# The Business Growth Playbook

## HOW LEADERS USE AI TO AMPLIFY PEOPLE AND GROW THE BUSINESS

Lee Harrington

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# Introduction — The Wrong Win

The first AI win is easy to recognize. A team that used to need three weeks now

needs five days. A manager who used to

wait for analysis until Friday gets it by lunch. A proposal that used to take a

weekend gets turned around in an afternoon. A COO looks at the new velocity,

looks at the budget, and sees a clean line from productivity to savings.

Of course they do. That is the first story the market knows how to tell. AI

made us faster. We took out cost. We became more efficient. We proved value.

Sometimes that story is even true.

The problem is not that efficiency is fake. The problem is that efficiency is

too small a definition of success for what AI is actually making possible. That

is the wrong win, and it can also become a costly one.

The speed of adoption makes that question urgent. Early workplace research

already shows rapid adoption and meaningful time savings. That kind of adoption

does not answer the strategic question. It makes the strategic question

impossible to avoid.

This book is for leaders who can already feel that tension. You may be under

pressure to show AI ROI quickly. Your board understands savings. Your CFO can

put labor reduction into a model. Vendors are happy to tell you that automation

is the cleanest path to value. Your peers want proof, not philosophy.

All of that is real. But if the first use of new AI capability is only to

remove cost, something

important can happen inside the organization without showing up immediately on a

spreadsheet. You can improve the quarter while weakening the future. You can

take out friction without asking what that freed capacity should become. You

can remove visible labor and also remove judgment, continuity, trust, and the

people who might have turned new leverage into new growth.

I am not writing this as the CEO who made every final call. I am writing it as

someone who has spent decades as an architect, builder, practice leader, and

trusted advisor inside enterprise and consulting systems. Clients have tended

to listen to me because I bring integrity, execution depth, and enough lived

experience to tell the difference between what sounds right in the meeting and

what actually strengthens the business over time. That is a different kind of

authority, but it is real. I have seen enough versions of this decision to know

what usually gets measured, what usually gets missed, and what tends to happen

later.

That is why this book keeps coming back to one question: What do we do with the

capacity AI creates?

Not the productivity. Not the demo. Not the vendor claim. The capacity.

Because that is the real leadership variable. AI changes how much one capable

person can do. It changes how quickly a small team can learn, decide, build,

and respond. It changes how much initiative, experimentation, redesign, and

range your organization can hold if you choose to invest in it. Once that new

capacity exists, the central decision is no longer whether AI works. It is

where the gains go.

Some leaders will use that capacity mainly to shrink cost. Some will use it to

build a stronger business. Those are not the same future.

## The Efficiency Trap

The trap in this book is not ignorance. It is pressure.

The pressure is easy to recognize:

• show savings fast

• prove that the AI spend was worth it

• reduce external dependency

• improve margins

• tell a story the market already understands

That pressure makes the reduction-first path feel responsible. It is not the

path of fools. It is the path of leaders working inside incentives that reward

what is visible before they reward what is durable.

Recent work on what some economists call pro-worker AI makes a related

argument: incentives and path dependence can push firms toward automation-first

choices even when more worker-amplifying uses are available. I do not need that

research to believe the point. I have seen it. But it is useful to know that

the pattern is visible beyond any one executive conference room.

That is why the early AI era can be deceptive. It produces real wins, but it

also narrows the imagination of the people receiving them. If the first visible

gain becomes the only category of gain the organization knows how to measure,

then AI gets trapped inside an efficiency story before the larger opportunity

ever has a chance to matter.

This book calls that mistake the Efficiency Trap. The trap is not that

automation works poorly. Often it works very well. The trap is that the

organization starts mistaking visible savings for the full harvest.

## Don't Eat Your Seed Corn

There is an older phrase that names the danger better than most management

language does: Don't eat your seed corn.

If you eat the seed corn, you solve the immediate problem and weaken the next

harvest. You use what should have funded the future to relieve the pressure of

the present. The move can still feel practical. It can even feel wise. That is

why people keep doing it.

The same thing happens when leaders use AI-created leverage mainly to strip

cost out of a business without deciding what kind of stronger organization that

leverage could have funded instead.

The immediate savings may be real. So is the loss.

A spreadsheet can show salary cost. It cannot show you the person who knows why

the client always objects late. It cannot show you the operator who can smell a

bad requirement before it turns into a bad build. It cannot show you the

cross-functional translator who keeps commercial, technical, and organizational

reality from drifting apart. It definitely cannot show you the future team that

never forms because every gain got harvested before it could be reinvested.

That is one of the central arguments of this book. AI does not only force you

to ask what can be automated. It forces you to ask what cannot be cut lightly,

what should be amplified, and what kind of future the organization is trying to

buy with the capacity it now has.

## Capacity, Not Just Productivity

`Productivity` is useful language, but it is not enough for this book.

Productivity tells you something got faster. Capacity tells you that a new

strategic asset now exists. That distinction matters.

If one skilled operator can now do the work that used to consume two or three

people's worth of time, the leadership question is not only whether the work

got cheaper. The deeper question is what new strategic asset now exists and

where it should go.

That is why this book treats capacity as the main unit of analysis.

Every time AI creates more room, leadership has to answer three questions:

• capacity for what

• capacity in whom

• capacity measured how

If those questions are never asked, the business tends to fall into what I call

capacity misallocation. The gains are real enough to celebrate, but nobody can

point to what the new capacity actually built. The organization becomes more

efficient and less ambitious at the same time.

That is an invisible failure. It will not look like failure in the quarter it

happens. It will show up later as the team that never formed, the capability

that never matured, the initiative that never launched, the next-level operator

who was never given enough leverage to become what they might have become.

## What Abundance Actually Comes From

This book makes a stronger claim than "do not cut too deeply." It argues that

AI does not create abundance by itself. Abundance comes from empowered humans.

That line matters because the dominant AI story still leans in another

direction. The loudest narrative in the market is usually some version of this:

AI gets better, labor matters less, the future belongs to the companies that

can replace more people faster than their competitors.

I do not think that is a good future, and I do not think it is the deepest

source of value.

The better future is one where AI increases the range of capable people. I have

seen what that looks like when one high performer is suddenly able to produce

two days of serious work in one day, or when the right first enterprise AI move

is not automating a process but giving five exceptional people real leverage

and coaching them hard enough to change what the organization thinks is

possible.

It helps leaders discover people they were already underusing. It helps

operators become more dangerous in the best sense of the word: more able to

see, decide, act, and create.

That is not sentimentality. It is a strategic view of where real advantage

comes from once generic throughput gets cheaper everywhere.

That is also more consistent with the best empirical evidence than the loudest

replacement rhetoric suggests. Some of the strongest field studies so far show

that generative AI often raises productivity unevenly, with especially large

gains for less experienced workers and meaningful gains for already capable

workers when the task fits the tool well. That is not the profile of a simple

one-for-one replacement story. It is the profile of a leverage story.

## The Lewis and Clark Pattern

I saw this most clearly when I proposed what I called the Lewis and Clark

expedition model for enterprise AI adoption.

The organization already had large-scale AI plans in motion, but the real

constraint was familiar. It had not simply opened the newest tools to everyone,

because serious companies move at the pace of security, governance, and trust.

So the right first conversation was not:

How do we automate one process and remove cost?

It was:

How do we safely give real leverage to a small number of exceptional people,

coach them seriously, learn what becomes possible, and then decide what should

scale?

That was the heart of the proposal. Start with five high performers. Give them

serious tools. Mentor them the way a high-performing operator actually has to

learn these systems, not as passive software users, but as people being taught

how to work with new leverage. Build in security mitigations from the start.

Make the first phase small enough to control, serious enough to matter, and

explicit enough to learn from.

That was not a cost program. It was an amplification program.

The point was not to make one workflow cheaper and then declare victory. The

point was to see what happened when capable people were given meaningful

leverage under conditions the organization could trust. The point was to find

out whether the future got bigger when the people got stronger.

That is the pattern this book wants leaders to see: not enterprise theater, not

abstract transformation slogans, not vague "start small" advice.

A real expedition:

• chosen people

• protected mission

• serious tools

• intentional coaching

• learning that transfers back into the institution

That kind of bounded first move says something larger about the organization.

It says the future may belong less to broad undifferentiated rollout and more

to small trusted teams with unusual range.

## What This Book Promises

This is not a book about prompts, vendors, or AI fashion. It is a book about

leadership under leverage. It is for enterprise transformation and operations leaders, business unit

leaders, and executive sponsors who need a better answer than "prove savings

and move on."

By the end of this book, you should be able to do five things with more clarity

than most organizations have right now:

• recognize when the first AI win is too small a definition of success

• see what is actually at risk when cost-cutting outruns judgment

• begin to identify which people and teams should be amplified, not merely optimized

• decide where AI-created capacity should go

• lead a program that builds a stronger business, not just a leaner one

There is an economic argument in this book because there has to be. The

reduction-first path feels rational for real reasons, and those reasons deserve

respect before they deserve challenge.

But there is also a human argument here, and it is not secondary.

A world that simply replaces humans with AI is not a good world. It is not a

better company just because fewer people remain on the chart. It is not a

stronger organization if the gains only show up as extracted cost while the

future surface of the business quietly shrinks.

The better future is not anti-efficiency. It is larger than efficiency.

It is a future where leaders use AI to reduce friction, yes, but also to

amplify people, protect what matters, and grow the business.

That is the work ahead.

The next chapter starts where the pressure starts: with the efficiency story

everybody understands.

# Chapter 1 — The Efficiency Story Everybody Understands

If the introduction named the wrong win, this chapter explains why smart people

keep choosing it.

The short answer is not that leaders suddenly lost judgment when AI arrived.

The short answer is that the reduction-first story is the story modern

organizations already know how to hear. It is measurable, defensible, legible

in a board deck, and disciplined in a budget review.

And when the first real AI gains appear, it arrives fully formed before a

leader has had much time to imagine a larger use for the capacity that just got

created.

That is what makes this story so powerful. It does not need to be invented. It

is waiting for the moment the numbers begin to move.

## Why the Story Wins So Fast

Imagine the first serious AI win inside a large organization. A finance team

closes a recurring analysis package in half the time.

A customer operations team handles a wave of issues with fewer escalations. A

technology group produces deliverables in days that used to take weeks. A sales

operations lead gets proposal support or reporting support far faster than

before.

No one has to teach leaders how to interpret that. The first conclusion comes

naturally: If this work now takes less effort, some of the cost should come

out. That is not irrational.

It is the most familiar kind of managerial math there is. A business finds more

efficient ways to do the same work and then expects the cost structure to

change. Every major function in a company has been taught, explicitly or

implicitly, to treat this as responsibility rather than as imagination.

That matters because many arguments against reduction-first AI strategy make the

mistake of sounding surprised by it. They speak as though leaders should have

met the first visible gains in a state of philosophical openness, ready to

launch a conversation about human amplification and future optionality.

That is not how most organizations behave under pressure. Most organizations

already have a narrative lane for savings. They do not yet have one for

capacity investment.

## Boards Understand Savings Faster Than They Understand Capability

Part of the problem is communicative. Savings travel well.

If a leader says:

• we reduced contractor spend

• we compressed cycle time

• we automated low-value work

• we reduced external dependency

everyone in the room knows what category of success that belongs to.

Capability is harder to carry. If the same leader says:

• we increased the range of our best operators

• we created capacity for a stronger customer response system

• we protected knowledge and reinvested capacity into new internal capability

• we widened the future surface of the business

the room gets quieter. Not because those things do not matter, but because they

do not yet move through the institution with the same ease.

They require interpretation. They demand a longer time horizon. They ask people

to believe that not every real gain appears first as reduced spend.

Savings are not only easy to measure. They are easy to narrate, and that

matters more than many leaders realize.

A strategy often wins its first round of support not because it is stronger,

but because it is easier to explain to the people who approve budgets, judge

performance, and ask whether the AI investment is working yet.

The market reinforces the same instinct. Most AI vendor stories still orbit the

same promises: do more with less, automate repetitive work, reduce manual

effort, improve efficiency, unlock productivity.

Those promises are not false. They are simply easier to package than a more

demanding claim:

this will change what your strongest people are capable of and create capacity

that should be reinvested with care.

The first statement sounds like software. The second sounds like leadership.

That is why leaders are not only responding to internal pressure. They are

swimming in an external narrative that keeps narrowing the question.

## Good Reduction, Necessary Reduction, Dangerous Reduction

One reason this topic gets muddy fast is that people jump from "cost-first is

insufficient" to "therefore cost reduction is wrong."

That is sloppy. Some reduction is good. Some reduction is necessary. Some work

should get cheaper and stay cheaper.

If AI removes genuinely low-value repetition, reduces avoidable coordination

drag, or lowers the effort needed for work that nobody should still be doing by

hand, leaders should not feel guilty about that. Businesses do need better

cost structures. Mature operators know that.

The question is not whether any cost should come out. The question is whether

the organization mistakes the first removable cost for the full strategic

answer.

Good reduction removes drag. Necessary reduction may respond to real budget

pressure or a business that has become bloated in places it cannot afford.

Dangerous reduction is different.

Dangerous reduction takes visible efficiency gains and treats them as a license

to shrink the organization before it has decided what future those gains should

fund. It pulls cost out of tomorrow while telling itself it is only cleaning up

today.

That is where the seed corn gets eaten.

## What the Early Win Hides

Early wins are powerful because they are visible. What they hide is just as

important.

When a leader sees work get faster, three different interpretations are now

available:

• the organization can do the same work with less cost

• the organization can do more or better work with the same people

• the organization can use some of the gains for efficiency and some to build

something it could not build before

The first interpretation usually arrives first because it is the easiest to

prove. The other two require judgment.

They require someone to say:

Yes, the savings are real. But if we spend the whole gain here, what will we

wish we had invested in six months from now? Which people should become more

powerful instead of merely more efficient? Which new capability becomes

possible now that friction has dropped?

Those are harder questions because they are allocation questions, not merely

measurement questions. They force leaders to decide what the business is trying

to become rather than only what it can stop paying for.

That is why so many organizations become more efficient and less ambitious at

the same time. It is not because they hate growth. It is because efficiency has

a default story and growth requires an explicit one.

## The Management Reward System Is Aligned With the Wrong First Answer

This is where the argument becomes more uncomfortable. Reduction-first logic

survives not only because it is legible, but because many management systems

reward it more quickly than they reward reinvestment.

Recent research argues that AI development and deployment can be pulled toward

automation-first uses by incentives, ideology, and path dependence. That is a

useful way to say something operators already feel in practice: the system does

not need to hate people in order to underinvest in them. It only has to reward

the faster story first.

If a leader can show:

• lower run cost

• reduced vendor spend

• fewer people doing the same work

• faster turnaround at a lower unit cost

that leader often looks disciplined.

If another leader says:

• we used the first gains to amplify a small number of high-judgment people

• we preserved some capacity to build a stronger internal operating system

• we protected a set of Knowledge Carriers and redirected effort into future

capability

that leader may be right. They may also sound slower, less certain, and harder

to score in the next quarter.

This is one reason I keep saying the trap is pressure, not ignorance.

Leaders do not need a lecture about the existence of incentives. They live

inside them. What they do need is better language for seeing when the reward

system is pulling them toward an answer that is too small for the moment they

are in.

The old operating instinct says: capture the gain.

The better instinct asks: what percentage of the gain should be captured, what

percentage should be reinvested, and what specifically are we trying to make

possible with the part we do not harvest immediately?

That second conversation is much rarer.

## This Works. Until It Doesn't.

The hardest thing about the reduction-first path is that it often works for a

while. That is why people trust it.

An organization may genuinely see:

• lower spend

• faster turnaround

• cleaner reporting

• fewer escalations in the first phase

and conclude that the strategy has already proved itself.

Sometimes the first quarter after a reduction-first move is exactly the data

the leader hoped for. That does not settle the argument. It only means the

visible half of the argument is visible first.

What takes longer to appear is what never happened because the gain was already

spent. The initiative that never got staffed. The operator who was never given

enough leverage to become a force multiplier. The internal range that quietly

thinned while the dashboards still looked efficient.

That is the pattern I have watched more than once. The early gains are often

real. The story they encourage is often too small. That is how companies gut

future capability and call it discipline.

This is why the phrase `capacity misallocation` matters.

It names the failure mode where a business takes a real gain and sends all of

it into the easiest bucket to defend. Money is saved. Applause may follow. But

no one can point to what the new capacity actually built, because the

organization never really decided that it should build anything.

That risk gets easier to miss when adoption itself becomes the headline. Early

survey research shows how quickly generative AI has already entered real work,

along with measurable time savings. But fast adoption and early savings do not

tell leaders where the gains should go. That is still a management decision,

and often the least developed one.

The result is a company that gets better at proving efficiency and weaker at

expanding possibility.

## The Difference Between a Saving and a Strategy

A saving is not automatically a strategy. A saving may be part of a strategy.

It may even be a necessary part. But if the entire story of AI value is told in

savings language, leadership is no longer deciding what the gain is for. It is

only reporting where the gain went.

A strategy answers what future is being built, what capabilities are being

protected, which people are being amplified, and what kind of organization will

exist after the gains are allocated.

A savings report answers what cost came out and how fast it came out.

That is why the reduction-first story, however understandable, is not yet a

complete answer to the AI moment. It is the story everybody understands. It is

not yet the strategy that everybody needs.

The next chapter moves from pressure to consequence. Once leaders start taking

the obvious gains, what exactly gets removed along with the cost?

# Chapter 2 — What Gets Lost When You Cut Too Deep

If the last chapter explained why the reduction-first path feels responsible,

this chapter explains what that path can quietly destroy.

The easiest thing to measure is labor cost. The hardest thing to measure is

what that labor was holding together. That is why this chapter matters.

A spreadsheet can show:

• salary cost

• contractor spend

• cycle-time improvement

• reduced external dependency

• apparent labor overlap after automation

It cannot show you what breaks three months later.

It cannot show you the customer relationship that becomes harder to steady when

pressure rises. It cannot show you the operator who remembers why an earlier

workaround existed and what goes wrong if a new team tears it out too quickly.

It cannot show you the cross-functional translator who keeps commercial,

technical, and organizational reality from drifting apart until the drift

becomes expensive.

Those things are real. They are simply not equally legible. That is why

organizations that cut too deeply often look cleaner before they look weaker.

## The Organization Knows More Than the Org Chart Can Show

One of the most expensive management mistakes is to assume the formal structure

of the organization tells you where its value lives.

It does not. Some value is visible. Some is documented. Some is encoded in process maps,

training decks, architecture diagrams, CRM notes, ticket history, and operating

playbooks.

But a great deal of continuity lives elsewhere. It lives in memory, in

judgment, in relationship trust, in workarounds nobody

is proud of but everybody still depends on. In the human ability to notice when

something small is about to become costly because it has happened before under a

slightly different name.

This is not sentimentality. It is operational reality.

Research on tacit knowledge and organizational forgetting points in the same

direction. The exact terms are different, but the core point is similar:

important organizational value often sits in forms that are hard to codify and

easy to underestimate until performance starts degrading.

Organizations run on more than formal authority and visible output. They also

run on informal coherence. Someone knows how a certain customer actually makes

decisions, not how the account plan says they make decisions. Someone knows

which internal dependency always says yes in the meeting and blocks progress

later. Someone knows that a technical problem is really a political problem with

technical symptoms.

You often do not see the value of that knowledge most clearly while it is

present. You see it when it is gone.

## Knowledge Carriers

This is why the phrase `Knowledge Carriers` matters in this book. Knowledge

Carriers are the people whose value is larger than their visible output.

They carry context the organization has never fully written down. They hold

continuity across decisions, teams, customers, systems, and compromises that

were never documented cleanly enough to survive easy transfer. They are often

the people who know what kind of mistake the organization is about to repeat

because they were around the first time it was made.

Some are senior. Some are not. That matters.

Organizations often assume the most important people to retain after AI will be

the most visibly strategic or the most visibly productive. Sometimes that is

true. Sometimes the more dangerous loss is the person in the middle who can

translate between functions, steady a tense relationship, or recognize trouble

before the dashboard moves.

Sometimes the most valuable person is the one whose best work looks like:

• fewer fires

• fewer misunderstandings

• fewer escalations

• fewer reasons for executives to panic

Those contributions are easy to undervalue because they often appear as the

absence of failure.

That is one reason older research on knowledge-intensive firms still matters

here. Studies of tacit knowledge capture have shown that firm performance can

depend heavily on knowledge that does not travel cleanly through documents

alone. The label in this book is mine. The underlying economic reality is not.

## A Person Can Look Replaceable Right Before You Need Exactly Them

This is not a theoretical problem. Years ago, I watched a technically strong consultant drift toward termination

because the visible story around him had become simple. The client was unhappy.

The relationship felt rough. The easiest conclusion was that he was not working

out.

That was the visible story. It was not the real one.

When I got into the actual communication trail, the deeper issue was not weak

capability. It was a communication breakdown wrapped around technical work the

client still needed and largely respected. Once that became clear, the job was

not to replace the person. The job was to coach the relationship, repair the

exchange, and let him reestablish trust directly.

That happened. A month later the client was praising him.

Why does that story matter in a book for business leaders?

Because the value at risk was never just task completion. It was continuity,

recoverable trust, technical judgment, and a person who could still become more

valuable once the real problem was identified. The original story made him look

like a labor problem. The deeper reality was that he was carrying value the

surface read had missed.

That is what organizations do to themselves when they cut by visible output

alone.

They fire the wrong story first and only discover later that the system knew

more than the org chart said it knew.

## What Gets Removed Along With Cost

When leaders take labor out of a system, they do not remove one thing. They

remove a bundle.

They remove context: the remembered details that let people act quickly without

having to rediscover the situation from scratch.

They remove continuity: the through-line between old decisions, present

constraints, and future moves.

They remove pattern recognition: the human ability to say, we have seen this

kind of problem before and it gets expensive if we miss it early.

They also remove relationship memory, informal teaching, exception handling,

and the workarounds that should probably be redesigned but still keep the system

functioning until redesign happens.

And they remove some of the human slack from which new capability often

emerges, because organizations do not invent much when every remaining person

is operating at the edge of confusion.

This is one reason aggressive cuts can make an organization look cleaner before

they make it weaker. The cost leaves immediately. The hidden functions linger

just long enough for the decision to be declared a success.

Then the second-order effects begin. Projects require more explanation. Decisions take longer. New people repeat old

mistakes. Customers get subtly harder to serve. Escalations become more

frequent. The people who remain inherit more ambiguity and less context.

Training gets thinner because the informal teachers are gone. Every new problem

takes longer to understand because the people who used to recognize it early

are no longer in the room.

None of that shows up as neatly as salary savings.

## AI Does Not Automatically Capture What Walks Out the Door

This is another place where the reduction story gets too convenient. Some leaders implicitly believe that if work has passed through systems long

enough, and if AI can now search, summarize, and generate effectively enough,

then the organization has already captured most of what matters.

It has not. AI can retrieve documented knowledge. It can synthesize artifacts. It can help

teams externalize more than they used to. All of that is useful.

But AI does not automatically preserve the human context that was never fully

encoded in the first place.

It does not know why a certain customer stopped trusting a reporting flow after

a bad quarter three years ago. It does not know which internal team will agree

in the steering committee and quietly block implementation later. It does not

know why a technically elegant option will fail politically unless somebody in

the room has lived that terrain long enough to say so.

That is why organizations can become strangely confident at the exact moment

they are becoming more fragile. Retrieval improves. Visible work arrives

faster. Documentation may even get better because AI makes it cheaper to produce.

What stays invisible is the silence of what was never written down in the first

place. The system answers more quickly and leaders conclude the system knows

more completely. Those are not the same thing.

That distinction is worth making carefully. Some recent work argues that AI can

help codify forms of knowledge that were previously more local or tacit. I

think that is true as far as it goes. But it does not erase the practical

reality that organizations can still lose context, judgment, and continuity

faster than they realize when the people holding them leave.

## Continuity Is Not Just Defensive

One reason this chapter matters is that continuity is usually framed as a

defensive concern: protect continuity, avoid disruption, retain institutional

memory. All of that is true. It is still only part of the picture.

Continuity is not only about preventing failure. It is also about enabling

growth.

You grow faster when the organization does not have to rediscover itself every

quarter. You can build new capability faster when the people shaping the next

move still understand the last three moves. You can trust new AI-enabled

systems more when they are being built on top of remembered judgment rather

than reconstructed from fragments.

This matters especially in functions where trust compounds. Customers do not

buy output alone. Internal leaders do not sponsor change based on dashboards

alone. People bet on teams they believe understand the terrain, remember what

matters, and will not make them pay twice for the same lesson.

When leaders cut too deeply, they do not just reduce cost. They often reduce

the quality of future growth.

And there is empirical support for the forgetting side of that warning. In

operations research, organizational forgetting has been shown to erode quality

gains over time. Different context, same lesson: what a system once learned is

not automatically retained just because the organization once knew it.

## The Beginning of the Do Not Cut List

This is where a practical rule starts to emerge. Before leaders ask how much labor can be removed, they should ask which people

the organization cannot afford to lose even if AI has made part of their

visible work faster.

That is the beginning of the Do Not Cut List: not a sentimental list, a

strategic one.

Protect the people who carry trust.

Protect the people who translate between functions.

Protect the people who teach others how the work really gets done.

Protect the people whose visible output understates their stabilizing effect on

the system.

Protect the apprenticeship nodes that create the next generation of judgment,

not only the current generation of throughput.

The list will vary by organization. The principle will not.

That is the deeper cost of dangerous reduction. It does not only take labor out

of the present. It thins the future before the business has admitted that is

what it is doing.

The next chapter begins the turn. Once leaders can see what the extraction path

removes, they can finally ask what the investment path makes possible instead.

# Chapter 3 — The Multiplier Model

By the end of the last chapter, the cost of the extraction path should feel

clear.

AI creates real gains. Those gains make reduction tempting. Reduction can look

disciplined, rewarded, and even successful for a while. It can also quietly

remove the context, trust, continuity, and human range the business will wish

it still had later.

That still leaves the central strategic question unresolved.

If the wrong answer is to treat AI mainly as a cost-harvesting engine, what is

the right answer?

This chapter offers the book's central fork.

I call it the Multiplier Model because the most important decision is not

whether AI gets used. That part is already happening. The real decision is what

kind of force leaders want AI to become inside the business.

Does it become an extraction engine?

Or does it become a multiplier?

## One Capability, Two Very Different Futures

The easiest mistake leaders make at this stage is to talk about AI as though

the tool determines the outcome.

It does not.

The same underlying capability can drive two very different strategies.

One leader uses AI to reduce the number of people required for the same basic

work. Labor compresses. Cost comes out. The visible efficiency becomes the main

story of value. The business gets leaner and tells itself that this is what

serious adaptation looks like.

Another leader uses the same class of tools to increase what strong people can

handle, improve how work flows, preserve the judgment and continuity that

matter most, and redirect the freed capacity into deeper customer value,

stronger internal capability, faster learning, and new growth.

That is not just an appealing theory. It is broadly consistent with the best

early field evidence. In customer support, consulting, and software

development, the strongest studies so far point to heterogeneous gains: AI

often amplifies workers unevenly rather than acting like a clean substitute for

everyone at once.

Same pressure. Same technological moment. Different governing idea.

That is the fork.

## The Extraction Path

The extraction path is the more intuitive one, especially in the early phase.

The logic sounds mature. Use AI to reduce labor. Remove cost faster than the

market reprices you. Simplify the organization. Prove to the board, to finance,

and to anxious peers that you are taking AI seriously and converting it into a

legible return.

There is a reason this path attracts smart leaders. It promises proof quickly.

It creates visible movement. It looks decisive without demanding a fully formed

theory of the future.

At first, it can even look superior.

The organization gets leaner. Some work gets faster. Some budgets look

healthier. Certain teams appear more efficient. Executive narratives become

easier to tell. The market may reward the appearance of discipline long before

it tests the deeper consequences.

That is why the extraction path can feel like the grown-up option.

It also creates a predictable set of downstream problems.

When leaders take the gains mainly as cost removal, they often shrink the

surface area from which stronger capability could have grown. They weaken the

internal bench before the next wave of change arrives. They make it harder for

underused high-ceiling people to become force multipliers. They become more

efficient and less adaptive at the same time.

The result is not always collapse. More often it is narrowing.

The business gets better at defending a smaller future.

## The Investment Path

The investment path starts from a different premise.

It assumes that the productivity unlocked by AI is too valuable to spend only

once.

Instead of asking only, "How much labor can we remove?" this path asks a harder

set of questions:

- which people become more valuable when amplified
- which workflows should be redesigned rather than merely sped up
- what context and continuity must be protected
- where the newly created capacity should go
- what stronger business the organization is now in a position to build

This path still cares about efficiency. It is not anti-cost and it is not anti-discipline. It simply treats efficiency as fuel rather than destination.

On the investment path, AI is used to multiply the reach of people who carry judgment, trust, pattern recognition, and learning capacity. It is used to make relationship owners more responsive, operators more scalable, experts more leveraged, internal teachers more effective, and small trusted teams more capable than their headcount once allowed.

This is the path that turns productivity into capacity rather than only into savings.

## Efficiency Extractor or Capacity Investor

This is where the leadership mirror becomes useful.

Some leaders become Efficiency Extractors. They are not foolish or immoral.

They are simply governed by a narrow definition of success. When AI creates a gain, they know how to capture it, report it, and move on. Their instinct is to harvest.

Other leaders become Capacity Investors. They see the same gains, but they treat them as an allocation problem before they treat them as a reporting win.

Their instinct is to decide what future the gain should fund.

The difference is not personality. It is operating logic.

An Efficiency Extractor asks:

• how much cost can come out

• how quickly can we prove savings

• how do we defend the gain in the next review cycle

A Capacity Investor asks:

• what percentage of this gain should be harvested

• what percentage should be reinvested

• which people and teams become more powerful if we do

• what new capability, resilience, or growth surface becomes possible

That is why this book treats `Capacity Investor` as more than a clever label. It

is a different leadership posture under leverage.

## What the Paths Look Like After Twelve Months

The fork becomes easier to understand when you stop treating it like a belief

system and start looking at it over time.

Twelve months into the extraction path, an organization may look cleaner.

Headcount is lower. Some run costs are down. Certain workflows are faster. The

leadership team has a set of efficiency stories ready for the next budget

conversation.

What it often does not yet have is a larger answer for what the gains were for.

The institution has moved, but mostly by compression.

Twelve months into the investment path, the organization may actually look

messier from the outside because reinvestment is harder to narrate than cuts.

But internally, something more interesting is beginning to happen. A few people

have become visibly more powerful. Small teams can handle work that once would

have required larger coordination structures. Certain patterns are being reused.

Capacity is starting to show up as better response, stronger internal learning,

faster experimentation, or more credible moves at the edge of the business.

The extraction path produces faster proof.

The investment path produces stronger options.

## The Rach 2 Problem

I saw the difference in compressed form when I was part of a GitHub Copilot

pilot even though I already knew the work I was doing.

That detail matters.

The tool was not teaching me the job. It was amplifying work I already knew how

to do. On the first day I had meaningful leverage from it inside a constrained

enterprise environment, I was not participating in an ordinary productivity

pilot. I was seeing what happens when friction drops for someone who already

has the judgment to use the gain well.

In roughly two hours I produced what would normally have been a full day's work

and a persuasive case study for the pilot. A couple of hours later I delivered

another day's worth of serious work and a second, different case study. Leaders

were impressed, but the important point was not that I had become cheaper. The

important point was that expertise had just become more dangerous in the best

sense of the word.

That is the heart of the multiplier argument.

The gain was not just speed. It was range.

That is also why the recent field experiments matter. In customer support,

consulting, and software development, researchers are finding that generative

AI does not affect everyone in the same way. The biggest gains often show up

where the worker-tool fit is strong and where less experienced people can draw

on patterns they did not previously have at hand. That does not weaken the

multiplier case. It sharpens it. Leverage changes the shape of capability.

And the strategic question was not, "How do we remove a person because this

person got faster?" The strategic question was, "What can we now do because a

capable person has just become more powerful?"

That is the question too many organizations skip.

## Why the Better Path Feels Harder

The investment path is strategically stronger, but it is managerially harder.

It asks leaders to protect certain people when the visible spreadsheet argues

for savings. It asks them to redesign work instead of merely compressing it. It

asks them to make explicit allocation decisions before the gain disappears into

the easiest budget bucket.

Most of all, it asks for a growth thesis.

That is the difference between saying, "AI helped us reduce effort," and

saying, "AI created capacity, and we have decided where that capacity should

go."

The first statement is much easier to authorize.

The second demands actual leadership.

A multiplier is not a pep talk. It is not a vague belief in people. It is a

practical operating choice: keep the right people, redesign the workflow around

leverage, raise the range of trusted operators, reinvest capacity deliberately,

and convert the gains into stronger customer value, stronger internal systems,

or stronger growth.

The jagged-frontier research matters here too. These tools can help

substantially on tasks that fit them and disappoint badly on tasks that do not.

That makes leadership judgment more important, not less. Someone still has to

decide where to trust the tool, where to redesign the workflow, and where human

judgment remains the real bottleneck.

That path is not softer than extraction.

It is harder.

It demands more discipline, more intentionality, and more managerial honesty.

It just uses that discipline to build rather than merely to cut.

## A Preview of the Rest of the Book

Once the Multiplier Model becomes visible, the rest of the book starts to

organize itself.

If the organization chooses extraction, the next questions are mostly about how

to keep shrinking without losing control.

If it chooses multiplication, the next questions become much more interesting:

- who gets amplified and who gets compressed
- which underused people are ready for more range
- where the capacity should go

• what must be protected

• what must be redesigned

• what kind of future the organization is now capable of funding

Those are the questions the rest of this book is trying to answer.

But the first answer has to be this one:

AI does not force one strategy on an enterprise.

It forces a choice.

# Chapter 4 — Who AI Replaces, Who It Multiplies

Once leaders accept that AI creates a fork, the next question gets practical

very quickly.

Where, exactly, should they expect compression?

And where should they expect multiplication?

This is where many organizations make their next serious mistake. They take a

true observation at the level of work and turn it into a false conclusion at

the level of people.

AI really does compress some work. It can reduce the time required to draft,

search, summarize, format, classify, route, compare, rewrite, and generate

first-pass output. It can reduce friction in ways that are genuinely material.

Leaders should not pretend otherwise.

The mistake is to assume that because some work compresses, the people nearest

that work automatically become less valuable. In many cases the opposite is

true. When friction falls, the people with judgment, context, trust, and

learning range become more powerful, not less. Their output expands. Their

surface area expands. Their reach expands.

That claim is increasingly supported by the empirical record. Across customer

support, consulting, and software development, the strongest early field

studies point to heterogeneous effects. AI often compresses effort while

shifting the relative value of judgment, learning, and context rather than

simply eliminating the need for capable people.

That is why the right question is not simply, "What jobs can AI do?"

The better question is, "What kind of human value grows when execution

friction drops?"

For a handbook, that means this chapter has one concrete job:

help leaders classify work and people more accurately before they redesign

roles, funding, or teams.

## AI Usually Compresses Work Before It Replaces Capability

Leaders often speak about AI as though it replaces whole roles in one clean

motion. In practice, that is not usually how the first serious impact appears.

What AI tends to compress first is not an entire human capability bundle, but a

set of repeatable tasks inside the bundle.

It reduces the cost of:

• first drafts

• routine synthesis

• basic lookup and retrieval

• standard reporting

• repetitive formatting

• straightforward classification

• low-judgment coordination work

• obvious pattern matching

Those are real gains. Some of that work should get cheaper and stay cheaper.

Some of it should disappear from the human workload almost entirely. A serious

leader should want that.

But a role is rarely just a stack of obvious tasks. A role usually contains a

mix of visible output and less visible value: escalation judgment, exception

handling, customer memory, informal influence, translation between functions,

pattern recognition, coaching, quality control, and the ability to notice when

the process no longer matches reality.

AI can compress the visible task layer while leaving the deeper human layer

intact, and sometimes more important than before.

That is why a person can look more replaceable on paper at exactly the moment

they are becoming more strategically valuable in practice.

The first handbook rule is simple:

start by classifying the work, not the job title.

## The Wrong Mental Model: Cheapest Equivalent Labor

The reduction-first organization tends to use one mental model for nearly

everything:

If AI can do a meaningful percentage of what this person was doing, the goal is

to remove as much of the human cost as possible.

That sounds financially disciplined. It is often strategically clumsy.

It assumes the value of a person is the sum of the tasks management happened to

measure. It ignores the possibility that the newly compressed work was never

the most valuable part of the role in the first place. It also ignores what

happens when the human on the other side of that compression can now operate at

a different level of range.

I have seen this pattern repeatedly. A leader notices that a strong operator,

analyst, architect, or product person can now complete the visible mechanics of

their work much faster. Instead of asking what new level of contribution has

just become possible, the system asks whether this person is now oversized for

the box they occupy. Then it starts thinking about cost.

That is the wrong move because the gain did not erase the person's value. It

changed where the value can now appear.

The easiest way to say it is this:

AI often replaces effort long before it replaces judgment.

And in organizations that still need judgment, that difference matters.

You can see that pattern in the literature too. Some of the best field evidence

shows large gains in throughput and quality under the right conditions, but not

a neat story in which human capability stops mattering. If anything, the better

the worker-tool fit, the more important it becomes to know what kind of human

asset is actually being amplified.

That leads to the second handbook rule:

do not let the finance view become the only view of the role.

## The People Who Become More Valuable

The people who gain the most from AI are not always the people with the most

formal authority. They are the people whose contribution expands when friction

falls.

That usually includes people who carry one or more of the following forms of

value.

First, people with trusted judgment. When a person reliably makes good calls in

messy conditions, AI does not remove their value. It raises the amount of

ground they can cover before fatigue, time, and coordination friction slow them

down.

Second, people with deep domain context. Someone who understands the customer,

the internal system, the history of past failures, or the hidden constraints of

the operation can use AI to move faster without losing the thread. Someone

without that context can move just as fast in the wrong direction.

Third, people who translate across boundaries. Many organizations quietly run on

people who can explain the technical to the business, the business to the

technical, operations to product, product to finance, or field reality to

headquarters. Those translators become more valuable when AI can handle more of

the drafting and first-pass synthesis around them.

Fourth, people with unusual learning velocity. Some individuals absorb a new

tool, pattern, or domain and turn it into working leverage very quickly. Those

people are often the first real multiplier candidates because they do not just

use the tool. They extend what the organization can learn from the tool.

Fifth, people who teach. Every enterprise has a handful of people whose real

value is larger than their direct output because they raise the range of others.

When AI lowers the cost of examples, feedback, templates, and working sessions,

good teachers become force multipliers.

These are not sentimental categories. They are economic categories.

If AI lowers the cost of execution, then the relative value of judgment,

context, translation, learning, and teaching goes up.

That is one place where the book's lived patterns and the research line up.

Older work on tacit knowledge and more recent work on AI augmentation both

point to the same managerial problem: visible tasks are easier to count than

embedded expertise, but that does not make them more valuable.

That is the basic multiplication pattern.

If the technology removes routine drag around a person and the person becomes

capable of producing better decisions, broader coverage, cleaner coordination,

or stronger colleagues, that person is not primarily a replacement candidate.

That person is an investment candidate.

## Knowledge Carriers Are Early Multiplier Candidates

This is where the logic of the last chapter connects directly to this one.

The people we called Knowledge Carriers are often among the first people

leaders should think about multiplying rather than replacing. Their value was

already larger than their visible output. AI changes the economics around them

because it can take lower-value friction out of the day while preserving the

part that actually matters.

That is one reason the Don story matters beyond rescue.

A shallow read of Don would have said: here is a communication problem, a

performance concern, a person creating enough visible friction that management

should consider removal.

A more forensic read said something different: here is a person who may be

misfiring in visible ways, but whose deeper value has not been understood

correctly yet. Coaching and better framing might recover far more than

replacement would.

That same logic applies in the AI era. If the visible, repetitive, or

mechanical part of someone's work starts compressing, the wrong response is to

assume the person has become the waste. The better response is to ask whether

the lower-friction environment finally gives you a chance to see what they

could become with the right leverage.

That will not be true for everyone. Some work really does shrink. Some roles

really do need fewer people over time. This book is not asking leaders to deny

that reality.

It is asking them to get the classification right before they start cutting.

## What Work Actually Compresses

Leaders need a more precise vocabulary than "white-collar work" or "knowledge

work" if they want to make good decisions here.

The work most likely to compress has some combination of these traits:

- the rules are reasonably knowable
- the output format is clear
- the task can be evaluated close to the point of production
- the consequences of error are limited or easily caught
- context is either documented or not especially deep
- trust is helpful but not central

This is why AI is often strong at first drafts, standard responses, routine

analysis, code scaffolding, document cleanup, status synthesis, and repetitive

internal coordination. None of that should surprise us.

When the work fits that shape, compression is real. Leaders should redesign

around it. Sometimes that means fewer hours. Sometimes fewer people. Sometimes

it means the same people now handling much more than before.

The important point is that compressed work should be identified at the level

of work, not guessed at from organization charts.

If you do that poorly, you cut the wrong layer. You remove the human who

carried the exceptions, the judgment, and the trust because the visible portion

of the role happened to be the easiest thing to benchmark.

Recent field research makes a related point from a different angle. On tasks

inside the model frontier, workers with AI can improve materially. Outside that

frontier, performance can get worse. That is one reason role-level

generalizations are so dangerous. The real question is not "AI or no AI?" It is

"Which parts of this role compress, which parts still require judgment, and

what happens when we confuse the two?"

If you are using this chapter as a handbook, start with a short list like this:

• work that is rule-heavy and repeatable

• work where first-pass output is most of the job

• work where errors are easy to catch quickly

• work where context is already well documented

• work where trust and persuasion are not central

That list does not tell you whom to cut. It tells you where redesign can begin

without pretending every role is the same kind of asset.

## What People Actually Multiply

The people most likely to multiply under AI usually have a different profile.

They are people whose value depends on one or more of these conditions:

• their work is full of exceptions, edge cases, or judgment calls

• they operate with context that is only partly documented

• they hold trusted relationships that make coordination or persuasion easier

• they connect domains that do not naturally understand each other

• they can turn faster execution into better decisions, not just more output

• they can teach, coach, or spread methods to others

If AI removes administrative drag around those people, they do not simply

produce the same amount of value faster. They can often take on broader scope,

support more stakeholders, coach more effectively, resolve more issues, and

work at a level of pace that used to require either burnout or bureaucracy.

That is multiplication.

It is one reason the strongest candidates for amplification are not necessarily

the cheapest people to scale, but the people whose ceiling rises materially

once friction falls.

The wrong organization asks, "Can AI do some of this person's current work?"

The better organization asks, "If AI removes the drag around this person, what

larger game can they now play?"

That question should become a standing management habit.

It changes the conversation from labor substitution to capability expansion,

which is where the investment path starts to become real.

## A Better Classification Test

When leaders are deciding whether AI is compressing work or multiplying a

person, they need a practical test.

I would start with four questions.

First, where does the real value sit? Is it mostly in predictable production,

or in judgment, exception-handling, trust, translation, and learning?

Second, what happens when friction drops? Does the work mostly disappear, or

does the person become capable of handling broader scope with the same quality?

Third, if this person left tomorrow, what would the org chart miss? Would the

organization mainly lose labor capacity, or would it lose context, continuity,

teaching, confidence, and the ability to move cleanly across functions?

Fourth, can this person spread leverage? Some people use AI only to improve

their own throughput. Others quickly turn new leverage into reusable patterns,

better standards, stronger colleagues, and broader system capability. Those

people are almost always multiplier candidates.

These questions will not make every decision easy. They will make the decisions

less shallow.

They move the conversation from "What percentage of this role is automatable?"

to "What kind of human asset are we actually looking at?"

That is a much better leadership conversation.

If you want to use the test quickly, here is the handbook version:

If most of the value sits in predictable output, the work is a compression

candidate.

If most of the value sits in judgment, trust, translation, learning velocity,

or teaching, the person is a multiplication candidate.

If both are true, redesign the role before you redesign the headcount.

## The Real Risk: Multipliers Hidden Inside Administrative Roles

One reason leaders get this wrong is that multiplier candidates do not always

sit in glamorous roles.

Sometimes they are in support, operations, delivery, enablement, project

coordination, internal consulting, or hybrid business-technical positions that

look ordinary from a distance. On the org chart, they may look like overhead.

In practice, they may be the people keeping complexity from turning into drag.

These are often the people who know which stakeholder really matters, which

process can be bent safely, which dependency always fails late, which customer

history changes the answer, or which team member can absorb more range if given

the chance.

When AI arrives, these people are easy to misclassify because some visible

portion of their day is exactly the kind of work AI can compress.

If a leader looks only at the compressible layer, they will conclude that the

role is shrinking.

If the leader looks at the deeper pattern, they may discover someone who can

now coordinate more, teach more, spot more, and extend the organization

further than before.

That is why leaders need to be careful about treating apparently

administrative roles as automatically low-future roles. In many enterprises,

the hidden multipliers are sitting there.

This is often where the handbook becomes most useful, because these are exactly

the roles a spreadsheet will flatten. A support, enablement, or coordination

role can look generic until you ask who keeps work from bouncing, who keeps

teams aligned, who catches weak requirements early, and who knows how to get

real progress across organizational seams. AI may compress the visible admin

layer while making the deeper coordination layer more leveraged than before.

## From Classification to Deliberate Investment

Once leaders see the difference between compressed work and multiplied people,

the job changes.

It is no longer enough to announce that the company believes in human

amplification. Leaders have to classify work more accurately, protect the

people whose value expands under leverage, and redesign roles so the freed

capacity does not get swallowed back into old reporting structures.

That means:

• compressing routine work aggressively where the risk is low

• protecting judgment-heavy people before they get mistaken for cost

• giving multiplier candidates broader scope, better tools, and real coaching

• measuring expanded range, not only reduced effort

• watching carefully for people whose future value is larger than their current

box

This is the first real operating discipline of the investment path.

You cannot invest capacity well if you cannot tell the difference between labor

that is becoming cheaper and humans who are becoming more powerful.

If I were turning this into a Monday-morning leadership move, I would do three

things:

• pick one function and map the work inside three or four roles before talking

about headcount

• identify one or two likely multiplier candidates and ask what broader scope

they could handle with AI leverage

• protect those people long enough to test the higher-range version of the role

That is not the whole playbook. It is the beginning of one.

## The Bridge to the Next Chapter

At this point, many leaders will realize something slightly uncomfortable.

Some of the people most worth amplifying are already inside the organization,

and they have been underestimated for years.

They are not always the most visible people.

They are not always the loudest people.

They are often the people whose range has been capped by old structures,

narrow role definitions, weak sponsorship, or managers who only measured the

work right in front of them.

That is where the next chapter goes.

If Chapter 4 is about learning to classify the difference between compression

and multiplication, Chapter 5 is about learning to see the underused talent

that many organizations are sitting on already.

# Chapter 5 — The People You Didn't Know You Had

If the last chapter was about classifying work and people more accurately, this

chapter is about a harder truth:

many organizations already have people inside them who could become much more

valuable under AI, and leadership has not learned how to see them yet.

That is not always because leaders are careless. Sometimes it is because the

signals are easy to miss. The people with the most future range are not always

the most polished presenters, the most politically obvious candidates, or the

most decorated resumes in the room. Often they are the people whose current job

has trained the organization to underestimate them.

They live inside roles that look bounded, operational, supportive, technical,

or narrowly functional. They have learned the work deeply enough to see around

corners, but not always visibly enough to get sponsored for larger things. They

solve more than they advertise. They learn faster than their box suggests. They

quietly make other people better.

Then AI shows up, friction drops, and the organization faces a choice.

Does it treat those people as labor that just became cheaper?

Or does it recognize that some of them are exactly the people whose ceiling is

about to expand?

This chapter is a handbook chapter. Its job is to help leaders find those

people before the system misclassifies them.

## Why Organizations Miss Them

Most organizations are better at measuring visible output than hidden ceiling.

They know how to reward volume, responsiveness, presentation polish, formal

scope, and current-title importance. They are less reliable at recognizing

judgment under pressure, unusual learning velocity, cross-boundary influence,

or quiet teaching power until those things have already been turned into a more

visible role.

That creates a predictable pattern. The organization often notices people after

they have already been promoted, already been sponsored, or already been given

a wider lane. It misses how much range they were carrying before that happened.

That is one reason the AI moment matters. When friction drops, hidden ceiling

becomes easier to see. A person who used to be constrained by documentation

work, repeated explanation, manual synthesis, or coordination overhead can

suddenly show more of what they are actually capable of.

If leaders are paying attention, AI does not only help them find efficiency. It

helps them discover people.

## The Wrong Way to Look for Talent

The wrong way to look for AI-era multiplier candidates is to ask a prestige

question:

Who are our stars?

That question sounds reasonable. It often leads somewhere shallow.

It leads to the most visible people, the people who already have sponsorship,

the people whose current role already signals importance, and the people whose

performance is easiest to narrate in the existing system.

Some of those people absolutely should be amplified. But if leaders stop there,

they will usually miss a different category of person: the underused

high-ceiling operator.

These are people the organization already depends on, but not yet in the right

way. Their present role captures only a fraction of the future value they could

create if someone deliberately widened their range.

That is why the better question is not:

Who already looks important?

The better question is:

Who becomes disproportionately more valuable when friction falls?

That is a very different search.

## Five Signals of an Underused High-Ceiling Person

You do not need a personality test or a nine-box ritual to start finding these

people. You need better signals.

The first signal is consistently strong judgment.

This person makes better calls than their title predicts. They see trouble

early. They notice weak assumptions. They know when something sounds clean but

will fail in reality. Other people start checking with them before acting, even

when the org chart does not require it.

The second signal is trusted context ownership.

This person carries real operating memory. They know how the process actually

works, not just how the documentation says it works. They can explain what has

been tried before, what hidden dependencies matter, and where an apparently

simple move will run into history, politics, or customer reality.

The third signal is unusual learning velocity.

This person absorbs tools, domains, and patterns quickly enough that the

organization keeps underestimating how fast they can grow. They do not just

complete the next assignment. They quickly become better than expected at

adjacent ones.

The fourth signal is broader range than the current box implies.

This person is functioning inside one role but already shows evidence of being

able to operate across functions, levels, or problem types. They can talk to

technical people and business people. They can move from analysis to judgment,

from execution to design, from support to teaching. The current role is not the

full shape of the person.

The fifth signal is positive force multiplication.

This person makes other people better. They explain clearly. They create useful

patterns. They lower confusion. They coach without drama. When they get

stronger, they do not only produce more themselves. The system around them gets

better.

Those are the signals I would trust more than polished self-presentation or raw

busyness.

## The Diagnostic: Who Gets Bigger When AI Arrives?

If Chapter 4 gave you the compression versus multiplication test, this chapter

adds a talent-specific version of it.

Ask these five questions about any person you are considering for early AI

amplification.

First, does this person already outperform the box they are in?

Not in title. In judgment, learning, range, and trust.

Second, if the repetitive drag around their work fell by half, would they

simply finish sooner, or would they start operating at a meaningfully broader

level?

Third, when this person gets stronger, does only their output improve, or does

the capability of the surrounding team improve too?

Fourth, if you gave this person better tools and serious coaching, would the

organization learn something useful from the experiment even if the role itself

did not change immediately?

Fifth, has the system been underrating this person because it has only measured

the visible layer of the role?

If the answer to three or more of those questions is yes, you are probably not

looking at a simple efficiency case. You are looking at a multiplier candidate.

That does not mean automatic promotion. It means the person is worth protecting

and testing before you let cost logic flatten the opportunity.

## What These People Often Look Like in Real Life

These people often sit in roles the organization does not immediately rank as

strategic. They may look like delivery leads, analysts, architects, operations

managers, internal consultants, or project and enablement leads. The common

feature is not job family. It is hidden surplus capability.

These are often the people who have been operating under a friction tax for

years. They spend too much time packaging, chasing, translating, cleaning up,

summarizing, or stitching systems together manually. Once AI removes part of

that drag, the organization gets a clearer look at what their real contribution

could be.

This is one reason I keep saying the future of abundance comes from empowered

humans. The abundance is not in the tool by itself. The abundance is in what

happens when the organization finally sees and backs people it had previously

confined to smaller boxes.

## One Person the System Could Have Missed

I have watched this happen often enough that it no longer feels surprising, but

it still matters every time.

In one annual review cycle, I was looking at someone whose formal role did not

fully explain the effect they were having on the system. On paper, the person

looked solid but not spectacular. The visible output was good. The title was

modest. Nothing in the standard performance language made them look like an

obvious high-potential bet.

But that was not the full picture.

When the work got messy, people kept going to this person anyway. They were

trusted. They learned quickly. They could absorb more than one kind of problem.

They explained difficult things cleanly. When they got stronger, other people

around them got better too. The system was already using them as more than

their role description admitted.

That was the tell.

The right conclusion was not "this person is doing fine where they are." The

right conclusion was "this person is under-deployed."

Once that became visible, the next move was not vague encouragement. It was a

different kind of investment: more room, more expectation, better support, and

more serious belief in what the person could carry. The person expanded into

it.

That is the pattern I want leaders to notice. Many organizations do not miss

their future multipliers because those people are absent. They miss them

because the system has normalized a small reading of what those people are.

## Why Coaching Matters So Much

Finding these people is not enough.

If leaders identify hidden multipliers and then simply give them access to a

tool, they will get some gains. They will not get the full return.

Underused high-ceiling people usually need three things:

• better tools

• wider permission

• serious coaching

The coaching piece matters because amplification is not only a software event.

It is an operating change. People need help learning how to structure the work,

how to judge the output, how to expand responsibly, how to avoid shallow

overconfidence, and how to turn their personal gains into reusable capability

for others.

In practice, that coaching usually means a few concrete moves:

• helping them decompose work so AI is used on the right layer instead of the

whole problem indiscriminately

• reviewing output with them so speed does not outrun judgment

• widening the lane intentionally by giving them a slightly larger mission, not

just a faster version of the old one

• asking them to externalize what they are learning so the gain starts to

spread

This is why the "give me five high performers" line matters so much in this

book. It is not really a line about software deployment. It is a line about

coached amplification.

The organization does not just need people with potential. It needs a way to

develop that potential under leverage.

## What I Learned Watching People Expand

One pattern I have seen repeatedly is that people often have more range than

their current environment has ever required from them.

Sometimes a person is not underperforming. They are under-deployed.

That distinction matters.

I have seen people who looked bounded by role become much more powerful once

they had better structure, better sponsorship, and better leverage. I have also

seen leaders misread those same people because the system only recognized the

formal part of their contribution and never the underlying capability.

That is one reason I want this chapter to stay practical. If leaders are going

to use AI well, they need a way to tell the difference between someone who is

merely adequate in a narrow role and someone whose range has been artificially

capped.

AI can reveal that difference faster than many organizations are used to. It

can also hide it if leaders treat every productivity gain as a reason to shrink

the labor box before they test the human upside.

## A Monday-Morning Talent Scan

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would ask

them to do a short talent scan in one function.

Start with five to ten people, not fifty.

For each person, ask:

• where do they already show judgment beyond their title

• where do they carry context the system depends on

• where do they learn unusually fast

• where do they improve the capability of others

• what friction currently keeps that range from showing up more fully

Then sort them into three groups:

• likely compression case

• unclear / redesign first

• likely multiplier candidate

Do not do anything with headcount yet.

First, pick one or two multiplier candidates and run a serious test:

• give them better AI leverage

• coach them intentionally

• widen the lane slightly

• watch for increased range, not just increased speed

That is how this becomes a handbook instead of a slogan.

## The Trap to Avoid

There is a temptation at this point in the argument to become romantic about

hidden talent.

Not everyone is an undiscovered multiplier. Not every role contains invisible

greatness. Some work really will compress cleanly. Some people will not want a

wider lane. Some managers will overread one strong person and build a fantasy

around them.

This chapter is not arguing for wishful thinking.

It is arguing against lazy classification.

The point is not that everyone is secretly extraordinary. The point is that

many organizations are leaving real human upside on the table because they have

not built a disciplined way to see it.

If AI lowers the friction around work and leaders still cannot recognize who

has expandable range, they will keep harvesting the present and missing the

future.

## The Bridge to the Next Chapter

Once leaders can see underused high-ceiling people, the next question becomes

harder and more economic.

What should all of this newly visible potential be for?

Where should the capacity go?

What stronger business is the organization actually trying to build with the

people it is choosing to amplify?

That is the next chapter's job.

# Chapter 6 — Every AI Program Needs a Growth Thesis

By this point in the book, a leader should be able to do two things more

clearly than when we started.

First, they should be able to see why the reduction-first path is so tempting.

Second, they should be better able to tell the difference between work that is

compressing and people who are becoming more valuable under leverage.

That still leaves the most important management question unresolved.

What is all of this for?

Once AI creates capacity, where should it go?

That is the question many organizations postpone for too long. They do not

usually postpone it because they are lazy. They postpone it because the first

gains show up faster than the strategic answer does. A team starts moving

faster. A function starts saving time. A budget line gets easier to defend. The

visible wins arrive before the leadership thesis does.

That is backwards.

Every serious AI program needs a growth thesis.

By that I mean something very simple:

a clear answer to what stronger business the organization is trying to build

with the capacity AI creates.

Another way to say it is this:

a growth thesis is where your AI gains are going before they disappear.

Without that answer, the gains will still go somewhere. They will just go to

the easiest bucket instead of the most strategic one.

## The First Question Is Not Technical

One of the cleanest examples I ever saw of this was not actually about AI. That

is one reason it still matters.

I was in a meeting where a smart team was trying to figure out what data should

be used for a new system. The energy in the room was technical. Which tables?

Which fields? Which sources were available? Which structure made implementation

easier?

Then the table got hit, figuratively and almost literally, with the right

question:

How does this business make money?

That changed the room.

It forced everyone to stop treating the available data as the starting point and

start treating business value as the starting point. It turned a technical

conversation back into a business conversation.

That is the same move leaders need to make with AI.

The first question is not:

What can we automate?

The first question is:

What stronger economic, operating, or customer outcome are we trying to fund?

If you skip that step, you will still get automation. You may even get good

automation. What you will not get reliably is a stronger business.

## Capacity Without a Thesis Gets Harvested

This is why the language of capacity matters so much in this book.

Capacity is not a slogan. It is a budgeting and leadership problem.

Once new capacity exists, leaders have to decide at least three things:

• capacity for what

• capacity in whom

• capacity measured how

Those questions are not philosophical. They are how the organization decides

whether AI becomes a one-time extraction event or a compounding asset.

If leaders never answer them explicitly, the gains will tend to flow toward:

• immediate cost relief

• visible productivity reporting

• local workflow convenience

• budget buckets that already have political legitimacy

That is not because those destinations are evil. It is because they are easy.

A growth thesis interrupts that default. It says:

We are not only asking where the first savings appeared. We are deciding what

future these gains are supposed to help pay for.

That is a very different leadership posture.

## What a Growth Thesis Is

A growth thesis is not a motivational sentence. It is not "we believe in

innovation." It is not "AI will transform the enterprise." It is not a vague

assertion that better tools will somehow lead to better outcomes.

A real growth thesis has four parts.

First, it names the kind of value the organization is trying to create. Better

customer response. Faster product learning. Better decision quality. Stronger

internal capability. New market exploration. Greater resilience in a critical

function. It has to point to something the business would actually care about.

This is the part that keeps the program tied to the business instead of to the

tool. If the value target is vague, the rest of the thesis will become vague

with it.

Second, it identifies where AI-created capacity should go first. Not everywhere.

First.

This matters because most programs become diffuse before they become strategic.

Choosing where the first meaningful capacity goes is how a leadership team

signals what it actually believes matters.

Third, it makes explicit which people, teams, or operating nodes are expected

to become more powerful as a result.

That is the human part of the thesis. If no one becomes more capable, more

effective, or more strategically useful, the program is probably still living

inside a throughput story.

Fourth, it gives leaders a way to tell whether the gains are building that

future or merely disappearing into general efficiency.

This is where many programs get weak. They can point to activity. They can

point to time saved. They cannot point to what the saved time is actually

funding. A real growth thesis needs some visible sign that the stronger future

is becoming more real: better response quality, stronger bench, faster

experimentation, more credible moves in the market, or better decision quality

in places that used to lag.

If those four parts are missing, what you have is not yet a growth thesis. What

you have is motion.

## The Wrong Thesis: "Show Me Savings"

Plenty of organizations do have a thesis. It is just narrower than they admit.

It sounds like this:

• automate repetitive work

• reduce labor dependency

• improve throughput

• show ROI fast

That is a thesis. It is simply an extraction thesis.

It tells the organization where gains should go, what success looks like, and

what will be rewarded first. In that sense it is often stronger operationally

than a lot of more aspirational AI language, because at least it is clear.

That is one reason savings-first programs keep winning. They may be too small,

but they are not vague.

Leaders who want something larger need to be at least that explicit.

They cannot answer a specific extraction thesis with a fuzzy belief in human

potential. They need a clearer allocation story.

## The Better Thesis: Build a Stronger Business

The better thesis does not reject efficiency. It puts efficiency to work.

It says something like:

• use AI to remove low-value friction

• protect the people and nodes where judgment and range matter most

• direct some of the freed capacity into a named business advantage

• measure whether that advantage is becoming more real over time

That is still disciplined. It is simply disciplined toward a larger outcome.

In practice, a growth thesis usually falls into one or more of these categories:

• customer growth

• faster and smarter response

• deeper account coverage

• better service quality

• operating capability

• stronger internal systems

• better cross-functional coordination

• better management leverage

• product and market learning

• faster experimentation

• better sensing at the edge

• quicker iteration around real demand

• resilience

• less fragility in critical workflows

• more bench strength

• better continuity under stress

These are not interchangeable. That is why leaders have to choose.

The easiest way to choose is not to ask which category sounds most ambitious.

Ask where the gap between your current capability and your required future

capability is most dangerous. Start where more leverage would most clearly

change the quality of the business.

The point is not to fund everything. The point is to know what kind of future

the first meaningful gains are meant to support.

## The Structured Economic Case

Some readers will understandably ask a harder question:

Why not just take the savings?

Sometimes the answer is: you should take some of them.

This chapter is not arguing that every gain must be reinvested. It is arguing

that leaders should stop pretending the only economically serious use of AI is

immediate extraction.

The structured economic case for a growth thesis is straightforward.

If you harvest everything immediately, you get:

• faster proof

• easier budgeting

• cleaner short-term reporting

• lower run cost

What you often give up is:

• stronger internal capability

• a more powerful bench of people

• faster learning in ambiguous work

• customer and market improvements that take longer to surface

• options you cannot buy quickly later once the people and context are gone

That is the trade.

The problem with savings-only economics is not that the savings are fake. The

problem is that they are often measured more carefully than the options being

destroyed.

This is one place where research usefully reinforces lived experience. Recent

work on AI incentives argues that firms can be pulled toward automation-first

uses not only because those uses are technically available, but because they

fit existing incentive systems so well. That should make leaders more careful,

not less. A decision can be legible and still be too small.

The better economic question is not:

How much can we cut?

It is:

How much should we harvest, how much should we reinvest, and what are we trying

to make possible with the part we keep alive?

That is the economic discipline of a Capacity Investor.

It is also where the people logic from the last two chapters comes back in. A

growth thesis is not only a budget decision. It is a decision about whether the

people you are choosing to amplify will simply run faster inside the old

system, or help build a stronger one.

## A Simple Allocation Pattern

If leaders want a practical starting point, I would use a simple three-bucket

pattern.

Bucket one: harvest.

Take some of the gains as real efficiency. Clean up work that should stay

cheaper. Reduce obvious waste. Relieve real budget pressure where needed. This

keeps the thesis connected to reality.

Bucket two: strengthen.

Use some of the gains to make critical people, teams, or workflows more

powerful. This is where amplified operators, Knowledge Carriers, translators,

teachers, and underused high-ceiling people get more leverage instead of being

flattened by cost logic.

Bucket three: build.

Use some of the gains to fund something the organization does not currently do

well enough: better customer responsiveness, stronger product learning,

stronger internal tooling, better decision quality, or a new strategic edge the

business has been too friction-bound to pursue.

Not every organization will divide the gains the same way. That is fine.

The point is that if all three buckets are never on the table, the organization

is not really allocating. It is defaulting.

## The Test: Can You Finish This Sentence?

Here is the handbook test for whether an AI program has a real growth thesis.

Can the leadership team finish this sentence cleanly?

We are using AI-created capacity to make our business better at _____ by

strengthening _____ and measuring progress through _____.

If a team cannot finish that sentence without drifting into generic productivity

language, they do not yet have a growth thesis.

They have enthusiasm, activity, or a vendor plan.

This is also a useful board and CFO test. If the sentence becomes clearer when

you remove all references to labor savings, then the program has a chance to

become strategic. If the sentence collapses without the savings language, then

you have learned something important.

## A Monday-Morning Capacity Review

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would run a

capacity review with five questions.

• where have we already seen real AI-created gains

• how much of those gains have already been silently harvested

• which people or teams should become more powerful because of the gain

• what specific business advantage are we trying to fund with the remaining

capacity

• how will we know six months from now whether that advantage is becoming real

Then I would force the team to write down three things:

• one harvest decision

• one strengthen decision

• one build decision

That simple exercise does not finish the job. It does stop the organization

from pretending that capacity allocation will somehow happen automatically.

It will not.

Leaders have to decide it.

## The Bridge to the Next Chapter

Once a leadership team has a growth thesis, the next question becomes more

portfolio-shaped.

What kinds of AI work should actually lose funding priority?

What kinds of work should gain it?

How do you tell the difference between AI investment that creates theater and

AI investment that builds the future?

That is the next chapter.

# Chapter 7 — Stop Funding the Wrong Work

Once a leadership team has a growth thesis, the next problem becomes much more

practical.

How do you use that thesis to make portfolio decisions?

Which AI work should move up the priority list?

Which work should be slowed, cut back, or stopped entirely?

This is where many organizations lose discipline again. They may now agree that

AI should do more than reduce cost. They may even have language for capacity,

amplification, and a stronger future. But when actual funding decisions show

up, the old habits come back.

The loudest demo gets attention. The tool with the cleanest sales story gets

budget. The initiative with the easiest ROI narrative gets approved. The pilot

that makes everyone feel modern gets protected.

Meanwhile, the work that would actually strengthen the business often gets less

attention because it is harder, slower, or less visually impressive in the

first meeting.

That is why this chapter exists.

If Chapter 6 asked, "What is our growth thesis?" this chapter asks, "What work

belongs in a portfolio built to serve it?"

## Most AI Portfolios Drift Toward Theater

AI theater is not fake work in the sense that nothing happens. Something often

does happen. A demo works. A pilot launches. A vendor gives a convincing

presentation. A dashboard lights up. A workflow gets faster in a narrow area. A

team feels momentum.

AI theater is work that produces activity without increasing capability.

That is what makes AI theater dangerous. It usually contains just enough truth

to protect itself.

The problem is not that the work is imaginary. The problem is that it does not

build the future the organization says it wants.

It consumes attention, money, management bandwidth, and institutional patience

without materially strengthening the business's real capabilities, real people,

or real strategic position.

That is why a portfolio needs a harsher test than "did something interesting

happen?"

It needs to ask:

did this work build the future we said AI was for?

## What the Wrong Work Looks Like

If leaders want a practical filter, I would start by identifying five patterns

of wrong work.

First, demo-driven work.

This is work funded because the artifact is impressive, not because the

capability is strategically important. It wins the room. It does not change the

business much.

Second, convenience work without thesis fit.

This is work that makes a local team happier or faster but does not clearly

connect to a named strengthen or build decision. Local convenience can be real.

It should not automatically outrank strategic leverage.

Third, pilot collections with no transfer model.

This is one of the most common forms of AI theater. A company runs many pilots,

learns little that transfers, and ends up with a shelf of isolated examples

instead of a stronger system.

Fourth, automation that removes friction in low-value places while leaving

high-value constraints untouched.

This often looks efficient and still misses the point. The organization gets

faster where speed mattered least and stays weak where judgment, continuity, or

coordination mattered most.

Fifth, spending that outsources learning.

This happens when leaders fund tools, vendors, or one-off builds in ways that

leave the internal organization no more capable than before. The work may get

done. The business does not get stronger.

I have seen this in a familiar form: an organization funds a stack of pilots

that each look promising in isolation, each give leadership something visible

to talk about, and none of them leave behind methods, talent, or operating

knowledge that really changes the next decision. The portfolio feels active.

The institution stays about where it was.

These patterns should not all be banned. But they should become harder to fund

by default.

## The Better Funding Question

Instead of asking whether a proposed AI initiative looks promising, leaders

should ask a more demanding question:

what future capacity does this create inside the business?

That question immediately changes the quality of the conversation.

It forces leaders to ask:

• which part of our growth thesis does this serve

• who becomes more capable because of it

• what gets stronger after the pilot ends

• what learning transfers back into the institution

• what future decision becomes easier because this work exists

If those answers stay vague, the work may still be useful. It is just probably

not top-tier portfolio work.

That is one of the hardest moves in leadership. Useful is not the same as

strategic.

## A Three-Level Portfolio Filter

If I were helping a leadership team clean up its AI portfolio, I would use a

simple three-level filter.

Level one: does the work fit the growth thesis?

If the initiative cannot be connected clearly to a harvest, strengthen, or

build decision that leadership already believes in, it should move down the

list immediately.

Level two: does the work increase internal capability?

If the initiative succeeds, who inside the business gets stronger? What can the

organization do afterward that it could not do before? If the answer is

"nothing, but the vendor can keep doing it for us," leaders should be careful.

Level three: does the work create reusable leverage?

Does it create methods, patterns, talent, judgment, workflows, or operating

knowledge that can spread? Or is it a narrow local improvement that dies where

it was born?

An initiative does not need to score perfectly on all three. But if it scores

poorly on all three, it is almost certainly consuming scarce AI capacity that

should go somewhere better.

## The Internal-Capability Test

This is the question I would force into almost every AI funding conversation:

when this project is over, what will we know how to do better ourselves?

That question does not mean every project must be built internally. It does

mean every project should be judged partly by whether it leaves the enterprise

stronger.

The strongest AI investments usually do one or more of these things:

• strengthen a critical human node

• improve a key workflow in a reusable way

• create a pattern that can spread

• deepen the organization's judgment about where AI works and where it does not

• leave behind better tools, better operators, and better operating knowledge

That is what future-building work looks like.

If a project produces a nice artifact and leaves none of that behind, leaders

should question its place in the top tier of the portfolio.

## What the Filter Should Actually Do

This filter should change funding priority in two directions.

It should move down work like:

• generic pilots with no transfer plan

• highly visible demos with weak thesis fit

• AI projects chosen mainly because the vendor story is clean

• local convenience tools that do not strengthen a strategic node

• work that increases dependency without increasing internal capability

• automation in low-value areas while higher-value constraints remain untouched

And it should move up work like:

• initiatives that strengthen high-judgment people and teams

• work that improves customer-facing quality or responsiveness in strategic

areas

• programs that create reusable methods and learning, not isolated wins

• efforts that reduce friction around critical operators, not just around easy

tasks

• projects that make the organization more capable after the first use case is

over

• work that closes a dangerous gap between the business's current capability and

the capability its future requires

That is the point where a portfolio stops being a collection of AI activity and

starts becoming a leadership instrument.

## A Monday-Morning Portfolio Review

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would put the

current AI portfolio on one page, bring in the growth thesis from Chapter 6,

and ask six questions of each item.

• which part of our growth thesis does this serve

• what future capacity does this create

• who gets stronger if this works

• what learning or methods transfer back into the business

• what happens after the pilot ends

• if we did not fund this, what strategic opportunity would we actually lose

Then I would sort the portfolio into three groups:

• keep and accelerate

• redesign to fit the thesis

• stop or deprioritize

That exercise is useful because most organizations have at least a few projects

they are funding by momentum rather than by decision.

The point is not to humiliate those projects. The point is to recover scarce

budget and leadership attention for work that actually builds the future.

### The Bridge to the Next Chapter

Once leaders stop funding the wrong work, they still need a better answer to a

positive question:

where should reinvested capacity actually go?

What are the main destination categories for capacity that is meant to

strengthen and build, not just to be harvested?

That is the next chapter.

# Chapter 8 — Build the Capacity Portfolio

Once leaders stop funding the wrong work, they still have to answer a more

constructive question:

where should reinvested capacity actually go?

That question sounds obvious until a team tries to answer it in a real meeting.

People say they want growth, capability, resilience, and better outcomes all at

once. They do. The problem is that those are not one bucket. They are different

destinations, and different destinations create different futures.

That is why a serious growth thesis needs a capacity portfolio, not just a

belief in reinvestment.

Leaders need a way to decide:

• which kinds of gains should be harvested

• which kinds should strengthen the current system

• which kinds should build something the business does not yet have

This chapter is about the strengthen and build side of that decision.

It does not repeat Chapter 6's case for why capacity must be allocated. It

assumes that. The job here is to show the main places capacity can go once a

leadership team has decided not to spend the whole gain on immediate

extraction.

## Capacity Is Not One Thing

One reason organizations struggle here is that they talk about capacity as

though it were a single resource.

It is not.

AI can create different kinds of usable surplus:

• time

• attention

• judgment surface

• managerial reach

• customer coverage

• experimentation bandwidth

• learning velocity

• coordination capacity

Those are not interchangeable.

If a team gains time but uses none of it to improve decisions, that produces a

different outcome than a team that gains experimentation bandwidth and uses it

to learn faster. If a function gains managerial reach and uses it to strengthen

coaching, that produces a different outcome than a function that gains customer

coverage and uses it to deepen relationships.

That is why leaders need destination categories. Without them, the word

`reinvestment` stays vague and the default budgeting instinct wins again.

## The Four Main Destinations

If I were helping a leadership team build a first capacity portfolio, I would

start with four destination categories.

The first is growth.

This is capacity invested directly into expanding customer value, revenue

surface, market responsiveness, or the business's ability to pursue demand it

could not serve cleanly before.

The second is capability.

This is capacity invested into making the organization itself stronger:

better operators, better systems, better internal tools, better decision

quality, better cross-functional execution, stronger teaching, and stronger

bench.

The third is resilience.

This is capacity invested into reducing fragility in important parts of the

business: continuity, backup strength, better recovery, lower dependency on a

few overloaded people, and better performance under stress.

The fourth is new value.

This is capacity invested into work the business has not really had room to do

before: new offers, new experiments, new adjacent opportunities, new service

layers, new internal products, or new forms of expression and leverage that did

not fit inside the old friction level.

These categories overlap at times. That is fine.

The point is not perfect taxonomy. The point is that leaders need a usable map

for where capacity can go besides the default bucket of cost extraction.

## Growth Capacity

Growth capacity should usually be the easiest category to explain and one of

the hardest to execute well.

This is where leaders use AI-created gains to help the business:

• respond faster to customers

• cover more accounts or stakeholders with quality

• improve service consistency

• increase speed from signal to action

• support more selling, advising, or delivery capacity without simply adding

headcount

This destination matters because many organizations say they want growth while

allocating almost all early AI gains to cost discipline. That is a mismatch.

If growth is genuinely the objective, some meaningful share of the first gains

has to increase the organization's customer-facing power.

The question is not "can AI help growth?" Of course it can.

The question is whether leadership is willing to let some of the gains stay

alive long enough to improve how the business actually reaches and serves the

market.

## Capability Capacity

Capability capacity is easier to undersell and often more foundational than

growth capacity.

This is where the business uses AI-created gains to become better at doing its

own work:

• stronger internal tools

• better operator leverage

• better handoffs and coordination

• better managerial coaching

• better training and apprenticeship

• better quality of internal decision support

This category matters because it is where a lot of compounding starts.

A company that uses AI to strengthen a few critical operators, improve internal

systems, and spread better methods may not look spectacular in the first

quarter. But it is building a stronger machine. It is making future growth more

credible instead of merely more hoped for.

This is also where many of the people from Chapters 4 and 5 come back into the

portfolio. If leaders have correctly identified underused high-ceiling people,

capability investment is often the first place to prove that those people can

carry more.

## Resilience Capacity

Resilience is the category leaders talk about most honestly after something has

already gone wrong.

That is too late.

AI-created capacity can be invested in resilience before a failure forces the

conversation.

That includes:

• reducing dangerous single points of failure

• making context less dependent on one exhausted expert

• creating more backup strength in critical workflows

• improving continuity in customer or operating systems

• reducing the fragility created by overloaded managers or overloaded

translators

This category matters because a lot of organizations are more brittle than

their dashboards admit.

They look efficient because a few trusted people are carrying too much.

If AI lowers friction around those people and leadership simply extracts the

gain, the fragility remains. If leadership uses some of the gain to spread

strength, codify useful patterns, and build bench, the organization becomes

harder to break.

That may not look exciting in a board deck. It can still be one of the highest

value uses of capacity in the whole portfolio.

## New Value Capacity

This is the most easily neglected category and sometimes the most strategic.

New value capacity is what becomes possible when the organization is no longer

spending every bit of human range on maintaining the current system.

This is where capacity can fund:

• adjacent offers

• new service layers

• better insight products

• internal products that unlock future scale

• experiments that test a new market hypothesis

• new forms of customer intimacy or responsiveness

• creative or intellectual assets the business previously did not have room to

produce

This category matters because the future of abundance does not come only from

doing the old work faster. It also comes from making room for work that was

never affordable before.

I have seen this personally in more than one domain. Once friction drops,

people do not only produce existing output more quickly. They can suddenly

articulate more, build more, explore more, and create things that had been

sitting just outside the practical range of the old system.

That is true in business too.

A leadership team that never allocates any capacity to new value is probably

still thinking about AI inside the boundaries of the current org chart.

## How to Choose Among the Four

A team does not need to fund all four destinations equally.

In fact, it probably should not.

The right question is:

which destination best addresses the most dangerous gap between the business we

have and the business we need?

That may be growth if the organization cannot currently reach the market with

enough speed or quality.

It may be capability if the internal system is too weak to support the next

stage of growth.

It may be resilience if a few overloaded people are quietly carrying too much of

the enterprise.

It may be new value if the company is too trapped in current-state operations to

explore the next source of advantage.

This is where the portfolio becomes a real leadership choice.

The question is not which category sounds smartest. The question is which

category would most change the quality and future surface of the business if it

received the next meaningful unit of capacity.

## A Balanced First Portfolio

If a leadership team wants a practical starting point, I would not begin with

ten destination categories or a complex scorecard.

I would begin by asking for one concrete investment in each of these three

areas:

• one strengthen-the-business investment

• one reduce-fragility investment

• one build-something-new investment

Then I would force one more question:

which of these, if it works, would make growth more credible within twelve

months?

That last question matters because it keeps the portfolio from turning into an

internal-improvement wishlist. The point is not to admire a balanced map. The

point is to place capacity where it changes the business.

## The Rach 2 Lesson Applied More Broadly

One of the things the Rach 2 story proved earlier was that the gain from AI was

not just speed. It was range.

Chapter 8 is what that insight looks like at portfolio level.

If one capable person gets faster, leaders can harvest the gain.

If one capable person gets more range, leaders can ask a better question:

where in this portfolio would expanded range produce the most business value?

That is the move many organizations never make. They see productivity and stop.

They do not move on to range, destination, and portfolio choice.

The whole point of a capacity portfolio is to make that second move explicit.

## A Monday-Morning Capacity Portfolio Session

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would ask

them to bring three things into one room:

• the growth thesis from Chapter 6

• the current AI portfolio from Chapter 7

• a short list of the people and nodes they most want to strengthen

Then I would ask them to sort proposed reinvestment into the four destinations:

• growth

• capability

• resilience

• new value

For each item, I would ask:

• why this destination

• why now

• what stronger business it is meant to create

• what person, team, or workflow becomes more powerful

• what visible sign would tell us this is becoming real

Then I would make them choose the top three bets.

Not twenty.

Three.

That is how a capacity portfolio starts behaving like a real leadership system

instead of a category exercise.

### The Bridge to the Next Chapter

Once leaders know where the capacity should go, the next question becomes one

of program design.

How do you structure pilots, partner work, governance, and learning so that the

organization actually develops amplified capability instead of scattered AI

activity?

That is the next chapter.

## Chapter 9 — Redesign the Program

By now the book has given the reader a leadership system:

• a growth thesis

• a way to stop funding the wrong work

• a portfolio of destinations for reinvested capacity

That is necessary.

It is not sufficient.

At some point a leadership team has to stop talking about what AI is for and

decide how the first serious program will actually be structured.

This is where many organizations lose their way again.

They understand the logic of amplification and then operationalize it through

the habits of committee-scale rollout. They spread the effort too widely too

early. They substitute visibility for learning. They create more pilots than

they can absorb. They confuse broad access with serious adoption. They design

the program around governance comfort rather than around capability formation.

The result is familiar:

• lots of activity

• weak transfer

• shallow learning

• limited trust

• unclear evidence about what real amplification looks like inside the business

That is why I keep coming back to the Lewis and Clark pattern.

Not as a metaphor.

As a program design model.

## Why Rollouts Underperform

The instinct to go broad early is understandable.

It feels democratic. It feels modern. It creates visible motion. It reassures

leaders that the organization is not standing still while the market moves.

It also creates a serious problem.

Broad early rollouts often maximize exposure before they maximize learning.

They put tools into many hands before the organization knows:

• who actually benefits most

• what kind of coaching is required

• where the governance pressure really lives

• what the highest-value missions look like

• which patterns deserve to spread and which should not

That is backward.

The first phase of an AI program should not be optimized for distribution. It

should be optimized for high-quality learning under controlled conditions.

That is the first redesign move.

## The Lewis and Clark Pattern

The Lewis and Clark pattern starts from a different assumption than a generic

rollout.

It assumes that the first serious objective is not to give everyone access. It

is to learn what amplified humans can actually become inside this organization

when the mission is real, the people are strong, and the environment is trusted

enough to support serious work.

That is why the pattern begins with a line I still believe:

Give me five high performers and I will coach them in the use of AI.

That line is easy to misread as a slogan about elite talent.

It is really a statement about program design.

It means:

• start with a small number of exceptional candidates

• give them serious leverage, not toy access

• define a mission that matters

• coach them hard enough to turn tool use into capability

• build security and governance into the expedition from the start

• learn what should transfer before scaling anything broadly

That is not innovation theater. It is a bounded expedition.

## Who Gets Chosen

The people for the first expedition should not be selected randomly and should

not be chosen only by title.

The best first candidates usually share several traits:

• high judgment

• high learning velocity

• strong trust inside the organization

• enough role relevance that their work matters

• enough range that amplification could change what the system learns

• enough discipline that they will not confuse raw speed with mature use

These are often the same people the earlier chapters were trying to surface:

trusted operators, translators, underused high-ceiling people, strong teachers,

and people whose work already touches consequential parts of the system.

The first group does not need to represent every function equally. It needs to

be capable of producing meaningful learning.

This is an important distinction.

A representative pilot and a high-learning pilot are not the same thing.

For the first expedition, I would choose learning quality over representational

neatness.

## What Protection They Need

High performers do not become multipliers just because you drop a tool into

their workflow and wish them luck.

They need protection.

Not protection from effort. Protection from noise, fragmentation, and premature

judgment.

That usually means:

• enough time to work seriously instead of only between other obligations

• permission to redesign parts of the workflow rather than merely add AI on top

• trusted handling of security and governance boundaries

• access to coaching and review

• a clear understanding that this is an enterprise learning mission, not just a

personal productivity experiment

This is where many programs fail. They give people access, but not protection.

Then they conclude the results were mixed.

Of course they were mixed. The participants were being asked to discover a new

operating model inside a system that still expected them to behave exactly as

before.

Protection is not indulgence.

It is part of the experimental design.

## What Mission They Should Be Sent On

The mission matters as much as the people.

The wrong mission is:

go try AI and report back.

That creates loose experimentation and weak institutional learning.

The right mission has four properties.

First, it matters to the business.

The mission should touch a real strategic node: customer response, operating

decision quality, delivery leverage, internal capability, or some other area

the growth thesis already identified as important.

Second, it is bounded.

The mission should be narrow enough to control and observe clearly, but large

enough to matter. The point is not to create a tiny sandbox disconnected from

reality. The point is to create a serious proving ground.

Third, it contains real friction.

If the mission is too easy, the organization will learn very little about

amplification. It will only learn that simple work got simpler.

Fourth, it creates transferable lessons.

The mission should be chosen partly because success or failure will teach the

organization something it can use elsewhere: about workflow design, coaching,

governance, judgment, security, tooling, or where amplification truly works.

This is why a bounded expedition beats a generic pilot. It is not just smaller.

It is designed to generate stronger learning.

## What Coaching Looks Like Inside the Expedition

This is where the program design becomes very different from broad rollout.

The first expedition should not treat participants as passive users. It should

treat them as people being coached into a new operating capability.

That coaching often includes:

• helping them decompose work so AI is used on the right layer

• pushing them past prompt-level tinkering into workflow redesign

• reviewing where judgment is still required and where AI can be trusted

• helping them externalize what is working so it becomes teachable

• making sure speed gains turn into better mission performance, not just more

output

This is one reason the first expedition should stay small. Coaching quality

falls fast when the group becomes too large too early.

If leaders want amplified capability, not just broad experimentation, coaching

is part of the program, not an optional add-on.

## How Learning Transfers Back

An expedition only matters if its learning transfers back into the institution.

Otherwise it is just a high-end pilot.

This is where leaders have to ask harder questions:

• what patterns should be documented

• what workflows should be redesigned based on what the expedition learned

• what training or coaching should be spread next

• which governance rules need to change

• what kinds of missions deserve a second wave

• which candidates should be brought into the next cohort

Transfer is where the bounded expedition turns into organizational capability.

Without transfer, the first group becomes a set of individual success stories.

With transfer, the first group becomes an engine for the second phase of the

program.

That is the whole point.

## Why This Beats Committee-Scale Rollout

Committee-scale rollout usually optimizes for comfort.

The Lewis and Clark pattern optimizes for learning.

Committee rollout spreads exposure.

The expedition concentrates capability.

Committee rollout often produces many weak examples.

The expedition aims to produce a few strong ones that actually change the

organization's understanding of what to do next.

Committee rollout makes governance the primary design driver.

The expedition respects governance, but treats learning and capability

formation as the primary objective.

That does not make the expedition reckless. It makes it honest about what the

first phase is for.

If leaders want scalable amplification later, they need concentrated learning

first.

## A Monday-Morning Expedition Design Session

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would ask

them to design the first expedition in one session around six decisions.

• what strategic node the mission will serve

• which five people are the strongest first candidates

• what protection those people need to do serious work

• what bounded mission they are actually being sent on

• how coaching will happen, by whom, and how often

• how the learning will transfer back into the institution

Then I would force one more rule:

do not approve the expedition until all six decisions are clear.

This matters because vague first phases create vague lessons.

The first expedition should be serious enough to matter and structured enough

to teach.

## The Bridge to the Next Chapter

Once the program is redesigned around serious expeditions, the next question is

what kind of operating system can actually compound the gains.

How do you coach, sustain, and spread amplified work so it becomes more than a

few hero stories?

That is the next chapter.

# Chapter 10 — Talent and Operating Model

If Chapter 9 explained how to run the first serious expedition, this chapter

answers the next question:

how does amplified work stop being a few impressive stories and become part of

how the organization actually operates?

That is a different problem.

A company can run one strong expedition and still fail to change itself. It can

coach five excellent people, learn a great deal, and still let the gains remain

isolated. It can produce internal legends instead of operating capability.

That is why systems matter.

If the first expedition proves what is possible, the operating model determines

whether that possibility compounds.

## Heroics Do Not Scale

Organizations often fall in love with the first person or team that demonstrates

real AI leverage.

That is understandable. The gain is visible. The story is exciting. The person

looks unusually capable. The difference in output, range, or clarity can feel

dramatic compared with the surrounding system.

Then the organization makes a mistake.

It treats the breakthrough as proof that it has solved the problem.

It has not.

It has only identified an existence proof.

The next question is harder:

can the organization make this capability more normal without turning it into

bureaucracy or diluting it into shallow adoption?

That is why this chapter exists.

The goal is not to produce a few AI heroes.

The goal is to build a system that can produce, coach, support, and spread

amplified work deliberately.

## What the Operating Model Has to Do

An AI-era operating model has several jobs at once.

It has to:

- coach people into mature use
- create apprenticeship paths for the next layer of talent
- turn first-wave lessons into repeatable patterns
- make judgment, not just output, part of the capability system
- reduce dependence on isolated heroes

• keep the organization learning without dissolving into chaos

That is more than enablement. It is an operating discipline.

This is why I keep coming back to the idea that systems beat heroics.

Heroics prove possibility.

Systems create repeatability.

## Cultural Spread Is the Real Test

One of the clearest reasons I believe this is that I have watched capability

spread culturally when the pattern was modeled well enough and repeated

consistently enough.

At one point I had become an early adopter and visible internal influencer

around generative AI. Some people jokingly called me `GPLee`. The nickname is

not the important part. What mattered was what happened around it.

As a manager, I kept teaching people on my team to use GenAI seriously. I was

not just showing them a tool. I was trying to model a way of working:

experiment, judge the output, recover from failure, and use the leverage

responsibly.

Later, when annual self-reviews came in, I was struck by how strong they were.

The quality was exceptional. Then people laughed and told me, in effect, "we

used ChatGPT like you taught us."

That moment mattered because it showed the right unit of value.

The win was not that one manager looked clever. The win was that a pattern had

spread. Thinking, coaching, and leverage had started moving through the system.

That is what leaders should care about.

A strong operating model turns isolated excitement into shared capability. It

makes curiosity safer. It makes experimentation more disciplined. It gives

people a way to learn from each other instead of starting from zero every time.

This is also why annual-review thinking matters here. If the organization only

recognizes the visibly dramatic win and never the spread of capability around

it, the system will keep underinvesting in the people who teach, coach, and

raise the range of others.

That is a managerial blind spot.

The operating model has to correct for it.

## Coaching Is Part of the System

At this point in the manuscript, coaching should no longer sound like a soft

adjacent concept.

Coaching is part of the economic case.

If AI lowers the friction around work, then the return on helping good people

use that leverage well goes up. The stronger the person, the more costly it is

to leave them under-coached.

That coaching needs to do more than teach tool usage.

It has to teach:

• task decomposition

• workflow redesign

• judgment about when AI helps and when it hurts

• how to verify outputs

• how to externalize patterns

• how to pass learning to others

This is one reason broad access alone does not create an operating model.

Without coaching, the organization gets uneven local improvisation.

With coaching, it starts building transferable capability.

## Apprenticeship Matters More Than Most Leaders Think

One of the quieter dangers in badly designed AI programs is that they can thin

out apprenticeship just when apprenticeship matters most.

If leaders over-extract the gains too early, the people who should be learning

from stronger operators disappear or lose access to the work where judgment is

formed. The organization gets thinner at the exact moment it should be building

its next layer of capability.

That is a seed-corn problem.

An AI-era operating model has to protect apprenticeship intentionally.

That means:

• letting less experienced people work near stronger operators

• making first-wave patterns visible and teachable

• creating real second-wave missions, not just broad access

• helping people move from tool use to judgment-rich use

• preserving enough bench so the next generation can actually form

If the system only amplifies a few people and does not build pathways for the

next layer, it has not solved the problem. It has simply modernized heroics.

## From Expedition to Center of Excellence

This is where my experience building Centers of Excellence becomes relevant.

A good COE is not a prestige object. It is a transfer mechanism.

It exists to do a small set of important things:

• capture lessons from the first wave

• create patterns that others can reuse

• coach teams into stronger practice

• define where standards matter and where flexibility matters

• reduce the cost of getting the second and third wave right

That is exactly what the organization needs after a Lewis and Clark expedition.

The expedition creates concentrated learning.

The COE converts that learning into repeatable capability.

This does not always require a formal department with a grand name. Sometimes

it starts as a few disciplined people carrying pattern, coaching, and judgment

across the next set of teams. What matters is not the label. What matters is

that the transfer function exists.

Without that function, each new team starts too close to zero.

With it, the organization compounds.

## AgentFlow as a Personal COE

One reason I believe this so strongly is that I have watched the same pattern

play out at personal scale.

AgentFlow, the method I use for structuring AI-assisted work, is really the

same idea in miniature. It is a personal operating model for preserving

context, review, and reusable learning instead of depending on raw improvisation.

It says:

• do not rely on raw heroics

• create a repeatable method

• preserve context

• create review loops

• externalize what works

• make the next cycle easier and better

That is not only a personal productivity lesson. It is an operating-model

lesson.

The reason systems beat heroics is that systems preserve learning.

They lower the cost of repeating what worked.

They make improvement less dependent on memory, charisma, or one extraordinary

person being awake and available at the right moment.

Enterprises need the same thing.

## What a Good Operating Model Usually Contains

If leaders want a practical checklist, a good AI operating model usually

contains at least these elements:

• a coaching layer

• an apprenticeship path

• a transfer mechanism from first-wave experiments into broader practice

• standards for judgment, verification, and appropriate use

• a way to identify and support multiplier candidates

• a way to keep learning from spreading without letting chaos spread with it

This does not need to start large.

It does need to start intentionally.

The operating model is how the business stops confusing isolated wins with

capability.

## What to Watch For

Leaders can usually tell the operating model is weak when they see some

combination of these symptoms:

• one or two impressive people and a weak surrounding system

• lots of access, little maturity

• no real second-wave coaching path

• repeated relearning of the same lessons

• strong first pilots that fail to spread cleanly

• managers who praise innovation but cannot describe the pattern others should

copy

Those are not people problems first.

They are system problems.

That distinction matters because it changes the response. The answer is not

"find better heroes." The answer is "build a better capability system."

## A Monday-Morning Operating Model Review

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would ask

them to review their AI effort with five questions.

• where does coaching currently happen, and where does it not

• how does a less experienced person become a mature operator in this system

• what lessons from the first expedition have actually been turned into

reusable patterns

• who currently carries the transfer function, and is that sustainable

• where are we still depending on heroics instead of repeatable capability

Then I would ask for three concrete follow-ups:

• one coaching mechanism to formalize

• one apprenticeship path to protect

• one transfer mechanism to build or strengthen

That is how the organization starts becoming capable on purpose.

## The Bridge to the Next Chapter

Once the operating model starts to take shape, the leadership problem shifts

again.

How do leaders explain, defend, and negotiate this agenda with boards, CFOs,

peer executives, and outside partners who may still be operating inside a much

narrower savings story?

That is the next chapter.

# Chapter 11 — The Leadership Conversation

By this point in the book, the leader has a real system:

• a growth thesis

• a portfolio filter

• a capacity portfolio

• a first-program design

• an operating model that can compound what the first wave learns

That is enough to run the work.

It is not enough to protect the work.

The next problem is conversational, political, and economic.

How does a leader explain this agenda to a board that wants visible proof, to a

CFO who is under pressure to harvest savings, to peer executives who are

balancing their own priorities, and to outside partners who may be more than

happy to help automate labor without helping the enterprise become stronger?

That is the leadership conversation.

If the leader does not define it, someone else will.

And most systems default to the smallest version of the story:

AI makes work cheaper.

That is not false.

It is incomplete, and incompleteness is dangerous here.

Under pressure, incomplete stories often win because they are easier to

measure, easier to repeat, and easier to defend in the short term.

## The Mandate Has to Be Defined Up Front

One of the easiest ways to lose the plot in an AI program is to let every

constituency hear a different mandate.

The board hears cost discipline.

Finance hears labor efficiency.

The business hears experimentation.

The operating teams hear tooling.

Outside partners hear a chance to sell more work.

At that point, misalignment is already underway.

The leader's job is to define the mandate before the surrounding system defines

it by default.

The clearest version I know is this:

we are pursuing a twin mandate of efficiency and empowerment.

That sentence matters because it protects two truths at once.

The first truth is that efficiency is real and should not be denied. Some work

should get cheaper, faster, and lighter.

The second truth is that the gains cannot all be judged at the point of cost

removal. Some of them have to be judged by what they make the business better

at doing.

Without the first half, the leader sounds unrealistic.

Without the second half, the leader has already surrendered the strategy.

## The Board Conversation

Boards do not need a seminar on AI possibility.

They need a disciplined answer to a simpler question:

what is this program doing for the business besides generating activity?

That means the board conversation has to stay above tools and below hype.

The most useful board-level language is usually some version of this:

• we will harvest some gains

• we will strengthen specific capabilities

• we will place a limited number of deliberate bets that make growth more

credible

• we will measure both visible savings and whether the business is becoming

stronger in the places that matter

That keeps the conversation anchored in governance and performance rather than

turning into either evangelism or defensive justification.

It also gives the board a better question to ask.

Not:

how many pilots are running?

But:

what stronger business are we building with the gains?

Boards often push hardest right here.

How is this different from the last innovation story that sounded promising and

went nowhere?

Why is the empowerment language not just softer wording for weaker discipline?

That is why the answer has to point to a defined share of harvested gains, a

defined set of strengthened capabilities, and a short list of bets that make

future performance more credible than it was before.

If I were coaching a leader for a board conversation, I would push them to be

able to say three things plainly.

First:

where we expect to harvest.

Second:

where we are intentionally reinvesting.

Third:

how we will know whether those reinvestments are building a stronger future or

simply disappearing into general efficiency.

That is a board-ready conversation.

It is concrete without collapsing into spreadsheet theater.

## The CFO Conversation

The CFO conversation has to begin with respect.

The savings pressure is real.

The burden of proof is real.

The desire to turn a technically promising moment into measurable economic

discipline is not foolish. It is responsible.

That is exactly why this conversation has to be handled well.

The leader should not argue:

do not take the savings.

The better argument is:

do not stop there.

Some gains should be harvested. Chapter 6 already made that clear.

The real issue is whether everything that can be measured immediately should be

extracted immediately.

That is where the conversation changes.

The most useful CFO language is usually built around three claims.

The first claim:

some savings are real, but they are not the whole return profile.

The second claim:

some of the highest-value uses of AI-created capacity are protecting

continuity, increasing operator range, reducing fragility, and building options

the business does not currently have.

The third claim:

if we harvest all of the gain at the point of first visibility, we may improve

the quarter while weakening the enterprise.

That is not a soft claim.

It is a capital allocation claim.

If I were helping a leader prepare for the CFO conversation, I would want them

ready with a sentence like this:

we are taking the savings where they should be taken, but we are also holding a

defined share of the gains in service of capability, resilience, and growth in

places where immediate extraction would reduce future strength.

That sentence does not deny discipline.

It redefines discipline at the right level.

## The Peer Executive Conversation

Peer executives often create a different kind of challenge.

They are usually not opposed to AI.

They are busy.

They are protecting their own priorities.

They are trying to avoid being the function that gets slowed down by someone

else's transformation agenda.

Some of them will also want to harvest the gains inside their own scorecard as

quickly as possible, even when that means shrinking the capability the wider

enterprise is trying to build.

That means the peer conversation should not begin with doctrine.

It should begin with relevance.

What does this help your function do better?

What pressure does it actually reduce?

What stronger capability does it create that your team will still have after

the first wave of activity is over?

This is where the capacity language becomes especially useful.

It lets the leader ask:

• capacity for what

• capacity in whom

• capacity measured how

Those questions stop the conversation from collapsing into generic enthusiasm

or generic resistance.

They also force local leaders to make a clearer choice.

Do they want an AI program that produces more motion around their function, or

do they want one that leaves their function stronger?

Sometimes that becomes a negotiation, not a friendly alignment session.

The leader may have to say, plainly:

I am not asking your function to carry someone else's theory project. I am

asking whether you want to take all of the gain immediately, or whether you

want to leave your team stronger after the first wave is over.

That distinction matters because peer executives are often the people who can

either protect a multiplier candidate, sponsor a high-learning mission, or kill

both by insisting on business-as-usual constraints.

The leadership conversation here is not abstract persuasion.

It is the work of gaining enough alignment that the real program can survive

contact with the surrounding org chart.

## The Partner Conversation

Outside partners can be genuinely useful.

They can bring acceleration, pattern recognition, technical breadth, and

delivery capacity that the enterprise does not yet have.

They can also help the client optimize for the wrong outcome.

That is why leaders need a buyer's framework, not just a sourcing process.

The first question is:

are you helping us identify where the capacity should go, or are you assuming

the answer is labor reduction?

The second question is:

when this work is over, what will we know how to do better ourselves?

The third question is:

how will you help us amplify our people rather than merely automate around

them?

The fourth question is:

what will transfer back into our institution beyond the immediate project

deliverable?

The fifth question is:

how will you help us distinguish theater from capability?

Those questions matter because they expose the partner's real theory of value.

A partner who keeps bringing the conversation back to labor replacement,

generic pilot counts, or technical novelty is telling you something.

A partner who can engage seriously with capacity allocation, multiplier

candidates, transfer, and operating-model formation is telling you something

different.

This does not mean leaders should avoid outside help.

It means they should buy help that strengthens the enterprise instead of help

that leaves the enterprise more dependent.

## A Simple Test for the Whole Conversation

If I wanted one fast test for whether the leadership conversation is healthy, I

would ask whether the story survives without the savings language.

If the program sounds compelling only when immediate efficiency is at the

center, then the mandate is probably still too small.

If the program can still be explained clearly in terms of stronger customer

reach, stronger operators, lower fragility, better judgment, and more credible

growth, then the mandate is probably starting to mature.

That does not mean savings disappear from the story.

It means they are no longer the whole story.

That is the leadership standard.

## A Monday-Morning Leadership Prep

If I were helping a leader use this chapter next week, I would ask them to

prepare four short statements before the next serious AI meeting.

One for the board:

• what stronger business are we building with these gains

One for the CFO:

• what are we harvesting, and what are we deliberately not harvesting yet

One for peer executives:

• what pressure does this reduce and what stronger capability does it leave

behind in your function

One for outside partners:

• what will we know how to do better ourselves when this work is over

Then I would ask the leader to write one more sentence for themselves:

the mandate we will not surrender is _____.

That matters because the conversation gets easier once the leader knows what

they are unwilling to hand over to default logic.

## The Bridge to the Final Chapter

Once a leader can hold these conversations well, the book's final question

comes into view.

What does the organization actually look like when this way of thinking, this

allocation logic, this portfolio discipline, this program design, and this

operating model start to become normal?

That is the amplified enterprise.

# Chapter 12 — The Amplified Enterprise

At the beginning of this book, the future was mostly described by contrast.

Do not take the wrong win.

Do not eat your seed corn.

Do not confuse visible efficiency with strategic success.

That was necessary.

But a leadership book cannot end only with warning.

It has to show the organization the leader is actually trying to build.

That is the amplified enterprise.

It is not a science-fiction company.

It is not a company with no humans, no management tension, and no cost

pressure.

It is a business that has learned to use AI-created leverage to make people

stronger, decisions better, teams smaller and more capable, and growth more

credible.

Put more sharply:

the amplified enterprise is one where capability compounds faster than cost is

extracted.

## What Changes First

The first thing that changes is not the org chart.

It is the unit of ambition.

In a cost-first enterprise, the main question is:

how much work can we remove?

In an amplified enterprise, the main question becomes:

what stronger business can we build because the friction around our people just

dropped?

That shift changes everything else.

It changes who gets protected.

It changes what gets funded.

It changes what kinds of teams are trusted with consequential missions.

It changes what leaders notice when they see someone becoming more effective.

They stop seeing only faster output.

They start asking whether range, judgment, customer reach, teaching capacity,

and institutional strength are increasing too.

That is the beginning of a different organization.

## Smaller Teams, Larger Reach

One of the clearest signs of the amplified enterprise is that some of its most

important work begins to move through smaller, higher-trust teams with

disproportionate reach.

That is where the Lewis and Clark pattern matters most.

Not as a claim that every company has already done this well.

And not as a romantic historical callback.

As an organizational design signal.

The old assumption is that scale requires broad layers, broad committees, and

large amounts of coordination drag.

The amplified enterprise begins to challenge that assumption.

It asks whether some missions are better served by:

• fewer people

• higher judgment

• more trust

• stronger tooling

• better coaching

• tighter transfer back into the larger system

That does not eliminate the wider organization.

It changes what the wider organization is supporting.

Instead of feeding large, slow structures by default, the enterprise starts to

design around high-capability teams whose learning can spread.

That is a meaningful difference.

The future organization is not only flatter.

It is more selective about where concentration beats diffusion.

## People Become More Valuable in New Ways

In an amplified enterprise, good people do not simply get busier.

They become more valuable in different ways.

A strong operator with AI leverage may now be able to cover more surface area

without becoming a bottleneck.

A trusted translator may now be able to move across functions with greater

speed and less loss.

A good manager may now be able to coach more effectively because some of the

administrative drag around the role has dropped.

A high-ceiling analyst may now be able to operate at a broader level because

the repetitive effort that used to trap them in the lower layers of the job no

longer consumes the same share of attention.

This matters because the amplified enterprise does not only produce more work.

It changes what kinds of contribution are possible.

That is why the organization starts to look different over time.

It begins to reward judgment, teaching, translation, and capability spread more

intentionally, because those are the human strengths that turn leverage into a

stronger business.

## The Organization Learns Faster

Another sign of the amplified enterprise is that it learns faster without

falling into chaos.

Ideas move more quickly from observation to experiment.

Experiments move more quickly from local success to shared pattern.

Good methods spread with less friction.

Bad methods are exposed sooner.

Leaders no longer have to choose only between rigid standardization and random

local improvisation.

They have a middle layer:

coached experimentation plus disciplined transfer.

That is why the operating model chapters matter so much.

Without coaching, apprenticeship, and transfer, an organization may still

produce brilliant local work. It just will not become normal.

The amplified enterprise turns isolated wins into teachable practice.

That makes the second wave stronger than the first and the third wave less

costly than the second.

You can feel this from the inside.

A team that used to start every serious effort half from scratch now starts

with better patterns, better questions, and stronger examples already in hand.

A meeting that used to revolve around status explanation now spends more of its

time on judgment, tradeoffs, and next moves. People still work hard, but less

of that work is wasted rediscovering what the organization should already know.

That is what compounding capability looks like inside a real company.

## Fragility Starts to Fall

The amplified enterprise is not defined only by speed and creativity.

It is also defined by lower fragility.

More than a few organizations look stable only because the same overloaded

people keep absorbing complexity on behalf of everyone else.

That is not strength.

That is hidden brittleness.

In an amplified enterprise, leaders use some of the gains to reduce those

dangerous concentrations:

• context spreads

• backup strength improves

• translator roles get supported instead of quietly overrun

• key workflows become more resilient

• fewer critical functions depend on one exhausted person being available at

exactly the right moment

This is one of the least glamorous parts of the future, and one of the most

important.

The stronger enterprise is not only the one that can do more.

It is the one that is harder to break.

## Growth Gets More Credible

The amplified enterprise also changes what growth feels like.

In many companies, growth talk is cheap because the operating system underneath

it is weak.

The teams are overloaded.

The bench is thin.

The customer-facing functions are inconsistent.

The internal handoffs are fragile.

The leaders talk about expansion while the machine underneath them is barely

holding its shape.

That is why this book has insisted so strongly on capability, resilience, and

new value alongside direct growth.

In the amplified enterprise, growth becomes more credible because the system

under it is stronger.

The organization can respond faster, learn faster, recover faster, and spread

better work more reliably.

That does not guarantee success.

It does create a company that is more able to pursue success on purpose.

That is a meaningful improvement over a business that keeps narrowing itself

while calling the narrowing discipline.

At some point the contrast becomes hard to miss.

One company is still using AI to defend a smaller future more efficiently.

Another is using AI to build a stronger future more deliberately.

## Leaders Behave Differently

Eventually the biggest difference is visible in leadership behavior.

Leaders in an amplified enterprise still care about efficiency.

They still care about proof.

They still care about economic discipline.

What they stop doing is treating immediate extractability as the final arbiter

of value.

They ask different questions.

Not only:

• what got cheaper

• what got faster

• how much labor can we remove

But also:

• who became more powerful

• what capability got stronger

• what fragility was reduced

• what new option became real

• what learning will transfer

In practice that changes the feel of the room.

The conversation stops ending at labor savings.

It starts moving toward capability, reach, resilience, and what the business is

now able to attempt that it could not attempt before.

Those questions are not softer.

They are larger.

They are how leaders stop running AI as an efficiency event and start leading

it as a business-strength decision.

## This Future Is Chosen, Not Granted

Nothing in this chapter happens automatically.

AI does not hand an organization this future as a free gift.

The tools may be available.

The leverage may be real.

The abundance does not arrive unless leaders keep making the larger choice.

They have to keep choosing:

• not to harvest every gain immediately

• to protect multiplier candidates long enough for capability to form

• to run serious expeditions instead of broad symbolic rollout

• to build transfer mechanisms instead of admiring one-off heroics

• to fund future-building work instead of theater

• to defend the larger mandate when the surrounding system tries to reduce it

That is why the future of the enterprise is still a leadership question.

The technology changed the leverage.

Leaders still decide what kind of organization that leverage will build.

## A Monday-Morning Future-State Review

If I were helping a leadership team use this chapter next week, I would ask

them to imagine the company eighteen months from now and answer five questions.

• where are smaller, higher-trust teams carrying disproportionate reach

• which people are clearly operating at a broader level than they were before

• where has learning begun to spread faster than before

• where has fragility actually fallen rather than simply been hidden

• what growth move is now credible because the system underneath it got

stronger

Then I would ask one last question:

if none of those answers are becoming visible, what story are we really living

inside instead?

That question matters because the amplified enterprise is not a slogan.

It should become observable.

### The Bridge to the Conclusion

At this point the choice is fully visible.

One future gets smaller while calling itself disciplined.

The other becomes stronger by using AI-created capacity to amplify people,

protect capability, and grow the business.

The conclusion only has to make that choice impossible to miss.

## Conclusion — Don't Cut Your Way to the Future

This book began with a wrong win.

Work that used to take a week now takes a day.

Work that used to require a team now requires fewer people.

A budget line improves.

A dashboard looks better.

A leadership team can point to something real and say:

AI is working.

Sometimes that is true.

The problem is not that the gain is fake.

The problem is that the definition of success is often too small.

If leaders stop the story at efficiency alone, they may improve the quarter

while thinning the future.

That is how companies eat seed corn and call it discipline.

This book has argued for a larger standard.

AI does not create abundance by itself.

Abundance comes from humans whose range, judgment, reach, and usefulness are

expanded by leverage and then reinforced by better systems.

That is why the central leadership question was never simply:

what can AI automate?

It was always:

what kind of business are we building with the capacity AI creates?

Everything else in the book flowed from that.

If the gains are harvested without a thesis, the system narrows.

If the wrong work keeps getting funded, the portfolio drifts into theater.

If the wrong people are overlooked, multiplier capacity stays hidden.

If the first program is designed for broad symbolic rollout instead of serious

learning, the organization learns little.

If heroics are admired without transfer, capability stays exceptional instead

of becoming normal.

If leaders do not defend the mandate, the surrounding system will reduce it to

the smallest available story.

That is the trap in its full form.

The brighter path is not softer.

It is harder.

It asks leaders to make more disciplined choices, not fewer.

It asks them to harvest where they should, reinvest where they must, protect

future capability while it is still easy to cut, and keep choosing a larger

definition of success even when the smaller one is easier to explain.

That is why this is a leadership book.

The leverage changed because of technology.

The future still changes because of leadership.

Some leaders will use AI to build organizations that get cheaper and smaller at

the same time.

Some will use AI to build organizations that get stronger, more resilient, more

capable, and more ambitious.

Those are not the same future.

They may begin with the same tools.

They do not end in the same place.

So the real choice is now visible.

When leverage arrives, will you use it mainly to remove cost from the present?

Or will you use it to amplify people, protect capability, and grow the business?

Do not cut your way to the future.

Build your way there.