

# The Culture Code



# The Sound of Silence

Ella leaned back in her chair, the metrics glowing green on her dashboard. Usage up, tools stable, feedback loops ticking. By every measure, the AI rollout was going well.

Yet something didn't sit right.

The once-busy chat channels filled with questions and discoveries had gone quiet. Teams weren't complaining, but they weren't engaging either.

It was as if a gentle fog had rolled in across the organisation, no resistance, just... withdrawal.

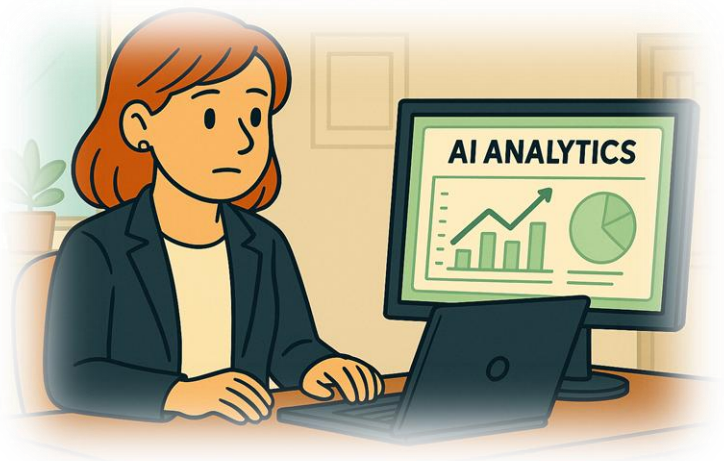
At the weekly leadership sync, Ella voiced it. "Has anyone else noticed things getting quiet?" A few subtle nods.

Then Ameen from Manufacturing offered what others hadn't said aloud. "They're afraid of getting it wrong. So they're not doing anything at all."

Ella realised they had mistaken silence for acceptance. But in truth, people were stuck, not in protest, but in paralysis.

No dashboard could show that. If people feared making mistakes, they would disengage. Politely, quietly, and completely.

This wasn't a tech issue. It was a culture one.



**Key Learning:** Adoption stalls not from opposition, but from unspoken uncertainty. Culture needs listening, not just metrics.

## Shadow Moves

Walking past a product team one morning, Ella spotted a brilliant customer-facing deck, concise, sharp, and visually spot on. She paused. “This is impressive,” she said. “Which prompt set did you use?”

A junior UX designer looked up sheepishly. “We didn’t use the company AI. Just ChatGPT. It’s faster and no one checks every word.”

Ella didn’t scold. She listened. And what she heard wasn’t defiance, it was pragmatism. People weren’t bypassing governance to be reckless; they were doing what worked.

To them, the approved tools felt too formal, too risky, too slow.

Later, Ella found more quiet cases of unsanctioned AI use. From marketing drafts to HR checklists, people were already integrating AI, just not the way the business had intended.

Shadow AI had crept in, not as rebellion, but as relief.

Governance hadn’t failed. It just hadn’t kept up with how people actually worked.



**Key Learning:** When official AI feels risky or clunky, people quietly turn to what works. Governance must meet reality.

# The Literacy Gap

Ella assembled a cross-functional working group to dig deeper. “Be honest,” she told them. “Where are you really at with AI?”

The honesty came in waves.

“I’m never sure when I’m allowed to use it,” said Sara from Procurement.

“I gave it a legal clause and it made something up,” Rishi admitted from Legal.

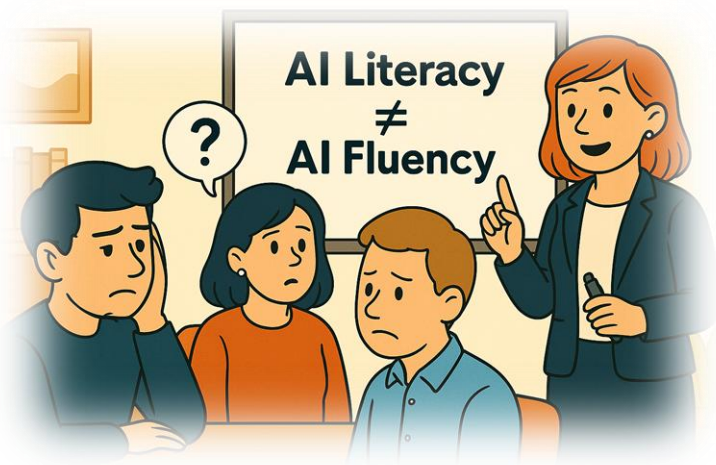
“I still think it’s cheating,” Jason from Finance added. “Feels like I’m cutting corners.”

Ella scribbled a phrase on the whiteboard: Literacy ≠ Fluency.

Knowing AI existed wasn’t the same as knowing how or when to use it effectively. Most people weren’t resisting AI; they just didn’t feel confident with it. And when people lack fluency, they avoid engagement. Worse, they fake it.

The solution wasn’t more slide decks. It was psychological safety.

A culture where saying “I’m not sure how to do this” wasn’t seen as a weakness, but as a starting point.



**Key Learning:** Awareness isn’t fluency. True AI culture is built by normalising questions, not expecting perfection.

# The New Champions

The moment came from an unexpected place.

On a regional site call, Nyree, a quiet team lead from Operations, demoed a simple solution: her frontline team used AI to rewrite messy shift handovers into clean summaries.

It saved them 15 minutes a day, time they now used for prep and safety checks.

Ella was stunned, not by the tech, but the mindset. They hadn't waited for approval. They saw a problem, tested an idea, and quietly improved their workflow.

Ella invited Nyree to present at the next town hall. Her story, humble and unpolished, sparked a wave of curiosity. "If they can do it," one warehouse manager muttered, "so can we."

These were the culture carriers. Not from head office, but from the ground up.

By spotlighting these small wins, Ella wasn't just driving adoption. She was building belief.



**Key Learning:** Everyday success stories do more to build culture than top-down directives amplify the quiet wins.

# Rewrite the Playbook

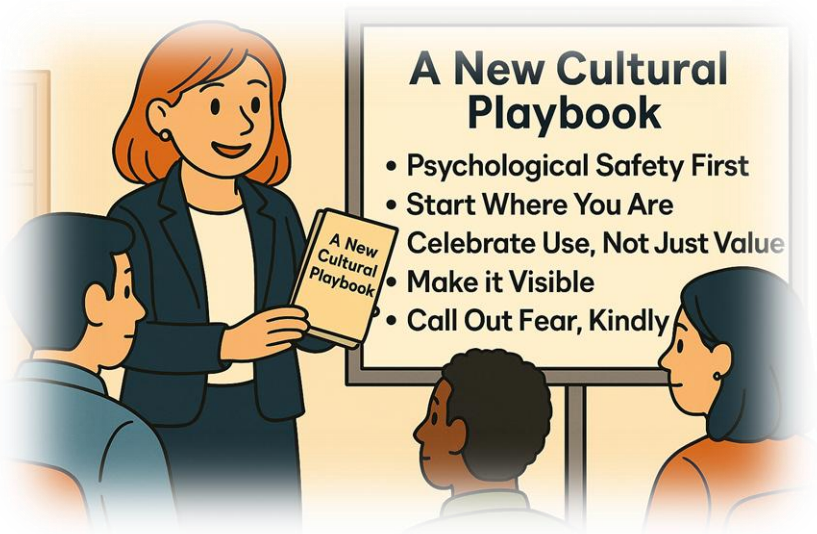
Ella met with the executive team and laid it out clearly. “This isn’t like SAP or Concur. People don’t just follow workflows. They create them with AI. And that means the culture around it matters just as much as the tools themselves.”

She pitched a new internal playbook:

- Start Where You Are – No need to master it all at once.
- Celebrate Curiosity – Reward attempts, not just outcomes.
- Model the Behaviour – Leaders must show, not just tell.
- Surface the Wins – Share what works across the business.
- Normalise the Learning Curve – Make it safe to not know.

The execs nodded. It felt different, less like governance, more like human leadership.

AI didn’t need a tighter policy. It needed a broader invitation. A signal from the top that curiosity was not only allowed but expected.



**Key Learning:** You don’t embed AI with rules alone. You need a culture that rewards curiosity and safe experimentation.



# The Ritual

At the next company all-hands, Ella stood before a blank whiteboard labeled: “I used AI today to...”

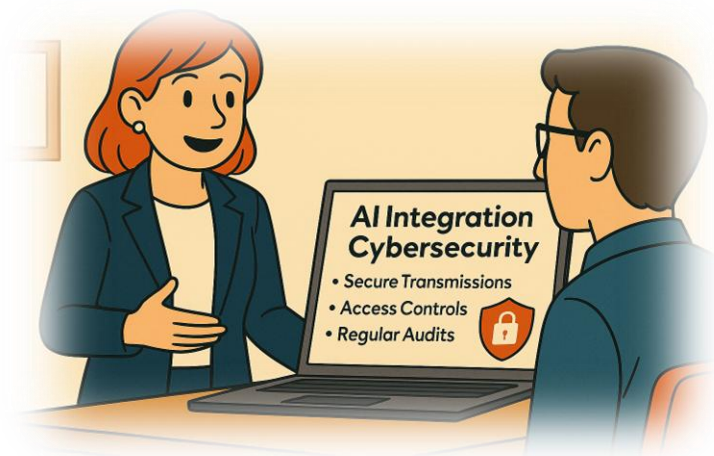
She invited people, anyone, to step up and write how they’d used AI. It started slowly. Then, line by line, the board filled.

- “... simplify a food safety procedure.”
- “... turn a long report into bullet points.”
- “... help me write an email to a supplier.”
- “... translate a product label into Vietnamese.”

The responses weren’t flashy. But they were real.

People began taking pictures of the board. Talking about it. Sharing what they’d learned.

This was the shift. Not a tool rollout. Not a policy shift. But a new ritual. One that made AI use visible, acceptable, and human.



**Key Learning:** Rituals turn change into habit. Shared stories and small acts make AI part of who we are.

## The Sceptic's Seat

Ella stared at her calendar invite, unsure for a moment before hitting send. She was asking David from Compliance to join the AI steering group. David, who'd once asked in a meeting if AI was "just the next productivity fad."

But culture wasn't built by excluding skeptics. It was shaped by including them.

David joined and made his presence known. "Where's the oversight?" he asked. "What happens if AI outputs breach a contract?" The room tensed.

Ella nodded. "That's exactly why we need you here."

Over time, David's challenges became invaluable. He pointed out model drift risks. He questioned data inputs. And slowly, his tone shifted from confrontation to collaboration.

"I still don't love the hype," he admitted later. "But I do love rigour."

Ella didn't need him to be an advocate. She needed him to be engaged. And now he was.



**Key Learning:** Cultural change means inviting dissent to the table, not excluding it.



# Code Switching

During a visit to a warehouse, Ella noticed something unusual, an AI cheat sheet pinned on the wall. But it wasn't from head office.

It was homemade, filled with casual phrases:

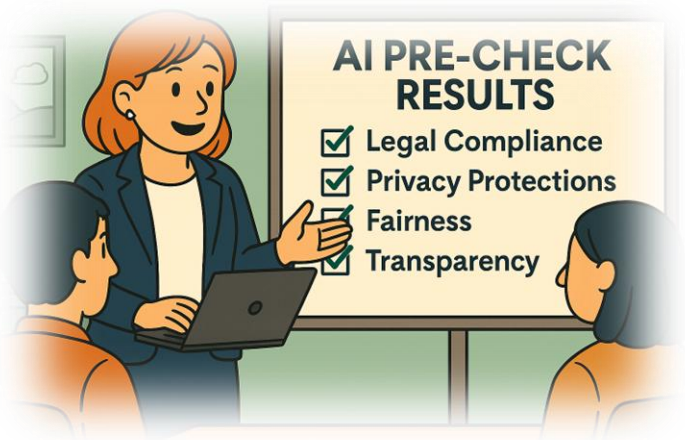
- “Make this less boring.”
- “Write in human.”
- “Explain like I’m 12.”

Mei, the supervisor, laughed. “We couldn’t follow your training slides. So we just made our own.”

What looked like non-compliance was actually innovation. The team had translated AI into their own language, prompting in shorthand, emojis, even memes.

It was messy. It was brilliant.

Ella shared the sheet company-wide. “This is what fluency looks like,” she wrote.



**Key Learning:** Real adoption happens when teams make AI their own, not when they copy head office.

# The Fluency Lab

Most AI training still felt like theory. People sat through presentations, clicked ‘next,’ and left unsure what to do differently.

So Ella launched something new: The Fluency Lab.

No slides. No formal training. Just people, real work, and AI side-by-side.

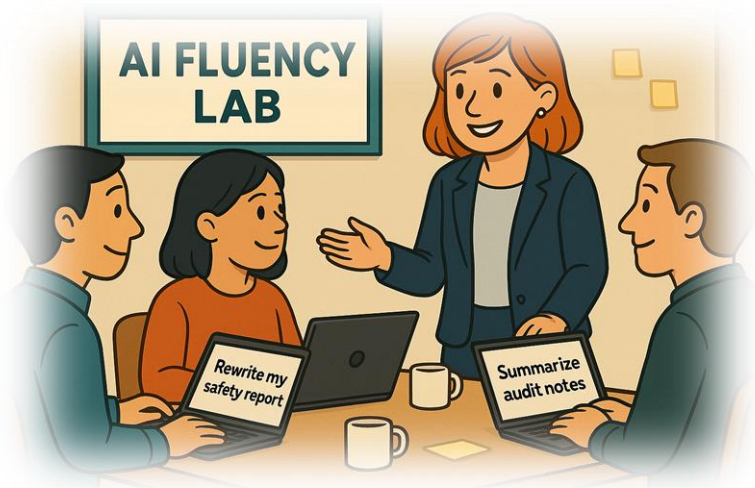
“Bring your job,” she said. “We’ll solve it together with AI.”

At first, it was quiet. Then a developer asked AI to refactor a script. A team lead rewrote an audit report. A junior marketer turned product specs into headlines.

People weren’t being trained. They were experimenting.

By the end of the day, someone said it aloud: “I didn’t think I was an AI person. But this makes sense now.”

Confidence had entered the room.



**Key Learning:** You don’t train culture into people. You grow it through experience and practice.

# Credits & Copyright

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