

From Pilot to Procurement

Most enterprise AI pilots do not fail. They succeed — and then die anyway. Here is why, and how to design ones that survive.

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The graveyard of enterprise AI is not full of failed pilots. It is full of successful ones — demos that delighted, metrics that impressed, steering committees that applauded — followed by silence. The pilot proved the technology. It proved nothing about the organisation's ability to buy, run, and answer for it. Those were the actual questions.

A pilot lives in a protected habitat: hand-picked data, tolerant users, no security review, no uptime obligation, no one accountable when it is wrong. Production is the opposite of every one of those conditions. The distance between the two is not a scaling problem. It is a **different problem** — and it is where the real cost lives.

Procurement is the pilot's real examiner

The gauntlet that kills pilots has familiar stations: data protection review, security assessment, vendor risk, integration cost, support model, and the deceptively simple question of who owns this when it misbehaves. None of these appear in a proof of concept. All of them appear in procurement — which is why the pilot's success is so often irrelevant to the buying decision that follows.

Design the pilot to answer procurement's questions, not the demo audience's.

Pilots that are procurable by design

The fix is to run pilots as rehearsals for production, not auditions for applause. Use governed data, not convenient data. Involve security and data protection at the start, when their requirements are cheap to meet. Define the owner, the monitoring, and the shutdown procedure before the first user logs in. Cost the production case — integration, support, review — as part of the pilot's output, not as a surprise after it.

This looks slower. It is faster. A pilot designed this way arrives at the procurement gate with the answers already written, and the organisation discovers whether it can operate the system while the stakes are still small. That is what a pilot was supposed to be for.

If your pilots keep succeeding and nothing keeps shipping, that is the conversation to have.

Integral advises enterprises on taking AI from experiment to production — governance, procurement, and operating model included. contact@integralconsulting.in