AI-Q

The 16 AI Strategy Types

A Comprehensive Guide to Understanding
Your Organization's AI Maturity

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Introduction

Most organizations believe they have an AI strategy. In reality, they have a collection of tools, a series of pilots, and a lot of hope. After 25 years of helping organizations transform digitally, I kept seeing the same patterns emerge—and the same mistakes repeated.

AI-Q is a diagnostic framework that categorizes organizations into one of 16 distinct types based on four dimensions:

Structure: Are your AI tools scattered across teams or consolidated?
Orientation: Are you reacting to trends or proactively building a roadmap?
Leadership: Is IT driving AI decisions or is the business?
Integration: Is AI stuck in pilots or embedded in daily workflows?

Each dimension is binary, creating 16 possible combinations. This guide details each type, helping you identify where your organization stands and what to do about it.

How to Read This Guide

For each of the 16 types, you'll find:

• **Overview:** What this type looks like in practice
• **Strengths:** What you're doing well that you should preserve
• **Blind Spots:** What you're missing that could derail progress
• **Symptoms:** How to recognize this type in your organization
• **Path Forward:** The single most important thing to do next
• **Action Items:** Specific steps to move toward Strategic Leader status

Understanding the Four-Letter Code

Each type is identified by a four-letter code. Here's what each position means:

Position	Dimension	Low Score	High Score
1st	Structure	**S** = Scattered	**C** = Consolidated
2nd	Orientation	**R** = Reactive	**P** = Proactive
3rd	Leadership	**T** = Tech-driven	**B** = Business-driven
4th	Integration	**E** = Experimental	**I** = Integrated

Example: CPBI = Consolidated + Proactive + Business-driven + Integrated (The Strategic Leader)

SRTE: The Chaos Pilot

"We have AI... somewhere."

Quadrant: Scattered **|** **Code:** SRTE

Overview

Your AI landscape is a graveyard of good intentions. Multiple tools bought by different teams, none talking to each other. Marketing has one chatbot, Sales has another, and nobody knows what Finance is doing with that spreadsheet plugin they expensed last quarter.

✓ Strengths

• Willingness to experiment with new technologies
• Budget available and being spent on AI
• No legacy lock-in to outdated systems
• Grassroots enthusiasm for AI adoption

✗ Blind Spots

• No visibility into total AI spend across organization
• Cannot measure ROI on any AI investment
• Teams frustrated by duplicate and conflicting tools
• Security and compliance risks from ungoverned tools
• Data silos preventing AI from accessing full context

Common Symptoms

• Multiple teams using different AI tools for similar tasks
• No one can answer "How much do we spend on AI?"
• New AI tools purchased monthly without central approval
• AI initiatives that start strong but fizzle out
• Employees hiding AI usage from IT

→ Path Forward

Stop buying. Start auditing. You need a complete inventory of every AI tool in use before you can make any strategic decisions. Create a simple intake process for new AI tools and consolidate where possible.

Action Items

1. Conduct a full AI tool audit across all departments

2. Create a shared inventory with owners, costs, and use cases

3. Implement a lightweight approval process for new tools

4. Identify the top 3 tools to consolidate first

5. Establish basic security and data governance guidelines

SRTB: The Wishful Thinker

"Can't AI just do that?"

Quadrant: Scattered | **Code:** SRTB

Overview

Leadership is excited about AI but treats it like magic. The CEO comes back from every conference with a new "AI should do this" idea. Business problems are identified, but no one translates them into technical requirements. Initiatives die from vagueness.

✓ Strengths

- Executive attention and enthusiasm for AI
- Focus on business problems rather than technology
- Budget unlocks possible when leadership is engaged
- Organizational openness to AI transformation

✗ Blind Spots

- Unrealistic expectations about AI capabilities
- No technical translation layer between business and IT
- Initiatives die from vague requirements
- Disappointment cycle eroding trust in AI investments
- Shiny object syndrome chasing every new trend

Common Symptoms

- Executives asking "Why can't we just use AI for that?"
- AI projects that start with excitement and end in confusion
- Technical team frustrated by unclear requirements
- Constant pivots based on the latest article or demo
- No measurable success criteria for AI initiatives

→ Path Forward

Translate business wishes into specific, measurable problems. Create a simple framework that forces clarity: What's the input? What's the output? How do we measure success? What data do we need?

Action Items

1. Create a one-page AI project brief template

2. Require success metrics before any AI project starts

3. Assign a "translator" between business and technical teams

4. Build a backlog of clearly defined AI opportunities

5. Educate leadership on AI capabilities and limitations

SPTE: The Over-Engineer

"The architecture is beautiful. Nobody uses it."

Quadrant: Scattered **|** **Code:** SPTE

Overview

Your tech team built impressive AI infrastructure. Modern stack, scalable architecture, all the right patterns. One problem: business users don't know it exists, and the few who do don't understand how to use it.

✓ Strengths

• Strong technical capability and modern infrastructure
• Forward-thinking IT leadership
• Scalable foundation ready for growth
• Technical debt avoided through good architecture

✗ Blind Spots

• Disconnect between technical capability and business needs
• "Build it and they will come" mentality
• Success measured by technical metrics, not business outcomes
• No user research or adoption strategy
• Engineers building for engineers, not end users

Common Symptoms

• Impressive demos that never become products
• Low adoption rates despite high technical quality
• Business teams finding workarounds instead of using official tools
• IT frustrated that "nobody appreciates what we built"
• AI platform with more features than users

→ Path Forward

Stop building. Start listening. Spend time with actual users understanding their workflows and pain points. Find one real problem worth solving and solve it completely before adding more features.

Action Items

1. Shadow business users for a week to understand workflows

2. Identify the single highest-impact use case

3. Build the minimum viable solution for that use case

4. Measure adoption, not technical sophistication

5. Create feedback loops with actual users

SPTB: The Ambitious Starter

"Great strategy, scattered execution."

Quadrant: Scattered | **Code:** SPTB

Overview

Good intentions, executive buy-in, strategy documents on paper. But execution is chaos. Multiple teams running in different directions, each interpreting the strategy their own way. Coordination is an afterthought.

✓ Strengths

- Executive sponsorship and strategic alignment
- Forward-thinking approach to AI
- Business-driven prioritization of problems
- Organizational energy around AI transformation

✗ Blind Spots

- Too many priorities running simultaneously
- Lack of coordination across teams
- Strategy diverging into incompatible implementations
- Resource conflicts between competing initiatives
- No single owner accountable for AI success

Common Symptoms

- Multiple AI "strategies" across different departments
- Teams discovering conflicts late in implementation
- Executives getting different status updates from different groups
- Good ideas competing for the same limited resources
- Strategy documents that don't match reality on the ground

→ Path Forward

Pick THREE initiatives maximum. Kill everything else. Assign clear ownership and create a lightweight coordination mechanism. Better to do three things well than ten things poorly.

Action Items

1. Force-rank all AI initiatives by impact and feasibility

2. Select top 3 and explicitly deprioritize the rest

3. Assign a single accountable owner for each initiative

4. Create a weekly coordination touchpoint

5. Establish shared success metrics across initiatives

SRTI: The Accidental Success

"It works, but don't ask me how."

Quadrant: Scattered **|** **Code:** SRTI

Overview

Against all odds, you have AI integrated into actual workflows. Real people using real tools to do real work. But it happened by accident—a passionate individual or team figured it out despite the organization, not because of it.

✓ Strengths

• Proof that AI can work in your organization
• A champion who figured out how to drive adoption
• Real value being created somewhere
• Template for what success looks like

✗ Blind Spots

• Single point of failure if the champion leaves
• Success is not replicable across the organization
• Leadership may not know this success exists
• No documentation of what made it work
• Success could disappear overnight

Common Symptoms

• One team vastly ahead of others in AI adoption
• Success stories that can't be explained systematically
• Key person dependencies for AI initiatives
• Leadership surprised to learn about working AI implementations
• "It just works because Maria makes it work"

→ Path Forward

Document everything. Now. Turn accidental wins into repeatable processes. Interview the champions, understand what they did differently, and create playbooks others can follow.

Action Items

1. Identify and document all "accidental" AI successes

2. Interview champions to extract what made it work

3. Create replication playbooks for other teams

4. Give champions formal recognition and resources

5. Build support systems so success doesn't depend on individuals

SRBI: The Shadow IT Hero

"Don't tell IT, but this is working."

Quadrant: Scattered | **Code:** SRBI

Overview

Business users signed up for AI tools with corporate credit cards. IT doesn't know, compliance hasn't reviewed, but the tools are solving real problems. A guerrilla AI movement is happening under the radar.

✓ Strengths

- Bias toward action over bureaucracy
- Real business problems being solved
- Proof of demand for AI capabilities
- Users who understand their own workflows

✗ Blind Spots

- Security and compliance risks accumulating
- No scalability path for successful tools
- Data silos and integration challenges
- IT relationship damage when discovered
- Duplicate spend across shadow implementations

Common Symptoms

- Expense reports with AI tool subscriptions
- Users reluctant to discuss their "productivity hacks"
- IT discovering tools they didn't approve
- Successful AI usage that can't be officially supported
- Compliance gaps in data handling

→ Path Forward

Bring it into the light. Partner with IT to legitimize what works rather than forcing users back to inferior official options. Create a fast-track approval process for proven tools.

Action Items

1. Conduct an amnesty program for shadow AI tools

2. Evaluate shadow tools for security and compliance

3. Fast-track approval for tools that pass review

4. Create an official pathway for business-led tool adoption

5. Partner IT with business users, not against them

SPTI: The Rogue Lab

"Our tech is amazing. The business doesn't care."

Quadrant: Scattered **|** **Code:** SPTI

Overview

A proactive tech team with integrated AI capabilities. They're building the future—but it's a future disconnected from business priorities. Amazing demos, impressive architecture, minimal business impact.

✓ Strengths

- Technical excellence and innovation capability
- Strong AI engineering culture
- Integrated, well-architected AI infrastructure
- Ability to build sophisticated solutions

✗ Blind Spots

- Building solutions looking for problems
- Seen as a cost center rather than value driver
- No seat at the strategy table
- Success metrics that don't resonate with business
- Growing disconnect from organizational priorities

Common Symptoms

- Tech team excited about capabilities business doesn't understand
- AI budget questioned every cycle
- Demos that impress but don't convert to projects
- Technical roadmap disconnected from business roadmap
- "The business just doesn't get it" frustration

→ Path Forward

Translate capabilities into business language. Find one executive sponsor with a real problem and solve it completely. Use that win to earn credibility for bigger initiatives.

Action Items

1. Identify one executive with a painful, measurable problem

2. Solve that problem using existing capabilities

3. Document the business impact in dollars and time

4. Use the win to build relationships with other executives

5. Create a "menu" of capabilities in business terms

SPBI: The Grassroots Movement

"Pockets of excellence, waiting to connect."

> **Quadrant:** Scattered | **Code:** SPBI

Overview

Multiple departments doing AI well, independently. Marketing has their thing, Operations has theirs, and both are succeeding. But they're not talking to each other, missing opportunities for shared learning and scale.

✓ Strengths

- Proven success stories across multiple teams
- Business ownership of AI initiatives
- High adoption rates in successful pockets
- Diverse use cases demonstrating AI versatility

✗ Blind Spots

- Duplicated effort across teams
- Incompatible tools and data formats
- No enterprise-wide view of AI maturity
- Missed opportunities for cross-team learning
- Scale limited by siloed implementations

Common Symptoms

- Multiple teams with their own AI success stories
- Different tools solving similar problems
- No forum for sharing AI learnings
- Reinventing wheels across departments
- Leadership unaware of total AI activity

→ Path Forward

Create a coordination layer—not to control, but to connect. Build a community of practice, shared tooling where it makes sense, and a way to replicate successes across the organization.

Action Items

1. Map all AI initiatives across the organization

2. Create an AI community of practice

3. Identify opportunities for shared infrastructure

4. Build cross-team learning sessions

5. Establish lightweight governance without bureaucracy

CRTE: The Controlled Experiment

"We're piloting... still."

Quadrant: Consolidated | **Code:** CRTE

Overview

Consolidated AI tools with good governance. IT has control, security is happy. But everything is stuck in permanent pilot mode. Pilots that were supposed to last 90 days are now in month 18.

✓ Strengths

- Low risk exposure and controlled environment
- Clean, well-managed tool landscape
- Good governance and security practices
- Organized approach to experimentation

✗ Blind Spots

- Pilots never becoming production systems
- Business losing patience with slow progress
- Vague success criteria that can't be met
- Analysis paralysis preventing decisions
- Innovation theater without real impact

Common Symptoms

- Pilots that keep getting extended
- No clear criteria for pilot graduation
- Business teams frustrated by "still testing"
- Risk aversion masquerading as diligence
- Impressive pilot metrics that don't lead anywhere

→ Path Forward

Set a kill date for every pilot. Graduate to production or shut it down. Define success criteria upfront and hold yourself accountable to timelines.

Action Items

1. Audit all active pilots and their age
2. Define clear graduation criteria for each

3. Set hard deadlines: graduate or kill

4. Create a streamlined production pathway

5. Celebrate successful graduations visibly

CRTB: The Waiting Game

"We're ready to be ready."

Quadrant: Consolidated   **|**   **Code:** CRTB

Overview

Business owns AI decisions, tools are consolidated, but everything is reactive and cautious. Waiting for the "right moment" to make a big move. Meanwhile, competitors are learning by doing.

✓ Strengths

- Clean, manageable AI landscape
- Strong business alignment on priorities
- No expensive mistakes or failed initiatives
- Foundation ready when you decide to move

✗ Blind Spots

- Competitors moving faster and learning more
- The "right time" never arrives
- Top talent bored and leaving
- Opportunity cost of inaction
- Risk aversion preventing any progress

Common Symptoms

- Frequent "we're not ready yet" conversations
- Watching competitors' AI moves with concern
- Talent frustrated by lack of AI investment
- Perfect being the enemy of good
- Endless research without action

→ Path Forward

Pick one low-risk, high-visibility initiative. Get in the game. Learn by doing rather than researching indefinitely. The cost of inaction exceeds the cost of imperfect action.

Action Items

1. Identify one initiative with clear ROI and limited risk

2. Set a 90-day deadline to launch

3. Accept that version 1 won't be perfect

4. Document learnings to build organizational confidence

5. Use the win to build momentum for larger initiatives

CPTE: The Tech Utopia

"If only people would use what we built."

Quadrant: Consolidated **|** **Code:** CPTE

Overview

You've done everything right—technically. Consolidated tools, proactive roadmap, modern architecture. The only thing missing: people actually using it. Adoption is THE problem.

✓ Strengths

- Solid technical foundation
- Future-proof architecture
- Ready to scale when adoption happens
- Good governance and security

✗ Blind Spots

- Adoption treated as someone else's problem
- Change management skipped or underinvested
- Technical elegance valued over user experience
- Building features instead of solving adoption
- Blaming users for not adopting

Common Symptoms

- Beautiful dashboards nobody logs into
- Training sessions with low attendance
- Users finding workarounds to avoid AI tools
- IT frustrated by "resistant" users
- Features launched but not used

→ Path Forward

Stop building features. Start building relationships. Invest in change management, user research, and making existing tools indispensable before adding new capabilities.

Action Items

1. Pause feature development for 90 days

2. Conduct user research to understand adoption barriers

3. Invest in change management and training

4. Identify and empower internal champions

5. Measure adoption, not feature count

CPTB: The Strategy Doc

"The deck is ready. Execution isn't."

Quadrant: Consolidated | **Code:** CPTB

Overview

Beautiful strategy, executive alignment, all stakeholders bought in. The deck is polished, the roadmap is clear. But you're stuck in the space between strategy and execution, waiting for perfect conditions.

✓ Strengths

- Clear, well-communicated vision
- Stakeholder buy-in achieved
- Prioritized roadmap ready to execute
- Resources allocated and available

✗ Blind Spots

- Perfectionism masquerading as planning
- Waiting for ideal conditions that never arrive
- Strategy documents getting stale
- Execution muscle atrophying
- Team losing faith in leadership's commitment

Common Symptoms

- Strategy presentations given repeatedly
- Execution timelines that keep slipping
- "We need just one more thing before we start"
- Team members updating resumes
- Competitors executing while you plan

→ Path Forward

Pick ONE initiative. Start THIS WEEK. Perfect is the enemy of good. Your strategy will improve through execution, not more planning.

Action Items

1. Select the single highest-impact initiative
2. Launch within 7 days, not 7 weeks

3. Accept imperfection as the price of learning

4. Create rapid feedback loops

5. Iterate based on real-world results

CRTI: The Efficient Machine

"Responsive but not innovative."

Quadrant: Consolidated **|** **Code:** CRTI

Overview

IT runs a tight ship, responding to requests efficiently. AI is integrated into workflows, governance is solid. But you're optimizing yesterday—executing requests rather than anticipating opportunities.

✓ Strengths

- Reliable execution on AI requests
- Strong governance and operations
- Efficient resource utilization
- Trust from business stakeholders

✗ Blind Spots

- No innovation pipeline or proactive exploration
- Reactive posture means always behind trends
- IT seen as a utility rather than strategic partner
- Best opportunities going unidentified
- Talent bored by maintenance work

Common Symptoms

- AI team backlog is all business requests
- No time allocated for exploration
- Team skilled at execution but not innovation
- Missing emerging AI capabilities
- "We're too busy keeping the lights on"

→ Path Forward

Carve out 20% for proactive exploration. Create space for your team to identify opportunities before business asks. Transform from service provider to strategic partner.

Action Items

1. Allocate 20% of AI team capacity to exploration

2. Create an innovation pipeline separate from requests

3. Build a proactive opportunity identification process

4. Present unsolicited recommendations to leadership

5. Rebrand AI team as strategic partner, not service desk

CRBI: The Service Desk

"We deliver what you ask for—nothing more."

Quadrant: Consolidated | **Code:** CRBI

Overview

AI is integrated and business-driven, but entirely reactive. You deliver exactly what stakeholders request, when they request it. Nothing more, nothing less. A reliable order-taker, not a strategic advisor.

✓ Strengths

- Reliable execution and delivery
- Strong business trust and relationships
- Working integrations that deliver value
- Responsive to stakeholder needs

✗ Blind Spots

- Missing transformative opportunities
- AI seen as cost center, not value creator
- No proactive roadmap or vision
- Dependent on business to identify AI opportunities
- Competing for budget rather than driving it

Common Symptoms

- AI budget questioned every cycle
- Success measured by tickets closed
- No AI representation in strategy discussions
- Team waiting for requests rather than proposing
- "We do what they ask" mindset

→ Path Forward

Earn a seat at the strategy table. Start bringing ideas, not just fulfilling requests. Identify opportunities business hasn't thought of and propose them proactively.

Action Items

1. Develop 3 proactive AI proposals
2. Request time with business leaders to present opportunities

3. Shift metrics from execution to business impact

4. Build industry knowledge to spot opportunities

5. Create a pipeline of proactive innovations

CPTI: The Almost There

"One conversation away from excellence."

Quadrant: Consolidated **|** **Code:** CPTI

Overview

Consolidated, proactive, integrated. You're doing almost everything right. The only gap: business isn't driving priorities. Technical excellence without business alignment means you're optimizing the wrong things.

✓ Strengths

- Strong execution capabilities
- Technical excellence across the board
- Integrated workflows and adoption
- Proactive roadmap and innovation

✗ Blind Spots

- Technical priorities not aligned with business strategy
- Success measured in technical metrics only
- Business sees AI as IT's thing, not theirs
- Missing the highest-impact opportunities
- Technology driving strategy instead of enabling it

Common Symptoms

- Impressive AI metrics, unclear business impact
- Business leaders delegate AI decisions to IT
- Roadmap built by tech team, reviewed by business
- AI strategy disconnected from business strategy
- Technical success, business indifference

→ Path Forward

Connect one AI initiative to a metric the CEO cares about. Revenue, cost, customer satisfaction—something on the executive dashboard. Make AI inseparable from business success.

Action Items

1. Identify the CEO's top 3 priorities

2. Map AI initiatives to those priorities

3. Rebuild AI metrics around business outcomes

4. Get business leaders to co-own AI initiatives

5. Present AI results in business terms, not technical terms

CPBI: The Strategic Leader

"AI is how we compete."

Quadrant: Consolidated **|** **Code:** CPBI

Overview

You've cracked the code. Consolidated tools, proactive roadmap, business drives priorities, AI embedded in workflows. AI isn't a side project—it's core to how you operate and compete.

✓ Strengths

• Clear ROI metrics tied to business outcomes
• High adoption rates across the organization
• Executive alignment and active sponsorship
• AI as competitive advantage, not cost center

✗ Blind Spots

• Risk of complacency at the top
• May over-engineer solutions
• Talent retention becomes critical
• Disruption could come from unexpected directions
• Success may mask emerging challenges

Common Symptoms

• AI initiatives with clear, measurable business impact
• Business leaders actively engaged in AI decisions
• Competitors trying to copy your approach
• Talent attracted by AI maturity
• AI embedded in strategic planning

→ Path Forward

Focus on talent retention and stay paranoid about disruption. Your biggest risk is complacency. Keep scanning for emerging technologies that could leapfrog your current approach.

Action Items

1. Invest heavily in AI talent retention

2. Create a disruption scanning process

3. Share learnings externally to build brand

4. Mentor other organizations to attract talent

5. Continuously raise the bar on what "good" looks like

What's Next?

Now that you understand the 16 types, take the assessment to discover yours. The AI-Q assessment takes just 5 minutes and provides:

• Your four-letter type code and what it means
• Scores across all four dimensions
• Specific recommendations based on your results
• A clear path forward tailored to your situation

Take the assessment at: **ai-q.fit**

Ready to accelerate your AI transformation? The AI Strategy Sprint provides a complete roadmap in just 2 weeks.

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