Connecting AI and Product Delivery: The AI Fluency Journey Map

A practitioner's guide to where you've been, where you are, and where your team is heading - across three levels of fluency and four modes of AI engagement.

How to read this document

Each level of the AI fluency ladder is described through three states. Use them to locate where you and your team are right now - and to see clearly what the next step looks like.

PRECEDING STATE	FUNCTIONING STATE	MIGRATING STATE
Recognizable patterns before this level - the plateau that signals readiness	What this level looks like in practice - what's working	Signals that further maturity is emerging - what comes next

The four modes of AI engagement

Before applying the fluency ladder, locate your Product Development (PD) team in the engagement spectrum. The same skill looks different - and matters differently - depending on which mode you're operating in.

PD WITH AI	PD OF AI	PD THROUGH AI	PD TO AI
AI-Augmented Development	**Building AI Systems**	**Intent-Driven Creation**	**Governing AI as an Entity**
AI tools enhance individual productivity. Most teams start here. The fluency ladder begins in this mode for most practitioners.	Your product is AI. You face unpredictable behavior, data pipelines, and model evaluation as first-class engineering concerns.	Products are created by describing intent. Specification quality and validation become the bottleneck, not development.	AI acts with meaningful autonomy. Scrum evolves from a delivery framework into a governance and oversight framework.

HOW TO USE THIS

Most teams today are in PD with AI - AI tools augmenting individual work.

As you read the journey map, note where the engagement mode changes what good looks like. The mode tags on each level header indicate which contexts that level's skills are most directly relevant to. Many teams are moving, often without fully realizing it, toward PD through AI territory, where specification quality and validation become the primary contributions.

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

Level 01 **Foundational**

Safe, intentional, contextually aware AI use - for everyone on the team

ENGAGEMENT CONTEXTS

PD with AI

PRECEDING STATE

The Enthusiastic Novice

"I use AI and LLM's all the time - how hard can it be?"

- **Instinct to trust:** AI outputs are accepted without review. If it sounds right, it probably is.
- **Prompt as command:** Prompts are short and vague. Context is assumed rather than provided.
- **No policy awareness:** Sensitive data is shared with AI tools without hesitation or understanding.
- **Tool conflation:** All AI tools are treated the same regardless of task.
- **Hallucination blindness:** Plausible-sounding facts are passed on to stakeholders without verification.

FUNCTIONING STATE

Safe, Intentional AI Use

AI is a useful tool. You know its limits. You take responsibility for what you share.

- **Productive skepticism:** First responses are starting points. Key facts are verified before reaching artifacts or decisions.
- **Contextual prompting:** Prompts include the user need, business objective, and current stage. Output quality improves noticeably.
- **Policy confidence:** Knows which tools are approved, what cannot be shared, and when to disclose AI use.
- **Ownership culture:** Any AI-assisted output is yours to defend, correct, and stand behind.
- **Hallucination recognition:** Over-confident AI outputs are spotted and challenged before they cause problems.

MIGRATING STATE

Emerging Practitioner

Reliable basics are in place. You're starting to use AI more ambitiously and noticing the gaps.

- **Frustration with shallow outputs:** Generic responses don't feel adequate. You're wondering how to improve them.
- **Natural iteration:** You find yourself following up on AI responses - the conversation is becoming a dialogue.
- **Context awareness:** Richer prompts produce better results. You're beginning to experiment with how.
- **Mode curiosity:** Colleagues using AI differently are getting different results. You want to understand why.
- **Tool differentiation:** You're forming opinions about which AI tools work better for which tasks.

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

The four domains at Level 1

UNDERSTANDING	DIRECTION	EVALUATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Know what AI gets wrong - and why Recognize hallucinations, understand unpredictable outputs, know the difference between AI confidence and AI accuracy. Know your approved toolchain.	**Context, format, intent - before you send** Prompts include the user need, business objective, work stage, and desired format. Know when AI adds value and when it doesn't.	**Read before you use** Treat the first response as a draft. Verify facts before they reach stakeholders. Spot implausible claims. Challenge outputs that sound polished but feel wrong.	**Own what you share** Protect sensitive data. Disclose AI use when required. Understand the policy. Everything you publish with AI assistance is yours to stand behind.

A THREAD THAT RUNS THROUGH ALL THREE LEVELS - DELIBERATE SKILL FORMATION

AI fluency is additive. But AI use can be subtractive if you are not deliberate.

Anthropic's own randomized controlled trial (Shen & Tamkin, 2026) found that AI assistance on coding tasks improved short-term output but reduced learning and comprehension - participants who used AI assistance scored lower on subsequent knowledge assessments than those who completed tasks without it. This is not an argument against AI use. It is an argument for intentional use: using AI to accelerate tasks you already understand, while protecting the deliberate practice and struggle that builds deeper capability. At every level of this ladder, the question is not only 'am I using AI well?' but 'am I still developing the foundational understanding that my AI use depends on?'

TRANSITION SIGNAL - WHAT READINESS FOR LEVEL 2 LOOKS LIKE

From compliance to craft

Level 1 is fundamentally about not causing harm - avoiding policy violations, hallucination pass-throughs, and reputational damage. Readiness for Level 2 shows up when safety feels routine, and attention has shifted to quality: 'I'm doing this safely, but I'm not getting the best out of it.' That restlessness is the signal.

SIGNALS YOU'RE READY TO MOVE

- You're consistently unsatisfied with first-pass outputs and naturally iterating on them
- You've started noticing the gap between generic answers and what you actually need
- You're forming intuitions about what makes a prompt work or fail
- You're thinking about how to use AI better, not just whether to use it safely
- Colleagues are noticing differences in how your team uses AI versus others

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

Level 02 **Practitioner**

Deliberate, iterative, outcome-focused AI use - where real craft begins and complacency becomes the primary risk

ENGAGEMENT CONTEXTS
PD with AI
PD of AI
PD through AI

PRECEDING STATE

The Safe but Frustrated User

"I'm doing it right, but it's still a lot of effort for mediocre results."

- **Single-shot thinking:** Tasks framed as single prompts. Multi-step chaining hasn't emerged as a pattern.
- **Generic context:** Prompts are safe, but thin - product-specific nuance is absent.
- **Output-focused framing:** 'Write me a user story' rather than exploring whether an assumption holds.
- **Velocity disconnect:** Individual AI use is producing results, but not yet accelerating team throughput.
- **Mode blindness:** AI treated as a single category regardless of whether you're augmenting, building an AI product, or generating through specification.

FUNCTIONING STATE

Confident, Iterative, Outcome-Oriented

AI is accelerating certain types of work. You iterate fluidly and catch errors early,but you know the productivity gains are real on some task types and still emerging at the product development/impact level.

- **Prompt chaining:** Complex tasks broken into steps - problem framing, hypothesis generation, acceptance criteria - rather than one comprehensive request.
- **Outcome context as default:** Prompts routinely include the target user, outcome goal, constraint, and stage of the work cycle.
- **Reasoning interrogation:** You ask AI to explain its reasoning and evaluate whether it holds. Being polished doesn't imply correctness.
- **Mode-aware usage:** In PD with AI, calibrating for quality. In PD of AI, DoD includes evaluation benchmarks. In PD through AI, specification quality is your primary contribution.
- **Honest about the limits:** You don't treat AI as a universal accelerant. You know which task types benefit and which create hidden costs - technical debt, reduced comprehension, skill erosion - that only surface later.

MIGRATING STATE

Systemic Thinker Emerging

Individual fluency is solid. You're starting to see AI's role in how the team works, not just how you work.

- **Reuse instinct:** You're recreating the same prompt structures and want to standardize them. 'The team should use this' starts appearing.
- **Event friction:** You're noticing where Scrum events feel misaligned with AI-assisted flow:- planning assumptions, velocity metrics, DoD.
- **Workflow design curiosity:** You're thinking about where AI should sit in the team's process, not just your own.
- **Mode transition awareness:** You sense the team is working differently - and the old patterns feel less adequate.
- **Coaching impulse:** You're naturally helping teammates stuck at Level 1 patterns and finding that you have useful things to say.

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

The four domains at Level 2

UNDERSTANDING	DIRECTION	EVALUATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Match tool to task - and mode to context	**Prompt as dialogue, not command**	**What's missing matters as much as what's wrong**	**Review before it reaches stakeholders**
Understand capability limits, context window effects, and the difference between confidence and accuracy. Know which engagement mode you're in and what that changes.	Set collaboration terms upfront. Chain prompts across multi-step tasks. Each response is a checkpoint. In PD through AI, specification writing is your primary skill.	Question polished outputs. Identify absent perspectives. In PD with AI: review code for architectural coherence. Avoid automation complacency - the Klarna problem is real.	Audit AI-generated work at consequential handoffs. Understand IP implications. Build in human review checkpoints. In regulated contexts, audit trail requirements change what's viable.

THE PRODUCTIVITY EVIDENCE IS MIXED - AND THAT MATTERS

Visible gains, hidden costs.

Controlled studies show AI tools can complete certain structured tasks 55% faster (GitHub/Microsoft, 2023). But independent longitudinal research on 211 million lines of code found that refactoring collapsed from 25% to under 10% of code changes as AI adoption rose, while code duplication increased fourfold (GitClear, 2024). A 2025 METR-controlled trial with experienced open-source developers found no statistically significant productivity gains and, in some measures, a slowdown, while participants believed they were 20% faster. The functioning Level 2 practitioner is honest about this: productivity gains are real on certain task types, but the aggregated evidence is contested, and hidden costs - technical debt, reduced comprehension, skill erosion - accumulate beneath a surface of apparent speed.

THE ARTIFACT EFFECT - AN EVALUATION TRAP SPECIFIC TO LEVEL 2

Better prompts do not automatically mean better scrutiny.

Anthropic's AI Fluency Index (2026) found that when AI produces polished-looking outputs, users invest more in directing up front but become less likely to evaluate what they receive in return. The research calls this the 'artifact effect.' It means that Level 2's signature strength - crafting better prompts - can paradoxically lower the guard on the evaluation side. A practitioner who has invested effort in a detailed, well-structured prompt is more likely to trust the response. The antidote is to treat direction and evaluation as independent disciplines rather than a trade-off. Better prompting earns you a better draft. **It does not earn you a pass on reading it.**

TRANSITION SIGNAL - WHAT READINESS FOR LEVEL 3 LOOKS LIKE

From personal fluency to team capability

Level 2 is where individual productivity peaks. The transition to Level 3 occurs when personal fluency starts to bump up against systemic constraints: the team isn't working consistently, events create friction, and the operating model feels misaligned with how AI-assisted work actually flows. The practitioner starts asking 'how should we work?' rather than just 'how should I work?' - and has enough experience to have credible answers.

SIGNALS YOU'RE READY TO MOVE

- You have strong intuitions about where AI should and shouldn't sit in the team's workflow
- You're rebuilding the same prompt frameworks repeatedly and want to codify them
- Scrum events feel poorly calibrated for AI-assisted velocity
- You're anticipating an engagement mode transition, and the team isn't prepared
- You have a natural coaching relationship with Level 1 colleagues
- You can articulate the difference between AI delegation and AI augmentation - and when each is appropriate
- You're actively protecting your own skill formation - using AI on tasks you understand, not substituting it for the learning you haven't done yet

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

Level 03 **Advanced**

Workflow architect, team coach, operating model contributor - shaping how the team works

ENGAGEMENT CONTEXTS

PD with AI
PD of AI
PD through AI
PD to AI

PRECEDING STATE

The Capable but Siloed Expert

"I'm getting a lot out of AI, but the team around me isn't keeping up."

- **Individual excellence, team gap:** Personal AI fluency is high, but there is no systematic effort to share or embed it in how the team works.
- **Workflow improvisation:** AI is bolted into processes ad hoc. Human review checkpoints are inconsistent.
- **Event drift:** Scrum events run as before, but AI-assisted velocity has made them feel misaligned.
- **Mode transition risk:** Team is moving toward 'through' or 'to' territory without governance, workflow design, or skill preparation.
- **Governance lag:** AI use policies haven't kept pace with how AI is actually being used. Accountability for AI outputs is unclear.

FUNCTIONING STATE

Orchestrator, Coach, Designer

The team's AI capability is being designed, not improvised. Human judgment is preserved at the right points.

- **Workflow architecture:** Multi-step AI workflows combine AI tasks with human judgment at deliberate handoffs - preserving inspect-and-adapt loops.
- **Reusable assets:** Prompt templates, evaluation criteria, and specification standards are built for team use.
- **Mode-calibrated governance:** Governance reflects engagement mode. In PD of AI: evaluation-driven DoD. In PD to AI: clear human authority boundaries and audit review cadences.
- **Event redesign:** Scrum events recalibrated - estimation reflects specification complexity; DoD includes AI quality gates; retrospectives capture experimental learning.
- **Active coaching:** Level 1 and 2 colleagues are actively supported. Team norms were contributed to, revisited, and improved.

MIGRATING STATE

Strategic Anticipator

The team is functioning well now. You're building for what's coming before it arrives.

- **Horizon scanning:** Monitoring developments in AI capabilities is a regular practice. You connect capability shifts to team and roadmap implications.
- **Workforce transition planning:** You're asking whether the team's current skills will remain adequate as engagement modes shift.
- **PD to AI readiness:** You're thinking seriously about what governance looks like when AI begins to act with meaningful autonomy.
- **Cross-organizational contribution:** Your thinking is influencing beyond the immediate team - contributing to policy and standards.
- **The fundamental reframe:** You're asking whether a delivery framework needs to evolve toward a governance framework - and what that requires.

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

The four domains at Level 3

UNDERSTANDING	DIRECTION	EVALUATION	RESPONSIBILITY
Anticipate the transition before it arrives	**Design workflows, not just prompts**	**Evaluate process, not just output**	**Coach, govern, and protect skill formation**
Understand meaningful model differences. Monitor capability developments. Actively track where your team sits in the engagement spectrum - and design for the next mode, not just the current one.	Build multi-step workflows preserving human judgment at consequential points. Distinguish AI delegation from AI augmentation. In PD to AI: explicitly define the boundaries of AI as an entity.	Assess AI reasoning, not just conclusions. Stress-test against edge cases. Build team-level evaluation criteria grounded in outcomes. Identify systemic error patterns.	Coach colleagues actively. Surface ethical risks. Contribute to governance frameworks that scale with AI autonomy. Actively design coaching that preserves deliberate practice and foundational learning - not just AI task completion. Plan workforce transitions with the risk of skill erosion in mind.

EVALUATION AT LEVEL 3 - CONTEXT MATTERS

What good evaluation looks like depends on which engagement mode you're in.

In PD with AI, it is primarily about quality and design coherence. In PD through AI, it is about specification quality and product validation. In PD to AI, it becomes a governance and assurance function - evaluating what AI systems have produced autonomously and whether to accept it. Level 3 practitioners design evaluation practices appropriate to their context, rather than applying a generic standard inherited from augmentation-era thinking.

SKILL FORMATION AT LEVEL 3 - THE COACHING OBLIGATION

The most consequential risk a Level 3 practitioner can miss is the one accumulating in their own team.

Anthropic's research found that AI assistance improved output but reduced learning - participants who used AI to complete coding tasks understood the code less well afterward. HBS research (Zhang et al., 2025) found that foundational skills underpin up to 80% of the wage premium for specialist expertise. As teams move along the engagement spectrum, the execution work AI takes over is often exactly where junior practitioners used to develop their judgment. A Level 3 practitioner who coaches only for AI fluency, without designing deliberate pathways for the foundational learning AI use can displace, is building a team with an invisible capability debt. Coaching at this level means holding both things: accelerating AI adoption and protecting the human depth that governance, oversight, and judgment depend on.

BEYOND LEVEL 3 - WHAT FURTHER MATURITY LOOKS LIKE

From operating model contributor to institutional architect

Level 3 is not a destination - it's a vantage point. The practitioners who move beyond it recognize that the engagement spectrum itself is shifting, and that the frameworks we use to organize product delivery - Scrum, and the skills ladder itself - need to evolve in response. Further maturity looks like contributing to those frameworks, not just operating within them.

SIGNALS OF POST-LEVEL 3 MATURITY

- You're contributing to how the organization - not just your team - thinks about AI governance
- You're designing for PD to AI transition readiness: governance structures, accountability frameworks, oversight models
- You're asking whether Scrum's human-centered model is adequate for AI with meaningful autonomy - and proposing alternatives
- You treat workforce transitions as a strategic design problem, not a training program.
- The frameworks you operate within are ones you're helping to shape

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.

About Scrum.org

Scrum.org, the Home of Scrum, was founded by Scrum co-creator Ken Schwaber as a mission-based organization to help people and teams solve complex problems. We do this by enabling people to apply Professional Scrum through training courses, certifications and ongoing learning all based on a common competency model.

Sources

- APOM AI Skills Progression Ladder · Dr. Alan Brown, Dave West
- Software Engineering in the Age of AI (2026) · Anthropic AI Fluency Index & Economic Index (2026)
- 4D AI Fluency Framework, Dakan & Feller (2025)
- McKinsey Global Institute (2025)
- GitClear Code Quality Research (2024–25)
- Shen & Tamkin, Anthropic - How AI Impacts Skill Formation (2026)
- Scrum Guide, Schwaber & Sutherland (2020)

©2026 Scrum.org | All Rights Reserved.