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The Consumption Gap

Why Trust Determines Whether AI Creates Business Value

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EXECUTIVE BRIEF

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Turning AI Capability into Repeatable Business Value

An organisation can have AI that works and still struggle to put it to work. Turning useful gains from individual tasks into broader transformation requires changes in how organisations make decisions, deliver services and organise work.

I call this the **Consumption Gap**: the difference between what AI can produce and what an organisation can confidently integrate into its everyday decisions, processes and operations. Bridging it is a leadership responsibility built on trust.

Earn trust and calibrate authority

Technical trustworthiness makes a system worthy of reliance; human trust describes people's willingness to rely on it. One is engineered; the other is earned. Reliable data, integration, security and governance remain essential. People also need experience of using AI, challenging its contribution and shaping how work changes.

The objective is **calibrated trust**: confidence proportionate to evidence, the task and the consequences of failure. Trust earns permission for AI to participate. **Automation Tolerance** describes how much decision-making and action people are prepared to delegate within a particular task, risk and accountability context. Allowing AI to draft an email and allowing it to send one are different decisions about authority.

Start with value and seek evidence

Begin with a bounded but consequential business problem, a named owner, a baseline and an explicit hypothesis. Define success and a credible path into real work before selecting technology. The paper distinguishes four outcomes:

Data Outcome	The required information is available and fit for this use.
Analytic / Functional Outcome	A reliable insight is produced, or a model, agent or reusable capability performs as intended.
Decision / Process Outcome	A decision is made, or a process is changed or executed.
Value Outcome	The resulting benefit is observed and measured, including useful learning or avoided cost and risk.

Ask what evidence justifies the next decision. A working capability is not proof of realised value. Evidence may justify proceeding, deferring, changing direction or stopping. Name the person accountable for acting on that evidence.

Value arrives on different clocks. Better work and useful learning already count as value; wider financial, customer or public benefits can take longer. Leaders should decide how released time and capacity will be used and measure what changes.

Build the ability to repeat

An AI business capability is the **repeatable ability to produce an outcome**. Business owners remain accountable for their processes and results; technology teams for the capabilities they build and operate. Bring those teams together with the people doing the work. Use systems thinking to examine dependencies and consequences across the whole process, supported by shared platforms and controls.

A credible path into real work needs engineering, integration, adoption and operating support. Each use case should leave reusable knowledge, implementation patterns, controls and evidence that make the next one easier. Build confidence through familiar work, then use that experience to redesign processes.

Choose the right role for AI

Assist, Create, Empower and Govern

Assist: AI supports people in work they continue to direct and own.
Create: AI outputs become reviewed, reusable organisational assets.
Empower: AI acts within bounded workflows under explicit authority.
Govern: AI operates across broader domains and at scale, while people oversee outcomes, exceptions and delegated authority.

Consumption encompasses all four stages. These stages describe how AI participates; the four outcomes describe what success means. Governance applies throughout. Different use cases can occupy different stages, and some should remain assisted. The appropriate degree of delegation depends on evidence, value and risk.

Design for what changes next

Production is not a steady state. Data, models, tools, costs and operating conditions change. Combine predictable controls, probabilistic AI and human judgement. Build composable capabilities that can be tested and replaced without destabilising the process.

Observe the complete work and its outcomes. Use explicit authority, secure access, operational limits and safe fallbacks. Continue testing after deployment, with somebody accountable for acting on the evidence. Retain the ability to intervene, recover and adjust authority. Comparable human work can help examine agent behaviour, but similarity does not prove correctness.

GO WIN

Get On With It Now. Be bold in the outcome, simple in the design and composable in the way you build. Start with a bounded, testable step, measure what changed and decide what comes next.

Purposeful sequencing creates the evidence and organisational capability for larger transformation: redesigned work, new services and different operating models. The advantage belongs to organisations that put AI to work **repeatedly, responsibly and at scale**.

For your leadership discussion

Agree the next step, the evidence and the owner.

Bring one live or proposed AI use case to the discussion.

Discussion	Questions
Purpose and ownership	What worthwhile problem are we addressing, how does the work perform today, and who owns the intended outcome?
Trust and authority	What are people prepared to rely on or delegate, on what evidence, and with which limits and means of intervention?
Results and next action	What benefits are expected or observed? How will any released capacity be used? What evidence supports proceeding, changing, scaling or stopping?

Finish with an agreed next decision, an accountable owner, the evidence required and a review date.

> **Technology creates capability.**
> **Trust creates consumption.**
> **Consumption creates business value.**

Explore the full paper

Start here for…	Where to read
Trust, permission and AI's role in work	Chapters 4–6
Business capability, multidisciplinary teams and delivery	Chapters 7–9
Reliable operation and measurable outcomes	Chapters 10–11
Reusable frameworks and practical checks	Appendix A

This brief summarises *The Consumption Gap*. The full paper contains practitioner cases and supporting research, with practical tools in Appendix A and sources in Appendix B.

Alec Gardner is a founding partner of AlphaZetta and a technology and AI leader with more than 25 years' experience helping organisations turn data, analytics and emerging technology into business outcomes.

Read the full paper: **aiconsumptiongap.com**