OPM HR Solutions | Federal Talent Management Center

Designing for Human + AI Work

Moving beyond performative adoption to purposeful work redesign

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Session Overview

01 A story and a pattern

One federal engagement, and what it revealed about where OD belongs in AI implementation

02 What the research says

Evidence on what happens when organizations adopt AI without the organizational layer

03 Your experience, applied

Individual reflection, chat, synthesis, and Q&A

A premise: AI can advance an organization's strategy — or just add to its noise. The difference is design.

OD practitioners are not the last step in AI implementation. They help shape how work is designed to advance strategy.

The story

The engagement started with a practical need:

“Will we be able to run this after you leave?”

The ask was **not** “**deploy AI.**”
It was “**build practical products this team can sustain.**”

Sustainment required:

- Clear workflows
- Stronger documentation
- Named owners and backups
- Quality checks
- Onboarding and continuity
- Decision rights and escalation

OD insight

Sustainment-focused work forces you to ask operating-model questions the organization may never have made explicit.

The story | continued

We thought we were designing **a workflow.** We were actually **designing trust.**

1

The plan looked right on paper.

Workflows, documentation, and AI supports were designed and ready on paper.

2

Employees experienced something different.

- Unclear inputs
- Unverified outputs
- Ambiguous ownership
- Weak review points
- Trust erosion

3

We had to return to the user need.

Simply increasing AI adoption does not guarantee value. Behavior change, process redesign, and operating-model clarity are what make AI integration work.

AI cannot clarify work the organization has not clarified for itself.

What organizations are actually missing

AI interest is high. Organizational readiness is not. The pattern is structural, not incidental.

What's often assumed

- AI is a technology project
- Tools drive adoption
- Productivity equals value
- Rollout equals implementation

What's often missing

- Process mapping before AI insertion
- Human review point design
- Governance and accountability
- Cognitive load and role clarity

What OD brings



- Work system diagnosis
- Operating model design
- Change readiness and trust
- Measurement of human + AI value

Sources: Bedard et al. (2026); Fountaine et al. (2019); Baier et al. (2024); Ranganathan & Ye (2026); Niederhoffer et al. (2025) — HBR.
Full source key: backup slide.

What the research says

How AI is integrated matters as much as whether it is used.

Source: Bedard et al. (2026), When Using AI Leads to Brain Fry, HBR — study of 1,488 full-time U.S. workers.

+14%	+12%	+19%	−15%	1,488
more mental effort (high vs. low AI oversight)	more mental fatigue (high vs. low AI oversight)	information overload (intensive oversight)	lower burnout (AI replaced routine tasks)	full-time U.S. workers in the 2026 study

The organizational layer is not optional.

- Widespread AI adoption requires attention to organizational and cultural barriers, not just tool access.
- GenAI creates value when treated as an assistive agent embedded in work, not automation layered on top.
- AI can intensify pace and hours if workload expectations are not made explicit and monitored.
- AI-generated work that shifts cognitive burden to colleagues weakens trust and productivity.

Translation for OD: define the work system, quality standard, human role, and learning loop before expanding AI-enabled workflows.

An emerging hypothesis

Based on one engagement, informed by the research. We are actively testing it.

1

Visible work

The steps, inputs, sources, and handoffs are knowable.

2

Governed work

Owners, decision rights, quality checks, and escalation are explicit.

3

Learnable work

New staff can build capability through playbooks, templates, and structured feedback.

4

AI-supported work

Technology reduces toil while preserving human judgment, accountability, and quality review.

AI is not a shortcut around organization design. It raises the cost of skipping it.

Individual reflection: 90 days, one workflow

The scenario: you have been asked to support AI adoption in one mission-support workflow. You have 90 days, limited budget, skeptical employees, and leadership pressure to show results.

What are the first three questions you would ask — and what would make you tell them to slow down?

1

Reflect

- 2 minutes
- Choose the first question you would ask before introducing AI. What do you need to understand about the work?

2

Post in chat

- 2–3 minutes
- Share one QUESTION and one SLOW DOWN signal. Format: QUESTION: … | SLOW DOWN: …

3

Learn together

- 2–3 minutes
- Dave reads a few chat responses. Rob and Tey connect the themes to practical OD choices.

Synthesis: four human-centered design moves

Slowing down, returning to the user need, and testing before scaling is not added work; it is the work.

1 **Start with the person**

How does the work feel to the people accountable for it?

2 **Define the problem before the solution**

What are we really trying to improve or protect?

3 **Test small and learn fast**

Where can we reduce pain points without creating new risk?

4 **Design the feedback loop**

How will humans detect error, adapt, and improve the system?

OD is not a phase at the end. It is the design intelligence that runs through every step.

The decision gate: four honest outcomes

After a pilot, the evidence should drive one of four moves. “Slow down” is professional judgment at work, not a failure.

1. **Scale**
   The workflow is reliable, risk-managed, and ready for broader adoption.

2. **Redesign**
   The promise is real, but controls, SOPs, training, or systems need adjustment.

3. **Pause**
   Evidence is incomplete, adoption barriers remain, or conditions are not ready.

4. **Stop**
   It does not solve the right problem, or the risk remains unacceptable.

Three of the four honest outcomes are not “scale.” Holding that line is the OD contribution.

OD's role: putting AI in service of strategy

The question is not whether your client should use AI. It is whether their organization is designed to let AI advance the strategy.

What AI-in-strategy requires

Clarity on strategic intent

What is the organization trying to accomplish? AI should accelerate that, not substitute for it.

Work that is visible and governed

AI can only support work that the organization has already understood, owned, and designed.

Roles designed for human + AI

Who is accountable for what AI produces? Where does human judgment stay in the loop?

What OD practitioners do

Work system diagnosis

Map the work before inserting the tool. Understand what is visible, governed, and learnable.

Operating model design

Define decision rights, quality standards, and the feedback loops that will catch errors.

Change readiness and trust

Build the organizational conditions that make sustained behavior change possible.

To close: from adoption to purposeful redesign

How do we help organizations move from “we adopted AI” to “we redesigned work in service of strategy” when the pressure is always to move faster than the evidence supports?

Closing reflections

Ongoing learning

The engagement is still underway. We are learning while the work is still unfolding.

Final takeaway

AI readiness is organization-design readiness: visible work, clear governance, human capability, & trust.

Continue the conversation

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Backup · Our current working model

How we are currently structuring AI strategy and implementation support. Offered for critique and adaptation.

1

AI Strategy
where to play

Discovery, use-case identification and prioritization, governance and risk guardrails, and a sequenced roadmap with metrics.

2

Implementation Phase 1
prove it works

Validate one AI-enabled workflow: map the process, design human review points, pilot against success and risk criteria, then apply the decision gate (scale / redesign / pause / stop).

3

Implementation Phase 2
transform the organization

Job impact mapping, future-state operating model, decision rights, performance measures, and the transition plan for skills, roles, and trust.

The model connects technology choices to work design, roles, skills, governance, and trust. AI strategy is organization design work.

Backup · Source key

Full source key for cited material.

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