Practical AI Adoption Framework

Short companion guide

FOR LEADERS IN BUSINESSES, PUBLIC SERVICES, CHARITIES AND MISSION-LED ORGANISATIONS

You've got AI tools. But are you getting organisational value from them?

Access isn't adoption.

Making ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude or other AI tools available does not in itself create organisational AI capability.

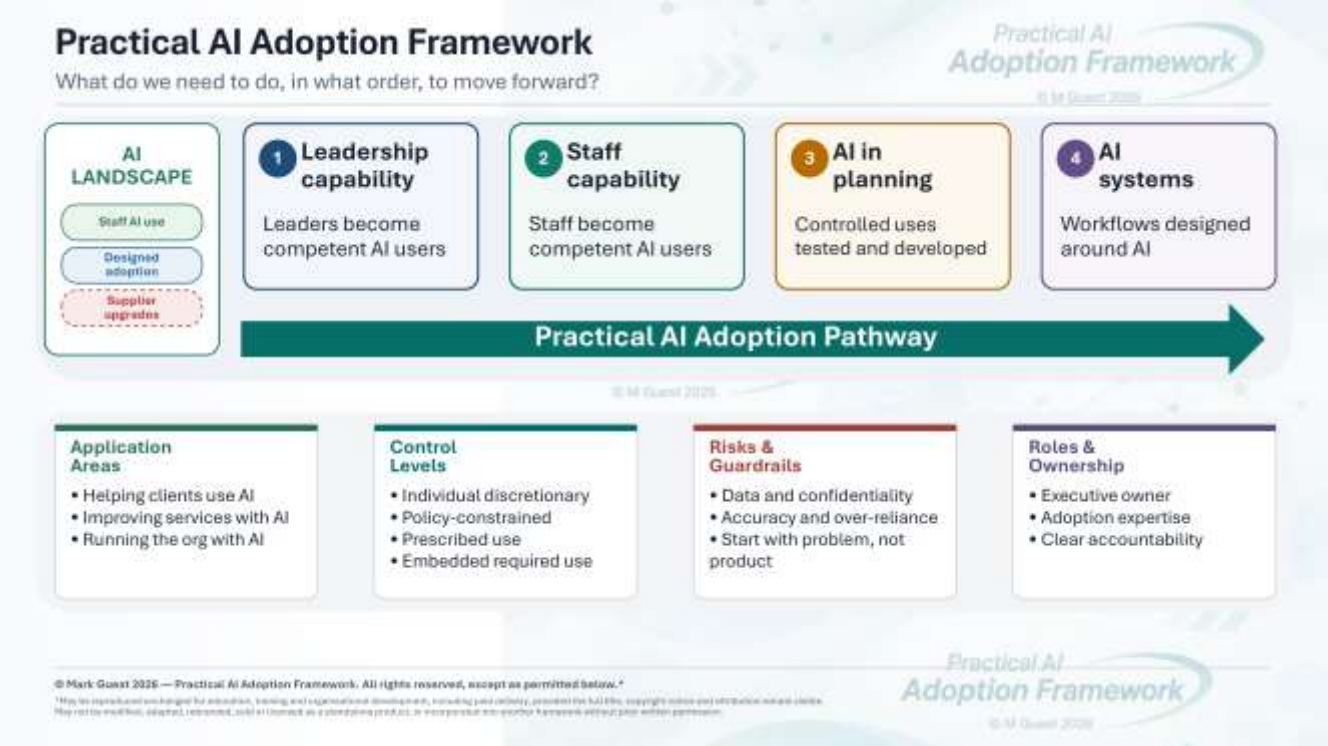
What has to become true inside my organisation for us to adopt AI properly?

The Practical AI Adoption Framework (PAIAF) provides a practical, leader-led way of thinking about that progression.

This guide is deliberately short. It is designed to help you understand the framework, recognise where your organisation is now, and start asking better questions about what AI could make possible.

The framework at a glance

The pathway is the spine. The surrounding elements help leaders interpret what adoption means in practice. It is a guide for judgement, not a formula.



The PAIAF shifts the focus from choosing AI tools to creating the organisational conditions for useful, controlled and sustained AI adoption.

Start with the landscape - then move along the pathway

The AI landscape

Most organisations already have more AI around them than they realise. The framework distinguishes three things:

- Staff AI use - people using tools such as ChatGPT, Copilot, Claude or Gemini in their own work.
- Designed adoption - deliberate organisational use of AI in work, services, workflows or systems.
- Supplier upgrades - AI features arriving through existing software and suppliers. PAIAF deliberately sets these aside from the adoption pathway: they will largely arrive through normal product development and can be handled much like other system upgrades, with familiarisation and training as needed. The framework focuses on staff AI use and designed adoption.

The first two stages build capability

1 Leadership capability

Leaders become competent AI users

Leaders need enough direct experience and competence with AI to understand what it can do, what it cannot reliably do, where risks arise and what more capable use feels like.

This is more than asking occasional questions or drafting emails. Leaders cannot effectively lead organisational adoption of something they have barely experienced themselves.

2 Staff capability

Staff become competent AI users

Capability then needs to extend beyond one or two interested individuals. Staff need the competence, confidence and judgement to use AI appropriately in their own work.

That includes checking, confidentiality, accountability and knowing when AI is - and is not - useful. Different roles and people will need different levels of capability, but the organisation needs to understand its overall position.

From capability to deliberate organisational adoption

3 AI in planning

Controlled uses tested and developed

The organisation begins systematically considering what AI changes or makes possible - in existing workflows, service delivery, productivity, new opportunities and activities that may previously have been too expensive or difficult to undertake.

The objective is not to use AI everywhere. It is to identify specific places where AI could create worthwhile organisational value, then test them on a small, controlled basis.

4 AI systems

Workflows designed around AI

At this stage, the organisation begins redesigning workflows, processes or services around what AI can do, rather than simply using AI to support an existing task. AI may become embedded, required or automatic, with clear ownership, controls and human fallbacks.

Not every organisation needs to reach the most advanced end of this stage. The point is to redesign and embed only where there is a clear reason to do so, with appropriate ownership and control.

Stage 3–4 distinction: is AI supporting an existing task - or is the workflow designed around what AI does?

The stages are directional, not rigid gates. Organisations can develop unevenly and some uses will sit near a boundary. The framework is there to improve judgement, not replace it.

The pathway is not the whole picture

The four cards beneath the pathway are prompts for the other questions that matter as adoption develops.

Application Areas

- Helping clients use AI
- Improving services with AI
- Running the organisation with AI
- Ask where AI could create value - not just where it could save time.

Control Levels

- Individual discretionary
- Policy-constrained
- Prescribed organisational use
- Embedded required use
- Different AI uses may need different levels of organisational control.

Risks & Guardrails

- Data and confidentiality
- Accuracy and over-reliance
- Clear human accountability
- Start with the problem, not the product
- Risks need managing - they are not a reason for paralysis.

Roles & Ownership

- Executive owner
- AI adoption expertise
- Clear accountability
- AI adoption needs organisational authority and implementation capability. One cannot substitute for the other.

Together, these lenses help leaders judge whether AI adoption is coherent, controlled and worthwhile. They bring into view the wider organisational questions that matter: whether adoption is aligned with organisational aims, compliant and accountable, reaching the right parts of the organisation, and creating real value. They also help prevent AI adoption from becoming simply a technology project, a collection of disconnected experiments, or progress in one area while other important parts of the organisation are left behind.

Don't let your assumptions limit the question

Most people naturally ask AI to do things they already believe AI can do. That can substantially limit what they discover.

**What would I like AI to help us do -
even if I assume it probably can't?**

The boundary of what is possible is changing quickly. The point is not to assume AI can solve everything. It is to test assumptions rather than letting those assumptions prevent potentially valuable ideas from ever being explored.

Don't only ask AI to do what you already think it can do. Some of the most interesting opportunities begin by testing what you assume it can't.

Three questions to ask

1	**Where on the Practical AI Adoption Framework is your organisation genuinely operating today?**
2	**Where is skilled human time being consumed by work around the valuable judgement, service or outcome?**
3	**What useful service, activity, customer group or opportunity is currently out of reach because, without AI, it would be too expensive, difficult or time-consuming to pursue?**

These are prompts, not a full organisational assessment. Their purpose is to turn the framework into questions about real work and real opportunities.

Is there something you would like AI to help your organisation do - but suspect it probably can't?

That may be exactly the kind of thing worth exploring.

The most valuable AI opportunities are often not the obvious ones. To help surface and explore some of those opportunities, a limited number of no-charge sessions are available for organisations with a real problem, workflow or idea they would like to test.

Up to 10 opportunities will be selected from those received by 30 September 2026. Fewer may be selected. Selection will favour interesting, worthwhile and realistically testable organisational problems, workflows or opportunities.

Expressions of interest must be received by 30 September 2026.*

If something genuinely worth testing emerges, the organisation needs to be willing and able to try a small implementation. There is no obligation to take anything further if no worthwhile opportunity is found.

How to respond

Go to practicalaiadoption.com and use the contact form. Start your message with **WORKFLOW** and briefly include:

- what you would like AI to help with;
- why it matters;
- whether your organisation would be willing and able to test a promising idea if we find one.

Don't limit yourself to the obvious. If you're wondering whether AI could do something useful, put the idea to the test.

Practical AI Adoption can also support organisations through:

- AI Thinking Partner Coaching for Leaders
- Staff AI Capability Diagnostic
- AI Opportunity & Innovation Workshops
- AI Project Partner — focused projects & practical implementation
- AI Adviser / Adoption Lead — retained, fractional or interim
- Something else? Ask

About Mark Guest

The Practical AI Adoption Framework was developed by Mark Guest, a former chief executive and organisational leader based in the West Midlands, UK. His experience spans private, public and not-for-profit sectors, with particular expertise in mission-led organisations. He now works as an AI Project Partner and AI Adoption Advisor, combining senior leadership experience with hands-on AI capability. He is a ChatGPT power user with experience across leading AI tools and has designed and built an AI-powered CEO support application.

*If this deadline has passed, visit practicalaiadoption.com to download the latest edition of this guide.

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