



## When Technology Works but Adoption Fails: Leadership Capability Gaps in Enterprise Artificial Intelligence Transformation

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**Abstract** – In all sectors, organisations have spent a lot on artificial intelligence, but a significant percentage of these projects fail to yield tangible results. This article proposes that this is not due to the technology per se, which has developed quickly, but to the skill deficits of the leaders of such technology adoption. All too frequently, senior technology leaders view AI as a product that can be bought and turned on, rather than a transformation programme for the entire enterprise that requires disciplined governance, data readiness, workforce engagement, and financial accountability. Based on the experience of 30 years of seeing what works and what doesn't work in manufacturing, global capability centres and large enterprises alike, the discussion highlights common problems pilots without success criteria, disjointed data, legacy systems that do not integrate, front-line workers who are not engaged with new tools, and a lack of ability to prove return on investment. Next, it outlines the disciplines of successful adoption defined problem, executive sponsorship, governed data, realistic integration, human oversight, and continuous measurement. The article also looks at the development of specific transformation leadership positions. The key message is positive businesses thrive when AI is viewed as a business change initiative with smart, self-directed business leaders and not as a procurement decision handed over to vendors. This article is aimed at executives, practitioners and the interested public.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence adoption, Enterprise transformation, Technology leadership, Data governance, Return on investment, Change management, Operating model, Chief artificial intelligence officer.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The advancement of Artificial Intelligence has taken place at a rapid speed, and it has moved from being an experimental novelty to being a boardroom priority. By 2026, most large organisations have yet to be untouched by the desire to add intelligence to their operations and the vocabulary of transformation has taken over strategic planning. However, there's an awkward truth practitioners witness again that marries this excitement, many of the adoption initiatives they see do not achieve the value they were designed for at the time of their inception. Systems are purchased, pilots are called, and budgets are passed, but the hoped-for productivity, cost, and customer experience gains can often never be realized or maintained.

The obvious answer is that it's the technology's fault. This is a wrong explanation. The tools that are used have been more reliable, more accessible, and more capable than at any earlier time. The truth is more in the leadership of adoption. Many tech leaders view AI as a software package that can be installed and turned on, and change will come as a matter of course. They tend to get on the bandwagon of the latest craze and are unable to make up their own minds as to what is what, and they rely heavily on outside vendors for direction. If the strategy is really outsourced, then the organisation is unlikely to get the internal buy-in it needs to implement change.

Hence the demand profile in the profession has changed drastically. Businesses are looking for transformation leaders instead of tool administrators, people who can design solutions and at the same time manage people, processes, data, business value and financial return as a unified whole. Newer roles, such as programme managers, solution architects, heads of adoption and senior officers focused on artificial intelligence, have been created, and these are not just technical roles but enterprise-wide with an impact on every facet of an organisation. Problems faced in practice are uniform and enlightening. Data often is disjointed, inconsistent, or legally restricted. Intelligent tools don't touch the shop floor or the front line where the value of operations lies, but only head-office knowledge workers. Older systems are not easily or readily connected with newer systems. Unsure of what is to come, employees quietly rebel. Leaders do not have a clear idea of what pilots need to do to be successful, nor can they determine if anything has changed. This leads to investment with no impact.

This article aims to fill that void straight. It explores the reasons behind the many failures of enterprise AI, it recasts the issue as one of leadership, not technology, and it outlines the disciplines that separate successful enterprise AI. It is used throughout to build, to help current and future leaders identify certain, avoidable pitfalls and to follow the practices that will lead to measurable results and ambition.

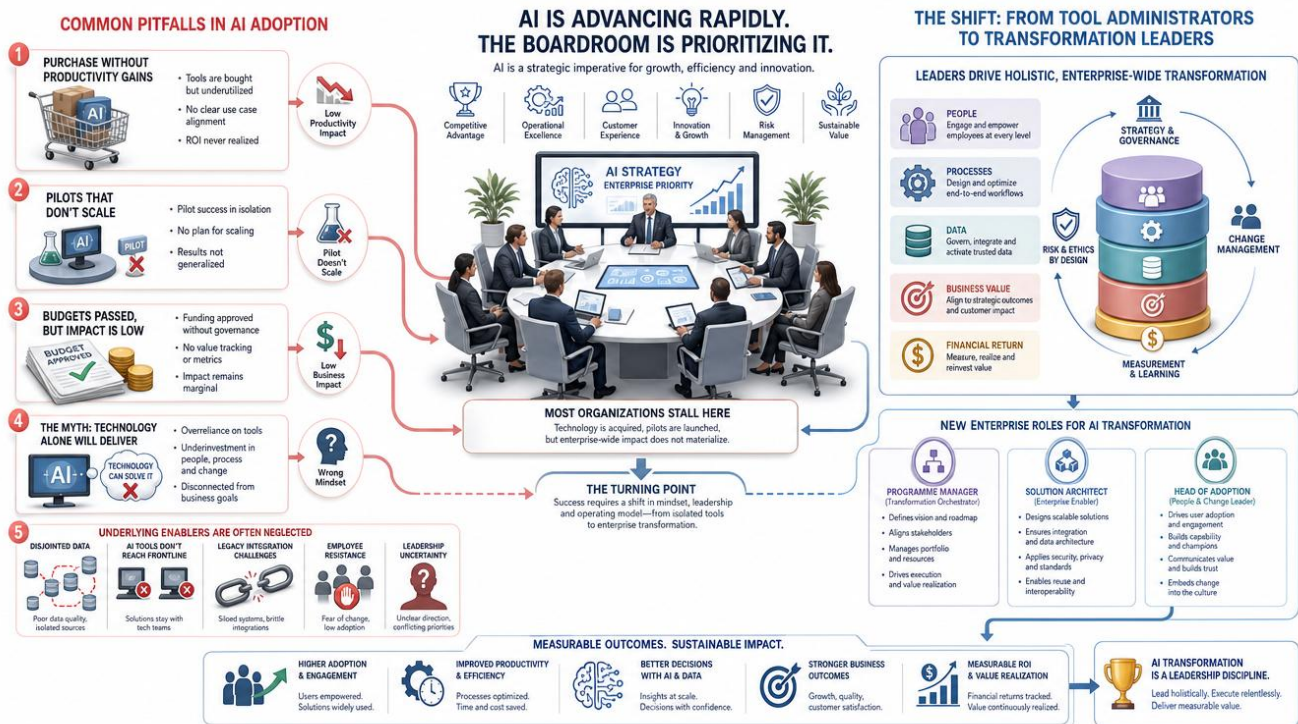


Fig -1: AI Is Advancing Rapidly the Boardroom is Prioritizing IT

## 2. OBJECTIVE OF THE ARTICLE

This article aims to offer a clear, balanced, and practical analysis of the reasons for the failure of AI initiatives in enterprises and to reimagine failure as a matter of leadership, not technology. It seeks to provide readers with a clear and accurate view of the common pitfalls that impede adoption and the practices that enable



sustainable value particularly for those who lead or want to lead technology functions. The article aims to cater to a wide range of readers by presenting technical and organisational ideas in a non-technical way and illustrating the impact of these ideas on business performance, economic efficiency, and societal benefit. Another goal is to provide a record of the creation of new transformation leadership positions and to articulate the operating model that enables artificial intelligence to be integrated into everyday business as opposed to a one-off experiment. Finally, the article aims to provide the reader with practical advice in a respectful manner and avoiding any blame for any individual, organisation, or community.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The lessons learnt here are based on long-term practical experiences and organized observations and not on one controlled study. The foundation is a combination of some 30 years of first-hand experience in corporate, manufacturing, global capability centres, and large multinational companies where adoption initiatives have been attempted, seen and sometimes even looked back on. This experiential base is complemented by careful consideration of current industry developments, such as the developing market for transformation leadership and the patterns that can be seen in the outcomes that are discussed in the public domain.

The lens is an analytical one, not purely technical. The degree of clarity of the business problem, readiness and governance of data, realism of integration with existing systems, strength of executive ownership, depth of workforce engagement, and rigour of the measurement of financial return are all examined for each initiative observed. Failures and successes are then compared, and the factors which consistently differentiate the two are identified.

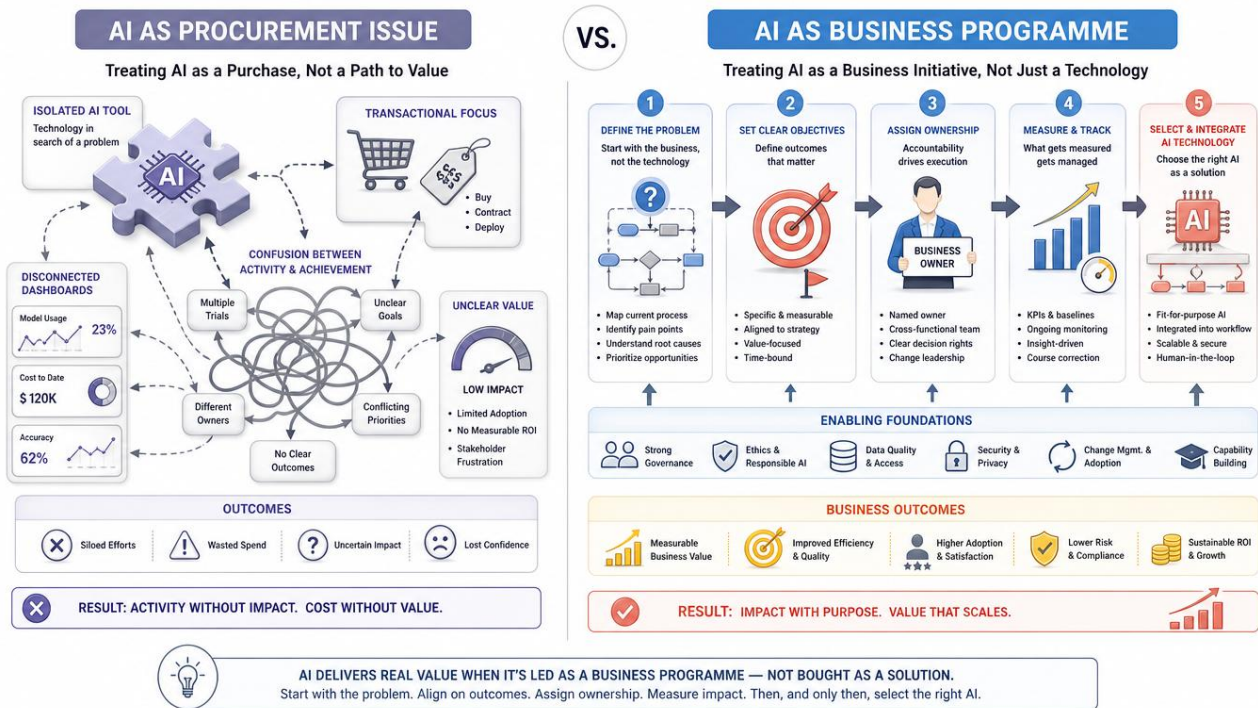
This method has its drawbacks and these need to be recognized. Observational evidence is not as rigorous as experimental evidence, and a range of organisational contexts exists where no one solution is universally applicable. To prevent bias, the discussion does not name any particular entity as the cause of any outcome, but instead looks for trends not individual events, and conclusions are given as disciplined judgement subject to improvement. The aim is to provide sound, equitable and helpful advice, but to be frank about the limits of observation.

### 4. TREATING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A BUSINESS PROGRAMME, NOT A PURCHASE

The worst thing you can do when adopting AI in the enterprise is to think of it as a procurement issue. It makes sense on the surface. There's a tool that's capable, many others are using it and buying it would seem to be the obvious first move. This framing in practice turns the correct sequence of work upside down. Technology is not the first choice and an organisation that starts with a tool has typically ignored the more difficult questions that need to be answered for any tool to be successful.

A business programme starts with a problem that is to be solved. It poses the question as to what the organisation wants to change, by how much and over what time. It names the owner of that result and the person(s) who will be held accountable for that result. The discussion of which capability might help only begins once these questions have been answered. If this discipline is followed, the ultimate decision on technology is almost a moot point, since the context of ownership, measurement, and purpose propels the technology. Even the best of tools goes astray when left to their own devices.

It's a huge difference for value. A procurement mentality creates a cost centre Licenses are paid for, dashboards are put on the wall, and activity is confused with achievement. A programme mind-set creates a change Processes are reworked, decisions are enhanced and the monetary gain is measurable. It's reflected in the way leaders talk about what they're doing. People who explain the tool they've purchased are typically having a difficult time, people who explain the business problem they are solving are typically having a good time.



**Fig -2:** Treating Artificial Intelligence as a Business Programme, Not a Purchase

This re-presentation has a real impact on the public. The organisations that have thoughtfully implemented AI in their processes are the ones that provide better employment, better products and better services as their investment is based on improvement and not on spending. Economically, the programme approach is the better option as waste is avoided, capital is directed towards measurable benefit and not towards fashionable acquisition. The lesson to the leader is simple and clear don't start with the answer. Start with the problem, set up ownership and measurement then let the technology do what was planned for it to do. It is the one discipline which a significant number of people's disappointments after they become ambitious are based on, and it is the basis for all subsequent practices.

## 5. THE COST OF INDEPENDENT JUDGEMENT SURRENDERED TO VENDORS

A good leader can make independent analytical judgements with respect to all major decisions. This is a rare and rare commodity in today's day and age. The speed of change has created an inclination in some leaders to follow the latest next new thing that is being touted at the time and not discern whether it is appropriate for their specific context. This means that those who sell solutions determine the strategic direction, while those who must deal with the consequences do.

There are vendor relationships and no organisation builds everything itself, it is a legitimate and necessary relationship. It becomes challenging when the relationship turns upside down and the supplier becomes the strategy developer instead of a party to it. If a vendor is in the business of selling a specific capability, then it will be a solution that the vendor provides. If a leader is unable to consider those recommendations in the context of the organisation's needs, then he or she has given away the very judgment that is the purpose of the job. What ends up happening is that people wind up getting a collection of tools that fit their budget, nobody inside knows the entire picture, and they quietly drop them when it becomes obvious that they don't work.

## The Cost of Independent Judgement Surrendered to Vendors



Fig -3: The Cost of Independent Judgement Surrendered to Vendors

Independent judgement does not depend on having a lot of technical knowledge of all systems. It takes discipline to pose tough questions, to seek data, not enthusiasm, and to tie any capability to a stated business objective. It is willing to say no to a popular choice that is not good for the organisation, even if it is not easy to say no. It also implies that there must be sufficient internal capacity to question external direction if an organisation is totally reliant on outside directions, it cannot assess what it is being directed to.

There's a lot at stake economically. three-fitting tools are bad investments, and the opportunity cost, or what could have been achieved with a different investment, grows with time. Leadership that truly thinks and acts on its own is also responsible for better adoption in society because it doesn't presume certain factors, like fairness, privacy, and workforce impact, but considers them. The moral for the would-be leader is to develop and protect independent thinking. While listening to vendors, learning from them and appreciating their expertise, never give away the strategic decision itself. The organisation requires a mind which can consider alternatives in its own way and the leader who supplies that mind is much more useful than the one who simply echoes the one recommendation which came best dressed.

### 6. WHY DATA READINESS DETERMINES THE OUTCOME BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGINS

Data is the root of the issue with nearly every underwhelming initiative. This is the least glamorous aspect of the job and for this reason, it is the most often neglected. An intelligent system can only be as intelligent as the information it can access and if that information is spread out in incompatible systems, inconsistent in structure, incomplete in content, or legally restricted in use, no amount of sophistication in the intelligent system can make up for that. The result is determined before the project starts, per se.

## WHY DATA READINESS DETERMINES THE OUTCOME BEFORE THE PROJECT BEGINS

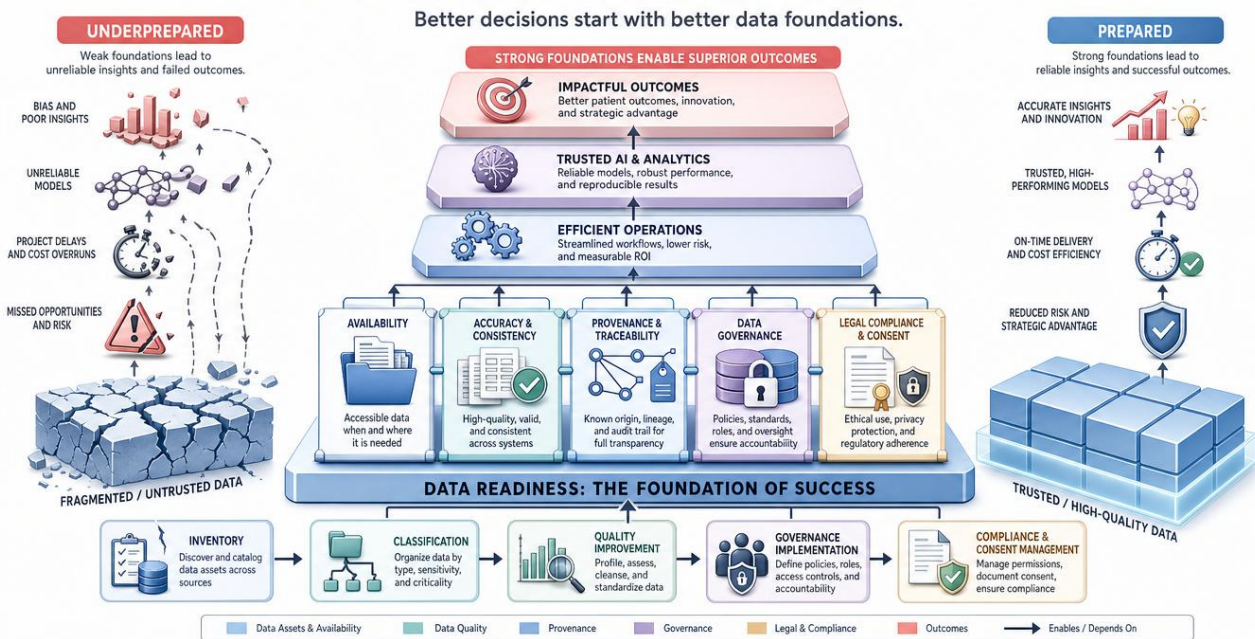


Fig -4: Data Readiness Determines the Outcome Before the Project Begins

There are a number of interrelated qualities of data readiness. The information should be available and in a form that can be used by those who need it. It must be accurate and consistent if it is not then it cannot be trusted and decisions based on untrustworthy data are worse than none. It is important to understand where it came from and how it was transformed, the origins and movement of it must be understood so that the organisation knows where the information came from. It needs to be governed by ownership, access and permitted use needs to be clearly defined. And it must be legally available and have the proper consent and respect for residency and retention.

It's often when a project slows down that many organisations find out what they have in their data. Information is often contradictory and disorganized over the years, and the work to straighten out all these systems, acquisitions and shortcuts is significant and not glamorous. Those who have underestimated this work discover that their timelines are coming to an end and their budgets are being eaten up by the foundational cleanup that should have been expected. But those who get a head start on data quality find it easier to do subsequent projects because the foundation is solid.

What the lesson is for leadership is that data should be treated as an asset and should be invested in continually, not as a technical detail that can be dealt with later. Investing in the not so sexy aspects of

inventory, classification, quality improvement, and governance is one of the highest pay-off actions a leader can take, and yet it yields no immediate, visible product. This investment is going to be an asset to the organisation, not just for one project good, well-governed data is good for decision making, everywhere.

Good data practice has more significance for society. When information is accurate, representative, and well managed, the risk of unfair or harmful consequences is minimized, privacy is safeguarded and trust is established, without which there can be no legitimate adoption. Economics make sense, too clean data reduces the expense and increases the likelihood of success of all future efforts. The competent leader first lays the foundation, and all that is built on it will follow suit.

## 7. THE FRONTLINE PROBLEM WHEN NEW TOOLS NEVER REACH THE PEOPLE WHO CREATE VALUE

A common and telling trend is that smart tools make it to the head office, and not the shop floor. The knowledge workers in the corporate functions gain access to new capabilities, but those who do most of the value-creating work in the company, such as supervisors, operators and frontline workers, are not touched. This is not a small detail in many cases it means that the initiative is focused on a smaller percentage of the opportunity and the biggest operational gains are not realised.

### THE FRONTLINE PROBLEM:

When New Tools Never Reach the People Who Create Value

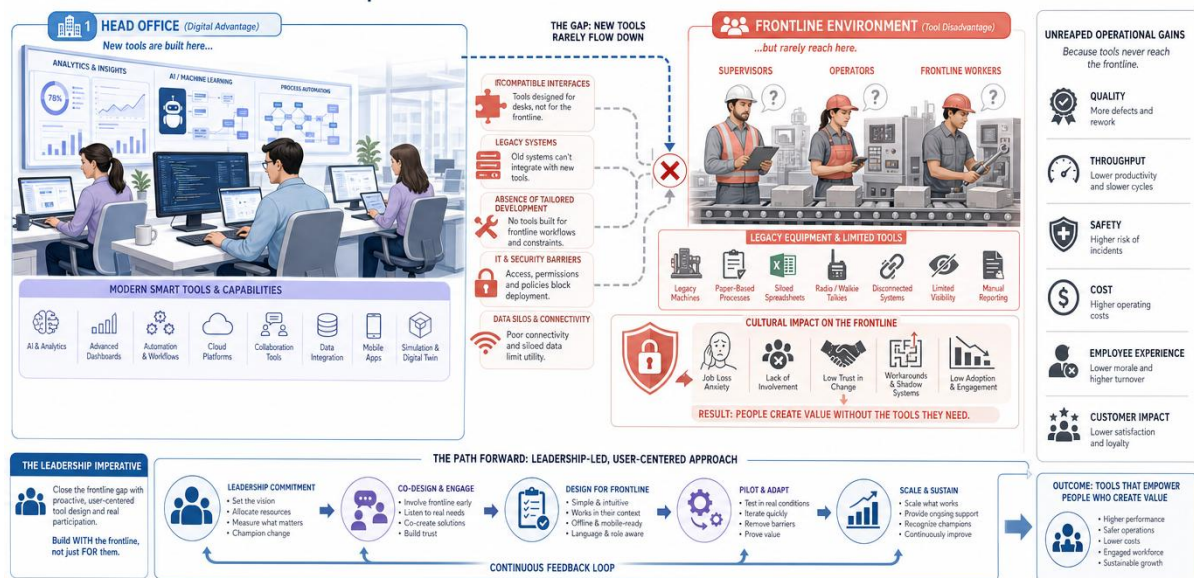


Fig -5: The Frontline problem

It is for both practical and cultural reasons. Often, frontline environments are equipped with older systems and equipment that are hard to interact with modern systems. The work takes place outside of desks, in production lines, in warehouses or in service situations where traditional interfaces are not applicable. It takes time and care to create tools that will be useful in these circumstances, which is not something that is often put into head-office-centric projects. Consequently, the tools that are developed are the tools that the designers want, and not the tools that the users need. The cultural aspect is also a key one. Frontline workers are often the most vulnerable to anxiety of job loss and are seldom engaged in designing systems that



impact their job. Tools placed without explanation or participation, elicit caution or quiet resistance. Even if a new system is great, if a supervisor is afraid the new system is going to take away his job or doesn't see how it will benefit, not only will he not back it but adoption will stall.

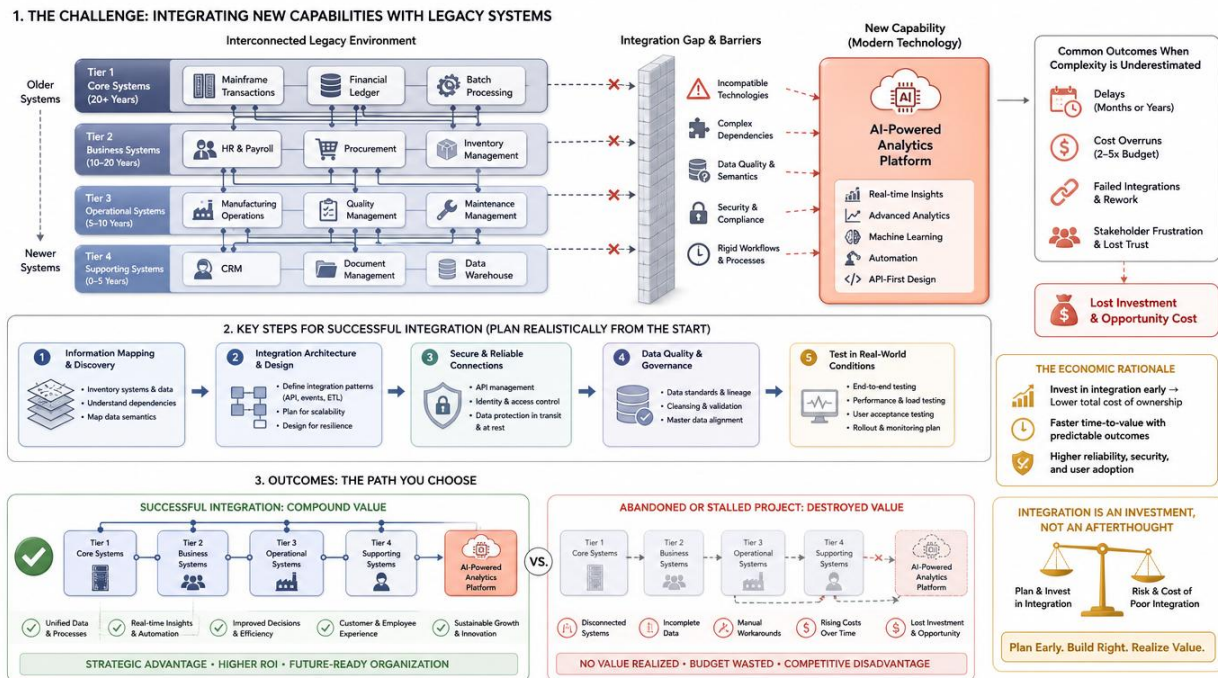
The repercussions spread out. Projects that are limited to corporate activities provide little and often intangible value and, consequently, it is hard to show the benefits to those that pay for them. Meanwhile, the operational improvements which could justify the entire investment, in quality, throughput, safety and cost, go unrepaid since the people who could deliver them were never equipped or engaged. The take-home message for leadership is that it is important to design for the frontline on purpose and early, not as an afterthought. This involves knowing what it is like to be on the front line, taking front-line workers into account in the design process, respecting their views and concerns, and investing in integrating and training tools to ensure they are usable in operational contexts. It also involves making it abundantly clear that it is about helping people and not about moving them and showing it in the actions undertaken. This is important for society as more people can be involved and more people can benefit, and dignity is respected, as the dignity of those whose role is often overlooked is respected. The frontline is often where the biggest and most quantifiable gains lie, economically. The competent leader understands that and makes sure that the change is for the people who add the most value, and not just the people who are making the decision.

## 8. INTEGRATION WITH LEGACY SYSTEMS THE UNDERESTIMATED OBSTACLE

The challenge of integrating new capabilities with existing systems is one of the few things that is underestimated time after time. Large organizations have many layers of technology that have been layered over years, some of which may be older and never intended to interface with newer technology. One of the most frequently made and expensive mistakes in adoption planning is assuming that a new capability can be just plugged in to this environment.

Integration is the place where aspiration meets reality. A tool that cannot tap into the information contained in core operational, customer, human resources and workflow systems is essentially locked in a possibility mode, with no ability to provide ongoing value in actual operations. Careful work is needed to bridge this gap, understanding where information is stored and how it is exchanged in existing systems, designing connections that are reliable, managing security and access issues, and ensuring that the combined system is reliable when operating under real conditions. None of this is unimportant and a lot of it is not something that can be abridged because of enthusiasm.

Leaders who don't appreciate this complexity find themselves facing predictable challenges. Timelines are stretched out as the integration reality is discovered. The more specialised effort that is needed, the higher the costs. Pilot projects that have shown to be valuable but are not able to be implemented in the real organisation infrastructure. Sometimes the challenge of integration is so great that the project is simply abandoned and the investment lost. The more important point is that integration needs to be evaluated realistically from the beginning it's an integral part of determining if a project is even possible. Commitment to something that cannot be successful in the environment is not realism, it's a lack of discipline in integration planning. A good leader considers how a new capability will tie into an existing system as not an afterthought, but as a core part of the capability, and then allocates time and resources accordingly. If the current systems are too much of a barrier to change, the leader either changes the foundation first, or chooses use cases that can be supported by the environment.



**Fig -6:** Integration With Legacy Systems Underestimated Obstacle

The economic rationale is simple integration represents a significant part of the overall effort in most successful integration projects and getting it wrong is a straight path to overspend and disappointment. In the organisation, whether a capability is a demonstration or a part of everyday work is dependent on sound integration. The takeaway for the leader is that connecting is hard. If the best tool cannot access the systems where the organisation's work happens, it's no good and if this is thought of at the start, it's the difference between initiatives that stick and those that don't.

## 9. PILOTS WITHOUT PURPOSE THE DANGER OF ACTIVITY MISTAKEN FOR PROGRESS

Much of the work of adoption is done in the form of pilots, and many of these pilots are done in a certain and avoidable way they start with no clear notion of what success would look like. A pilot without clear action plans will not be successful, for it is not clear what success will look like, nor can it be successful if there are no criteria to measure it against. All that is left is activity something which can be confused with progress. Pilots are a desirable profession no question. They look at low risk, they indicate movement and they help leaders to show that something is going on. However, a pilot isn't worth anything unless there is a question to answer. A well-designed pilot will clearly define in advance what it will seek to improve, how much, and how to measure the improvement. It outlines the criteria for success that will be used to determine if it is successful enough to scale and the criteria for stopping. These are the elements that make a pilot a real learning tool, without them, it is a continuous experiment that is a waste of resources and is solving no problems.

## PILOTS WITHOUT PURPOSE: The Danger of Activity Mistaken for Progress.

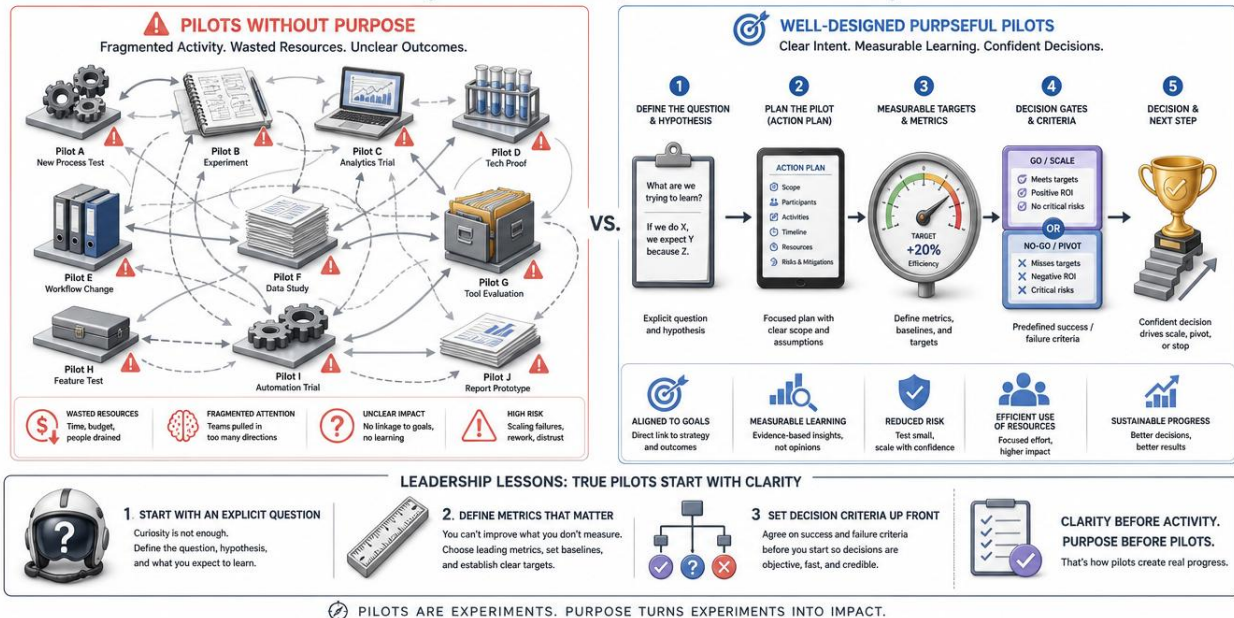
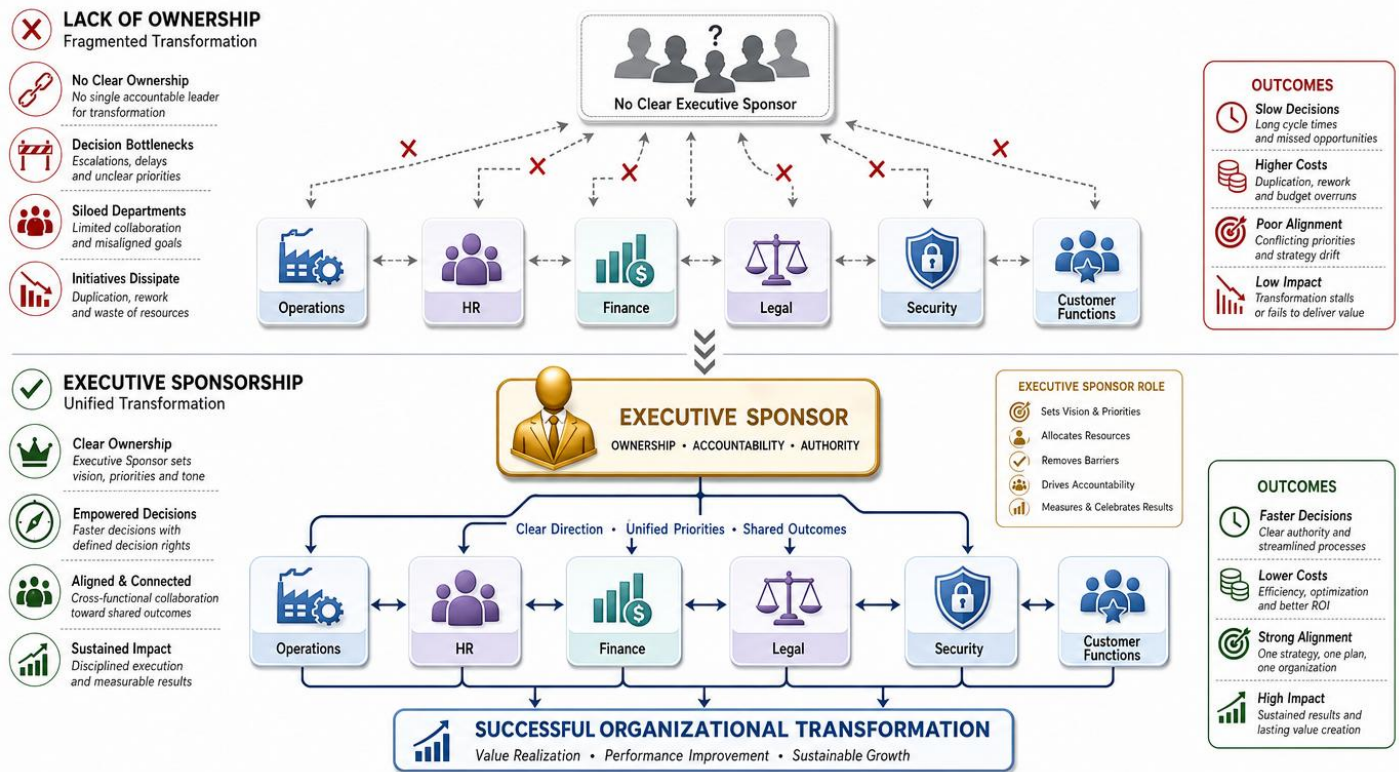


Fig -7: Pilots Without Purpose

The effects of senseless pilots work quietly. Many of them may be operated by an organisation and each may yield interesting observations, but none a decision. Resources become over-extended, attention is fragmented and the organisation appears to be innovative, but it is not. At the time of leadership, there is no clear answer to what value has been added and the credibility of the whole effort is undermined. This is one of the most common reasons for the loss of support for adoption programmes. The lesson on leadership is to ask for purpose before permission. No pilot should start without an explicit statement of the business problem that it's solving, the metrics that will be used to evaluate it, and the decision that it will inform. This field demands clarity up front and provides for a true decision on whether or how to continue with each experiment. It also takes the courage to pull a pilot that isn't working, instead of letting him or her continue for the sake of not stopping and feeling like a failure. It's important to the general population because it channels resources towards actual improvement and not the illusion of innovation. Economically, useful, and purposeful pilots save capital and hasten the way to real value, whereas purposeless ones waste money and time. The rule is very simple and easy to remember. If a pilot does not ask a question, he or she does not get an answer, and if a pilot asks no question, he or she is not a pilot. Determine success before you start, measure objectively, and allow each experiment to stand on its own merits, informing a real decision.

### 10. EXECUTIVE SPONSORSHIP AND THE QUESTION OF WHO TRULY OWNS THE OUTCOME

Without a true sense of ownership at the highest level of the organisation, transformation on the whole organisation can't happen. This must be genuine, not titular, ownership. When senior leaders say they support an initiative, it's one thing, but when they have responsibility for the initiative, for managing the conflict it will certainly cause and for the outcomes of the initiative, it's another. The success or failure of any sponsorship can often be decided by the difference between these two types of sponsorship.



**Fig -8:** Executive Sponsor

By its very nature enterprise adoption transcends organisational boundaries. It involves operations, customer functions, human resources, finance, legal and security and needs these disciplines to operate in new ways and harmonize their efforts. No single department can force this co-ordination. When tough decisions are required decisions on priorities, decisions on resources, decisions on which functions have to make adaptations then someone has to have real authority to make these decisions. Without that person, the initiative becomes a collection of initiatives in each department, and no one takes responsibility for the entire initiative.

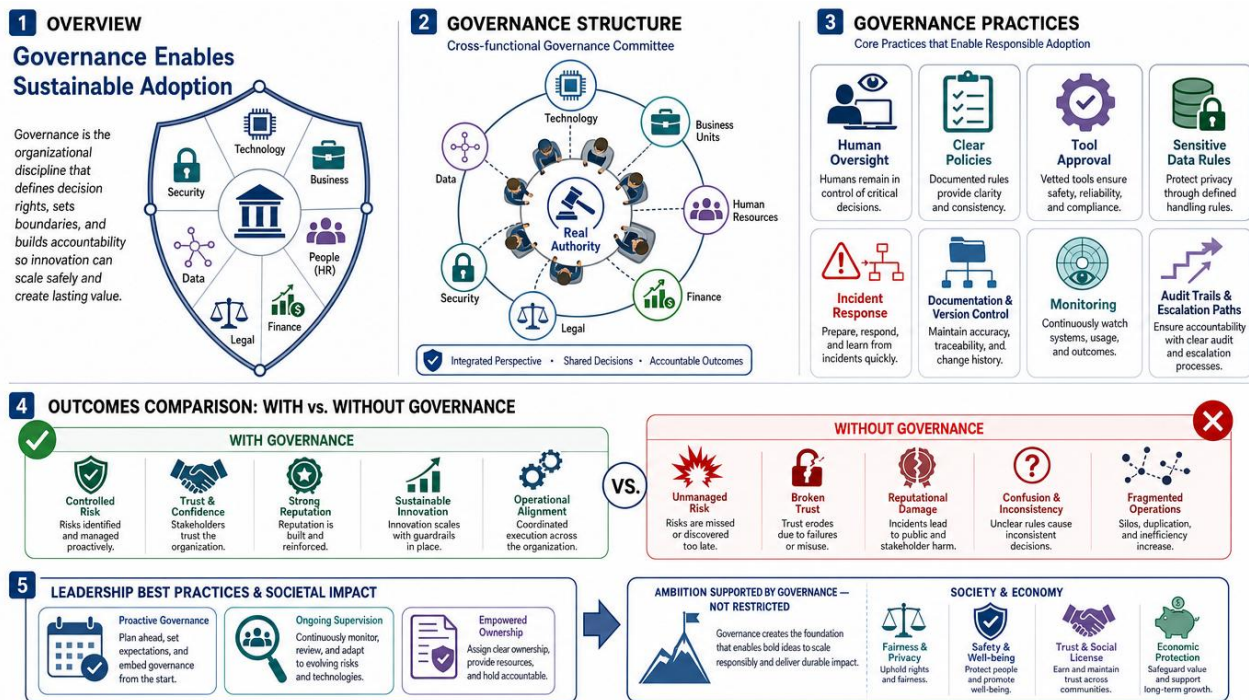
In a society where there is no real ownership, that is shown in typical ways. Decisions are not made as no one has the authority to make them. Resources are in contention as no one has authority to allocate them. If there is resistance from any one function, it can stop the progress as nobody has the mandate to overcome it. The initiative becomes an orphan, it's supported by many, but no one really owns it and it floats away, until it quietly dissipates. Genuine sponsorship is when identified senior leaders have explicit accountability for the outcome and have the authority to achieve it. It implies that the appropriate functions are not only involved as spectators but also as responsible players, where the leaders of the functions are also responsible for success. It implies that decision rights are well defined, that is, when decisions need to be made, the organisation knows who is making them. While this is not the key to success, it is almost guarantee that it will be hard to succeed without it.

The leadership lesson make sure there is true ownership before investing much in the initiative and turn down initiatives that do not have ownership. Any large-scale initiative which comes without an answer to an easy question should be viewed with suspicion who is responsible for this result and what power do they

have? If the answer is fuzzy, then it's likely that the initiative will not survive. Clear ownership allows the challenging coordination required for transformation to happen within the organisation. Economically, it helps to avoid wasting that is associated with stalled and fragmented efforts. Accountable leadership means that important decisions are made by identifiable individuals in a conscious way, not by default, for society. The competent manager knows that ownership is not just a formality, but the structure that coordinated change is based on.

## 11. GOVERNANCE AS THE DISCIPLINE THAT MAKES ADOPTION SUSTAINABLE

Governance is one of the least understood parts of the work and it is needed for sustainable adoption. It is a word that to some means bureaucracy, which hinders progress, but in fact, good governance is what enables progress to continue safely over time. It gives the framework to an organisation to determine which uses to pursue, controls the risks it generates, assures the quality and use of data, and keeps an eye on the evolving situation. If it's not there, even the most successful programs are at risk and vulnerable.



**Fig -9:** Governance as the Discipline That Makes Adoption Sustainable

Good governance is carried out in a cross functional structure with real authority. It's not housed in one department, but it provides a way to integrate the areas, technology, business units, human resources, finance, legal, security, and data so that decisions are made that consider the entire spectrum of areas that it impacts. This committee has real power over what is adopted, how the risks are managed, how the data is treated and how the adoptions are supported. Joint responsibility for these functions helps to ensure that all considerations are considered and that the responsibility is shared appropriately.

Governance is a practice, comprised of several interrelated practices. Human oversight is needed for high-stakes decisions and outputs that impact people outside the organisation, to ensure that consequential judgements are not made without it. There are clear policies as to which tools are approved, which data



should never be used and how incidents are to be handled in the event of something going wrong. Documentation, version control, and monitoring enable the organisation to know what its systems are doing, and it can identify when systems' behaviour changes. Audit trails and escalation paths help to trace and fix issues. These practices constitute the matrix of adoption, which is ambitious and responsible.

Where there is no governance, the consequences are predictable harm. Risks are not realised until they become reality. Practices are not consistent and are disseminated throughout the organisation. If something goes wrong, no one knows what to do, and the costs of governance that could have prevented damage to operations, to reputation, to trust, is nothing compared to the damage. The leadership lesson is to not add governance after issues have arisen, but to develop governance from the start. This is not a limitation on ambition, but rather is the condition for the responsible pursuit of ambition in the long run. The competent leader sets up the governing body, formulates policies and provides ongoing supervision before expanding any program. In society, governance is the system that ensures fairness, privacy and safety are upheld, and trust is established that is crucial to legitimate adoption. Economically, it avoids the expensive results of uncontrolled risk. The rule for the leader is simple: Governance is not the enemy of progress, it is its protector and the organisations that last are the ones that create it on purpose.

## 12. WORKFORCE ADOPTION AND THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO CHANGE

Technology doesn't take people to do, and nothing is more critical and more overlooked to success than human response to change. An organization could opt for a great tool, set up its data, and create good governance and still be a complete failure because the people are not willing to use the new capability. Therefore, the human dimension cannot be a soft consideration but must be a central one.

The human reaction to change is dependent on understanding and fear. We accept, adapt, and embrace what we know and trust, and reject what we don't know and what we feel is threatening. The fear of losing one's job is pervasive, entirely sensible and, when disregarded, manifests as silent opposition that can't be addressed by any mandate. No matter how good that capability is, if workers are afraid of it or don't understand it, it will not be used to its fullest potential, and the investment will not be repaid.

This dimension needs to be taken care of with ongoing and resourced work. It involves telling people the truth about the reasons for change and what it will entail for them, instead of allowing them to think the worst. It requires a true understanding by training them to do the task according to their role, to know why it will help them. It involves engaging workers in the change, rather than imposing it on them, and seeing their concerns as legitimate, not as barriers to change. Most important of all it is to show by example that the intent is to help people in their work, not just to decrease their numbers.

This can't be an afterthought that's paid for from the remainder of the money. Change management and the creation of a wide understanding should not be optional extras but should be invested in and a must-have for any major project. Where people invest, people adopt where people don't invest, even good programs falter in the face of human resistance that was entirely foreseeable. The leadership takeaway Lead like you would the technical aspects of change. Leaders should, from the beginning, think about how they are going to inform, equip, and involve people, and finance this plan appropriately. If the people that are supposed to use the most sophisticated capability will not, then it is for nothing.

## WORKFORCE ADOPTION AND THE HUMAN RESPONSE TO CHANGE

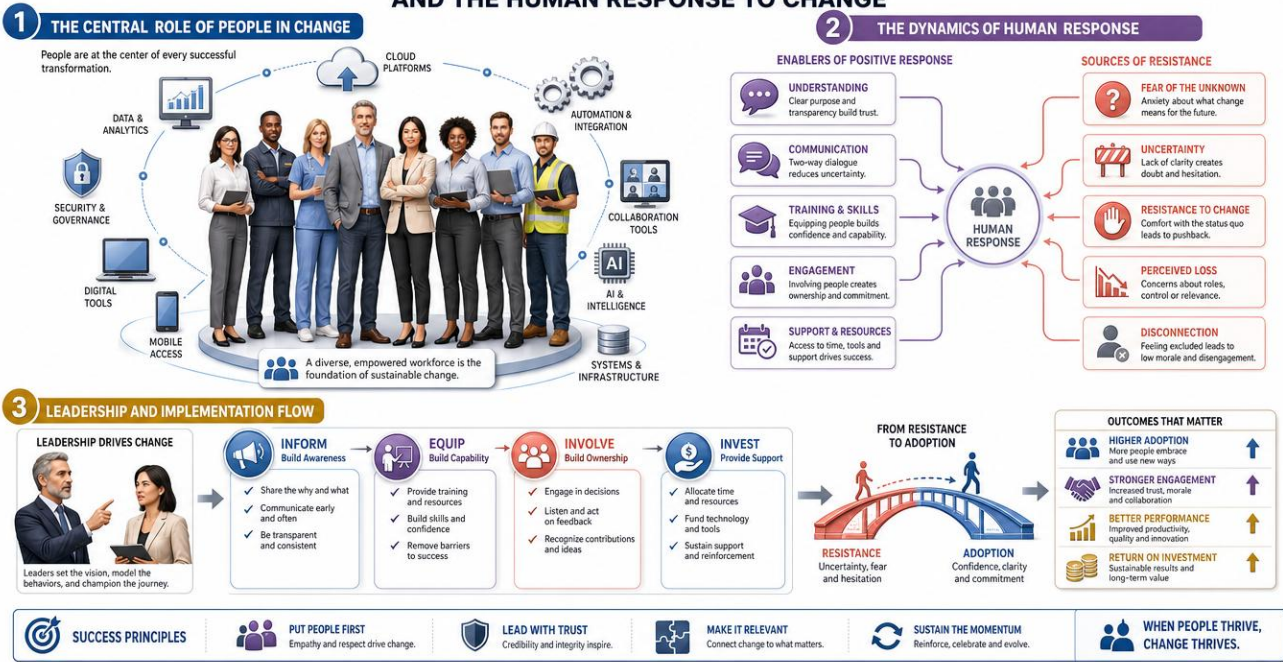


Fig -10: Workforce Adoption

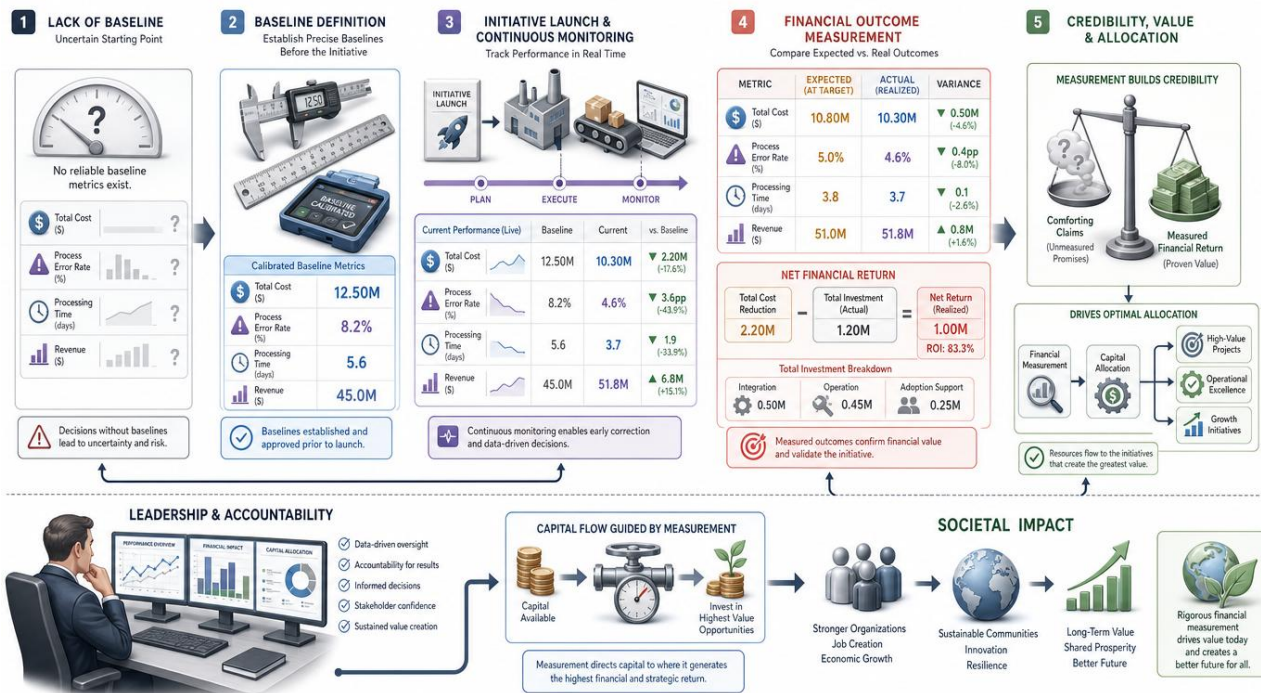
Attention to the workforce is important for society because when change is done with dignity and respect, dignity is maintained and harm is minimized, but when it's done carelessly, it's dignity that is lost and harm that is increased. Economically, it is people who turn investment into return and adoption is all about people. The competent leader knows that change is change in the way people work and that the key to change is to get people to work differently.

### 13. MEASURING RETURN IN FINANCIAL TERMS, NOT COMFORTING CLAIMS

One of the challenges that has always plagued adoption is that they cannot show financial value. Initiatives are often rationalized in ways that seem to promise increased productivity or capability but are in terms that are not easily measurable. At the time of the eventual funders demand for a return on their investment, there is no hard data to offer as a satisfactory answer, and the entire effort loses credibility, as does the future of investment in the project. The challenge many times starts with the lack of baseline. An organisation needs to know where it is starting from to demonstrate improvement the cost, the error rate, the processing time, the revenue, the service level, or whatever measure the initiative is looking to improve must be known. If you don't have this baseline, established prior to the start of the initiative, then any subsequent assertion of improvement is based on impression rather than fact. Many programs go ahead without setting up these initial steps and so they can never demonstrate what they achieved.

In the real money, not the fluffy mumbo-jumbo. Even if a claim is made that productivity will be improved, it is not the same as a demonstrated financial benefit, because unless the time saved is turned into a reduced cost, increased output, or improved service that the organisation can achieve, it does not equate to financial benefit. Honest measurement should be made by first defining what the financial outcome is, then setting up

the baseline and then monitoring the real outcome against the baseline over time. It also demands intellectual honesty in terms of costs, the total cost of the capability, its integration, its operation, and the work to support its adoption and that the return is measured next of the cost of what it took to achieve.



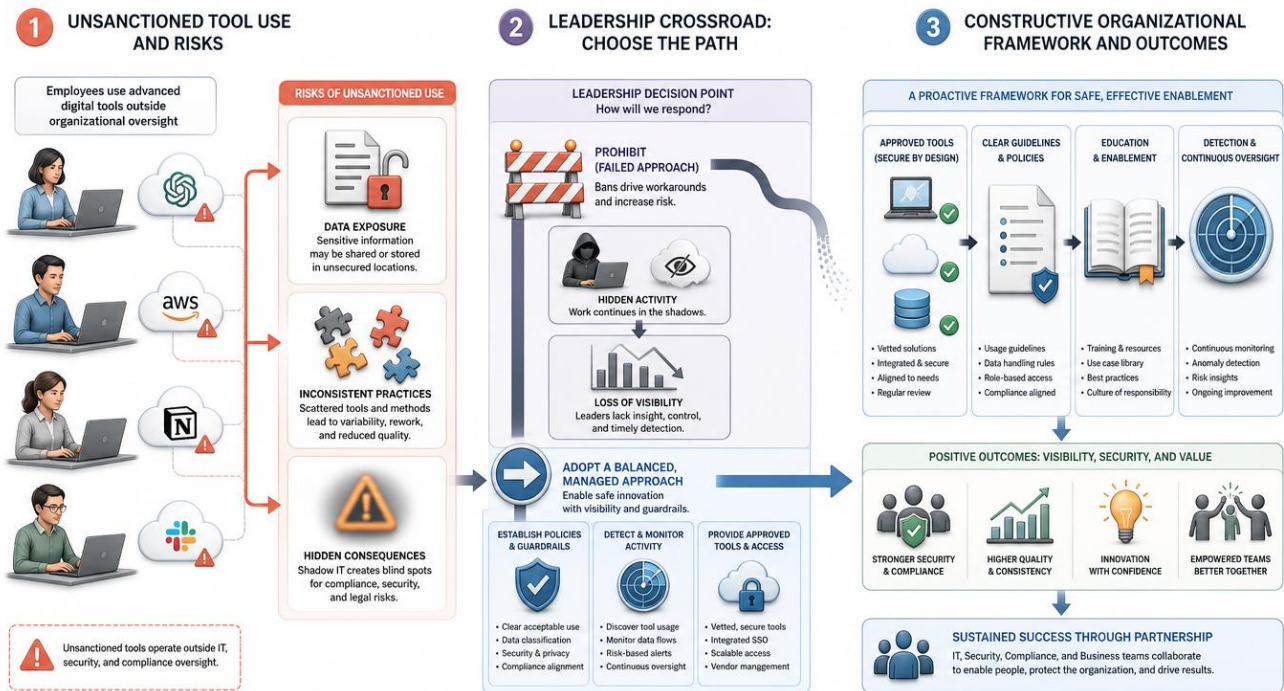
**Fig –11:** Measuring Return in Financial Terms, Not Comforting Claims

Financial measurement is more than just a satisfaction to those who have financed the work. It concentrates the whole effort on real value, as financial return is a measure of clarity, which leads to a better understanding of the value that is being created. Many initiatives fail to explain the financial benefit they are seeking and therefore they are seeking improvement that is illusory the discipline of measurement will reveal that. The leadership takeaway is that financial measurement must be made from the beginning, with baselines set prior to the beginning of initiatives and results recorded honestly after. A would-be leader should be able to respond to monetary terms what each initiative is supposed to produce and if it did. This is the ability to show value, which helps to maintain support for ongoing investment. Disciplined measurement for society helps to channel resources to where they are really needed and not wasted. Economically, it guarantees that the capital is allocated to projects that generate actual value and therefore boosts the efficiency of capital investment in the economy. The rule of thumb for the competent leader is simple. There is no value in claims, and there is no defense for unmeasured value. Measure true and let proven return be the measure of work.

## 14. CONTROLLING UNSANCTIONED USE WITHOUT STIFLING INITIATIVE

Capable tools are becoming more commonplace, and employees are increasingly using them without the organisation's knowledge or approval. This is an unsanctioned use that comes from a positive sense of

wanting to work more effectively, but that presents actual dangers when it's outside a governing framework. Sensitive data can be revealed, practices may be inconsistent and the organisation can be subject to consequences they may not have opted in for and cannot foresee. This phenomenon must be thoughtfully managed and is a growing responsibility of leadership.



**Fig -12:** Controlling Unsanctioned Use Without Stifling Initiative

The natural reaction is to say no to ban all such use, and often this fails and leads to negative outcomes. Outright prohibition simply pushes the activity under the table and eliminates any visibility that the organisation may have had and the real benefit that the employees were after. A good leader understands that the motivation behind unauthorized use is good and tries to harness it instead of squelch it.

The constructive approach is a mix of clarity of policy and provision. Clear policies are in place to identify what tools are allowed for what purposes, what data should never be shared with outside systems, and how employees should behave. What is as important is that the organisation offers legitimate alternatives that are approved and capable, thus employees have a way to gain benefits they are looking for. The less people are tempted to use the tools in ways they aren't supposed to, the better the tools they have and the clearer the instructions are. Policy without provision is nothing but frustration provision without policy, nothing but permission to risk; the two together, are the appropriate response to the phenomenon.

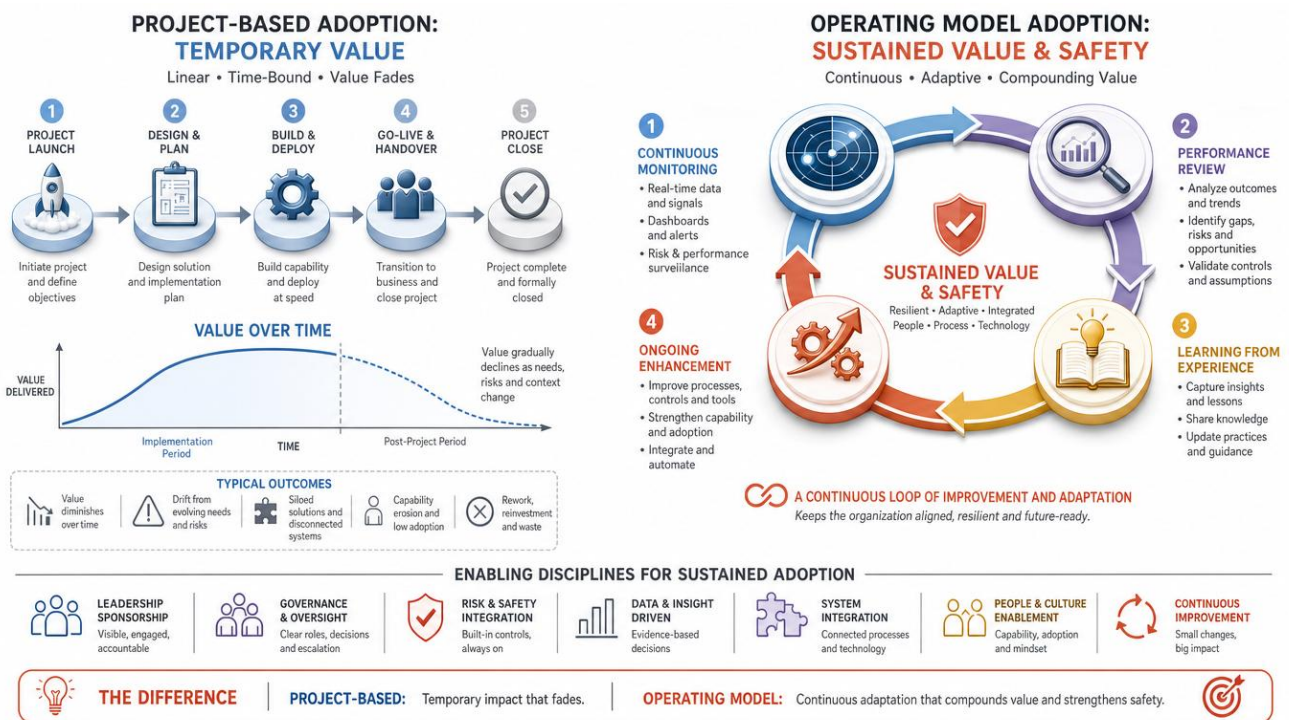
The approach is complemented with detection and education. The organisation should have a reasonable understanding of the use of the tools to be able to see new risks. It should also invest in educating employees on the benefits and hazards, to make sure that they make the right decisions not out of compulsion but out of understanding. Education has a longer shelf-life than prohibition, since it alters judgement, not just behaviour. The lesson for leadership is to be clear, provide and educate about

unsanctioned use, and not just prohibit. An aspiring leader should be attuned to the legitimate desire to use such and offer good alternatives, establish clear boundaries, and educate people on those boundaries.

For society, this balance is a way of safeguarding sensitive information, minimising harm and acknowledging the initiative of capable people. Economically, it represents the true productivity which economically motivated employees can generate, without the risk of unmanaged use. To the capable leader, the idea is to embrace initiative, not fear it, and create a framework where the organisation's people can wield powerful tools in an effective and safe way.

### 15. TREATING ADOPTION AS AN OPERATING MODEL CHANGE, NOT A ONE-TIME PROJECT

One of the most basic reframing that needs to happen with leadership is to realize that meaningful adoption is not a project that has an end but a change in the way the organisation works that is ongoing. The project has ended, it is finished and it's on to the next project. This approach to adoption creates a certain pattern of disappointment: a capability is created, announced, and then gradually fades away as circumstances evolve, and nobody cares about it.



**Fig -13:** Enabling Disciplines for Sustained Adoption

The fact is that intelligent systems are in a dynamic environment. The information they use changes, the circumstances for which they are designed change, and their actions can change over time, reducing their value or creating new dangers. A capability that works great in the beginning might not work great in the end because the world changed around it, not because it wasn't built well. An organisation that saw its adoption as an accomplished project would not have any way to see or rectify this fall.



Adoption is an operating model change that requires the development of disciplines that will help sustain value over time. It is the continuous surveillance of monitoring systems to identify changes in their behaviours. It is not about accomplishing the data, the integration, and the governance, but about keeping them alive. It involves checking and reviewing performance, learning from experience, and continually improving. It entails rethinking decisions, processes, and controls to make the capability an integral part of how work is done, not something that is added on to it. This is the real and tough challenge not to create one capability, but to change the way the organisation works, to make the capability happen and to keep it going.

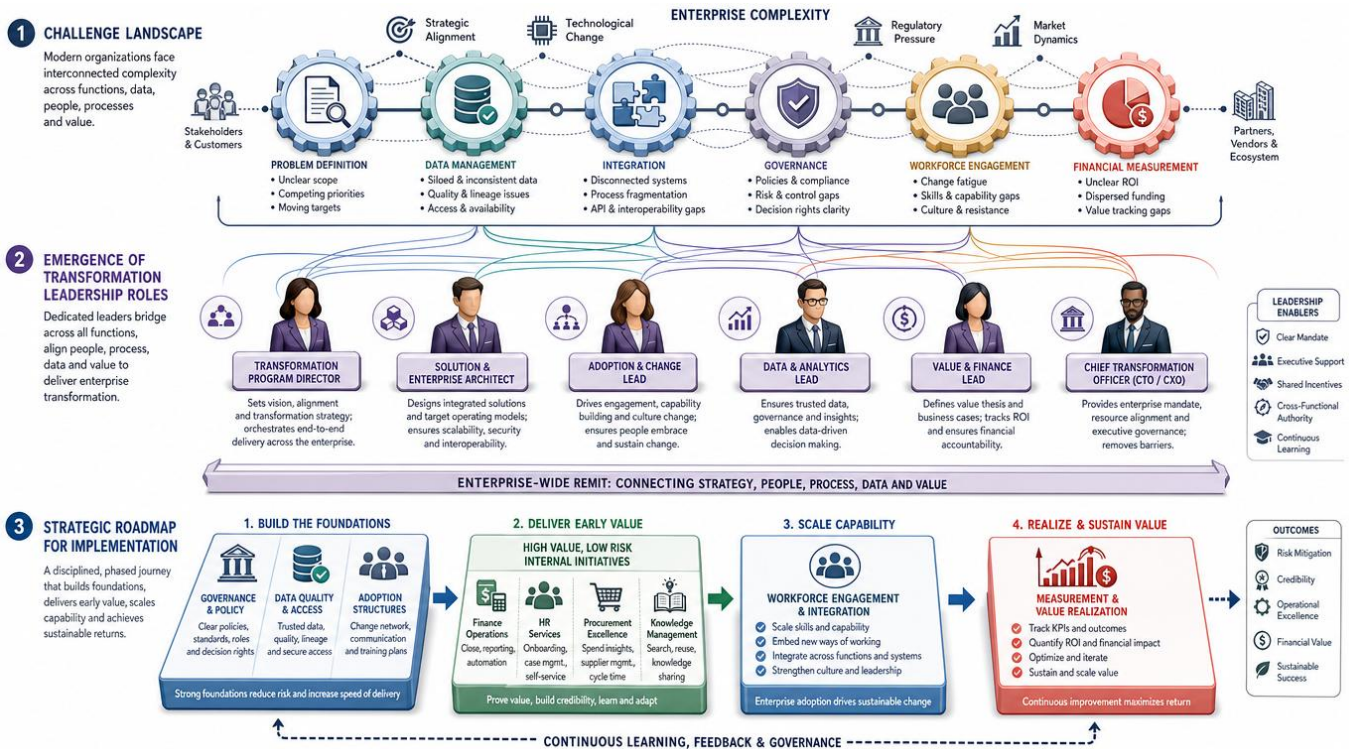
The lesson for leadership is that it is important to think long-term from the start and to provide for the constant monitoring, maintenance and enhancement that is needed to sustain value, rather than leaving the task to someone else's future. An aspiring leader should not only consider what it will take to create capability, but also what it will take to make it continue to be valuable over years and should design the operating model accordingly. This is important for society because if capabilities are kept responsibly, they will be safe and good over time, if they are not kept, they will become a risk over time. In economic terms, there is much more to be gained from a capability which continues to add value for a long period of time after launch than from one that fades out quickly. The rule for the competent manager is that it's never done it's about operation, not projects, transformation is an ongoing process, and the disciplines that sustain it are what distinguish value from achievement, and achievement from value.

## **16. THE EMERGENCE OF DEDICATED TRANSFORMATION LEADERSHIP AND WHERE TO BEGIN**

This is why so many transformation leadership positions have come to the fore, as all of this is hard work. Organisations have realised that the problem definition, data, integration, governance, workforce engagement, and financial measurement coordination is a significant enterprise-wide task that can't be thrown over the transom of an existing job. This has led to the emergence of senior roles dedicated to spearheading this effort, including programme managers, solution architects, heads of adoption and senior officers with a remit across the business. These positions are not as deep as they are wide. They are not specialist roles with a narrow focus on building systems, they are enterprise-wide leadership roles that are built around people, process, business value and return. Whoever occupies them need to have a good balance of technical expertise to make informed decisions and a level of organizational authority and capability to integrate the various functions, to lead change and to show value to those who invest in the work. This is a combination that is demanding and that's why the demand for such leaders has increased in such a drastic way.

If an organisation is taking the first steps on this journey, then the question of where we start is important. The disciplined response is to start with foundations and with lower-risk, more carefully selected opportunities and not with ambitious and high-visibility experiments. The foundations should be given priority governance and policy, data quality and access, and the structures that enable good adoption. In addition to these, an organisation should choose one or two true high value uses not too many and invest in the workforce engagement and integration that adoption entails and set the measurement that will show value. Experience says that when it comes to those first uses, it's better to start with low-risk in-house functions than to perform high-visibility experiments for customers. The more glamorous front-office pilots that attract attention tend to have messier and less measurable returns, with higher risk, as opposed to

back-office activities like finance operations, human resources service delivery, knowledge search, procurement, and service support. They offer a space for the organisation to develop capacity, prove itself and acquire the skills of proper adoption before venturing into more vulnerable and significant areas.



**Fig -14:** The Emergence of Dedicated Transformation Leadership

The lesson for leadership is to plan the work well, starting with foundations, prioritizing value, and feasibility over visibility, and gaining credibility to invest more. For society, it is a more responsible way of adoption, and it is less harmful than hasty and high-stakes experiments. Economically, it boosts the probability of investment success and hastens the way to real return. Patience with purpose, for the able leader start where there is value and there is not too much risk, establish the base upon which everything else rests, and then establish a right to further ambition by success.

## 17. RESEARCH GAP

A lot of the current conversation about AI in organizations focuses on technology itself that it can do, what it can't do, and the pros and cons of various technologies. There's a huge amount of advice out there about building and deploying systems and an increasing amount of literature on technical issues of performance and safety. Much less, however, considers the failure of adoption as a matter of leadership capacity, as opposed to technological sufficiency, and this is where the present discussion can help. The difference is important because evidence from practice continually shows that it is leadership and organisational issues that are the key to success and these are given too little structured consideration. In most cases, discussions about strategy are based on a level of leadership capacity that is not consistently present, and discussions about capability often focus on the technical aspects of capability, rather than the broader aspects of judgement, ownership, and coordination that enterprise transformation requires. Practitioners know that



initiatives are failing because of broken data, under-resourced workforces, lack of ownership, meaningless pilots, and unmeasured returns, but this is not yet a unified narrative of leadership responsibility.

This Article fills that void by considering failure as a leadership issue and by relying on ongoing observation of practice in addition to technical analysis. It brings together the common organizing challenges into one image and converts them into tangible disciplines that leaders can implement. It also notes the growing number of specific transformation leadership positions in response to the very thing the literature has underweighted, and which the market has also recognised. Limitations remain. Observational insight is not as precise as experimental insight, and the variety of organisational contexts renders it impossible to give one account that is applicable in every instance. There is a need for more systematic research, with a focus on correlating specific leadership practices with the actual results of adoption in different settings, to further support and clarify the conclusions made here. The present contribution is best thought of as a disciplined synthesis that is designed to focus on an under-examined cause and to invite the more rigorous investigation that the cause merits.

## 18. CONCLUSION

The failure to deliver results that often happens with enterprise AI is not, for the most part, a failure of technology. The tools are well developed and there are many systems available that are capable. The problem is in the way that they are being adopted and the first step to doing better is to realise this. When initiatives are seen as purchases and not transformations, when strategic decision making is handed over to anyone selling a solution, when data is ignored, when front-line workers are overlooked, when integration is underestimated, when pilots are run without purpose, when ownership is lacking, when governance is ignored, when front-line workers are left anxious and unengaged, when the value is not measured, and when the initiative is treated as a project that ends, the results are predictable. The solution is also simple and can be achieved by any leader who is prepared to adopt the disciplines required. Those disciplines are a unity. Start with a business problem and a sense of ownership. Put in place good, governed data first before going for the gold. Be honest in planning for integration and for people's reaction to change. Set up a definition of success beforehand and measure return on real money. Set up governance that will ensure that adoption is sustainable, be clear and provide for the legitimate initiative of employees rather than prohibiting it and view the entire process as a permanent shift in the way the organisation works. Most importantly, keep an independent mind, learn from others but do not lose the right to make a strategic decision that the leadership role is about.

As transformation work has become more recognised as large scale, enterprise wide and requiring more than just technical skills, transformation leaders have become a distinct group. The leaders that will be successful are the ones that recognize that it is about people, processes, value, and trust, and that technology is a means to the end. They will plan their work shrewdly, starting where there is value and where there is not too much risk, and gaining credibility to allow them to take higher risks. For a wider society, it's more important that it's right than any one organisation. Good adoption is responsible, well-governed, value focused and results in better services, more sustainable employment, more efficient use of capital and more public trust, whereas poor adoption results in waste, harm, and disillusionment. These are outcomes that are mostly dependent on leadership. The invitation of this article is therefore both practical and hopeful. The



mistakes are knowable and avoidable, the disciplines are learnable, and the leader who master's them can turn ambition into enduring and genuinely beneficial outcome.

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