

FREE QUICK START GUIDE

The Executive's Guide to *AI Governance*

What to establish before you buy, build, or deploy – and why most organizations get this wrong before the first meeting is over.

WRITTEN FOR

CEOs · Board Members · PE & VC Leadership
Operating Executives · Tribal & Government Leaders

INCLUDES

AI Readiness Self-Test

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What AI Governance *Actually Means* — And Why Most Miss It

Most executives hear "AI governance" and picture a compliance checklist or an IT policy document. It is neither. Governance is the set of decisions your organization has already made — or failed to make — about who is accountable when AI gets something wrong. Governance before deployment. Judgment before speed.

THE CORE PROBLEM

The majority of AI failures inside organizations are not technology failures. They are **decision failures** — situations where no one was clear on who approved the use case, who owns the output, or what happens when the system produces a result no one planned for.

WORKING DEFINITION

"AI governance is the structure that answers three questions: Who decides where AI is used? Who is accountable when it goes wrong? And what does a human have to approve before the output matters?"

These questions sound simple. Inside real organizations — with legacy systems, cross-functional teams, vendor relationships, and budget constraints — they are anything but. Most leaders delegate these questions to whoever is most excited about AI. That is exactly backwards.

THE THREE PILLARS OF GOVERNANCE

01

DECISION AUTHORITY

Who in the organization has the standing to approve a new AI use case — and who can stop one?

02

ACCOUNTABILITY STRUCTURE

When an AI-generated output causes a problem, who owns it? Not the vendor. Not IT. It has to be a named human.

03

HUMAN REVIEW GATES

Which outputs require human sign-off before they trigger action? Define this before deployment, not after an incident.

WHY THIS IS AN EXECUTIVE PROBLEM, NOT AN IT PROBLEM

Technology teams can build guardrails. They cannot define organizational accountability. They cannot set the risk tolerance for decisions that affect customers, employees, regulators, or communities. Those decisions belong at the top of the organization — and they require executives who understand enough about AI to engage substantively, not just sign off on a vendor's proposal.

"The organizations that deploy AI successfully are not the ones with the best technology. They are the ones whose leaders made clear decisions about accountability before the first system went live."

Governance is not a one-time document. It is an ongoing operating discipline — a set of habits, decision rights, and review structures that evolve as your AI footprint grows. It starts with leadership, and it has to be built **before** the pressure of a live deployment is on.

CHAPTER 02

The 5 Mistakes *Executives Make* Before Deploying AI

These are not edge cases. They appear in nearly every engagement — across industries, organization sizes, and leadership teams. If your organization is preparing to adopt AI, assume you are vulnerable to all five.

- 1 TREATING AI AS A TECHNOLOGY DECISION**
The most common and most expensive mistake. AI adoption is an **operating model decision** — it changes who does what, how decisions get made, and what humans are accountable for. When it's handed to IT or a vendor, the operating model implications go unexamined until they surface as problems in production. By then, the costs are structural.
- 2 DELEGATING STRATEGY TO VENDORS**
Vendors are not advisors. They have a product to sell and a quota to meet. When an organization asks a vendor "what should we do with AI," it is asking the wrong party. **The vendor's answer will always be their product.** Executives need an independent technical voice — one with no stake in the sale — before, during, and after vendor conversations.
- 3 SKIPPING THE READINESS CONVERSATION**
AI readiness is not a technology checklist. It includes data quality, decision-making culture, change management capacity, and the maturity of existing workflows. **Most organizations are not as ready as they think.** The gap between "we use cloud tools" and

"we can successfully govern an AI deployment" is significant – and discovering it mid-project is costly.

4 BUILDING BEFORE GOVERNING

Speed is a real pressure. Boards want results. Competitors are moving. But deploying AI into an organization that has not defined accountability structures, review gates, and escalation paths is not moving fast – **it is building debt**. The organizations that move fastest sustainably are those that spent 6–8 weeks on governance before touching a deployment.

5 CONFUSING AUTOMATION WITH INTELLIGENCE

Automation executes a defined process faster and more consistently. AI makes judgments – probabilistic, context-dependent, sometimes wrong. These require **fundamentally different governance approaches**. When executives conflate the two, they apply automation-era oversight to AI-era risk. The result is a governance gap that often goes undetected until something goes wrong in front of the wrong audience.

CHAPTER 03 – SELF-ASSESSMENT

How AI-Ready Is *Your Organization?*

Answer five questions honestly. No scoring system rewards the answer you think you should give. The full 25-question assessment is available at combsintelligencegroup.com.

For each question, select the response that most accurately reflects your organization today – not where you want to be. Score: A = 0 pts · B = 1 pt · C = 2 pts. Total out of 10.

QUESTION 01 OF 05

If an AI system in your organization produced an incorrect output that affected a customer or stakeholder – who is accountable?

- A We haven't defined that yet
- B The team that deployed it, generally
- C A named executive with defined authority over that use case

QUESTION 02 OF 05

Who is currently leading your organization's AI strategy?

- A A vendor or implementation partner

B An internal IT or technology team

C Executive leadership, with independent technical counsel

QUESTION 03 OF 05

Has your organization formally assessed its AI readiness – including data quality, workflow maturity, and change capacity?

A No formal assessment has been done

B A vendor conducted a readiness review as part of their sales process

C An independent assessment has been completed and documented

QUESTION 04 OF 05

Before an AI-generated output triggers a real decision or action in your organization, what review process exists?

A None – the output is acted on directly

B Informal – someone usually checks it

C Defined human review gates are documented and followed

QUESTION 05 OF 05

How confident are you that your leadership team can evaluate a vendor's AI proposal independently – without relying on the vendor's own framing?

A Not confident – we rely heavily on vendor guidance

B Somewhat – we ask good questions but don't always know what we're missing

C Confident – we have or retain independent technical judgment

YOUR SCORE

Complete the online assessment to receive your score.

YOUR NEXT STEP

The Full Assessment Goes *25 Questions Deep.*

This teaser covers the surface. The complete AI Readiness Assessment maps your organization across five dimensions: governance structure, data maturity, workflow readiness, vendor exposure, and leadership alignment. You'll receive a scored report and a prioritized starting point — at no cost.

TAKE THE FULL ASSESSMENT →

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ADVISORY

Everyone at the Table *Is Selling Something.*

1:1 governance advisory for executives who need a trusted technical voice – not a vendor.

Leaders know AI matters. Few have the governance structures to adopt it responsibly. These private engagements are built to close that gap – through decision framework design, operating model alignment, risk assessment, and governance sequencing the organization can actually absorb.

PRIVATE ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS**01 AI GOVERNANCE FOUNDATIONS**

Private 12-week 1:1. Governance baseline, AI risk assessment, decision frameworks, and a 90-day action plan.

02 AI OPERATING MODEL DESIGN

Governance architecture, ownership mapping, risk framing, vendor evaluation, and operating model implementation planning.

03 GOVERNANCE + LEADERSHIP ALIGNMENT

Leadership-team governance sessions, stakeholder alignment on AI decision frameworks, and cross-functional implementation roadmap.

04 GOVERNANCE & TRANSFORMATION INTENSIVE

Private on-site working sessions. Governance auditing, decision architecture, leadership interviews, and a priority roadmap.

WHAT LEADERS WALK AWAY WITH

- Clarity on AI value and risk inside your organization
- Confidence evaluating vendors independently
- Defined ownership, approvals, and human accountability
- Sequenced adoption your teams can absorb

GOVERNMENT & TRIBAL LEADERSHIP

Jeremy has direct experience advising **public-sector agencies, tribal nations, and government-adjacent organizations** navigating AI adoption inside environments shaped by sovereignty, compliance, and complex stakeholder accountability.

Limited engagements available. Apply directly.

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