

Why Team-Level AI Adoption Stalls — And How to Fix It

WHY TEAM-LEVEL AI ADOPTION IS THE FOCUS

Most companies have broad individual AI usage, but workflows look the same as a year ago. A widely cited September 2025 study found **90% of teams pursuing AI adoption failed**. The interesting question is what the successful 10% did differently — and notably, they were no more technically adept than the rest. (One success story was a Midwest team where everyone was over 50.)

THE A&I INDEX: WHAT THE 10% DID DIFFERENTLY

Successful teams followed an **Activation → Institutionalization sequence** anchored in five repeatable practices:

1. **Start from where the workflow is stalled**, not "where should we use AI?" A more pedestrian framing, but it produces real targets.
2. **Decompose the workflow into task units** and quickly classify each as AI-addressable or not — avoids overreach.
3. **Run weekly short-form experiments** with a steady cadence. Nothing fancy.
4. **Justify ROI on decision quality and speed-to-action**, not hours saved. Time-saving business cases got rejected at IT investment review; quality/speed cases compressed time and moved KPIs.
5. **Reassign roles via "micro-accountabilities"** so AI is used collaboratively across the team.

HOW THE SESSIONS RUN

55 minutes, private to your company, led by the faculty who did the original research. ~10 minutes to teach the practice, ~45 minutes applying it live to the team's real work over Zoom or Teams. Example session: "Measure Twice, Spend Once" — a Fortune 500 pharma regulatory affairs team used it to discover that 40% of their submission delay came from clinical/legal iterative rewriting, then went after that specific bottleneck.

THE COHORT MODEL

Cohorts of ~20 representative companies (sizes 1K–100K+, across pharma, retail, manufacturing, financial services). Companies enroll teams, apply the practices, and openly share results using a common measurement methodology. The January 2026 cohort (J.Crew, Gilead, Nationwide, others) is reporting promising early results.

THE INVITATION

A half-day session for CHROs and their core team (typically 2–3 attendees, often including the CIO) is scheduled for late May in Palo Alto. The January cohort will share measured results; a new May–November cohort kicks off — ~5 seats remain. A 20-minute intro call is the next step for anyone considering joining.

QUESTIONS RAISED

Manufacturing applicability: enrolled teams pick workflows from any function — supply chain optimization and channel distribution have been common starting points.
Leveling: for AI adoption specifically, teams should mix subject-matter experts with leaders; all-VP teams underperform. The high-performance and innovation tracks can skew more senior.