



WHY AI STRATEGIES STALL

The AI Literacy Gap Nobody Talks About

Companies rolled out the training and bought the tools. Most still can't use AI well. The reason most AI strategies fail before they start is a literacy gap, and it begins at the top.

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The comfortable lie: “we've rolled out training”

Ask most leadership teams whether their people can use AI and you'll hear the same answer: we ran the training, we gave everyone access, we're covered. The data says otherwise. DataCamp's 2026 survey of more than 500 enterprise leaders found that 77% of organizations offer some form of AI training, and yet 59% of those same organizations still report an AI skills gap.



Training is widespread. Capability is not. Source: DataCamp, State of Data & AI Literacy 2026 (500+ enterprise leaders).

Training and literacy are not the same thing. A one-hour session on how to open ChatGPT teaches people that the tool exists. It does not teach them which problems to point it at, how to tell a good answer from a confident-sounding wrong one, or where trusting the output puts the business at risk. That judgment is what AI literacy actually is, and only 35% of organizations have a mature, company-wide program that builds it.

The gap starts in the boardroom

The literacy gap is widest exactly where it matters most: among the people setting AI strategy. BCG's May 2026 “Split Decisions” survey of 625 leaders (351 CEOs and 274 board members at companies above \$100M in revenue) found a striking disconnect. Three quarters of board members believe their AI knowledge is on par with or ahead of their peers. Their CEOs disagree: nearly 40% say the board lacks an informed view of how AI is reshaping strategy, one in three say the board overestimates what AI can replace, and 61% say their boards are pushing faster than the organization is ready to deliver.



The disconnect at the top. Sources: BCG Split Decisions survey (May 2026); DataCamp 2026.

The people most confident in their AI literacy are directing strategy, and they are the least likely to have it. You cannot govern what you don't understand, and you cannot prioritize investments well if you can't tell a real capability from a demo.

What executive AI literacy actually is

Executive AI literacy is not knowing how to write a clever prompt. It is a small set of judgments that shape every AI decision a leader makes:

1. **Where AI belongs.** Knowing which decisions and workflows AI should touch, and which it should stay away from, before a dollar is spent.
2. **How to judge the output.** Telling a trustworthy answer from a fluent, confident, wrong one, and knowing when to demand a human check.
3. **Where the risk lives.** Understanding what data can go where, what a model can be relied on for, and what happens when it fails.
4. **What “done” looks like.** Setting a real standard for an initiative’s outcome instead of accepting activity as progress.

None of that comes from a tool license or a lunch-and-learn. It comes from working through real decisions with someone who has made them before.

Why generic training doesn't close it

The reason 77% can train and 59% still have a gap is that most training is built around the tool, not the work. Generic demos show people features. They don't change how a controller closes the books, how an underwriter assesses a risk, or how a leadership team decides which of five AI proposals to fund. Literacy is built inside real workflows and real decisions, which is exactly what a generic program can't reach, and why it can't be a one-time event.

Literacy is a function, not an event

The companies that close this gap treat AI literacy the way they treat financial discipline: an ongoing capability that someone owns, not a box checked once a year. Someone sets the standard for good AI use, coaches leadership through real decisions, keeps governance current as the tools change, and makes sure the judgment lives inside the business rather than in a slide deck.

That is a large part of what Spej does as its clients' AI Office. We build the literacy where the decisions get made, starting with the leadership team, so the strategy is set by people who actually understand what they're directing. An AI strategy is only as good as the judgment of the people steering it. Close that gap first, and everything downstream gets easier.

Sources

Boston Consulting Group, Split Decisions: The BCG CEOs and Boards Survey (May 2026, 625 leaders).

DataCamp, State of Data & AI Literacy 2026 (500+ enterprise leaders, with YouGov).