

Patterns & antipatterns for *AI adoption*

A Ways of Working Initiative · SSH Advocate co-create, March 2026

AI amplifies systems. It accelerates value **and** existing problems. Your ways of working determine which.

✓ PATTERNS

ASK WHY AI?

Start with the problem, not the tool. Define outcomes, not adoption. Test whether solutions are desirable, feasible and usable.

VALIDATE BEFORE SCALING

Make success measurable from the start. Validate value in small cycles. Use experiments that actually teach you something.

MOVE DECISIONS TO THE WORK

Include those who build and use AI in strategic conversations. Authority belongs closest to the problem.

INVEST IN LEARNING

Reward learning, not just success stories. Create feedback loops from real usage. Share practical case studies openly.

EXPOSE CONSTRAINTS

Use AI adoption to surface organisational bottlenecks. Map value streams to understand where effort really flows.

PEOPLE FIRST

Support people through change, not just the technology. Prioritise wellbeing, equitable access and ethical impact.

✗ ANTIPATTERNS

MISSING VALUE PROPOSITION

Unclear ROI, disconnect between decision-makers and practitioners. Frustration from lack of measurable returns.

LEADERSHIP MINDSET

Adoption driven by hype. "We must have AI everywhere". Awards for AI use promote superficial take-up over learning. Misplaced deference to vendors who in reality know as little as you do.

WAYS OF WORKING OVERLOOKED

AI amplifies existing issues when ways of working aren't addressed. Practitioners left out of strategy conversations.

FEAR OVER ENGAGEMENT

AI used to justify headcount cuts before value is understood. Creates fear rather than engagement, limits learning, destroys trust.

CONTROLS & GOVERNANCE

Emergence of a new version of "ShadowIT" with data and security risks. Excessive bureaucracy as overreaction replaces thoughtful oversight.

AI IMPERFECTION IGNORED

Treated as flawless despite hallucinations. Accurate purpose-built tools overlooked in favour of AI that feels more advanced.



Start with purpose

"What outcome are we improving and how might AI tools help with that?"



Build a learning culture

Reward experiments, not just outcomes. Share what doesn't work



Engage and respond

Move decisions to people doing the work. AI adoption is cultural, its new ways of working