ROUNDTABLE REPORT · NOVEMBER 17, 2026

Why AI Rollouts Stall

Insights from a leaders' roundtable on AI adoption

Hosted by Dr. Shindale Seale, Ed.D. · SEADE Coaching & Consulting

Shared under roundtable rules: insights are not attributed to individuals or organizations.

Why we gathered

This year, Gallup's CEO said businesses are investing heavily in AI, but the results are not showing up in the bottom line. Six leaders from HR, technology and higher education met for one hour to answer one question: **why do AI rollouts stall?**

29%

of U.S. employees engaged in Q3 2026, the lowest level since 2011

27% → 22%

global manager engagement, 2024 to 2025: a five-point drop in one year

< 1 in 3

employees in AI-adopting organizations say their manager actively supports their team's AI use

Source: Gallup, State of the Global Workplace 2026; Gallup U.S. engagement data, Q3 2026.

The short version

1. Unlimited access isn't a strategy.
2. Access without coaching stalls at the basics.
3. Showcasing early adopters can hide the people who need help most.
4. Fear is the variable nobody budgets for.
5. Two tensions need active governance: speed versus risk, and human judgment versus AI autonomy.

Five insights from the room

01 **Unlimited access isn't a strategy.**
One large organization opened AI to everyone, then pulled back after duplicate work and rising costs. Defined behaviors replaced open access.

02 **Access without coaching stalls at the basics.**
Licenses alone leave people at simple prompts. Specific use cases and hands-on training are what move them to real value.

03 **Showcasing early adopters can hide the people who need help most.**
Success stories feature the enthusiasts. Quiet resisters, and people experimenting alone, rarely surface, so support never reaches them.

04 **Fear is the variable nobody budgets for.**
Mid-career employees are asking what AI means for their roles. Honest conversations about that fear work better than enthusiasm campaigns.

05 **Two tensions need active governance.**
Speed versus risk, and human judgment versus AI autonomy. Organizations that name these tensions out loud make better decisions.

THE QUESTION STILL OPEN

What is the stall costing per month?

No one in the room could yet put a number on it: licenses used at half strength, time lost to duplicate work, people quietly opting out. Until that number exists, the people side of AI stays a "soft" issue, and soft issues don't get funded.

What this means for your sector

The room's insights, applied to the sectors in our circle.

Technology companies	Wide access is easy to grant and expensive to unwind. Set usage behaviors and cost tracking before you scale, and look past the enthusiasts for the quiet resisters.
Large employers and corporate HR	A basic tool for everyone, with advanced access by request, is a sound start. Next come role-specific use cases, manager-led adoption, and AI built into reviews and surveys.
Advisory and consulting firms	Clients range from "go experiment" to "hit these metrics." Your edge is naming speed versus risk and judgment versus autonomy early, so clients choose on purpose.
Higher education	Start with practitioners and fluency programs, not policy memos. Address faculty fear openly, enlist respected alumni, and give students hands-on AI skills.
Cities and fire service	Public scrutiny raises the stakes on risk and transparency, and shift-based crews resist anything that feels like surveillance. Lead with governance, one use case people ask for, and labor partners at the table early.
Real estate and development	Corporate teams adopt first while field and site teams wait. Choose use cases that serve the field, equip regional managers to lead adoption, and track it by location.

What leaders are trying

- Three AI behaviors in place of open access: be sharp about what AI is pointed at, be sure a human owns every output, be open about what you learn
- AI questions in performance reviews and engagement surveys, so managers are prompted to support their teams
- An AI governance committee that vets tools for safety, privacy and business value, with AI responsibility written into the handbook
- An AI-focused employee resource group and a moderated Teams channel for questions and sharing
- An AI session during career week, which drew the week's highest attendance
- **For higher education:** practitioners who teach, AI fluency programs, honest talk about fear, and respected alumni to bring skeptical faculty along

NEXT SESSION · TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2027

From stall to traction: a working session

Every stall we heard traces to one of three causes. Bring one team where AI has stalled. We'll diagnose it together, choose one technique, and set a 30-day experiment to report on in April.

Fear
"Is this replacing me?"

Fog
"What am I allowed to do with it?"

Friction
"I don't have time, and it doesn't fit my work."

A calendar invite will follow.

Thank you for your candor. This was exactly the conversation I hoped for.

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Sources: Gallup, State of the Global Workplace 2026; Gallup U.S. engagement data, Q3 2026.