

After the Prompt



The trends that are beginning to redefine the relationship
between AI, operational autonomy and enterprise governance

ANTAS
DA CUNHA
E CIJA

The next major transformation in Artificial Intelligence is no longer just about the intelligence of models.

It is about the growing autonomy of systems.

As agents begin to execute tasks, consume services, interact with one another and operate with increasing levels of autonomy, traditional concepts of oversight, governance, accountability and operational control are being challenged by new forms of autonomous decision-making, execution and coordination.

AI is gradually evolving beyond a support tool.

It is becoming an active execution layer within organizations.

The challenge is no longer purely technological. It is understanding how to govern operational autonomy across increasingly distributed, dynamic and interdependent ecosystems.

This article explores some of the trends that are beginning to redefine the relationship between AI, operational autonomy and enterprise governance.

1. REDEFINING HUMAN OVERSIGHT

From Human in the Loop to Human in Command

INSIGHT

At least 15% of day-to-day work decisions will be made autonomously by AI agents by 2028, up from 0% in 2024.

(Gartner, June 2025)

1.1 THE NEW FRONTIER OF OVERSIGHT:

- Human in the Loop, Human on the Loop or Human in Command?
Agentic AI is fundamentally reshaping how we think about human oversight.

1.2 FROM TOOL TO AGENT:

- AI is evolving from assistant to autonomous executor.
AI agents are beginning to execute tasks, take initiative and operate with increasing levels of autonomy.

1.3 HUMAN IN THE LOOP:

- Humans retain direct control over critical decisions.
Greater human supervision provides greater control - but lower operational scale.

1.4 HUMAN ON THE LOOP:

- The agent operates autonomously while humans supervise the system.
Oversight shifts away from individual actions and toward continuous monitoring.

1.5 HUMAN IN COMMAND:

- Humans no longer intervene in every individual decision and instead oversee delegated autonomy.
They define limits, guardrails, override mechanisms and accountability proportional to risk.

1.6 OVERSIGHT IS NO LONGER ENOUGH:

- The challenge is no longer merely technological.
Organizations will need to redefine governance, accountability, internal policies and mechanisms for human intervention.

2. SYSTEM ORCHESTRATION

From System Governance to Ecosystem Governance

INSIGHT

40% of enterprise applications will have embedded specialized agents by the end of 2026, up from less than 5% in 2025. (**Gartner, August 2025**)

2.1 A NEW OPERATIONAL PARADIGM:

- AI no longer operates through a single model.
Today it functions through agents, APIs, distributed workflows and orchestration layers.

2.2 SYSTEMS BEGIN TO COORDINATE:

- The real shift is not the number of models.
It is the way they begin to interact, decide and execute autonomously together.

2.3 THE SYSTEM GAINS AUTONOMY:

- AI no longer functions merely as a response interface.
It becomes a distributed system where unexpected behaviors may emerge from interactions between autonomous components.

2.4 RISK CHANGES SCALE:

- Risk is no longer concentrated in a single model or provider.
It emerges from interdependencies and autonomous execution chains across systems.

2.5 GOVERNANCE GAINS A NEW LAYER:

- Traditional governance remains essential.
However, AI introduces risks emerging from autonomous coordination across multiple services and agents.

2.6 THE RISE OF ECOSYSTEM GOVERNANCE:

- The next frontier will be supervising ecosystems rather than isolated models.
Monitoring interactions, autonomy and distributed accountability will become critical.

3. *THE AUTONOMOUS CONSUMER*

From Human Consumption to Autonomous AI Consumption

INSIGHT

33% of enterprise software applications will include agentic AI by 2028, up from less than 1% in 2024. **(Gartner, June 2025)**

3.1 THE BEGINNING OF AUTONOMOUS CONSUMPTION:

- Until now, AI consumption has been centered on human users.
Agentic AI is beginning to change that logic.

3.2 AGENTS BECOME CONSUMERS:

- Agents are beginning to consume AI autonomously.
They call APIs, use models and coordinate services without direct human intervention.

3.3 THE ECONOMIC MODEL CHANGES:

- Consumption no longer depends solely on people.
It increasingly depends on the autonomous activity of agents.

3.4 SCALE IS NO LONGER HUMAN:

- A single agent can generate massive and continuous consumption.
Hundreds of API calls and workflows can be executed autonomously.

3.5 THE CHALLENGE BECOMES OVERSIGHT:

- The question is no longer simply how much AI costs.
It becomes who controls autonomous AI consumption.

3.6 GOVERNING AUTONOMOUS CONSUMPTION:

- The next generation of governance will need to manage autonomous consumption between agents.
Authorization, traceability and accountability will be fundamental.

4. *THE INVISIBLE BILL*

Pricing Models in the Agentic Era

INSIGHT

40% of enterprise buyers cite reducing per-user licenses as the primary lever for reducing software spending, placing direct pressure on seat-based pricing models. (**BCG via Moxo, February 2026**)

4.1 PRICING ENTERS THE AGENTIC ERA:

- The economics of AI were built around human usage.
Autonomous agents are beginning to change that logic.

4.2 THE USER IS NO LONGER AT THE CENTER:

- Traditional commercial models were designed around human consumption.
With autonomous agents, the concept of a “user” is becoming insufficient.

4.3 NEW PRICING MODELS:

- Commercial models may increasingly reflect autonomous activity.
Tokens, APIs, completed tasks, compute and active agents enter the equation.

4.4 CONSUMPTION GAINS AUTONOMY:

- Costs become more difficult to predict and control.
Who approves, monitors and limits autonomous consumption in real time?

4.5 CONSUMPTION BECOMES LESS TRACEABLE:

- Without appropriate governance, financial risks increase rapidly.
Difficult-to-track autonomous consumption and automated cycles may generate spiraling costs.

4.6 AUTONOMY ENTERS THE BUDGET:

- Budgets, contracts and financial models will need to evolve.
Managing AI costs will also mean governing operational autonomy.

5. *SMALLER. SMARTER. YOURS.*

From LLMs to Specialized Models

INSIGHT

Smaller specialized models are gaining relevance in enterprise use cases due to efficiency, lower cost and adaptability to context. (**Microsoft, November 2024**)

5.1 SPECIALIZATION GAINS GROUND:

- AI evolution is increasingly moving toward specialized models. Efficiency and context are becoming as important as scale.

5.2 SCALE IS NO LONGER ENOUGH:

- More computing power is no longer the only priority. Use cases increasingly demand efficiency, speed and contextual adaptation.

5.3 SMALLER. MORE SPECIALIZED.:

- Smaller specialized models are becoming operationally relevant. They are faster, more efficient and better suited to specific tasks.

5.4 THE RIGHT MODEL FOR THE RIGHT CONTEXT:

- The discussion is no longer only about model size. It is also about fitness for purpose.

5.5 CONTROL BECOMES MORE GRANULAR:

- Specialized models may change how organizations manage risk and technological dependency.
Greater operational control becomes a strategic advantage.

5.6 INTELLIGENCE BECOMES MODULAR:

- The future will likely be hybrid and orchestrated.
LLMs and specialized models will coexist within distributed ecosystems.

6. RULES ABOUT RULES

The Rise of Meta Governance

INSIGHT

Organizations that have implemented AI governance platforms are 3.4 times more likely to achieve high AI governance effectiveness. (**Gartner, February 2026**)

6.1 GOVERNING GOVERNANCE:

- Agentic AI creates a new organizational requirement.
Organizations increasingly need to govern governance itself.

6.2 GOVERNANCE IS NO LONGER LINEAR:

- Traditional frameworks were designed for relatively static systems.
Autonomous agents make oversight significantly more dynamic and distributed.

6.3 GOVERNING GOVERNANCE:

- Meta Governance sits above operational governance.
It defines who sets limits, changes rules and oversees autonomy.

6.4 WHO CONTROLS THE CONTROLS?:

- Rules may conflict, overlap or create gaps.
The challenge shifts to the architecture of the control model itself.

6.5 A NEW LOGIC OF OVERSIGHT:

- Organizations will need clear accountability mechanisms.
Delegated autonomy requires traceability and continuous review of operational boundaries.

6.6 THE NEXT LAYER:

- Meta Governance is not merely a technical issue.
It will become a strategic, organizational and executive leadership challenge.

7. *WORK. REDEFINED.*

INSIGHT

The interaction between humans, machines and algorithms is reshaping professional roles and work models across multiple industries. (**World Economic Forum – Future of Jobs Report 2025**)

7.1 THE INVISIBLE CONTRACT:

- Employment relationships were built around supervised human work. Agentic AI is beginning to alter that operational logic.

7.2 THE CHAIN OF SUPERVISION CHANGES:

- For decades, work and supervision followed a relatively linear structure. With autonomous agents, that chain becomes less clear.

7.3 THE GREY AREA OF OVERSIGHT:

- Who supervises an agent? Who is accountable when something goes wrong? The concept of effective control becomes increasingly difficult to demonstrate..

7.4 ACCOUNTABILITY SHIFTS:

- Disciplinary accountability and supervisory duties begin to evolve. The introduction of agents may become a topic for labor dialogue and collective bargaining.

7.5 A NEW WORKFORCE ARCHITECTURE:

- Defining limits to autonomy is no longer simply good practice. It becomes essential to reduce legal and organizational exposure.

7.6 THE FUTURE OF SUPERVISED WORK:

- The discussion will move beyond productivity. It will increasingly focus on oversight, accountability and delegated autonomy.

8. DO YOU KNOW YOUR AGENT?

From Vendor Due Diligence to Agent Due Diligence

INSIGHT

More than 40% of agentic AI projects may be abandoned by 2027 if organizations fail to establish the right governance and ROI foundations.

(Gartner, June 2025)

8.1 AUTONOMY ENTERS THE SUPPLY CHAIN:

- Organizations know how to assess critical suppliers. Few are prepared to assess autonomous agents.

8.2 AGENTS ENTER THE OPERATIONAL ECOSYSTEM:

- Agents can make decisions and execute actions autonomously. Most organizations still lack processes designed to evaluate them.

8.3 THE ACCOUNTABILITY CHAIN CHANGES:

- When an agent causes harm, responsibility becomes less clear.
The absence of assessment is no longer merely an operational gap – it becomes a legal risk.

8.4 A NEW ASSESSMENT PERIMETER:

- The challenge is no longer purely technological.
It is understanding what autonomy an agent has, what systems it can activate and what decisions it can make.

8.5 DUE DILIGENCE GAINS A NEW DIMENSION:

- Inventory, assessment, contracting and monitoring become essential.
Deploying agents without proper assessment becomes equivalent to onboarding a critical supplier without due diligence.

8.6 THE FUTURE OF THIRD-PARTY RISK:

- Agent due diligence is likely to become part of mainstream enterprise governance.
Autonomy, accountability and risk will increasingly become assessment criteria.

9. WHO SHARED THAT?

From Data Privacy to Autonomous Data Exposure

INSIGHT

Only 23% of IT leaders are highly confident in their organization's ability to manage security and governance for GenAI tools. **(Gartner, October 2025)**

9.1 PRIVACY ENTERS THE AGENTIC ERA

- Privacy frameworks were built around supervised human decisions.
Autonomous agents are beginning to challenge that operational assumption.

9.2 DATA GOVERNANCE IS NO LONGER HUMAN-BY-DEFAULT:

- Governance frameworks assume continuous human validation.
Agents are beginning to access, transfer and process data autonomously.

9.3 RISK BECOMES LESS PREDICTABLE

- Risk no longer resides solely in human error.
It increasingly resides in the autonomous behavior of agents.

9.4 REGULATION ENTERS A NEW LEVEL OF COMPLEXITY:

- The GDPR already addresses automated decision-making.
However, growing agent autonomy makes accountability, legal bases and oversight more difficult to operationalize.

9.5 PRIVACY BECOMES OPERATIONAL:

- Deploying agents without appropriate governance significantly increases exposure. Mapping access, limiting permissions and ensuring traceability become essential.

9.6 CONTROL MUST BE DEMONSTRABLE:

- Organizations will need to demonstrate control over what agents do with data. Auditable logs, access controls and adapted policies will become fundamental.

10. THE DELEGATION PREMIUM

The Price of Delegated Autonomy

INSIGHT

By 2027, the cost-value gap in process-centric service contracts will be reduced by at least 50% through reinvention enabled by agentic AI. (**Gartner, 2026**)

10.1 THE COST OF DELEGATION:

- The economics of AI are beginning to reflect more than consumption and compute. They may increasingly reflect autonomy and risk delegated to agents.

10.2 DELEGATION GAINS SCALE

- Agents no longer simply assist users. They increasingly execute tasks, make decisions and trigger actions autonomously.

10.3 A NEW OPERATIONAL ASSET:

- Organizations are beginning to purchase more than software.
They are beginning to purchase the ability to delegate work to machines.

10.4 PRICING MAY REFLECT AUTONOMY:

- Two agents may have similar technological costs.
Yet they may represent radically different levels of operational risk.

10.5 AUTONOMY ENTERS ECONOMIC LOGIC:

- Governance and oversight begin to influence the economics of AI.
Operational risk may increasingly become part of commercial models.

10.6 VALUE REFLECTS OPERATIONAL TRUST:

- The future of enterprise AI increasingly resembles delegated risk management.
Pricing may ultimately reflect the level of autonomy an organization is willing to delegate.

11. AUTONOMOUS IP FLOWS

From Intellectual Property to Autonomous IP Operations

INSIGHT

WIPO identifies transparency, traceability and the use of content and datasets as central themes in international discussions on AI and intellectual property. (**WIPO – Artificial Intelligence and Intellectual Property**)

11.1 IP IS NO LONGER STATIC:

- Until now, intellectual property was relatively controllable and traceable. With autonomous agents, IP begins to circulate, recombine and transform continuously across systems.

11.2 THE REAL SHIFT:

- The challenge is no longer simply AI-generated content. It is agents autonomously reusing and transforming intellectual property without continuous human oversight.

11.3 TRACEABILITY BEGINS TO DISAPPEAR:

- Prompts, models, datasets, APIs and third-party content increasingly blend together. Understanding the origin and rights associated with outputs becomes progressively more difficult.

11.4 RISK CHANGES NATURE:

- Risk is no longer limited to copyright infringement.
It increasingly includes autonomous reuse, IP contamination and loss of traceability.

11.5 IP GOVERNANCE BECOMES OPERATIONAL:

- Organizations will need to govern models, datasets and autonomous reuse of outputs.
IP Governance becomes an integral component of AI Governance.

11.6 THE EMERGING CHALLENGE:

- The challenge is no longer simply protecting intellectual property.
It is demonstrating control and provenance across autonomous ecosystems that continuously transform IP.

How Can We Help?

Antas da Cunha Ecija is the first Full AI Firm in Portugal. An international firm with over 200 professionals, it is committed to innovation and multidisciplinary teams. It is part of ECIJA, the largest Ibero-American network and the Winston Taylor global alliance, with over 3,000 lawyers in 30 countries..

Ana Bastos

sócia

abastos@adcecija.pt

Paulo Morgado

sócio

pmorgado@adcecija.pt

Joana Pinto

sócia

jpinto@adcecija.pt





YOUR FULL AI FIRM



 [@antadacunhaecija](https://www.linkedin.com/company/antadacunhaecija)

www.adcecija.pt