

AI Doesn't Work Without Workflow Redesign

Ad Hoc AI vs. Workflow Redesign — Summary

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The Assembly Line Problem in AI

Where We Are

Asking office workers to “use AI” without new processes is as nonsensical as Henry Ford telling craft production workers to “use assembly lines” before installing the assembly line itself.

The Mistake

- Organizations invest in AI
- Management ambiguously instructs workers to “use AI” without defined processes
- Employees are forced to improvise workflow design while executing their jobs
- Productivity gains remain unrealized
- The issue is framed as a gap in education or individual capability
 - AWS & Pearson: *AI Readiness: Building the Bridge from Higher Education to Work*

The Reality

- AI delivers gains only when embedded in integrated workflows
 - MIT Project NANDA: *The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business 2025*
- Effective use requires redesigning workflows to leverage AI capabilities

 Engineered workflow

Existing workflow → AI + workflow redesign → new workflow → realized gains

 Unengineered workflow

Existing workflow → "use AI" → hilarity ensues

The Consequence

- Ad hoc AI usage produces no scalable productivity gains
- Failure is systemic, not individual
- Continued investment without redesign yields no meaningful returns

Bottom Line

The limiting factor is not whether individuals can use AI, but whether the organization has built the equivalent of the assembly line. Until that system exists, gains will not materialize; once it does, gains come from throughput, not worker efficiency.