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Human-first AI:
A practical checklist for scaling AI responsibly

AI is no longer just for technical experts. It is becoming part of everyday work across roles and teams. With that shift comes a new responsibility: to use AI in ways that strengthen human experience, build trust, and support sound judgement. This checklist is designed to help you do just that. Use it to guide team discussions, evaluate use cases, and keep your AI adoption focused on providing value to your employees.

1. Start with the human goal

Before choosing any tool or platform, be clear about the human need it supports.

- ☐ Can you clearly articulate the human benefit (better experience, inclusion, accessibility, confidence) beyond efficiency?

- ☐ Have you identified everyone affected, not just direct users? Think of learners, customers, students, and citizens.

- ☐ Are you using AI to support, not replace, human judgement, empathy, and context?

2. Evaluate use cases with people in mind

Every use case is, at its core, a description of how someone uses a tool to get something done. For each one, ask:

- How will they interact with the tool? (For example, will they rely on the first output or refine it?)

- Why use AI for this at all?
- What do they want to accomplish?
- Who is involved?

- ☐ Does the use case improve quality, clarity, or wellbeing?

- ☐ Would a process improvement solve the problem more effectively than AI?

- ☐ Do you understand users' behaviours and limitations, such as confidence levels, digital literacy, and likely shortcuts?

3. Look beyond time and cost savings

Speed and efficiency matter, but they are not always the most meaningful gains. AI can lighten the admin load, reduce cognitive strain, and free people to focus on work that feels purposeful.

- ☐ Does the use of AI reduce cognitive load and administrative burden ?

- ☐ Does it help people focus on meaningful work rather than increase complexity or pressure?

4. Keep AI useful, not overwhelming

Balance is key. To keep people empowered, use AI to reduce strain, not replace thinking. Focus on managing cognitive load, supporting autonomy, and avoiding over-reliance.

☐ Are you using AI for low-value tasks (like summaries and formatting) while keeping people involved in deeper thinking?

☐ Are you building skills in critical thinking, prompting, and interpretation?

☐ Are you actively avoiding dependency by making sure people can still complete core tasks without AI?

5. Empower managers to lead by example

Managers play a key role in shaping how teams use AI by guiding behaviour. People need time, training, and safe conditions to learn: to try, fail, and refine their approach.

☐ Do managers run hands-on sessions for teams to experiment safely and learn from mistakes?

☐ Are teams encouraged to discuss risks, limitations, and uncertainties openly?

☐ Do managers model accountability? (For example, "If my name is on it, I am responsible, even if AI drafted it")

6. Design learning that's AI-powered

AI "coaches" and learning companions are emerging as a way to offer real-time support beyond traditional training. They are especially valuable for learners with diverse needs.

☐ Are AI learning tools shaped for tone, clarity, empathy, and adaptability?

☐ Are L&D professionals shaping how tools are used, rather than letting the tech lead?

☐ Are materials personalised to support different learning needs, with human oversight?

☐ Are learners encouraged to challenge outputs and think critically?

7. Talk openly about culture and bias

AI reflects the data it is trained on, including cultural norms, tone, and assumptions. For example, American models may sound more optimistic and encouraging, while European ones can feel more direct. AI also tends to flatter, agree, and reinforce the user's point of view.

☐ Have you discussed how different tools reflect different cultures or tones?

☐ Are users aware of confirmation bias and the "flattery effect"?

☐ Is there an open conversation about healthy digital habits, screen time, and overuse?

☐ Are you protecting employees from psychological risk by ensuring AI supports rather than monitors?

8. Set clear responsibilities and boundaries

People are ultimately accountable for anything created with the help of AI. Without clear boundaries, trust erodes and risk increases.
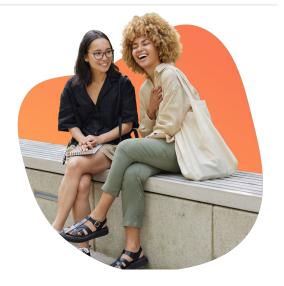
☐ Are there clear guidelines on what AI can and cannot be used for?

☐ Do all external communications require human review and approval?

☐ Is everyone aware of data privacy and security rules?

☐ Are experiments starting small, focusing on low-risk internal tasks?

9. Make critical thinking your team's AI superpower

AI works best when used as a thinking partner – a tool that sparks insight, not one that replaces it.

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The future is human + AI collaboration

AI is changing how we work and learn, but it's people who shape what that change looks like. With clear values, thoughtful use cases, and strong critical thinking, AI can lighten the load, improve outcomes, and expand access, without losing sight of trust, empathy, or human connection.

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