AI coaches: How to empower your employees for everyday AI success

eraneos

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Executive summary

Shifting mindsets from deployment to employee-centric empowerment

Generative AI has moved beyond experimental pilots into daily work, reshaping industries, operating models and how value is created with the potential of adding $13–16T to S&P 500 market value by 2030. Despite this potential, many organizations struggle to capture full value because AI initiatives fail to address core challenges, remain disconnected from workflows, lag in fostering skills development, and lack clear ownership of the technology.

The solution isn't technology alone but enabling people through a structured approach that unites technology, transformation, and enablement. The Eraneos approach recognizes that 70% of AI's value comes from people's motivation to adopt new ways of working and thus helps companies to integrate AI into their core business. We help companies to deliver measurable business outcomes and to operationalize for long-term growth through individualized guidance, practice-oriented learning, and sustainable community.

Our experience shows that successful AI transformation requires moving beyond mere access to tools toward building true agency – the confidence and capability for employees to harness AI effectively, responsibly, and independently. This approach creates environments where experimentation thrives without fear of failure, recognizing that sustainable adoption depends on employees' ability to identify opportunities, apply AI appropriately, and integrate it into workflows.

By embedding AI coaches who combine business context with technical proficiency, Eraneos empowers employees at all levels, connects strategy to execution, and sustains adoption through continuous coaching and collaboration. This comprehensive support system builds internal champions who drive cultural transformation toward an AI-first mindset, accelerating adoption and delivering measurable competitive advantage.

This article outlines how to unlock the potential of Generative AI by focusing on three pivotal levers:

1. **Building the foundation through a shift from access to agency**
2. **Establishing a network of AI ambassadors to drive peer-to-peer adoption**
3. **Enabling practical AI usage through a practice-oriented coaching approach**

Throughout, we'll share practical implementations and pragmatic governance frameworks so organizations can achieve real business value quickly and sustainably.

From access to agency: Building the foundation for AI adoption

The deployment of AI tools across organizations has accelerated dramatically in recent years and months, with many companies rushing to provide access to the latest generative AI models. However, simply making tools available rarely translates to meaningful business impact. The first critical lever in unlocking GenAI's potential is moving from mere access to true agency – while providing tools creates visibility, transformational value only emerges when employees develop the confidence, capability, and autonomy to apply AI effectively, responsibly, and independently in their daily work.

Why agency matters more than access

Our experience at Eraneos reveals a common pattern: organizations that focus exclusively on tool deployment often see initial excitement followed by declining usage and minimal business impact. The missing element is agency – employees' ability to identify opportunities, apply AI appropriately, and integrate it into workflows without constant expert support.

Real-world insight: A major German insurance company faced the challenge of low AI adoption rates within their IT department. Through a targeted program that included individual assessment of each employee's AI skills, they identified efficiency levers of up to 20%. Personal AI efficiency improvements accounting for 5% and an additional 15% through workflow-based AI adoption. This granular approach to understanding skill gaps proved essential for creating meaningful agency among technical teams.

To build this foundation, we've developed a four-pronged framework that systematically develops organizational AI readiness.

01. AI literacy: Understanding capabilities and limitations

The foundation of effective AI adoption begins with comprehensive AI literacy across the organization. Employees need more than superficial exposure to AI tools – they require a nuanced understanding of what these technologies can and cannot do within their specific work context.

At Eraneos, we build this literacy through immersive, role-specific learning experiences that go beyond theoretical concepts. We've found that employees who understand AI's core capabilities – and equally important, its limitations – approach adoption with greater confidence and discernment. They learn to recognize when AI can generate valuable insights and when its outputs require careful verification.

"The most common barrier we encounter isn't technical resistance but uncertainty about appropriate use," explains one of our Senior AI coaches. "When employees understand concepts like hallucinations, data leakage risks, and bias, they develop a healthy balance of enthusiasm and critical thinking that drives responsible innovation."

02. Enablement: Creating safe spaces for experimentation

With literacy as the foundation, employees need safe spaces to apply their knowledge. We establish sandbox environments where they can explore AI capabilities without risk to production systems or sensitive data, complete with prompt libraries and templates that accelerate the learning curve. Critically, we work with leadership to make time specifically for AI exploration. Our client experiences show that suspending standard performance metrics during initial rollout periods significantly increases adoption rates.

"The organizations that see the fastest adoption are those that explicitly carve out time for learning," observes Dragana Mijatovic, Partner and Practice Lead Organizational Excellence & Transformation at Eraneos in Amsterdam. "When employees know they have permission to experiment without immediate productivity expectations, they engage more deeply and ultimately discover more valuable applications."

Real-world insight: Democratizing AI remains a challenge in the utilities industry. We guide utilities companies from AI strategy development to scaling transformation programs. What we've consistently observed is that even with strong top management buy-in, success remains elusive when AI transformation programs are conceived without enablement. Creating dedicated space and time for experimentation and learning is absolutely essential for energy providers looking to build sustainable AI capabilities.

03. AI application radar: Developing an "eye" for opportunity

As employees experiment with AI tools, they develop what we call an "AI application radar – the intuitive ability to spot high-potential use cases within their daily work.

"The most valuable AI use cases often come from employees who deeply understand their domain challenges," notes Claudia Schulze, Partner Data & AI at Eraneos in Munich. "When properly coached, these domain experts consistently identify more valuable and implementable opportunities than centralized AI teams working in isolation ever could."

Our methodology includes practical exercises that sharpen this radar, helping employees distinguish between flashy but low-value applications and those that address fundamental business needs.

04. Integrated governance: The foundation for scaling

As AI adoption grows, organizations need governance that enables rather than restricts. We help create simple, clear policies that employees can easily understand and apply, along with lightweight Communities of Practice that evolve as organizational maturity increases.

"Effective governance isn't about control – it's about creating clarity and confidence," further explains Dragana Mijatovic. "When employees understand the boundaries and have clear evaluation criteria for AI outputs, they innovate more freely within those parameters."

The cultural factor: AI ambassadors as peer-to-peer multipliers

Why ambassadors are key

While a good learning path helps in setting a clear direction, peer networks make change feel real and help to accelerate it. An AI ambassador is a curious, effective communicator, who enjoys experimenting and helping others. Ambassadors translate abstract policies into actionable tips, localize guidance to team contexts, and flag emerging risks.

Simply nominating and training them isn't enough, as organizations must set clear expectations and scope, so ambassadors know whether to focus on testing specific tools and processes or to freely explore opportunities. While responsibilities may vary by company, clear expectation-setting is essential.

This isn't theoretical. Microsoft's well-known Champion model shows how structured networks drive adoption and behavioral change.

How to fast-track an ambassador network

Building an effective AI ambassador network requires planning, intentionality, and effective support. Our lessons learned from the energy sector, where utilities companies intend to effectively integrate AI into their operating model, have shown that ambassador programs thrive when they combine structured governance with sufficient autonomy. Here's how to fast-track success:

→ **Select with intent:** Nominate 1–2% of employees across functions and regions, focusing on credibility, curiosity, and availability (~2 hours/week).
→ **Set clear expectations:** Define the mission early (e.g. pilot tools, coach high priority processes, scout new use cases). Clarity on objectives prevents confusion and maximizes impact.
→ **Provide resources:** Equip them with assets to kick-off their engagement, such as day-one-slides, demo scripts, and prompt libraries. Hold monthly jour fixes with central AI experts and maintain a support channel.
→ **Orchestrate the AI literacy journey:** Ambassadors anchor learning in the flow of work. Establish internal or external learning sessions to cover fundamentals quickly, give a prompting masterclass to create reusable instruction blocks, complement with a portfolio of modular trainings provided by experts, and coach teams by co-designing first use cases.
→ **Use technology:** Leverage platforms like Champion Management tools or SharePoint to track impact and escalate issues efficiently.
→ **Recognize contributions:** Reward with badges, team recognition, and quarterly metrics (sessions hosted, hours saved, risks addressed).

Avoid common pitfalls

Even with a well-designed ambassador network and clear guidance, pitfalls can stall impact. Anticipate and address those from the start to maintain momentum. Here are key obstacles to watch out for and how to overcome them:

→ **Insufficient role time:** Ambassadors without dedicated time become symbolic rather than impactful. You must ensure managers allocate adequate hours for this role as well as realistic time windows for coaching.
→ **Unclear scope:** Ambiguity kills momentum. Set measurable goals (e.g. pilots launched, use cases documented) to keep efforts focused.
→ **Over-reliance on one expert:** Avoid the "AI wizard" problem. Distribute responsibility by scaling peer networks across all teams.

The AI ambassador multiplier effect

Peer-to-peer influence is the catalyst that transforms AI adoption from a top-down mandate into an organic movement. By strategically selecting, empowering, and supporting a network of AI ambassadors (1-2% of your workforce), organizations create a sustainable engine for change that accelerates adoption, contextualizes learning, and builds cultural momentum. The key is intentionality – clearly defining ambassador roles, allocating dedicated time, providing practical resources, and recognizing contributions. When properly executed, this approach creates a self-reinforcing cycle where enthusiasm and expertise spread naturally through existing trust networks, dramatically reducing resistance while increasing both the speed and quality of AI integration across the enterprise.

AI coaching: The catalyst for sustainable skill development

While ambassador networks create momentum and peer support, organizations often need more structured guidance to systematically develop AI capabilities across diverse roles and functions. This is where dedicated coaching becomes essential – bridging the gap between tool access and true proficiency.

Why dedicated coaching is essential for AI transformation

Effective AI coaches, whether developed internally or engaged as external partners, bring critical advantages that complement AI ambassador efforts:

→ **Specialized expertise** in AI applications and implementation methodologies
→ **Structured approaches** for skill development and use case identification and implementation
→ **Dedicated focus** on accelerating learning curves through proven frameworks
→ **Cross-functional perspective** that connects technical capabilities with business needs
→ **Consistent standards** for quality, ethics, and best practices

Our experience at Eraneos shows that organizations with dedicated coaching resources typically achieve meaningful adoption 2-3 times faster than those relying solely on self-directed learning. This is particularly true during the critical early phases when patterns of use are being established and employees are forming their understanding of AI's potential.

The AI maturity journey: A structured path to mastery

Employees acquire sustainable AI adoption through different levels of learning programs. Figure 1 illustrates how employees can evolve from a general to an AI-specific skillset through increasing upskilling effort and complexity of AI involvement.
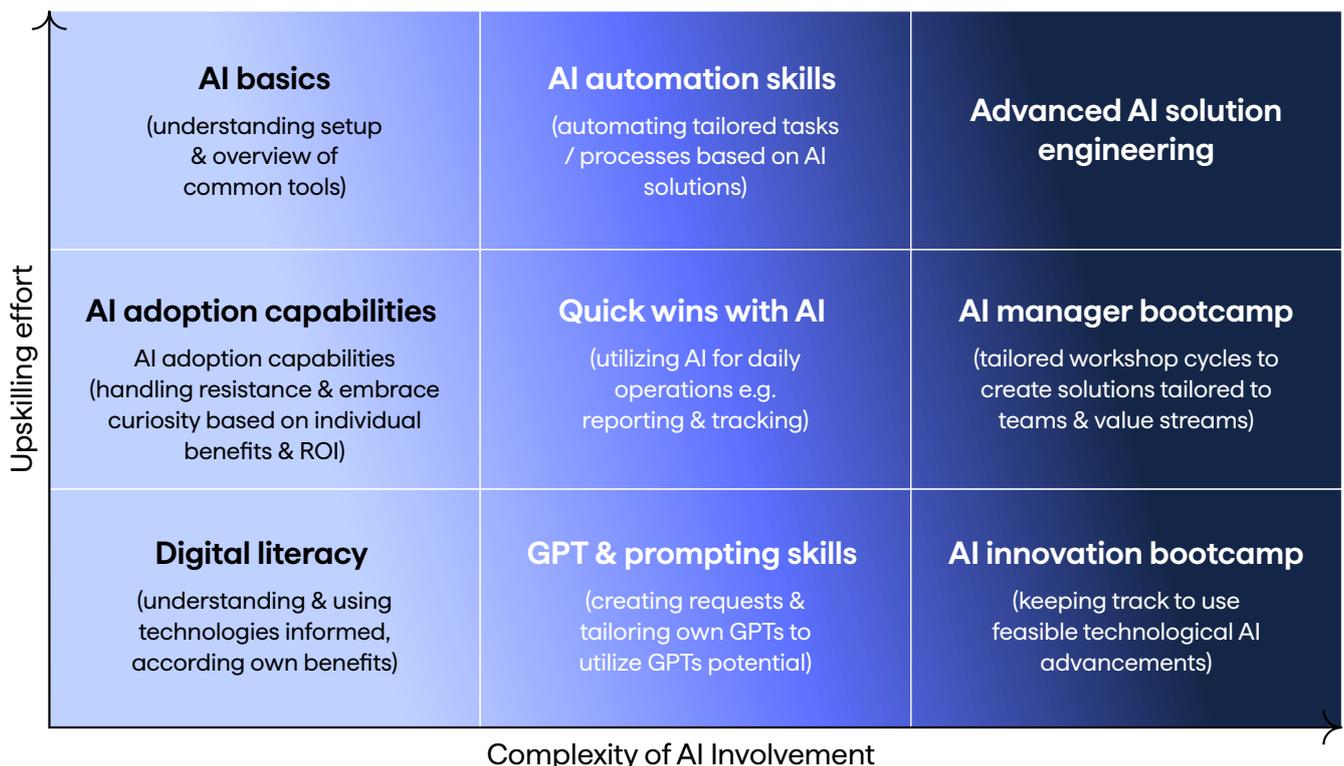
We recommend starting with Level 1 "Awareness" for broad reach, moving to Level 2 "Proficient user" in priority domains within one to two quarters, and selectively growing Level 3 "Makers" to embed advanced capabilities. This represents a roadmap for scaling AI agency, not just an overview of learning modules:

→ **Level 1 – Awareness:** Build a shared baseline. Learn what GenAI can and cannot do, how to use AI safely, and how approved tools are effectively being used. This level requires no prior knowledge on AI – only a general skillset.
→ **Level 2 – Proficient users:** Get comfortable turning AI into quick wins in daily work. Apply role-specific patterns, evaluate outputs, and know when to escalate. This level requires a mix between general and AI-specific skills.
→ **Level 3 – Makers:** Go deep and utilize your AI-specific skills. Design multistep instruction/prompt chains, connect to approved data sources, and author team-level instructions to standardize quality.

Fig. 1: Eraneos roadmap for scaling AI agency

Our literacy/learning modules

● General skillset   ● AI specific skillset   ● AI leadership & engineering

AI basics (understanding setup & overview of common tools)	**AI automation skills** (automating tailored tasks / processes based on AI solutions)	**Advanced AI solution engineering**
AI adoption capabilities AI adoption capabilities (handling resistance & embrace curiosity based on individual benefits & ROI)	**Quick wins with AI** (utilizing AI for daily operations e.g. reporting & tracking)	**AI manager bootcamp** (tailored workshop cycles to create solutions tailored to teams & value streams)
Digital literacy (understanding & using technologies informed, according own benefits)	**GPT & prompting skills** (creating requests & tailoring own GPTs to utilize GPTs potential)	**AI innovation bootcamp** (keeping track to use feasible technological AI advancements)

Upskilling effort →

Complexity of AI Involvement →

The 70/20/10 model: Balancing theory and practice

To support this upskilling effort, Eraneos drives AI adoption with a proven 70/20/10 model, combining technical upskilling and a structured mindset shift:

→ **10% structured training:** AI coaches lead workshops and bootcamps; deliver customized trainings; build materials and best-practice libraries.

→ **20% coaching and mentoring:** Regular 1:1 coaching sessions; communities and peer groups; AI ambassadors; high-performance coaching; systemic coaching.

→ **70% learning-by-doing:** On-the-job support of real use cases; integrate tools into workflows; troubleshoot and optimize.

This balanced approach recognizes that classroom training alone is insufficient – real proficiency comes from guided application in actual work contexts. Because practical implementation is often the hardest part of adopting a new operating model, organizations need coaching resources that can act simultaneously as coach, trainer, and consultant.

The AI coaching persona spectrum

Successful AI transformation requires addressing multiple dimensions simultaneously. At Eraneos, we've developed a spectrum of coaching personas that collectively cover all critical aspects of AI adoption. Each persona represents a set of specialized skills and focus areas that can be deployed flexibly based on your organization's specific needs.

Our AI coaching personas:

- **AI coach for tech:** Supports IT and business teams with technical questions on AI tool use, integration into existing systems, data connections, and prompt engineering – offering hands-on help for implementing and optimizing use cases.

- **AI coach for productivity:** Focuses on applying AI to streamline daily work and routine tasks. Trains employees on practical use cases – such as text generation and data preparation – while sharing best practices, tips, and effective every-day workflows.

- **AI coach for leadership:** Drives cultural change by helping leaders model AI adoption, improve change communication, and evolve decision-making ensuring acceptance at the management level.

- **AI coach for business integration:** Aligns AI solutions with core business processes and strategic goals. Identifies and prioritizes high-impact use cases, optimizes workflows, and ensures measurable business value and fast ROI.

- **AI coach for ethics & compliance:** Ensures AI solutions meet regulatory requirements for data responsibility, fairness, transparency, and compliance. Minimizes risks and builds trust among employees, customers, and regulators.

Flexible deployment of coaching personas

Our coaching approach is highly adaptable to your organization's specific needs:

→ **Individual coaches may embody multiple personas** based on their expertise and your requirements
→ **Coaching teams can be assembled** with complementary personas for comprehensive coverage
→ **The mix of personas can evolve** as your transformation progresses through different phases
→ **Internal coaches can be developed** to take on specific personas over time

The Eraneos advantage: Integrated expertise

At Eraneos, we bring these coaching personas to life through our unique combination of strategy, technology, and transformation expertise. Our multidisciplinary teams seamlessly blend technical knowledge with business acumen and change management capabilities – allowing us to deploy the right coaching mix for your specific needs. Whether you require comprehensive coverage across all personas or targeted expertise in specific areas, our integrated approach ensures your AI transformation addresses all critical dimensions without the fragmentation of multiple external partners.

Results you can expect: Make AI transformation stick

Our structured coaching approach delivers measurable outcomes that build momentum for your AI transformation:

→ **Increased confidence and consistency:** More employees using approved tools within established guardrails
→ **Reduced shadow AI:** Fewer unauthorized experiments as employees gain access to supported pathways
→ **Clear human-AI workflows**: Well-defined processes where human oversight becomes a natural extension
→ **Accelerated adoption curves:** Faster time-to-value through guided practice and targeted support
→ **Measurable capability growth:** Trackable progression of skills across your organization

By explicitly linking governance to a clear, staged learning path, organizations gain a credible, scalable way to grow AI citizenship while retaining flexibility for future expansion. Client feedback consistently emphasizes the value of structured training paired with accessible, supported pilots to accelerate adoption and build sustainable momentum.

Eraneos transformation drumbeat: Our proven rhythm for success

We've developed a standardized transformation management approach or AI adoption playbook that we deploy across all our client engagements. This structured drumbeat creates the necessary momentum and accountability to drive sustainable adoption:

Executive steering rhythm (monthly)

- **AI transformation board:** 90-minute monthly session with executive sponsors and key stakeholders
- **Standard agenda:** Progress review, barrier removal, strategic adjustments, resource allocation
- **Decision framework:** Structured approach to prioritization and go/no-go decisions
- **Value tracking:** Regular reporting on adoption metrics and business impact

Implementation coordination rhythm (bi-weekly)

- **AI transformation office:** 60-minute coordination sessions with workstream leads
- **Barrier log review:** Systematic tracking and resolution of implementation obstacles
- **Cross-functional alignment:** Ensuring consistent approach across business units
- **Sprint planning:** Setting clear 2-week objectives for all transformation workstreams

Coaching deployment rhythm (weekly)

- **Coach alignment sessions:** 45-minute synchronization across coaching personas
- **Adoption pulse checks:** Quick assessment of user engagement and pain points
- **Knowledge sharing:** Cross-pollination of successful approaches and lessons learned
- **Resource adjustment:** Flexible reallocation of coaching resources based on emerging needs

User community engagement (continuous)

- **AI ambassador forums:** Regular gatherings of power users and champions
- **Use case showcases:** Structured sharing of successful implementations
- **Feedback collection:** Systematic gathering of user experiences and suggestions
- **Peer learning:** Facilitated knowledge exchange between early adopters

This proven drumbeat establishes the governance backbone for your AI transformation, ensuring consistent progress while maintaining the flexibility to adapt to your organization's needs and challenges. By implementing these standard routines from day one, we create immediate structure and clarity around roles, responsibilities, and expectations – accelerating your path to sustainable AI adoption.

Navigating common transformation challenges

Throughout our AI transformation engagements, we've consistently observed several critical challenges that can derail even the most promising initiatives. Our coaching approach directly addresses these common pitfalls:

- → **Tools-first illusion:** Rolling out AI tools creates visibility, but without ongoing, hands-on coaching in day-to-day workflows, real adoption and impact remain superficial.
- → **Ambiguity gap:** Unclear responsibilities and expectations leave employees uncertain. We set concrete targets, transparent policies, and communicate available support to ensure confidence and direction.
- → **Training without development:** Standalone trainings increase knowledge but rarely result in habit or behavior change. We focus on role-specific, regular coaching sessions to embed sustainable AI practices.
- → **Underused coaching expertise:** Too often, coaching expertise is underutilized. We activate dedicated internal or external coaches, equipped with proven frameworks, to facilitate learning, troubleshoot challenges, and accelerate transformation at scale.

The most successful transformations we've led have all shared a common characteristic: they prioritized people over technology. While AI tools themselves are increasingly accessible and powerful, the human element remains the decisive factor in transformation success. Our coaching methodology systematically addresses the psychological, cultural, and practical barriers that typically emerge during AI adoption.

By embedding coaches directly into teams, we create safe spaces for experimentation while providing just-in-time guidance when employees encounter obstacles. This approach transforms abstract training concepts into practical skills, building confidence through guided application rather than theoretical knowledge alone. The result is a workforce that not only understands AI's potential but can actually realize that potential in their daily work – creating a virtuous cycle of adoption, value creation, and continuous improvement.
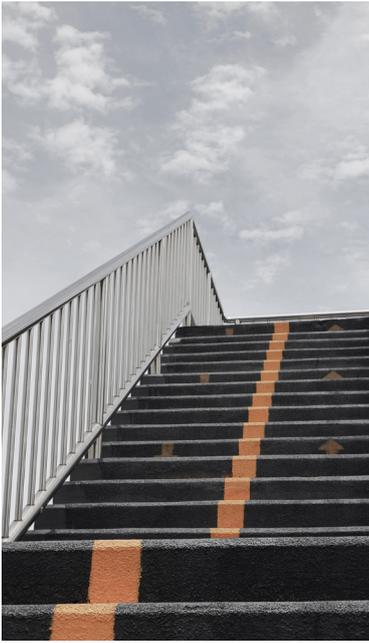
Connecting the transformation elements

Dedicated coaching completes the virtuous cycle of AI transformation by connecting the foundation of agency with the momentum of ambassador networks. While agency provides the baseline capability and ambassadors create peer momentum, coaches ensure depth of expertise, structured skill development, and methodical guidance that accelerates the entire transformation journey.

Future possibilities: The flywheel effect

As your AI transformation matures, we help you create a self-reinforcing flywheel of continuous improvement:

→ **Standardization:** Converting successful approaches into repeatable patterns
→ **Streamlining:** Refining instructions and clarifying roles to increase efficiency
→ **Quality enhancement:** Raising output standards with each implementation wave
→ **Functional scaling:** Expanding into specialized applications that automate repetitive work

By targeting high-frequency, low-variation tasks first, teams create visible momentum and free up capacity for more complex initiatives. As your organization masters fundamentals through AI ambassadors, our 70/20/10 learning approach, and specialized coaching personas, a powerful dynamic emerges: employees become increasingly self-sufficient at identifying AI opportunities, designing solutions, and implementing them in their domains.

The journey progresses from guided learning to autonomous innovation. Coaches initially establish standards, then domain experts build targeted applications for specific business challenges. Early wins compound into broader adoption, turning skeptics into advocates and culminating in a workforce that shapes AI to evolving needs, focusing people on higher-value work like creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking.

In this future state, coaching shifts from teaching fundamentals to facilitating innovation, and your organization develops an adaptive capability for continuous improvement and sustained AI-driven advantage.

Conclusion: GenAI coaching as a foundation for cultural change

Equipping employees with tools isn't enough – sustainable AI transformation requires structured coaching and peer-driven adoption. By focusing on:

1. **Building the foundation through a shift from access to agency:** Moving beyond tool deployment to develop employees' confidence and capability to apply AI independently
2. **Establishing a network of AI ambassadors to drive peer-to-peer adoption:** Creating internal champions who translate abstract policies into actionable guidance within their teams
3. **Enabling practical AI usage through a practice-oriented coaching approach:** Providing hands-on support that helps employees integrate AI into their daily workflows

Organizations can transform Generative AI from a new technology into a source of continuous improvement and innovation.

The core choice is clear:

→ **Choosing not to transform creates a compounding disadvantage:** While competitors embed AI into their business processes, your speed and quality decline, inconsistency rises, and future talent gravitates to more advanced companies, making recovery increasingly difficult.
→ **Committing to transformation**, by contrast, unlocks measurable upside. Coached adoption and peer networks lift performance and convert isolated experiments into repeatable, trusted outcomes. Done right, AI transformation enables your workforce to self-identify the organization's highest productivity opportunities and, by professionalizing AI integration into workflows, turn them into a lasting competitive edge.

These aren't theoretical concepts. Across industries – from insurance companies targeting 20% efficiency gains through personalized AI skill development to energy utilities democratizing AI access – we've seen how structured enablement makes the difference between superficial tool deployment and transformative adoption. The organizations achieving measurable results are those that systematically build agency, activate peer networks, and provide practice-oriented coaching.

The result is a more capable, confident, and future-ready workforce, prepared to embrace the AI era with trust and accountability. Deploy wisely, scale effectively, and let GenAI coaching set the pace for innovation.

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Ready to empower your employees for everyday GenAI success?

Contact our team at Eraneos to discover how our GenAI coaching can safely accelerate adoption, reduce shadow IT, and prepare your culture for the next phase of AI.

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