Lumen
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INTRODUCTORY BRIEFING

AI (Integrated Process) First

What "AI-first" really means — in plain language.

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The short version



The human is the origin and the compass of an AI-integrated process.

Last year **95%** of company AI projects produced no measurable return, on $30–40 billion of spend. It is tempting to blame the technology. The technology worked. What failed was the **structure** around it. This briefing explains what that means — and what to do about it — without assuming any technical background.

95%

Of company AI projects returned nothing last year

Not the tools

The gap is structure and skills, not technology

You = compass

The AI operates; you steer it

If you remember one phrase, make it this: it is not "AI-first," it is AI-Integrated-Process-First. You do not add AI to how you work. You rebuild how you work around AI, and then you rebuild people's skills around the new way of working. Everything below is that idea, explained slowly.

First, three words you'll keep hearing

Before the argument, three plain definitions — because most confusion about AI comes from fuzzy words.

An AI "agent" is software that doesn't just answer a question, but carries out a task end-to-end: it can read, decide, and act across several steps on its own. Think less "search box," more "a very fast junior colleague who never sleeps."

A "workflow" is simply the sequence of steps your business runs to get something done — how an invoice gets approved, how a customer request is handled, how a contract is drafted. It includes who does what, in what order, and who signs off.

"Process redesign" means changing that sequence — not just speeding up one step. It is the difference between giving a runner better shoes and re-drawing the whole race. Most AI projects buy the shoes and leave the race unchanged. That is why they fail.

And "AI-first"? It is the slogan that promised that simply putting AI at the centre would transform the business. It sounds decisive, but on its own it means nothing operationally — it does not tell anyone which process to change or which skill to build. That gap between a confident slogan and an unchanged way of working is exactly where most of the money went last year, and came back with nothing.

Why adding AI to an old process fails

Imagine giving a brilliant new assistant to a team that keeps every old habit, every old hand-off, every old approval step. The assistant is fast, but the work still waits in the same queues, for the same sign-offs. The assistant is quick; the process is still slow. Nothing really improves.

That is exactly what most companies did: they bought a tool and pointed it at an unchanged workflow, run by unchanged people. The research is blunt about it — the single thing most linked to real returns was redesigning the workflow, not the model and not the budget.

Add AI to a broken process and you just get a faster broken process.

Adding a copilot to a broken process is decoration. Rebuilding the process — and the skills around it — is structure. Only structure creates value, and only a minority of companies actually did it.

So what did that minority — the ones who got real returns — do differently? Three simple things, none of them about buying a fancier model. They picked one important process and redrew it around the AI instead of bolting the AI on. They brought in people who had done it before, rather than improvising internally. And they put checks in place so the system kept getting better with use, instead of being switched on and forgotten. Plain discipline, not magic.

The big flip: who is the copilot now

For two years we were told "AI is your copilot" — a helpful assistant sitting beside you while you stay in control of every step. In a process genuinely built around AI, that picture flips. The AI does the flying: it operates, decides, and

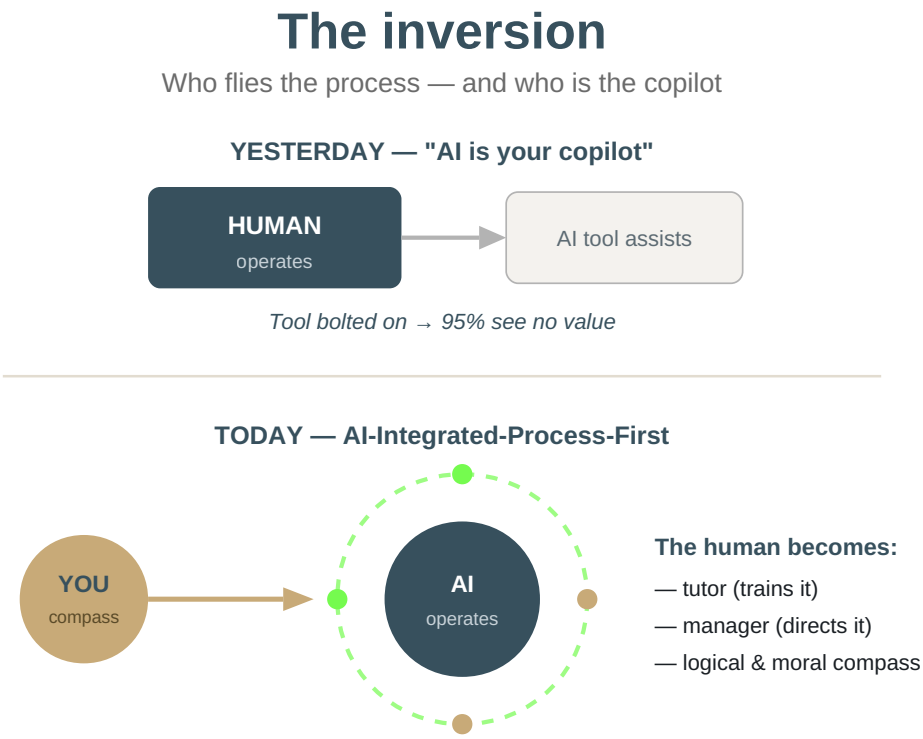
LUMEN CEO SAYS

For two years, AI was sold as our copilot. In a process built around AI it is the opposite: the AI operates — and we become its copilot, its tutor,

executes the routine work. The human moves into a different seat.

> *and its logical and moral compass. That inversion, not the tools, is the real work.*
>
> Riccardo Rolando — CEO, Lumen Holding SA

You become the copilot — the tutor who trains the system, the manager who directs it, and the compass, logical and moral, that keeps it pointed at something worth doing and stops it where it should stop. That is a harder job than "using a tool," not an easier one. It needs judgement, not clicks.



The shift in one picture: the AI operates; you are the tutor, manager and compass.

What "redesigning the process" looks like

Take customer support. The old way: every email lands in one queue; agents read each one, look things up, write a reply, escalate the hard ones. Add AI as a tool and an agent gets a suggested reply — but every message still flows through the same queue and the same hands. A little faster; fundamentally unchanged.

Now redesign around AI: the system reads and classifies every incoming message, answers the routine 70% completely, gathers the context for the rest, and routes only the genuinely difficult cases to a person — who now spends their day on judgement calls, not triage. The people don't disappear; their role moves up. That is process redesign, and it is where the returns actually come from.

Notice what had to change: not just the software, but the steps, the hand-offs, the decision of what humans do versus what the system does, and the skills people need. Buy only the software and you get the first picture. Change the structure and you get the second.

It becomes a hybrid team

The destination is not "people using AI." It is a hybrid organization — part human, part agentic — where the day-to-day starts to feel like managing a team: you delegate, you trust but verify, you supervise, you escalate. You won't manage these agents like a piece of software you switch on. You'll manage them more like junior colleagues — with goals, guardrails, and review.

Which is why the real work is not installing tools. It is redesigning processes and people's skills until humans and agents work together. The tools and the org chart adapt to that, not the other way around.

And the natural worry — "does this replace people?" — deserves a plain answer. The repetitive parts of many jobs do get automated. But the work that's left is the harder, more valuable part: judgement, exceptions, relationships, deciding what the machine should and shouldn't do. People who learn to direct and supervise the system become more valuable, not less. The risk is not the machine; it is standing still while the role changes around you.

How a company actually starts

You do not start with a company-wide "AI strategy" slide. You start with one process that matters and is painful — a place with clear volume and clear rules — and you redraw it around the capability end to end. You decide what the AI runs and what a human owns, you set the guardrails, and you measure the outcome, not the activity.

Then you do the human half: show the people whose work is changing what their new role looks like, and give them the skills to run it. One redesigned process that genuinely works teaches the organization more than ten pilots that don't. Get one right, and you have a pattern you can repeat — which is exactly the opposite of buying tools and hoping.

Where this is already happening

Two places make it concrete. In consulting and IT services — long sold by the hour and by headcount — buyers now expect AI by default, and the big firms are restructuring fast. When the work that justified big teams can be compressed, what you are paid for shifts from effort to outcome.

And in cybersecurity it turns adversarial: automated attackers can now take over a network in under an hour, with no human involved. A once-a-year manual security check cannot keep up. The answer is not buying another tool — it is a continuously tested structure, with AI amplifying a human team rather than replacing it.

Fulcrum and lever

Here is the idea to carry away. Think of Archimedes: give me a lever and a place to stand, and I move the world. The powerful AI models are the fulcrum — the fixed point. They are extraordinary, and they are available to everyone, including your competitors. A fulcrum on its own moves nothing.

The lever is what you place on it: your experience, your market knowledge, your culture, the way your people actually get things done. That is the part nobody can download, copy, or buy off the shelf — and it is the part that actually moves your business. Spend everything on the fulcrum and you will move the least. Build the lever and the same models lift far more.

This is also the reassuring part. You do not need to out-spend the giants on technology — you can't, and you don't have to. The models everyone shares are the commodity. What you already own — your know-how, your relationships, your judgement about your own market — is the scarce ingredient. The job is to put that to work on top of the shared tools, not to buy your way to an edge that's for sale to everyone.

The fulcrum is available to everyone. The lever — experience and culture — is not.

What Lumen is building

This is exactly the change Lumen is built to help with. We are putting together an Adoption & Change Management engine: the technology used sensibly and fluidly, but inside a clear framework run by people who know the subject — so a company can rebuild itself around AI without losing what made it good in the first place. The aim is plain: help your people run their own AI-powered organisation while keeping the know-how and the relationships that are uniquely theirs.

And the bigger picture: over the next few years the edge will not go to whoever buys the most AI. It will go to whoever rebuilds how they work around it, with the right people in the right new roles. AI-first was never a technology decision — it is a structural and human one. We don't follow innovation; we structure it, and we bring the people with us.

Key takeaways

- → Don't add AI to the process — rebuild the process around AI.
- → Then rebuild people's skills; the destination is a hybrid human–AI team.
- → The AI operates; you are its tutor, manager, and compass.
- → Models are available to all; your culture and experience are the real edge.

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