

Pilot Purgatory: Why 75% of Enterprise AI Pilots Never Reach Production

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Your company has run AI pilots. Some worked well in the sandbox. Very few reached production. Fewer still changed how work gets done. You are not alone. This is the most common failure mode in enterprise AI.

The Pattern

A team identifies a use case. They build a proof of concept. The demo goes well. Leadership says "impressive." Then nothing happens. The pilot enters a holding pattern: waiting for budget approval, waiting for IT security review, waiting for the next planning cycle, waiting for someone to own the production deployment.

Months pass. The team moves on. The pilot becomes a slide in the quarterly innovation update. Eventually someone asks what happened to it. Nobody knows.

“It's like eating a feast but having the digestive system of a sparrow. More food doesn't help. It makes things worse.”

Why It Happens

Pilot purgatory is not a technology problem. The technology worked. The demo proved it. The failure is organizational:

- **No pre-agreed graduation criteria.** The pilot was approved without defining what success looks like or what happens next if it works.
- **No production owner.** The innovation team built it. Nobody in operations committed to running it.

- **No process redesign.** The pilot added AI to an existing workflow. Nobody redesigned the workflow around the new capability.
- **Budget cycle dependency.** The pilot needs production infrastructure. That requires next year's budget. So it waits.
- **Risk asymmetry.** Approving a pilot has low risk. Approving production deployment means someone is accountable if it breaks.

“74% of companies can't get past AI pilots. Not because the technology fails. Because the organization can't digest what the technology produces.”

The Fix

The fix is not "run better pilots." The fix is to stop treating pilots as experiments and start treating them as the first phase of production deployment:

1. Define graduation criteria before the pilot starts. What metric, at what threshold, triggers production deployment?
2. Name the production owner on day one. An operations leader, not the innovation team.
3. Allocate production budget alongside pilot budget. If you cannot fund production, do not start the pilot.
4. Redesign the workflow first. Then build the AI into the new workflow. Not the other way around.

The OMI Connection

Pilot purgatory shows up in OMI scores. Organizations stuck in it score high on Technology Metabolism (they can build AI) but low on Process Metabolism (they cannot redesign work) and Leadership Metabolism (decisions take too long). The OMI identifies which specific bottleneck is keeping your pilots from graduating.

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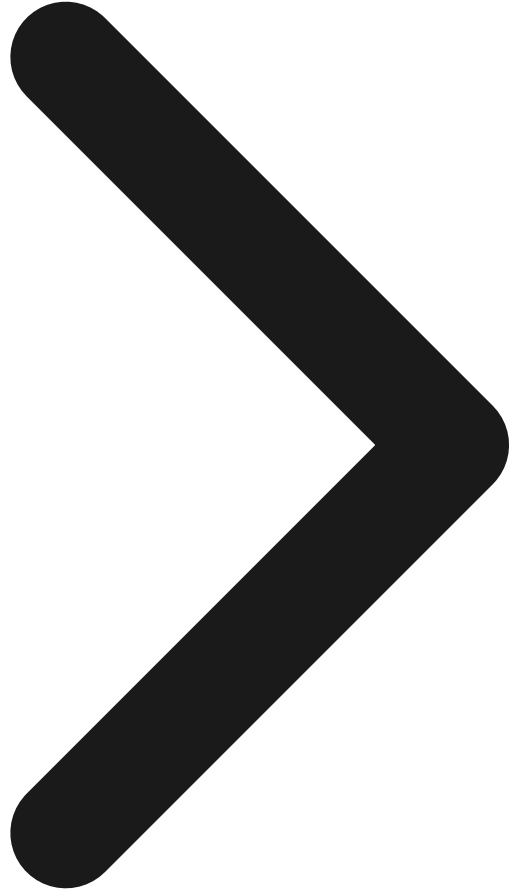
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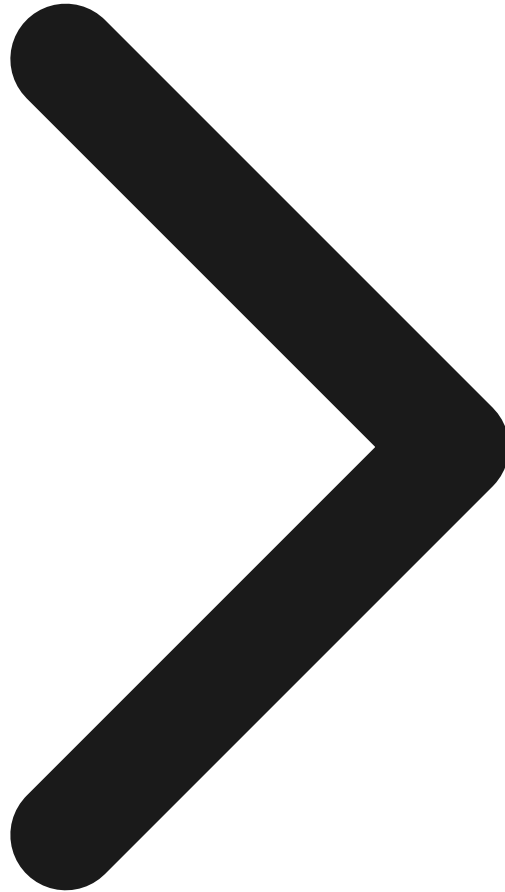
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