

Helping your line managers be leaders of change

Presented by Melanie Franklin, CEO of Capability for Change Limited

Introduction

This is my presentation to a network of over 200 change professionals, interested in how AI is starting to shape the role of Change Manager. For an opportunity to learn techniques to support people through AI transformations, join my interactive workshop for change professionals.

My session explored why AI transformation is fundamentally different from previous digital change programmes, and why the standard change management playbook needs to be extended to meet the unique human challenges that AI adoption creates.

The presentation covered the human and psychological factors at play, a practical framework for dividing work between humans and AI, techniques for understanding the impact on individual roles, and a set of tools and approaches for nudging people to adopt new behaviours when they may be facing an existential as well as a professional challenge.

The human factor in AI adoption

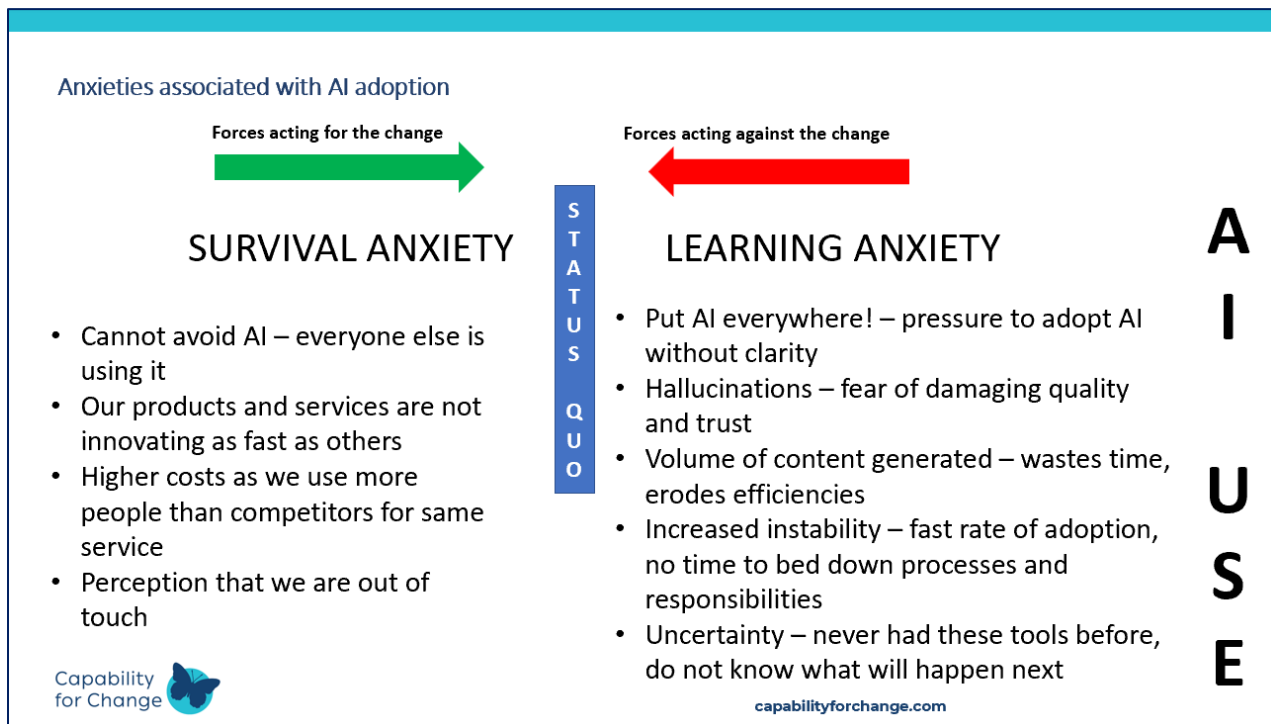
AI transformation is more than the tools

- AI technology may be moving at light speed, but people are not. And that disconnect is one of the main issues facing companies trying to adopt AI. This year 93% pointed to human issues such as culture and change management as the key challenge to data and AI adoption—the highest-ever percentage in this survey. <https://hbr.org/2026/01/hb-how-executives-are-thinking-about-ai-heading-into-2026>
- "AI Transformation Is a Workforce Transformation." Only about 5% of organizations have reaped substantial financial gains, primarily through "significant process and workflow improvements. To get employees to embrace AI and change their daily working behaviours, companies should build a holistic change plan, starting with an inspiring narrative." — [BCG \(Feb 2026\)](#)

My opening argument is that AI transformation is not simply an IT project, it is, at its core, a human change. The first and most important thing to recognise is that there is a human factor. Technology may be moving at speed, but people do not move at the same speed, and that disconnect is one of the central challenges facing every organisation trying to adopt AI.

A longstanding observation from my 30 years in change and transformation is that the ratio of project delivery time to behavioural adoption time is approximately 1:3. If a project is expected to take six months to deliver, it typically takes around eighteen months for the new behaviours to become genuinely embedded and feel normal. In some organisations it may be 1:4 or even 1:5. This ratio is a useful starting point for calibrating the change effort needed around any AI implementation.

Blockers to AI adoption



Professor Edgar Schein’s model of survival anxiety and learning anxiety can usefully be applied to the AI context. The survival anxieties which are the forces driving AI adoption are largely organisational and competitive in nature. Many organisations have invested in AI not because of a clear evidence-based benefit case, but because they fear being left behind. Some of the driving forces identified from CEO-level reports included:

- Fear that products and services are not innovating as fast as competitors
- Higher costs as organisations use more people than competitors for the same service
- A perception of being out of touch

I can illustrate the higher costs anxiety from a conversation I had recently with an HR director in the public sector whose team of six people had spent two days building complex spreadsheets to manage overlapping bank holiday entitlements for employees on different hybrid contracts. I demonstrated using a couple of generative AI tools a way to complete the same task in a matter of minutes. My observation is that customers will increasingly struggle to tolerate the kind of slow, manual approach that was previously accepted as the norm.

On the learning anxiety side, the forces acting against adoption are familiar blockers including the pressure to adopt AI without clarity about the outcome, fear of hallucinations damaging quality and trust, the risk of wasting time with volumes of poorly scoped content, increased instability from fast-moving adoption, and general uncertainty about a technology that has no precedent in previous workplace experience.

Blockers unique to AI adoption


AI has unique resistors

- The values-based resistor — those who feel AI dilutes their professional skill and that relying on it means losing their own ability
- The existential resistor — a feeling unique to AI (not present in previous tech transformations like ERP or Salesforce) that their role, profession, and usefulness may become extinct

WHAT WILL CHANGE	WHAT WILL REMAIN THE SAME
RATIONALE FOR CHANGE	
ACKNOWLEDGE THE LOSSES	HONOUR THE PAST

↓

Status
Certainty
Autonomy
Relatedness
Fairness

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I believe there are two specific forms of resistance to AI that do not appear in other technology transformations such as ERP or CRM implementations:

1. The values-based resistor: a person who feels that using AI dilutes their professional skill and expertise. Across legal, finance, accountancy, marketing and HR, people have invested years in building professional qualifications and respected knowledge. The concern is that by relying on AI they will get lazier, lose the habit of thinking for themselves, and see their hard-won expertise eroded. This is not a concern that arises when introducing Salesforce or a new finance platform. It is unique to AI. It is also generational, as this is not a concern if you are just starting out in your career, as you do not have extensive experience to lose.
2. The existential resistor: a deeper and more emotionally significant form of resistance, the feeling that by adopting AI, a person may become the architect of their own redundancy. This is not a theoretical observation. For example, reading a product announcement from claude.ai recently, highlighting its amazing new capability to produce presentations and training course materials left me feeling, briefly but genuinely, a sense of doom and hopelessness. If I can feel like this, when I deal with technology transformation all the time, then the many thousands of people going through AI transformations will feel it too and it deserves to be taken seriously and named openly in change planning.

The response to these unique resistors must go beyond the five key messages from William Bridges: what will change, what will remain the same, the rationale, acknowledging losses, and honouring the past. Change leaders need to explicitly call out the values-based and existential anxieties so that people feel safe to surface them, rather than driving them underground where they will quietly undermine adoption.

David Rock's SCARF model is also a useful lens for understanding the automatic, neurological responses that AI triggers. The five SCARF factors: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness and Fairness are real trigger points that the brain responds to instinctively.

In an AI transformation, the threat to professional status in particular is significant: the brain connects status with survival, so any perceived erosion of expertise or relevance will automatically generate resistance, regardless of the logic of the business case.

AI adoption can limit our Relatedness. As individuals spend more time working with AI tools, there is a real risk of becoming increasingly disconnected from human interaction and the social bonds that make work meaningful. This is a genuine design challenge for any AI transformation, not a soft consideration but a structural one.

Balancing human and AI expertise

One of the most practical contributions that change management can make to an AI transformation is helping people to think clearly about how to divide their work between humans and AI. This is not a simple or static divide; it requires ongoing reflection and collaboration but having a framework makes it far easier for individuals and teams to have the conversation.

A UC Berkeley paper responding to earlier MIT research on the ROI of AI offers a compelling reframe: we have essentially discovered a new group of workers who are highly capable, efficient, tireless digital employees who never need coffee breaks, never have bad days, and never call in sick. The challenge is not whether to work with them, but how to manage and optimise that collaboration over time.

In my experience, my leadership style when working with an "AI assistant" is pace-setting. I am dictatorial in issuing instructions, pointing out errors and demanding corrections. Before I move to meetings with humans, I need to take a short break, have a cup of tea and reset my mind to become the more facilitative, collaborative leader that is best suited to working with humans.

I find that in working effectively with AI, I need to spend much more time determining the outcome, the quality criteria, and the constraints for any piece of work before delegating to an AI tool. The emphasis has moved decisively from how to get something done to what, exactly, is wanted and being very specific about it. This is a new and demanding cognitive discipline, and if it is demanding for an experienced practitioner, organisations should plan carefully for how they support teams to develop it.



Balancing tasks

Human tasks

- Relationships – creating, maintaining and using relationships to create value
- Creativity – using imagination, intuition and curiosity
- Using emotional intelligence to select and apply appropriate behaviours
- Defining and applying morality and ethics

AI tasks

- Repetitive tasks defined in detail with logical sequence
- Continuous monitoring and application of quality criteria without variation based on exhaustion or emotion
- Applying pre-defined logic to identify tasks and take decisions
- Analysis of vast amounts of information

This is an example of a framework for thinking about which tasks are better suited to AI and which remain firmly in human territory:

AI is well suited to:

- Repetitive tasks defined in detail with a logical sequence
- Continuous monitoring and application of quality criteria without variation based on exhaustion or emotion
- Applying pre-defined logic to identify tasks and take decisions
- Analysis of vast amounts of information at speed

Humans remain essential for:

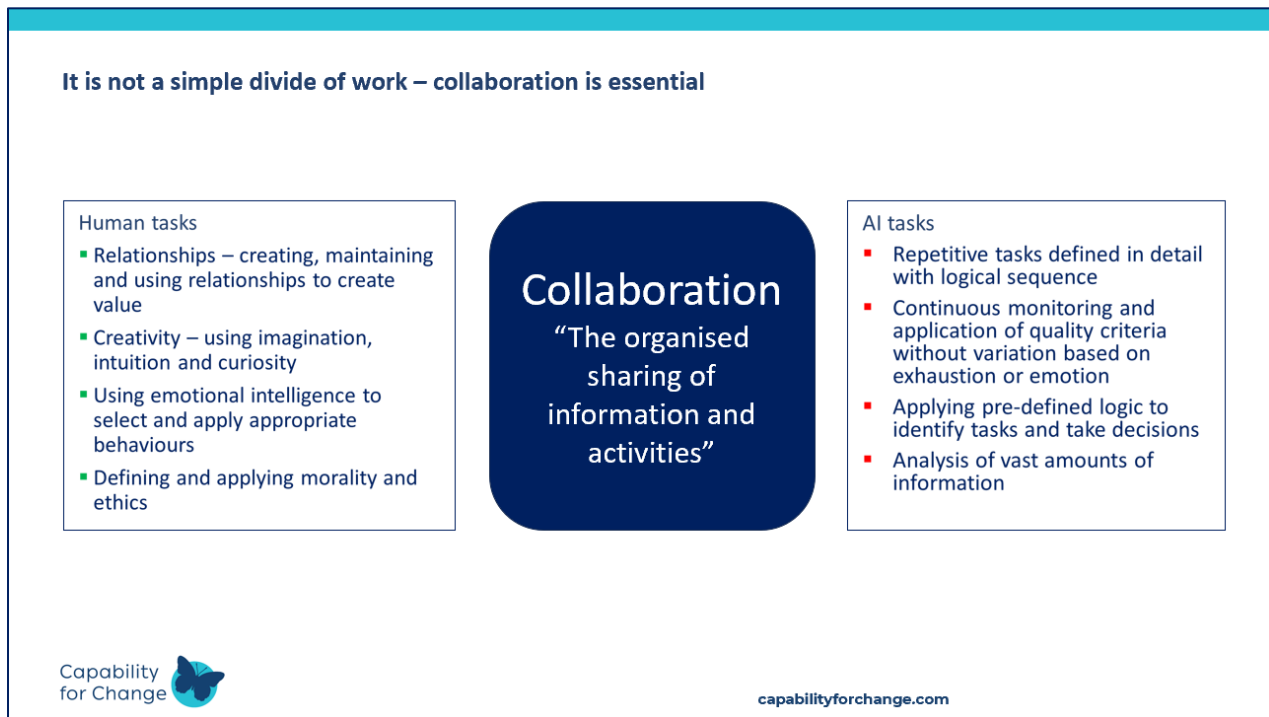
- Creating, maintaining and using relationships to generate value
- Creativity, imagination, intuition and curiosity
- Using emotional intelligence to select and apply appropriate behaviours
- Defining and applying morality and ethics

Daniel Goleman's work on emotional intelligence is relevant here. At a lecture in August 2025, Goleman reinforced the fundamental distinction: AI can replicate neural networks, but it does not have a brain, a prefrontal cortex, or a limbic system. It will never have the genuine emotional responses, the oxytocin-driven connection, or the mirror neurons that make human interaction uniquely powerful. The ability to read eyes, to feel genuinely connected, and to respond with appropriate emotion is distinctly and permanently human and that is a source of real professional value that AI cannot erode.

This has practical implications for change professionals. One of the most important contributions to an AI transformation may simply be helping people remember what they are uniquely good at and reconnecting them with the value they bring precisely because they are human.

A clear definition of collaboration, drawn from the Agile Change Handbook, was presented: the organised sharing of information and activities. This definition has become more important than ever in the context of AI transformation, because one of the core planning tasks is now deciding how to organise the use of AI versus humans.

Collaboration is essential




Something critical sits in the space between the purely human tasks and the purely AI tasks: the collaboration layer. This is where teams need to agree how information is shared, how AI outputs are reviewed and validated, and how human judgement is applied to AI-generated content. Planning for this layer is a new and essential element of any AI change plan.

Humans need to feel valuable

Corporate Profile Technique

<p>SECTION 1: WHERE YOU ARE NOW</p> <p>Your Current Role and Purpose</p> <p>Your Current Values and Priorities</p> <p>Your Current Achievements and Strengths</p>	<p>SECTION 3: WHERE YOU WANT TO GO NEXT</p> <p><i>Define Your Future Vision</i></p> <p>Your Career Aspirations</p> <p>Your Future Values and Priorities</p>
<p>SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF CHANGE</p> <p><i>How Will Changes Affect You?</i></p> <p>The Changes Happening in Your Organisation</p> <p>Impact on Your Current Role – use WAITE model</p> <p>Your Feelings About the Change</p> <p>Career Opportunities and Threats from Change</p>	<p>SECTION 4: BRIDGING THE GAP</p> <p><i>From Where You Are to Where You Want to Be</i></p> <p>Skills Gap Analysis</p> <p>Experience and Knowledge Gaps</p> <p>Leveraging Organisational Changes</p> <p>Your Current Assets and Resources</p> <p>Building Your Assets for the Future</p>

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AI can feel like a threat to our value and purpose at work. The Corporate Profile is a practical technique hosted on the [ChangeabilityPro®](#) platform that can be used directly in an AI transformation to help individuals reconnect with their value and navigate the anxiety that AI creates around their professional identity.

The Corporate Profile Technique encourages people to evaluate:

- What they are good at
- What they enjoy doing
- What they believe their contribution is within the organisation

This technique is particularly valuable in the context of AI transformation because it helps people remember that there are genuine expertise, experience and value that they bring and it provides a structured way to think about which of those strengths align to human tasks rather than AI tasks.

It also connects people back to their values and priorities: why are they here, what matters to them, and how does the AI transformation affect the direction they want to move in?

Feedback about this technique highlights how reassuring it is to be reminded of our skills, leaving people with a clearer sense of what to invest in, what to develop, and what to let go of. It is the kind of reflective exercise that change professionals can facilitate for the people they are supporting through AI transformation.

People-led change needs people experts

A broader theme emerging from AI transformations connects to trends in the Global Change Capability Survey: the need for change management professionals to build much stronger relationships with HR and L&D.

The direction of travel is clear, away from managing change centrally through frameworks and templates, and toward building the capability for change in others. The measure of success for change professionals is increasingly not whether they can create the right methodology, but whether they can coach, nudge and encourage change capability in others.

How our roles might change because of AI

Impact on my role

Human impact

- More blank spaces in my schedule – for thinking and meeting
- Value thinking over doing

AI impact

- I don't start anything from a blank piece of paper
- I need more thinking up front otherwise I can waste time generating the wrong content – start with the end in mind
- Deciding the order/flow of information is more important than creating the information
- AI draws from a wide range of [sources](#) so I need to form my own opinion of the validity of new sources it suggests
- AI processes high volumes of data so I can include different forms of sentiment or impact data than before
- I need to include new rules for use of data in my approach

Rather than speaking abstractly about AI's impact on roles, let me use myself to examine the impact of AI on my role, as the starting point to build empathy for others going through the same process.

On the human side, the primary shift has been the need for more blank space in my working day, time for thinking, for being curious, for building relationships. This sounds simple but runs against the powerful dopamine reward that comes from completing tasks. The brain is wired to prefer doing over thinking, because achievement produces an immediate positive boost. Carving out protected thinking time therefore requires a genuine mindset shift, starting with senior leaders. The argument made to leadership teams is this: if we deliver change iteratively, we need the space between waves of delivery to squeeze out the learning before moving on. Thinking is not skiving. It is strategic.

On the AI side, the biggest practical changes have been:

- Never starting from a blank page because AI always provides a foundation to react to and refine
- Needing more thinking up front about the outcome and the criteria before engaging the tool
- Recognising that the order and flow of information now matters more than the creation of information
- Having to form independent views on the validity of sources that AI suggests
- Including more explicit rules and boundaries for AI use in approaches and documentation

How the practice of change management is impacted by AI

I believe AI has the power to significantly shift how we support change at work. Strategic-level documentation has become far more important and more detailed. Because line managers and team leaders are now feeding change documentation directly into their own AI tools to generate local change plans, announcements, and communications, any ambiguity or vagueness in the central change documentation will be amplified across every team in the organisation.

The phrase 'introduce tools', for example, used in a role description in a workshop the previous day, turned out on examination to encompass training, coaching, practice, measurement and benefit realisation none of which was made explicit by the use of the word 'introduce'.

In an AI-mediated world, fluffy language creates divergent interpretation at scale. Specificity is no longer optional.

Nudging towards a new way of working

Our challenge, common to all changes at work is how to move people to adopt AI when there is no authority to compel them. In previous technology implementations, resistance has generally been practical people need training, need time, need support. In an AI transformation, the resistance can be values-based or existential, and the nudge needs to go deeper.

The premise is simple but important: none of the change management techniques in this section are new, but they have never been needed more urgently or applied to a more personally challenging type of change.

This transformation is personal!

- We have no authority to compel people to change their minds about AI but we can encourage, motivate and inspire via behavioural nudges!
 - **Emotional** – creating a desire and an internal pressure to change
 - *Examples: feeling part of the “in-crowd”; feeling bad because the rest of your peer group have made the change*
 - **Environmental** – create an atmosphere that welcomes and celebrates experiments and sharing of experiences
 - *Examples: have lunch and learn sessions where people demonstrate what they have been using AI for; ensure there are “practice” versions of the software*
 - **Behavioural** – role modelling by people of interest
 - *Examples – encourage those who others willingly follow to try things out*
 - **Procedural** – insert AI uses into existing procedures
 - *Examples: swap minute taking for AI summaries of transcripts*

Emotional nudges: creating a desire and an internal pressure to change. This works through the social psychology of belonging and the feeling of being part of the in-crowd, or conversely the mild discomfort of being one of the few who have not yet made the shift that others have made.

Oxytocin, the neurochemical of connection and trust, plays a key role here: people who feel part of a community that is making a change together are far more likely to engage than those who feel isolated or singled out.

Environmental nudges: creating an atmosphere that welcomes and celebrates experiments. Examples included lunchtime sessions where people demonstrate what they have been exploring with AI and ensuring that practice environments exist where there is no risk to quality or trust from a failed experiment. I have worked with several HR Directors in the last year who are focused on cultivating curiosity as an ongoing organisational value, hiring for it, and building programmes to sustain it. I have created techniques in the **ChangeabilityPro®** platform to help stimulate curiosity because it is such demand.

Behavioural nudges: role modelling by people of interest, specifically, encouraging those who others willingly follow to try things out and share their experiences. The principle is straightforward: when trusted, respected individuals are seen to engage with AI, it reduces the perceived risk for others. Mirror neurons mean we literally learn through observation of people we feel connected to.

Procedural nudges: inserting AI uses into existing procedures so that trying the new approach is the natural, easy option rather than a conscious act of will. A simple example: swap manual minute-taking for an AI-generated summary of a meeting transcript. The change is practical, low-risk, and immediately beneficial and it normalises AI as a working tool.

Personally, I am stressed by the need to keep pace with AI developments: the sense of guilt at not having experimented with every new platform, the feeling of being overwhelmed by the volume of new tools, the pressure to stay current. This is not unique, it is something that everyone, from the most experienced change professional to the most junior team member, is experiencing. Naming that openly, and building that awareness into change planning, is part of doing this well.

Next steps

Your next steps

Do you have enough techniques and solutions for nudging people to adopt a change that might cause them an existential crisis?



- Experience 43 techniques created from the application of neuroscience and positive psychology to extend and refresh your toolkit
- Agile Change Coach course [14th/15th April](#)

Do you know how to frame your communications to trigger curiosity and experimentation to overcome reticence?



- Develop your understanding of how words, actions, expectations and past experiences trigger powerful chemical reactions in the brain, so you can make informed decisions about what to say and how to say it
- Neuroscience for Change course [16th/17th April](#)

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It is an exciting time to be in change management. But it requires investment, courage, and a willingness to go deeper into the human dimension of work than the profession has ever had to go before.

Start with yourself exploring the tools, keeping a diary of what works, noticing the anxieties as they arise is the best preparation for helping others through the same journey. Techniques for nudging: the need for a deep and varied toolkit of techniques for helping people through an existential and values-based resistance has never been greater. The Agile Change Coach course is an opportunity to access 43 techniques derived from neuroscience and positive psychology, specifically designed to extend and refresh the change practitioner's toolkit for exactly these kinds of challenges.

Neuroscience for change: understanding how the brain reacts to change is not an optional extra, it has become the base-level skill from which everything else in change practice now develops. How words activate threat or reward responses, how to trigger curiosity rather than compliance, how to frame communications to overcome reticence, all of this is grounded in neuroscience.

The Neuroscience for Change course is the next step for practitioners who want to be more deliberate and more effective in how they frame their communications and design their change interventions.

Another vital resource is the [ChangeabilityPro®](#) platform which contains a growing library of practical techniques including the Corporate Profile Technique described in this session and many others that can be applied directly in an AI transformation context.

Conclusion

AI transformation is an opportunity for the change management profession, but only if practitioners are prepared to invest in developing a deeper toolkit. The nature of the work is shifting from what needs to happen to how to help people make it happen and the skills needed to navigate values-based and existential resistance are more demanding than anything previously required for a technology transformation.

In my view, the change professionals who will thrive are those who enjoy coaching and enabling others, who are comfortable working at the emotional and relational level of change, and who can operate with empathy built on genuine personal experience of the AI transition.