sides.

The gap is bigger than most leaders think. In large companies, 88% of executives believe their people have what they need to work with AI. Only 21% of workers agree. In Australia and New Zealand, almost all HR leaders said their organisation was ready for AI. Fewer than half of employees said the same.



Two realities: executives and workers

Same organisations, very different realities. Source: WalkMe, State of Digital Adoption 2026, 14 countries.

So a real baseline is not a score. It does not tell you what level you are or which stage you have reached. It shows you what is living in your organisation: which of these signals are there, how strong they are, and how differently leaders and staff experience them.

And it has to be asked in a way people can answer honestly. If people hide their AI use from their manager, they will not reveal it in a meeting with that manager.

Once you see the field clearly, something else becomes visible. You see where it hurts most. That is where you start.

What sits underneath, and where to start

Every signal has a reason behind it. Treat the signal without the reason, and it comes back. Here is what usually sits underneath each one, and a small first move. The numbers point to the options in the next section, where each one is worked out.

Waiting

Underneath: Fear of getting it wrong, so nothing is allowed until everything is safe. But while the organisation waits, its people don't. They use AI anyway, only without guidance.

First move: Agree a small, safe space where people may use AI now, with a few simple rules. (Option 7, Set light rules)

Working in secret

Underneath: The organisation already uses AI. It just can't see it, guide it or learn from it. People hide their use because they fear it makes them look lazy, or proves their job can be done without them.

First move: Invite people to share what they use and how, with no blame. (Option 5, Make it safe to talk)

Being quietly avoided

Underneath: AI was handed over without asking how it fits the work. In WalkMe's research, the main reason workers gave up on it was fragmentation across applications: moving data by hand between systems while the AI lost the context of their work.

First move: Ask why, and listen, before you push harder. (Option 5, Make it safe to talk)

Being ticked off

Underneath: Access without meaning. People don't see the link between AI and their own work, so they show activity instead of value.

First move: Drop the login target. Let each team choose one real piece of its own work to improve with AI. (Option 6, Let teams solve their own problems)

Piloting forever

Underneath: Pilots start because they are possible, not because they matter. Nobody agreed up front what success would look like, so nobody can decide to scale them or stop them.

First move: List every pilot and what it actually delivered. (Option 3, Take stock of what exists)

Living on islands

Underneath: There is no shared picture, so each group optimises for itself. Every team solves its own piece, and nobody sees the whole.

First move: Bring the islands to one table, around one shared picture. (Option 2, Look at it together)

Filling a shopping list

Underneath: AI was treated as a purchase, not as a way to reach business goals. The question became “what should we buy?” instead of “what are we trying to achieve?”

First move: Start from two or three business goals and ask where AI helps you reach them. (Option 9, Put AI inside the business strategy)

Keeping everyone busy

Underneath: Usage is measured because value is hard to measure. Activity starts to look like progress.

First move: Agree what “better” means in two or three key processes, and measure that. (Option 10, Measure outcomes, not usage)

Producing polished emptiness

Underneath: Speed is rewarded and checking is not. The effort moves from the person who creates the work to the person who receives it.

First move: Agree who checks what before AI work goes out. (Option 13, Keep human judgement where it matters)

Doing the thinking

Underneath: People hand over thinking, not just tasks. Research shows that people who trust AI more tend to think less critically about its answers, while people who are confident in their own expertise think more.

First move: Name the decisions where a person must think it through, and keep those human. (Option 13, Keep human judgement where it matters)

Creating two realities

Underneath: The gain is real for leaders. But people feel the change was done to them, not with them.

First move: Let leaders and staff look at the same picture, together. (Option 2, Look at it together)

Running ahead of the rules

Underneath: Use grew faster than the rules. In WRITER's 2026 survey, two in three executives believed their company had already suffered a data leak because someone used an unapproved AI app.

First move: Map how AI is used today against your data and legal rules. Start with client data. (Option 7, Set light rules)

You will not fix all of this at once, and you shouldn't try. Pick the one that hurts most. A good first move is small, visible and owned by the people who feel the pain.



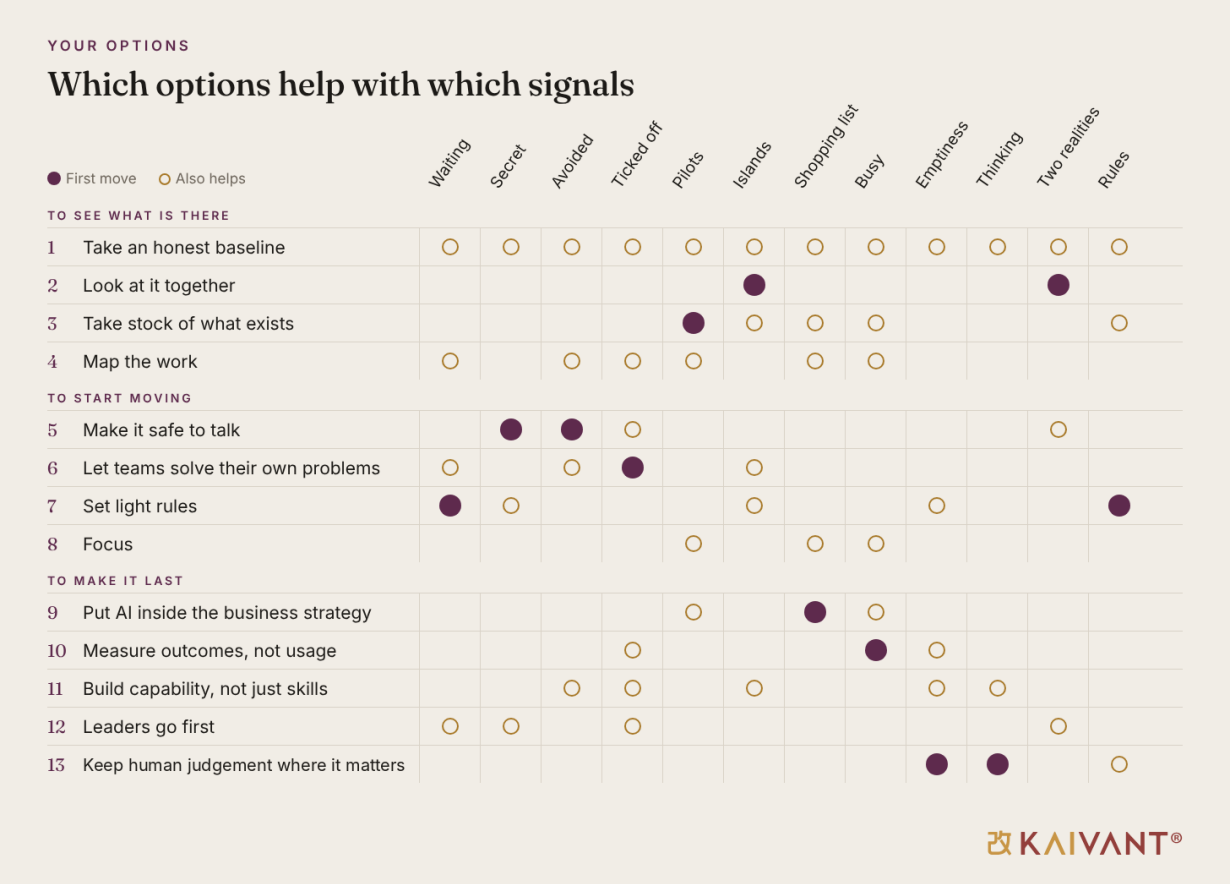
From what you see to your first move

Pick the one that hurts most. Make one small move.

Your options, worked out

Here are the thirteen options we see working. You don't need all of them. Each option helps with several signals, and most signals can be helped by more than one option. The overview below shows how they connect.

They fall into three groups. Some help you see what is really there. Some help you start moving. And some make sure that what you start keeps working.



Which options help with which signals

Which options help with which signals.

TO SEE WHAT IS THERE

Option 1 Take an honest baseline

Everything starts here. A baseline shows which of the twelve signals are living in your organisation, how strong they are, and how differently leaders and staff see them. It is not a score to compare yourself with others. It is a picture to act on.

How to start

> *• Ask leaders and staff the same questions, so you can compare the answers.*
>
> *• Make it anonymous where it needs to be. People will not admit hidden use or quiet avoidance with their name on it.*
>
> *• Look for the gaps between groups, not only the averages. The gaps are often the real story.*

Helps with: Every signal. This is where the picture comes from.

Watch out: A baseline that only leaders fill in will show you the organisation leaders believe they have.

Option 2 Look at it together

The fastest way to close two realities is to put them on the same table. Leaders and staff look at the same picture and talk about what they see. In WRITER's 2025 survey, two in three executives

said AI had created tension between IT and the business, and almost as many said it had created tension between executives and employees.

How to start

> • *Share the baseline results openly, including the uncomfortable parts.*
> • *Bring leaders, staff, IT and the business together in one session around the same data.*
> • *Ask one question: what surprises you? Then agree on one thing to change.*

Helps with: First move for Living on islands and Creating two realities.

Watch out: If leaders use the session to explain why staff are wrong, the gap gets wider, not smaller.

Option 3 Take stock of what exists

Before you start anything new, list what is already running. Every pilot, every licence, every team experiment, and what each one actually delivered. Many organisations are surprised by how much is there, and by how little of it they can account for. In WRITER's 2026 survey, more than half of executives described AI use in their company as a chaotic free-for-all.

How to start

> • *Collect every AI initiative, official and unofficial, in one simple list.*
> • *For each one, write down what it was meant to do and what it actually did.*
> • *Sort them into three groups: keep, fix, stop.*

Helps with: First move for Piloting forever; also Living on islands, Filling a shopping list, Keeping everyone busy and Running ahead of the rules.

Watch out: This is not an audit to find someone to blame. If it feels like one, the unofficial initiatives will stay hidden.

Option 4 Map the work

Look at the work itself, step by step, the way you would map a value stream. Where does time go? Where do people wait, copy, check or repeat? That is where AI may help, and also where it may not. In McKinsey's 2026 global survey, nearly three in four of the companies getting real value from AI (only about 6% of all respondents) had fundamentally redesigned their workflows. Among all the other companies, only one in four had done so.

How to start

> • *Pick one process that matters to your customers or your costs.*
> • *Map it with the people who do the work, not only with their managers.*
> • *Mark where AI could take over, where it could support, and where it should stay out.*

Helps with: Waiting, Being quietly avoided, Being ticked off, Piloting forever, Filling a shopping list and Keeping everyone busy.

Watch out: Mapping the work is not the same as automating it. The goal is better work, not just faster steps.

TO START MOVING

Option 5 Make it safe to talk

Hidden use and quiet avoidance have the same root: it does not feel safe to be honest. People fear looking lazy, looking slow, or proving that their job can be done without them. Punishment makes it worse. In WalkMe's 14-country study, 78% of executives said they wanted to discipline unapproved AI use, while only 21% of workers had ever been told what the AI rules were.

How to start

> • *Say clearly that sharing how people use AI today will not be punished.*
> • *Ask people what they use, what helps, what doesn't, and why some avoid it.*
> • *Share back what you learned, and act on at least one thing.*

Helps with: First move for Working in secret and Being quietly avoided; also Being ticked off and Creating two realities.

Watch out: One person punished after speaking up will undo the whole effort.

Option 6 Let teams solve their own problems

Instead of pushing AI from the top, let each team pick one real problem from its own work and try AI on it, in a short and protected time box. AI stops being a target and becomes help with work people care about. BCG's 10-20-70 approach puts around 70% of the value of AI in people and processes, and only 30% in technology, data and algorithms. Most organisations already have the people to lead this. In WRITER's 2025 survey, three in four employees who used AI were already champions or could become one.

How to start

> • *Each team picks one problem that annoys them, not one chosen for them.*
> • *Give them a few weeks and a champion who already uses AI well.*
> • *Let them show what worked, and what didn't, to the rest of the organisation.*

Helps with: First move for Being ticked off; also Waiting, Being quietly avoided and Living on islands.

Watch out: If management picks the problem, it becomes a mandate again.

Option 7 Set light rules

Most organisations swing between two extremes: everything forbidden, or everything allowed. Both fail. What works is a small set of clear rules that people can actually follow, and that grow as use grows. Globally, only four in ten workers say their workplace has any policy or guidance on generative AI at all. One analyst who studied the survey data put it simply: a little governance is better than none.

How to start

> • *Decide which data may never go into which AI, starting with client data.*
> • *Decide who makes decisions about AI, and who may challenge an AI-supported decision.*
> • *Write it on one page, and review it every quarter.*

Helps with: First move for Waiting and Running ahead of the rules; also Working in secret, Living on islands and Producing polished emptiness.

Watch out: Rules written only by legal and IT will be read by nobody. Write them with the people who have to use them.

Option 8 Focus

Most organisations have more AI ideas than they can ever fund or follow through. In one survey across nine countries, seven in ten business and IT leaders said they had more use cases than they could pay for. Spreading attention over all of them is how pilots stay pilots.

How to start

> • *Choose two or three value streams that matter most for your business.*
> • *Put your best people and budget there.*
> • *Stop or pause the rest, and say so openly.*

Helps with: Piloting forever, Filling a shopping list and Keeping everyone busy.

Watch out: Stopping is the hard part. Agree up front what "not working" looks like.

TO MAKE IT LAST

Option 9 Put AI inside the business strategy

An AI strategy that sits next to the business strategy easily becomes a shopping list. Three in four executives in WRITER's 2026 survey admitted their AI strategy is more for show than for real guidance. The better question is not "what is our AI strategy?" but "how does AI help our strategy?"

How to start

> • *Start from your two or three most important business goals.*
> • *For each goal, ask where AI could help you get there faster or better.*
> • *Drop AI plans that don't connect to any goal.*

Helps with: First move for Filling a shopping list; also Piloting forever and Keeping everyone busy.

Watch out: A list of things to buy is not a strategy, however good the list looks.

Option 10 Measure outcomes, not usage

Logins and active users tell you that people open AI, not what changed because of it. Real results are still thin. In McKinsey's 2026 survey, just over a third of companies could link any profit impact to AI at all, and that share did not grow from the year before. In PwC's 2026 survey of more than 4,000 CEOs, only one in eight said AI had brought both lower costs and higher revenue. You will not find the value if you only count the activity.

How to start

> • *For two or three key processes, agree what "better" means: faster, cheaper, fewer errors, happier customers.*
> • *Measure it before you start and again after.*
> • *Report outcomes to leadership, not usage numbers.*

Helps with: First move for Keeping everyone busy; also Being ticked off and Producing polished emptiness.

Watch out: People chase what you measure. Measure logins and you get logins.

Option 11 Build capability, not just skills

Knowing which buttons to press is not enough. People need to learn how to think with AI: when to use it, how to check it, and when not to use it at all. Most don't get that support. In BCG's 2025 survey of more than 10,000 workers in 11 countries, just over a third (36%) felt they had received adequate AI training, and across six Southeast Asian markets employer training reached only 14 to 29% of workers. Capability also protects judgement: people who are confident in their own expertise check AI's answers more critically.

How to start

> • *Teach judgement, not only features: checking, questioning and knowing the limits.*
> • *Make learning part of the working week, not something for evenings.*
> • *Let people learn from colleagues who already use AI well.*

Helps with: Being quietly avoided, Being ticked off, Living on islands, Producing polished emptiness and Doing the thinking.

Watch out: Training once is not capability. It takes practice and feedback.

Option 12 Leaders go first

People follow what leaders do, not what they say. Yet in BCG's 2025 survey, only a quarter of frontline employees said they get enough guidance from their leaders on using AI. In Microsoft's 2026 findings for Singapore, the most advanced AI users were clearly more likely to have managers who openly use AI (87% against 72%) and who make space to experiment (81% against 63%).

How to start

> • *Use AI visibly in your own work, and talk about it.*
> • *Share your mistakes, not only your successes.*
> • *Protect time for your team to experiment.*

Helps with: Waiting, Working in secret, Being ticked off and Creating two realities.

Watch out: A leader who demands AI use but never uses it sends the clearest message of all.

Option 13 Keep human judgement where it matters

AI can draft, summarise and suggest. But someone has to own the decision. When nobody checks, small errors turn into big ones. A major consulting firm had to refund part of its fee for a government report that contained made-up references and a made-up quote from a court judgment. And the more people trust AI, the less critically they tend to look at what it gives them.

How to start

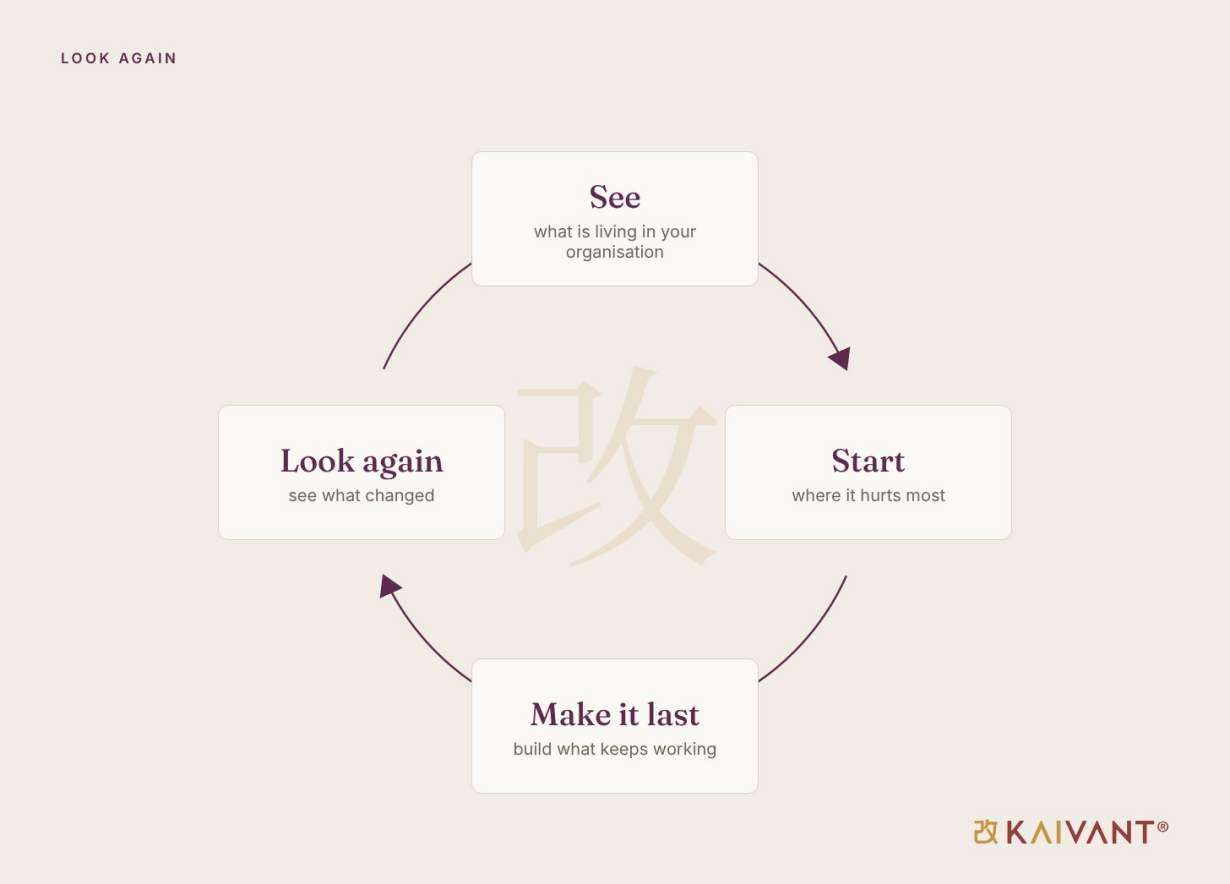
> • *Name the decisions and outputs where a person must think it through, not just approve.*
> • *Agree who checks what before AI work goes to a client, a manager or a regulator.*
> • *Make checking normal, not a sign of distrust.*

Helps with: First move for Producing polished emptiness and Doing the thinking; also Running ahead of the rules.

Watch out: Don't let this become a reason to block AI everywhere. Keep it for where the stakes are high.

Look again

What is living in your organisation today will not be what is living there in six months. New AI arrives every month, people change how they work, and what helped last quarter may not help next quarter. So the baseline is not a one-time exercise. Look again, see what changed, and adjust.



See, start, make it last, look again

See what is there, start where it hurts, make it last, and look again.

That is what KAIVANT® was built for. KAIVANT shows what AI is really doing in your organisation, seen from leaders and staff alike. It is not a ranking and not a stage. It is an honest picture you can act on, and come back to.

So go back to the three questions from the start. Who uses AI you don't know about? What connects your AI initiatives? And what has AI actually delivered?

If you can't answer them yet, that is your entry point.

Stop adopting AI. Start seeing what it's doing.

Find your first move in three minutes at kaivantscore.com/stop

About the author

Michiel R. de Boer is the founder and Chief Architect of KAIVANT®. He has more than 30 years of experience helping organisations across Asia Pacific improve how they work, using best practices in programme, project and process management. He is based in Kuala Lumpur.

Sources

KPMG and University of Melbourne, Trust, attitudes and use of artificial intelligence: A global study 2025 (48,340 people, 47 countries; fieldwork November 2024 to January 2025). https://mbs.edu/news/global-study-reveals-trust-of-ai-remains-a-critical-challenge

KPMG and University of Melbourne, study details and method (48,340 people, 47 countries). https://mbs.edu/faculty-and-research/trust-and-ai

WalkMe (SAP), State of Digital Adoption 2026 (3,750 executives and workers, 14 countries; vendor research). https://www.walkme.com/news-releases/enterprises-lose-51-workdays-per-employee-to-technology-friction-annually-despite-record-ai-investment-walkme-global-study-of-3750-finds/

WalkMe findings on why workers abandon enterprise AI, as reported by Benzinga via Yahoo Finance. https://finance.yahoo.com/sectors/technology/articles/companies-spending-millions-enterprise-ai-120104941.html

Enterprise Strategy Group, generative AI ROI study (2025; 1,900 leaders, nine countries), as reported by CIO.com. https://cio.com/article/4198030/7-issues-impacting-ai-strategies-and-how-cios-should-respond.html

PwC, 29th Global CEO Survey (January 2026; 4,454 CEOs, 95 countries and territories). https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/news-room/press-releases/2026/pwc-2026-global-ceo-survey.html

WRITER, AI Adoption in the Enterprise 2026 (2,400 respondents, US and Europe; vendor research). https://writer.com/blog/enterprise-ai-adoption-survey-results-press-release/

WRITER and Workplace Intelligence, Generative AI Adoption in the Enterprise 2025 (1,600 respondents; vendor research). https://go.writer.com/enterprise-ai-adoption-survey

WRITER 2025 tension figures (68% between IT and the business, 63% between leadership and employees), as reported by Virtualization Review. https://virtualizationreview.com/Articles/2025/03/18/Enterprise-AI-Survey-Shows-Divisions-Tension-and-Sabotage.aspx

McKinsey, The state of AI in 2026: On the road to ROI (August 2026; 1,719 participants, 97 countries). https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai

BCG, the 10-20-70 approach to AI value. https://www.bcg.com/featured-insights/how-to/roi-of-ai

BCG, AI at Work 2025: Momentum Builds, But Gaps Remain (June 2025; more than 10,600 workers, 11 countries). https://www.bcg.com/press/26june2025-beyond-ai-adoption-full-potential

Stanford Social Media Lab and BetterUp Labs, research on AI “workslop” (1,150 US workers, 2025), as reported by Fortune. https://fortune.com/2025/09/23/ai-workplace-productivity-workslop-nvidia-openai-deepmind

Microsoft Research and Carnegie Mellon University, The Impact of Generative AI on Critical Thinking (2025), as reported by The Register.
https://www.theregister.com/2025/02/11/microsoft_study_ai_critical_thinking/

Cornerstone, The Hidden Number (2026, Asia Pacific), as reported by IT Brief Australia.
https://itbrief.com.au/story/ai-readiness-gap-widens-across-asia-pacific-report-finds

Deloitte Australia partial refund to the Australian government (2025), as reported by CFO Dive.
https://www.cfodive.com/news/deloitte-refunds-60k-report-ai-errors-australian-government-accounting/803321/

Milieu Insight, SEA AI at Work 2026 (3,000 professionals in six Southeast Asian markets).
https://www.mili.eu/sg/insights/sea-ai-at-work-2026-training-gap

Microsoft, Work Trend Index 2026, Singapore findings, as reported by eCommerceNews Asia.
https://ecommercenews.asia/story/singapore-workers-outpace-global-peers-in-workplace-ai

DBTA and Radiant Advisors, 2026 AI Market Study, presented at Data Summit 2026.
https://www.dbta.com/Editorial/News-Flashes/How-to-Escape-AI-Pilot-Purgatory-176093.aspx

Published by KAIVANT Sdn. Bhd. · A company registered in Malaysia · KAIVANT® is a registered trademark · kaivantscore.com/articles