The OrgChange.AI Dispatch — August 2026

The readiness gap points up, not down. AI adoption stalls at the altitude where leaders stop learning.

Craig Russell August 1

Leaders have a settled explanation for why AI underdelivers: the people aren't ready. This month's evidence points the other direction. HCLTech, surveying 467 senior executives through Omdia, asked them to grade their own CEO and board — 87% said the board needs education on the fact that AI carries real investment risk, and 83% said the same about whether underinvesting could prove existential (HCLTech, 2026). BCG's first CEOs and Boards Survey found those two bodies diverging on pace, competence, and accountability (BCG, 2026). The misdiagnosis is measurable: the C-suite is 2.4× more likely to name employee readiness as the barrier than its own alignment — while employees use gen AI three times more than leaders assume (McKinsey, 2025).

This month: case studies locating where the constraint actually sits, leadership voices naming the human architecture as the failure point, and the Nine-Square Grid™ mapping where the change work belongs. The through line is simple: AI adoption stalls at the altitude where leaders stop learning.

I. Case Studies

The tools performed in every case below. What varied was whether the layer above the user — manager, firm, executive, institution — did the design work that converts use into value.

At a glance

Organization	What Worked	Where It Leaked	The OCM Fix
B2B sales (McKinsey)	Coaching lifted conversion 4.5 pts	Scaling past the pilot	Redesign the manager's role
Legal (LEAP)	Integrated tools preferred 34% to 15%	Ungoverned tools used more	Adoption design
Teams (Atlassian)	89% report faster work	Only 6% can prove ROI	Fund coordination
Higher ed (Pearson)	Training predicts capability	US faculty at 20% strong	Systematic provision

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B2B Sales (McKinsey)
AI Tools: Agentic workflow orchestration, AI sales-coaching platforms, AI-enabled pricing.
How AI augments organizational change: A large construction company facing wide variance in seller performance deployed an AI coaching platform that turns captured customer interactions into personalized actions — reps using it gained 4.5 percentage points in conversion. Managers moved from riding along in the field to coaching against diagnosed skill gaps at scale; the gain came from redesigning the manager's role, not from the model.
OCM Takeaway: AI makes coaching scalable only when the manager's job is redesigned around it.
Source: McKinsey & Company, *The Future of B2B Sales* (2026).

Legal (LEAP)
AI Tools: Integrated legal-specific AI, standalone general-purpose AI, document review and drafting.
How AI augments organizational change: Across 700 legal professionals, 56% use standalone tools regularly or daily — more than the 49% using integrated, firm-sanctioned ones. Among those using both, 34% say integrated tools deliver greater impact against 15% for standalone, with 43% calling them equal: where a preference exists, it runs more than two to one toward the governed path — the one used less.
OCM Takeaway: When the sanctioned tool is better and less used, the problem is adoption design, not tool selection.
Source: LEAP, *Profitability in Law: Global Report 2026*.

Cross-Functional Teams (Atlassian)
AI Tools: AI agents embedded in collaboration platforms, AI notetakers, workflow automation.
How AI augments organizational change: Among 172 Fortune 1000 executives, 89% say AI increased the speed of work, but only 6% are confident they can point to specific ROI. Just 24% of AI implementations target teams — while the 12,035 knowledge workers surveyed report spending roughly 80% of their time on collaborative work. Atlassian calls the resulting drag a 'fragmentation tax' and models it at $161 billion a year across the Fortune 500.
OCM Takeaway: Individual productivity gains do not aggregate into organizational value without deliberate investment in shared context and workflows.
Source: Atlassian Teamwork Lab, *State of Teams 2026*.

Higher Education (Pearson)
AI Tools: AI-enabled pedagogy, faculty upskilling programs, curriculum design tools.
How AI augments organizational change: Only 13% of higher-education leaders rate faculty AI capability as 'very strong', and while 67% describe AI-driven change as fast, just 24% believe universities are keeping pace. Pearson links the variance to training provision — in Saudi Arabia, where 86% of leaders report extensive ongoing training, 86% of faculty rate strong; in the US, reporting the study's lowest training levels, that figure is 20%.
OCM Takeaway: No market in the study shows high capability alongside low training provision — which makes provision the first variable to check, though a two-market comparison cannot settle cause.
Source: Pearson, *AI Readiness Report 2026*.

II. Leadership Voices

HCLTech
Jill Kouri, Global Chief Marketing Officer

"Every AI initiative is, at its core, a change management initiative. The technology is rarely what fails. What fails is the human architecture around it — the behaviors, the trust, the willingness to work differently."

Who: Jill Kouri, Global CMO, HCLTech (2026)
Theme: The failure mode is organizational, and it is predictable.
Why it matters: HCLTech's respondents expect 43% of major AI projects started in the next 24 months to fail — while CEOs set 18-month payback targets. Kouri names why both numbers can be true at once: the payback assumption prices in the technology and ignores the behavioral rebuild. Treat any AI business case without a change budget as an incomplete forecast.
Source: HCLTech, *The AI Impact Imperatives, 2026*.

Quick Hits

- “When organizations fail to connect their AI vision to the day-to-day realities of their people, adoption stalls and skepticism grows.” — Kim Billeter, Global People Consulting Leader, EY (2025)
- Twice as many employees below VP level (21%) as at VP and above (9%) say AI strategy was never clearly communicated — the message thins as it descends. — EY (2025)
- 69% of C-suite leaders prioritize speed over security on AI tools, against 37% of administrative staff. Executive behavior sets the shadow-AI norm. — Teramind, *Shadow AI Behavior Report* (2026)
- 79% of CEOs and 80% of board members now say prospective directors should demonstrate measurable AI understanding. — BCG (2026)
- Jobs ‘professionalised’ by AI — where AI does the basic work — are 22% of postings and growing, while ‘democratised’ jobs, where AI takes the complex work, are 52% and falling behind. — PwC, *Global AI Jobs Barometer* (2026)

III. The OrgChange.AI Nine-Square Grid™

This month’s evidence loads the People and Process rows, because the constraint is comprehension and design rather than capability. Squares 4, 7, and 8 were not activated: no source this month locates the problem in the tooling itself, and the coalition question is folded into Square 1.

At-a-glance Grid

	Kotter	Lewin	ADKAR
People	Urgency Without Comprehension	The Middle Is Not Unfrozen	Self-Taught by Default
Process	—	Rewire, Don’t Overlay	Governance Trails Behavior
Technology	—	—	Data Debt Caps Trust

Square 1 — People / Kotter: “Urgency Without Comprehension”

Definition: This is where leaders generate pressure to move before they understand what they are asking the organization to do.

- 87% of senior executives say their CEO and board need education on AI’s investment risk — including 38% who call it poorly understood (HCLTech, 2026).
- Roughly 60% of CEOs believe their boards are rushing AI transformation, and board urgency runs highest among directors least confident in their own AI knowledge (BCG, 2026).

Square 2 — People / Lewin: “The Middle Is Not Unfrozen”

Definition: This is where the managers who must carry the change decide whether they can survive it.

- 53% of people managers worry they may not be good at supervising an AI-augmented team; 82% say it will make the role more challenging (EY, 2025).
- 63% of non-managers are hesitant to pursue supervisory roles for that reason — a change model assuming willing middle managers does not describe this transition (EY, 2025).

Square 3 — People / ADKAR: “Self-Taught by Default”

Definition: This is where organizations either build knowledge deliberately or quietly outsource it to employees’ own time.

- 85% of desk workers are learning to work alongside AI agents outside of work, while only 52% of senior leaders report a fully deployed training initiative (EY, 2025).
- Executives are nearly twice as likely to invest in tools (84%) as in upskilling; just 31% of knowledge workers report extensive AI learning opportunities (Atlassian, 2026).

Square 5 — Process / Lewin: "Rewire, Don't Overlay"

Definition: This is where organizations decide whether to redesign the work or bolt AI onto the work they already have.

- High-growth companies are about three times more likely to have raised AI investment by double digits (71% vs. 25%); high performers are nearly three times more likely to have fundamentally redesigned individual workflows around AI (McKinsey, 2026).
- Adding AI to fragmented data and disconnected teams "often just automates complexity" — fewer than 10% of organizations have scaled AI in any function (McKinsey, 2026).

Square 6 — Process / ADKAR: "Governance Trails Behavior"

Definition: This is where reinforcement either makes the sanctioned path the default or fails, and behavior routes around it.

- 89% of workplace AI use occurs outside enterprise-governed channels, and only 34% of organizations have an AI governance policy at all (Teramind, 2026).
- Prohibition displaces rather than solves: 48% would keep using AI tools if explicitly banned, and 56% say they lack clear guidance in the first place (Teramind, 2026). BDO's remedy is structural — a standing data and AI strategy committee reporting to the board on a defined cadence (BDO, 2025).

Square 9 — Technology / ADKAR: "Data Debt Caps Trust"

Definition: This is where sustained use depends on whether people believe the output — and belief is bounded by what the AI was given to work with.

- Only 22% of knowledge workers fully trust AI to produce accurate, high-standard deliverables, and 69% say their data foundations are not optimized for AI (Atlassian, 2026).
- 71% of legal professionals report AI saves moderate to significant time, yet verification remains mandatory (LEAP, 2026) — the ceiling is set below the model, at the data layer.

Sources

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