Microsoft

Driving Sustainable AI Adoption

Lessons from Microsoft's Frontier Finance Journey

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Microsoft

Scaling AI adoption through enabling people and innovation.

What is this?

A practical guide of approaches Microsoft Finance has used to scale AI adoption.

Who is this for?

Finance and transformation leaders shaping employee skilling, innovation, and adoption.

How to use this guide:

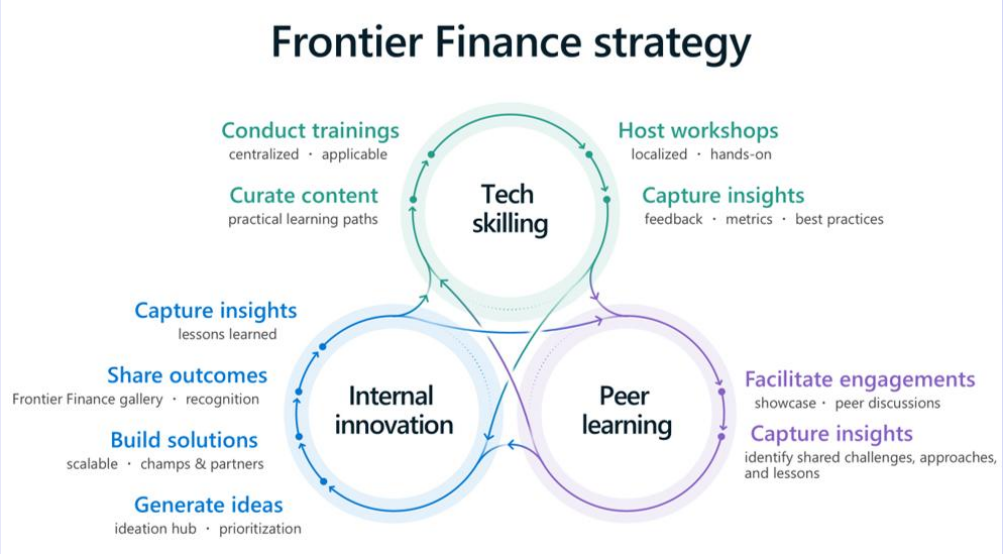
Use this guide to reflect on your organization's AI adoption journey, identify where momentum may be stalling, and adopt lessons from Microsoft Finance into practical next steps for your teams.

Overview

In speaking with Finance leaders from different companies about their AI transformation journeys, we hear from many of them that they have invested in AI but struggle to turn access to the tools into sustained adoption and measurable productivity gains. This guide shares practical lessons from Microsoft Finance's transformation journey to help finance leaders build employee capability, scale innovation, and convert AI adoption into business value.

Microsoft Finance Method

At Microsoft, the Frontier Finance team was created to help our employees learn, experiment, scale solutions, and exchange lessons with peers across organizations. The three interconnected pillars of Frontier Finance create a continuous cycle from learning to innovation to shared best practices:



Tech skilling equips employees to apply AI in daily work through curated content and workshops, **internal innovation** turns those skills into scalable solutions by identifying ideas and helping teams build, and **peer learning** brings Microsoft Finance and leaders from other top companies together to exchange learnings, compare approaches, and identify best practices across organizations and tools.

Together, these pillars inspire the next cycle of transformation both internally and externally.

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What We Learned Along the Way

The following learnings highlight what helped Microsoft Finance move from individual experimentation to broader organizational implementation, along with the groups that helped enable each lesson.

	Why it Matters	Who Enables It
1 Communities scale change	We have a community engagement model of "champs" who are leaders and employees across different teams that become multipliers, helping share best practices, connect employees with resources, and amplify innovation across Finance.	**Senior leaders** appoint team champions and **pillar leads** coordinate learning, innovation, and peer learning efforts across the community.
2 Accessible resources enable learning	Self-paced learning, live demos, workshops, office hours, and updated content provide continuous learning opportunities to meet employees where they are in their AI journeys.	**Learning leads** provide tech skilling curriculum, and **managers** encourage setting aside time for learning.
3 Innovation needs pathways	Employees are more likely to contribute ideas when there are clear mechanisms for discovering solutions, sharing knowledge, and scaling successful innovations.	**Innovation leads** and **IT teams** help foster ideas, accelerate development, and scale solutions.
4 Leadership buy-in matters	Adoption accelerates when leaders reinforce priorities, model new behaviors, and encourage experimentation. Microsoft Finance's transformation journey balances leadership vision with grassroots enthusiasm.	**Executive** and **business leaders** amplify priorities, model behaviors, and encourage experimentation.
5 Recognition drives momentum	Celebrating key contributors and innovations help amplify good ideas and encourage broader participation.	**Executive** and **business leaders** recognize contributors and make innovation visible.

Questions to ask during an AI transformation:

- Who is accountable for driving AI adoption across the organization?
- How can leaders model the behaviors they want to see in their teams?
- What mechanisms can enable employees to adopt new ways of working, and how can they be implemented?
- What skills and behaviors will be most important for employees to thrive in an AI-enabled workplace?

Five Actions to Accelerate AI Adoption

1. Build AI champion network. Identify an executive sponsor for AI adoption and a group of AI champions across business units to drive adoption locally.

2. Invest in learning. Provide employees with protected time, role-based training, office hours, and peer forums that help apply AI to real business scenarios.

3. Create pathways for innovation. Establish mechanisms, such as a central AI resource hub, to capture opportunities, prioritize high-value ideas, and connect innovators with the right support.

4. Celebrate success and share stories. Recognize and incentivize individuals and teams that are driving adoption, sharing knowledge, and delivering impact. Use their stories to demonstrate what is possible and inspire others to participate.

5. Define success and adapt based on outcomes. Establish clear measures of success and regularly assess progress using indicators such as cost savings, productivity gains, employee satisfaction, decision quality, or process efficiency.

Sustainable AI adoption does not come from technology access alone. It requires leadership, learning, innovation pathways, and reinforcement mechanisms that embed new ways of working into the fabric of the organization.

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