

REPORT

BUILDING AN AI-ENABLED ORGANIZATION THROUGH AGENTIC TRANSFORMATION

The New Inflection Point

In 1994, Phil Brandenberger logged onto a website called NetMarket and bought a CD copy of Sting's "Ten Summoner's Tales" for \$12.48 using a credit card with encryption. It was the first secure ecommerce transaction on the internet. In the 30-some years since, the fundamental goal of every commerce organization has been essentially the same: Get someone sitting in front of a screen to notice your product and buy it.

Most organizations are still knee deep in digital transformation. They're still trying to find their data, work cross-functionally, and get their product content right across their major retailer partners. They're still arguing over which team owns the digital shelf and how to allocate budget. They're even still arguing about whether or not digital has a meaningful impact on the P&L.

And, now, everything is changing again with the agentic shelf.

The agentic shelf fundamentally changes how consumers discover and buy products, how brands market and operate and how technology gets adopted and implemented. While it's exciting that organizations can do more at scale than ever before, it also means that internal setups must be ready to adapt to the change.

This is a move beyond pilots and it requires a true rewiring and redesigning of how work gets done, how decisions are made, and how humans and AI work together. This introduces a new age of agentic transformation. It's the internal change. It's what has to happen inside a company for it to compete in this new environment.

Sixty-eight percent of consumers now use generative AI (GenAI) tools at least monthly, according to Digital Shelf Institute (DSI) survey data and NIQ consumer insights from "[Inside AI's Influence on Consumer Choice and Brand Strategy](#)" report.

Key Terms

Agentic Commerce	Agentic commerce is a new model of online shopping where autonomous AI agents act on behalf of consumers or businesses to perform complex, multi-step tasks such as product discovery, comparison, negotiation, and purchase execution, all with minimal human intervention. (Salsify)
Answer Engine Optimization (AEO)	The practice of optimizing brand data and citations to ensure AI models (like ChatGPT, Perplexity, or SearchGPT) cite your product as the definitive answer to a user’s natural language query.
Agentic Transformation	The structural rewiring of an organization to move from human-led task execution to human-orchestrated agent workflows.
Agentic Discovery	A paradigm shift where consumers no longer “search” via keywords but “delegate” the finding of products to an AI that understands their specific intent, history, and constraints.



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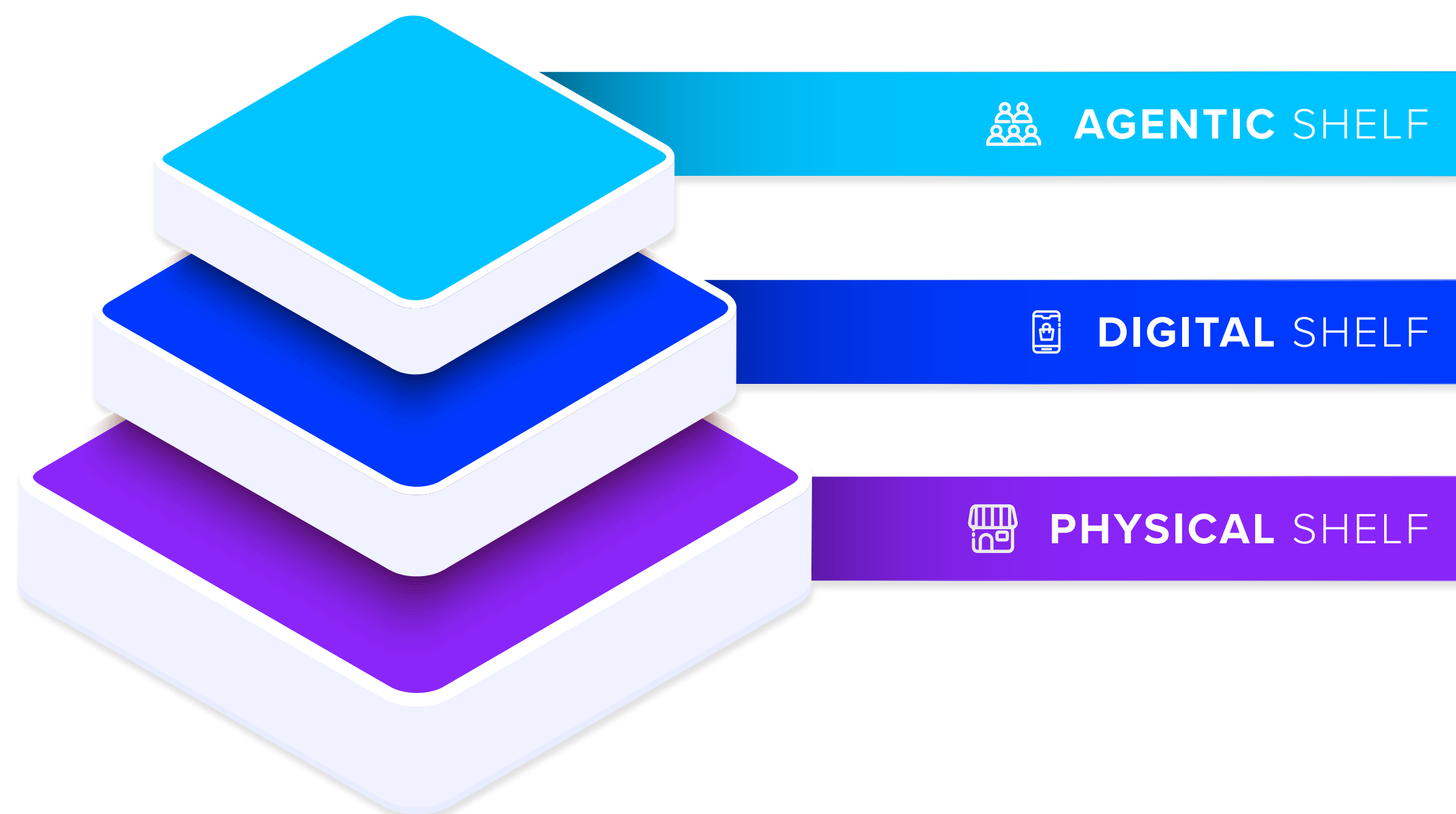
The New Shelf

For the last 30 years, we've known two kinds of shelves. There's the physical shelf: the one in a Target aisle with planogram rules and the constant battle for eye-level placement.

And then there's the digital shelf, aka the product detail pages (PDPs), search results, and content that shoppers see on screens.

The digital shelf transformed commerce, and most organizations are still managing the complexity of doing it well.

Now, there's a third shelf: the agentic shelf. It's the least understood, and the fastest growing. If a brand isn't on the agentic shelf, it doesn't exist to the consumers whose AI agents are making recommendations on their behalf.

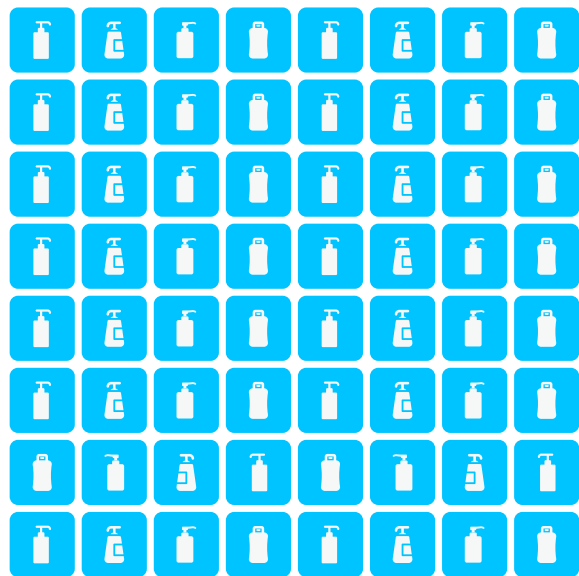




Consumers are now engaging with and shopping on the agentic shelf. For example, a consumer who needs to buy a new refrigerator might go to ChatGPT and ask for the best refrigerators with specific features.

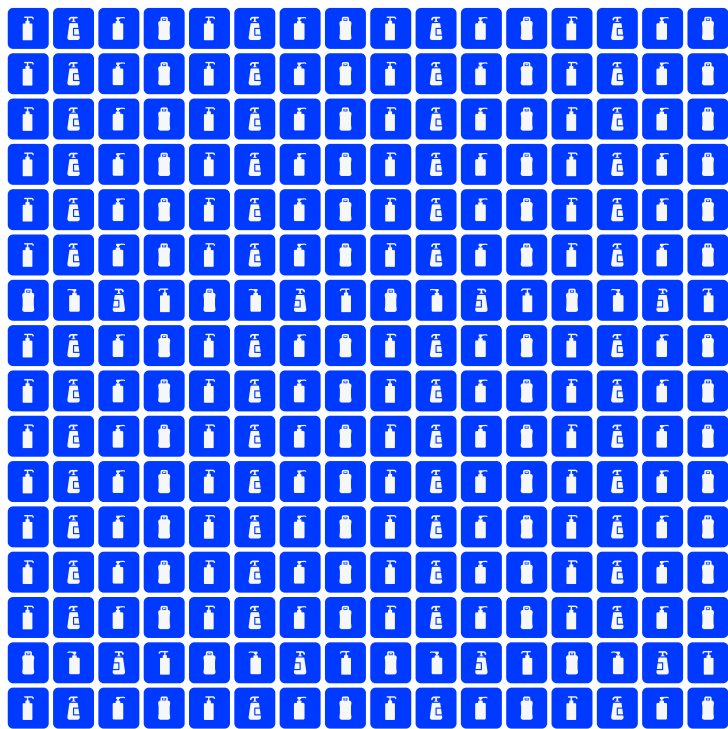
The shopping journey could look like this: ChatGPT recommends five different products. Then, the consumer clicks on the top recommendation, visits the retailer site, and purchases the product.

Product Discovery Is Changing



200-500

Items on the
Store Shelf



100,000+

Items on the
Digital Shelf



10-60

Items on the 1st Page
of Amazon



5

Items on the ChatGPT
Comparison Chart



1

Item Recommended
by ChatGPT

Brands have a new customer that needs to be trained to recommend their products: the AI agent.

AI agents think differently than consumers. They require more data, different types of data, and, above all else, more context, according to the “[Mastering the Agentic Shelf: A PXM Playbook for AI-Fueled Growth](#)” whitepaper.

They’re tailored to the person who is searching, and every AI search is unique. That introduces an additional level of complexity for brands.

Thirty-four percent use AI to research products and 23% use it to summarize reviews, but only 8% have initiated a direct purchase, according to the DSI and NIQ report data. The concept of agentic commerce varies across the industry.

The Spectrum of Agentic Commerce

AI-Assisted Discovery (Where We Are Today)	Product research and discovery	✓ Answering product questions ✓ Recommending products ✓ Summarizing reviews
Delegated Shopping	Agent acting on behalf of the consumer with set preferences	✓ Reordering household items ✓ Buying at a specific price point
Autonomous Commerce	True autonomous shopping with the agent as the decision maker and executor	✓ Agents manage household inventory and use integrated calendars to purchase food for dinner parties

The Spectrum of Agentic Commerce



The amount of work needed to support the changes in commerce can't be done by the structures and teams that exist today.

Here's an example: Let's say your organization has 3,000 SKUs. Most organizations update their PDPs once a year if that, but a best-in-class practice would be to update your PDPs quarterly.

Updating 3,000 SKUs quarterly would equate to 12,000 PDP updates. Remember this is only accounting for one channel.

Let's use Walmart, for this example. If it takes you and your team approximately 10 minutes to update each SKU, that equals 2,000 hours of work. (For context, a traditional 9-5 job is about 2,000 hours of work per year.)

What if you had to update your PDPs on the following number of channels?

- ✔ 4 channels = 48,000 updates > 8,000 hours (~4 FTEs)
- ✔ 15 channels = 180,000 updates > 30,000 hours (~15 FTEs)
- ✔ 30 channels = 48,000 updates > 60,000 hours (~30 FTEs)

What if you had to update your PDPs every month?

- ✔ 3,000 SKUs x 12 updates a year, on 4 channels = 144,000 updates, or 24,000 hours

The demand for fresh, personalized content that provides the right context for the consumer and the agent is a critical element of success.

That amount of work can't be done by humans alone. Organizations wouldn't be able to add enough headcount. AI-enabled organizations and AI agents are no longer an edge case. They're becoming a primary interface for product discovery, decision making, and scaling business.

The way to look at AI is like a force multiplier that can enable scale and efficiency. It can free up time from your existing teams to be more strategic.

You might be faced with, "Is this just another metaverse, or will people buy through agents?" But that's the wrong question to be asking.

AI will fundamentally change almost every aspect of the world. The question is, "How long will it take to change behavior?" The answer is "quickly."



We're very early on in this change, but it's moving faster than any other technological advancement. It took about four years to reach 1 million users on the internet, but it took ChatGPT five days.

The Pace of Adoption Is Increasing
Time To Reach 1 Million Users



While robots aren't autonomously doing tasks for us right now, they might in the future — and organizations need to be ready for that. Let's look at ecommerce as a good example.

Ecommerce has only been around for around 31 years, and most brands are in the infancy of digital transformation. They're still struggling to update their PDPs on a yearly basis; they're not all clear on where their data lives; and they're still working within functional silos.

AI will move faster than ecommerce adoption, and organizations won't have the luxury to ask where their data is. They'll be outpaced by organizations that have been working internally on their transformations. That's why organizations need to start thinking about the internal shifts now.

This introduces both an internal and external transformation that needs to take place. While the external transformation of creating the right content and getting discovered by the agents is critically important, the internal transformation might be even more so.

For example, how organizations think about adding internal agents to their teams, how they plan for a world where humans and agents work together as co-workers, and how they think about recruiting future talent are all crucial.

External transformation involves understanding how agents think and surface products to consumers. This is all about updating content, optimizing for answer engine optimization (AEO) and showing up to agents, according to the DSI and Azoma report [“How to Prepare your PDP for the Agentic Commerce Era.”](#)



Address the Fear

Before moving forward in this report, it's important to address the fear and anxiety that also comes with such a big change in our industry and in the world. We're at a time where many things are undefined, and we're all figuring it out.

Will ways of working and jobs change? Yes. Will the world be taken over by robots tomorrow? No. While some jobs might be taken away, new jobs will appear.

It's important to understand that this is a fundamental change in our society, just like the internet was, and it will ebb and flow as we figure out what the new normal is.

Every major technology shift in the last 100 years has produced this same fear. When email arrived, people worried about the death of real communication. When ecommerce took hold, brick-and-mortar retail was supposed to vanish entirely.

When smartphones changed how people worked, there were serious concerns about what would happen to the workers whose jobs those phones were automating. None of those technologies made people obsolete.

They changed what people did with their time. They created entirely new categories of work that nobody had imagined before the technology existed. The same is true of what's happening now.

It's also important to focus on the things that will always be important as humans like empathy, critical thinking, community, and human connection.

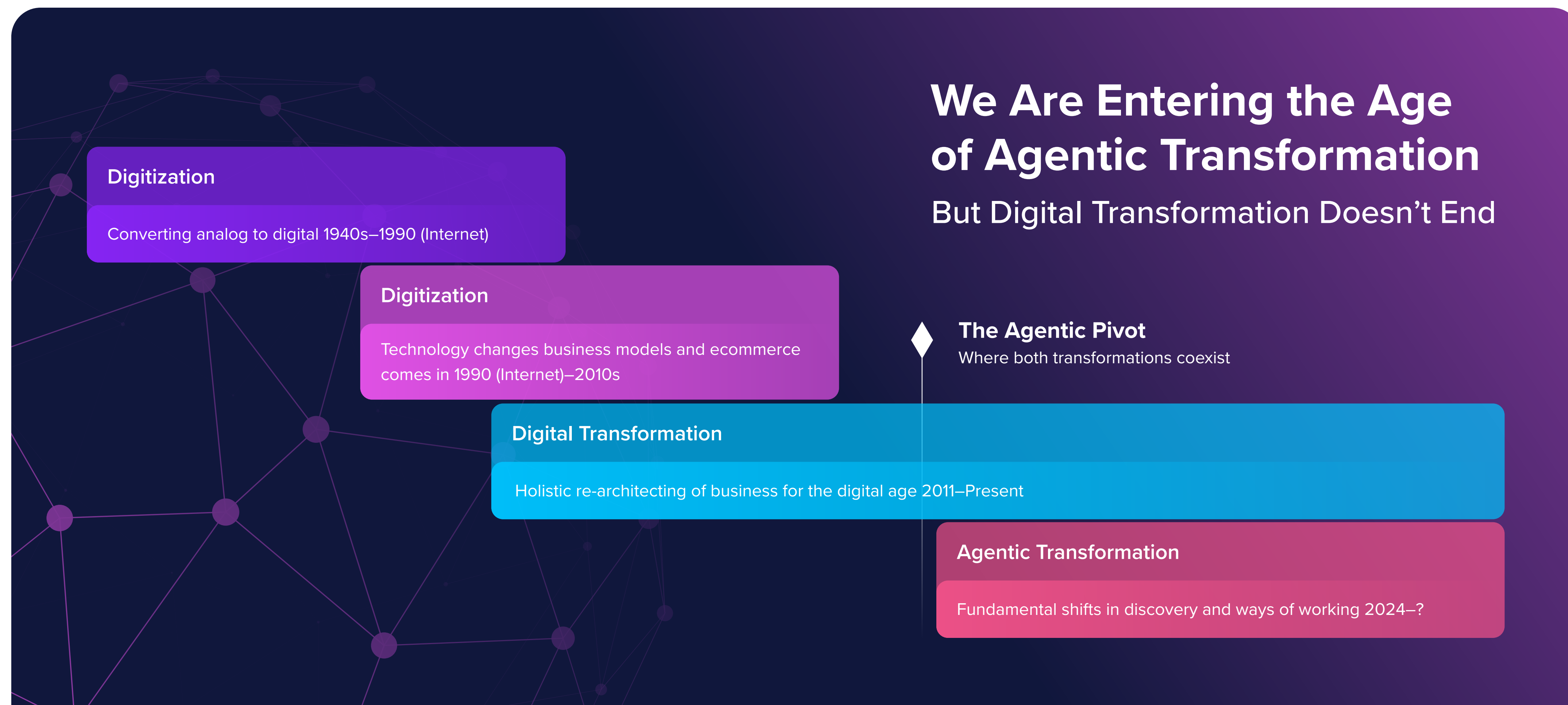
What stays human in an agentic world is worth being specific about. Agents aren't capable of feeling empathy, genuinely understanding what a customer is experiencing, what a colleague is going through, what a moment requires emotionally.

Agents can't conduct critical thinking in genuinely ambiguous situations, where the data doesn't point clearly in one direction and judgment is required.

The ability to build trust — to hold a room, to bring people along through uncertainty, to make a call when no one else will — is a human skill. An agent can optimize a process. It can't decide what's worth optimizing, or why, or what tradeoffs matter. That's a person.

The Eras of Transformation

While there are eras of commerce, there are also eras of transformation that have occurred around advances in technology. These transformations challenge the status quo of how companies operate.



We Are Entering the Age of Agentic Transformation

But Digital Transformation Doesn't End

The very definition of transformation is a thorough or dramatic change in form or appearance.

Let's compare and contrast each of these major corporate transformation types, and in particular discuss how they impact manufacturing and retail. Before digital transformation, organizations focused on digitizing work. Digital transformation changed how work happens. Agentic transformation changes who (or what) does the work.

Digitization

- ✓ Converting analog to digital 1940s—1990 (internet)
- ✓ Information becomes accessible but processes are still manual. The dawn of the World Wide Web.

Digitalization

- ✓ Technology changes business models and ecommerce comes in 1990 (Internet)—2010s
- ✓ Using digital technologies to change business models and provide new revenue and value-producing opportunities.
- ✓ 2000-2010 the rise of ecommerce (Amazon and eBay)

Digital Transformation

- ✓ Holistic re-architecting of business for the digital age (2011—Present)
- ✓ What is digital transformation? Digital transformation is the process of fundamentally changing how an organization operates, creates value, and serves customers by embedding digital technology into the core of the business, not just adding new tools.
- ✓ The term “digital transformation” dates back to 2011 when Capgemini and MIT used and defined the term in reports as using digital technologies to radically improve performance or reach of a business.
- ✓ We often heard the term used when organizations were bringing in more ecommerce capabilities.
- ✓ Digital transformation improved capabilities, but it didn't fundamentally change how organizations work. It added ecommerce as a tack on function instead of embedding it into the organization. Organizations were built for linear planning on their fiscal year, siloed functions that do not talk to each other and have separate goals and the in-store pace of change.

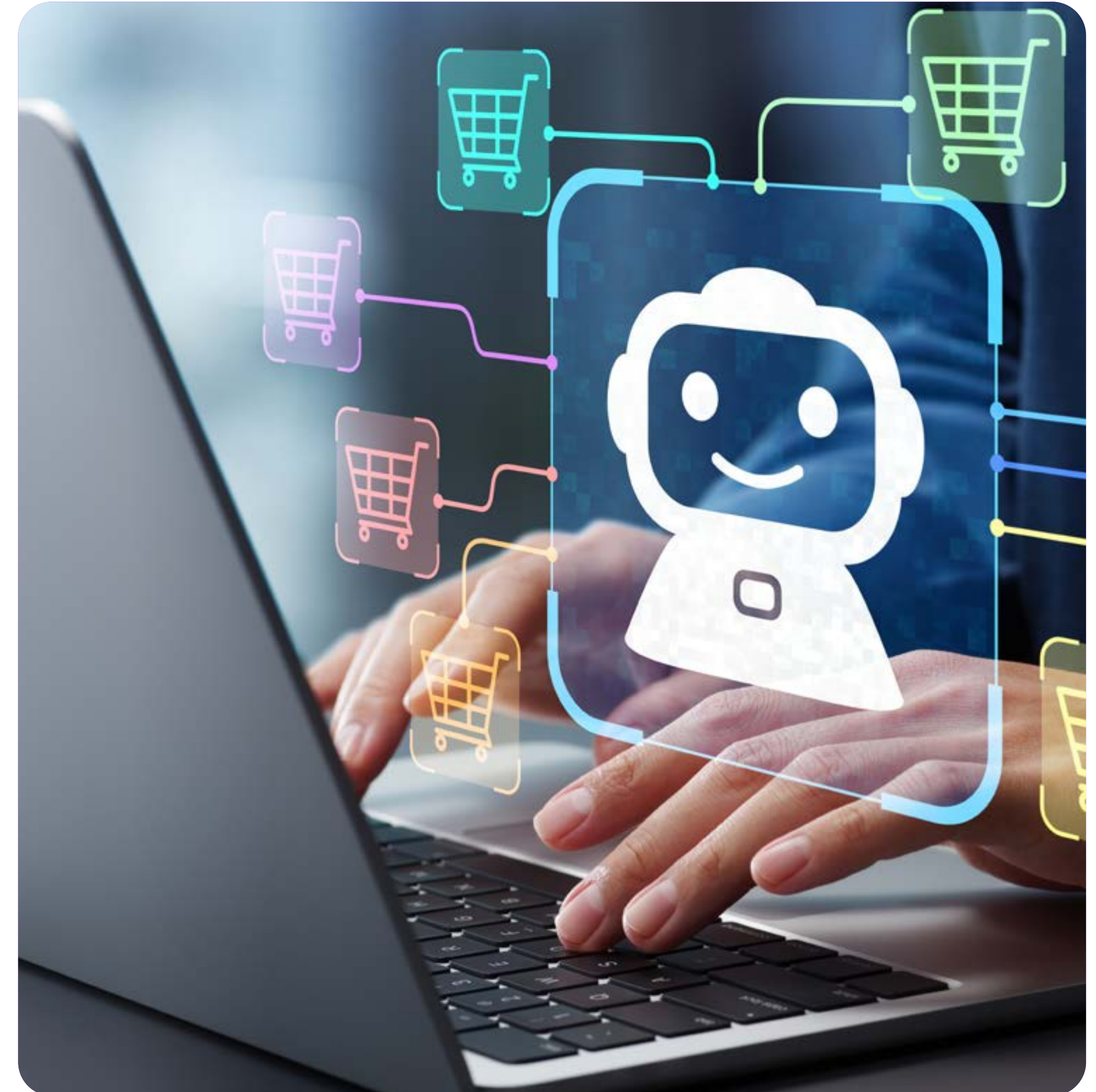
Agentic Transformation

- ✓ What's **agentic transformation**? Agentic transformation is the next stage of business transformation where AI agents support and execute work. It's the shift from humans operating systems to humans orchestrating intelligent agents that sense, decide, and act in tandem or on their behalf.
- ✓ Agentic transformation signals a shift in the workforce. Work that was once done by humans with the support of technology will now be done by humans, technology and an added element of agents.



How do you assess what agents can support? The first thing to note is that agents are constantly getting smarter. Even if they can't do something now, they might be able to in a few months.

When defining use cases, map them along a spectrum: Agents can handle some of the straightforward ones and humans handle the messy, imperfect parts of decision-making.





The chart below maps this capability spectrum.

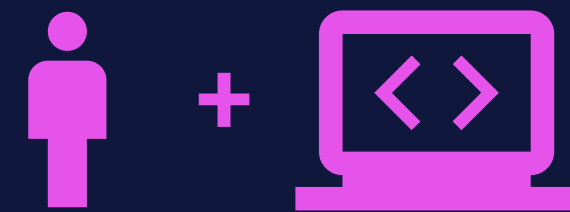
Format	Characteristics	Examples
Work Done by AI	High-volume, repetitive, data-intensive, low ambiguity, hands-on keyboard execution (grunt work) Questions to assess: ✔ Is it manual? ✔ Is it repetitive?	Metadata Creation: Automatically adding metadata to images across your DAM
Human-to-Agent Orchestration	Guardrail setting, managing expectations, interpreting signals, defining intent	Content Creation: Creating digital shelf images based on guardrails with human in the loop review
Work Done by Humans	Humans: Human capacity is reserved for the messy and imperfect parts of the business that require emotional intelligence, deep connection, and long-term vision	Relationship Building: Negotiating complex joint business plans (JBPs) with major retailers or managing sensitive partner relationships Creative Strategy and Brand Vision: Dreaming up the “next big thing,” defining the company’s overarching purpose, and ensuring brand integrity in an invisible, agent-driven era

What Is Agentic Transformation?

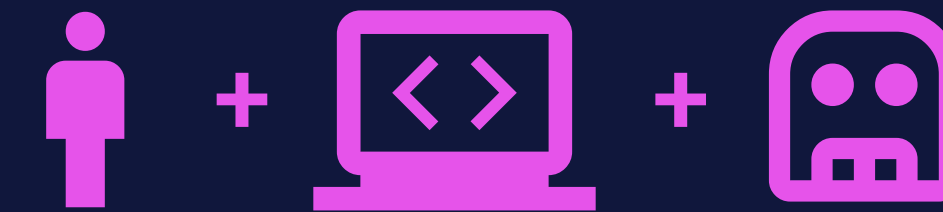
Agentic transformation is a fundamental shift in how organizations work, think, learn, and make decisions. It's the shift from human operating systems to humans orchestrating intelligent agents that sense, decide, and act in tandem or on their behalf.



Humans



Humans + Technology



Humans + Technology + Agents

Where Are Some Places That Organizations Can Use AI?

Data Analysis

AI can analyze large amounts of data at scale and enable teams to gather insights quickly and look at real-time data.

It can also help create and maintain real-time dashboards for leadership to get a full view of the business.

Content Creation

Content creation is a very popular way organizations are using AI today. It can help in creating both copy and imagery for the digital shelf.

Mondelez, for example, is deploying a new GenAI tool to produce marketing content more efficiently. The company expects the tool to cut marketing production costs by 30–50%, potentially reducing reliance on advertising agencies. Mondelez has invested more than \$40 million in the technology, developed with Accenture, according to [Reuters](#).

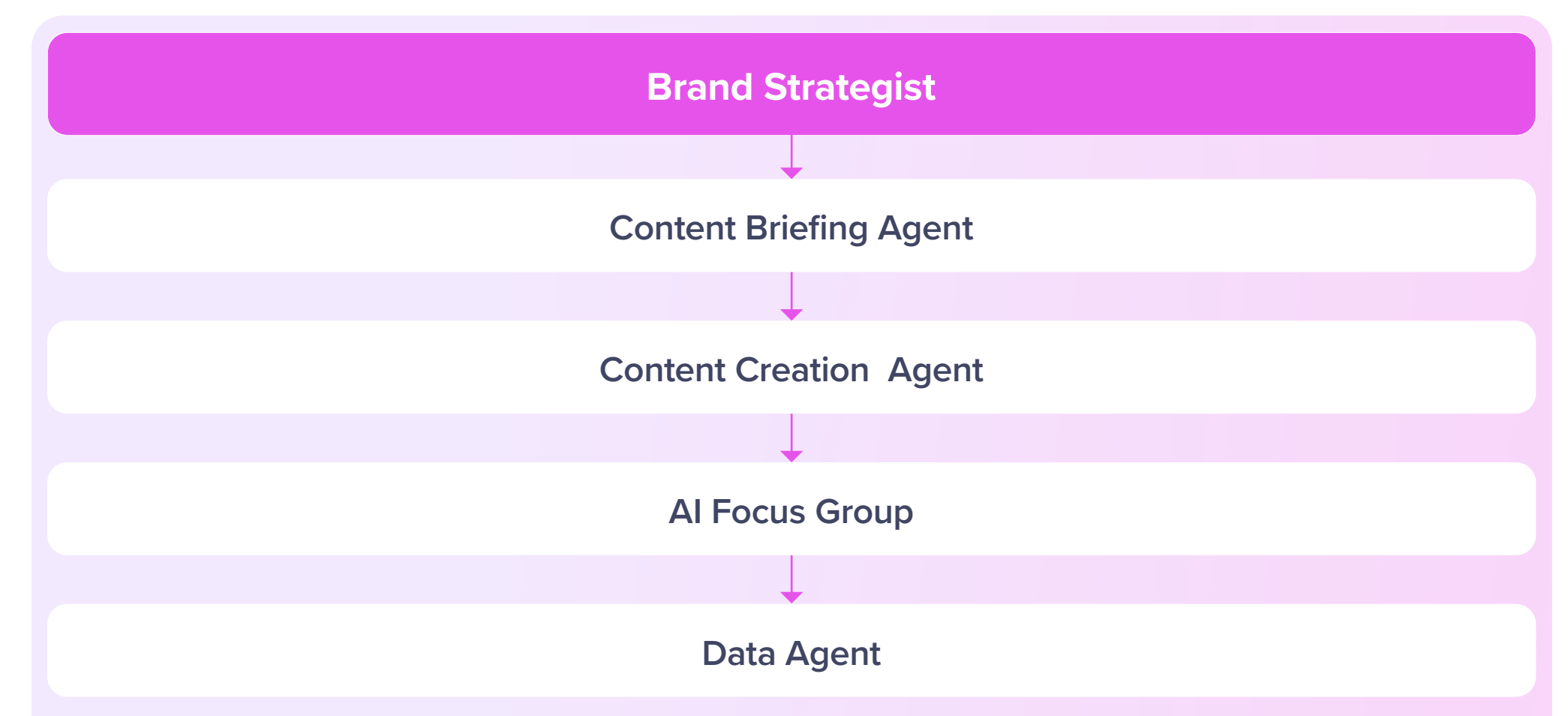
Digital shelf content management is another example where AI content creation can make a difference in efficiency. In an AI-enabled organization, a digital shelf content manager is managing a team of agents that can help support their work.

Instead of spending weeks writing a brief, the manager can prompt AI on the project. The AI is already trained on the brand voice, knows about all past and current campaigns, understands requirements for the digital shelf and can draft a brief for the content that needs to be created.

That manager can approve the brief and the briefing agent will then share the brief with the content creation agent that can create all of the content needed. The content agent will share the content with the manager who will review and approve.

Then the content will be reviewed by an AI focus group trained on the target consumer. Once approved the content can be sent to a product experience management (PXM) platform to syndicate to the appropriate retailer.

The process of content creation can go from four weeks to four days.



A/B Testing and Focus Groups

AI can serve as a focus group to test content, ideas, and new product innovations acting like your key consumer.

New Product Innovation

AI can act as a thought partner when creating new innovation.

Example: In a joint field study, Procter & Gamble and Wharton Business School found that when employees used GenAI tools, innovation output roughly tripled compared to traditional workflows, as reported by [Mi3](#).

Supply Chain Forecasting

An agent is given all past forecasting information for the company as well as access to inventory management systems. It's trained on the brands, consumers, and has insights about world events and historical information.

The forecasting agent is connected to all internal product data and inventory systems and has insight into specific world events and details. In this example, the agent is trained on this year's and last year's allergy and cold and flu season data to forecast the appropriate amount of product needed and when there will be higher demand.

Workflows and Process Automation

Most organizations were built around cross-functional silos and manual handoffs between projects. AI can help to create and automate workflows to remove silos and create more visibility.

Using agents doesn't automatically mean you'll see a cost savings or an efficiency gain. It's important to understand the problem you're trying to solve, reprioritize what needs to get done, and clearly articulate the value of the work.

Similar to the latest DSI report "[Reinventing the Omnichannel Organization](#)," the approach to agentic transformation isn't to take what's existing and add in AI.

It's to take the "clean-sheet-of-paper approach," and think about the art of the possible without old systems and processes holding you back. It's important not to focus solely on adding AI to be more efficient, but instead taking a step back and focusing on how work gets done and the outcome.

Just because we're entering agentic transformation doesn't mean that digital transformation ends. Being brilliant at the basics in commerce is still the foundation for any transformation. In fact, it means that multiple transformations are occurring at once. If done correctly, agentic transformation can accelerate your digital transformation.



The fact is that most organizations are still going through digital transformation and will continue to over the next few years before they can fully move to agentic transformation. There are currently multiple transformations happening at once, which requires even more from brands.

Adding on AI to an organization that doesn't have the core fundamentals right will do more harm than good. Many organizations shouldn't rush to "just add AI." They should be intentional about where and when they can use it to accelerate their transformation.

We're at an agentic pivot point where both transformations co-exist. You can't have agentic transformation without digital transformation.

"Before moving forward with any initiative we check if it is possible, plausible and probable to achieve the desired outcome."

Ajay Sharma

Vice President, eCommerce & Omnichannel, North America, Bayer



What Is the Desired Outcome of Agentic Transformation?

The desired outcome of agentic transformation is not simply “using AI.” It’s a fundamental shift in how organizations create value, make decisions, and operate when humans work alongside autonomous AI agents.

Decisions move closer to data	✓ Faster decision cycles ✓ Continuous optimization
Human shift from doing to orchestrating	✓ Less manual work ✓ More focus on strategy
Organizations become adaptive versus reactive	✓ The shift from deterministic to probabilistic
Silos break down and fluid cross-functional systems operate	✓ Re-organization around outcomes

Before shifting from digital to agentic transformation, organizations must address a few fundamental questions. Skipping these essentials means adding AI will only make a bad situation worse.

Data	✓ Do I know where my data lives and who owns it? ✓ Do I have clean and accurate data for my products? ✓ Do I understand my consumer persona by category?
Processes	✓ Do I have standard processes for the digital shelf and ecommerce? Content creation? Approvals? ✓ Are there clean hand offs between functions? ✓ Are there any bottlenecks in my commerce processes?
Culture	✓ Does my organization understand the inflection point of the industry? ✓ What is my organization’s appetite for change? ✓ Do I have dedicated change management resources? ✓ Do I have support from the leadership?
Outcomes	✓ Are we clear on the outcomes for our business? ✓ Do we have north star metrics for measuring success?

Agentic transformation is going to be even more impactful than past transformations and enable more scale. Just like any other transformation, it will take time to fully change, but the rate of change will be faster than any other transformation we’ve seen.

Agentic transformation marks a shift in decision-making. In most organizations today there are three-to-five-year strategic plans, yearly JBPs, and static goals for the year. The world of commerce doesn’t work like that and neither does agentic transformation. It shifts decision making from deterministic to probabilistic.

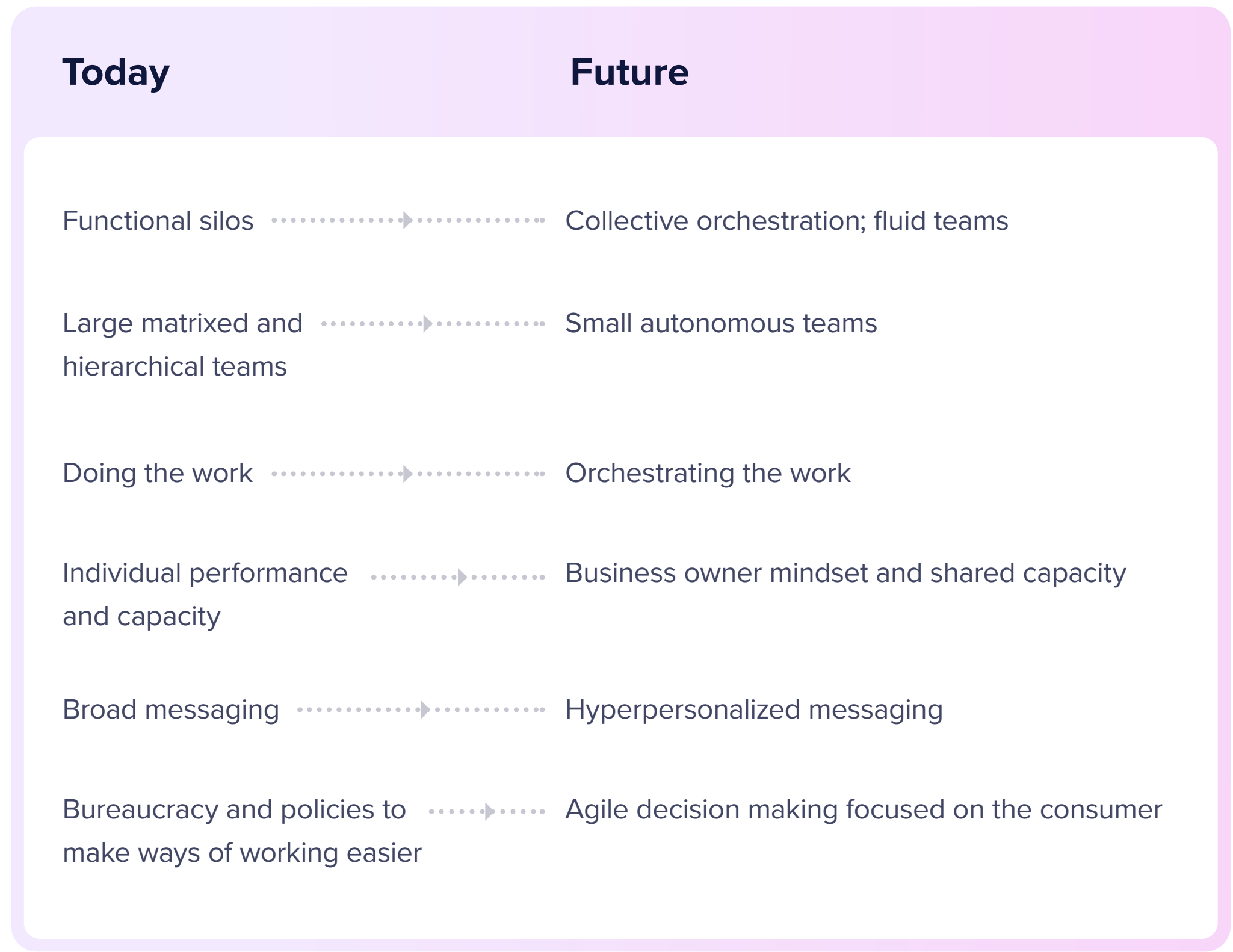
Deterministic to Probabilistic

AI will help leaders and organizations interpret signals and stress test ideas versus give them definitive answers. The definitive answers will still need to be made by humans who have full context to the business and might make a decision not recommended by the AI due to other factors.

For example, an AI agent might recommend spending \$X in retail media with a specific retailer, but leadership knows that they need those dollars to invest in a special initiative with another retailer based on their latest JBP. Given that context, the leader has to make a different decision than what the AI provided.

Instead of determining a budget or strategic plan for the year, in an agentic organization, agents are creating budgets in real time and leaders are interpreting those signals and adjusting continuously.

Overall shifts and what success looks like in an agentic world.



Agentic transformation requires rearchitecting and complete rewiring of the business. Just like ecommerce, you can’t just tack on AI and expect it to make a significant change. It means redesigning work around AI not just adding AI.

Phases of Agentic Transformation

Like all transformations, this will happen over time and organizations will go through many phases of agentic transformation when it comes to work getting done.

Assisted Work (AI as a tool)

This is where most organizations are today. Using AI as a tool to help re-write an email, brainstorm an idea or help with productivity. Most organizations are in pilot mode trying to understand how AI can impact productivity.

Sixty-six percent of organizations are still stuck in the experimentation or pilot phase and have not begun to scale AI across the enterprise, according to [McKinsey & Company](#).

Delegated Work (AI as an Executor)

This is the shift from “tell me the answer” to “do this task.” AI agents are able to work autonomously within guardrails.

Collaborative Work (Hybrid Human and Agent)

Instead of using one agent, you have a team of agents doing work on your behalf. You might task an agent with competitive research and copywriting, and then have an AI focus group review it.

Orchestrated Intelligence (Agentic Systems)

This moves into agentic systems where humans and agents are working together in a connected way throughout the organization. Agents are monitoring and reacting to data in real time, then making decisions and taking actions autonomously.

They’re learning from past mistakes, getting feedback from their human and agent teammates and continuing to operate. All systems and processes in the organization are set up for an orchestrated world.

The Agentic Transformation Framework

Agentic transformation touches every part of an organization from marketing to sales to supply chain and R&D. Digital transformation should have touched all areas of the organization but instead stayed in the ecommerce teams.

When the scope is this broad, the instinct in most organizations is to grab at tactics, a new tool here, a training session there, an AI policy document sent out by HR. Activity happens, but the underlying structure never changes. A year goes by, and the organization is essentially the same, just with more test-and-learns stuck in pilot purgatory and a lot of confusion about who's actually responsible for any of it.

A framework doesn't prevent all of that, but it does give you a way to see the whole system at once and identify actual gaps, rather than just responding to whatever feels most urgent in a given week.

The agentic transformation framework is a way of thinking about what it means to become an AI-enabled organization. There are four pillars, and each one addresses a different part of the organizational system.

Pillar 1: Data and Technology

The first pillar is the Foundation: Data and Technology. This is where everything starts, because you can't build anything durable on top of bad data or disconnected systems.

Before anything else matters, an organization needs to know where its data lives, if it can be trusted, and if its technology is architected to let agents actually work with it. A weak foundation doesn't just slow you down. It means everything built on top of it is fragile.

Pillar 2: Talent and Culture

The second pillar is the Engine: Talent and Culture. Technology alone has never transformed an organization. Not once in the history of organizational change.

The people inside the company and the culture that shapes how they work together are where transformation actually lives or dies. This is the hardest pillar and the one that takes the longest to change, which is exactly why it needs to start first.

Pillar 3: Context, Governance, and Operating Model

The third pillar is the Blueprint: Context, Governance, and Operating Model. AI without guardrails is a liability.

Someone has to define who owns what, how decisions get made, and how teams are structured so they can move with speed without creating risk. This isn't bureaucracy for its own sake. It's the architecture that lets everything else operate without breaking.

Pillar 4: Education and Change Management

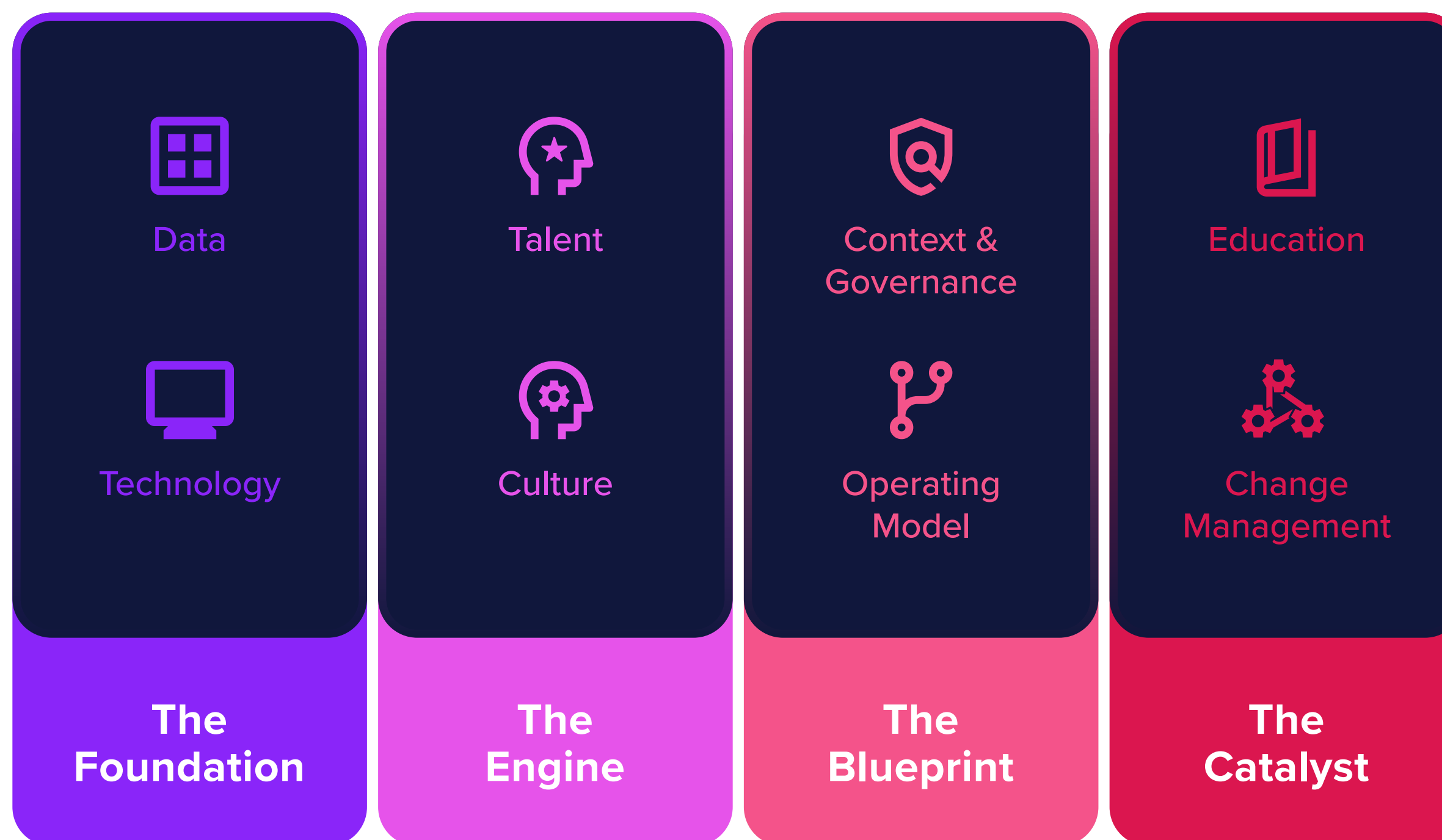
The fourth pillar is the Catalyst: Education and Change Management. None of the above sticks if people don't understand what's happening and why. Education and change management are what turn a framework into a living operating system rather than a strategy document that gets reviewed once a year and then forgotten.

These four pillars aren't a strict sequence. You don't finish the foundation before touching talent, and you don't wait until the governance model is perfect before starting to educate your teams. But they do have real dependencies.

A weak foundation makes the engine inefficient. A strong foundation with the wrong culture produces resistance. Governance without education produces confusion. Each pillar reinforces the others, and gaps in any one of them will show up as problems somewhere else in the system.

The rest of this paper takes each pillar in turn, starting with the one that makes everything else possible.

Agentic Transformation Framework



The Foundation: Data and Technology

If your data is bad, AI isn't going to fix it. There's no amount of model sophistication or agentic tooling that turns poor quality data into a good product recommendation.

What AI does with bad data is amplify it. It takes your errors, your gaps, your inconsistencies, and it operates on them at scale. You don't get AI-powered efficiency on top of messy data. You get automated chaos.

According to DSI Survey Data and NIQ Consumer Insights:

- ✔ 66% of organizations are hindered by significant data silos.
- ✔ 20% say their baseline data hygiene requires a complete overhaul.
- ✔ Only 4% of brand manufacturers have AI-ready infrastructure.

The diagnostic questions here are straightforward, even if the answers are sometimes difficult.

Do you know where your data lives and who owns it? Do you have clean, accurate product data across your catalog?

Do you understand your consumer persona by category well enough that an agent could use it to personalize a recommendation?

Most organizations, when they're being honest, can't say yes to all three. That's the gap that needs to close before AI produces the outcomes they're hoping for.

PXM is the backbone of the agentic shelf. When a consumer's AI agent asks for "the best protein powder with at least 25 grams of protein per serving, no artificial sweeteners, and third-party testing certification," what happens next depends entirely on how your product attributes are structured in your PXM.

The agent is pulling structured data. It's reading attributes, comparing them against parameters, and returning results. If the attribute doesn't exist, the product doesn't match. If the attribute exists but isn't populated, same result. If the attribute is populated inconsistently across your catalog, the agent can't reliably interpret it.

"Third-party tested," "3rd party certified," and "yes" in a testing column mean three different things to a machine, even if a human sales rep would know they're the same thing.

The Engine: Talent and Culture

Here's the question to every leader reading this: 80% of your job can be automated. What are you going to do with that time?

Because if 80% of someone's role today is repetitive, process-driven, volume-intensive work — content updates, data pulling, report generation, status updates, meeting prep — and that work gets handed to an agent, what remains is the 20% that actually requires a human.

The judgment calls. The relationships. The creative leaps. The decisions that no model is confident enough to make alone. That's not a smaller job. That's a better one.

“The traits of future leaders in this space are being comfortable with ambiguity, willing to take on a challenge and being willing to experiment.”

Suzanne Crettol

Head of Operations, CPG Guys



The first exercise I'd encourage every leader to do is simple. Go through each role in your organization, and ask a few questions:

- ✓ Which elements of this job are repetitive and rule-based?
- ✓ Which elements require genuine strategic oversight, human judgment, or relationship management?
- ✓ What gets handed to an agent — and what stays with the person?

The diagnostic questions here are straightforward, even if the answers are sometimes difficult.

This isn't an exercise in figuring out who to let go. It's an exercise in understanding what your organization actually needs from its people — and then making sure the people are spending their time on those things.

Talent and People

The biggest complexity in any agentic transformation is an organization's people, and, as we outlined, it's a massive cultural shift for them. They need to navigate that the job they may have done for the past 10 years is either fundamentally changing, or they need to pivot to a new type of role.

When it comes to people, there are a few different things to think about with agentic transformation.

Building Leaders of the Future

The leaders of the future look different from the leaders we have today. They need to understand how to manage both people and systems of agents.

Their role transitions to that of The Orchestrator, where they have an understanding of the overall business and can bring together teams and ideas to get to a desired outcome.

Here are five characteristics of a future-ready leader:

- ✓ Orchestrator of human and AI collaboration
- ✓ Technical fluency to be able to operate with agents
- ✓ Overall understanding how the business works and cross-functional partners plug in
- ✓ Governance of AI behavior
- ✓ Algorithmic decisions aligned to brand and org values

New Role Creation

While some roles might change or become hybrid with AI, others will emerge to monitor and support a hybrid workforce.

Some new roles that will be needed in organizations going through agentic transformation include:

- ✓ **AI Trainers:** With AI agents working with humans and making decisions for the organization, it's important that they stay up to date on the parameters of the brand and the organization.
- ✓ **Chief AI Officer:** This is a role similar to the chief digital officer that you'll see pop up as AI becomes more prevalent but will eventually be integrated back into the overall business. There needs to be a focus on how AI can be integrated into the organization and therefore putting a role in place can help do that.
- ✓ **Commercial Intelligence Officer:** A leader focused on creating the context layer across the organization
- ✓ **Agentic Commerce Optimization Manager:** An additional leader focused on optimizing content across all channels for AEO and generative engine optimization (GEO).

Talent Development and Career Plans

With AI handling the entry-level tasks that junior analysts and interns usually start with, companies must rethink professional development.

One way to mitigate that talent gap is by implementing apprenticeship programs. Junior talent gets the opportunity to observe and learn from more experienced leaders with AI as their co-pilot.

Talent planning also needs to shift in order to incorporate more non-traditional skills and new skills into roles. Much of talent planning today is built on a system for in-store brick and mortar shopping.

For example, the old approach was “First, you learn sales, then marketing, then this, then that, and then you can become a general manager.”

However, the leaders of tomorrow do not follow such a linear path. Talent planning needs to be based on outcomes and identifying what skills leaders need to get to those outcomes. Even universities are tearing up the old playbook, adapting to a younger generation by prioritizing micro-credentials and real-world AI application over traditional four-year linear tracks, according to [EdTech Breakthrough](#).

Talent Assessment, Performance Management, and Incentives

If an organization is going through agentic transformation, it’s moving from more of an individual mindset to a collective mindset, which will require a change in how individuals are assessed on performance, measured, and incentivized.

If the organization is focused more on a shared mindset, then goals need to shift to match that.

For example, brand managers are incentivized on their brand’s performance, not the “collective knowledge” of the company. If an agent suggests shifting budget from Tide to Downy because it’s “better for the collective,” the Tide Brand Manager will fight that agent to the death.

The concept of shared north star goals is critical to the changes needed for agentic transformation.

An added element of performance assessment will be agent monitoring and assessing. Instead of focusing on productivity which means checking a box, the focus should be on what additional value and outcomes are created by the individual orchestration agents.

Here are some changes that will need to be included in talent assessment:

- ✓ How are employees unlocking value with agents?
- ✓ How are they using AI tools in their role?
- ✓ How are they affecting the company outcomes?

The Cultural Shift: From the Individual to the Collective

Every piece of research on organizational change says the same thing, and it aligns completely with this industry: Transformation lives or dies in the people and the culture. Technology is the enabler. Culture is the constraint.

Agentic transformation introduces a cultural shift in how work gets done inside organizations. It will require companies and individuals to change how they work, how they think, how they learn, and how they make decisions. It can give equal brainpower to every level of the organization as well as every single one of your competitors.

The lines between the individual employee and the entire organization begin to blur.

Today, each individual in the organization has a specific set of knowledge. Some have more years of experience than others and have specialized in a specific role. Now, any individual can use AI to get a base level knowledge of any topic. This doesn't eliminate the expertise you have in your organization, but it does even the playing field of knowledge.

AI will also help eliminate a lot of the administrative tasks that most of us do in our jobs. It will increase productivity and free up time to be more strategic. The focus will move from task completion to value creation. But that means organizations need to move as one, where outcomes are shared and value is created for the entire organization.





It requires employees to eliminate ego and move to a more “we” mindset. AI shifts to shared knowledge, shared outcomes, and shared intent.

Having a superagent or a collective knowledge center for the entire company allows someone in supply chain to have the same knowledge and insight as someone in marketing. If a half-baked deck is being created by someone in sales, then someone in ecommerce can access it and build on it.

All of the collateral created by individuals at your organization becomes training data for the agent as well as shared intelligence for the entire organization.

The Impact of the Cultural Shift: What Changes?

How We Work

Teams get smaller and more autonomous. The shift will be from large hierarchical teams to smaller agentic teams that are focused on a specific outcome.

Busy stops being a badge of honor and people are valued and compensated for throughput, judgement, and orchestration.

How We Think

Before AI, access to information and expertise across the organization was based on your seniority, connections inside the organization, and your function. With an AI-enabled organization, you move to a model of shared intelligence. One where access to data and information is shared across the entire organization.

Thinking becomes more collaborative. The entire organization can feed into the collective mind of the business. Instead of going to an agent and saying you want X, it's about having a conversation, asking questions, getting information, and getting to an end result.

This will be a behavior change because humans won't rely on their expertise alone, they'll be supercharged with the shared intelligence of the organization.

It's not about what you know but instead how you can get information and piece it together.

How We Learn

AI is changing and evolving faster than any other technology before it. This means that continuous learning is needed in order for teams to stay up to date. Since learning will be an ongoing constant, it's important to embed it into everyday life instead of making it a one off approach.

Previously, learning was a static activity. Go to a three-day training, take that learning, and apply it to your job. In an AI-enabled organization, learning becomes more continuous. It's built in the workflow of engaging with agents, it's personalized to your job and outcomes, and AI is there as a constant learning companion.

Training future leaders fundamentally changes. Analyst level roles often started with hands-on keyboard work and worked their way up through management. Most of that hands-on keyboard work is now being replaced by AI.



Without that learning, how will organizations be able to train the leaders of tomorrow? Many organizations are thinking of apprenticeship programs where junior talent can shadow leaders to learn the skills they need to grow in their roles.

How We Make Decisions

AI will fundamentally impact how you make decisions about the business and about prioritization. Instead of making stagnant decisions and sticking with them for a full year of planning, decisions will be much more fluid taking into account data as it's updated.

Traditionally, organizations set a strategic plan for three to five years and build out yearly JBPs to execute. In an AI-enabled organization, there will be real-time data available to make decisions on a weekly to monthly basis with full visibility to the numbers of the organization.

With integrated data sets, all levels of the organization can make real-time decisions.

Cross-functional collaboration becomes even more critical in an agentic world. All functions need to move in harmony in order to achieve the same overarching goal.

AI will help enable that cross-functional collaboration by providing visibility to projects, flagging when certain members of functions need to be involved, monitoring projects, and setting guardrails.

An exciting element of agentic transformation naturally breaks down silos by providing information about the entire business to the whole organization. While individuals might still sit in a certain function, they'll have access to data across the entire organization.

What does that look like in practice? Let's say your organization has 10 brands.

You're planning a new product launch on a personal care brand for May and everything is lined up from content to media activations. In today's current world, if you didn't have any collaboration with the other brands you wouldn't have any visibility to other launches happening. In an AI-enabled world, you could engage with your organization's AI agent and ask if there were any other launches happening on the same day.

The AI agent can then surface that another brand is launching on the exact same day, and tell you that it might make sense to shift the launch by a few weeks. This results in saved dollars and a more cohesive experience for the consumer.

In the past, for example, an organization got all of the relevant leaders for each function together to talk about performance and roadblock. All of the functional teams spent weeks preparing decks, creating dashboards, and writing talk tracks for the conversations. In that conversation, many new things surfaced that others were unaware of.

In an agentic world, the executive team sits down weekly for two hours and looks at reports and data created by a series of agents that are trained on the business. The meetings are recorded and the agents are trained off of the questions being asked and how the leaders look at the data.

After the meeting, a trained AI agent summarizes findings and predicts questions that will come up in the next meeting.

The outcome:

- ✓ Time back to functions and teams needing to stop their day to day job to create slides;
- ✓ A full picture of the data and business; and
- ✓ Faster, connected decision making enabled.

When reading this example, the initial reaction is often to say “What if the agent is wrong?” That’s where the reframe of moving from deterministic to probabilistic comes in. The job of the AI agent isn’t to tell the leaders the answer, it’s to share all of the facts and have the leaders decide based on their own knowledge, strategy, and reasoning.

For example, the agent might recommend that an organization spend more media dollars at Walmart based on statistical modeling, but the leadership has decided to take those dollars and allocate them to an emerging channel because they think their existing Walmart strategy will continue to help them grow.





Cross-Functional Partners

Some additional cross functional partners that are now even more important in an agentic world are PR and corporate communications, legal, HR, and IT.

PR and Corporate Communications

AI agents use citations to understand what types of content to surface to consumers and your PR and communications teams can help you get more citations on those sites. With LLM search, trust is everything and more citations equal trust.

Legal

There are many complexities when it comes to AI tools and content that legal needs to assist with. Partnering with your legal team to explain the importance of machine readable content and building a collaborative relationship is important.

HR

How people work, what their job descriptions are, and how you develop talent is even more critical.

IT

IT has always been a strong cross-functional partner in all things digital, but they're increasingly important in helping to protect your data, your brand safety and overall liability when using agents.

External Partners

Brands can't do this alone. There will be more agency partners, technology partners, and thought leaders needed to help influence this change.

The Blueprint: Context and Governance

A great analogy about AI is that it's like a GPS. You plug in an address, it takes you from Point A to Point B in the fastest time possible. But what if you hate sitting in bumper-to-bumper traffic? You'd rather take an extra 30 minutes and just keep moving. The GPS doesn't have that context about you, so it can't give you that experience.

That's exactly the problem inside most organizations right now. And it's the problem in how those organizations are trying to work with consumers. Agents can execute. They can move fast, produce outputs, complete tasks.

What they can't do on their own is understand the difference between the technically correct answer and the right answer for this brand, this consumer, this moment. Context is what closes that gap. Governance is how you build context in.

When talking to leaders about governance, AI is approached in two ways. The first is treating it as a legal or compliance checkbox, something to hand off and forget. The second is waiting until something goes wrong. Both are expensive mistakes.

The governance layer needs to answer specific structural questions before agents go live: What data can agents access? What actions can they take without human sign-off? What's completely off-limits? How do you set guardrails that protect the business without slowing it to a crawl? These are architectural decisions that get made up front, not patched in after the fact.

Brand safety is where governance gets real. Any AI-generated content that goes out under your brand name is your brand's content, legally and reputationally. If an agent produces a product description that makes a false claim, your brand owns that claim. The governance layer is where you define the guardrails before something goes wrong, not after.

Legal needs to be at the table early, not brought in after something breaks. The legal frameworks around AI tools, AI-generated content, and the data that trains agents aren't fully resolved anywhere in the world right now.

Content rights, data usage, output ownership, all of these need policies, and those policies need to be living documents because the legal environment keeps shifting. If your legal team is only hearing about your AI deployments when something surfaces in the news, that's a structural problem.

IT is the other partnership that marketing and commerce leaders sometimes underestimate. IT protects the data layer, enforces access controls, and manages the

infrastructure that agents actually run on. Brand safety and data protection aren't separate concerns, they're the same concern, approached from different directions.

Context, context, context. Agents that operate without adequate context produce outputs that are technically correct and contextually wrong. They'll generate a product description that's accurate and completely misaligned with your brand voice. They'll recommend a promotional strategy that conflicts with a channel agreement your sales team negotiated. The governance layer is also the context layer, it's where you encode what the agent needs to know about how your business actually works.

Operating Model

If you take anything away from this paper, let it be this: Agentic transformation can't be tackled by one function. Full stop. The commerce team, the marketing team, the digital team, whoever it is in your organization that's been handed the AI mandate, you're the changemakers. But you can't own this alone.

“The AI organization of the future is built with agents that are being managed by specialists.”

Joanna Lambadjieva

Founder and CEO of Amazing Wave





Whoever “owns” AI in a company that has siloed it to a single team will eventually hit the ceiling of what that team can do by itself. Brands that put digital commerce inside one function and left it there spent years fighting for resources, fighting for access, fighting for relevance at the table where real decisions were made. AI is going to follow the same pattern unless organizations design around it from the start.

A best practice from leading brands is creating an AI task force, cross-functional by design — not a committee, an actual decision-making body. It’s responsible for shared goals, shared visibility into what agents are doing across functions, and shared budget conversations. The meetings are about decisions, not status updates.

Before you can fix a process, you have to know what that process actually is. Map your current processes end to end, find the bottlenecks, the handoffs, the places where work piles up waiting for approvals. And when you’re doing that mapping, try not to bring all your old assumptions with it. Does it have to be a traditional sales and marketing function?

Could it be an activation function? Could it be organized around omnichannel outcomes rather than departmental ownership? You can’t fix something you don’t know is broken. And you can’t reinvent something if you’re only willing to adjust it.

Creating a central AI hub helps build the context layer for AI: where governance policies are maintained, where the organization’s learning gets captured and shared. Small, outcome-focused agentic teams are what you’re building toward. Organized around what they’re trying to accomplish rather than what function they historically came from.

Planning and budgeting cycles are also going to have to change. Traditional annual planning is too slow for AI-first workflows. Early movers are already experimenting with agentic approaches to budgeting, AI agents that propose budgets, scenario agents that run forecasts, reporting agents that provide real-time insights rather than monthly snapshots. Finance leaders in those organizations are shifting from collecting spreadsheets to interpreting signals. That’s a fundamentally different job.

Finally, there are cross-functional partners that now matter in ways they didn’t used to. PR and corporate communications teams have a new and direct stake in how AI agents operate. LLM-based search surfaces content based in part on citations, on what appears on trusted sites, in credible publications, in authoritative sources.

PR and comms teams can influence what gets cited. That’s a direct line between PR strategy and AI-driven consumer discovery. HR matters more than ever, because how people work, what their roles actually require, and how you develop talent for an agentic world are all active questions that someone needs to own.

The Catalyst: Education and Change Management

DSI and NIQ research found that 40% of leaders don't use AI because they're worried about trust and safety. Another 29% say they lack the internal skills to actually work with AI tools.

AI is new to everyone and is something that we all need to get comfortable with and understand. Similar to the importance of ecommerce education, putting in place AI literacy programs is critical to the success of a future-focused organization.

This is an initiative that needs to come from the top down. The leadership team needs to both explain and demonstrate that AI literacy is an important element to the success of the organization.

“You can’t only upskill one level of people in the organization, you need to upskill everyone otherwise AI becomes an individual use case.”

Caroline Giegerich

VP, AI & Marketing Innovation, IAB



Address the Skill Gap

From analysts to C-suite leaders, there's a skill gap that exists in a new agentic world. For analysts it's the ability to get the hands-on skills needed to learn which are now automated by agents.

For executives, the playbook is completely different. The traditional success of an executive has been attached to managing large teams and budgets as a proxy for importance in their position. An agentic world looks different.

Many executives must abandon their old playbook as well as their ego to adapt to a new world that has more probabilistic outcomes with smaller agile teams.

The level of tech fluency needed by C-suite leaders is similar to that of traditional IT leaders which will require upskilling and reskilling.

The Glue that Holds it All Together: Change Management

Imagine you are an employee who has spent 20 years perfecting a very specific skill and is a master at that thing. Then your organization introduces a new AI technology that automates that skill. How would you feel?



We’ve all heard the stat that 70% of change efforts fail, largely due to employee resistance or lack of adoption (McKinsey). The reason for that is because of meta-thesiophobia, which actually means the fear of change. Humans naturally have a resistance to change and as we stated in the beginning, this is a VERY big change.

That is why change management isn’t just a nice-to-have but a must-have in your organization as you think about implementing AI.

To start, it’s important to understand your organization’s comfort level with change. How do they react to it, where do they get their information and where’s the best place to educate them.

For this specific change, there needs to be top down communication of the importance of integrating AI into the business as well as the understanding of why. This should include a clear change story with what and why now. Then, it needs to be disseminated through all of the leaders in the organization and embedded into the business.

How To Start Thinking About Change Management

Create a change story	Why are we implementing AI into what we do, and how will it affect everyone’s jobs? What outcomes will it drive?
Have leaders share examples	Have top-down leaders share examples of how they’re using AI or how they see it being used in the organization.
Set up open discussion forums	There will be many questions about the changes that are coming with AI. Create spaces where leaders can share and employees can ask questions.
Identify change champions	Designate employees in every function and team to help champion the change.
Begin to measure adoption	It’s important to measure the change in the organization. Who is using AI and for what? This also helps you identify what education or technology is needed.

The P&L Impact of AI

We've talked about all of the benefits of an AI-enabled organization and how it can be more autonomous and agile to react to what is happening in the industry. But what will this transformation take and how will it affect the P&L?

The truth is that this transformation will require investment from the organization in people, process, and technology in order to be successful.

There will need to be investment with your external partners to advance and connect current technologies. Partners will be critical in this transformation as they create and update their technology for an agentic future.

Forty-two percent say their AI budget will remain flat, according to DSI Survey Data and NIQ Consumer Insights.

This transformation will require investment in change management, upskilling, and technology in order to get your current employees ready.

It requires a joint conversation with your executive leadership team about how to fund this change.

New Success Metrics

With a new way of working comes a new way of measuring success. When AI agents are intertwined with the existing workforce new metrics need to be put in place to measure adoption and effectiveness.

The first stage of measurement might be around usage and productivity, but it's important to build a plan that gets you to measuring value and outcomes. If you only measure productivity, more work will be getting done but it might not be connected to the broader success of the organization. The goal is a measurement system that gets you to value and outcomes.

Example Metrics

- ✓ % of decisions automated by AI agents (This stat tells you how much of the operational burden has shifted.)
- ✓ % of workflows triggered by agents (not humans)
- ✓ % of workflows supported by agents
- ✓ % of employees using AI agents daily
- ✓ Quality of outputs: Are agent-produced outputs meeting or exceeding human-produced baselines, and is that improving over time?
- ✓ Speed from brief to execution

In an agentic organization, the person who orchestrates three agents and touches 50 processes a day creates a very different kind of value than the person who completes tasks manually.

Performance systems built around individual output can't see that difference. They'll systematically undervalue the people who are working at the intersection of human judgment and agentic execution — which is exactly where you want your best people operating.

Success in an agentic organization is no longer primarily about individual output. It's about what outcomes the individual enables. That is a meaningful shift in how performance gets recognized, rewarded, and developed. Organizations that adjust their performance frameworks will attract and retain the people best equipped for this kind of work. Organizations that don't will find those people leaving.



Where Do Organizations Start?

Transformation doesn't have a single starting line. Organizations come to this at varying levels of data maturity, unique cultures, different levels of executive buy-in, and different existing technology infrastructure.

While agentic transformation isn't going to immediately change things, it's the fastest technological advancement we've seen to date and it takes time for organizations to adapt to change, so you need to start now.

You can think about agentic transformation in four phases:

1. Awareness

3. Integration

2. Experimentation

4. Rewiring

1. Awareness: Build the Foundation

Assess your data quality and systems. Take a clear look at your technology baseline and your organizational readiness. Invest in initial education across levels of the organization. Identify the specific problems AI can actually solve in your context — not problems in the abstract, but the bottlenecks your team hits every week. The goal of this phase is shared vocabulary and shared curiosity.

Questions To Ask Yourself

- ✓ Do you have a PXM platform?
- ✓ Do you know where your data is, who owns it, and if it's accurate?
- ✓ Do you have all of your digital shelf processes mapped out?

2. Experimentation: Pilot Programs and Proof of Concepts

Fifty-eight percent of digital leaders are using AI for content and creative today and 12% for analytics, according to the DSI and NIQ Survey.

This is the phase where the culture of experimentation either takes hold or it doesn't, and the difference is usually whether failures are treated as data or as evidence that the whole thing is a bad idea.

Successes and failures both need to be documented and shared. The organization's collective learning during this phase is one of its most valuable assets going forward.

3. Integration: Embedding agentic capabilities across operations

New roles start appearing on org charts.

The operating model gets actively redesigned around agentic workflows rather than retrofitted. Technology infrastructure comes into focus: API-first systems, real-time data access, structured data standards that agents can actually work with.

This phase requires organizational patience that can be hard to sustain when there are quarterly targets to hit. Leaders who protect the space for integration to happen are making a long-term investment in structural advantage.

4. Rewiring: Hybrid workforce

Human-agent collaboration is the default, not the exception. The organization looks structurally different from what it was at the start. New functions exist. Old ones have changed shape. The metrics and the performance management systems reflect a different definition of productivity.

The fact is that organizations will always be transforming and the more we can get our organizations used to that the better. The ones that build the muscle for continuous change — that get genuinely comfortable with not knowing what the next version of the work looks like — will be better positioned than the ones that treat every transformation as a disruption to endure and then return to normal.



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While at Johnson & Johnson, Livak Gilbert launched a new, successful digital strategy for its Consumer North America business. At Salsify she worked with more than 100 global brands to develop a comprehensive commerce strategy, including staffing, technology investments, and performance-based processes. And at the DSI she connects with brands, retailers, tech partners and agencies to help advance the industry with her research and content.