

The Human Side of AI Adoption: Lessons From the Field | Ganes Kesari - MIT Sloan Management Review

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Executive Summary

This article addresses the lag in AI adoption across traditional, non-tech industries such as construction, mining, and waste management. The author argues that human factors, rather than technical limitations, are the primary barriers to AI adoption in these sectors. Drawing from 15 years of field experience, the article identifies three key obstacles: AI appears inaccessible and threatening to workers, it seems to create additional work rather than reduce it, and the benefits don't justify the perceived costs. The author proposes three strategies for successful AI adoption: using familiar analogies to demystify AI, integrating AI into existing workflows rather than forcing new systems, and measuring success using metrics already tracked by stakeholders. The article emphasizes that successful AI adoption in conservative industries requires understanding human psychology and organizational context rather than focusing solely on technological capabilities.

Key Insights

1. AI adoption challenges in traditional industries stem from human factors rather than technical limitations, including fear, change fatigue, and misaligned value propositions
2. Conservative industries often have stable legacy processes that have worked for decades, making workers skeptical of new technology that appears disruptive
3. The dichotomy in AI adoption exists between digitized, pro-technology industries and traditional sectors still using legacy systems and manual processes

Practical Takeaways

- Demystify AI by connecting it to familiar technologies people already use daily, such as smartphone facial recognition or social media recommendations
- Integrate AI incrementally into existing software systems rather than implementing completely new workflows or platforms

Critical Analysis

The article provides valuable practitioner insights based on extensive field experience, but relies heavily on anecdotal evidence and case studies rather than systematic research. While the author claims 15 years of experience helping dozens of industries, no specific data on success rates or quantitative outcomes are provided. The three-pillar approach appears logical but lacks empirical validation. The article would benefit

from more rigorous methodology and peer-reviewed evidence to support its claims.

Organizational Practice

The article describes practices at Hey Bubba (AI platform for trucking using voice interfaces), an unnamed industrial materials distributor (AI engine for sales opportunity identification), and various fleet maintenance operations (AI embedded in computerized maintenance management systems)

Strategic Implications

The findings suggest that AI adoption success in traditional industries depends more on human-centered implementation strategies than on technological sophistication. Organizations may need to prioritize change management and workflow integration over advanced AI capabilities when entering conservative markets.

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