

HubSpot VP: AI's next big question isn't adoption, it's accountability

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the challenge organizations face in demonstrating measurable business impact from AI adoption, using HubSpot's two-year experience as a practitioner case study. Ben Putterman, HubSpot's VP of Learning and Talent Development, argues that AI transformation is fundamentally a human transformation, not merely a technology adoption exercise. Key findings include: 84% employee AI comfort and 90% usage rates were achieved through visible CEO role modeling and broad tool access, yet this created confusion around tool selection; a subsequent 'year of fluency' refined the approach through function-specific AI competency definitions, learning days, hackathons, and integration of AI fluency into hiring and promotion criteria; approximately half of employees reported using AI to automate or augment their work by year-end. Putterman introduces a three-stage loop — see the work, redesign it with AI, measure and scale — with redesign options including automation, augmentation, cessation, or deliberate human retention. The article also examines AI's role as a levelling force that blurs tenure-based hierarchies, the reversal of the engagement-performance causal relationship as Putterman frames it, and the primacy of clarity as an organizational obligation to employees navigating AI-driven change.

Key Insights

1. AI adoption metrics (comfort and usage rates) do not automatically translate to measurable business outcomes; the accountability question — 'So, what?' — remains largely unanswered even in organizations with high adoption.
2. Much organizationally valuable knowledge is tacit and invisible to AI systems, residing in individuals' heads rather than documented processes; surfacing this hidden work is a prerequisite for effective AI-driven redesign.
3. AI is functioning as a hierarchical leveller, blurring the experiential distinction between junior and senior employees and enabling reverse mentoring at scale in ways that previously failed — a dynamic Putterman predicts some organizations will struggle to absorb culturally.

Practical Takeaways

- Defining AI fluency at the function level rather than the organizational level produces more actionable competency standards, as the skills required differ substantially across roles such as engineering versus sales.
- Measurement cycles for AI transformation initiatives are observed to be most effective at six to twelve weeks, with annual review cycles considered misaligned with the pace of change.

Critical Analysis

Strengths: The article benefits from a practitioner's candid acknowledgment of failure and course correction, which adds credibility compared to typical vendor-driven success narratives. The distinction between adoption and accountability is a substantive and underexplored tension in AI transformation discourse. The 'see, redesign, measure and scale' loop is concrete and operationally grounded.

Limitations: All evidence is self-reported by HubSpot and presented through a single speaker at a company-sponsored event (Reimagine '26), introducing significant selection and social desirability bias. No independent verification of the 84% or 90% figures, nor of the business outcomes claimed, is offered. The causal claim that performance drives engagement rather than the reverse is asserted as personal view without empirical support. **Biases:** As a company-hosted event presentation, the framing is inherently promotional of HubSpot's approach. The article does not surface dissenting voices, employee perspectives, or comparative data from peer organizations. The journalist's framing is largely uncritical and amplifying.

Organizational Practice

HubSpot implemented a phased AI adoption program beginning with broad tool access in late 2024, supported by CEO role modeling. In 2025, the organization introduced organization-wide AI learning days, hackathons, and reverse mentoring programs, and embedded AI fluency as a criterion in hiring and promotion decisions. Leaders are assessed on their ability to lead change and navigate ambiguity. A three-stage internal loop — surfacing hidden work through direct observation, redesigning tasks via automation or augmentation options, and measuring results within six-to-twelve-week cycles — was adopted to operationalize AI integration.

Strategic Implications

The article reflects a broader trend in which organizations are shifting from measuring AI success by adoption rates toward demanding demonstrable business outcomes, suggesting performance management systems may need to evolve to capture AI-augmented productivity at the task and function level. The blurring of tenure-based hierarchies through AI capability signals potential reconfiguration of how seniority, compensation, and promotion criteria are structured in knowledge-intensive organizations. The integration of AI fluency into hiring and promotion decisions represents an emerging practice that may become a standard dimension of performance frameworks.

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