

Ad Hoc AI vs. Workflow Redesign

Why some teams see measurable gains—and others see none

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Organizations are investing heavily in AI and expecting productivity gains, yet most are not seeing net impact on the bottom line. The reason is simple: AI only delivers gains as a component of integrated workflows. Recent research makes this clear. AWS & Pearson's *AI Readiness: Building the Bridge from Higher Education to Work* highlights that employers struggle to find "AI-ready" talent, framing the issue as a gap in education or individual capability. This is a management error. It is equally nonsensical to ask office workers to "use AI" as it would have been for Henry Ford to tell craft production workers to "use assembly lines" before installing the assembly line itself. In both cases, the missing element is not education or ability—the process does not yet exist.

By contrast, MIT Project NANDA's *The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business 2025* shows that bottom-line gains appear only when existing workflows are reimplemented to leverage AI efficiencies—in other words, when work is redesigned from craft production into something closer to an assembly line. Most organizations, however, are operating in the opposite mode. Management is asking production staff to "use AI" without defining specific processes for specific tasks—invoking a system that has not been built. This forces employees to perform on-the-fly process engineering while executing their primary tasks, a role they are neither trained for nor positioned to succeed in. The outcome is predictable: no net gains are realized at scale. Workers are not failing. AI is not failing. Management is misallocating responsibility. Until workflows are redesigned to integrate AI, additional investment will not translate into results.

 Engineered workflow

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

 Unengineered workflow

Existing workflow → "use AI" → hilarity ensues