

The AI Leadership Opportunity.

Your teams are already using AI. Here's how to lead it well, and what becomes possible when you do.



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— WHERE YOU STAND TODAY

You're already leading this - whether you've named it or not.

If you're a leader in a New Zealand organisation, AI is already part of how many of your people are working. In most cases, the tools arrived and people started using them before any AI strategies or policies were in place.

Teams are using the tools to draft communications, summarise documents, analyse data, and support decisions. Some are doing it well. Others may not be - and often there is a lack of shared standards or any structured capability development. That gap is also the gap between the productivity gains your teams could be realising and the ones they actually are.

What may not have landed yet is that **AI capability is a leadership issue**. If you're accountable for the performance and development of teams, you're accountable for how they're using AI.

The good news: a small, deliberate set of moves is enough to convert today's informal use into structured, credible capability - and to put you firmly ahead of where most organisations sit.

The question isn't whether your organisation is using AI. It's whether you've put something in place that you can stand behind.

This briefing is designed to help you think through that question. It draws on the latest NZ and global data, and provides a straightforward framework - and a plan you can start this quarter — to lead your teams to use AI effectively.

— THE PICTURE IN NEW ZEALAND

Adoption is high. The room to grow is bigger.

New Zealand's adoption of AI looks strong on the headline number. Look just below it and a more interesting picture emerges - one where the upside still belongs to whoever moves first on capability and governance.

ADOPTION

87%

of NZ organisations are using AI

CAPABILITY

36%

of NZ workers feel skilled to use AI

GOVERNANCE

16%

say their organisation provides AI pathways

SOURCES: DATACOM 2025 [1] · NEWZEALAND.AI [5] · BEYOND RECRUITMENT [6]

Adoption nearly doubled in two years — from 48% in 2023 to 87% in 2025 [1]. But only 12% of organisations have rolled AI out across the whole business. Most remain in pockets of early adoption [1], with just 24% of New Zealanders having received any formal or informal AI training [5].

Often, the people using AI are doing it without any formal company deployment or guidance [3]. Which means the work of structuring it - building shared standards, capability, and confidence - is still wide open.

**Adoption is high. Capability is the lever.
Governance is the differentiator.**

THE GAP WORTH CLOSING

A small group is creating most of the value. The rest is upside waiting.

In most organisations, a small number of people are creating disproportionate value with AI. The majority are using it sporadically, inconsistently, or not at all - not because they don't want to, but because no-one has shown them how. Closing that gap is the single highest-leverage move available to most leaders today.

THE VALUE SIDE

Productivity gains are real — but concentrated.

89% of NZ AI users report productivity gains [1]. The catch: that efficiency is concentrated in the few who figured it out on their own. Distribute the capability and the gains compound.

89% report productivity gains

THE RISK SIDE

Unmanaged use, not use, is the exposure.

People are deciding which tools to use, what data to share, and how to interpret outputs without oversight. The 2026 Kordia NZ report found 24% of businesses now rank staff misuse of AI in their top three security challenges, up from 16% [7].

43% cite accidental data exposure as #1 cyber risk

Globally, 67% of business and IT decision makers have felt pressured to approve AI despite known security concerns [10]. The pattern is consistent: the issue is rarely the tools - it's that capability and guardrails arrived after them.

AI is already in your organisation. The opportunity is to make its use deliberate.

There is also a uniquely New Zealand dimension to this. GDP per hour worked sits about 40% below comparable economies like Denmark, Finland and Sweden [9]. Accenture estimates generative AI could contribute between **NZD \$76 billion and \$108 billion** annually to NZ's economy by 2038 [12]. Whether that lands depends on whether organisations build the capability to use AI well -or- leave it to chance.

— THE PEOPLE SIDE

Capability is the engagement strategy.

Most leaders think about AI risk in terms of data, security, and governance. There's a quieter, more human story too - and it's the one with the biggest upside when you get it right.

A 2026 study of 2,400 knowledge workers across the US, UK and Europe found that 29% admitted to actively working around their company's AI strategy. Among Gen Z workers, the figure was 44%. The behaviours included entering proprietary data into public AI tools, generating poor outputs deliberately, and refusing to engage with mandated platforms [14].

The instinct is to read this as a workforce problem. The same study found that **75% of executives admit their company's AI strategy is "more for show than substantive."**

The tools were rolled out without the capability to use them. The resistance is rational [14].

Beneath that sits a deeper feeling: **FOBO - the Fear of Becoming Obsolete**. Unlike traditional job insecurity, FOBO isn't about getting fired; it's about becoming irrelevant. Four in ten workers now name AI-driven job loss as a primary fear, a share that has nearly doubled in a single year [15].

Only about a third of workers say their employer is providing adequate AI training - down nearly 10 points from 2024 [15]. Which means the lever is sitting right there, untouched.

What looks like resistance is usually a lack of capability, confidence, and inclusion. Address those three things and resistance becomes momentum.

And capability changes everything.

PwC's 2025 Global Workforce Hopes and Fears Survey, with nearly 50,000 respondents across 48 economies, found that daily GenAI users report improved productivity (**92%**), greater job security (**58%**), and salary increases (**52%**) [16]. The anxiety is concentrated in people who haven't been given the capability to participate. PwC's conclusion: the biggest barrier to AI's productivity benefits is not employee resistance — it's piecemeal adoption [16].

— BOARD READINESS CHECK

Six questions a confident leader can answer.

If your board, your risk committee, or your CEO asked you about AI capability tomorrow, these are the six you'd want to walk through with confidence. Most organisations can't yet - which is exactly why this is the moment to.

- 1 What structured AI capability programme do we have in place across the organisation - and who has access to it: the early adopters, or the people doing the day-to-day work?
- 2 What guidance have we given staff on responsible AI use - covering data handling, quality review, and accountability?
- 3 How are we tracking AI capability development, and what evidence do we have of progress?
- 4 Do we know which AI tools our people are using, what data they're sharing with those tools, and what governance sits around that?
- 5 If something went wrong - a data exposure, a flawed decision based on unchecked AI output, a compliance gap - could we demonstrate that we had a reasonable framework in place?
- 6 Are our people engaged and confident with AI, or are they anxious, disengaged, or working around the tools we've provided?

If you can't answer most of these today, you're in good company - most organisations can't. The leaders who act on this aren't the ones who know the most about AI. They're the ones who recognise that **a credible, structured response is itself the leadership move.**



— THE TURN

Here's the good news - **the playbook** is short.

You don't need to become an AI company. You don't need a moonshot. You need a deliberate, structured way to build capability across your people, paired with clear expectations and a way to measure progress.

The next pages lay out what that looks like in practice - and the six concrete moves leaders are using right now to put themselves on the front foot.





WHAT STRONG LOOKS LIKE

Practical, distributed, measurable.

Organisations getting this right aren't trying to become AI companies. They're building practical, distributed capability across their workforce, paired with clear expectations. Here's what they have in common.

ELEMENT	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE
Baseline capability across teams	Everyone - not just early adopters - can use AI effectively in their role.
AI embedded in real workflows	Teams have moved beyond experimentation to structured, repeatable use.
Clear guidance on responsible use	Simple, practical policies covering data, quality, and accountability.
Shared standards and expectations	The organisation learns collectively, not in isolated pockets. A common language for how AI is used.
Structured learning with measurable progress	Capability development is tracked and evidenced. Leaders can show what's been done.
A safe environment to practise	Teams have space to test, iterate, and build confidence.
Workforce engagement and confidence	People feel included in the change. Anxiety is replaced with agency.

The data supports this approach. 81% of NZ businesses say they support AI training, but only 16% of professionals say their organisation provides clear pathways to build AI capability [5,6]. And 65% of workers say they want more investment in AI skills development from their employers [8].

Your people are asking for this. The opportunity is to be the leader who provides it.

— WHAT TO DO NOW

Six moves you can start this quarter.

The leaders moving on this aren't waiting for large technology programmes. They're making a deliberate, practical decision to start building usage of AI in an inclusive, structured, progressive, and credible way.

01

Build baseline AI capability across your organisation.

A structured programme that reaches everyone. This is the single highest leverage action most organisations can take, and the one most commonly deferred.

02

Identify where AI should be applied in core workflows.

Move from general awareness to specific, high-value use cases. The organisations seeing the strongest gains pair capability building with workflow redesign.

03

Put clear, practical guidance in place.

Your people need guardrails - policies in plain language that address data handling, quality review, and accountability.

04

Make capability measurable.

If you can't track it, you can't govern it. Dashboards and completion tracking give you evidence - and give your people recognition.

05

Bring your people into the change.

The research is clear: resistance comes from exclusion, not opposition. People given structured capability development embrace AI. They feel more secure, and FOBO fades.

06

Choose a partner you can stand behind.

When your board asks what you've done, you want an answer that reflects due diligence. The credibility of the programme matters as much as the content.

— A DECISION YOU CAN STAND BEHIND

AI for Business - built for NZ organisations, by academyEX.

A structured capability programme built by academyEX - New Zealand's only private postgraduate institute for mid-career professionals.

1

Four structured courses

Foundations through to strategy and leadership - sequenced so every role finds its level.

2

70+ tools, resources & insights - updated weekly

A curated, current library of tools, resources and insights so your teams stay sharp without chasing the news cycle.

3

Hands-on playground

A safe practice environment for building confidence - the missing piece in most rollouts.

4

Tracking and badges

Dashboard reporting and digital badges. Capability you can point to when asked.

5

\$150 per person, per year

Organisation-wide pricing. Built for scale, designed for whole-of-workforce reach.

6

AI for Good

Every licence enables a NZ charity to access the same training, free of charge.

AI will keep evolving. With AI for Business, your people will too.

Contact us to find out more:
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