



AI That Works for You: A Guide to Value-Driven Use Cases

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When I stepped away from the C-suite in December, I'll admit - I had my doubts.

After years driving digital transformations at some of Europe's large financial organizations, helping bloom the Netherlands' first digital bank, and leading award-winning AI initiatives at Virgin Money, I wondered: could I really build something meaningful starting from scratch? Just me and a simple question: what if software and humans could work like a team, amplifying each other?

That experiment became Claridora, and then 4 AI agents. Since launching my "How-to Guide to Agentic AI" and beginning interviews for my upcoming book "Care, Dare, Share: Lead and Thrive with Heart, Mind, AI" something unexpected happened. Board members, CEOs, and chairmen started reaching out, not for polished consulting presentations, but for honest conversations about their AI transformation struggles.

The pattern became clear: transformations were an art at the best of times, but now, with the advent of AI, they are crucially needed and require a real balance between difficult choices: on people, on processes, on methods, on strategy. Senior leaders are facing difficult choices with little basis of experience.

So in this Newsletter, I will tackle, week after week, the key questions senior leaders raise with me and propose a simple, practical, action-driven approach to solve them.

This week, I'm going to explain why most enterprise AI initiatives fail not because of technology limitations, but because leaders choose the wrong battles to fight.

Here's the uncomfortable truth I've witnessed recently across boardrooms, including of big enterprises: organizations are drowning in AI possibilities while starving for AI results. Every vendor promises revolutionary outcomes, every consultant delivers 100 pages of AI strategy and roadmaps, every conference showcases spectacular demos (I was at both London Tech Week and Vivatech last week), and every competitor claims breakthrough success. Meanwhile, you're left wondering which use cases will actually move the needle for your business versus which ones just make for impressive referrals for the providers.

The difference between AI that transforms your enterprise and AI that burns through budgets comes down to one critical skill: knowing how to separate genuine value creation from technological theater. But here's what the technology vendors won't tell you: even perfect use case selection means nothing without organizational buy-in. I've seen it time and again—70% of your ability to extract value from AI comes from people embracing the change, not from the sophistication of your algorithms.

Master both the strategic selection and the human dimension, and you'll build competitive advantages that compound for years. Get either wrong, and you'll join the graveyard of expensive AI experiments that never scaled, worse that create scepticism towards AI and your leadership^, hard to overturn for years.

Now, let's dive in.

The Chef's Knife Principle: Precision Over Power

Think of enterprise AI like a chef's knife in a Michelin-starred kitchen. The knife itself doesn't make the dish extraordinary, it's the chef's understanding of ingredients, technique, and the diner's desires that creates magic. Yet most organizations approach AI like they're collecting kitchen gadgets, hoping the tools themselves will somehow deliver results. The magic is not in the tool, is in the people using the right tool for the right moment with the right purposeful idea in mind.

I recently worked with a large financial services company that had deployed 47 different AI pilots across their organization. Impressive technology, substantial investment, but minimal business impact. When we audited their approach, we discovered they'd been solving problems that didn't significantly impact their core business metrics, nor their people, nor their customers.

We refocused on just three use cases tied to their biggest pain points: pricing optimization, customer churn prediction, and fraud detection. But more importantly, we spent equal time on change management, ensuring teams understood not just how the AI worked, but why it mattered to their daily operations and career growth.

The trajectories achieved show that these three initiatives deliver more value than their previous 47 combined. The transformation wasn't in the AI sophistication, it was in the strategic focus on problems that actually mattered to their revenue base, coupled with organization-wide embrace of the solutions and preparation of the scaling up.

The Three-Lens Assessment: Impact, Feasibility, and Strategic Alignment

While your peers debate the latest AI breakthroughs, successful enterprise leaders apply a rigorous filter to separate transformational opportunities from expensive distractions. Every potential use case must pass through three critical lenses.

Consider a global insurance conglomerate. They had identified 100+ potential AI applications across their business units. Instead of pursuing them all, a three-lens test was adopted. Impact: Would success fundamentally change financial performance or competitive position? Feasibility: Did they have the data infrastructure and organizational readiness? Strategic alignment: Would this accelerate their core business strategy or create new advantages?

Only 12 use cases survived this filter. But those 12 initiatives now generate over €50 million in annual value across claims processing automation, risk assessment enhancement, and personalized product recommendations. The secret? They invested as much in organizational readiness as they did in technology, training teams, redesigning workflows, and celebrating early adopters who became internal champions.

As the executive team rightly said: "We thought we needed to do everything with AI. Turns out, we needed to do the right things exceptionally well, and get our people excited about the journey alongside us."

The FOMO Trap: Benchmarking Reality vs. Press Releases

Here's where most enterprise AI strategies derail: leaders make decisions based on little first hand experience and competitors' announcements rather than their actual needs. The AI press release playbook is predictable, breakthrough technology, revolutionary potential, transformational outcomes, loud voices. The reality behind those headlines is often far more modest.

I've seen large financial institutions invest tens of millions trying to replicate a competitor's AI success story, only to discover that the competitor's "revolutionary" system was actually delivering marginal improvements on a single use case. Meanwhile, they could have achieved better results focusing on their own operational and client challenges.

The pharmaceutical giant that got this right didn't chase headlines about AI drug discovery. Instead, they focused on using AI to optimize their existing clinical trial processes, a less glamorous but more impactful application that reduced trial timelines by 18 months and saved hundreds of millions in development costs. Sometimes the most valuable AI applications are the ones that never make the news.

The Enterprise Paradox: Scale Creates Complexity and Opportunity

If you're leading AI initiatives in a large organization, you face a unique challenge: the same scale that creates massive opportunities also creates coordination complexity. Your divisional heads each have their favorite AI use cases, your technology teams are excited about different platforms, and your board wants results across multiple business units.

Here's what I've learned from guiding enterprise transformations: successful large-scale AI adoption requires what I call "coordinated decentralization." You need enterprise-wide standards and shared infrastructure, but you also need the flexibility for business units to pursue their highest-impact opportunities.

The global manufacturing conglomerate that mastered this approach established three enterprise-wide AI platforms, predictive maintenance, supply chain optimization, and quality control, while allowing their 5 business units to develop specialized applications on top of these foundations.

Crucially, they also created an internal AI ambassador program, training 200+ employees across all levels to become change champions within their divisions. These ambassadors didn't just explain the technology, they helped colleagues understand how AI would make their work more strategic and less routine, and crucially, not replace them provided they embraced it.

The result: several hundreds of millions in value creation with 80% less technology complexity than their competitors who let each division build independent AI solutions, and remarkably, 85% employee satisfaction scores for AI-related changes—compared to industry averages of 45%.

Finally, I hope you'll resist the temptation to solve every problem with AI, and instead focus on solving your most important problems brilliantly.

The organizations that win with AI don't have the most use cases, they have the most valuable use cases. They don't chase every technological possibility, they pursue strategic advantages that compound over time. Because after all, AI is just a tool. It is not magic. It is a tool in a much wider tool set to achieve successful transformations.

Remember: in the enterprise AI game, precision beats proliferation every time. Choose your battles wisely, and AI will become the competitive weapon you always hoped it could be.

Wishing you clarity in cutting through the AI noise to find the signal that matters.

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