Navigating Hesitant Adoption: Unveiling Barriers and Enablers for Generative AI Adoption By Mid-Level Leaders

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Abstract

Generative AI (Gen AI) holds significant promise for private sector organizations, yet its adoption by mid-level leaders—those managers with frontline leaders reporting to them—is critical to the success of digital transformation efforts. Many mid-level leaders engage with Gen AI only sporadically, superficially, or with limited confidence, reducing its potential organizational impact. Without clear insight into what both hinders and enables adoption at this level of the hierarchy, companies risk underutilizing their technology investments and falling short of key performance goals. This qualitative research seeks to explore the nuanced factors influencing Gen AI adoption within this critical managerial level, utilizing the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) as the theoretical framework.Through a qualitative approach comprising a qualifying survey and in-depth interviews with mid-level managers, this study examines the interplay of individual, technological, and organizational dynamics that enable or hinder Gen AI adoption. The study further investigates how mid-level leaders can act as key enablers, effectively influencing their teams of frontline leaders to embrace and utilize Gen AI.The findings of this research aim to contribute actionable insights for organizations to bridge the gap in technology adoption at the mid-level leader level, ensuring better alignment with digital transformation goals. By shedding light on the drivers and barriers to Gen AI adoption, this study strives to understand a culture of technological confidence and sophistication among mid-level leaders.

Keywords
Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI), Technology Adoption, Mid-level Leaders, Technology Acceptance Model, Digital Transformation

Biographies
Dr. Debra ("Debbie") Frank joined Florida Polytechnic University in 2025 as an Assistant Professor of Data Science and Business Analytics. With over seven years of teaching experience in business and accounting courses and 15 years as an accountant, she brings a wealth of practical insights into her academic work. Debbie's research focuses on entrepreneurship and organizational management, exploring innovative strategies to enhance business performance and leadership practices. Debbie earned her Doctor of Business Administration from the University of South Florida,

alongside a Master of Accounting & Taxation, a Master of Business Administration, and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Florida Gulf Coast University. She is both a Certified Public Accountant and an Enrolled Agent, exemplifying her expertise in taxation and financial management. Debbie is a dedicated mentor committed to empowering students through dynamic, real-world-focused learning experiences. She actively advocates for innovative teaching practices that bridge academic knowledge with professional growth. Her contributions aim to inspire both students and professionals in the evolving landscape of business and organizational excellence.

Dr. Gregory ("Gregg") Kober is a Talent Development Consultant and Researcher who has spent more than 20 years designing and facilitating change in Fortune 2000 organizations to improve their success during turbulent times. His passion is partnering with clients to develop their most valuable assets – their current and future leaders. Gregg has held both management and individual contributor roles but his focus through all these positions has been on improving the practice of management and its impact in a changing world. Gregg is currently a Director of Global Solutions-Americas with Harvard Business Publishing's Corporate Learning Group. Global Solutions designs, develops, and delivers customized leadership solutions that leverage Harvard Business School's research-based ideas and educational technologies to positively impact organizations' business priorities at scale and around the globe. Dr. Kober earned his Doctor of Business Administration from the University of South Florida. He has also earned a Master of Public Health degree from Drexel University, Master of Education degree from The Pennsylvania State University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Franklin and Marshall College.