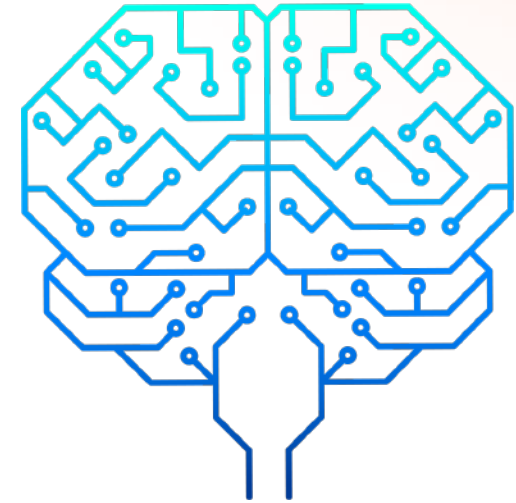


How to Keep the AI Momentum Alive: Lessons from Real-World Champions Networks



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The Challenge of Scaling AI Adoption

As enterprises deploy generative AI tools, they often rely on a Champions Network - a distributed group of early adopters and influencers for model use, to share best practices, and accelerate adoption.

While a Champions Network is theoretically driven by Grassroots energy and peer learning, it only generates real impact when leadership remains engaged, communication flows freely, and governance provides direction without stifling innovation.



Case Study Overview: Analyzing the Adoption Momentum Gap

A US-based organization with a technically sophisticated and highly collaborative workforce launched an AI Champions Network to accelerate enterprise-wide Gen AI adoption. Leadership initially framed the network as a “critical lever for adoption,” and initial enthusiasm was strong.

Early Success and Cultural Wins

In its initial stages, the network demonstrated the power of collective intelligence and peer learning:

- Champions met twice weekly, sharing use cases, tips, and governance concerns.
- Early adopters experimented rapidly and shared best practices.
- The program was seeded by a senior leader and had a dedicated facilitator.
- Common questions were quickly answered by technically savvy champions, accelerating skill development across the group.
- The presence of a representative from the CTO's office added credibility and structure, ensuring emerging ideas were captured in a growing backlog of potential use cases and policy needs.
- Champions proactively sought guidance on how to cascade insights and coach their own teams, signaling a strong appetite for structured enablement.

Above all, the sentiment of “we’re in this together” was palpable. The community became a space of transparency, curiosity, and shared purpose - a cultural win that laid a solid foundation for sustained enterprise adoption.

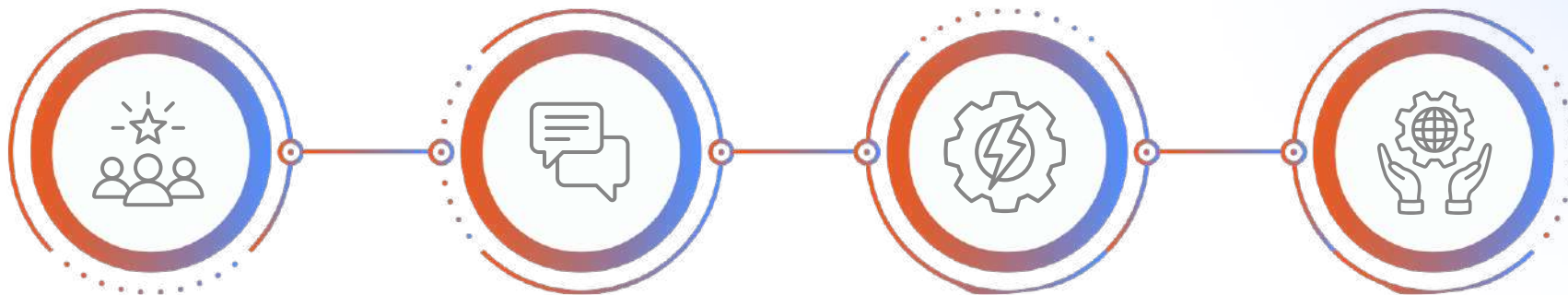
Loss of Momentum

However, the program's foundation quickly eroded. After the first few weeks, the senior leader stopped attending sessions and was disengaged from the champions' communications. This withdrawal was a critical shift. Without visible executive sponsorship or clear escalation pathways, the initial enthusiasm rapidly decreased.

- Champions grew increasingly frustrated by the lack of structure for communicating valuable insights or influencing the overall AI strategy.
- Crucial governance questions remained unresolved, creating a policy vacuum.
- Consequently, some teams began using unapproved tools, which led to a fragmentation of the organization's AI landscape and increased compliance risk.

Key Momentum Barriers

The deceleration of the Champions Network can be traced to four key obstacles that stalled progress:



Leadership Disengagement

The absence of executive sponsors signals a lack of organizational priority. When executive leadership withdraws visible participation, the program is perceived as optional, undermining its strategic importance.

Lack of Communication Architecture

The champions, the connectors to the field, lacked structured channels for essential activities: escalating policy issues, sharing external success stories beyond their calls, and receiving vital feedback from leadership, compliance, and their own team members.

Overreliance on Voluntary Energy

Champions' enthusiasm carried the network early on, but without recognition, direction, or measurable outcomes, participation waned, leading champions to question the investment of their limited time.

Governance Paralysis

Without clear accountability, individual teams acted independently, leading to inconsistent adoption standards across the organization, duplicated work efforts, and significant compliance risks from unsanctioned tool usage.

Best Practices for Sustainable Champions Networks

To transition the Champions Network from a tactical effort to a strategic accelerator, organizations must establish these four foundational best practices.

Maintain Leadership Presence and Accountability

Leaders must consistently demonstrate how the network's input directly shapes enterprise strategy, validating its status as a core organizational priority.

Visible Executive Sponsorship:

Senior leaders should attend at least one Champions call per month—not just for passive updates, but to listen, respond, and publicly act on input.

Leadership Action Logs:

Establish a lightweight system (e.g., a shared document or dashboard) where champions can log issues or ideas, and leadership is committed to responding within a defined SLA (e.g., one week). This keeps feedback loops tight and visible.

Champion Insights in Leadership Meetings:

To ensure champions feel heard and valued, one rotating champion each month should be assigned to present highlights or critical concerns directly in executive forums.

Provide Structure and Enablement for Champions

Champions are more than just power users; they are strategic connectors between the central AI strategy, governance, and end-user needs.

Define Clear Roles:

Formalize the champion role with defined deliverables such as running team-level demos or office hours, curating FAQs or playbooks, and systematically collecting use cases for a shared repository.

Create Reusable Communication Templates:

Provide champions with short-form templates for updates (“Top 3 AI Wins This Week”), compliance reminders, and executive summaries. This reduces their cognitive load and ensures standardized, professional communication across the enterprise.

Offer Recognition and Incentives:

Formal recognition is essential and non-negotiable for champion retention. Publicly acknowledge contributions during company meetings or newsletters. To tangibly reinforce their value, these efforts must be paired with small, meaningful incentives such as certifications, badges, or professional development credits.

Build a Governance and Communication Backbone

Establish a clear rhythm for information exchange and knowledge management.

Two-Way Communication Loop:

- Inbound: Champions collect and summarize field feedback weekly.
- Outbound: Leadership communicates strategic updates or policy changes via champions. Establish this rhythm early and automate summaries using Gen AI tools.

Digital Hub for Knowledge Sharing:

Use a central, searchable workspace (e.g., ChatGPT Team workspace, Confluence, or Notion) to host meeting notes and recordings, publish validated prompts and AI use cases, and track governance updates and FAQs.

Facilitator as the Program Backbone:

Keep a dedicated facilitator or program manager to ensure consistency, manage documentation, and follow up on leadership commitments.

Governance That Empowers, Not Restricts

Policies should build trust and enable controlled speed, not create bottlenecks.

Transparent Decision-Making:

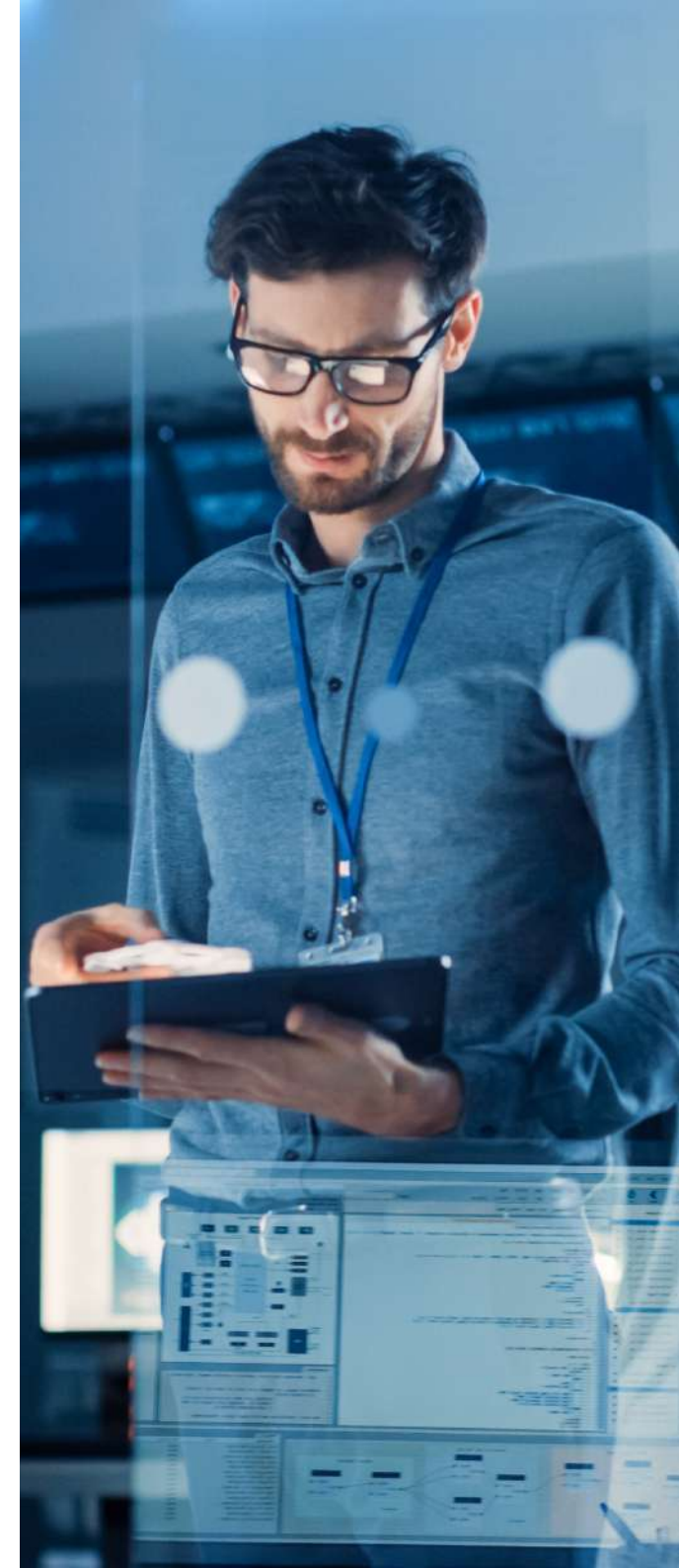
Publish governance principles and clearly explain the “why” behind policies. This reduces rogue tool usage and builds trust.

Rapid Experimentation Framework:

Allow champions to pilot use cases with approved tools, document outcomes, and accelerate the transition of successful experiments into production.

Progressive Policy Development:

Co-create policies with champions by involving them in drafting or reviewing AI usage guidelines to enhance adoption and credibility.



The Leadership Imperative

AI adoption is not just a technical initiative but a cultural transformation. Champions networks lose momentum when leadership treats them as grassroots efforts instead of adoption and governance accelerators.

To sustain momentum, the organization must ensure:

- Leaders must stay engaged.
- Governance must be transparent and responsive.
- Champions must feel empowered, supported, and heard.

When these principles align, champions become co-designers of the enterprise AI strategy, effectively bridging the gap between experimentation and execution. The organization gains not only faster AI adoption but the ability to keep pace with continuous innovation.

Key Takeaways

As AI models evolve at lightning speed, organizations need more than adoption plans; they need adaptive networks of champions capable of translating continuous change into immediate action.

The ultimate organizational return is two-fold: the organization gains not only faster AI adoption but the essential agility to keep pace with continuous innovation.



About Altimetrik

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Recognized in the 2025 Constellation Research ShortList™ for Global AI Services and named a Major Contender in Everest Group's PEAK Matrix® for BFSI IT Services Specialists and Life Sciences Digital Engineering Services, Altimetrik ensures efficiency, visibility, and frictionless processes, empowering businesses to thrive in the AI era.

