AI Adoption is Mostly "The Shock of the Old"[1]

A quick crosswalk between my "Old Tools, New Eyes[2]" paper and Every's field report[3] on what's actually working in companies.

Michael Stoyanovich

Version 1.0.1

Disclaimer

This work is intended for informational and educational purposes only. The views and analyses presented – particularly those related to ethics, policy, and AI system design - reflect the author's interpretations and do not constitute legal, regulatory, or professional advice. Readers are encouraged to critically assess the content and consult appropriate experts or authorities before applying any concepts discussed herein. The author assumes no liability for any decisions or actions taken on the basis of this work.

Why do this exercise

This crosswalk turns "AI adoption" from a vague slogan into a **diagnostic**. When something works, it's rarely because the model is magical—it's because someone fixed (or respected) an **old layer**: access controls, data plumbing, process legibility, or incentives/routines. That makes the conversation actionable: instead of tool-chasing, you can identify the specific layer blocking progress and address it.

Two-sentence summaries

My paper (Old Tools, New Eyes[4]): Technology change is usually **layering, not replacement**: meaning emerges from use (Wittgenstein), coordination hardens into convention (Lewis), novelty tempts us into misreading competence (Dennett), and deep infrastructures/institutions constrain what's possible (Nagel)[5].

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[1] David Edgerton, *The Shock of the Old: Technology and Global History since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[2] Michael Stoyanovich, *Old Tools, New Eyes: Edgerton's "Shock of the Old" through the Four Philosophers Framework* (Version 1.4.2, PDF), accessed December 31, 2025, https://www.mstoyanovich.com.

[3] Natalia Quintero, "I Talked to More Than 100 Companies About AI—Here's What's Actually Working," *Every*, December 16, 2025, https://every.to/p/i-talked-to-more-than-100-companies-about-ai-here-s-what-s-actually-working.

[4] Michael Stoyanovich, *Old Tools, New Eyes: Edgerton's "Shock of the Old" through the Four Philosophers Framework* (Version 1.4.2, PDF), accessed December 31, 2025.

[5] Michael Stoyanovich, *Old Tools, New Eyes: Edgerton's "Shock of the Old" through the Four Philosophers Framework* (Version 1.4.2, PDF), accessed December 31, 2025, https://www.mstoyanovich.com. Note on scope: Nagel is used here as a heuristic marker for the limits of third-person explanation and the role of first-person experience—not as a full phenomenology of technology (see Section VI, "Nagel – Layered Experience: Surface and Deep Structure" in *Old Tools, New Eyes: Edgerton's "Shock of the Old" through the Four Philosophers Framework*.

The Every article: After speaking with 100+ companies, most are stuck at "smarter Google," AI doesn't spread like normal software, and what works is clarity + defined workflows (SOPs), champions, leadership modeling, and centralized testing—often under real security/compliance constraints.[6]

Legend: my "old layers" (AI adoption blockers)

- **OL1 Data** = enterprise data is **unstructured / siloed / poorly labeled**
- **OL2 Identity & access** = **RBAC / directory services / compliance constraints** govern what's possible
- **OL3 Process legibility** = processes are **analog / undocumented / idiosyncratic**
- **OL4 Incentives & routines** = incentives/routines remain **unchanged**, blocking adoption

Monday-morning takeaways (high signal)

1. **Stop tool-jumping.** If pilots stall, it's usually OL2/OL3/OL4—not "we picked the wrong model."
2. **Treat SOPs as the real frontier.** If you can't describe the work, you can't automate it reliably.
3. **Seed adoption with champions (not rollouts).** Small groups create conventions; conventions scale.
4. **Institutionalize evaluation.** Central testing reduces novelty churn and spreads "what works" as practice.
5. **Assume constraints are real.** Security/compliance tooling (OL2) is often the hidden determinant of "what's possible."

Implementation note: For a role-design path that assigns ownership for OL1–OL4 and scales champions/testing, see *Leading Through Alignment: A Framework for the Chief AI Officer.*[7]

Crosswalk matrix: Every's illustrations → my lenses + "old layers"

(All illustrations below are from the Every article; categorization is my interpretive mapping.)

Every illustration / practice	Primary lens (paper)	Secondary	Old layers tag(s)	One-line diagnostic
NYC subway real-time delays map became valuable	Wittgenstein	Nagel	OL3	Capability mattered once it

[6] Natalia Quintero, "I Talked to More Than 100 Companies About AI—Here's What's Actually Working," *Every*, December 16, 2025, https://every.to/p/i-talked-to-more-than-100-companies-about-ai-here-s-what-s-actually-working.

[7] Stoyanovich, M. (2025, July). *Leading Through Alignment: A Framework for the Chief AI Officer* (Version 1.2.1). https://www.mstoyanovich.com/.

Every illustration / practice	Primary lens (paper)	Secondary	Old layers tag(s)	One-line diagnostic
only when usable[8]				entered a real workflow.
"95% of GenAI pilots fail[9]" framing	Nagel	Dennett	OL1/OL2/OL3/OL4	Failure is often the stack, not the model.
"Clarity problem, not tech problem"	Wittgenstein	Lewis	OL3	No clear steps → no stable "use."
AI used as "slightly smarter Google"	Dennett	—	OL3/OL4	Surface use substitutes for workflow integration.
"Tool-jumpers" chasing new apps	Dennett	Lewis	OL4 (often OL3)	Novelty masks lack of routine change.
"Couldn't get docs into ChatGPT → switched tools"	Nagel	Dennett	OL1/OL3	Tool swap doesn't fix content flow/integration.
Asana spreads; AI doesn't spread similarly	Lewis	Wittgenstein	OL4/OL3	AI value is contextual; conventions don't propagate automatically.
"Stuck using Copilot" due to security/compliance constraints	Nagel	Lewis	OL2	Governance and access determine the feasible toolset.
"Lonely power user" can't spread value	Lewis	Nagel	OL4 (often OL2)	Adoption requires shared norms and permission structures.
Train 10 "AI champions" rather than everyone	Lewis	—	OL4	Build a local equilibrium, then diffuse.
Champions need permission to build + room to fail + eagerness to share	Lewis	—	OL4	These are the conditions for convention formation.
Peer builds scheduling GPT spanning	Wittgenstein	Nagel	OL3	Works because it targets the actual messy process.

[8] Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), "MTA Launches Groundbreaking Live Subway Map, Creating Next-Generation Map Following Iconic Hertz and Vignelli Designs," October 20, 2020, https://www.mta.info/press-release/mta-launches-groundbreaking-subway-map-creating-next-generation-map-following-iconic-hertz-and-vignelli-designs.

[9] Sheryl Estrada, "MIT report: 95% of generative AI pilots at companies are failing," *Fortune*, August 18, 2025, https://fortune.com/2025/08/18/mit-report-95-percent-generative-ai-pilots-at-companies-failing-cfo/.

Every illustration / practice	Primary lens (paper)	Secondary	Old layers tag(s)	One-line diagnostic
calendars/email/phone tag				
Scheduling GPT saves hours; adoption spreads because it's peer-built	Lewis	Wittgenstein	OL4/OL3	Peer legitimacy shifts expectations; usefulness anchors routine.
"Hard part is defining goal and steps"	Wittgenstein	—	OL3	Making tacit work explicit is the bottleneck.
"Train AI like a smart intern" (be prescriptive)	Wittgenstein	Dennett	OL3	Operational prompting is process specification.
"This era will be remembered as SOPs"	Wittgenstein	Nagel	OL3	SOPs are the substrate for reliable automation.
CEO models heavy personal use (curiosity > mandate)	Lewis	—	OL4	Leadership behavior shifts permission and norms.
Centralized testing teams evaluate tools + share best practices	Lewis	Dennett	OL4 (often OL3)	Institutionalizes coordination and reduces novelty churn.
"Start with champions, not rollouts" (3–5 build peer-usable solutions)	Lewis	—	OL4	Convention first; scale second.
"Documentation culture" (finance/engineering advantaged)	Nagel	Lewis	OL3	Documentation is deep infrastructure for legible work.
"Dictate workflows (Monologue) to create the outline"[10]	Wittgenstein	Nagel	OL3	Turning practice into text is the bridge to automation.

Bottom line

Every's "what works" is basically Edgerton in enterprise form: AI adoption is less about replacing the old, and more about **making the old legible, governable, and shareable**—SOPs, permissions, data pathways, and routines.

[10] Monologue, "Monologue" (product site), accessed December 31, 2025, https://www.monologue.to/.

Ethics, Disclosure, and Acknowledgements

Ethical Considerations

This work does not draw on private, sensitive, or personally identifiable data. All examples are hypothetical, anonymized, or derived from public sources. No human-subjects research was conducted, and no institutional ethics review was required. All citations conform to academic standards. The broader ethical implications concern public interpretation, policy design, and stakeholder responsibility in AI deployment. These implications are intended to provoke critical discussion and inform future regulatory and design frameworks.

Use of AI Tools

AI language models – most notably OpenAI's ChatGPT – *were* used during the writing process as interlocutors: for brainstorming, structuring sections, and testing rhetorical clarity. These tools helped refine transitions, surface edge cases, and probe internal consistency. This meta-use aligns with the essay's themes. Interacting with generative AI during authorship provided firsthand insight into the very limitations analyzed here: fluency without grounding, responsiveness without perspective, and the ease with which stylistic coherence can be mistaken for conceptual depth. Responsibility for all ideas, arguments, and conclusions lies solely with the human author.

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Disclosure Statement

This work was conducted independently, without institutional affiliation, funding, or external influence. The views expressed are the author's alone and do not represent any current or former employer. No financial or professional conflicts of interest are declared.

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Related Links

Stoyanovich, M. (2025). *Old Tools, New Eyes: Edgerton's "Shock of the Old" through the Four Philosophers Framework* (Version 1.4.2). Retrieved from https://www.mstoyanovich.com

Quintero, N. (2025, December 16). I talked to more than 100 companies about AI—here's what's actually working. Every. https://every.to/p/i-talked-to-more-than-100-companies-about-ai-here-s-what-s-actually-working.

Version History and Document Status

This is a living document. As generative AI systems and their use evolve, this paper will be periodically updated to incorporate new empirical findings, theoretical insights, and policy developments. Major revisions are recorded here to preserve transparency and scholarly traceability.

Version	Date	Description
1.0.1	December 2025	Initial release.