AGENT MANAGEMENT · OPERATING MODEL · GOVERNANCE

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TYPE: OPERATING MODEL · AUDIENCE: CTO, CIO, CHIEF OPERATOR, CHIEF AI OFFICER, CHIEF DATA OFFICER, CHIEF AGENT MANAGEMENT

TL;DR AGENTS

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The Discipline Your AI Transformation Is *Missing*

When AI can act — not just assist — your operating model must change. Task decomposition, tool permissions, audit trails, and accountability are not controls bolted on after the fact. They are the architecture of safe, scalable agentic work.

The moment an AI agent can trigger a workflow, write into a system of record, send an email, update customer data, or spend money, the rules of software governance have stopped depending on predictable human behavior and started introducing a new type of digital labor into your organization.

That shift demands a discipline most transformation programs have not built. Not more prompting. Not another governance framework left on a SharePoint. **Agent management** is the operating discipline that makes AI agents safe, effective, and scalable.

> *"Initiative AI sits at the edge of work, upstream of all its tools it is planning, deciding, and executing through tools. That changes what good management means."*

The tipping point: from assistive to acting

Assistive AI is legible and low-stakes. It suggests. It drafts. It summarizes. The human remains the execution engine, the model is a smart co-pilot.

Agentic AI is different in kind. When an agent has tool access — a CRM API, a payment trigger, an identity system — autonomy and consequence arrive together. And the operating questions become immediate:

- Who owns outcomes when an agent acts?
- What is the agent allowed to do without approval?
- What evidence trail does if something goes wrong?
- How do you contain impact when an agent makes a bad call?

These are not theoretical. OWASP's work on agentic application risks identifies **tool misuse** and **identity and privilege abuse** as core failure modes — not future concerns, but patterns already showing up in production deployments where agents have autonomy and broad tool access.

If your transformation program does not explicitly address these questions, you are not scaling AI. You are scaling uncertainty.

What is agent management?

Agent management is the combination of four operating disciplines designing work so agents can act within boundaries, limiting what they can touch, tracing everything they do, and assigning clear human ownership over their outcomes.

These are not controls layered on top of an agentic deployment. They are design decisions embedded into the workflow itself. Which tools can the agent access, anyway — during an incident, a compliance review, or an executive conversation that asks "What exactly did the agent do, and who approved that?"

1 · Task decomposition: make work legible for agents

Agents fail most reliably when given vague goals inside messy workflows. The fix is not a better prompt it is redesigning the workflow before they touch it.

Decomposition every workflow into three categories:

THREE TASK CATEGORIES

CATEGORY	INTERACTION	AGENT DEFAULT
Deterministic	Repeatable, rule-based, low-judgment tasks with clear inputs and outputs	Autonomous — agent executes on trigger
Judgment	Ambiguous, interpretation-heavy, context-dependent	Human decision required; agent drafts
Irreversible	Payments, contracts, access grants, external commitments	Human approval mandatory; dual control where stakes warrant

This decomposition gives you immediate clarity on where **bounded autonomy** is safe and where a human must remain the decision maker. The goal is not to restrict agents — it is to design their operating space intentionally.

AUTHOR FOR COMPREHENSION BEFORE YOU DEPLOY

For every agentic task, define these four parameters before launch:

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GOAL
Single, measurable outcome.
Example: "Resolve password reset tickets
within 5 minutes, no escalation."

CONTEXT
What data, tools, and permissions
does the agent need?
Nothing more than that.

CONSTRAINTS
What actions require human approval?
What spend limits, rate limits,
and escalation triggers?

EVIDENCE
What must the agent log so a human
can review what it did and why?
Inputs, tool calls, outcomes, errors.
```

Without explicit stop conditions, "autonomy" is indistinguishable from "guessing." The templates makes bounded autonomy operable not just theoretical.

2 · Tool permissions: agents need access **badges**

Agents derive real power from tools: CRM updates, ticketing systems, document repositories, internal APIs, payment rails. Without explicit limits, a helpful agent broad credentials to "make it work," you have created a single point of failure with velocity and scale.

Identity and privilege abuse is explicitly called out as a top agentic risk category — and the consistent mitigation is **least privilege** and rights scoped capabilities. Not as an afterthought. As the default operating posture.

3 TIERS FOR PERMISSIONING MODEL

TIER	ACCESS	APPROVAL REQUIRED
Tier 1 · Read-only	Read only, drafting recommendations	Fully autonomous
Tier 2 · Write-access with constraints	Write access with constraints: limited fields, capped amounts, allowlisted actions	Guardrails + sampling review
Tier 3 · High-impact	Money movement, contracts, access changes, production changes	Explicit approval or dual control required

This turns human-in-the-loop from a slogan into a designed mechanism. Humans are engaged at the tier where risk is real, not ceremonially everything and not absent from things that matter.

3 · Audit trails and observability: evidence is the product

In agentic work, auditability is not optional. It is how you preserve trust, accelerate debugging, satisfy regulators, and have defensible conversations when something goes wrong.

At minimum, you need traceability across four dimensions:

```
WHAT TO LOG
MINIMUM VIABLE AUDIT TRAIL

WHO  — Identity, delegation chain
WHAT — Tool calls, parameters, outcomes
WHY  — Prompt version, retrieved context
WHEN — Timestamps, latency, retries
COST — Token usage, API calls, compute

WHY CHANGES MATTER
Model updates, prompt changes,
tool schema changes, retrieval
changes — any of these can change
behavior without a code change.
```

AUTHOR FOR COMPREHENSION: WHY AUDIT LOGGING

Logging is table stakes. The harder — and more important — question is how useful it is. If an agent makes a bad call at scale, can you trace damage?

- Can you pause the agent immediately without manual intervention?
- Can you roll back to a known-better prompt or tool version?
- Can you detect abnormal tool sequences not just abnormal outputs?
- Can you have the full chain — not only the models final response?

OWASP's agentic risk work points directly at tool misuse patterns: legitimate tools used in unsafe combinations. Your observability must cover the chain of tool calls, not only what the model said.

4 · Accountability and escalation: one owner per agent

Every agent needs a named human owner accountable for its outcomes. When something goes wrong, incidents become blame-storms, the vendor, the model, the prompt, the integration. The answer is never found because no one was asked to own the question.

A clean operating model assigns four distinct roles:

```
OWNERSHIP ROLES

PRODUCT OWNER  Owns business outcome and
               acceptance performance.
               Asks: Did the agent deliver the
               outcome we intended?

SRE / OPS      Owns reliability, latency, and
               escalation paths.
               Asks: Is the agent degrading
               gracefully when it fails?

SECURITY       Owns tool access, identity,
               monitoring thresholds, and
               escalation paths.
```

PRINCIPLE: REVIEW provides a useful mechanism for humanizing this as a management system — with ownership, escalation paths, and accountability and structured processes. Not bureaucracy — operational clarity at scale.

The operating model blueprint

Here is a pragmatic implementation path you can apply without turning it into a multi-quarter governance program.

ROLLS OF AGENT OBJECTIVE · TOP OPERATIONAL TASK ALIGNMENT

For every agent in production, capture purpose and scope, allowed actions by tier, tools and permissions, stop conditions and escalation paths, named owners, release cadence, and evidence requirements. If you cannot list your agents, you cannot govern them. This is the minimal model equivalent of a log inventory.

DEFINE DECISION RIGHTS AT EVERY STEP

Decide explicitly: what the agent does autonomously, what requires human approval, what requires dual control and what is prohibited. Then design the workflow around those rights — so humans are not asked to rubber-stamp volume they cannot meaningfully review.

IMPLEMENT TELEMETRY THAT PROVES BOTH VALUE AND CONTROL

Executives will eventually ask: "Show me business impact and show me it's under control." Build for both from day one.

VALUE METRICS	CONTROL METRICS
Cycle time reduction	Escalation rate
Cost to serve	Override rate
Throughput per team	Exception handling
Conversion / retention / NPS	Incident frequency & path

CREATE A LIGHTWEIGHT CHANGE CADENCE

Agents change from three causes: enterprise software, your operating rhythm should include quarterly model reassessment, prompt and tool updates, and release monitoring and sampling reviews. Incident reviews with learnings captured as design changes, and rollback procedures that work under pressure — not just on paper.

> **Pilot to production.** Agents that moved from 3 pages 2026, with governance rules and obligations for general purpose AI effect from 2 August 2026. Prudential production and AI governance. Operational discipline, not boilerplate. Ship fast, but ship with audit trails, decision boundaries, accountability, and documented evidence. Agent management is how you meet that line without slowing down.

The Refund Agent

An AI agent handles refunds end-to-end: reads the request, verifies purchase data, applies policy, calculates the refund, and issues payment. Ship it fast. Ship it with guardrails. This guideline shows how.

If you treat this as a productivity win, you miss the operating model redesign it requires. Run it properly and every discipline applies.

Task decomposition: refund detection, eligibility check, calculation, approval routing, execution, ticketing, customer notification, internal escalation	Permissions: read-only on order history, write-access only on the refund ledger, no access to payment credentials, spend limit per transaction, human approval for any refund above threshold
Observability: every tool call logged, every decision traceable, every failure path visible	Governance: refund policy owned by the product team, escalation owned by SRE, security owns the credential boundary

Multiply this across 100 Finance ops procurement and sales ops. That is why agents 10 changes big enough not just productivity.

Simulate before you scale

Most organizations discover operating model failures after critical exceptions reach agentic approvals become rubber-stamping, agents gain over-permissioned to keep velocity, evidence trails are incomplete. Two tools let you get ahead of that.

SIMULATE, TEST, AND VALIDATE BEFORE PRODUCTION

EVOS Preview

Simulate your business against backtests, approval queues, decision logics and latest tool schemas. Identify bottlenecks before production. Even until one weekend — Friday deploy, Monday morning review.

Preview your AI, agent ops, and governance.

AI Replayer

Preview

If you cannot tell your agents you cannot manage them. The AI Replayer gives you a timeline of every agent's production — tool calls, decisions, context, audit artifacts and fail-safe. Coming soon.

```
$ replay --agent refund-bot
$ replay --trace 4f2a
$ replay --diff --prompt v3 v4
```

Frequently asked questions

What is agent management?

Agent management is the operating discipline for designing, governing, and running AI agents that can act autonomously. It covers four areas: task decomposition (defining where agents can act and where they must stop), tool permissions (what systems and data they can touch), audit trails (traceability of inputs, decisions, tool calls, and outcomes), and accountability (named ownership and escalation paths for every agent in production).

Why do AI agents require an operating model change, not just governance controls?

Because once agents act, the questions that arise — who owns outcomes, what evidence exists, what can the agent touch — are ring design questions, not just compliance ones. Governance frameworks that sit on top of agentic deployments must be designed into how work runs, not appended as a controls layer afterward.

What are the biggest risks with agentic AI?

Tool misuse and identity or privilege abuse are the most consistently cited production risks — particularly when agents have broad tool access combined with a high degree of autonomy. Prompt injection and goal hijacking are also serious. It is far easier to grant broad credentials than to design tightly scoped access, especially when teams are under pressure to ship.

What is a "stop-condition" for an AI agent?

A stop-condition is a given without trigger that causes an agent to pause and escalate to a human rather than continuing to act. Examples include confidence falling below a threshold, an action classified as Tier 3 high-impact, a tool call that would exceed a spend limit, or a product that does not match expected completion criteria. Stop conditions convert "bounded autonomy" from a concept into a designed mechanism.

What is a Digital Twin of the Organization (DTO) and how does it apply to agentic AI?

A DTO is a simulation model of an organization's workflows, decision points, and constraints. Applied to agentic AI, it lets teams test bounded autonomy, tool permissions, escalation rules, and blast radius scenarios before agents are deployed in production — reducing the risk of discovering failure modes at scale.