

AI Is Not the Disruption. Misalignment Is.

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Artificial intelligence is not the disruption everyone should be worried about. Yes, it's fast moving. Yes, it has the potential to reshape how we work, lead, and make decisions. But the true disruption for most organizations isn't the technology itself—it's what AI adoption *exposes* about the way their business actually functions.

What gets exposed? Misaligned priorities. Foggy decision rights. Disconnected strategies. Cultures that reward caution over clarity. These are the things that bring transformation to a crawl, long before AI gets a chance to prove its value.

As a change leadership advisor, I've worked inside Fortune 500s and fast-moving firms alike. And I'll say this plainly: AI doesn't break your organization. It reveals where it was already broken.

THE ILLUSION OF READINESS

There's a pattern I see unfolding in boardrooms across industries right now. The pressure to "do something with AI" is mounting. Leaders are greenlighting pilots, forming task forces, investing in tools.



But very few are pausing to ask the harder questions:

- Who actually owns this change?
- What behaviors will need to shift at every level?
- Are we structured to scale this across business lines?
- Do we have enough trust to try and fail?

Instead, many companies jump into AI implementation as if it's a software upgrade. They assume the biggest hurdles will be technical. But the breakdowns start elsewhere: in strategy, in sponsorship, in the invisible assumptions about how work really gets done.

This urgency to act without aligning is understandable. In times of disruption, action *feels* like leadership. Rolling out tools creates the illusion of momentum. But it's also a form of avoidance. It delays the harder work of confronting ambiguity, realigning governance, rethinking outdated decision structures, and surfacing tensions in the way leaders work together.

WHAT AI ADOPTION ACTUALLY TESTS

AI is a mirror. It reflects the coherence—or chaos—of your leadership and operating model:

- If decision making is vague, AI will multiply confusion.
- If silos are strong, AI will reinforce them.
- If trust is low, AI will increase resistance, not efficiency.

The organizations best positioned to integrate AI aren't the ones with the most data scientists. They're the ones with alignment muscle: clear governance, empowered cross-functional teams, and leaders who can translate strategy into behavior.

In short, success isn't about how fast you can pilot. It's about how well you can scale *without breaking the system around it*.

MISALIGNMENT IS THE COSTLIEST RISK

One executive I worked with asked, "If we invest in AI but don't change anything else, how much damage could we do?" It was the right question because when you layer AI on top of an unclear strategy or inconsistent accountability, you don't get innovation. You get accelerated misfires.

I call this the illusion of transformation: progress on paper, chaos in practice. Projects move, but they don't stick. Change gets initiated, but not adopted. Leaders wonder why the impact doesn't match the investment. It's not because the tools are wrong. It's because the conditions weren't right.

Here's what I often say to executive teams: You can't automate your way out of ambiguity. If you don't slow down to surface



what's misaligned—in strategy, structure, and behavior—AI will only move you faster in the wrong direction.

FROM READINESS TO RESULTS: WHAT LEADERS CAN DO NOW

If you're in the middle of AI planning, here's where to focus before your next investment or announcement:

Get brutally honest about decision rights. Who will make what calls as AI capabilities expand? What happens when human and machine recommendations conflict?

Clarify what success actually looks like. Are you optimizing for efficiency, customer experience, learning, or something else? Don't assume alignment, create it.

Engage your people early and intelligently. AI will shift workflows, roles, and identities. That level of change requires more than comms and training. It takes trust, involvement, and leadership.

Name the gaps your AI adoption is revealing. Don't ignore the friction. Use it. Friction is feedback. It shows you where you need to lead more clearly.

Treat AI as an enterprise capability, not a side hustle. If it lives in innovation teams only, it will never scale. AI strategy is business strategy now.

Look for the patterns beneath the resistance. If leaders or teams are resisting AI efforts, don't write it off as fear. Often, it's a rational response to unclear direction, overcomplicated governance, or poor role clarity.

Reveal the tensions, don't smooth them over. AI transformation often exposes strategic tensions between speed and quality, autonomy and control, efficiency and human touch. These are not problems to solve, but rather trade-offs to lead through.

AI is forcing a different kind of leadership conversation. Not about tools or timelines—but about alignment, culture, and clarity. If you want to raise your probability of success in AI transformation, stop asking who owns the tech. Ask who owns the *conditions* that will allow it to thrive.

The hard truth? AI will not wait for your organization to get aligned. The good news? You don't need to have every answer. But you do need to ask the right questions and be willing to act on what they reveal. [AQ](#)

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