

AI Could Improve Your Projects - Or Make Them Harder

Two things owners should watch as AI moves from the enterprise to the jobsite

By Sue Dyer

An owner managing hundreds of projects has a powerful reason to be interested in AI. Better visibility across the program. Earlier warning when projects drift. Faster access to information. Less administrative work. Better decisions across a large portfolio.

Those possibilities are real. But owners also have unusual leverage over how AI enters a project. The systems they select, the information they require, and the decisions they centralize can either make work easier at the project level - or quietly make it harder.

Two patterns deserve special attention: AI that increases the burden on the field, and AI that pulls decision-making farther away from the people closest to the work.

1. Watch the Burden You Push to the Field

The first question an owner should ask about any AI implementation is simple: What does this require from the people doing the work?

Construction already asks project teams to feed many systems. Daily reports, schedule updates, safety records, progress photographs, cost information, quality documentation, RFIs, submittals, owner reports, and countless other project records all compete for attention. Each requirement may make sense on its own. Together, they can create a heavy administrative load.

AI can reduce that burden. It can help turn a voice note into a structured record, organize information that has already been captured, summarize recurring issues, and reduce the need to type or re-enter the same information in several places.

But AI can also create the opposite result. A new dashboard may require another field to be completed. A new analytics system may depend on information that someone at the project level now has to produce. A corporate AI initiative may promise better visibility to leadership while the field quietly absorbs the extra work required to feed it.

If the field has to do more work so the enterprise can see more, the implementation may be improving visibility while reducing productivity.

Ask Whether AI Removes Work or Creates More of It

Before rolling out a new AI workflow, owners can test it against a few practical questions:

- Does this make information easier to capture at the source?
- Does it eliminate duplicate entry or create another place to enter information?
- Does it save time for the superintendent, foreman, project engineer, or PM who will actually use it?
- Have the people closest to the work tested it before it becomes a requirement?
- Can we point to work that disappears because this system exists?

If better data requires more administrative effort from already overloaded project teams, the owner may be improving the reporting system while making the project itself harder to run.

2. Watch Decision-Making Drift Away From the Project

The second risk is less visible. As AI gives owners and executives more information, it can create a strong temptation to make more decisions from farther away.

A program dashboard may show schedule movement across hundreds of projects. An AI system may flag cost variance, unanswered issues, delayed approvals, or patterns across the portfolio. That visibility is useful. But visibility is not the same thing as context.

A project team knows what happened in yesterday's coordination meeting. It knows which trade is struggling, what temporary workaround is keeping the work moving, why a sequence changed, and which relationship needs careful handling. Much of that context is difficult to see from a program-level screen.

When decision authority moves upward because information becomes easier to see, the field can end up responsible for two jobs: doing the work and continuously explaining enough of the work for someone farther away to decide what should happen next.

That can slow the very responsiveness AI was supposed to improve.

Use AI to Strengthen Project-Level Judgment

A better goal is not to use AI to move every decision upward. It is to use AI to help the right decision happen faster at the right level.

That may mean giving project teams quicker access to prior decisions, surfacing open issues before they become constraints, organizing information across meetings and records, or helping a PM see patterns that would otherwise take hours to reconstruct.

For owners, the leadership question becomes: Which decisions genuinely belong at the program level, and which are better made by the people who understand the immediate project conditions?

AI should improve the quality of local judgment, not automatically replace it with centralized oversight.

A Simple Owner Test

When an owner is considering an AI system or new information requirement, two questions can reveal a great deal:

- Does this reduce burden for the people closest to the work?
- Does this help decisions happen closer to where the knowledge and consequences actually live?

If the answer to both is yes, the technology is likely moving in the right direction. If the system creates more reporting and moves more authority away from the project, it may be adding complexity even if the dashboard looks impressive.

The Owner Has More Influence Than the Technology

Owners have enormous influence over the future of AI in construction because their requirements often shape the systems, records, and behaviors used across the entire project team.

That makes implementation choices consequential. A requirement intended to create visibility can become another administrative burden. A tool intended to support better decisions can unintentionally weaken the judgment of the people closest to the work.

The opposite is also possible. Owners can use AI to remove friction, simplify capture, reduce repetitive work, surface issues earlier, and give project teams better information when they need it.

The measure of success should not be how much AI an owner deploys or how much data the system collects. It should be whether the projects become easier to run, decisions become better and faster, and the people responsible for delivery are more capable because the technology is there.

AI will shape construction. Owners will help determine whether that makes the work easier - or harder.

ABOUT CONSTRUCTION AI LAB

Construction AI Lab helps busy construction professionals stay ahead of a fast-moving AI world. We watch what is changing, connect the dots, and explain what is likely to be coming next. Our goal is simple: to give construction professionals perspective and foresight they are unlikely to find anywhere else, so they can see the AI era more clearly and be better prepared to succeed in it. Construction AI Lab is a no-cost initiative of sudycos. ConstructionAILab.ai

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Sue Dyer is the founder of Construction AI Lab and a longtime construction industry leader whose work has focused on partnering, trust, collaboration, project culture, and improving how people and organizations work together. Her perspective on artificial intelligence is grounded in more than 45 years of experience helping complex construction teams navigate interdependence, uncertainty, conflict, and change. She is the author of *The Trusted Leader*, *The Trusted Leader Journal*, and *Partner Your Project*.

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