

Finding Problems Worth Solving



The Business Case Requirement.

Last night, a professional networking event reminded me why I'm building AI solutions instead of just talking about them.

Understanding the technology through hands-on experience is the only way to separate genuinely useful applications from expensive demos.

The Business Process Reality Check

Last night's conversations centred around a frustrating pattern we are all noticing, **professionals treating AI like a magic solution that requires no context or expertise.**

We discussed how general AI models require the same detailed requirements gathering that any successful project needs:

- What specific process are we improving?
- What does success look like?
- What constraints exist?
- How does this integrate with existing systems?

The Professional Advantage

The group agreed that professionals with business analysis backgrounds have a natural advantage with AI implementation. We understand:

- How to break down complex problems into specific requirements
- Why process mapping matters before automation
- How systems integrate (or fail to integrate)
- What questions to ask before building solutions

This is not about technical coding skills; it's about **structured thinking and discipline**.

Why the HBR Framework Matters

A Harvard Business Review report, "[A Systematic Approach to Experimenting with Gen AI](#)", I was reading describes generative AI as a general-purpose technology, comparable to electricity or the printing press. The adoption pattern is predictable: broad deployment, initial productivity dip, then sustained gains once complementary investments are made.

This is the productivity J-curve, and we are currently in the dip phase.

The implication? **AI success does not start with adopting the technology. It starts with structured experimentation around real business problems.**

My Personal Experiment: From Theory to Practice

This is why I have shifted from traditional PMO work to hands-on product creation with AI development. Not because I wanted to go back to be a programmer, but because I realised something critical:

You cannot manage what you do not understand.

Over the past months, I have built:

- Business Case Generators that analyse ROI across scenarios
- Market Analysis tools that cross-reference multiple data sources
- Content Creation pipelines that maintain consistency

Each project taught me something the networking conversations confirmed: The real challenge is identifying where AI meaningfully improves a decision, process, or outcome.

The Manufacturing Advantage

The HBR report highlights why manufacturing moves faster with AI: their processes are measurable, repeatable, and operationally constrained. Machines produce data continuously. Performance ties directly to throughput, quality, and cost.

What does this have to do with Financial Services or other industries? In my experience most processes are fragmented, less visible, and success metrics are often unclear.

The same experimentation logic applies. We just need to find our equivalent of "**predictive maintenance**" and "**production optimisation**."

The Experimentation Framework That Works

The HBR research advocates against designing full AI strategies upfront. Instead:

1. Identify high-value operational problems
2. Run controlled experiments
3. Measure outcomes
4. Scale what works

This is not revolutionary thinking. It's **basic transformation discipline applied to new technology. This is the underlying reason why many programmes are created.**

From my experience leading large programmes in financial services, this is how every successful initiative works.

The only difference with AI? This technology changes faster than our ability to govern it.

Why I'm Building, Not Just Managing

My transition from traditional PMO and Programme Manager to AI-enabled project delivery is not career pivoting, it's professional evolution. The conversations last night made clear why this matters:

Traditional approach: "We need an AI strategy. Build some pilots." (I am not kidding, I remember senior management asking for AI ideas to build, no business case or underlying cost analysis were necessary).

Practical approach: "We have this operational problem. Could we solve it better with an AI based project than with the existing tools?"

By building actual solutions, even crude prototypes, I can answer questions like:

- Will this work at scale?
- What are the real integration challenges?
- Where does the technology break down?
- What does success measurement look like?

The Uncomfortable Truth

HBR and other publishers I read often, mention that many organisations currently run AI pilots that demonstrate technical feasibility but fail to deliver operational value. That's not experimentation. It's technology exploration.

The HBR report is diplomatic about this but I will be direct: **AI initiatives will fail when we are looking to solve a technology problem, not business problems. It is not about having the latest tool because everyone has one, it is about having the right tool for an existing problem.**

The Path Forward

Not more hype about capabilities, but frameworks for identifying use cases worth pursuing.

This is where transformation disciplines become essential:

- Clear problem definition
- Measurable outcomes

- Defined ownership
- Operational integration

Without this structure, AI initiatives become disconnected pilots and innovation theatre.

The Real Opportunity

Many manufacturing firms are already doing AI products effectively.

Financial institutions and professional services now face the same challenge: not to adopt AI, but to identify where AI meaningfully improves how we operate.

Because the organisations that win will not be those with the most AI projects. They will be the ones with the right use cases.

What's your experience? Are you finding clear use cases for AI in your organisation?

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