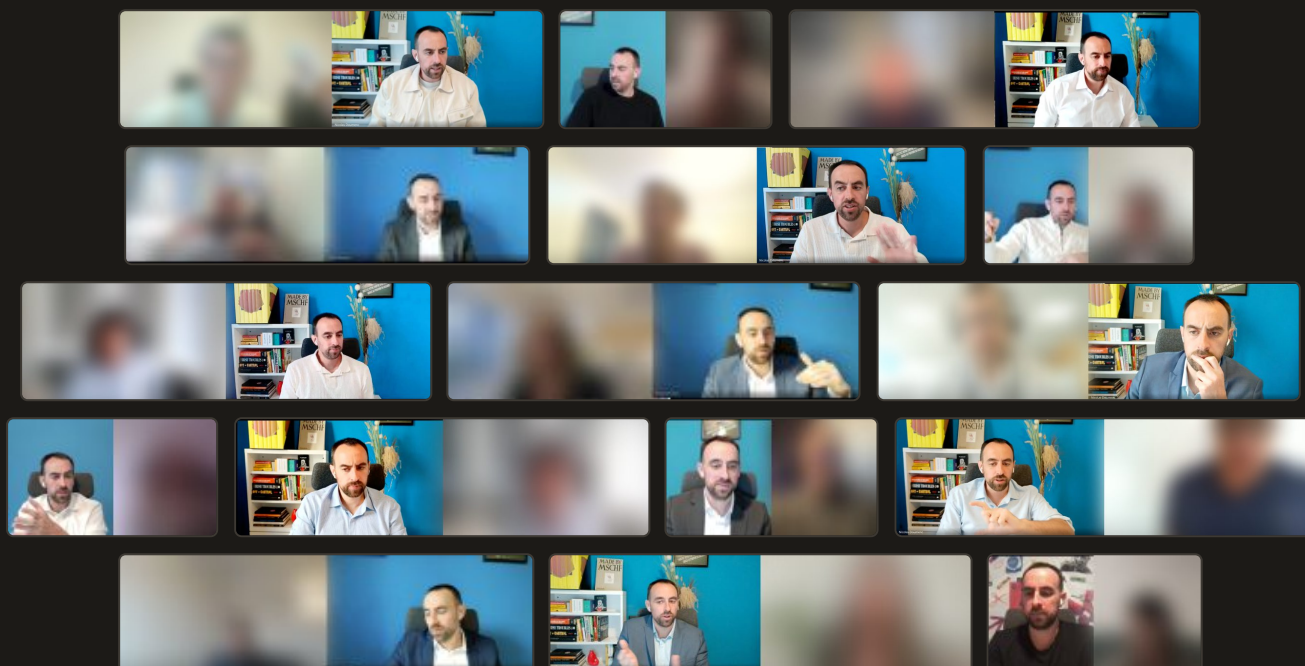


300h

Over the last 6 months, I've spent 300 hours talking AI with CEOs, board members, CFOs, CIOs etc. of companies from 200 to 200,000 people. Here are the 10 mistakes they make that keep AI from “taking off”.



Your company runs like it's 2015 (plus the cost of the licenses).

You bought licenses (like everyone else), ran AI trainings (like everyone else), launched pilots (like everyone else).

Nothing changed.

You were told to go bottom-up, train the people in the field, and the transformation would happen on its own. Spoiler alert: you'll be waiting a long time.

The approach that works is **Patient Zero**: you start with the executive committee. It's on you to become an AI power user in your own daily work. The company follows because it sees, not because it's told.

1 You're not an AI power user. And it shows.

2 You confuse adoption with transformation.

3 You train instead of transforming.

4 You wait for use cases.

5 You automate instead of multiplying your superpower.

6 You ask "who do I fire" instead of "what more can I do".

7 You feed AI data instead of experience.

8 You forget that a transformation is 70% psychology.

9 You let IT and vendors decide for you.

10 You do efficiently what should not be done at all.

1 You're not an AI power user. And it shows.

Being a power user isn't summarizing meetings and rewording emails. It's being able to do, on a real decision or a real analysis, in 3 hours, work that would have taken you a month in 2019. Until you've lived that, you can't set the course, can't smell the bullshit, and can't tell your teams "you're doing this wrong" with the credibility of someone who's done it.

The CEO of a services scale-up told me he'd spent very little time on AI, without the slightest worry: for him, AI could only be a net positive for his business. I told him that if he spent one hour actually using it well, he'd start being a lot more worried.

And when a leader flips, everything changes. A CIO, after a few weeks of practice: "for once, I'll be able to bring my teams along. Not by telling them 'do this', but by telling them 'I got hooked myself. Do what I did, and I'll sit down with you to show you how to use it'."

THE MOVE Two weeks, 50% of your day routed through AI: your decisions, your reasoning, as a sparring partner. Don't look for use cases for others yet: use it for yourself. And aim for a practical understanding, not a theoretical one.

2 You confuse adoption with transformation.

An industrial group of 40,000 people: Copilot licenses galore, adoption rates above 90%, plenty of people coached, plenty of usage. I ask my question: is the company doing anything different? The answer, honest and immediate: "No."

That's AI purgatory: plenty of good ideas, plenty of desire, green metrics everywhere, and a company that runs exactly like before. Adoption measures logins and tokens burned. "What are we doing differently?" is the question that stings, because it forces you to look at the real blockers: IT, data, legal, GDPR. As long as you watch usage, you can tell yourself a transformation story. The moment you look for what's different, you see what's actually stuck.

THE MOVE Throw out your adoption KPIs. Instead, try listing every week what the company is doing differently from 2015.

3 You train instead of transforming.

The only way to train someone on AI today is to sit down with them and say: "what's your challenge today? That one? OK, we're doing it with AI. I'll sit with you and show you how it's done."

Classic training produces trained people, not transformed people. What transforms is running the race: take someone's most important task; they run their plan, you run yours with AI; you compare; you explain why you won; they go again. It's visceral, not theoretical. You feel the gap, then you close it.

And note the direction of the movement: top-down. We're used to bottom-up transformations: train the teams, wait for it to trickle up. This is the reverse. You transform the leaders, and the leaders don't "train" their teams: they sit down with them. "What's on your plate? That? Let's go, I'll show you, we're in."

4 You wait for use cases.

In a large industrial group, IT took 6 months to build the pilot of a tool for the sales team. Six months. For a pilot. The leader, now that he's hooked, could rebuild the equivalent in a few hours, have his teams test it the next day, and only then walk into IT with a clean POC to deploy. His CIO says it himself: "the risk of a rollout isn't failure, it's the one-shot: POCs everywhere, used once, and nothing changes in how people actually work."

Use-case inventories, opportunity audits and prioritization committees produce reports about hypothetical results. Meanwhile, a 50,000-person services company is putting into the pocket of its 800 sales reps an agent built on the brains of its 40 best salespeople. It will have taken only a few weeks of constant iteration.

THE MOVE No audit. AI-native profiles embedded in the teams, delivering a real result. Then copy what works.

5 You automate instead of multiplying your superpower.

The usual reflex is called “simplify to amplify”: automate first, remove things, so you can focus on the core business later. Logical on paper, and it doesn't work: announcing you're going to automate a bunch of things is anxiety-inducing, everyone tenses up. Do the reverse. “Here's where I expect you. The real mission of our department is this, and we're going to multiply it with AI. And since that will take more time, let's use it to automate what eats a lot of it.” Same content, reversed order: it completely changes how teams get on board.

What people come to **you** for when nothing forces them to: that's your superpower. AI should multiply it by ten, not automate what you avoid.

THE MOVE List what people come to you for when nothing forces them to. Multiply that.

6 You ask “who do I fire” instead of “what more can I do”.

Almost every AI plan I read is a cost plan: how many positions, how many FTEs, how much in savings. In M&A, everyone knows cost synergies materialize and revenue synergies never arrive. With AI, it's exactly the reverse. Productivity programs will give you the results every one of your competitors can get: you're not moving forward! The projects where you go for more (more business, a better product for your customers, innovation) give you what nobody else has.

Example: a CFO takes five years of investments and analyzes, file by file, whether the promised ROI ever materialized. Then he injects that experience into the analysis of the next investments. Impossible to run a project that big solo without AI: too expensive, too slow.

THE MOVE Instead of thinking savings, think market share and better decisions.

7 You feed AI data instead of experience.

You can't clone someone's brain from their emails. Nobody wants to talk to your emails. A CEO showed me how he was preparing a lunch with a strategic partner: his AI process was very good, but the output was generic. Anyone having lunch with the same person would have had the same brief. What makes your AI unbeatable is when your strategy and your experience run through everything it produces. The 800-reps agent is built on 40 brains extracted through interviews, not on product sheets.

At a 2,000-person industrial site, the last expert of a critical trade was retiring. We started from the data to lay the base: his archives, years of logged interventions. Then we extracted the brain: hours of interviews on his real cases, his rules, his intuitions. Because the truth is, company data is usually unusable; what's always excellent is an expert interviewed well. Feeding your AI experience instead of data: that's what differentiates you, precisely because everyone has the same AI and nobody has your experts.

THE MOVE Five hours of extraction with your best people before writing a single line of specification.

8 You forget that a transformation is 70% psychology.

An AI rollout is 30% technology and 70% psychology. And the confrontation starts with you. Become a power user, and there will come a precise moment when you tell yourself: "wait. AI is doing my job. What am I going to do?" You have to face that void. The way out is upward: what is my superpower, how does this feed the company's strategy, what does this let me transform.

You have to go through it, because your teams will feel exactly the same thing, with more anxiety: they are afraid of being fired. You can't walk others through a void you've never looked at yourself.

THE MOVE Before any rollout, answer publicly the question nobody asks out loud: "and me, what am I for, after?"

9 You let IT and vendors decide for you.

Three different companies pitched me the same idea: appointing a “VP of Agents”. Each time, I answer with a question: what's an agent? Silence. Appointing a head of agents is like appointing a head of knives in a kitchen: it's important, everyone uses them, and centralizing it makes no sense. Plenty of CIOs grabbed the topic with “20% of what it takes to make the decisions”, and the solution vendors do the rest.

Meanwhile, the real opportunities wait for a stamp: nobody dares authorize access to the data, every validation waits for the one before it, and proven gains sleep in a drawer for months. That's organizational molasses. And it gets paid for in shadow AI: your teams are not waiting. They're already on their personal accounts.

THE MOVE The only antidote to vendor bullshit is a leader who practices. Take the decision back. IT secures; it doesn't set strategy.

10 You do efficiently what should not be done at all.

“There is surely nothing quite so useless as doing with great efficiency what should not be done at all.”

Peter Drucker, Harvard Business Review, 1963

An industrial mid-cap sends an automated mailing to 3,000 detected projects: 3 small jobs signed. The problem wasn't the tool, it was the idea: volume instead of targeting. That's AI's most insidious trap: it makes producing so easy that you forget to ask whether the thing deserves to exist at all. The 900-page RFP response is already dead: nobody will write it anymore (AI does), nobody will read it anymore (AI does that too). Only one thing still counts: the angle, the one you can explain in 30 minutes.

Finding the angle means finding the blue ocean inside the red ocean. On an RFP: simulate what your competitors will answer on this deal; look for what would genuinely matter on the client's side; feed the exercise with your experts' experience, and razor-sharp angles come out. You spend much more time finding the angle, much less time writing: AI handles the writing. And in a world where clients will end up saying “just send me your prompt”, because their AI will read the responses, stacking pages makes no sense anymore. A strong angle serves everywhere: in the document, in the pitch meeting, and in the relationship after.

When execution costs nothing, direction is the only thing that still costs. And it cannot be delegated.

THE MOVE Before accelerating a task, ask whether it should exist. Then ask where the angle is.

The three-year window

A window is opening, and it will last maybe three years. It's not for everyone: it's for those who move while the others run pilots.

Whoever equips their company now takes market share on the cheap: they reinvent a piece of the customer experience, decide better, answer in hours when their market answers in weeks. A mid-cap I work with won a deal purely on speed. The client, asked who else they had consulted, answered: "No one. You were too fast." That's what cheap market share looks like.

The ten mistakes share one root: a system with no experience inside, run by leaders with no experience of the tool.

The companies that win do the opposite, and they're no more tech-savvy than you. They extract the experience of their best people (the salesperson who smells the deal, the expert who hears the breakdown, the CFO who has lived through ten integrations) and put it into their systems. Their leaders practice enough to demand the level above, smell the bullshit, and lead by example on their own files. The rest (the licenses, the trainings, the POCs) is just logistics.

Process powered is over. Experience powered is the window.

I don't just preach the transformation. I used it to write this report.

Every one of my meetings is recorded and transcribed. To write this document, AI re-read 300 hours of conversations in about thirty minutes and pulled out anecdotes I had forgotten myself. I chose the angle, the ten mistakes and the quality bar; it did the rest in a few hours.

Two years ago, this document would have been a three-month project. Which is exactly what this report is trying to tell you: the question is no longer “who do I fire”, it's “what more can I do”. This report is one example. Your equivalent exists in your own business, and it's waiting for you.

If you recognized yourself in three mistakes or more, let's talk.

Let's take 30 or 60 minutes together and make concrete progress on your challenges:

cal.eu/nicolasdoumenc/madlabs · Nicolas Doumenc, Madeleine Labs