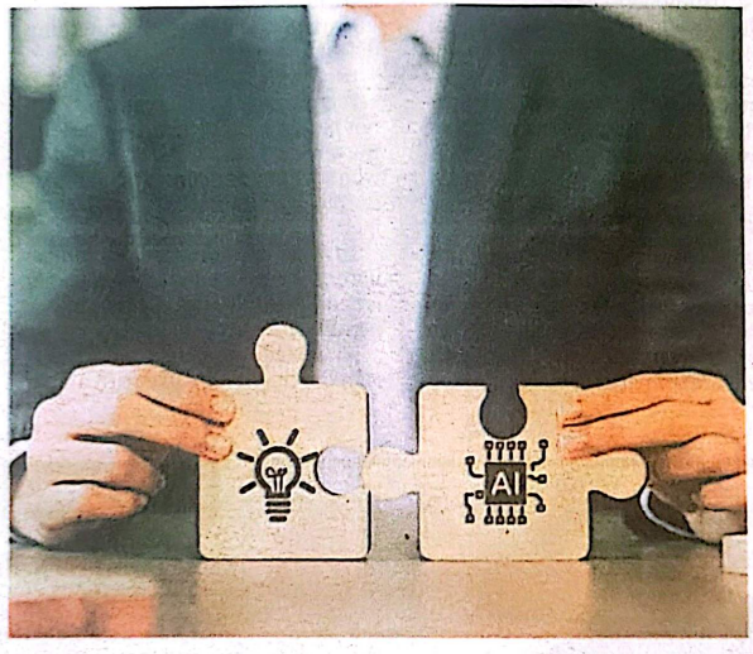
Five strategies for driving responsible AI adoption

BRUNO SZARF



The elephant in the room: 'Will AI replace me?'

You cannot have a productive conversation about Artificial Intelligence (AI) adoption until you address the elephant in the room. When employees hear "efficiency" and "automation," they often think "redundancy."

We found that ignoring this fear just breeds resistance. We had to be incredibly transparent about what AI was there to do, and what it was not. Doing that changed the narrative from replacement to upskilling.

When we first introduced AI tools for recruiting, there was natural hesitation. Were we trying to automate the recruiter out of the process?

We had to sit down and look at the actual workflow. A recruiter spends hours manually screening resumes, often giving each one only 30 seconds of attention because of the sheer volume. We showed them how our internal AI tools could handle that initial screening against job descriptions in seconds. This was not to make the decision, but to surface the data so the recruiter could spend their time actually talking to candidates.

Once they saw that the tool was not taking their job, but rather the tedious administrative work they hated, the buy-in happened naturally. Now, our recruiters are some of our heaviest users because they realised AI gave them their time back.

Taking AI adoption from 'don't you dare' to 'here's how'

In the beginning, our policy stance, like many companies, was defensive. We were worried about security, data privacy and the "black box" of public AI tools. But we quickly realised that a strict ban does not stop people from using AI, it just pushes them into the shadows. People will use the tools that make their life easier, whether you sanction them or not.

We had to shift our mindset from policing to "sandboxing." Working with our VP of Innovation, we realised we needed to give employees a safe place to play. We moved away from a culture of "do not touch that" to one of guided experimentation. We created internal, private instances of these tools with safe environments where company data remained secure. We also attached a crucial caveat to this freedom: the "human in the loop" rule.

We made it explicitly clear in our policies that while we encourage experimentation, the employee is ultimately responsible for the work product. If the AI hallucinates or makes a bias error, you cannot blame the bot. You are the editor. This balance was the turning point for responsible adoption.

Training: Moving beyond the 'lunch and learn'

Early on, I will admit that some of our training was reactive. We would see a security "oops" or a misuse of a tool and we would rush to correct it. We realised pretty quickly that reactive training does not build competence. We also learned that generic training falls flat. Sending an employee a link to an "Intro to AI" video on LinkedIn Learning is fine for basics, but it does not help them do their specific job.

We started finding success when we made the training contextual. We leveraged our "SAI Library" – our internal suite of AI tools – and began showing specific departments exactly how it applied to them.

For our software developers, the training was about code documentation. For HR, it was about drafting communications or analysing engagement survey data. We stopped trying to make everyone an AI expert and started trying to make them experts in using AI for their specific role.

The power of peer influence

Perhaps the biggest lesson we learned is that employees do not always want to listen to leadership or IT. They are influenced by each other. To get real traction, we launched "AI Week." Instead of just having executives lecture the staff, we opened the floor to experts from different business units.

There is something powerful about seeing a peer from a neighbouring department get up and say, "Hey, I used this prompt to solve this problem, and it saved me three hours." It turns the abstract concept of innovation into something tangible.

Modeling from the top

Finally, none of this works if the C-suite is exempt. If leadership views AI as a tool for "the workers" to increase productivity, but not something they need to learn themselves, the initiative will die on the vine.

We made a concerted effort to ensure our leadership team was visible in their adoption. When a CEO stands up in a town hall and admits they used AI to help draft a memo or analyse a report – and crucially, when they admit they had to double-check the output – it gives the rest of the organisation permission to be curious. It signals that we are all learning this together.

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