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EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

The Human Variable Behind Stalled AI Adoption

The strongest predictor of whether AI adoption actually succeeds isn't the tooling. It's whether employees have a manager who visibly supports using it.

<1 in 3

US employees at AI-implementing organizations who strongly agree their manager actively supports their AI use

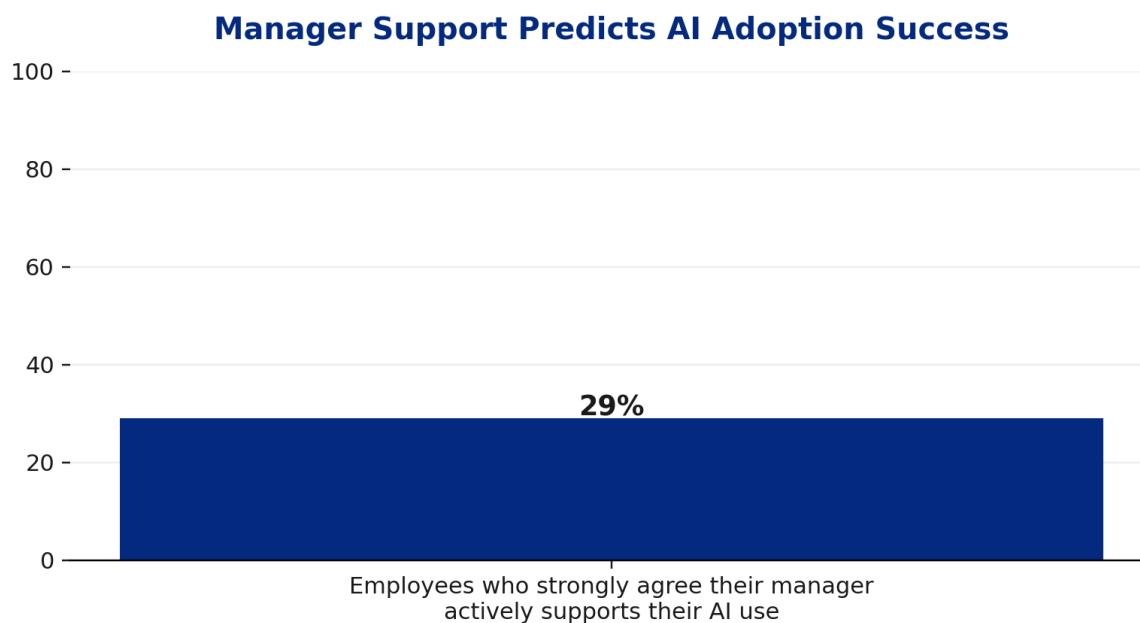
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Where the AI Adoption Conversation Usually Goes Wrong

Most AI adoption strategy is built around the technology: which tools to license, which use cases to prioritize, which teams to pilot first. Gallup's research points to a variable that gets far less attention and predicts outcomes more reliably. Whether employees have a manager who actively supports their use of new AI tools is the strongest predictor of adoption success, ahead of the technical integration itself.



Source: Gallup AI adoption research, 2026

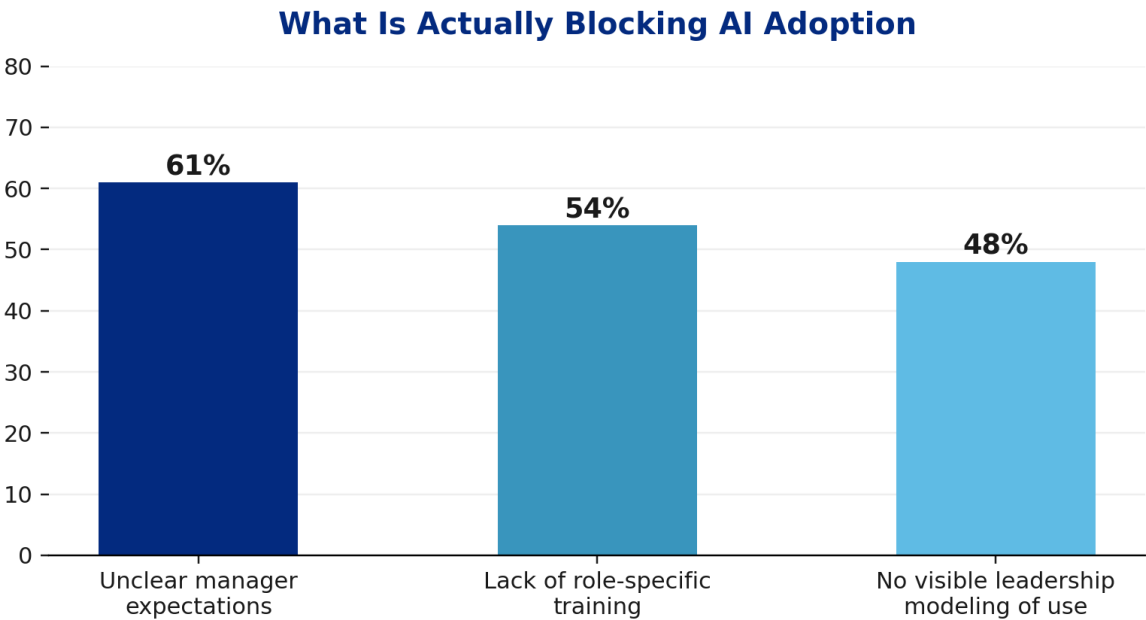
Manager support for AI use remains rare even at organizations actively implementing AI.

The Gap Between Investment and Support

Fewer than a third of US employees at organizations actively implementing AI strongly agree their manager actively supports their use of it. That is a striking gap given how much capital is currently being deployed toward AI tooling and licensing. The technology is arriving faster than the managerial permission and encouragement needed to actually use it.

The Numbers at a Glance

Metric	Figure	Source
US employees who strongly agree their manager supports AI use	<33%	Gallup AI adoption research, 2026
Manager support ranked ahead of technical integration as adoption predictor	Yes	Gallup AI adoption research, 2026



Source: Gallup AI adoption research, 2026

The barriers to AI adoption are managerial and behavioral, not technical.

Why Managers Are the Actual Bottleneck

Managers sit at the exact point where AI adoption either becomes real behavior change or stays a licensed tool nobody uses. If a manager is uncertain about how AI use affects their own role, unclear on what good use looks like, or quietly worried about being replaced by the very tool they are meant to champion, none of that ambiguity stays contained. It transmits directly to the team, regardless of what the adoption rollout plan says on paper.

Two Different Jobs to Do

For the CEO

Before approving the next AI tooling investment, ask what percentage of your managers can articulate, specifically, how they want their teams using it and what good use looks like in their function. If that number is low, the tooling investment is arriving ahead of the organizational readiness to use it.

For the CHRO

Manager enablement for AI adoption deserves the same structured investment as any other major capability rollout, including explicit conversations about how AI changes the manager's own role rather than only the roles of the people they manage. Ambiguity at that level is what suppresses adoption further down.

The Reframe Worth Making

AI adoption strategy that starts and ends with the technology is solving half the problem. The other half, and based on this data the more predictive half, is whether the manager layer has been equipped and genuinely supported to lead the change rather than simply administer it.

References

1. Gallup, AI adoption and manager support research, 2026.