

Case Study: Building AI readiness at enterprise scale

A story of mandate, momentum,
and the hard work beneath the hype

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As part of our work studying AI readiness, we set out to understand not just how organizations think about AI, but how they are actually navigating it in practice. Beyond survey data and maturity models, we spoke directly with organizations that are living the reality of AI transformation today, wrestling with real constraints, making hard decisions, and learning quickly what readiness really requires.

What emerged were clear patterns, along with stories that brought the data to life. This case study is one of them. It captures how one technology services organization approached AI not as an experiment or efficiency play, but as a fundamental capability tied to its survival and long-term relevance.

For this organization, AI was never treated as a passing hype cycle.

The president of the company was explicit from the start: in a market where they build data and AI solutions for others, falling behind on AI internally would not just be ironic, it would be existential. If they became a laggard, the company itself would cease to exist as a viable entity.

That conviction set the tone. Rather than allowing AI to emerge organically or cautiously, leadership issued a clear mandate: the entire organization was going all in on AI.

From mandate to momentum

The company began with an AI Transformation Center of Excellence (COE), built on a simple but powerful metaphor.

If every line of business was holding a snowball of AI transformation and started rolling it downhill, each would build momentum on its own. Over time, those snowballs would grow, converge, and reshape the organization together.

It was a compelling vision, but reality set in quickly. By day one, the COE realized something critical. While they had deep expertise in AI, data, and engineering, they knew far less about how AI would fundamentally change HR, finance, legal, and other functions. They didn't yet know what a truly transformed HR department or finance function should look like in an AI-enabled world.

That realization became an inflection point.



About the Organization

Industry

Technology services and solutions

Size

Approximately 15,000 employees

Focus

Building data, analytics, and AI solutions for enterprise clients

AI Posture

AI-first mandate driven by executive leadership

AI Op Model

Federated AI transformation led by central AI Transformation Center of Excellence and business-led champions

Status

Actively scaling AI across functions, with enterprise wide enablement and transparency

The power of the right champions

Rather than trying to centralize all knowledge within the COE, the organization shifted to a federated model grounded in people who knew the business best. They identified AI champions across the enterprise, not based on job title or availability, but based on competence and credibility.

These champions shared a few defining traits. They deeply understood how their function actually worked. They had strong relationships across their teams and could quickly pull in context they didn't personally have. And they carried enough trust and influence to move fast without constant escalation.

This choice mattered. Where business units sent their strongest people, AI transformation accelerated. Where they delegated participation to less experienced or less committed staff, progress lagged almost immediately.

In this model, the COE does not own transformation alone. The champions own the vision and strategy for their domains. The COE's role is to help bring those visions to life, translating between business and technology, asking the right questions, and removing friction. That translation skill proved essential. Without people who could bridge business complexity and technical possibility, progress wasn't possible.

The prioritization problem

Success created its own challenge. Within a short period, the organization surfaced more than 335 AI use cases, with new ideas emerging daily. The volume quickly became overwhelming.

Rather than allowing enthusiasm to turn into chaos, the company invested in discipline.

A dedicated team worked with business leaders to sharpen problem statements before anything moved forward. Each use case was then evaluated through an AI-specific prioritization model designed to assess feasibility, impact, risk, and success metrics. This ensured that AI efforts tied directly back to outcomes, not just experimentation.

The result was a shared language for deciding what mattered most, which use cases should move now, which should wait, and which should not move at all.





Radical transparency as a force multiplier

One of the most distinctive aspects of this organization's approach is its commitment to radical transparency. AI use cases, their status, and progress are visible across the enterprise. AI champions can see what others are working on, reducing duplication and accelerating collaboration.

This visibility has led to practical benefits. Shared needs surfaced quickly, such as the demand for a common process documentation solution across HR, finance, and other functions. Instead of solving the same problem multiple times, teams aligned early and built once.

Transparency also extends to enablement. The company created active channels for AI tools, training, and questions, connecting a growing AI community across the business. Champions lead within their domains, but learning and momentum flow across the entire organization.

Enablement at scale

To ensure AI fluency was not limited to a small group, the organization invested heavily in enablement and training. A global team focuses on bringing everyone to a baseline level of AI understanding, then helping individuals progress based on their role and ambition.

Central to this effort is an enterprise-wide internal AI enablement program. All employees are required to complete Level 1, out of five total levels, by the end of the year. From there, employees can deepen their skills as AI becomes more embedded in their work. This structure sends a clear signal: AI is not optional, and learning is not left to chance.

Culture as an accelerant

Culturally, the company already valued curiosity, experimentation, and exploration. That foundation made it easier to embrace AI. There was no stigma in testing or failing early.

Instead, there was a growing sense of urgency and even friendly competition around participation.

Over time, the culture evolved. It is no longer just about experimenting with AI but about making experimentation useful. The organization tracks how often people use AI and makes that data visible. AI use is normalized. It is not framed as cheating or cutting corners, but as part of doing better work.

The company even encourages personal experimentation, reinforcing psychological safety. From playful internal uses to communities centered on emerging practices like vibe coding, employees are invited to explore AI without fear.

Trust, reinforced through transparency, allows people to play, learn, and contribute.



Tackling the data challenge head-on

Given how often data fragmentation derails AI efforts, the company's approach here is notable. Through the COE, they created department-based workstreams paired with agile delivery pods. Each pod includes a product manager and contributors from the data lake team, application development, data science, and other disciplines.

Reporting lines remain within disciplines, but the work happens cross-functionally. This structure allows teams to unlock data, rethink processes, and challenge legacy assumptions together. Rather than throwing AI at existing workflows, they ask why those workflows exist at all.

This agent builder factory model has been critical in addressing both data readiness and process redesign at the same time.

What ultimately made the difference

When asked what mattered most, everything points back to people. Specifically, getting the right people involved from the lines of business and within the COE itself. Competence, curiosity, and the ability to ask the right questions turned out to be more important than any single tool or platform.

This organization's experience reinforces a core insight from our AI readiness research. AI success is not driven by technology alone. It is built through mindset, people, process, and technology working together. Where those foundations are strong, AI compounds. Where they are weak, even the best tools stall.

In this case, readiness did not happen by accident. It was designed, reinforced, and lived every day.



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Complete the AI growth index for advice on moving from where you are now, to the next level: *Take Mercer's AI Readiness Assessment*