Juliette's Learning Tribe · Workbook for boards

for my Learning Tribe x

Seven board decisions before AI first

What a board decides before the company can line up behind AI. One page for every decision, and one page for the wall.



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read this before your next board meeting

If the board can't say it, nobody can.

Why the board goes first

Most boards have said "AI first". Far fewer have decided what it means. That gap is where alignment breaks.

"We will be AI first" is a mood, not a decision. A mood travels badly. Sales hears "move fast". IT hears "lock it down". Finance hears "cost". HR hears nothing at all.

this is where alignment breaks

So the company cannot line up behind something the board never said. Here is how it usually shows.

1. **Every department invents its own AI first.** Each director tells a different story, so each team builds a different thing.
2. **IT blocks what the business encourages.** One part says move fast. Another says lock it down. Both think they are following the board.
3. **People hear "AI" and hear "redundancy".** Nobody said what the company promises, so people fill the silence with fear.
4. **Pilots never end.** Nobody decided what success looks like, so nothing stops and nothing scales.
5. **The bill surprises the board.** Nobody set a budget, so the first number anyone sees is a shock.

people fill silence with fear



How this workbook helps

Seven decisions, one page each. Every page ends with one sentence the board agrees.

Run it as a two-hour board session. Page 13 has the agenda. Start with the self-check on page 4.

Page 12 puts the seven sentences on one page, for the whole company to read.

Seven decisions, three groups

decide once, at the top

Direction first, then limits, then follow-through. Each decision has its own page, and each one ends in a sentence.

A — The direction

1 **Why** What AI first means for us p5

2 **Where** Where we start, and where we never go p6

B — The limits

3 **Risk** How much risk we will carry p7

4 **Money** What we will spend, tokens included p8

5 **People** What we promise our people p9

C — The follow-through

6 **Owner** One name at the board table p10

7 **Measure** What the board will look at p11

Then the IT, then the people

The CTO's ten steps, then the people's six. Last week's workbook sets up the ground and the guard rails. The one before takes each team through six steps, one task at a time.

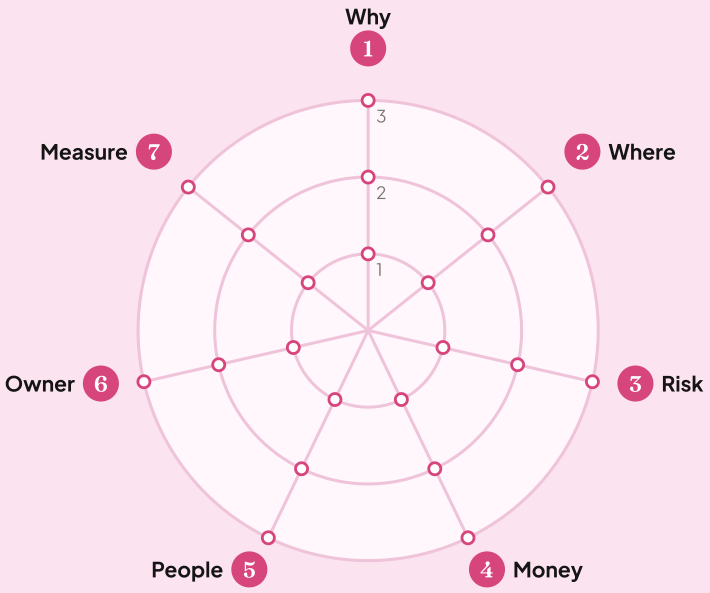
Start here

Where is your board now?

minutes are not a decision

Each board member scores alone, then you compare. Be harsh. A decision that only lives in the minutes has not been made yet.

#	Decision	0	1	2	3	Owner
1	**Why** What AI first means for us	☐	☐	☐	☐	
2	**Where** Where we start, and where we never go	☐	☐	☐	☐	
3	**Risk** How much risk we will carry	☐	☐	☐	☐	
4	**Money** What we will spend, tokens included	☐	☐	☐	☐	
5	**People** What we promise our people	☐	☐	☐	☐	
6	**Owner** One name at the board table	☐	☐	☐	☐	
7	**Measure** What the board will look at	☐	☐	☐	☐	



The scores

- 0 Never discussed
- 1 Discussed
- 2 Decided and minuted
- 3 The whole company knows

Mark each score on its spoke, then join the dots. If two board members draw different shapes, that is your answer.

Total, out of 21:

Lowest decision:

Decision 1 of 7 · The direction

1 Why

What AI first means for us

if it needs a slide, it's too long

Say what AI first means for you, in one sentence. Not a slide and not a strategy deck. A sentence the newest starter can repeat on their first day.

A mood

"We will be AI first."

Everybody nods. Nobody can act on it.

›

A decision

"By next autumn, every team uses AI on its three most repeated tasks, and a person checks what comes back."

It has a date, it covers everyone, and it says what changes.

Who it touches	What changes	What stays the same
Our customers		
Our people		
Our products		
How we work		
Our suppliers		

The sentence we agree Copy it onto page 12, line 1.

Done when

- [ ] The sentence fits on one line and has a date in it.
- [ ] Every board member can say it without reading it.
- [ ] It says what stays the same, as well as what changes.

Decision 2 of 7 · The direction

2 Where

Where we start, and where we never go

start with the dull, repeated work

Not every part of the business should start at once. Put each area in one of four boxes: start, try, plan or never.

Value ›

Start here High value, low risk	**Plan it carefully** High value, high risk
Let teams try Low value, low risk	**Never** Low value, high risk

Risk ›

Dull, repeated, low risk is the best place to start. Invoices, meeting notes, first drafts, sorting documents.

Name the **never** box out loud. People relax when they know where the line is.

Area of the business	Value	Risk	Start	Try	Plan	Never
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐
			☐	☐	☐	☐

The sentence we agree Copy it onto page 12, line 2.

_____

Done when

- ☐ Each area is in one box, and the board agrees which.
- ☐ The first three areas have a named lead.
- ☐ The never list has been told to the whole company.

Decision 3 of 7 · The limits

3 Risk

How much risk we will carry

write it down before, not after

Decide how much risk the board will carry before something goes wrong. Three lists: what AI decides on its own, what it only suggests, and what it never touches.

AI decides on its own

- Sort and tag documents
- Draft first versions
- Summarise meetings

AI suggests, a person decides

- Replies to customers
- Hiring shortlists
- Prices and discounts

AI never touches

- Pay and dismissal
- Final legal sign-off
- Anything a regulator signs

Examples only. Your lists depend on your sector, your customers and your regulator.

Kind of decision	○ On its own	● Suggests	● Never	Who signs off
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	
	☐	☐	☐	

The sentence we agree Copy it onto page 12, line 3.

_____

Done when

- ☐ The three lists are written down and agreed.
- ☐ Every never has a reason a new starter would understand.
- ☐ The CTO has the lists, and builds the guard rails from them.

Decision 4 of 7 · The limits

4 Money

What we will spend, tokens included

tokens are a running cost

AI costs money every month, not once. Decide the budget, who holds it and how the board will judge the return. The board does not need to understand tokens. It needs to decide who pays.

Tools and tokens
The running cost. It grows as people get better at using AI.

Time to learn
Hours in the diary, in working time, not after work.

Changing the work
Redesigning the process, not just adding a tool to the old one.

1. **The board sets the budget** ›
2. **Each team gets a limit** ›
3. **Spend reviewed monthly** ›
4. **The board sees spend against value**

Pot	This year	Who holds it	How we judge the return
Tools and tokens			
Time to learn			
Changing the work			
Held back for surprises			

The sentence we agree Copy it onto page 12, line 4.

_____

Done when

- [ ] Every pot has a figure and a named holder.
- [ ] The board sees spend against value at least every quarter.
- [ ] Teams know how to ask for more, and who says yes.

Decision 5 of 7 · The limits

5 People

What we promise our people

say it before the rumour does

The first thing your people learn about AI is what the board does not say. Decide what you promise them, and say it before the rumour does.

We will tell you first.

We will train you before your job changes.

We will say what AI will not do here.

Examples. Write your own, and only promise what the board will keep.

Group of roles	What may change	Support we give	When we tell them

The sentence we agree Copy it onto page 12, line 5.

Done when

- [ ] The promise is written down, and the board will keep it.
- [ ] Every group of roles knows what may change for them.
- [ ] People hear it from their manager before they hear it anywhere else.

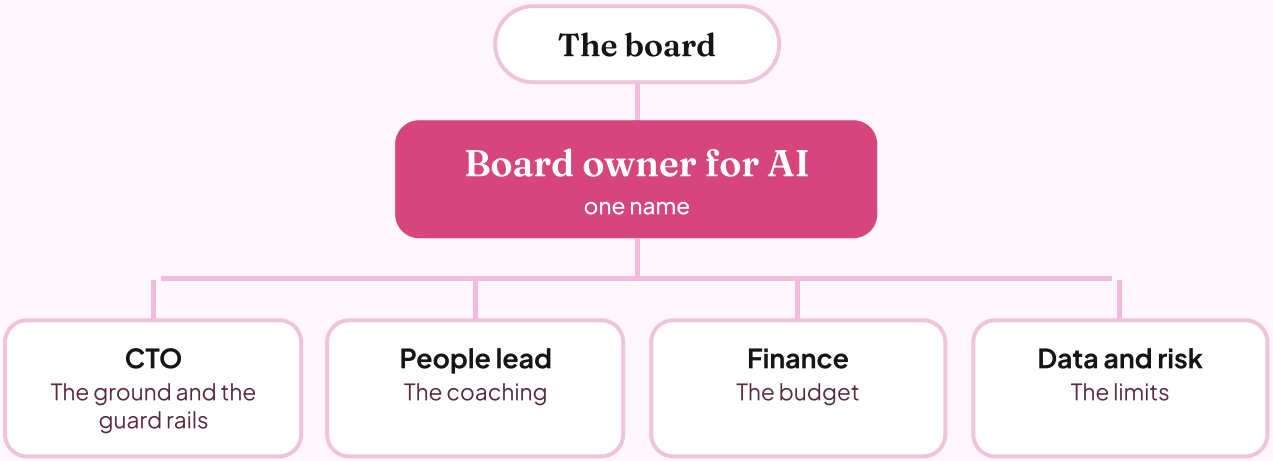
Decision 6 of 7 · The follow-through

6 Owner

One name at the board table

one name. Not a committee.

AI first needs one name at the board table. Not a committee and not a working group. One person who can say yes, no or stop, and who reports back.



The owner

Fill in together.

Board owner for AI: _____

Deputy: _____

Meets the four leads every: _____

Reports to the board every: _____

Can stop a project: _____

Decides on budget up to: _____

The sentence we agree

Copy it onto page 12, line 6.

_____

Done when

- [ ] One person is named, and everyone knows who.
- [ ] The four leads meet them on a fixed rhythm.
- [ ] They have used the word stop at least once, or know they can.

Decision 7 of 7 · The follow-through

7 Measure

What the board will look at

decide when you'll stop, too

Decide what the board will look at, and how often. Decide when you will scale. Decide when you will stop, too. A pilot with no end date is not a pilot.



Teams using AI on real tasks



Hours given back



Risks raised and closed



Spend against plan



How people feel about it

Five things a board can look at every quarter. No measure on its own tells you it is working. Together they do.

Measure	Where it comes from	Who reports it	How often	Scale when	Stop when
Teams using AI on real tasks					
Hours given back					
Risks raised and closed					
Spend against plan					
How people feel about it					

The sentence we agree Copy it onto page 12, line 7.

Done when

- [ ] Every measure has a source and a name next to it.
- [ ] Every pilot has a stop date before it starts.
- [ ] The board has looked at the measures at least once.

Photocopy this

Our AI first statement

put this on the wall

Seven sentences, one per decision. This is the page the whole company reads. It is what the CTO builds from, and what the coaching starts from.

1 For us, AI first means _____

_____

2 We will start with _____

and we will never use AI for _____

3 AI may decide on its own when _____

A person always decides _____

4 This year we will spend _____

and we will judge it by _____

5 We promise our people _____

_____

6 The board owner for AI is _____

_____

7 We will know it is working when _____

We will stop if _____

Chair: _____ **CEO:** _____ **Date:** _____

A board session in two hours

phones away. Biscuits allowed.

One session, the whole board in the room, the seven decisions in order. A suggested plan. Move the times to suit you, not the order.

0:00 · 15 min
The scores
Everyone does the self-check on page 4 alone. Then compare the shapes.

0:15 · 30 min
The direction
Why and where. Pages 5 and 6.

0:45 · 40 min
The limits
Risk, money and people. Pages 7, 8 and 9.

1:25 · 20 min
The follow-through
Owner and measure. Pages 10 and 11.

1:45 · 15 min
The page
Read the seven sentences aloud. Change what sounds wrong. Sign it.

2:00
Done
The statement goes to the whole company within a week.

Before the session

- [ ] Send the self-check a week before.
- [ ] Bring last quarter's AI spend, if anyone knows it.
- [ ] Invite one person who uses AI at work every day.

Who is in the room

Chair: _____

CEO: _____

CTO: _____

People lead: _____

Finance: _____

Data and risk: _____

Board owner for AI: _____

Ready to tell the company

When every decision scores a 3, the board has done its part. Then hand the statement to the CTO, and the coaching can start.

Agreed

1. Why
2. Where
3. Risk
4. Money
5. People
6. Owner
7. Measure

Chair: _____ **CEO:** _____

Board owner for AI: _____ **Date:** _____

Start on Monday

1. Put the self-check on your next board agenda.
2. Name one board owner for AI, by name.
3. Write the first sentence. What does AI first mean for us?

Then the IT, then the people

Ten steps to safe IT control of AI is the CTO's workbook. It turns this page into tools, rules and guard rails.

The journey to becoming an AI first organisation takes each team through six steps, one task at a time. Both are free.

juliettedenny.com/papers

now hand it to your CTO!



I would love to know which decision your board found hardest. For the next one, join Juliette's Learning Tribe on LinkedIn.

Juliette