EXECUTIVE WHITE PAPER

Crossing the Trust Chasm™

Why the journey from dashboards to AI is not a smooth progression—and the leadership required to cross it

THE TRUST CHASM™ FRAMEWORK

Developed by Pete Hitchen

THE EXECUTIVE QUESTION Can your organisation trust its data well enough to let a machine act on it?

A six-page briefing for CEOs, boards and executive teams

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A familiar pattern is repeating

AI adoption is meeting the same divide Geoffrey Moore described in 1991

In "Crossing the Chasm", Geoffrey Moore explained why technology adoption doesn't move smoothly from enthusiasts to the pragmatic mainstream;

- **Early adopters are prepared to act on potential.**
- **Mainstream organisations require evidence, reliability, reduced risk and repeatable outcomes.**

The same pattern is now visible in organisational AI…or to lean into the buzzword du jour "Agentic AI".

√ Demonstrations are abundant.
√ Tools are accessible.
√ Executive ambition is high.

Yet moving from an impressive pilot to dependable, organisation-wide value is proving much harder.

The obstacle is rarely the model alone. It is whether the organisation can rely on the data beneath it: whether important information has agreed meaning, measurable quality, accountable ownership, traceable lineage and controls that work in practice.

> **THE MODERN CHASM** Between "AI can do this" and "we can safely depend on AI doing this" sits a gap of trust.

Potential persuades pioneers. Evidence persuades the mainstream.

Organisations cross when trust becomes demonstrable and repeatable—not when enthusiasm becomes louder.

Conceptual note: this framework is inspired by Moore's technology-adoption insight and applies an original five-stage lens to organisational data and AI readiness.

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The five-stage journey

Each stage asks a more consequential executive question



five-stage view: visibility increases from left to right; delegated action begins only when trust and governance are repeatable.

Stage	Executive question	Leadership test
1 Reporting	What happened?	Can recurring outputs be produced accurately?
2 Dashboards	Can I see it faster and explore it?	Do shared measures support useful visibility?
3 Trusted Data	Can I believe it?	Are critical data, quality, ownership and lineage evidenced?
4 Governance	Can everyone believe it?	Do decision rights and controls work across teams?
5 AI	Can I let the machine act on it?	Are inputs, authority, monitoring and value dependable?

THE CROSSING
Stages 3 and 4 turn isolated confidence into an organisational capability. Only then can Stage 5 scale with control.

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The leadership gap

Why capable organisations still become stranded

Many organisations already have data engineers, analysts, platforms, dashboards and governance policies. What they often lack is one leader connecting and orchestrating those assets to the executive mandate — and knowing how to make trust operational.

The scarce capability is not "knowing about AI"

- **Recognise the chasm.** See that a stalled AI programme may be a trust and operating-model problem, not a tooling problem.
- **Translate it for leaders.** Turn technical uncertainty into clear business decisions, ownership and risk choices.
- **Make trust measurable.** Establish usable definitions, quality thresholds, ownership, lineage, classification and evidence.
- **Make governance operational.** Embed decision rights, controls and escalation into normal delivery rather than policy alone.
- **Connect strategy to execution.** Give Data Engineering, Data Scientists, Data Analysts and Governance teams clarity on their roles and agreed priorities, accountable owner and the clear definition of 'done'.
- **Move beyond readiness.** Use the trusted foundation to select, govern and scale AI opportunities that create distinctive value.
- **Institutionalise the crossing.** Establish Pete Hitchen's Data Guild™ operating model so that data ownership, controls, shared standards and continuous improvement become part of business as usual.

> **THE HIRING IMPLICATION**
> The organisation may not need another AI specialist. It may need a Head of Data who can take it from enthusiasm to dependable execution.

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What leaders should ask this role to deliver

A mandate for crossing—not merely maintaining the current estate

First 90 days	3–6 months	6–18 months
Align executives on the decisions, risks and AI ambitions that matter.	Prove trust improvement in a priority domain or data product.	Scale governance across the portfolio with proportionate controls.
Establish a baseline for ownership, quality, lineage and classification.	Install working ownership, decision rights and escalation paths.	Turn trusted data into repeatable AI readiness and investment gates.
Connect the delivery backlog to business outcomes and accountable owners.	Make governance part of engineering, BI and business routines.	Build differentiated AI using proprietary data and operating knowledge.

Make trust sustainable through the Data Guild™

Developed by Pete Hitchen as part of his Trust Chasm™ approach, the Data Guild™ is a practical operating model for keeping trusted data reliable after the initial crossing.

It is not a new department or another governance committee. It creates a regular working rhythm that brings together the executive sponsor, business data owners and stewards, risk and control partners, data engineers, BI analysts and data scientists.

Together, the guild agrees critical definitions and standards, resolves data issues, embeds appropriate controls into delivery, and reviews evidence that data and AI investments are producing trusted business outcomes.

Pete establishes the Data Guild™, defines its membership, responsibilities and decision-making rhythm, and then transfers its operation to the organisation. This turns trust from a one-off improvement programme into a sustainable, client-owned business capability.

Evidence of a successful crossing

- Executives spend less time debating which number is right.
- Critical data has named business owners and visible measures of fitness.
- Engineers and analysts work from clear priorities and definitions of done.
- Governance changes delivery behaviour rather than adding ceremony.
- AI use cases have trusted inputs, accountable authority, monitoring and measurable value.

> **BLUE-SKY OPPORTUNITY**
> When trust and governance become business as usual, AI can move beyond isolated efficiency plays toward automation, new services and competitive differentiation.

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06 / ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A data leader for the crossing

Pete Hitchen is a Sydney-based executive and independent adviser in data, AI and technology transformation. His experience includes data governance, regulatory reporting, analytics modernisation and laying the data foundations for future AI use cases.

Pete welcomes conversations about permanent and interim data leadership, as well as independent advisory work on data strategy, governance and AI readiness.

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