

Why Your Team Is Resisting AI (And It's Not What HR Thinks)

By Rahul Jindal

The pilot worked. The leadership team approved the rollout. The vendor delivered the training. Six months later, adoption is at fourteen percent, the most experienced people in the function are quietly working around the new system, and three of the team leads have started circulating a memo about “risks the pilot did not surface.” HR calls it change resistance and proposes more training. That is the wrong diagnosis.

The team is not resisting the tool. The team's identity is attached to the workflow you are about to retire, and the organization's immune system is doing exactly what immune systems do: attacking what it perceives as a foreign body.

Metabolism without immunity is autoimmune

Most AI readiness frameworks measure how fast an organization can absorb change. That is necessary but incomplete. An organism that can absorb anything at maximum speed is not high-performing. It is sick. Healthy organisms decide what to absorb and what to attack. They have an immune system.

The same is true of organizations. The capability you are missing is not metabolism. It is the immune system that decides whether structural change gets absorbed or rejected. Get that wrong and your rollout dies, not in a meeting, but in the slow accumulation of workarounds that never make it onto a status report.

“An organism that absorbs everything is not healthy. It is sick. The immune system is the missing capability.”

The five dimensions of an organizational immune system

- **Identity.** How tightly is people's sense of self attached to the specific workflow being changed? “I am the person who knows X” is the most expensive sentence in the enterprise. When this dimension is missing, the team turns every retirement into a *Hill to Die On*.
- **Closure.** Does the organization give a retired workflow proper closure, or does the retirement happen in silence? Without closure, what is officially decommissioned shows up unofficially as *Ghost Workflows*: shadow spreadsheets, secret syncs, “just one more meeting”.
- **Trust.** Is the immune system attacking actual threats, or attacking anything new? Most enterprise immune systems have terrible discrimination; they reject the cure and accept the disease. Without trust, every change becomes an *Allergic Reaction* and survivors stop proposing.
- **Belonging.** How easily can a new group supporting the change form across team boundaries, and how easily can a group opposing it form? Symmetry matters. When belonging is closed, the original *Inner Circle* closes ranks and the new way of working can't find a group to land in.
- **Agency.** Can the organization retire its own workflows, processes, and roles when they no longer serve the mission? This is the single most diagnostic dimension. Without agency, retirements are decreed top-down and met with *Quiet Quitting*. People show up, withdraw effort, and the ones with options leave first.

The four immune profiles

1. **Immunocompromised.** The organization absorbs whatever is pushed in. Vendor roadmaps, executive whims, consultant frameworks. No defense, no discrimination. Looks fast. Burns out fast.
2. **Autoimmune.** The immune system attacks the organization's own healthy tissue: the new initiative, the cross-functional hire, the structural change. Looks like rigor. Is actually self-destruction.
3. **Hyper-reactive.** The immune system overreacts to harmless triggers. A small tooling change produces a town-hall-sized response. Disproportion is the tell.

4. **Adaptive.** The organization can tell signal from noise, retire what no longer serves the mission, and absorb what does. The goal state. Rare, learnable.

“The cheapest tell is whether your organization can retire its own workflows. If it cannot, it cannot absorb new ones.”

The interview question that surfaces this in five minutes

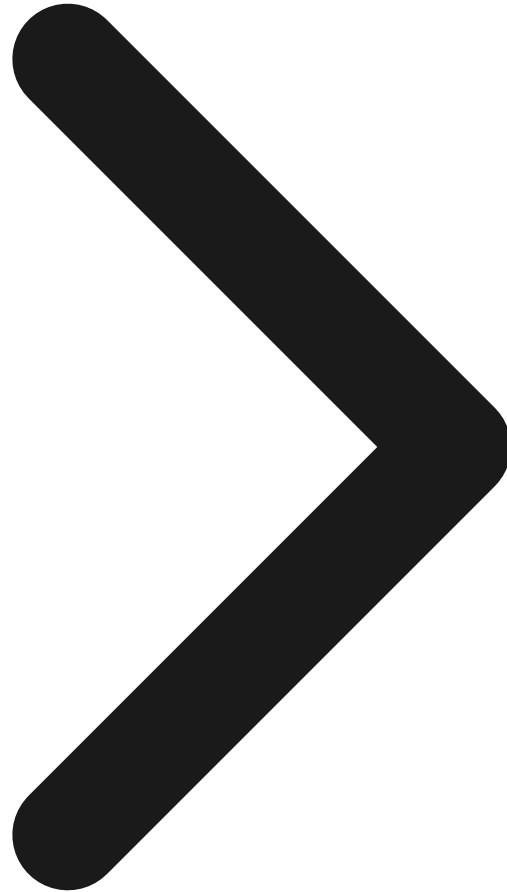
For any team you are about to push an AI rollout into, ask the senior people: “What is the last process this team retired? Not modified, retired. When? Who decided? What did the people who used to own it move on to?”

If the answer is a long pause, you are not in Adaptive. You are in one of the other three profiles, and your rollout is going to hit a wall that the change-management deck did not predict. The fix is not more training. The fix is building the immune system before you ask it to absorb anything else.

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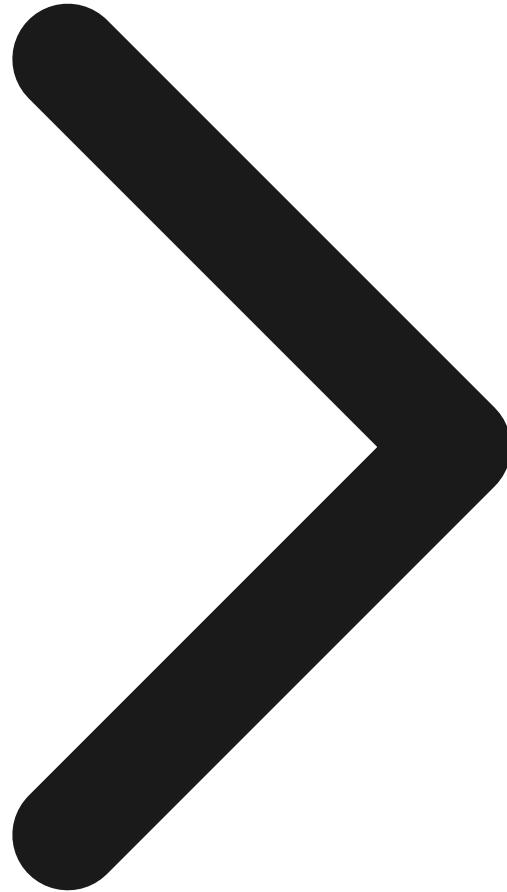
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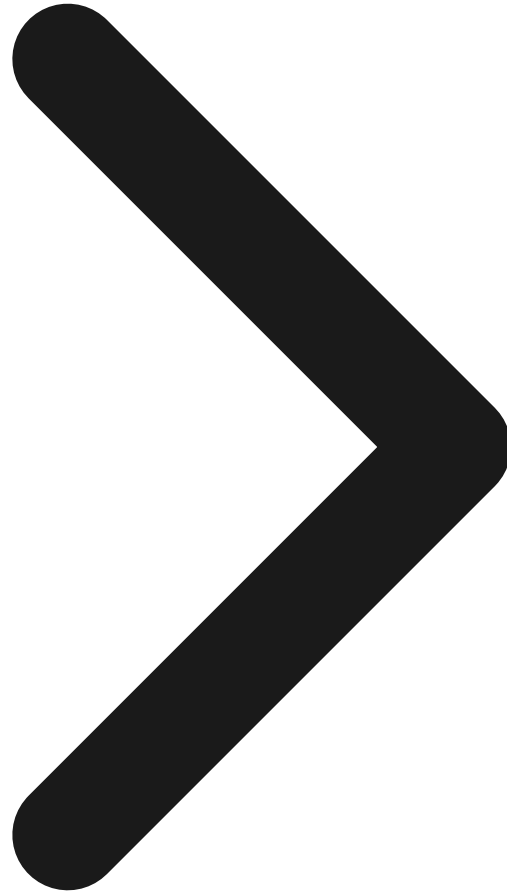
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