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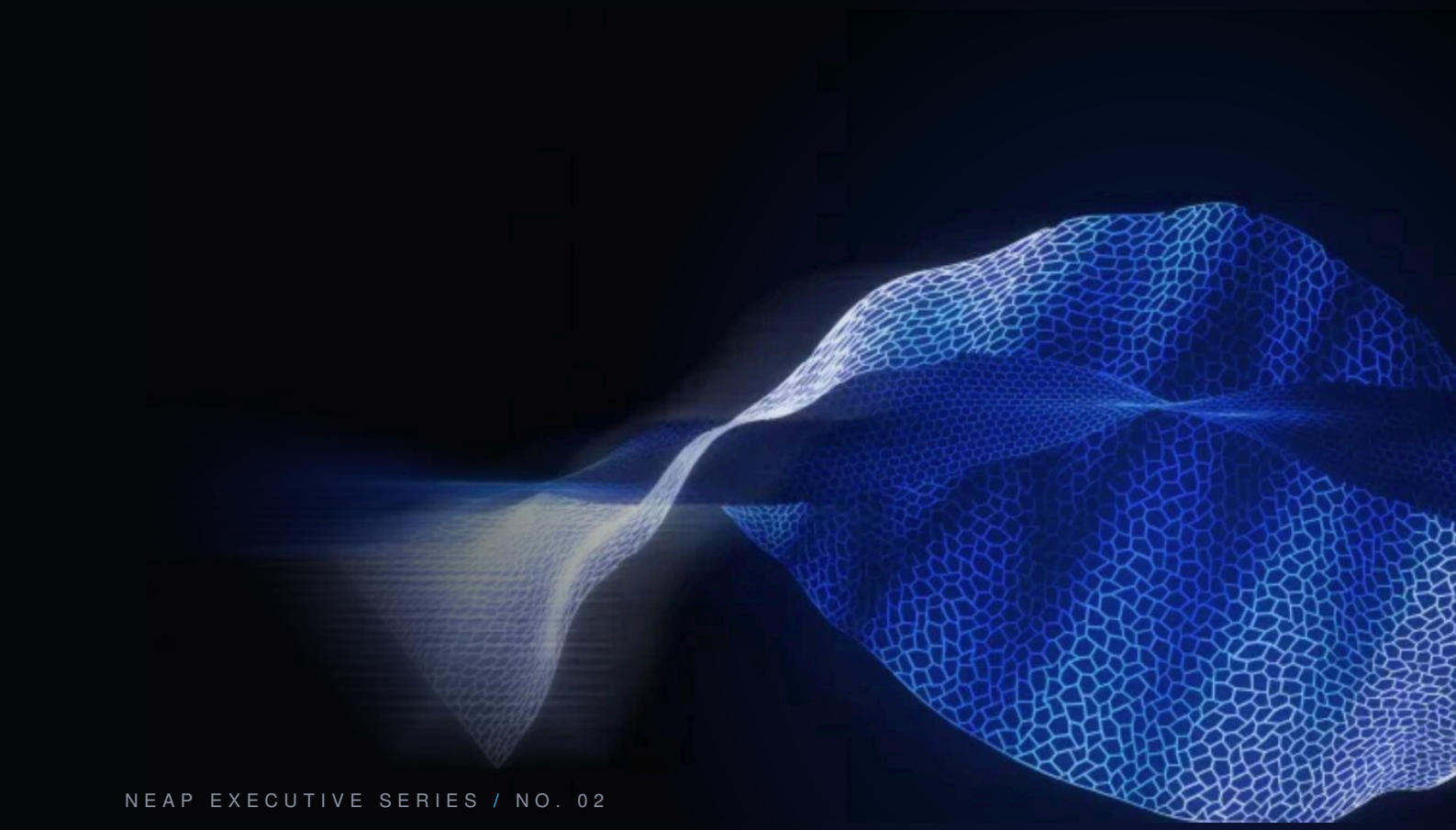

NEAP EXECUTIVE SERIES / NO. 02

The AI readiness playbook

Five pillars, four levels and an honest way to score your company, with the first fixes for each gap.

ABOUT THIS PLAYBOOK

Know where you stand before you decide where to go.

Most AI projects that fail were doomed before they started, by missing data, unclear ownership or a business case nobody could measure. This playbook helps your leadership team find those gaps first. It follows the structure of the NEAP Readiness Index: five pillars, scored on four levels, with the weakest area setting the pace.

01	Why readiness comes first	The cost of skipping it
02	The Index at a glance	Pillars, levels, the weakest-link rule
03	Pillar I · Organisational	Leadership, ownership, skills
04	Pillar II · Judgment and governance	Rules, risk and oversight
05	Pillar III · Business value	Cases, measurement, funding
06	Pillar IV · Data	Availability, quality, access
07	Pillar V · Infrastructure	Systems, integration, security, cost
08	Score yourself	Worksheet and how to read it
09	What to do at each level	A six-month plan

USE IT AS A TEAM

Ask three to five leaders to score separately, then compare. Disagreement is the most useful output.

TIME NEEDED

45 minutes to read; about an hour for the scoring session.

BE STRICT

Score what you can show today, not what is planned. Chapter 02 explains how to judge evidence.

CHAPTER 01

Why readiness comes first

The most expensive AI project is the one that works in a demonstration and then cannot be used, because the company around it was not ready.

The research on failed AI projects reads like a list of readiness gaps. Gartner predicts that through 2026 organisations will abandon 60% of AI projects that are not supported by AI-ready data, and found that 63% of organisations either lack the right data management practices for AI or are not sure they have them.[1] MIT's study of enterprise generative AI attributes most stalled pilots not to model quality but to a "learning gap": tools that do not fit how work is actually done and organisations that have not adapted to use them.[2]

60%

of AI projects without AI-ready data expected to be abandoned through 2026.

GARTNER, FEB 2025

63%

of organisations lack, or are unsure they have, data practices fit for AI.

GARTNER, FEB 2025

2×

How much more likely AI high performers are to have defined processes for measuring AI's impact.

MCKINSEY, 2026

The companies that earn from AI have, in effect, done the readiness work. McKinsey's high performers are twice as likely as others to report committed senior leaders and defined processes for measuring AI's impact, and about three times as likely to redesign workflows around AI.[3] BCG reports that the most AI-mature companies, which concentrate AI on clear priorities and invest in governance and people alongside technology, now earn 2.3 times the shareholder return of laggards.[4]

Readiness is not the same as ambition

Readiness does not mean having an AI team or a large budget. It means that the conditions a specific AI use case depends on are in place: someone owns the result, the data exists and can be reached, the systems can connect, the risks are understood and there is a way to measure the outcome. A small company with clean order data and an engaged owner can be more ready for its first case than a large group with a strategy deck and fragmented systems.

THE PRINCIPLE BEHIND THE INDEX

Your AI capability is limited by your weakest area, not lifted by your strongest. Excellent infrastructure cannot rescue a case nobody owns, and an enthusiastic CEO cannot rescue data that does not exist.

What a readiness assessment gives you

- **A shared picture.** Executives often hold very different views of the same company. Scoring separately and comparing exposes those differences early.
- **A sequence.** It tells you what must be fixed before which kind of project, so investment goes where it unlocks the most.
- **A baseline.** Repeating the assessment every six to twelve months shows whether capability is actually being built.
- **Better conversations with vendors.** You can judge proposals against what your company can absorb, not against what a demo can do.

WHO SHOULD SCORE

Three to five people who see the company from different angles: the chief executive or general manager, the head of finance, the head of operations or the largest business unit, the person responsible for IT, and, where there is one, the person responsible for risk or compliance. Avoid scoring alone: a single view, however senior, is usually too optimistic about the areas it does not run.

BEFORE

Prepare

Send each person this playbook and the five level tables. Ask them to score alone and note their evidence.

DURING

Compare

Reveal scores pillar by pillar. Discuss only the gaps of a point or more, and agree a score based on evidence.

AFTER

Commit

Record the agreed level, the weakest pillar and three first fixes, each with an owner and a date.

CHAPTER 02

The Index at a glance

Five pillars cover everything an AI case depends on. Each is scored from 1 to 4, and the result is read as one of four levels.

I

Organisational

Leadership commitment, clear ownership, skills and AI literacy.

II

Judgment and governance

Policies, risk assessment, human oversight, accountability.

III

Business value

A pipeline of cases tied to priorities, with measurement and funding.

IV

Data

The data cases need exists, is good enough and can be reached safely.

V

Infrastructure

Systems, integration, security and cost control to run AI in production.

The full NEAP Readiness Index breaks these five pillars into twelve dimensions and is completed by executives in about 15 to 20 minutes. The short Readiness Check on our landing page uses two questions per pillar. This playbook works at pillar level so a leadership team can score itself in one sitting.

Four levels

Founding

AVERAGE BELOW 1.8

AI is discussed but not organised. Use is individual and informal. The priority is shared understanding and basic rules.

Forming

1.8 TO 2.5

Interest and first experiments exist, but ownership, data and measurement are patchy. The priority is a roadmap.

Prepared

2.6 TO 3.3

Foundations are in place for specific cases. The priority is a well-run pilot that is built to go live.

Operating

3.4 TO 4.0

AI runs in production with owners, controls and measured results. The priority is scaling and reuse.

The weakest-link rule

Averages flatter. A company scoring 4, 4, 4, 4 and 1 averages 3.4, which reads as Operating, yet one pillar is at the very start. The Index therefore caps your overall level at **one level above your weakest pillar**. In that example, a weakest pillar at Founding caps the company at Forming until that pillar improves. This keeps attention on the gap that will actually stop a project.

Example profile: a mid-sized manufacturer

Pillar scores from 1 to 4. Average 2.8 reads as Prepared, but Governance at Founding caps the result at Forming.



ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE. GREY MARKS THE WEAKEST PILLAR.

Said, Shown, Seen: judging the evidence

The most common scoring error is rating intentions rather than facts. When you score, ask what kind of evidence supports each answer.

EVIDENCE	WHAT IT MEANS	HOW TO SCORE IT
Said	Someone states it is true: "our data is clean", "we have a policy".	Treat as a claim. Do not score above 2 on this alone.
Shown	A document, dashboard or record shows it: the policy exists, the data dictionary is published.	Can support a 3.
Seen	It is observed working in daily operations: staff follow the policy, reports run from the data every week.	Required for a 4.

> **A note on origins.** The Index architecture is adapted from AI Singapore's AI Readiness Index (AIRI) under its Creative Commons licence, and recalibrated by HTech for Lebanese enterprises.[5]

CHAPTER 03 · PILLAR I

Organisational readiness

Does someone senior own AI's results, and do your people understand it well enough to use it and to question it?

Technology is the smaller part of AI adoption. BCG's rule of thumb for successful programmes is 10% of effort on algorithms, 20% on technology and data and 70% on people and processes.[6] McKinsey's high performers are distinguished above all by senior leaders who own and model AI use.[3] In Europe, the AI Act as amended in 2026 now requires organisations that deploy AI to take measures to support the AI literacy of the staff who use it, a sign of where expectations are heading.[7]

LEVEL	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Founding	No one is accountable for AI. Leaders have not used the tools themselves. Staff experiment privately, if at all.
Forming	An interested executive sponsors AI informally. A few enthusiasts run experiments. No training plan or defined roles.
Prepared	A named executive owns AI outcomes and reports on them. Each priority case has a business owner. Leaders and key staff have had structured training.
Operating	AI ownership sits in the operating model. Leaders use AI daily. Training is ongoing and role-based, and AI skills appear in job descriptions and reviews.

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

SAID

"Our CEO is very supportive of AI."

SHOWN

A named owner in the organisation chart; a training plan with dates and attendance.

SEEN

Leaders using AI in meetings; owners presenting results to the executive committee.

FIRST FIXES

- Name one executive accountable for AI results, with time set aside for it, not as a side title.
- Run a half-day AI foundation session for the leadership team, using your own documents as examples.
- Give each candidate use case a business owner who will be measured on its result.
- Identify five to ten curious people across functions as internal champions.

CHAPTER 04 · PILLAR II

Judgment and governance

Do you know which AI is used where, what could go wrong, and who decides when a person must stay in the loop?

Governance is what makes it safe to move faster. Without it, use goes underground. IBM's 2025 breach study found that 63% of breached organisations had no AI governance policy or were still developing one, that one in five had suffered a breach involving unsanctioned "shadow AI", and that high levels of shadow AI added about $670,000 to the average breach cost.[8] Established frameworks such as the NIST AI Risk Management Framework (govern, map, measure, manage) and the certifiable ISO/IEC 42001 standard give a structure to build on.[9,10]

LEVEL	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Founding	No rules on AI use. Staff may be pasting client or company data into public tools. Nobody tracks which AI is in use.
Forming	An acceptable-use note exists but is not enforced. Approved tools are unclear. Risks are discussed case by case.
Prepared	A written AI policy, an inventory of AI systems, a simple risk rating for each case, and defined human review points. Data protection obligations are mapped.
Operating	Governance is routine: new cases pass a standard review, outputs are monitored, incidents are logged and learned from, and audits check compliance.

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

SAID

"Nobody here would put client data into ChatGPT."

SHOWN

A signed acceptable-use policy; an AI inventory; risk ratings for live cases.

SEEN

Staff choosing approved tools by default; reviews actually blocking or changing a case.

FIRST FIXES

- Publish a one-page acceptable-use policy: approved tools, data that must never be entered, who to ask.
- Provide an approved, company-managed AI tool, so staff have a safe alternative to personal accounts.
- Start an AI inventory: what is used, by whom, with which data, for what decision.
- Agree a simple rule: AI may draft, but a named person approves anything that reaches a client, regulator or payment.

No. 04 in this series sets out a full governance starter kit.

CHAPTER 05 · PILLAR III

Business value

Can you name the cases that matter, say what each is worth, and prove it afterwards?

This is the pillar that separates activity from results. In McKinsey's 2026 survey, 80% of respondents said AI had improved their personal productivity, yet only 37% saw any effect on EBIT.[3] BCG finds the leading companies concentrate AI in a single coherent programme aimed at their biggest priorities and measure its impact directly in the profit and loss.[4] MIT adds that budgets drift to visible front-office tools while the clearest returns often sit in the back office.[2]

LEVEL	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Founding	AI ideas come from vendors or news. No list of cases, no estimate of value, no budget line.
Forming	A list of ideas exists, but cases are not scored or tied to business priorities. Pilots run without baselines or targets.
Prepared	A scored pipeline of cases linked to strategy, each with an owner, a baseline, a target and a funding decision.
Operating	Results are tracked in money and reported regularly. Funding follows proven value, and lessons from one case speed up the next.

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

SAID

"AI will save us a lot of time."

SHOWN

A ranked case list with value estimates; a baseline measured before the pilot.

SEEN

Monthly reports showing cost or revenue effects; a case stopped because it did not pay.

FIRST FIXES

- Hold a two-hour session to list 10 to 20 cases from real operations, starting where people read, re-type and check documents.
- Score each on value and feasibility (No. 03 gives a complete method) and choose one or two.
- Measure today's baseline for each chosen case before anything is built: volume, time, cost, error rate.
- Decide in advance what happens to the time saved, so productivity turns into money.

CHAPTER 06 · PILLAR IV

Data readiness

Does the data your first cases need exist, is it good enough, and can AI reach it without breaking rules?

Data is the most common reason AI projects are abandoned.[1] For generative AI, "data" includes documents, emails, scanned forms and chat histories, not only database tables, so the question is broader than many IT teams assume. In Lebanon, much operational knowledge sits in paper archives, personal inboxes and WhatsApp threads, often in more than one language. Personal data is also subject to Law No. 81 of 2018, which requires, among other things, that it be collected for legitimate, specific and explicit purposes and kept secure.[11]

LEVEL	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Founding	Key information lives in paper files, personal devices and individual spreadsheets. Nobody knows what data exists or who owns it.
Forming	Core systems (ERP, CRM, accounting) hold structured data, but quality is uneven and documents are scattered. Ownership is informal.
Prepared	Data for priority cases is identified, owned, accessible through controlled routes and checked for quality. Key documents are digitised and organised.
Operating	Data is managed as an asset: catalogued, quality-monitored, access-controlled and reused across cases. New processes capture data digitally by design.

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

SAID

"We have years of data on that."

SHOWN

A list of data sources for each case, with owners and a quality check on a real sample.

SEEN

Reports and AI systems running from that data routinely, with errors caught and fixed.

FIRST FIXES

- For each chosen case, map the data it needs, where it is, who owns it and what format it is in.
- Test quality on a real sample of 100 to 200 records or documents before committing to a build.
- Digitise and organise the specific document sets your first case depends on, not everything.
- Check personal data in scope against Law 81/2018 and your own policies before it is used.

CHAPTER 07 · PILLAR V

Infrastructure

Can your systems connect to AI securely, keep running in local conditions, and do it at a cost you can see?

AI rarely needs new hardware to start. It does need your core systems to share data through controlled interfaces, identity and access rules that carry over to AI tools, security that covers new risks such as prompt injection (ranked the top risk for AI applications by the OWASP security community), and a way to track usage costs.[12] In McKinsey's 2026 survey, about one in five organisations said AI running costs already constrain their use.[3]

LEVEL	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Founding	Core systems are old or disconnected; data moves by export and e-mail. No managed cloud or AI tools. Security policies predate AI.
Forming	Some cloud services and modern systems, but limited integration. AI tools used without central access control or cost tracking.
Prepared	Priority systems expose data through APIs or connectors. Approved AI services sit behind company identity, logging and cost monitoring. Local resilience is planned.
Operating	A standard platform for building, testing and running AI cases, with monitoring, security testing and cost controls. New cases reuse it.

EVIDENCE TO LOOK FOR

SAID

"Our IT can integrate anything."

SHOWN

An architecture diagram showing how AI connects to core systems; a cost report by tool.

SEEN

An AI case running in production with logs, alerts and an owner who fixes issues.

FIRST FIXES

- List the systems your first case must read from and write to, and check how each can connect.
- Put approved AI tools behind company accounts with single sign-on, logging and usage reports.
- Decide where sensitive data may be processed: approved cloud regions, or on your own servers.
- Plan for power and connectivity cuts: queues, retries and offline fallbacks for critical steps.

CHAPTER 08

Score yourself

Score each pillar from 1 to 4, average them, then apply the weakest-link rule. Do it separately first, then together.

PILLAR	1 · FOUNDING	2 · FORMING	3 · PREPARED	4 · OPERATING	SCORE
I · Organisational	No owner	Informal sponsor	Named owner, trained leaders	Built into the operating model	
II · Governance	No rules	Rules not enforced	Policy, inventory, review points	Routine review and monitoring	
III · Business value	No case list	Ideas, not scored	Scored pipeline with baselines	Value tracked in money	
IV · Data	Scattered, unknown	In systems, uneven	Owned, accessible, checked	Managed as an asset	
V · Infrastructure	Disconnected	Partial, uncontrolled	Connected, secured, costed	Standard AI platform	

1 **Average the five scores.**
Add them and divide by five. Read the level: below 1.8 Founding; 1.8 to 2.5 Forming; 2.6 to 3.3 Prepared; 3.4 and above Operating.

2 **Find your weakest pillar.**
Translate its score into a level the same way.

3 **Apply the cap.**
Your overall level is the lower of your average level and one level above your weakest pillar.

WORKED EXAMPLE

A distribution company scores Organisational 3, Governance 2, Business value 3, Data 1.5 and Infrastructure 3. The average is 12.5 ÷ 5 = 2.5, which reads as Forming. Its weakest pillar, Data, is at Founding, so the cap would be Forming as well. Result: **Forming, with Data as the priority**. A pilot now would likely stall on data, so the first investment should go into the specific data its top case needs.

Reading the conversation, not just the number

- **Spread of more than one point between leaders** on a pillar usually means nobody owns it, or different units are at very different stages.

- **High scores backed only by "Said" evidence** should be marked down until someone can show the document or the practice.
- **A strong pillar next to a weak one** is often where the quickest gain is: good data with no owner, or an eager owner with no data.

A 60-MINUTE SCORING SESSION

0–10 min	Agree the scope: whole company, or one business unit. Recap the four levels and the Said, Shown, Seen rule.
10–40 min	Reveal individual scores pillar by pillar. Spend time only where scores differ by a point or more. Agree each score on evidence.
40–50 min	Calculate the average, find the weakest pillar, apply the cap. Write down the level.
50–60 min	Choose three first fixes from the pillar chapters. Give each an owner and a date. Set the date to re-score in six months.

CHAPTER 09

What to do at each level

The right next step depends on your level. Spending ahead of your readiness is the most common and most expensive mistake.

LEVEL	FOCUS FOR THE NEXT SIX MONTHS	TYPICAL FIRST MOVE
Founding	Build shared understanding in the leadership team, publish basic rules, give staff a safe approved tool, and list where AI could help.	A one-day AI foundation for leadership, such as the NEAP Foundation Workshop.
Forming	Turn ideas into a scored pipeline, fix the weakest pillar for the top cases, and agree owners, baselines and a budget.	An AI strategy and roadmap engagement with a prioritised case list.
Prepared	Run one or two pilots built to go live, with real users, real data, a target and a go or stop date.	A roadmap that ends in a pilot, then a production decision.
Operating	Scale proven cases, reuse components and data, deepen monitoring, and train the wider workforce.	Implementation of the next wave on a shared platform.

A six-month readiness plan

MONTH 1

Baseline

Score the five pillars as a team. Agree the level and the weakest pillar. Name an executive owner.

MONTHS 2–3

Fix the blocker

Apply the first fixes for your weakest pillar, focused on what your top one or two cases need.

MONTHS 4–6

Prove and re-score

Run the first case with production intent. Re-score at month six and compare against month one.

THE ONE RULE TO REMEMBER

Do not let enthusiasm in your strongest pillar decide the pace. Fix the weakest pillar for the cases you actually plan to run, then move.

> **Want the full twelve-dimension assessment?** Companies in a NEAP cohort complete the full Readiness Index during the Foundation Workshop and receive a readiness profile. HTech's roadmap engagements start from the same instrument.

SOURCES AND NOTES

Where the numbers come from

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YOUR NEXT STEP

Score your company in three minutes, then talk it through with us.

This playbook is the long form of the NEAP Readiness Check. Take the short check with two or three colleagues, compare your answers, and bring the differences to a free debrief. That conversation is usually where the real gaps show up.

FREE · 3 MINUTES

Take the Readiness Check

Ten questions across the five pillars of the NEAP Readiness Index. You get your level, your weakest pillar and the one next step that fits.

FREE · 30 MINUTES

Book a debrief with HTech

Walk through your result with an HTech consultant and leave with a short list of where AI can create value in your company first.

Book a debrief

NEXT NEAP COHORT

Join the Foundation Workshop

One day for your leadership team. You leave with a full readiness profile and a commitment card for your first AI case.

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