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The Five AI Enablers

What it actually takes to accelerate your AI programme.

INTRODUCTION

Most organisations aren't behind on AI because of the technology.

The tools exist, the budget is there, and the board is asking questions. But somewhere between intent and impact, things stall. Pilots that proved a success quietly die off, confidence stays uneven, and usage spikes before it drops. The gap between "we're doing AI" and "AI is actually changing how we work" still feels unbridgeable.

After building AI transformation programmes for Arla, TeamViewer, and a multinational technology corporation, we've identified five things that determine how fast any organisation moves. All five are organisational questions rather than technology ones. When all five are working, progress accelerates. When even one is missing, it stalls.

These are the five enablers.

01

Vision

A large retailer we worked with had an AI vision that survived three budget cycles.

It survived because it was specific rather than ambitious. The vision was simple: make everyone more valuable. It was anchored to a real constraint, growth targets that couldn't be met through headcount alone, and it connected directly to what the CFO was already tracking. Every AI investment could be evaluated against it. It didn't require translation.

That's what a working vision looks like: simple enough that anyone in the organisation can explain it, tied to a business priority the board cares about, with KPIs that prove whether it's working.

> McKinsey's research found that 92% of organisations plan to increase AI investment in the next three years. Only 1% have reached what they define as AI maturity. The distance between those two numbers comes down to whether the vision is clear enough to drive decisions and survive a budget cycle.

The organisations that stall are usually the ones trying to "AI everything." The ones that accelerate have picked something specific and strategically important, built the metrics around it, and embedded it into every initiative. The vision doesn't need to be grand as long as it's useful.

02

People

When we survey teams at the start of an AI programme, the same distribution curve appears almost every time.

Around 15% of people are already running ahead. They've found their own tools, built their own workflows, and are generating real output. Enthusiasts, and genuinely valuable. But there's a danger with these early adopters. Overfocus the programme on them and you build something that works for 15% of the team. Leave them unsupported, and well-intentioned individuals start experimenting without structure, building things that aren't consistent, governed, or scalable.

The real work for leaders is in the middle: moving the mainstream by building confidence, demonstrating practical value, and creating enough visible momentum that the sceptics follow.

> Francine Katsoudas from Cisco said it plainly at the company's AI Forum in January 2026: "When a leader uses AI, their team adoption doesn't just grow, it doubles. So, you are the 2x multiplier."

What leaders model matters more than what they mandate. The two metrics we track to know whether something is actually changing are time spent with AI tools and confidence, which are a better gauge of progress than number of cool pilots.

03

Process

Every organisation has a graveyard.

Pilots that ran and experiments that showed results, followed by nothing. You ask what happened to the best one that never went anywhere and you almost always find the same answer: a governance gap, an ownership question, or a sequencing mistake, and almost never a technology failure.

> **McKinsey's State of AI research found that nearly 70% of organisations are piloting AI. Fewer than 20% have scaled anything enterprise-wide. The graveyard is full everywhere.**

What most organisations don't see going in: the first job in Process is asking whether your processes are documented at all, before you go looking for the right pilot. Most organisations discover at this stage that their best workflows live in the heads of experienced people. Implicit knowledge walks out the door at 5pm. You can't give a system context it can't access. Codification has to come before automation.

There's something else worth knowing about killed pilots. In our experience, an experiment that looked like a failure often becomes the foundation for something much bigger twelve months later. The thinking doesn't disappear. A structured approach just makes sure you extract the learning before the people involved move on.

The test of this enabler is how many experiments are embedded in daily workflows, used by the whole team, and generating validated learnings whether they succeed or not.

04

Technology

The official technology picture almost always surprises the senior team.

There's what IT has sanctioned. There's what people are using on their own. And then, reliably, there's something someone built over a weekend that six colleagues have quietly adopted because it works better than anything on the approved list.

> **BCG, presenting at the WFA Global Marketer Week in Stockholm in April 2026, reported that 70% of the effort needed to close the AI gap is change management, not tools. Most organisations are underinvesting in one and overfocusing on the other.**

The Technology enabler gives three perspectives on tools for your team. First: enterprise tools: Microsoft, ChatGPT Enterprise, the platforms already paid for and approved. The productivity gains available here are consistently underestimated, and it's where scale usually starts. Second: custom functional tools, built for specific teams or workflows, often grown from a successful pilot. These need to be managed like products, with a named owner, an engaged user community, and usage metrics tracked week to week. Third: on demand or shadow IT.

The reflex is to treat shadow IT as a risk, but it's more useful when read as a signal. People using personal tools instead of approved ones are usually doing so because the approved options don't meet their needs. The colleagues experimenting on their own time are often the first to tell you what to ask for next. Encourage it as learning. Draw the line only where company data is going into unmanaged systems.

05

Governance

Governance is usually the silent killer, and slow reactivity does more damage than malice ever could.

When a grey-area question takes three weeks to get an answer, people stop asking. They stop using, or they use and don't tell anyone. Neither is a good outcome for an organisation trying to move with speed.

> **McKinsey's diagnosis across thousands of organisations is consistent: the primary barrier to AI impact is "not a technological problem, but one of governance."**

The difference between governance that accelerates and governance that creates friction usually comes down to where it lives. Low-maturity programmes govern by memo from legal or brand: "thou shalt not." It creates friction without safety. People work around it. High-maturity programmes govern at team level: short, memorable principles that people can actually act on.

A working example: Arla's in-house agency, the Barn, runs on one AI governance principle for creative content: no fake food. Everyone on the team remembers it. It answers a real question about AI-generated imagery. It doesn't require a 40-page policy.

One distinction that proves useful in almost every governance, compliance and legal conversation: what is playbookable, and what needs a human? Some questions have a definitive answer that can be built into a system. Others involve judgement, context, and brand risk that no rule can fully capture. Helping a team draw that line is some of the most practically useful work in an AI programme.

Governance needs to be a living entity, embedded in products that are safe by design and updated as new speed bumps appear and new things become possible.

WHAT THE FIVE ENABLERS ARE FOR

Five enablers, one job: acceleration.

Treat them as working parts rather than a readiness checklist or a maturity model you file away.

> They're the five things that, working together, allow an organisation to accelerate. To move from "we're doing AI" to "AI is doing what we actually need it to do."

Most organisations have some of them, but few have all five. The ones that stall usually know where the gap is. They just haven't said it out loud in the same room.

The Deft AI Audit maps where you stand across all five enablers, in ten days, at a fixed price, with board-ready outputs. You leave with a clear picture of what's working, where the friction is, and the three changes that would move you fastest.

Working with Deft

Deft helps CMOs and marketing leaders build the functional capability, across strategy, adoption and operations, to move at a different speed than the organisations around them. We work with your tech, across the full AI programme, and stay until the change sticks.

If your AI programme is taking longer than you'd like to map out, or it's up and running but failing to demonstrate the results you'd like, that's the ideal time, as a leader, to start a conversation with us. We believe that a human, open conversation is the easiest and best place to start.

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