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A GUIDE FOR LEADERS

Fix the Process First

5 reasons your AI spend isn't showing up in output

Many organisations are paying for AI tools and still not seeing a lift in output. Usually the tools aren't the problem. **The process underneath them is.** This short guide sets out five common reasons the investment doesn't show up in results, a question to test each one against your own work, and what to do instead. It finishes with a one-page checklist you can run on a single process this week.

1

Automating a broken process makes it fail faster.

If a process is full of workarounds, duplicate entry and rework, adding a tool tends to speed up the same problems rather than remove them.

> ASK YOURSELF
> If you took the tool away tomorrow, would the process still make sense on paper?

DO THIS INSTEAD

Map the process as it actually runs today, including the workarounds. Remove steps that add no value and fix the causes of rework before you automate anything.

2

No one owns the process end to end.

When a process crosses several teams, each team optimises its own part. Nobody is accountable for how the whole thing performs, so problems sit in the gaps between them.

> ASK YOURSELF
> Can you name the one person accountable for this process from start to finish?

DO THIS INSTEAD

Name a process owner with the authority to change the process across team boundaries, and agree how its performance will be reported.

3

There's no baseline, so no one can prove a lift.

Without a measure of how the process performed before the change, any improvement is a matter of opinion. That makes it hard to justify further investment, or to know when to stop.

> ASK YOURSELF
>
> Do you know today's volume, end-to-end cycle time and rework rate for this process?

DO THIS INSTEAD

Before you change anything, record a small set of measures: volume, end-to-end cycle time, hands-on time and how often work comes back. Use the same measures afterwards.

4

Tools are bolted onto handoffs and approvals instead of removing them.

Much of the delay in a process sits in queues: waiting for the next team, the next sign-off, the next reply. A tool that moves those queues to a new screen doesn't shorten them.

> ASK YOURSELF
>
> Does the new tool reduce the number of handoffs and approvals, or just move them somewhere else?

DO THIS INSTEAD

Challenge each handoff and approval: who needs it, what risk it controls, and whether a clear rule, a threshold or a single decision-maker could replace it. Then apply technology to what is left.

5

Pilots never scale.

A pilot without a success measure or a decision date tends to drift. It neither proves its value nor gets stopped, and the organisation learns little from it.

> ASK YOURSELF
>
> Does your current pilot have a named owner, a success measure and an agreed date to decide whether to scale or stop?

DO THIS INSTEAD

Run each pilot as a small experiment with a hypothesis, a measure and a decision point. Scale what the evidence supports, stop what it doesn't, and record what you learned.

YOUR NEXT STEP

Run this on one process this week.

Pick one process and work through the list with the people who do the work. It should take an hour or two, and it will tell you more than another strategy deck.

- [ ] **Choose one process** with high volume, several handoffs and visible rework.
- [ ] **Name the owner** who is accountable for it end to end. If no one is, note that as your first finding.
- [ ] **Walk it through** with the people who do the work and map the steps as they actually happen.
- [ ] **Mark the friction:** every handoff, approval, workaround and point of rework.
- [ ] **Record a baseline:** weekly volume, end-to-end cycle time and how often work comes back.
- [ ] **Check each tool** or automation in use: does it remove a step, or add one?
- [ ] **Choose one change to test** and write down what you expect to improve.
- [ ] **Set a review date** and decide on the evidence: scale, adjust or stop.

Your notes

Process

Owner

Volume per week

End-to-end cycle time

How often work comes back

Handoffs and approvals

Change to test

Review date

Want a second view on one process?

Book a 30-minute conversation about one process that's slowing your team down. We'll look at where redesign, and AI only where the evidence supports it, would make the biggest difference.

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