PRACTICE AREA CARD · ONE-PAGER

Leadership & sponsorship

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The leader's own practice, stance, and sponsorship.

- A lot of leaders have told their organizations to use more AI, and the instruction usually arrives with nothing else attached: nothing about what the use is for, how long the budget will last, or what kinds of problems people should point it at. Some of the organizations that pushed hardest are now pulling back, because they spent far more than they expected and never had a plan for what the spending was supposed to produce.
- In eighteen years of agile, lean and DevOps work I've seen three kinds of sponsor:
  - **The partner** helps people understand what the change means and works it out with them, so when part of it doesn't fit the team, they talk about it and adjust.
  - **The bystander** says the right words and lets everything carry on as before, until the change is a checkbox that nobody follows.
  - **The enforcer** keeps the change alive and makes it worse. The rule becomes “this is what the framework says,” whether or not it fits the company, the work or the people, and people go along with it without really buying in. With AI, the enforcer is the leader who has had AI write a status deck and now tells the whole company to use more of it.
- The next time you're about to tell your organization to use more AI, write a page to go with the instruction. Say what the AI use is for, how long the high limits will last and what happens after that, and what kinds of problems you want people to go after.
- Ask in both directions. Ask people what problems they are facing and who wants to take them on with AI, and ask what people have already solved, and how. When ten people turn out to be building similar tools, pull them together, because otherwise the company pays for the same work ten times.
- You will write a better page once you have gone past the beginner level yourself. Pick a piece of your own work that repeats, have the AI save what it learns from your feedback as documents in a folder you control, run it on the real work more than once, and check what comes back. No study has tested whether leaders who do this make better decisions about AI. It is my position from my own use, and it may matter less as AI gets more capable and more trustworthy.
- Check yourself: if someone on your team asked you this week what the plan is, what would you tell them?

What's Behind This Card

Read the full case, including the argument against asking leaders to build anything, at “Use More AI” Is Not a Plan. For the page that goes with your instruction, there is a template you can fill in: the One-Page AI Sponsor Plan.

This is one of seven cards today. The field guide maps seventeen practice areas, and I'm growing this set as each one earns its own depth.

This is a fit question, not a recipe. Where your team actually sits against this list, and what that's costing, is what the Engineering Ways of Working Diagnostic is built to find.