

Excelling with Executive AI

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Introduction: AI is Becoming Non-Negotiable—Are You Ready to Lead It?

AI is no longer an optional tool. It's becoming woven into everything—from how we work to how we make decisions. The days of AI being just a fancy search engine or a writing assistant are fading. Fast.

In 2025, AI isn't just answering questions. It's making recommendations. Handling tasks. Acting on our behalf.

That changes the game.

For years, professionals have treated AI as a tool to pull information—a way to get faster search results, generate content, or automate repetitive work. But this mindset is outdated. AI is shifting from static tool to interactive agent, and that means we need a different skill set to use it effectively.

- AI will book meetings, draft responses, and optimize schedules without being asked.
- AI will suggest strategic business moves based on real-time data.
- AI will run negotiations, approve transactions, and execute tasks dynamically.

This isn't the future. It's happening right now.

And yet—many professionals are still treating AI like it's just another productivity hack.

That's a problem.

Why AI Requires an Executive Cognitive Style

AI is no longer just something you “use.” It's something you guide, refine, and lead.

That's why the most effective AI users aren't necessarily the most technical. They're the ones who approach AI with an executive cognitive style—a way of thinking that prioritizes:

- Clear objectives. What do you want AI to accomplish?
- Iterative refinement. Is this response good, or does it need adjustments?
- Critical evaluation. Does this make sense? Is this useful? Would I sign off on this?

These are the same cognitive patterns used by executives, business owners, and decision-makers. But they aren't limited to people with leadership titles.

Parents. Community organizers. Church leaders. Project managers. Anyone who strategizes, delegates, and refines their approach is already using an executive cognitive style. The shift to AI as an interactive agent simply makes this skill set even more valuable.

Because here's the truth: AI is only as effective as the person guiding it.

Call to Action: AI is a Leadership Skill—Are You Ready to Master It?

AI is changing how we work, think, and make decisions. That's no longer up for debate.

What's still undecided is who will adapt—and who will fall behind.

This paper is about how professionals can develop an executive approach to AI, regardless of job title. The ability to set objectives, iterate, and critically evaluate AI outputs is quickly becoming a defining skill in leadership, decision-making, and productivity.

Those who master this approach will lead the AI-driven workplace. Those who don't? They'll struggle to keep up.

Which side do you want to be on?

Why AI Requires an Executive Cognitive Style

AI isn't just something you use. It's something you lead.

For years, professionals have approached AI as a high-powered automation tool—something that speeds up tasks, pulls information faster, and simplifies repetitive work. This mindset was useful when AI was mostly about search enhancement and content generation, but it's no longer enough.

AI is changing. Rapidly.

Today's AI isn't just reacting—it's predicting. It's not just answering questions—it's offering strategic insights. It's not just passively waiting for input—it's actively handling execution. AI is moving from tool to agent, and that shift fundamentally changes how professionals need to interact with it.

This means the most effective AI users aren't necessarily the most technically skilled—they're the ones who understand how to direct, refine, and oversee AI as a collaborative partner. AI is no longer just a passive assistant; it's becoming an interactive system that requires strategic leadership.

That's where an executive cognitive style comes in.

AI is No Longer Just a Tool—It's an Interactive System

A passive AI user asks and accepts—they put in a request and take what AI gives them, no matter how generic or incomplete. A strategic AI user guides and refines—they understand that AI's responses are only as good as the instructions they provide and the adjustments they make.

This distinction is becoming a professional differentiator.

Consider a marketing executive using AI to generate social media content. A few years ago, they might have typed: *"Give me 10 post ideas for LinkedIn."* AI would respond with a list—some useful, some generic. The executive would sift through the options manually, choosing what worked and discarding the rest.

Now, AI can do more than just generate ideas—it can analyze engagement trends, predict content performance, and even optimize distribution timing. But that level of intelligence doesn't activate automatically. It requires the user to engage AI as a strategic partner, not just a generator of lists.

Instead of a basic request, an executive-minded AI user would guide the system with specific, layered instructions:

- *"Analyze engagement data from the past three months. Identify the top-performing content themes and explain why they work."*
- *"Based on that data, draft 10 LinkedIn post ideas optimized for audience growth and brand positioning."*
- *"For each post, suggest the best publishing time based on previous engagement patterns."*

This isn't just about better AI outputs—it's about a more sophisticated approach to problem-solving. AI is capable of advanced pattern recognition and workflow automation, but only if the user knows how to guide it effectively.

This level of engagement requires a shift in cognitive approach—one that mirrors the way executives manage teams, refine strategies, and optimize outcomes.

What is an Executive Cognitive Style?

An executive cognitive style is not about job title. It's about how you think, structure tasks, and refine outputs.

At its core, an executive cognitive style is built around three fundamental skills:

1. Clarity – Defining the objective before taking action.
2. Iteration – Adjusting and refining as you go.
3. Critical evaluation – Challenging assumptions and optimizing for results.

These skills aren't exclusive to executives. They are mental models used by professionals across industries—from project managers refining workflows to parents balancing financial planning with day-to-day logistics.

Take a project manager overseeing a product launch. They don't just set deadlines and hope for the best—they continuously adjust based on progress, troubleshoot roadblocks, and refine strategy based on evolving needs.

Take a community leader organizing an event. They don't just create a plan and execute blindly—they gather input, adapt based on challenges, and ensure that resources are being used effectively.

This is exactly how high-functioning AI users approach AI interaction. They don't just ask and accept—they guide, refine, and assess.

The Three Core Executive Skills That Make AI Work

1. Defining Clear Objectives

AI doesn't "know" what you want—it only processes what you tell it. If you don't define your objectives with precision, AI fills in the gaps with generic assumptions.

A sales professional asking AI for outreach help might start with:

- *"Write a cold email for a SaaS company."*

AI will generate something generic, uninspired, and predictable.

A strategic AI user structures the request with intent:

- *"Write a cold email targeting CFOs at mid-sized SaaS companies."*
- *"Make it concise, with a strong subject line and a data-backed value proposition."*
- *"Include a soft CTA for a discovery call and a follow-up sequence for non-responders."*

This isn't about being more detailed for the sake of it. It's about ensuring AI understands the outcome you're aiming for.

2. Iterative Problem-Solving

AI rarely gets it perfect on the first try. Strong AI users don't accept the first response as final—they treat it as a starting point for refinement.

A business consultant asks AI for a market trend analysis. AI produces a generic industry overview, missing critical data. Instead of settling, the consultant iterates:

- *"Focus on supply chain disruptions in manufacturing."*
- *"Cite at least three industry reports with real statistics."*
- *"Rewrite it in a more executive-level tone, focusing on actionable insights."*

This is the AI equivalent of reviewing a draft report from a team member. The best professionals don't settle for 'good enough'—they refine until it's excellent.

3. Critical Evaluation

AI is not a flawless source of truth. It generates responses based on pattern recognition, not real-world reasoning. That means it can be biased, inaccurate, or missing key perspectives.

A financial analyst using AI for revenue projections doesn't just accept AI's model. They challenge its reasoning:

- *"What variables did you weigh most heavily?"*
- *"What are the downside risks?"*
- *"Generate a worst-case scenario model factoring in potential recession indicators."*

AI is a thinking partner, not an infallible expert. Strong professionals question it the same way they'd question a consultant's report.

AI is a Leadership Skill—For Everyone

AI engagement is no longer about who can use AI—it's about who can lead it.

It's a professional skill—one that determines who will thrive in an AI-powered workplace and who will struggle to keep up.

Some will use AI at a surface level and get surface-level results.

Others will engage AI like a strategist, refining, optimizing, and leading it to generate exponential value.

That difference?

It's not about technology.

It's about thinking like an executive.

The Difference Between Passive and Executive AI Users

AI is only as smart as the person using it.

That's not just a cliché—it's the defining factor in how much value AI brings to your work. AI can automate tasks, generate insights, and even make recommendations, but it does so based on the direction it's given. Professionals who treat AI as a collaborative, strategic tool will extract immense value. Those who engage with it passively will find themselves stuck with generic, surface-level results—or worse, misled by inaccurate or incomplete outputs.

The real divide in AI engagement isn't between those who use AI and those who don't. It's between those who lead AI and those who let AI lead them.

What Passive AI Use Looks Like

Many professionals fall into passive AI habits without realizing it. They approach AI as a one-step process—ask a question, get an answer, move on. This is a fundamental misunderstanding of how AI works.

Passive AI users:

- Treat AI like a search engine—input a request, take what comes back, and don't push further.
- Assume AI's first response is its best response, rather than treating it as a starting point.
- Fail to iterate, refine, or clarify their requests to get more useful outputs.
- Don't challenge AI's logic, meaning they risk accepting misinformation or flawed reasoning.

This approach severely limits what AI can do. Imagine a manager asking a junior employee to write a report, then accepting the first draft without review or revision. No leader would do that—yet many professionals treat AI the same way, assuming that its first attempt is automatically correct or complete.

Without refinement, iteration, and oversight, AI will always underperform. The gap between passive AI users and strategic AI users is the difference between mediocre and exceptional results.

What Executive AI Use Looks Like

Executive AI users don't just use AI—they guide it, refine its outputs, and integrate it into their strategic thinking.

They interact with AI in three key ways:

1. Refining and Clarifying Responses

Executive AI users don't accept the first response at face value. They treat AI outputs like a first draft—something to improve, refine, and optimize.

A marketing professional might ask AI for LinkedIn post ideas. If they stop there, they get generic results. A strategic AI user pushes further:

- *“Analyze my last 10 posts and identify engagement trends.”*
- *“Now generate 10 post ideas based on those trends.”*
- *“Make them more conversational and include industry statistics.”*

This iterative approach dramatically improves AI’s usefulness. Instead of a random list of ideas, the AI aligns its output with actual audience data, producing posts that are not just creative but strategically optimized.

2. Engaging in Strategic Iteration

Strong AI users adjust their inputs based on what AI gives them. They test different angles, refining their approach to get more precise and actionable results.

An HR manager needs an employee engagement survey. A passive AI user types in *“Write a survey on employee engagement.”* AI generates a generic template—something that could apply to any company, in any industry.

An executive-style AI user iterates with strategy in mind:

- *“Create a survey that measures engagement, burnout risk, and career satisfaction.”*
- *“Tailor it for a remote workforce.”*
- *“Ensure the questions produce measurable, actionable data.”*

Instead of an off-the-shelf questionnaire, the AI produces a custom survey designed for real business insights.

3. Applying Critical Oversight

AI isn’t perfect. It pulls from training data, which means it can produce biased, outdated, or misleading outputs.

Executive AI users know this—and they challenge AI responses the same way they’d challenge a consultant, analyst, or team member.

An operations director asks AI for a hiring strategy. AI generates a standard list of best practices. A passive user accepts it without questioning. An executive-minded AI user tests its validity:

- *“What hiring strategies work best for mid-sized tech firms?”*
- *“What are the biggest hiring challenges they face right now?”*
- *“How would this strategy change if my budget were cut by 20%?”*

Each refinement forces AI to think deeper, adjust its recommendations, and provide more tailored responses. The result? A truly useful hiring strategy, not a cookie-cutter plan.

Comparing Passive vs. Executive AI Use

The difference in engagement style produces dramatically different results.

Passive AI User	Executive AI User
Uses AI like a search engine	Uses AI like a strategic assistant
Accepts AI's first response	Refines and improves results
Doesn't challenge AI's logic	Evaluates AI's reasoning and bias
Uses AI for surface-level tasks	Integrates AI into decision-making

Example: A Sales Leader Using AI

A passive AI user types: *"Write a cold email for SaaS sales."*

AI generates a generic, impersonal email. The passive user copies, pastes, and sends—without realizing the email lacks differentiation and personalization.

An executive AI user refines the process:

- *"Target CFOs at mid-sized SaaS companies."*
- *"Make it concise, with a compelling data point as the hook."*
- *"Include a soft CTA for a discovery call, and a follow-up sequence."*

Now, AI doesn't just generate a basic email—it creates a highly strategic sales asset.

Why This Matters: The Competitive Advantage of Executive AI Users

AI is a multiplier of thinking ability. But only for those who engage with it at a high level.

Professionals who use AI passively will:

- Produce generic work. AI will generate outputs that are technically correct but lacking insight, nuance, or differentiation. A passive user won't notice the difference.
- Struggle to extract real strategic value. They will use AI for small, surface-level tasks while missing its deeper potential for decision-making and problem-solving.
- Find themselves outpaced by AI-literate peers. As AI becomes embedded in professional workflows, those who fail to actively refine and guide AI interactions will struggle to keep up.

The real advantage goes to professionals who use AI as an extension of their strategic thinking. These users don't just generate content or automate tasks—they use AI to enhance their decision-making, refine their problem-solving, and accelerate their ability to produce meaningful work.

AI as a Force Multiplier for Leadership and Execution

Think of AI engagement like leading a team. A great leader doesn't just hand off tasks and hope for the best—they set clear objectives, provide feedback, and challenge their team to improve. They refine processes, optimize workflows, and ensure that the final product meets a high standard.

AI is no different.

An executive AI user treats AI like an employee, consultant, or thought partner—something that needs guidance, direction, and refinement to be truly effective. This is the difference between someone who leverages AI to its full potential and someone who simply uses it for low-value automation.

Here's where the gap widens:

- A passive AI user might generate a marketing strategy document, but it will be basic, templated, and undifferentiated.
- An executive AI user will refine AI's strategy recommendations, test different approaches, and integrate data-driven insights into a well-structured plan—reducing hours of manual work while improving quality.
- A passive AI user might use AI to draft sales emails, sending whatever the AI generates without critical review.
- An executive AI user will push AI to craft highly targeted, persuasive messages tailored to decision-makers—iterating on tone, structure, and call-to-action for maximum effectiveness.

The compounding effect of these differences is massive. AI amplifies your approach to problem-solving. If you're passive, you get passive, uninspired outputs. If you're active, you get leveraged, strategic outputs that allow you to work at a higher level, faster, and with better results.

The Emerging Gap: AI Leaders vs. AI Laggards

We are already seeing a two-tiered AI adoption curve in the professional world:

- **AI Leaders:** These professionals are mastering AI as a strategic tool, integrating it into their workflows for content generation, research, decision-making, and innovation. They are refining their interactions, experimenting with AI's capabilities, and positioning themselves at the forefront of AI-driven work.
- **AI Laggards:** These professionals are using AI only for surface-level tasks, relying on it for generic outputs without deep engagement, iteration, or refinement. They are missing AI's strategic value, and as AI becomes more deeply embedded in professional settings, they will fall behind.

This isn't just about productivity—it's about who gains leverage and who loses it in an AI-driven economy. The professionals who treat AI as a thought partner rather than a simple tool will rise faster, think bigger, and execute better.

AI as a Professional Differentiator

If AI is a force multiplier, then the ability to use it well is a professional differentiator.

Imagine two professionals with identical resumes, skills, and industry knowledge. The difference?

- One engages with AI like a leader—they structure their queries, refine AI's outputs, challenge assumptions, and use AI to solve problems more effectively than their peers.
- The other treats AI passively, using it for small tasks but never fully integrating it into their thinking or execution.

Over time, the first professional accelerates. They produce better work, make sharper decisions, and increase their impact. The second struggles to keep up, trapped in outdated workflows and shallow AI use.

This isn't theoretical—it's already happening. Companies are actively prioritizing AI literacy in hiring and promotion decisions. Professionals who master AI's potential will find new career opportunities opening up, while those who engage with it passively may struggle to remain competitive.

The Future Belongs to Those Who Lead AI, Not Follow It

This shift is happening now. AI is no longer optional or experimental—it's becoming a foundational skill for leadership, strategy, and execution.

- Professionals who learn to guide AI, iterate on its responses, and apply critical oversight will thrive.

- Those who treat AI as a one-step tool will fall behind.

The question isn't whether AI will change professional work. It already has.

The question is: Will you be someone who actively leads AI—or someone who passively follows?

Because in an AI-driven world, that choice will define who moves forward—and who gets left behind.

How to Develop an Executive Approach to AI

AI is rapidly becoming a defining force in professional work, yet the difference between those who merely use AI and those who engage with it at a high level is staggering. Many professionals assume that effective AI use is intuitive—that if they can type a request into ChatGPT or a generative tool, they're getting the most out of the technology. But AI proficiency isn't about knowing how to generate an output—it's about knowing how to direct AI strategically to produce high-quality, refined, and valuable results.

The professionals who treat AI as a passive tool—asking simple questions, accepting the first response, and failing to refine the interaction—will experience AI as a basic assistant that provides uninspired results. Those who treat AI as a strategic partner—structuring requests effectively, iterating on responses, and critically evaluating AI-generated outputs—will unlock exponential value, improving decision-making, streamlining workflows, and accelerating their ability to execute at a high level.

AI engagement is not a one-step process. It is a thinking system that requires input, refinement, and oversight. Mastering AI requires developing three fundamental skills:

1. Structuring queries with clarity and precision to get the best outputs.
2. Iterating on AI responses to refine and improve quality.
3. Critically evaluating AI-generated information for accuracy, depth, and bias.

Developing these skills doesn't just make AI more useful—it makes AI a leadership tool rather than a basic utility. Those who fail to engage AI strategically will soon find themselves at a professional disadvantage, struggling to compete in environments where AI-literate leaders can produce more insightful, well-informed, and polished work in a fraction of the time.

Structuring AI Queries for Maximum Impact

AI is only as effective as the instructions it receives. Many professionals make the mistake of assuming AI will “figure it out” based on a loosely defined request. But AI does not think critically or infer meaning the way a human would. If the request is vague, AI fills in the gaps with generic assumptions, leading to bland, uninspired, or completely off-target responses.

A clear, structured request ensures that AI produces specific, high-quality outputs that align with the user's objectives. Consider an HR manager using AI to create an employee engagement survey. If they simply type, *"Create an employee engagement survey,"* AI will produce a standard, one-size-fits-all template that could apply to any company in any industry. It may contain questions about job satisfaction, work-life balance, and team communication, but it won't account for the company's remote work culture, recent restructuring, or unique employee concerns.

Now, compare that to a more strategic request:

"Create an employee engagement survey for a remote workforce at a mid-sized tech company. Focus on identifying communication gaps, burnout risk, and career development concerns. Limit the survey to 15 multiple-choice questions, ensuring results are easily quantifiable for leadership analysis."

In the first case, AI generates a generic, surface-level questionnaire. In the second, it provides a customized, high-value survey that directly serves business needs. The difference isn't in AI's capabilities—it's in how the user structures the request.

Effective AI users learn to frame queries with precision, incorporating:

- Context: Giving AI relevant background information to refine its response.
- Constraints: Specifying length, format, tone, and focus areas.
- Clarity: Defining the exact outcome they need.

This same principle applies across industries. A business consultant requesting a market trends report could type, *"Give me a report on AI trends,"* and receive a high-level, generic summary that lacks industry-specific insights. However, by structuring a request like, *"Generate a 1,000-word report on AI adoption in finance, focusing on fraud detection and risk assessment. Include regulatory concerns and cite case studies from 2022-2024,"* they ensure the output is deeply relevant, data-driven, and tailored for their industry.

By mastering the ability to structure AI requests with clarity, professionals can ensure they receive strategic, actionable results, rather than generic content that adds little value. But even a well-structured request doesn't mean the first AI response will be perfect—this is why iteration is essential.

Iterating on AI Outputs to Refine and Improve Quality

One of the biggest mistakes professionals make when engaging with AI is assuming that the first response is the best response. In reality, AI often requires refinement and guidance before it can produce optimal results. Strong AI users approach interactions like a drafting process, improving, adjusting, and optimizing AI outputs with each iteration.

Consider a marketing executive using AI to generate LinkedIn content. If they simply type, *“Write a LinkedIn post on AI in business,”* AI will likely return a predictable, high-level take on AI’s role in automation—something safe, uninspired, and indistinguishable from thousands of other posts.

Instead of publishing the post as-is, a strategic AI user refines it step by step:

1. *“Make this more engaging and add a strong opening hook.”*
2. *“Reframe this as a contrarian take, challenging a common assumption about AI.”*
3. *“Now, make it concise and under 200 words, with a punchy closing.”*

With each refinement, the post becomes sharper, more engaging, and better positioned to stand out. What started as a generic AI response transforms into a high-value thought leadership piece.

This approach applies across professional use cases. A CFO analyzing sales data might begin by asking AI, *“Identify sales trends in our Q3 data.”* AI may provide a useful but broad overview. A strong AI user pushes further:

1. *“Break these trends down by region and customer segment.”*
2. *“Compare this quarter’s performance to last year’s.”*
3. *“Identify risk factors based on declining trends.”*

Rather than accepting basic insights, a refined AI engagement process yields sophisticated, high-impact analysis.

This ability to guide AI through iteration ensures that outputs move from functional to exceptional. However, even a refined AI response must still be critically evaluated—because AI is not inherently objective.

Critically Evaluating AI Responses for Accuracy, Bias, and Depth

AI is a pattern recognition system, not a reasoning entity. It mirrors biases in its training data, produces plausible-sounding but false information, and lacks the ability to independently verify facts. Professionals who use AI without critical oversight risk making flawed decisions based on inaccurate or incomplete data.

Effective AI users do not blindly trust AI outputs. Instead, they question, verify, and challenge AI responses, ensuring they are accurate, nuanced, and free from bias.

A financial analyst using AI for market research might ask, *“What are the biggest AI investment trends?”* AI will generate an overview. A strong AI user doesn’t stop there:

- *“What are the most common criticisms of this investment trend?”*
- *“Provide counterarguments that suggest AI investment is overhyped.”*

- *“Cite the most recent studies that support these claims.”*

Each challenge forces AI to reconsider its assumptions, deepen its response, and generate a more well-rounded perspective.

This active, strategic approach to AI engagement is what separates leaders from passive users. Those who structure requests well, iterate effectively, and critically evaluate AI responses will extract significantly greater value—gaining a powerful competitive edge in an AI-driven economy.

Those who fail to do so? They will remain stuck with surface-level insights, mediocre outputs, and a limited ability to harness AI's true potential.

Final Thoughts: Mastering AI as a Competitive Advantage

The difference between basic AI use and executive-level AI engagement is the difference between working at a surface level and operating with strategic depth. AI is not a magic solution that automatically delivers value—it is a system that responds to the clarity, iteration, and critical oversight of its user.

Professionals who simply input a request and accept AI's first response will find themselves trapped in a cycle of generic outputs, mediocre insights, and underwhelming results. They will mistake access to AI for mastery of AI, failing to recognize that the real power of AI lies not in automation, but in augmentation—the ability to amplify and refine human thinking.

Meanwhile, professionals who learn to structure requests with precision, iterate strategically, and critically evaluate AI-generated outputs will separate themselves in a rapidly evolving workplace. They will produce more insightful work in less time, make better decisions with deeper intelligence, and integrate AI seamlessly into their professional workflows.

This is not just a productivity skill—it is a leadership skill. The executives, strategists, and decision-makers who develop an executive cognitive style for AI engagement will not only outperform their peers—they will shape the future of work itself.

AI is already changing the way professionals think, operate, and compete. The question is no longer whether AI will be integrated into high-level work—it already has. The only real question left is:

Will you be someone who leads AI, or someone who is left behind by it?