uncertaintyLAB

Using AI Without Losing Your Judgement

Seven practices for senior leaders working with AI

What's in here

Seven practices senior leaders can use to challenge their thinking, make more robust decisions and communicate more precisely using AI.

Each one includes when to use it, an example in practice and a prompt you can try this week.

The practices aren't sequential. You'll move between them depending on what you're working on. All you need is access to a conversational AI tool - ChatGPT, Claude, Copilot or Gemini.

This isn't a guide to using AI more. It's a guide to using it without losing your judgement.

AI supports your thinking. It doesn't replace your judgement.

Sue Cunningham
Founder and Principal Advisor
The Uncertainty Lab

© The Uncertainty Lab 2026 · uncertaintylab.com.au

01

Pressure-test your thinking before others do

Challenge and sensemaking

Without this, you take untested assumptions into the room.

Instead of asking AI to produce something, ask it to push back on your thinking.

In this mode, you use AI to clarify strategic problems, pressure-test assumptions before they reach a board, surface blind spots in a proposal or explore different framings of the same issue. You can ask it to play devil's advocate, stress-test a business case or find the weakest link in your argument.

> *You define the space. AI provides friction. Judgement stays with you.*

In practice

You're preparing a strategic proposal for the board and you're not sure how it will land. Instead of refining the slides, you spend twenty minutes asking AI to identify the three weakest assumptions in your case. It surfaces two you hadn't fully examined. You address them before you walk into the room.

Try this week

Choose a strategic decision you're weighing. Open a conversation with AI and set the scene: your role, the decision, the options on the table, your current leaning and what's making you hesitate. Include any constraints - budget, timeline, stakeholder dynamics, political sensitivities. The more specific the context, the more useful the pushback.

> *"Identify the three assumptions I'm making that I haven't tested. For each one, explain what would change if it turned out to be wrong. Then give me the strongest argument against my preferred option, and the one question I should be asking that I haven't yet thought to ask."*

A note on using this guide. Use tools and information you are authorised to use. A paid subscription does not automatically make a tool suitable for confidential work; its terms, settings and your organisation’s requirements matter.

02

Prepare for pressure before it happens

Learn and rehearse

Without this, you're working it out live - often when tone, clarity and confidence matter most.

AI can be a useful rehearsal partner. It won't tell you what to think, but it can help you rehearse, reflect and sharpen how you communicate under pressure.

You might rehearse a difficult conversation with a direct report, test the language for a restructure announcement, reflect on why a negotiation didn't land or prepare for a media interview on a sensitive topic. You can ask AI to play a sceptical stakeholder, a resistant board member or peer, or a journalist looking for the weak point in your position.

> *You notice your own patterns. AI gives you feedback as you rehearse. It doesn't define how you lead.*

In practice

You've been asked to speak on a panel at an industry forum and you don't feel fully prepared on one of the topics. You use AI to rehearse your key points and test how you'd respond to three likely challenging questions. The version that came out the third time wasn't performance. It was what you actually think, said clearly.

Try this week

Think of a conversation, presentation or meeting coming up where the stakes are real. Open a conversation with AI and describe the context: who you're speaking to, what's at stake, the outcome you're aiming for and what concerns you most.

> *"I need to rehearse this. Play the role of [the board chair / the sceptical stakeholder / the resistant team member]. Challenge me the way they would - don't be polite about it. After each exchange, tell me what landed well and what needs sharpening: was I too vague, too defensive or too long-winded?"*

03

Find the signal in the noise

Scan and identify patterns

Without this, the volume of information can mean you miss what actually matters.

You're expected to digest a great deal - board papers, market intelligence, regulatory updates, performance data, what stakeholders and competitors are doing. The insights are often there, but only if you can see the connections.

In this mode, you use AI to synthesise across sources, surface recurring themes and tensions, or research an unfamiliar sector or policy area. It can find patterns across dozens of inputs you wouldn't spot reading them one by one.

> *You curate what goes in and judge its credibility. AI surfaces patterns. You decide what they mean.*

In practice

The 90-page culture survey has been on your desk for a week. Twelve business units, hundreds of comments. You upload it and ask for the three themes that appear most consistently and the two that show up in only one unit. The outliers, buried on page 67, turn out to be the most strategically significant.

Try this week

Pick a document you've been putting off - a board paper, an industry report, an insights report. Upload it to a conversational AI tool you're permitted to use for it, and tell it your role and what you're trying to decide or understand.

> *"Given that I'm [your role] and I'm reading this because [reason], summarise the three most important strategic implications for someone in my position. Identify anything surprising or contradictory. Flag anything notably absent - what would you expect to see in a document like this that isn't here? Then give me the three questions I should be asking."*

If the answer feels too neat, push back: "That's too tidy. What tensions have you smoothed over? What could a reasonable critic argue is missing?"

04

Test ideas before they become commitments

Explore and prototype

Without this, ideas can gather momentum before they've earned it.

When an idea is forming but isn't ready for investment - a new service model, a partnership, a transformation roadmap - you can use AI to see what it might look like without committing budget or political capital.

You might test the logic of a business case, explore three alternative approaches to the same problem, or map the downstream implications of a decision before it becomes hard to reverse. The aim is to see the consequences quickly enough to inform the real conversation.

> *You decide what's worth exploring and when to stop. AI speeds up discovery. It doesn't choose the direction.*

In practice

Your executive team is debating two service delivery options and the arguments have become circular. In thirty minutes, you use AI to map the implications of each option across cost, capability, risk, stakeholder impact and speed. The comparison shows that Option B has a critical dependency no one had named.

Try this week

Take an idea you're considering but haven't committed to. Describe it to AI in full: what it is, the problem it solves, why you're considering it, who it affects and what you're most uncertain about. Include constraints - budget, timeline, political dynamics, dependencies.

> *"Stress-test this proposal. Give me the three strongest arguments for proceeding, the three strongest arguments against, and the one thing that would need to be true for this to work. Identify the most likely unintended consequence I haven't considered, and suggest the simplest, lowest-risk way to test the idea before committing."*

Then ask one more thing: "What evidence would tell me to stop?"

© The Uncertainty Lab 2026 · uncertaintylab.com.au

05

Capture what would otherwise be lost

Capture and consolidate

Without this, what felt like alignment can turn out to have been momentum.

Senior roles generate a great deal of thinking - in meetings, on calls, reading reports, between appointments - and much of it evaporates before it becomes useful.

In this mode, you use AI to turn meeting notes into clear actions, distil a day of conversations into the decisions that actually need to be made, or convert rough notes into a brief your team can act on.

> *You choose what to keep and how it's structured. The judgement about what matters stays with you.*

In practice

It's 5pm. The whiteboard is covered and there are six pages of notes. The leadership team has done good work, and most of it is about to evaporate. You feed the raw material into AI and ask it to extract the agreed decisions, the actions with owners and the questions still open. Within ten minutes you have a clean one-page summary to send before close of business.

Try this week

After your next significant meeting, paste your rough notes into a conversational AI tool - or photograph them - however messy they are. Add context: what the meeting was about, who was there and what you were trying to achieve.

> *"From these notes, create a clean one-page summary with: (1) decisions made and by whom, (2) actions with owners and timeframes, (3) unresolved questions, each with a suggested owner and deadline, and (4) anything discussed but left hanging that someone should track. Use plain, direct language I could send to my team within the hour."*

Treat what comes back as a fast first draft. AI can miss nuance or misread shorthand, so check it before you send it.

06

Make complexity visible

Visualise and make meaning

Without this, insights stay hidden and decisions stall.

Some ideas only become clear when you can see them. In this mode, you use AI to create frameworks, diagrams and models that make complexity easier to navigate - for you and for the people you need to bring with you.

You might map the relationships in a complex governance structure, create a visual of your strategic logic, reduce a complicated change program to a single page, or organise competing priorities into a model a team can work from.

> *You decide what the picture needs to clarify. AI generates options. You choose what carries meaning.*

In practice

You're explaining a complex multi-stakeholder governance arrangement to a new board or team member. Instead of sending three more pages of text, you ask AI to generate a visual showing the relationships, decision rights and escalation paths. They understand in thirty seconds what the written brief struggled to convey.

Try this week

What are you trying to explain that isn't landing? A project with too many moving parts, a decision with hidden dependencies, a change program that needs a single page. Describe the situation to AI in detail: the key players, the relationships, the decision points and what's creating the complexity.

> *"Help me create a structured visual map of this situation. Show the key elements, how they relate, where the decision points sit and where the dependencies or tensions are. Make it clear enough that someone new could grasp the essential picture in under a minute. Then tell me what's missing - what have I left out that probably matters?"*

The first version rarely nails it. Ask AI to simplify, reorganise or highlight different elements. The second or third version is usually the useful one.

07

Say what actually needs to be said

Articulate and influence

Without this, people fill the gaps with their own interpretation.

All the thinking and analysis eventually has to reach other people - through board papers, stakeholder briefs, speeches or internal communications. In this mode, you use AI to sharpen how you communicate consequential ideas.

You might draft a report that captures nuance without waffle, test different framings for a sensitive announcement, translate complex analysis into language a non-specialist can act on, or prepare talking points that need to land differently with different audiences. The goal isn't to have AI write for you. It's to produce a stronger version of what you mean.

> *You decide what to say, how to frame it and why it matters now. AI supports expression. It doesn't replace your voice.*

In practice

Three audiences, one announcement. Internal changes, real uncertainty and three groups who need to hear it differently - the all-staff message, the board communiqué and the FAQ for HR. You draft each version with AI, testing what each audience needs to hear. Each speaks to its audience. None buries the truth.

Try this week

Write the rough version first, in your own words, even if it's messy. Don't let AI start the thinking. Then paste it in with context: who the audience is, what you're trying to achieve, the right tone and what the reader needs to do next.

> *"Strengthen this. Make the argument clearer and more direct, and remove anything vague, hedging or redundant. Identify the point where the reader is most likely to lose confidence, disengage or misunderstand what I'm asking. Then give me a tighter, more precise version that keeps my voice and intent."*

© The Uncertainty Lab 2026 · uncertaintylab.com.au