EBOOK · A4 · 16 PP
2026 / EDITION 01

A PRACTITIONER'S PLAYBOOK

Four pillars. Five levels.

One diagnostic that forces a decision.

01	02	03	04
A	D	A	M

Mikołaj Salecki

Digital consultant

salecki

v1.0

MAY 2026 · 16 PP

ADAM Framework Playbook.

AUTHOR

Mikołaj Salecki
Digital consultant

SUBJECT

Digital strategy
Organizational diagnostics
Operations

EDITION

v1.0 · May 2026
16 pages · A4
Digital PDF

READING TIME

Approx. 30–40 minutes end-to-end. The 4×5 matrix on page 11 is the artifact you'll reuse.

HOW TO READ

Read sequentially the first time. Return via the index. Use the matrix as a quarterly artifact, not a one-time exercise.

Why *a framework.*

Strategy is the choice. A framework is the test that protects the choice from wishful thinking.

Strategic decisions are rarely made. They are *arrived at*—through inertia, through whoever's voice carries the room, through the path that requires the least disagreement. The decision that gets executed is usually the decision that was easiest to talk about.

A framework is the disagreement, written down in advance. Its only job is to make it harder for a business to lie to itself about which floor of the building is on fire. A model that cannot make leadership uncomfortable is decoration with footnotes.

ADAM is four pillars and five levels. The pillars—**AI, Digital, Automation, Measurement**—are not equally weighted. They are equally **necessary**. A business strong on three and weak on one is not 75 percent of the way there. It is fragile in exactly the dimension nobody is watching, and the failures it produces are predictable.

The model does three things, in order. It defines the four pillars precisely enough that a team can disagree about a specific one. It maps each pillar onto a five-level ladder so position can be argued from evidence, not impression. It collapses both into a single 4×5 matrix that fits on one A4 sheet and forces one decision per quarter.

The decisions the framework forces are unglamorous by design. Which pillar to leave alone this quarter. Which standing meeting to cancel. Which initiative to defund so another can move. The model does not choose the bold path. It chooses the next path. Boldness compounds when discipline is in front of it.

What the framework refuses to do matters as much. It does not measure strategy—that work belongs upstream. It does not measure intent. It does not credit good people for trying. It reads what the operational machinery is actually producing, and it refuses to flatter what it finds.

The model is small on purpose. A framework large enough to describe everything ends up being used to describe nothing. ADAM is small enough to be remembered—and to be acted on before next quarter starts.

For my three.

Mikołaj Salecki

MAY 2026

Four pillars, *one decision.*

Every business already runs on all four. The only question is which one is quietly making the others useless.

01 / 04	02 / 04	03 / 04	04 / 04
A	**D**	**A**	**M**
AI	**Digital**	**Automation**	**Measurement**
The capability layer. Models, prompts, agents.	*Strategy, channels, data infrastructure as one engine.*	*The orchestration layer. Connect AI to the systems.*	*The feedback loop. System performance plus adoption.*

Every business runs on AI, Digital, Automation, and Measurement—not by choice, by gravity. Someone is using a model in a browser tab. Some workflow is automated, however badly. Some metric is being looked at, however selectively. The pillars describe what is **already happening**. The framework asks how well, how owned, how visible.

The four are interdependent in a specific direction. Digital is the floor: the platform, the channels, the data on which the rest stands. Automation is the connective tissue between systems. AI is the capability that adds intelligence to that work. Measurement is the loop that decides whether any of it is helping. Each pillar earns interest only when the one beneath it can support its weight.

AI vs. Automation

The two A's in ADAM use overlapping tools. They are not the same pillar. **AI is the capability layer**: where intelligence is added—generation, classification, reasoning. **Automation is the orchestration layer**: the connective tissue that links those capabilities to systems already running.

A workflow that triggers when a form arrives, validates input, and stores it is automation. The same workflow, asking a model to classify the lead and draft the reply, has *AI inside automation*. Both pillars are present, doing different jobs at different layers. Conflating them is one of the cleanest ways to overspend on intelligence while underbuilding the rails.

Why these four

Frameworks that list culture or talent as separate pillars are not wrong. They measure something different. ADAM is **operational**. The human element shows up explicitly in **Measurement**, which covers two halves—what the system does, and what the team does with it.

Four pillars is the smallest set that maps both the technology and the feedback loop deciding whether the technology is working. A fifth would not be wrong. It would be unaffordable.

Five levels, *one position.*

Each pillar is rated on the same five-level ladder. A business sits at one level per pillar—no averaging, no aspirational placement.

01 Reactive

TOOLS, NO POSTURE

Capability exists because someone bought it once. *No owner, no review cadence, no roadmap.* The pillar runs on whatever happens to happen, and breaks the same way.

02 Aware

NAMED, NOT LED

An owner exists on the org chart. Reporting is sporadic and qualitative. *Decisions still rely on senior intuition.* Procurement happened. Adoption did not.

03 Capable

OPERATIONALIZED

Workflows are documented. Outputs are measured. *No single person carries the pillar.* Failures become visible before they become expensive.

04 Strategic

DRIVES DECISIONS

The pillar feeds quarterly planning. Trade-offs are made on its data. *Investment decisions cite it explicitly*—a roadmap, not a hope.

05 Optimized

COMPOUNDING

Improvement cycles are short. The pillar improves itself through structured experiments. *The advantage is the pace*, and the pace compounds quarterly.

PRINCIPLE 03

Strengthen the *weakest* pillar first. Always.

A business strong on three pillars and weak on one is not 75 percent of the way there. It is fragile in exactly the dimension nobody is watching. Resources allocated to the strongest pillar return the least; resources allocated to the weakest pillar return the most. The math is uncomfortable. The discipline more so.

A

PILLAR 01 OF 04

A is for *AI.*

The capability layer. Where intelligence enters the work—through prompts, through models, through agents that decide.

AI is not a tool category. It is not a vendor category. The right question is not which AI you have bought, but where in the work intelligence is doing something a human used to do, and how well that handover is measured.

The pillar moves through three stages. **Assistive** intelligence surfaces options for a human to pick from. **Augmentative** intelligence completes tasks the human signs off on. **Agentic** intelligence executes multi-step work with bounded autonomy. Most teams operate at assistive and describe themselves as agentic. The language costs them clarity about what they actually have.

The honest test of AI maturity is not the stack. It is whether a leader can name three places where intelligence changed an outcome, point to who owns each, and quote the metric that proved it. If those three sentences are difficult, the AI investment is decoration.

The capability layer cannot be stronger than the data layer beneath it. AI inherits the precision of the records it reads, the cleanliness of the workflows it joins, the consistency of the policies that govern its access. A team that wants Level 4 AI without Level 3 Digital is buying a sports car with a flat tire.

Written AI policy is the unglamorous Level 2 to 3 marker. Not a procurement document. Not a compliance checklist. A one-page document describing what staff may use, on what data, with what oversight. Most teams discover during the audit that this document does not exist. That discovery is the audit's first useful output.

AI does not survive without the other three pillars. AI on broken digital inherits the broken data below it. AI without measurement is unverifiable. AI without automation is a co-pilot that needs a human passenger every time it flies.

IN PRACTICE

Custom AI Agents · LLM Integration · Generative Content Pipelines · Predictive Analytics · AI Governance · Rapid Prototyping.

SELF-DIAGNOSTIC / 5 QUESTIONS

01 Can you name three places where AI **changed an outcome** last quarter, with evidence?

02 Is there a written AI policy that staff have read, with one named owner?

03 If a model your team relies on changed pricing tomorrow, who notices and who decides?

04 Are AI use cases tied to a **business metric**—revenue, hours, error rate—or to “AI adoption”?

05 What was the last AI experiment that **failed**, and what did the team learn?

D

PILLAR 02 OF 04

D is for *Digital.*

The platform the rest sits on. Strategy, channels, and data infrastructure working as one engine—or as a folder of subscriptions that share a logo on the procurement page.

There is a difference between digital ownership and digital fluency. **Ownership** is the count of subscriptions a company has. **Fluency** is the depth at which the people inside use them. The first is a procurement output. The second is a capability. They are not the same, and the gap between them is where most budget quietly evaporates.

The visible test is the SaaS ledger. Most operations carry many tools they paid for, partially set up, and never made central to a workflow. The handful used daily by the team that owns them—those are the digital pillar. The rest are accounting weight pretending to be capability.

Every function needs one tool of record—one place where the truth lives. Customers in the CRM. Transactions in the ERP. Process in the wiki. When a function has two tools of record, it has two truths, and reconciliation becomes a permanent task. Most digital indebtedness is mechanically the proliferation of competing tools of record.

The growth move on this pillar is consolidation, not expansion. Fifteen well-used tools defeat 40 half-used ones. The path from Level 1 to Level 3 in most organizations runs through a procurement audit followed by retirement—never through addition. This looks like a budget cut and feels like a step backwards. It is neither. Announce the retirement list before the migration date; the slowdown that follows a surprise removal is the political cost the budget cut never priced in.

Digital fluency is also where Automation begins. The clearest sign that a team has crossed Level 2 is when manual data-copying between systems stops. That moment is undramatic, often invisible to the people doing it, and one of the cleanest transitions in the whole framework.

A digitally fluent team can swap a tool without disrupting the work. A digitally indebted team cannot, because the workflow lives in someone's head, not in the platform. The first is resilience. The second is one resignation away from a regression.

IN PRACTICE

Digital Audits · Growth Strategy · Channel Mix Planning · Vision and Roadmap · Business Alignment · STDC and RACE Workshops.

SELF-DIAGNOSTIC / 5 QUESTIONS

01 How many active subscriptions do you pay for, and what is the **active use rate** of each?

02 If a key person left tomorrow, would the digital workflow they own still work?

03 Can a non-technical manager **find an answer** to a routine question in under five minutes, alone?

04 When was the last time you **retired** a tool because it stopped serving the work?

05 Is your data flowing between systems automatically, or are humans the integration layer?

A

PILLAR 03 OF 04

A is for *Automation.*

The orchestration layer. The connective tissue that turns AI capability and digital tools into work that happens without anyone touching it.

If AI is **what intelligence is added**, Automation is **which work happens unattended**. The two share tools and overlap in practice. They are different pillars because they answer different questions, and conflating them is one of the cleanest ways to overspend on intelligence while underbuilding the rails.

Automation is the only pillar where every well-built piece earns interest forever. A documented automation that saves four hours a week saves them every week, until the underlying system changes. The compounding is real. So is the inverse: a flow that breaks silently and routes wrong information for weeks creates a debt that takes longer to pay back than building it correctly would have taken.

Automation that fails loudly is a feature. Automation that fails silently is a liability. The difference is monitoring. A flow that emails an owner when it breaks is a flow worth keeping. A flow that quietly routes invoices to the wrong account has earned more in damage than it ever saved in time.

The unglamorous starting move is the audit. Every flow gets a name, an owner, a trigger, an output, and a failure path. The first audit always finds at least one critical workflow with no named owner and no monitoring. Finding it is the point.

The mid-market automation stack is almost never a single platform. It is one tool in one team, another in another, scripts on a founder's laptop, an overflow tool, and a spreadsheet that emails itself for reasons no one remembers. Coherence is not the goal. Inventory is. A stack you cannot describe is a stack that will surprise you.

The healthy ratio of build to maintain on this pillar is roughly two to one. Teams default to all-build and discover the maintenance debt the hard way—usually on a Friday, when the flow that books invoices stops working and nobody can remember who owns it.

IN PRACTICE

Workflow Automation · Automated Reporting Pipelines · Lead Routing · Content Publishing · Data Syncing · Tool Integration · Process Automation.

SELF-DIAGNOSTIC / 5 QUESTIONS

01 Name three workflows that ran **last week** without a human touching them. Can you?

02 If the most-used automation broke at 9 a.m. Monday, when would you find out?

03 Who **owns** each automation, and where is it documented?

04 How many hours a week do staff spend **copying data** between systems?

05 When a new automation is built, is the **monitoring** built with it?

M

PILLAR 04 OF 04

M is for *Measurement.*

The feedback loop that closes the other three. Two halves—system performance and organizational adoption. The pillar that includes the human element.

A dashboard does not improve a business. It shows the business it cannot lie to itself any longer. The improvement comes from the decisions that follow, made faster than they used to be, by people who can no longer pretend the data is somewhere else.

Measurement covers two halves, deliberately. **System performance** is the obvious one—analytics, KPIs, hours saved, error rates, the things that fit a quarterly review. **Organizational adoption** is the second—how fluent the team is, how fast a tool stops needing a champion, how many people on the org chart can read the dashboard without being walked through it.

For each pillar there should be one number a leader would defend on a Monday morning. Not five. One. A dashboard with 30 metrics has none of them—30 things to look at is the same as nothing to look at, and the meeting that reviews it becomes a recital.

Adoption metrics are the second-hardest thing to measure here. Not because they are technically complex, but because they require the team to expose itself. Tool usage rates. Time-to-productivity for new hires. Number of people who can run a workflow unsupervised. These measurements are uncomfortable because the answers are usually worse than leadership's intuition. That discomfort is the diagnostic.

The hidden metric of the pillar is **decision lag**—the time between data showing a problem and someone deciding about it. Most operations run a four-to-six-week lag and call it normal. Compressing the lag is mostly an organizational decision about who is allowed to act on what without a meeting. The technology is the easy part.

If the dashboard never makes leadership uncomfortable, it is decoration. The discomfort is the point.

IN PRACTICE

Web Analytics Audits · Tag Management (incl. Server-Side) · BI Dashboards · CRO · Behavioral Analytics · KPI Frameworks · Analytics Infrastructure · Performance Evidence.

SELF-DIAGNOSTIC / 5 QUESTIONS

01 What is the **one number** for each pillar that you would put on a single A4 sheet?

02 How long is the lag between a metric showing a problem and someone deciding about it?

03 Is your team's **AI fluency** measured, or only the tooling spend?

04 When was the last time a metric on your dashboard **changed a decision**?

05 Who reviews each metric, and what action are they empowered to take?

Plot yourself, *honestly.*

The whole framework collapses into one A4 sheet. Mark a level per pillar. Read the lowest cell. Plan accordingly.

PILLAR	L1 REACTIVE	L2 AWARE	L3 CAPABLE	L4 STRATEGIC	L5 OPTIMIZED
A	Free tools, no policy. Shadow use across teams.	Licenses bought. Adoption sporadic. No owner.	Use cases owned. Outcomes measured per case.	AI roadmap tied to OKRs. Lead in place.	Agentic in production. Self-improving loop.
D	Tools bought once. Email is the integration layer.	Inventory exists. Power users carry the team.	Documented flows. Adoption above the threshold.	Stack rationalized quarterly. Data flows by design.	Tool swaps painless. Onboarding measured in days.
A	Two flows from years ago. One owner, undocumented.	A few flows. No inventory. No monitoring.	Inventory, owners, failure paths documented.	Hours-saved tracked. Default is to automate.	Self-healing flows. Versioned and tested like code.
M	Reports on request. Decisions on instinct.	Dashboards exist. Action is sporadic.	One number per pillar. Owners named.	Adoption tracked alongside performance.	Decision lag in hours. Predictive alerts live.

HOW TO USE IT

For each row, mark one cell honestly. Not the cell you wish you were in. The cell a stranger running the diagnostic would mark for you. The yellow cells here are an *illustrative profile*, not a target—your own profile will look different.

WHAT THE PROFILE TELLS YOU

Read the lowest cell. *That* is your constraint, regardless of how strong the others are. The next quarter's work is to lift that pillar by exactly one level—not two, not three. **One level, well, in one quarter.**

PRINCIPLE 07

The *dashboard* is not the work. It is the *mirror* the work has to face.

Measurement does not improve a business. It shows a business it cannot lie to itself any longer. The improvement comes from the decisions that follow—made faster than they used to be, by people who can no longer pretend the data is somewhere else.

Eight failure *patterns.*

Recurring shapes in the operational machinery. None unique to any single business. All avoidable once named.

01

AI bolted on top of broken digital.

A model recommending answers on data nobody has standardized. AI inherits the floor below it. Fix the floor first.

02

Automation without measurement.

A flow runs for a year. Nobody knows whether it saved hours or routed wrong. Both are equally probable.

03

The dashboard graveyard.

Thirty metrics, four reviews per year, zero decisions changed. The dashboard is decoration looking for a meeting.

04

The pilot that never ends.

An experiment in its third quarter, still labeled “pilot.” Pilots that do not graduate are graveyards with branding.

05

ROI math without a baseline.

A claim of saving 30 percent. Of what? Against when? Without a baseline the percentage is fiction with decimals.

06

Tooling without ownership.

A platform is bought. The vendor implements. Six months later, no one can answer “who owns this?”—the tool decays.

07

The hero engineer.

One person built every automation, knows every system, is the bottleneck for any change. Pair-document before you lift—the runbook is the deliverable, not the migration.

08

Optimizing the wrong pillar.

The meta-pattern. Resources flow to the strongest pillar where the team feels confident, while the weakest invalidates the rest.

A 90-day plan that *survives reality.*

Three phases of 30 days. One pillar lifted by exactly one level. No more, no parallel.

DAYS 01-30 · PHASE 01

Diagnose.

Run the matrix honestly. Find the constraint. Resist the urge to start fixing while you still have things to learn.

- → Run the **4×5 matrix** with three people who would disagree.
- → Inventory every tool, automation, and dashboard. **Audit, do not fix.**
- → Identify the **one pillar** at the lowest level. That is the constraint.
- → Define the **one metric** that proves a one-level lift.
- → Document the **status quo** for the constraint pillar—one sheet, no embellishment.
- → Read the **last quarter's calendar**. Where did the time actually go?
- → Name **two people** who would defend opposite views on the diagnosis.

The audit is the deliverable, not the agenda. Most teams skip it because finding nothing wrong feels like wasted time. Finding nothing wrong is itself the diagnosis: the work did not need to start here.

DAYS 31-60 · PHASE 02

Lift.

One pillar, one level, in 30 working days. Exclude every other improvement—especially the ones that feel productive.

- → Pick **three concrete moves** from the level-up checklist for that pillar.
- → Assign **one named owner** per move. No committees, no shared accountability.
- → Communicate to the rest of the org what is **not happening** this quarter.
- → Block the standing meetings that will try to absorb this work.
- → Set a **15-minute weekly check-in** —status only, not discussion.
- → Document **every change** before deploying it. Reversible by default.
- → Decline every **adjacent improvement** that would dilute the focus.

The defended quarter is the discipline. Lifting one pillar by one level is harder than it sounds, because the org will reflexively try to absorb the work into adjacent initiatives. Defending the focus is most of the work.

DAYS 61-90 · PHASE 03

Verify.

Did the metric actually move? If yes, lock in and re-diagnose. If no, find out why before scaling anything.

- → Re-measure the **one metric**. Did it actually move—or did the noise?
- → Document what worked, what did not, and what was discovered along the way.
- → Re-run the matrix. The constraint may have **moved to a new pillar**.
- → Capture **what surprised the team**. Surprise is the data the diagnostic missed.
- → If the metric did not move, identify the **binding constraint**, not the next pillar.
- → Decide: re-run the same pillar another quarter, or rotate to the new constraint?
- → Plan the next 90 days against the **new** constraint, not the old roadmap.

Verification is where most rollouts collapse. The metric not moving is information; the metric moving without an explanation is the more dangerous outcome. Evidence beats narrative every time.

The cadence is deliberately slow. **Three quarters of disciplined, single-pillar lifts** outperform a year of simultaneous initiatives. The compounding is in the discipline, not the surface area.

What this model *leaves out.*

*Every framework is a set of choices about what to ignore.
Knowing what ADAM does not measure is part of using it well.*

- **ADAM measures operational machinery.**

  It does not measure strategy. The decision of where to compete, what to build, who to serve—those belong elsewhere, with OKRs, funnel models, or whatever method leadership uses to choose. ADAM diagnoses whether the machinery beneath those choices can execute them.

- **The model does not credit good intentions.**

  A team can be honest, motivated, well-led, and still sit at Level 2 across all four pillars. The diagnostic reads what the system produces, not what the people are trying to do.

- **The model does not measure pace.**

  A pillar can be lifted by one level in 30 days. It can also take a year. Pace is a function of organizational will—not something a diagnostic can install.

- **The model does not measure governance.**

  When the matrix cannot reduce to one cell per pillar, the constraint is decision rights, not measurement. The framework names that as a finding, not a failure.

- **The model does not measure courage.**

  The diagnosis only matters if the next quarter's calendar reflects it. Most matrices end up taped to a wall and forgotten by month two—not because the diagnosis was wrong, but because the meeting that would have actioned it was the same meeting that was always going to absorb it.

01.

Diagnose. The matrix takes one hour with two people who would disagree. The disagreement is the diagnostic.

02.

Decide. One pillar. One metric. One quarter. The model only earns its keep when it forces a choice.

03.

Defend. Block the standing meeting that will try to absorb the work. The framework's value is everything it stops you doing.

A framework only works if it forces a decision. The rest is decoration.

— FOREWORD, PAGE 03

CONTACT

Mikołaj Salecki

Digital consultant

hi@salecki.digital

salecki.digital

salecki