AI Will Scale Good Leadership and Bad Leadership

The CHRO's Method for Redesigning Work Before AI Scales What's Broken

The Evidence Brief

By Liz Corey | Q4 2026 Edition | 14 chapters, 26 independent findings

Every chapter of the book makes a claim about what AI does to leadership. This brief pairs each one with recent independent research from McKinsey, BCG, Accenture, EY, IBM, PwC, Gallup, Harvard Business Review, SAP SuccessFactors, Heidrick & Struggles, and The Josh Bersin Company. The pattern is consistent: the value is in redesigned work, owned decisions, and capable leaders.

THE PREMISE
AI is the multiplier.

THE FOUNDATION
Leadership is the infrastructure.

THE ENGINE
The GROWTH Execution Model™ is the execution architecture.

THE FINDING BEHIND THE TITLE **Gallup, 2026.** In organizations that have adopted AI, 24 percent of employees say their culture improved and 25 percent say it got worse. Same technology, opposite results. The difference is the manager: employees whose manager champions AI are 8 times more likely to say it has transformed how work gets done (33 percent versus 4 percent). Yet 50 percent of CHROs are not confident their managers can guide employees on AI.

THE BOOK **AI will scale good leadership and bad leadership. The leader is the variable.**

PART I Decode *See the work before you touch the technology.*

CHAPTER 1 AI Changes Work, Not Just Technology

THE RESEARCH **Harvard Business Review, August 2026.** Of 600 HR leaders who made AI-driven layoffs in the year to February 2026, only 8.4 percent said the restructuring delivered as promised. The authors argue companies start from headcount when they should start from the work, breaking roles into tasks first.

ALSO **McKinsey Global Institute, September 2026.** More than 70 percent of US workers could see over 15 percent of their task time reallocated by 2035, whether their occupation grows, shrinks, or holds steady. Jobs are bundles of connected activities, so companies must understand which tasks are changing.

ALSO **SAP SuccessFactors Future of Work Research Lab, October 2026.** Across 2,718 employees and 500 C-suite leaders, 72 percent of executives said most organizations claiming to transform work with AI are really automating existing jobs faster. 88 percent of employees said their jobs changed because of AI, and half of those changes came with no guidance from a manager or the organization. SAP calls this the productivity trap: optimizing for efficiency when the work should be designed for value.

THE BOOK **Four questions before any initiative. Work first. Tool last.**

CHAPTER 2 AI Without the Jargon

THE RESEARCH **Accenture, Pulse of Change 2026.** Only 18 percent of employees strongly agree that leaders communicate clearly about AI, and more than half say poor AI output has wasted their time. Accenture concludes that skilling alone is not building readiness.

THE BOOK **Five plain terms, so everyone argues about the same thing.**

CHAPTER 3 AI Inherits Your Knowledge. All of It.

THE RESEARCH **McKinsey, April 2026.** About two-thirds of enterprises have experimented with agents, yet fewer than 10 percent have scaled them to real value. Eight in ten name data limitations as the roadblock.

THE BOOK **AI distributes your knowledge exactly as it stands. Access is not truth.**

CHAPTER 4 Every Agent Needs a Job Description

THE RESEARCH **Boston Consulting Group.** Agents should be designed from day one with explicit ownership, least-privilege access, clear autonomy thresholds, hard ethical boundaries, and a way to shut them off.

ALSO **The Josh Bersin Company, October 2026.** Most companies will soon run dozens of HR agents. Each should hold a bounded role, a defined slice of data, and clear accountability, with human checkpoints built into every workflow. The decisions that govern them are business decisions that belong to HR leadership, not IT.

THE BOOK **Purpose, scope, context, decision rights, escalation, a named owner, and the conditions for unplugging it. The agent count comes out of redesigned work, never in.**

PART II Redesign *Decide what humans and AI should each do.*

CHAPTER 5 Show Me the Work

THE RESEARCH **Accenture, September 2026.** 82 percent of leaders are raising AI investment, but only 23 percent report widespread, sustained value, down from 32 percent earlier in the year. One cause: the real processes, exceptions, and workarounds are rarely documented.

THE BOOK **You cannot redesign work you have not seen.**

CHAPTER 6 The Work Assignment Matrix

THE RESEARCH **McKinsey, July 2026; PwC, 2026.** Checking, repairing, and re-verifying account for roughly 60 percent of an agentic task's cost. PwC adds that oversight is often spent on routine, low-risk decisions, adding friction without benefit.

THE BOOK **Set every destination by the cost of being wrong and the cost of checking, not by what the demo can do.**

CHAPTER 7 Who Owns What the System Does

THE RESEARCH **EY, September 2026.** 98 percent of large companies have formal AI governance policies, yet 47 percent admit skipping the process for urgent deployments, and 49 percent of agent users have not updated their frameworks for agents.

THE BOOK **Designed is not the same as owned. Five names on every rule that moves money or touches people.**

CHAPTER 8 Capability: The Gap between Knowing and Doing

THE RESEARCH **IBM, 2026 CHRO Study.** Across 1,500 CHROs and 8,800 employees, 60 percent of employees worry AI is eroding their skills, with critical thinking cited most often.

ALSO **McKinsey Global Institute, September 2026.** Growing occupations seek 68 distinct skills, versus 47 in declining ones, and demand more judgment. McKinsey frames the resulting cognitive load as the employer's responsibility, not the individual's.

THE BOOK **Knowing the term and catching the error under deadline are different skills.**

PART III Scale *Scale the system without scaling what is broken.*

CHAPTER 9 Are We Ready to Scale?

THE RESEARCH **Boston Consulting Group, July 2026.** Only 6 percent of large US public companies qualify as AI leaders. Their outperformance comes from revenue growth and margin, most reinvest gains to grow, and their biggest differentiator is developing talent.

ALSO **McKinsey Global Institute, September 2026.** Organizations with similar workforces can follow very different AI paths. Workflow maturity, data quality, operating discipline, and leadership priorities set the pace.

ALSO **McKinsey Talks Talent, August 2026.** Kate Smaje, McKinsey's global leader of technology and AI, calls adoption scorecards that track tool usage "a highway to nowhere." The measure is capabilities and jobs to be done, not tools. High-usage groups are exhausted because AI is working: what remains is judgment, decisions, and difficult conversations.

THE BOOK **Scale multiplies whatever produced the output. The leader is the constraint.**

CHAPTER 10 Managing the Mixed Team

THE RESEARCH **Harvard Business Review, July 2026.** Agents expand the scope of work people attempt. As workers move from operators to supervisors, leaders must redesign roles, workflows, and oversight.

ALSO **McKinsey Global Institute, September 2026.** As AI absorbs routine work, people take on new work: reviewing AI output, handling exceptions, documenting decisions, and supervising intelligent systems.

ALSO **McKinsey Talks Talent, August 2026.** The business owner who looks after the people in a process should also look after the agents in it. Few organizations can recall a conversation about the performance of their nonhuman labor. Agents need life cycle management: one that was fit for purpose six months ago can be a liability today.

THE BOOK **One leader, accountable for how both halves of the team perform.**

CHAPTER 11 The GROWTH Execution Model™

THE RESEARCH **Boston Consulting Group, September 2026.** BCG describes the harness as an operating system around agents that earns trust, and warns that many CEOs are scaling agents with limited controls and little accountability.

THE BOOK **GROWTH is the harness for AI leadership. It directs AI output through human judgment before it becomes a decision.**

PART IV Embed *Turn new ways of working into the way work gets done.*

CHAPTER 12 The Experience Doesn't Go Away

THE RESEARCH **McKinsey, August 2026.** Trust in the organization and its leaders is one of the strongest predictors of readiness to use AI, and higher-trust organizations report capturing more enterprise value.

ALSO **McKinsey Global Institute, September 2026.** Culture and incentives determine which skills employees build. Companies should measure redeployment and employee outcomes, not just cost savings.

THE BOOK **Culture is still made at the top.**

CHAPTER 13 Ambiguity Has Beneficiaries

THE RESEARCH **Harvard Business Review, September 2026.** AI improves enterprise decisions only when the underlying work is clear. Opaque processes that depend on informal knowledge simply get reinforced.

THE BOOK **Resistance to clarity is older than fear of job loss. Resolve the ambiguity on purpose.**

PART V Execute *Put the operating model to work.*

CHAPTER 14 The Roadmap, the Operating Model, and the Choice

THE RESEARCH **Accenture, reported by Forbes, June 2026.** Only about a fifth of companies are rebuilding processes for AI, and fewer than one in ten are redesigning roles around it.

ALSO **Heidrick & Struggles, October 2026.** 45 percent of Fortune 1000 CEOs have asked their CHRO to lead the AI transformation. Only 25 percent of CHROs operate as enterprise CHROs. What sets them apart is positioning, not budget: they are measured on bench strength and workforce transformation, and spend 10 more hours a month with the CTO.

ALSO **SAP SuccessFactors, October 2026.** Executives ranked work redesign as the transformation pillar that will create the most enterprise value over the next five years, and named HR as its leading owner. C-suite leaders estimate 49 percent of HR work will be fully automated within five years, versus 35 percent of enterprise work overall.

THE BOOK **Redesign the work before AI scales what's broken.**

What the research agrees on

- **Value comes from redesigned work, not tools.** The few companies pulling ahead changed how work gets done before they scaled.
- **Leaders admit the gap.** 72 percent of executives say most "transformation" is automation at speed. CEOs are handing AI to the CHRO, and most CHROs have no method for the job yet.
- **Ownership lags deployment.** Policies exist. Named owners for the decisions systems now make mostly do not.
- **Leaders are the constraint.** Trust, capability, and consistent standards separate the leaders from everyone else. People management, leadership, and influence rank among the skills least exposed to automation.

Before you scale AI, know what you are scaling. Take the AI Leadership Load Assessment, or start the conversation, at onthegrow.ai

About the author. Liz Corey is the founder and CEO of OnTheGrow Leadership. She has served as CHRO and Chief People Officer for private-equity-backed companies in software and professional services, and held senior HR roles at public companies, leading organizations through mergers, transformations, and every wave of workplace technology. Creator of the GROWTH Execution Model™. Forbes Human Resources Council contributor. onthegrow.ai

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