

People Drive Change:

BUILDING HUMAN CAPABILITY IN AN AI-ENABLED WORKPLACE

Artificial intelligence is changing tasks, workflows and the skills people need at work. Yet introducing a tool is not the same as building the capability to use it well. Organisations also need people who can communicate clearly, question outputs, apply analytical judgement, learn continuously and work constructively with colleagues as AI evolves.

Recent UK evidence captures both the opportunity and the challenge. Skills England identifies communication, critical thinking and analytical skills as cross-cutting capabilities that support people to use AI. Henley Business School's 2026 survey found optimism about AI alongside widespread feelings of being overwhelmed by its pace. Together, these findings make a strong case for a people-centred approach to AI adoption.

This paper explores how business coaches, HR and L&D professionals can help organisations connect technology plans with workforce capability. It argues that successful adaptation depends on practical, role-relevant learning, clear communication, employee involvement and an understanding of how behaviour affects collaboration. PRISM behavioural insight can support self-awareness and conversations between colleagues. It does not provide AI training or directly develop critical thinking or analytical skills. Its contribution is to help people understand how they respond, communicate and adapt while building those capabilities.

Introduction: people drive change

AI is moving from experimentation into everyday work. It can help with research, drafting, analysis and routine tasks, but the effects will vary by role, organisation and use case. Some people may gain time for higher-value work. Others may need to learn new processes, check more outputs or reconsider how their expertise is applied.

The question for organisations is not simply which tools to buy. It is how to introduce them in ways that build capability, support good work and give people a clear part in shaping change. Plans become real through people's decisions and actions. This means workforce learning, communication and behavioural understanding belong in AI planning from the beginning, rather than being added after implementation.



1. From AI adoption to workforce capability

Skills England's Annual Skills Report 2026 describes AI as reshaping skills across jobs, sectors and regions. It says the challenge is not only to increase the number of AI specialists, but to help the wider workforce adapt to technological change that is rapid, uneven and uncertain. The report identifies communication, critical thinking and analytical skills as important cross-cutting capabilities, alongside the need for people to upskill and reskill throughout their careers. [1]

The distinction between adoption and capability matters. A worker may have access to an AI assistant without knowing which tasks are appropriate, how to frame a useful request, how to verify the response or when human judgement should take priority. In some organisations, people are learning informally through trial and error, peer support and online resources. This can help people get started, but it may also create inconsistent practice and uncertainty about safe or effective use.

The Skills for AI research programme, developed with Skills England, draws on workshops with around 150 organisations, ten case studies and a UK employer survey with 536 responses. Its evidence suggests that AI learning is often constrained by limited time, staff pressure, cost and training that is not sufficiently connected to real roles. The programme recommends practical, task-based learning that develops technical, non-technical and responsible use together. [2]

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For coaches, HR and L&D, this points to a broader question: what will people need to know, practise and decide as work changes? That question should be considered alongside investment in technology, not after it.

2. What workers are telling us

Henley Business School's World of Work Institute surveyed 2,900 full-time UK workers across 29 sectors for its 2026 AI pulse check. Fifty-eight per cent said they were optimistic about AI at work, while 61 per cent continued to feel overwhelmed by the pace of development. The findings show that interest and unease can exist at the same time. [3]

The survey also identified concerns about becoming overly dependent on AI tools, losing skills over time and being able to spot errors. These concerns should not be dismissed as resistance to change. They raise practical questions about how people are supported to use AI, how they maintain expertise and how they know when an output needs checking.

For organisations, this is a cue to make space for questions and feedback. People need to understand what is changing, what is expected of them and where they can get help. Communication should be two-way. Leaders and people professionals also need to listen for what is unclear, which tasks create uncertainty and what kinds of learning would make a difference in practice.

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3. The human skills around AI

AI tools can generate suggestions and outputs, but people still need to judge what is relevant, accurate and appropriate for a particular task. Skills England's emphasis on communication, critical thinking and analytical skills reflects this human contribution. These capabilities are not a replacement for technical AI literacy. They help people use technical knowledge with context and care. [1]

Communication is needed to explain a task, frame a question, share learning and make decisions understandable to others. Critical thinking helps people examine assumptions, notice gaps and question a plausible but incorrect answer. Analytical skills help them interpret information, consider patterns and decide what further evidence may be needed.

Responsible use also involves knowing when not to use a tool, respecting information boundaries and escalating concerns. The Skills for AI employer guide groups AI skills into technical, responsible and ethical, and non-technical capabilities. It emphasises that many roles require a combination rather than advanced technical expertise alone. [2]

These capabilities are strengthened through application. A short course may provide a useful foundation, but people also need opportunities to use their learning on relevant work, compare approaches and reflect on what has or has not worked. Organisations should therefore treat capability as an ongoing part of work design and development.

4. Designing learning that keeps pace

The pace of AI development makes one-off training difficult to sustain. Tools change, organisational use cases evolve and people start from different levels of confidence and experience. Learning needs to be practical enough to apply now and flexible enough to update as work changes.

The Skills for AI employer guidance recommends learning that is practical, accessible, integrated into work, modular, expandable and sustainable. It should connect to real tasks and decisions, be available in formats people can use, and be updated as tools and work practices develop. [2]

For L&D teams, this could mean combining short formal learning with guided practice, peer discussion, worked examples and time to test a tool on a relevant task. For HR, it means connecting learning plans to workforce planning, role design and clear expectations about human oversight. Managers need to know how to support people as tasks shift, not just how to announce a new system.

CIPD guidance also recommends assessing whether a tool improves work outcomes and is reliable enough for its intended task. It highlights the importance of governance, role-based upskilling and sustainable use. In practice, organisations should consider whether AI saves time in a meaningful way, whether checking the output creates additional work and whether people retain opportunities to exercise judgement and build expertise. [4]

Learning should be evaluated by what people can do in their work, not only by course attendance or the number of accounts activated. Useful measures may include confidence with defined tasks, quality of reviewed outputs, appropriate escalation and whether the tool improves the intended outcome.

5. Behaviour shapes the experience of change

People do not all experience the same change in the same way. A new AI tool may look like an opportunity to one colleague and a source of uncertainty to another. One person may want to experiment; another may need clarity about accuracy, process or implications for their role. These responses may reflect different questions and information needs, not a simple division between people who support change and people who oppose it.

This is where conversation matters. If questions are interpreted as obstruction, people may stop raising them. If concerns are heard and examined, organisations can identify gaps in communication, training or implementation. Coaches and leaders can help by asking what a person needs to understand, what they are noticing in the work and what would help them take part.

Behaviour is also affected by context. Under pressure, people may rely more heavily on familiar ways of working. Some may become more decisive, while others may seek additional detail, consultation or reassurance. None of these responses should be treated as a fixed label. The practical issue is whether the behaviour is helping the person and team meet the demands of the situation, and whether another approach would be useful.

For organisations, understanding this variation can improve the quality of implementation conversations. It helps leaders consider how messages are landing, where a team may need more support and whether different perspectives are being used. This does not remove the need for clear decisions or accountability. It can make both more effective.

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6. Practical actions for coaches, HR and L&D

A people-centred approach can be put into practice through a set of connected steps.

Start with the work. Identify the tasks and decisions AI is expected to support. Be specific about the problem being solved, the intended outcome and the situations in which human review is required.

Involve the people affected. Ask employees and managers how the work is currently done, what could improve and what risks they see. People closest to a task can often identify important context that may not be visible during a technology selection process.

Map the capabilities needed. Consider technical skills alongside communication, critical thinking, analytical judgement and responsible use. Assess where people are starting from and make the learning relevant to their roles.

Build learning into everyday work. Provide clear guidance, time to practise, opportunities to learn with colleagues and routes for asking questions. Keep training current as tools and tasks change.

Review the impact and adapt. Check whether the tool is improving the intended outcome, whether people can use it confidently and safely, and whether new problems have emerged. Use feedback to refine training, processes and expectations.

Business coaches can help leaders examine the assumptions behind their plans and translate broad goals into the behaviours and capabilities needed to deliver them. HR professionals can connect AI adoption with workforce planning, governance, role design and employee communication. L&D professionals can build role-based learning pathways, create practical opportunities to apply skills and evaluate whether learning transfers into work.

Across these roles, the essential practice is to keep returning to the people doing the work. What do they need to understand? What do they need to practise? What should they be able to question? What support will help them adapt?

7. Where behavioural insight can help

Behavioural insight can add a useful perspective to workforce development. It can help people explore how they prefer to communicate, respond to demands and adapt their behaviour in different situations. For teams, it can provide a starting point for discussing different ways of approaching decisions, detail, relationships and action.

PRISM is a neuroscience-based behavioural profiling tool that maps self-expressed and observed behavioural preferences. Its purpose is not to label people or predict how they will respond to AI. A facilitated conversation can help individuals reflect on what comes naturally, how they are adapting to a role and how their behaviour may be experienced by others.

Used thoughtfully, this can support better conversations about collaboration and change. A leader might consider whether a message is giving enough context for different colleagues. A team might explore whether it is making room for both careful evaluation and new ideas. A coach or L&D professional might help someone identify a small behavioural adjustment that supports a working relationship.

PRISM does not teach technical AI skills or directly develop communication, analytical or critical thinking skills. Those need their own learning and practice. Behavioural insight can support the self-awareness and understanding of others that help people learn and work together as change unfolds.

Conclusion: build capability with people

AI adoption will continue to change tasks and roles, but technology alone does not determine the quality of the outcome. People need relevant learning, opportunities to practise, clear communication and a meaningful role in shaping how work changes.

For business coaches, HR and L&D professionals, this is an opportunity to connect workforce plans with everyday behaviour. Ask what people need to understand, what they need to learn and what conversations will help them adapt. People drive change when they have the capability and support to take part in it.

REFERENCES

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