

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

When an AI Initiative Dies, the Machine Takes the Blame. A New Book Argues It's Almost Always the Wrong Suspect.

In PREVAIL (Wiley, January 14, 2027), strategy advisor and Wall Street Journal bestselling author Tim Bottke turns two decades of transformation work into a working diagnostic for why AI initiatives break down — and what leaders must do differently.

Every executive who has quietly shelved an AI project has the same explanation ready: the model underperformed, the vendor oversold, the technology “wasn’t there yet.” In **PREVAIL: What Leaders Must Do Now Because Machines Can’t Manage**, Tim Bottke argues that this story is a convenient way to avoid the real culprit — a chain of management decisions made long before anyone trained a model.

“The bug isn’t in the technology. It’s in us,” Bottke says. “I have sat in the steering committees. Nobody ever presents the slide that says the problem was never defined. The machine cannot defend itself, so it takes the blame. It is almost always the wrong suspect.”

The book moves through the management questions that decide AI outcomes before the first model is trained — problem definition, data, experimentation, ownership, measurement, lifecycle discipline, and the new question of agents: what machines may do alone, and where a human must stay in the loop. Chapter checklists turn the argument into a working audit, with action lists for the operator fixing a rollout, the executive shaping a portfolio, and the board member stress-testing a proposal.

Bottke is a Senior Strategy Partner at Deloitte and its Global Sector Leader for Telecom, Media & Entertainment, and Sports. He has taught at leading European business schools and was named to the Thinkers50 Radar Class of 2026. His first book, *Digital Transformation Payday* (Wiley), reached #2 on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list.

PREVAIL publishes in hardcover and ebook on January 14, 2027 (US); international editions follow in approximately March 2027. Pre-orders are open at all major retailers. ISBN 978-1-394-45493-8.

Press contact: press@prevailthebook.com · Review copies & interview requests welcome

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Bottke

**Short bio (60 words)**

Tim Bottke is a Senior Strategy Partner at Deloitte and its Global Sector Leader for Telecom, Media & Entertainment, and Sports. He has taught at leading European business schools and is a Thinkers50 Radar Class of 2026 honoree. His first book, *Digital Transformation Payday*, reached #2 on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list.

Full bio

Tim Bottke is a Senior Strategy Partner at Deloitte and its Global Sector Leader for Telecom, Media & Entertainment, and Sports. For more than 25 years he has advised boards and top management on strategy and large-scale transformation, working with clients in more than 20 countries.

He has also taught strategy and digital transformation at leading European business schools, and was named to the Thinkers50 Radar Class of 2026 — the list of management thinkers most likely to shape the future of how organizations are led.

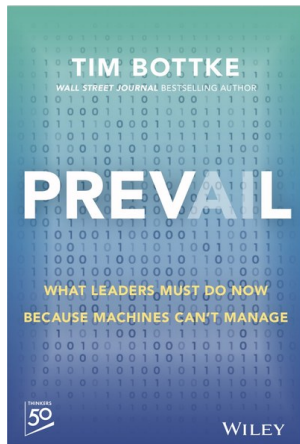
His first book, *Digital Transformation Payday* (Wiley), reached #2 on the Wall Street Journal bestseller list. His new book, *PREVAIL: What Leaders Must Do Now Because Machines Can't Manage* (Wiley, January 2027), is a working diagnostic for why AI initiatives break down — and what leaders must do differently, starting with the management decisions made long before anyone trains a model.

He lives in Munich.

High-resolution photography and the cover image are available on request. Press contact: press@prevailthebook.com
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AT A GLANCE

PREVAIL — Fact Sheet



Title	PREVAIL
Subtitle	What Leaders Must Do Now Because Machines Can't Manage
Author	Tim Bottke
Publisher	Wiley
Publication	January 14, 2027 (US) · international approx. March 2027
Formats	Hardcover · eBook
ISBN	978-1-394-45493-8
Audience	Executives, boards, investors, and operators running AI programs

The book in one paragraph

When an AI initiative dies, the machine takes the blame — and it is almost always the wrong suspect. PREVAIL locates the real cause in a chain of management decisions made long before anyone trains a model, and turns that argument into a working diagnostic: chapter checklists for a working audit, action lists for operators, executives, and boards, and a shared vocabulary to pressure-test any AI proposal before the budget is committed.

The seven questions — one per chapter

“Problem first, or tool first?” · “Right data, or just data?” · “Experiment, or just ship?” · “Vacuum at the top?” · “Any number the CFO trusts?” · “Is anyone still watching?” · “Left a human in the loop?” — the first letters spell the title. The word on the cover is the checklist.

Written for three rooms

The operator fixing a rollout that quietly stalled. The executive shaping a portfolio. The board member or investor stress-testing what management presents. Each chapter closes with action lists for all three.

Background

The book’s argument is grounded in more than two decades of transformation work with listed companies and in the author’s systematic reading of how firms themselves describe AI setbacks in their public disclosures. A methodology note is available for journalists on request.

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INTERVIEW MATERIAL — MAY BE QUOTED

Q&A with Tim Bottke

Author of PREVAIL: What Leaders Must Do Now Because Machines Can't Manage (Wiley, January 14, 2027)

Q: The book started with a three-word message. What was it?

“Time to update?” No preamble, no hope-you-are-well. Someone I had met at a talk for my previous book was asking for the next one. He was not the first. The honest answer was that the world had changed — everyone was suddenly running AI programs — but the way those programs were being managed had not changed at all. That gap is the book.

Q: The subtitle says machines can't manage. Isn't that exactly what AI vendors promise?

They promise it loudly. And look, the technology is genuinely remarkable — that is not the argument. The argument is that no model defines the problem, owns the outcome, or decides what a number is worth to the business. Those are management acts. When they are skipped, the initiative breaks down, and the machine — which cannot defend itself — takes the blame. I have sat in those steering committees. Nobody presents the slide that says the problem was never defined.

Q: Where do AI initiatives actually break down?

Earlier than anyone wants to admit. The damage concentrates at the start — reaching for the tool before naming the problem — and then it compounds, because every decision after that is built on the first one. By the time the dashboard turns red, you are looking at the fourth or fifth consequence of a choice made a year earlier. That is why the book is a sequence, not a list of tips. Fix the sequence, not the technology.

Q: What should a board ask at its next AI review?

One question predicts success better than anything: what problem does this solve? Ask it about the flagship initiative and watch the room. If the answer is fluent, you are in decent shape. If there is a pause — and in my experience the pause is more common than anyone admits — that pause is the finding. The book gives boards a full battery of questions, but that one carries the most weight.

Q: The last chapter is about agents. What changes when AI starts acting on its own?

Speed, mostly. An agent takes the quality of your management decisions and executes them at machine pace — including the bad ones. If the problem is well defined and the boundaries are written down, agents are a gift. If not, you have automated your confusion. Hence the chapter's question: left a human in the loop? It is the one question that gets harder, not easier, as the technology improves.

Q: What do you want a reader to do differently on Monday?

Ask the questions, in order, out loud, with the people who build and run the systems in the room. Not a committee — a conversation. The questioning is the leader's job. It always was. Do that honestly and the word on the cover stops being a claim: you prevail because the management did, not the machine.

Long-form interviews, podcast appearances, and keynote inquiries welcome. Press contact: press@prevailthebook.com
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FOR JOURNALISTS — BACKGROUND

How the Research Behind PREVAIL Was Built

PREVAIL is a leadership book first: its argument is about management decisions, and its tools are questions, checklists, and action lists. The empirical work sits underneath as foundation. For journalists who want that foundation, here is what was done, in plain language.

The corpus

18,130 publicly available company filings from 978 NYSE-listed companies, covering 2021 through early 2026. The pipeline reads the three narrative sections of these filings — the places where firms describe, in their own carefully chosen words, what is happening to their technology programs.

The pipeline

The filings were screened for paragraphs that discuss AI — 3,518 of them. These went through filtering and two-stage LLM classification, followed by the part no one automates: every flagged paragraph was read by a human, line by line, over a three-week stretch. At the confirmed and probable tiers, that review found 100 percent binary precision and zero false positives — every filing the pipeline flagged as a high-confidence AI breakdown was, in fact, an AI breakdown when read independently. 48 filings from 29 companies remained: validated breakdown signals, written by the firms themselves under securities-law disclosure obligations.

What the language shows

Filing language is flat, but precise in ways that reward close reading. Companies rarely announce AI breakdowns in those terms; the signal sits in what the language does. Three recurring patterns: **operational silence** (the program works; the language integrates into segment results), **slow fade** (enthusiasm decaying quarter by quarter, no announcement, no continued investment), and **conspicuous absence** (language that appeared for quarters, then vanished without explanation).

What this note deliberately leaves out

The book reports its statistical findings with their full uncertainty — including which results survive conservative corrections and which remain suggestive. Those nuances do not compress honestly into a press summary, so this note does not attempt it. Journalists writing about the empirical results are asked to work from the book's appendices, which state every limitation explicitly, and are welcome to contact the author for methodology interviews.

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