



Research Brief:

When AI Adoption Outpaces Alignment

Why organizations are struggling to turn AI use into organizational value.

April 2026

Table of Contents

Pg. 3 Executive Summary

Pg. 5 Key Findings

Pg. 7 Next Steps for Leaders

Pg. 9 Methodology

Pg. 10 About Sprout Narratives

Executive Summary

Many organizations are encouraging the use of artificial intelligence tools in daily work. In many cases, employees are responding — experimenting, building capability, and reporting meaningful gains in efficiency.

But this research suggests a critical gap:

Adoption is outpacing alignment.

While most respondents indicate their organizations support AI use, that support is often informal — expectations are unclear, use cases are undefined, and shared standards are non-existent. As a result, employees are making individual decisions about when and how to use AI, rather than operating within a consistent organizational approach.

This gap is showing up in several important ways:

- Employees report moderate to significant efficiency gains from AI, but they do not consistently share those gains with teams or managers
- Many employees are unsure about the benefit of sharing or are concerned it may lead to increased workload or expectations
- Others choose not to use AI in certain situations, not due to lack of skill, but because of uncertainty around quality, trust, or appropriateness

From a leadership perspective, this creates a pattern that's easy to overlook:

AI is being used. Value is being created. But it is not being captured at the organizational level or applied consistently.

Instead, efficiency gains remain largely invisible — disconnected from broader workflows, performance expectations, or strategic priorities.

This points to a fundamental issue:

AI implementation is not primarily a tools or training challenge. It is an organizational alignment challenge.

To fully realize the value of AI, organizations must move beyond encouragement and experimentation to define how AI fits into work, including:

- Where it is expected — and where it is not
- How outputs are evaluated
- How efficiency gains are understood and reinvested

This requires more than policy. It requires:

- Intentional communication
- Clear governance
- Shared understanding across leaders, managers, and employees

Without this structure, organizations risk creating a fragmented model of adoption — where individuals benefit from AI, but the organization as a whole does not.

The question is no longer whether employees are using AI. It's whether organizations are prepared to align around it and act on it.

Key Findings

1. Organizations are encouraging AI use but not defining how it should be used.

- Most respondents report their organizations are encouraging AI use
- But a significant portion says that encouragement is informal, not operationalized

Translation: Leaders are signaling the importance of AI use, but they're not defining expectations, guardrails, or workflows.

2. Employees feel capable but still choose not to use AI.

- Most respondents say they are fully or somewhat capable of using AI tools
- Yet the majority report frequently or occasionally choosing not to use AI

Translation: Employees feel confident in their ability to use AI, so this not a skills problem. It's a decision and context problem.

3. AI is delivering real efficiency gains, but those gains are not consistently shared.

- Most respondents report moderate to significant efficiency improvements
- But only a portion of respondents regularly share efficiency gains
- Many share inconsistently or rarely

Top reasons employees do not share gains:

- They haven't thought about sharing
- There's no clear benefit
- Concern about increased workload or expectations

Translation: Efficiency is happening, but it's invisible to the organization because employees aren't talking about it.

4. Organizational response to efficiency discourages transparency.

- The most common outcomes of increased efficiency:
 - More work
 - Higher expectations (without support)

Translation: Employees keep efficiency gains to themselves because they're concerned about increased workloads and expectations.

5. The real barrier isn't fear or capability. It's trust and context.

When people *don't* use AI, it's mainly because:

- Tasks require human judgment
- They trust their own expertise more
- They don't fully trust outputs

Translation: Employees aren't resisting AI. They don't know when and how it should be used.

What Leaders Should Do Next

To move from fragmented adoption to organizational value, leaders should focus on four priorities:

1. Define where AI should (and should not) be used.

Move beyond general encouragement and establish clear expectations:

- Identify high-value use cases where AI is expected
- Clarify where human judgment is required
- Provide examples of appropriate and inappropriate use

Without this clarity, employees default to individual interpretation, creating inconsistency and risk.

2. Establish shared standards for output and quality.

Adoption accelerates when employees understand what “good” looks like:

- Define how AI-supported work should be reviewed and validated
- Set expectations for accuracy, attribution, and refinement
- Align managers on how to evaluate AI-assisted output

This reduces hesitation and builds trust in when and how AI can be used.

3. Make efficiency visible and safe to share.

If efficiency gains remain hidden, organizations cannot scale them:

- Create clear pathways for employees to share time savings and improvements
- Reinforce that efficiency will not automatically result in increased workload
- Capture and redistribute effective use cases across teams

Visibility turns isolated gains into organizational capability.

4. Align leadership, managers, and employees on expectations.

AI adoption breaks down when expectations are inconsistent across levels:

- Ensure leaders communicate not just encouragement, but intent and boundaries
- Equip managers to guide day-to-day application
- Reinforce expectations through multiple channels and touchpoints

Alignment is what turns experimentation into execution.

Get Started

Organizations that want to understand where AI adoption is breaking down can start with an **AI Adoption Gap Scan** developed by Sprout Narratives.

The AI Adoption Gap Scan identifies where AI decisions are breaking down between leadership intent and day-to-day execution and what to do about it.

Visit www.sproutnarratives.com/services to learn more.

Methodology

This report is based on a survey designed to better understand how employees are using artificial intelligence tools in their day-to-day work, and how organizational context is shaping that use.

The survey was distributed to a broad network of professionals across industries, functions, and levels. Respondents primarily represent knowledge-based roles where AI tools are increasingly accessible.

A total of 56 responses were collected over a six-week period from professionals across multiple regions of the United States.

The survey explored four core areas:

- Organizational encouragement and expectations around AI use
- Employee confidence and decision-making related to AI
- Reported efficiency gains and how they are (or are not) shared
- Barriers to use, including trust, quality, and appropriateness

Responses were analyzed to identify patterns in behavior, perception, and alignment between leadership intent and employee action.

While directional, the consistency of responses highlights clear themes about how AI adoption is unfolding within organizations.

About Sprout Narratives

Sprout Narratives is a boutique consultancy that uses strategic storytelling to turn complex ideas into shared understanding — and shared understanding into aligned action.

Our work focuses on the systems that support this, including decision readiness, governance, and alignment, ensuring that priorities are not only communicated, but consistently carried through the organization.

We offer the **AI Adoption Gap Scan**, a focused assessment designed to identify where AI-related decisions are not translating into consistent, effective use.

To learn more, visit www.sproutnarratives.com or contact Jenny Jones at jenny.jones@sproutnarratives.com