

FREE CHECKLIST

The 7 foundations of AI adoption that actually holds.

Score your organization in 20 minutes, before you buy a single license.

AI is an amplifier. It magnifies the strengths of healthy organizations and the dysfunctions of struggling ones. That's the headline finding of DORA's 2025 State of AI-assisted Software Development report, a study of nearly 5,000 technology professionals. The research identified 7 capabilities that decide whether AI helps your team or hurts it. None of them are about which tool you buy.

I've translated each one for small businesses, agencies, and nonprofits. For each foundation, mark every statement that's true for you today. 3 checks means that foundation is solid. 0 or 1 means start there.

01. A clear and communicated AI stance

Does everyone know what AI use is expected, permitted, and encouraged here? Without clarity, cautious people use AI less than they could, and bold people use it in ways they shouldn't. The research found the clarity of your policy matters more than its content.

- We have a written AI policy, in plain language, that everyone has seen.
- My team could tell you which AI tools are permitted without asking.
- People feel safe experimenting with AI openly, instead of quietly.

02. A healthy data ecosystem

Is your company's information high-quality, easy to find, and unsiloes? AI's organizational benefits depend heavily on this. Garbage in, garbage amplified.

- Our SOPs and docs are current, and people actually use them.
- Client and project information lives in one agreed place.
- Finding past work or decisions takes minutes, never days.

03. AI-accessible internal context

Are your AI tools connected to your actual business context (your docs, your voice, your history), or working from generic internet knowledge? Licenses are the cheap part. Context is where the gains are.

- Our AI tools can reference our internal docs and SOPs.
- We routinely give AI our real context instead of generic prompts.
- AI output sounds like us and reflects how we actually work.

04. Safety nets you trust

Can you undo? Drafts before sends, staging before publishing, backups before bulk changes. A cheap mistake is what makes a team willing to experiment.

- Every automation has a validation step, so nothing breaks silently.
- We can roll back or recover from a bad change quickly.
- There's an audit trail for the things our automations do.

05. Working in small batches

Small changes, shipped often, checked quickly. AI tempts you to generate huge things in one go, and huge things are what nobody reviews properly.

- We pilot changes with one workflow or team before rolling out wide.
- Work is broken into pieces someone can finish and check in days, not months.
- We review AI output in pieces small enough to actually read.

06. A user-centric focus

The sharpest finding in the report: without a user-centric focus, AI adoption actively harms team performance. With it, AI's benefits are amplified. Speed without direction means moving quickly the wrong way.

- Every AI project starts with: who is this for, and what do they need?
- We measure whether the people served are better off, beyond time saved.
- We'd kill a clever automation if it made the experience worse.

07. A quality shared foundation

Your operational backbone: the project system everyone actually uses, the shared stack, the guardrails. AI's effect on organizational performance is negligible when this is poor and strong when it's good.

- We have one project management system the whole team really uses.
- Our tool stack is deliberate; we know why each tool is there.
- New people can find how we work without asking 5 colleagues.

What your score means

16–21 checks: your foundations are strong. AI will amplify what's already working; go after your biggest bottleneck first.

8–15 checks: typical, and fixable. Pick the weakest foundation and spend a month on it before expanding AI use. Local wins won't become company wins until the system can carry them.

0–7 checks: pause the tool shopping. The research is blunt about this: AI dropped into a struggling system amplifies the struggle. Foundations first, and honestly, this is the fun part.

"A bad system will beat a good person every time." — W. Edwards Deming

Want a second pair of eyes?

I'm Françoise Danoy. I help mission-driven small businesses, agencies, and nonprofits set up the systems they run on, and adopt AI in a way that holds. I work with a handful of clients at a time, led with aroha. If you scored this and want to talk it through, email kiaora@francoisedanoy.com. No pressure, no pitch.

Source: DORA, State of AI-assisted Software Development 2025 (Google Cloud). Translation to small teams: mine.