



# Building Human Capacity for the Age of AI

From Dedicated Roles  
to Distributed Capacity

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*Co-evolving with AI*  
*Paper #9*

## Overview of the Co-evolving with AI series

This series of nine papers began with the observation that AI is influencing how humans think, defer, develop and lead.

Eight papers later, the terrain has turned out to be larger than expected. We have covered a lot of ground:

1. What AI is doing to individual thinking; how the presence of AI changes the conditions in which judgment forms, insight develops, and ideas take shape
2. The civilisational choices being made right now about power, culture and the kind of future we build together
3. What human development requires, and what is at stake when those conditions are eroded in the AI encounter
4. The fault lines beneath most organisations navigating AI adoption. These are specific, predictable, and largely invisible until the consequences become too significant to ignore
5. How leadership has evolved as a response to emerging global context, and the implications for leadership in the AI era
6. The leadership this moment calls for, and what the interior development of that leadership requires
7. What is L&OD's role as an ecosystem architect in the AI age.
8. The choice to build an adaptive culture, one in which AI develops rather than diminishes the people inside it and why that choice remains available even within very different national contexts and institutional environments.

The final paper in this current series describes the human capacities required in the age of AI and the kind of cultures necessary to adapt and thrive.

Before commencing this final paper, we would like to share how privileged we feel to connect with the extraordinary range of practitioners, leaders and philosophers that have informed this work. We feel inspired by how much we have learned and developed through writing this series, and somewhat daunted by how much we have to learn and explore as this field races across our organisational skies at a faster rate than any meteor before it. While this is the last paper in this current series, it is also just one stop on the next phase of exploring this topic. More on that later!

Cultural transformation at the scale AI is demanding requires people in different roles, at different levels, with different capabilities, all oriented toward the same essential purpose.

The way the work may be organised or where decisions are made is also changing, as many of the traditional tasks that sat within areas of expertise or specialist skills can now be done more efficiently with AI agents.

As new technology, in this case AI, disrupts current ways of working as well as provide new capacities, we initially need to understand the new skills required, and over time integrate them into people's daily work habits. This is a well-worn, but often challenging path that we have seen play out in other transitions. There is an opportunity to learn from the past to accelerate this journey.

This paper suggests that to build that capacity will initially require a network of AI change agents as a temporary structure. Over time, the roles within this change agent structure are designed to transition into everyone's day to day work. A specific change agent role has been successful when it is no longer required as a separate role and has been incorporated into an organisations day to day workflows.

## Why a Change Agent Network?

In most organisations that navigate significant cultural shifts, a common pattern appears. Alongside the formal leadership, a distributed group of people emerge who understand what the organisation is trying to become, who hold that understanding in their daily work and ways of working, and who influence the culture around them through the quality of their presence, their questions, and their example. Some of these people have formal change roles. Many do not. What they share is a commitment to something larger that is emerging. We call this group of people a **Change Agent Network**.

In the age of AI, the Change Agent Network needs to be deliberate rather than emergent. The pace of change, the complexity of what is shifting, and the stakes of getting it wrong are too high to leave it to chance.

Consider how organisations have handled difficult conversations. For decades, the capability to address underperformance with honesty and care sat almost exclusively in HR. Over time, through deliberate design, coaching and modelling, that capability has spread. It has become an expectation of the management role itself. HR shifted from doing to enabling; the dedicated function was no longer needed in the same form.

The Change Agent Network follows the same logic. In the early stages of AI adoption, dedicated roles are necessary to hold the space from both efficiency and capacity perspectives. But the goal from the outset is for those roles to transition into everyone's day-to-day work. A role has been successful when it is no longer required.



## The Developmental Arc: From Roles to Capabilities and Capacities

Creating real, embedded transformation often requires the explicit introduction of new roles that carry the capabilities and capacities needed for transformation. Together, these roles form the core of the Change Agent Network.

Over time these capabilities and capacities become part of everyday ways of working across the organisation.

This is a transformational journey, and it typically moves through three phases:

### Phase One - Establishing

Dedicated roles are created to hold capabilities and capacities the organisation does not yet have. What do these look like in the AI age? We believe that five roles will be crucial to create beyond, and in support of, the Chief AI Officer role: **The Change Steward, The Sense-Maker, The Ethical Steward, The Experience Curator and The Network Integrator**. We believe that establishing these roles will be crucial as without them, the work simply will not happen effectively.

### Phase Two - Building

The capabilities and capacities begin to transfer through the mentoring and stewardship of the Change Agent Network. The work shifts from being done by dedicated individuals to being enabled through their coaching, modelling and creating the conditions for cultural progress.

### Phase Three - Embedding

The capabilities and capacities have become part of the culture. They live in the habits, expectations and reflexes of the organisation as a whole. The roles, having done their work, are no longer needed in the same form.

Most organisations will spend considerable time transitioning through these three phases; some capabilities and capacities transferred, others still needing dedicated ownership, the Change Agent Network evolving as the organisation evolves. This is the nature of cultural transformation at this scale and pace.

**Capability** is what people can **DO**: the skills they demonstrate, the behaviours they model, and the tools they have learned through experience and training. These are important and contribute directly to role effectiveness.

Beneath visible capability lies a deeper layer that profoundly influences how people respond to complexity, challenge, and change.

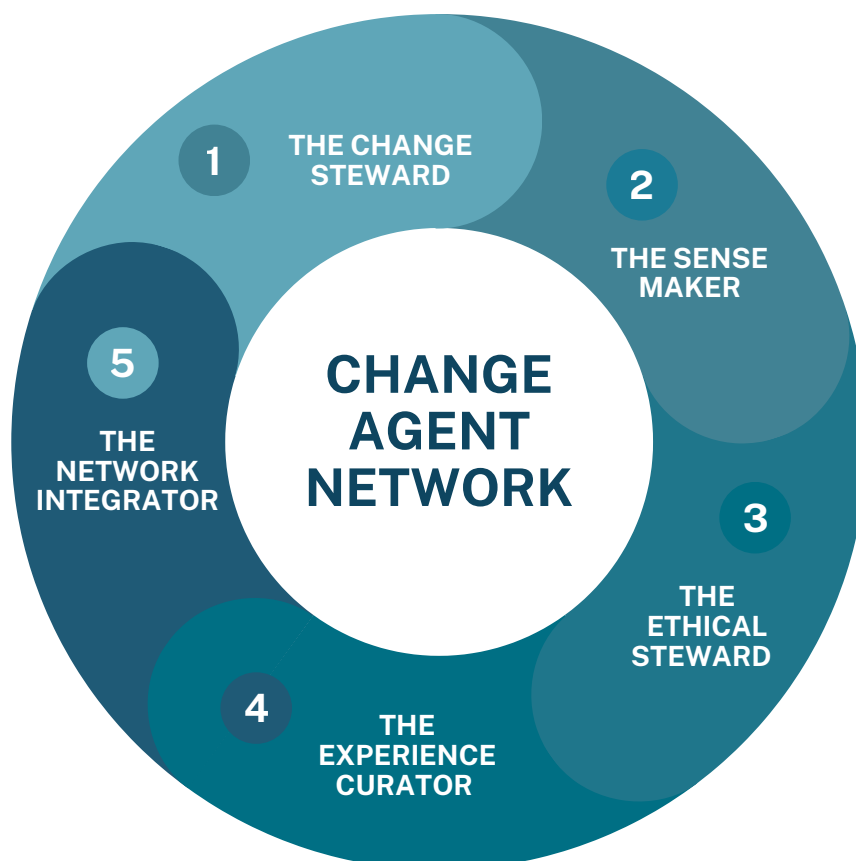
This is **capacity** — the ability to **HOLD** uncertainty, integrate multiple perspectives, regulate reactivity, and stay open under pressure.

Both **capability** and **capacity** matter. But they are not the same.

## The Five Roles

As you reflect on the following five roles, you may notice some of these roles already beginning to appear in different ways across your organisation, either as specific roles or within specific roles. Green shoots are to be celebrated. The invitation for the culture practitioner is how to scale these green shoots and support the embedment of the core capacities being developed across its population. While embedment is an essential activity for productivity and creativity it is also crucial for individual growth and career progression. As the saying goes, *“humans won’t be replaced by AI, but they will be replaced by other humans who more effectively embrace AI.”*

The following five roles are not a fixed network – by its very nature, a Change Agent Network evolves. We have developed this thinking based on observations of and learnings from how organisations have historically embedded new fields and the cultural roles that are crucial. And then we have applied a lens of what does this mean specifically for AI. As you read the following, hold this as a possibility, and reflect on your own organisational context and what it may mean.



## The Developmental Arc: From Roles to Capabilities and Capacities

### The Change Steward

The primary focus of the change steward is to engage people to consciously and intentionally engage with AI. As part of this, the Change Steward works to counter automation bias - the tendency to over-trust AI outputs and under-apply human judgment. They also help craft and share the organisational narrative about its AI journey; about its challenges, its learnings and the inspiring progress in productivity, creativity and strategic insight that emerges through the AI partnership.

*The question at the heart of this role: what is AI doing to how we think, and how do we shape this towards human and organisational evolution?*

### The Sense-Maker

AI is extraordinary at surfacing patterns. The sense-making role helps people across an organisational system to develop capacities to interpret those patterns in the full context of an organisation's history, relationships, values and purpose.

The Sense-Maker translates between AI-generated data and strategic meaning, between predictive outputs and the human narratives that make those outputs actionable. The Sense-Maker observes both the patterns and insights that data identifies and also what it cannot see: what experience is absent from the dataset, what the AI is trained to find, and what assumptions are built into the model before the first question is asked.

Over time, the goal is that this critical literacy spreads; that every strategist and team lead develops the habit of asking what the data cannot see, not just the person whose role it is to ask.

*The question at the heart of this role: what are we sensing, what is becoming visible that we haven't previously seen and what might that mean for what we are missing?*

### The Ethical Steward

Every AI deployment raises ethical questions. Some organisations explore these questions at the point of implementation and then move on prematurely. The Ethical Steward understands that second and third-order ethical considerations emerge over time, often in ways nobody anticipated.

The Ethical Steward explores the familiar terrain of bias auditing and fairness reviews and also extends their remit into the developmental consequences of AI deployment for the people inside the organisation. What is AI doing to human judgment over time? What capabilities are atrophying? What conditions for development are being removed in the name of efficiency? These questions need to be held with sustained attention rather than periodic reassessment.

Over time, the goal is that every leader practices the habit of looking past immediate efficiency to ask what is happening to the people inside the organisation.

*The question at the heart of this role: what is this doing to us, not just to our outputs?*

### The Experience Curator

The way AI is designed shapes what humans do and do not develop through their encounter with it. An interface that is constantly affirming produces a different human over time than one that creates productive discomfort, invites reflection on judgment, and makes AI's reasoning visible rather than opaque.

The Experience Curator is responsible for the quality of the human-AI encounter at the design level. They bring together user interface capability with a developmental orientation, exploring how design can build human capability rather than substitute for it. They are the person who insists that human growth through the encounter matters as much as the efficiency of the output.

Over time, the goal is that this developmental orientation spreads into every product, process and workflow decision; that the question of what humans are learning through their encounter with AI becomes a standard design consideration, not a specialist one.

***The question at the heart of this role: what is the human learning through this encounter, and is that learning intentional? Is that encounter suppressing or expanding development?***

### The Network Integrator

The other four roles can exist in isolation; capable people in each function, doing good work within their domain. However, without sufficient connection to each other or to the wider transformation the organisation is navigating, the effort can be ineffective or incoherent. The Network Integrator is the person who ensures that does not happen.

The Network Integrator's work is relational at its core. They see the Change Agent Network as a living system with its own health, its own dynamics, its own patterns of connection and disconnection. They work to ensure distributed ownership of AI-related capability across the organisation rather than concentration in technical teams. They create practices and forums and ways of working that build effective relationships between change agents, between functions and between levels as the Change Agent Network and the organisation evolve.

They also encourage, when the time is right, the deliberate work of transitioning the roles into everyday ways of working.

Over time, the goal is that this relational awareness becomes part of how the organisation breathes, that maintaining connections across the Network is a shared instinct rather than one person's responsibility.

***The question at the heart of this role: how is the whole Network holding together, and what does it need to remain generative?***

## How the Network Functions

These five roles are most powerful when they function as a Change Agent Network rather than a set of parallel positions.

The Change Steward and the Sense-Maker work most naturally in close relationship – the change steward shaping the quality of human engagement with AI, the sense-maker shaping the quality of learning and growing from the AI outputs. Together they hold both sides of the encounter.

The Ethical Steward and the Experience Curator share a concern for the developmental consequences of AI deployment, and their work is stronger when they bring their perspectives together - one from the ethical long view, one from the design level.

The Network Integrator holds the connections between all of them, ensuring that insight generated in one part of the Change Agent Network reaches the parts that can use it, and that the Network remains oriented toward its purpose rather than fragmenting into separate functional concerns. A Change Agent Network that is healthy tends to be visible in specific ways. People in different roles bring each other into their work. Questions that arise in one domain are shared with others. The informal conversations between change agents are as substantive as the formal ones. And the Network has a shared story about what it is collectively trying to build - a lived experience of purpose rather than parallel job descriptions.

A Change Agent Network that is struggling shows different patterns. Change agents drift into silos. The Ethical Steward raises concerns that never reach the Experience Curator. The Sense-Maker produces translations that the Change Steward never receives. The Network Integrator works to maintain connections that should be self-sustaining but are not. And underneath all of it, purpose is diminished - each role doing good work, but the collective impact less than the sum of its parts.

## Navigating Power and Politics

These roles operate in environments designed to maximise efficiency and speed. The people holding them will regularly find themselves arguing for slower, more considered approaches in cultures that reward the opposite. That requires organisational support and advocacy, not just personal resilience.

A crucial question is where the Change Agent Network sits. It needs sufficient seniority and sponsorship to ensure it has an equal voice, particularly alongside whoever holds the AI technology mandate. The Change Agent Network and the technology function need to operate as counterparts, each with a legitimate seat at the table. Without that parity, the balance between human development and technological efficiency tips before the conversation has a chance to begin.

Several reporting lines can work: within the CEO office, which signals strategic importance and ensures direct sponsorship; alongside L&OD under the Chief People Officer, which keeps the work in the human development conversation while giving it independence from L&OD itself; or under a Head of Transformation or Strategy, which situates the Change Agent Network within the organisation's longer term thinking. The appropriate choice will depend on organisational context and the readiness of each of areas to be able to stand up the Change Agent Network with influence and engagement.

Whatever the structure, three principles matter more than the reporting line itself. The Change Agent Network needs a named executive sponsor who treats its work as essential rather than supplementary. It needs sufficient independence from the technology function to maintain its own perspective. And it needs the organisational standing to bring difficult observations to senior leadership and have those observations taken seriously.

## Measuring The Network Maturity

Traditional metrics that measure adoption speed and cost savings typically evaluate only the technology implementation, leaving the human dimension largely unassessed or assumed. The consequences of not attending to the human dimension are both well documented and sadly are regularly repeated. Subtle resistance that means systems are never fully embraced or implemented, holding on to past processes or ways of working that no longer serve, or blindly adopting new technology without considering its consequences or how it aligns to or integrates with other systems.

Measuring human growth requires us to observe the quality of the encounter between the person and AI, and how that encounter is changing over time.

Because the Change Agent Network moves through three phases, the measurement framework moves with it. What we look for in the early days is not what we look for when the work is mature. The following three phases mirror the three phases of the Change Agent Network itself – establishing, building and embedding.

### Phase 1: Establishing

In the early days, the goal is to observe whether the organisation is creating effective conditions for human engagement with AI. The metrics here measure the quality of that early effort.

**First Thought Sanctuary:** How long teams deliberately sit with a complex problem before inviting AI into the room.

**Visibility of Struggle:** How often leaders openly share their unassisted reasoning to normalise the value of human thought.

**Nature of Inquiry:** Whether teams ask how to accelerate an output or pause to ask whether AI actually serves their strategic intent.

**Deliberate Provocation:** How often teams explicitly prompt AI to challenge the consensus of the room rather than affirm it.

**Network Connectivity:** How actively change agents are consulting and connecting across roles.

## Phase 2: Building

As the capabilities and capacities spread beyond the dedicated roles, attention shifts toward how the broader organisation is changing its relationship with AI. The key question at this phase is whether the Change Agent Network's questions are beginning to be asked by people outside the Network.

**Prompt Maturation:** The movement away from simple extraction commands toward dialogic prompts that challenge underlying assumptions.

**Contextual Grounding:** How often teams bring the organisation's history, relationships and context into their AI interactions before asking it to synthesise a strategy.

**Workflow Redesign:** Whether teams are altering their ways of working to create space for dialogue, rather than simply inserting AI into existing processes.

**Collective Sensemaking:** How often individuals bring isolated AI encounters into a team conversation to test insights against lived experience.

**Return to Own Judgment:** How often people edit, question or override AI outputs.

**Psychological Safety:** How freely people raise tough observations, including concerns about AI's impact on their work and identity.

## Phase 3: Embedding

When these capabilities and capacities have become part of everyday ways of working, the focus shifts to whether the organisation has genuinely changed and whether the Change Agent Network's roles are still needed in their original form. The following are some ways that progress in broadly developing these capabilities could be measured.

**Unassisted Capability:** Whether individuals demonstrate stronger systemic thinking and judgment in purely human interactions, having internalised what AI previously provided.

**Narrative Depth:** Whether the organisation can hold competing perspectives and complex trade-offs without rushing toward premature certainty.

**Ecological Awareness:** How naturally teams consider the wider consequences of their AI tools on the communities they serve.

**Capacity Spread:** To what extent are the capabilities and capacities held by the five roles now distributed across the broader management layer, not just within the Change Agent Network.

**Role Transition:** How many of the Change Agent Network's roles have successfully transferred into everyday ways of working and are no longer needed in their dedicated form.

*“When a measure becomes a target,  
it ceases to be a good measure.”*

**- MARILYN STRATHERN**

## The Approach to Measurement and why it Matters

The technology exists to measure almost everything described above. Prompts can be timestamped, dialogic complexity can be scored, patterns of AI use can be tracked across the organisation. The temptation to automate measurement is understandable, AND it could undermine much of what the Change Agent Network is trying to build.

When people realise their prompts are being assessed, many may stop asking genuine questions and start providing performative responses. The time and space to explore and experiment may reduce. What was meant to measure development may end up preventing it.

To illustrate this, one client shared with us that AI agents were deployed to assess efficiency in their organisation and advise on process improvements. The agents reported back many areas for improvement. The agents also reported back human habits such as taking a phone call or having a five-minute Instagram scroll. Where does the boundary between efficiency and humans having space and agency lie? If people perceive that measurement becomes weaponised, the measurement will cease to be effective.

The observations of how people are actually developing through the AI interaction – whether challenging an AI output reflects growing confidence or fatigue, or whether a team conversation represents real sensemaking or performance - requires a level of human judgment and insight that machine observation can't yet replace.

This means the approach to measurement needs to both observe the broader system (AI observations, dashboards and broad metrics) AND be localised with human observation and dialogue. Within Adaptive Cultures, we have found it tremendously valuable to share our learning experiences and conundrums and provide each other immediate observation and feedback on what is emerging. Over time, this builds a level of self-iteration and objectivity that somehow can get lost in the direct conversation with the agent.

*“There is a crack in everything.  
That’s how the light gets in..”*

- LEONARD COHEN

## The end of this series...and the beginning of another

This series has been developed at a moment in time that is moving faster than careful thinking usually allows.

Each paper has been an attempt to share our insights about what AI is doing to human development, to organisational culture, to leadership, to the conditions that make collective intelligence possible, and to the choice every organisation faces about what kind of future it is building.

We are aware, as we write this final paper, that we are writing from inside the moment we are describing. The ground is shifting under us as we write. What we have said will need revisiting. What we have understood is already deepening. What feels settled may turn out to be provisional.

The nature of this work is adaptive. It requires us all to remain curious, hold conclusions lightly, and keep bringing lived experience back to reflection and exploration rather than letting our insights harden into fixed assumptions and assured answers. The tension here is significant, with much of AI still in its infancy and regularly reinforcing fixed assumptions and premature assurance. The greatest gift and challenge for you as a culture practitioner, a leader or an AI enthusiast, is to hold this tension as the next generation of organisations, technology and human beings unfolds.

Our thinking on AI, culture and human development continues to evolve. Even as we conclude this series, we are already busily exploring many themes that have emerged from this first offer.

We would welcome you into that conversation at [adaptivecultures.co](https://www.adaptivecultures.co).

## Questions for Reflection



Across the nine papers we have invited questions to explore how you can deploy AI across your organisation. These are the ones we would leave you with.

1. Where in your organisation do you see the work of these five roles already happening – formally or informally? Who is doing it, and are they resourced and connected well enough to do it well?
2. Which of these roles is most absent in your organisation right now, and what is the cost of that absence?
3. What would it mean to build a Change Agent Network deliberately rather than waiting for it to emerge? What would need to change about how your organisation resources and values this kind of work?
4. Where are your change agents operating in isolation from each other – and what would it take to build the connections between them?
5. How does your leadership relate to the change agent work underway – as essential or supplementary?
6. At which phase of the journey does your organisation sit – establishing, building or embedding? And what would it take to move toward the next phase?
7. Who in your organisation is asking the questions these five roles are designed to hold? And who is listening to the answers?
8. What would it mean to treat the development of your Change Agent Network as one of the most important investments your organisation makes in its AI future – and to design it, from the outset, with its own transition in mind?

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We also acknowledge the role of generative AI systems — including *ChatGPT*, *Claude*, *Gemini* and *Perplexity* — in the development of this series. These systems were engaged as thinking partners to test ideas, surface patterns, challenge assumptions, and support the articulation of emerging insights. The quality of what emerged was shaped as much by the questions brought to these systems as by the systems themselves. All interpretation, judgement and final authorship remain our own.

### **A note about imagery:**

The imagery in this series continues our long-standing use of nature to reflect the patterns and dynamics of living systems. In this instance, some images have been created or refined with the support of generative AI — a natural extension of the inquiry itself, as we explore what it means to co-evolve with these technologies.

**Adaptive Cultures exists to enable cultural evolution for the good of people and planet. Working alongside WDHB, we partner with organisations to evolve culture, leadership and collective impact in ways that are grounded, practical and responsive to a rapidly changing world.**

**We work with leaders, teams and internal practitioners to understand how culture is really created and sustained: through patterns of thinking, relating and working that shape everyday decisions and outcomes, especially under conditions of uncertainty and change. We support intentional shifts that align purpose, strategy and systems with the culture required to thrive.**

**Our approach combines deep diagnostic insight with developmental practice, building the adaptive capacity needed to navigate complexity and create meaningful, lasting change.**

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