American Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation (AJAMRI)

E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX ● Website: www.ajamri.com ● Email: editor@ajamri.com

Agentic AI and Autonomous Workflows: Rethinking Organizational Processes, Accountability and Innovation

Steven G. Blank

Professor Stanford University

Abstract

The emergence of agentic artificial intelligence (AI) represents a significant evolution beyond conventional AI systems that primarily generate predictions, recommendations, or responses. Agentic AI systems can interpret objectives, plan multi-step actions, interact with digital tools, make context-dependent decisions, and execute workflows with varying degrees of autonomy. This transformation has important implications for how organisations design processes, allocate responsibilities, manage employees, and pursue innovation. This paper examines the potential of agentic AI to reshape organisational workflows while focusing on three interconnected dimensions: process transformation, accountability, and innovation. A conceptual qualitative methodology is adopted to analyse the characteristics, applications, benefits, risks, and governance requirements associated with autonomous AI-enabled workflows. The study proposes an organisational agentic AI framework comprising goal definition, planning, tool integration, execution, monitoring, human oversight, and continuous evaluation. The analysis suggests that agentic AI can reduce repetitive administrative work, accelerate decision processes, improve cross-functional coordination, and enable new forms of organisational innovation. However, increased autonomy also creates challenges related to accountability gaps, erroneous decisions, cybersecurity, data privacy, employee displacement, model unpredictability, and excessive automation. The paper argues that organisations should not treat autonomy as an objective in itself. Instead, autonomy should be calibrated according to task criticality, risk, reversibility, and required human judgement. A human-centred governance model is therefore proposed in which AI agents operate within clearly defined authority boundaries, escalation mechanisms, audit trails, and performance controls. The study concludes that the successful adoption of agentic AI will depend not simply on technical capability but on organisational redesign, responsible governance, workforce adaptation, and the development of new accountability structures.

Keywords: Agentic AI, Autonomous Workflows, Artificial Intelligence, Organisational Processes, AI Governance, Accountability, Automation, Human-AI Collaboration, Digital Transformation, Organisational Innovation.

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1. Introduction

Artificial intelligence has traditionally been deployed within organisations as a tool for prediction, classification, recommendation, automation, and information retrieval.

Recent advances in large language models and AI systems have introduced a more autonomous paradigm.

Instead of simply responding to a user's request, an agentic AI system can potentially:

- Interpret a goal.
- Break a task into subtasks.
- Develop a plan.
- Retrieve information.
- Use software tools.
- Execute actions.
- Evaluate results.
- Modify its approach.
- Escalate problems to humans.

This transition can be represented as:

Traditional Automation → AI Assistance → AI-Augmented Work → Agentic Workflows

The distinction is strategically important.

A conventional automation system generally follows predefined rules:

Input → Rule → Output

An agentic workflow can operate through:

Goal → Planning → Action → Observation → Adaptation → Outcome

This introduces a new organisational question:

If an AI system independently performs a sequence of organisational actions, who is responsible for the resulting outcome?

This question places accountability at the centre of agentic AI adoption.

2. Concept of Agentic AI

Agentic AI refers broadly to AI systems capable of pursuing objectives through multiple steps and interacting with their environment or external tools.

An agent may combine:

- Large language models.
- Planning mechanisms.
- Memory.
- Retrieval systems.
- External APIs.

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- Software tools.
- Databases.
- Monitoring mechanisms.

A simplified architecture is:

Goal → Reasoning → Planning → Tool Selection → Action → Feedback → Replanning

Unlike traditional chatbot systems, agentic AI is therefore oriented towards goal-directed activity.

3. Agentic AI versus Conventional AI

Feature	Conventional AI	Agentic AI
Primary function	Prediction or response	Goal-oriented action
Workflow	Usually predefined	Dynamically planned
Tool usage	Limited	Extensive
Autonomy	Low–Moderate	Moderate–High
Adaptation	Usually limited	Continuous during tasks
Decision sequence	Mostly fixed	Potentially dynamic
Human involvement	Often direct	Can be supervisory
Accountability	Easier to define	More complex

Agentic AI does not necessarily eliminate human involvement.

Instead, it can change the human role from direct execution towards supervision, exception management, and strategic judgement.

4. Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Examine the concept of agentic AI.
2. Analyse autonomous organisational workflows.
3. Identify potential applications across organisational functions.
4. Examine the implications for accountability.
5. Evaluate innovation opportunities.
6. Identify operational and ethical risks.
7. Develop a governance framework for agentic AI.
8. Analyse the changing role of employees.
9. Identify future directions for autonomous organisational systems.

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5. Research Methodology

This paper adopts a conceptual qualitative research approach.

The analysis synthesises research and conceptual developments relating to:

- Artificial intelligence.
- Autonomous agents.
- Large language models.
- Business-process automation.
- Human-AI collaboration.
- AI governance.
- Organisational innovation.
- Digital transformation.

The analysis focuses on seven dimensions:

Dimension	Core Question
Autonomy	How independently can the AI operate?
Planning	Can it execute multi-step tasks?
Integration	What organisational systems can it access?
Decision-making	What decisions can it make?
Accountability	Who is responsible for outcomes?
Governance	What controls constrain the agent?
Innovation	What new organisational capabilities emerge?

6. Evolution of Organisational Automation

Organisational automation has evolved through several stages.

Stage 1: Manual Work

Employees perform activities directly.

Stage 2: Rule-Based Automation

Software executes predefined instructions.

Stage 3: Intelligent Automation

AI assists with prediction and decision support.

Stage 4: Generative AI

AI generates content, code, analysis, and recommendations.

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Stage 5: Agentic AI

AI systems can coordinate and execute multi-step workflows.

The transition from Stage 4 to Stage 5 is particularly significant because it moves AI from content generation towards action execution.

7. Organisational Workflow Transformation

Traditional workflows are often structured around functional departments.

For example:

Customer Request → Sales → Finance → Operations → Customer Service

An agentic architecture could coordinate these activities dynamically.

Customer Request → AI Agent → Sales Data + Finance System + Operations System → Resolution

The agent can potentially coordinate multiple systems without requiring employees to manually transfer information between them.

8. Autonomous Workflow Architecture

A typical agentic workflow consists of:

8.1 Goal Layer

Defines the desired outcome.

8.2 Planning Layer

Breaks the goal into actionable steps.

8.3 Knowledge Layer

Provides relevant organisational information.

8.4 Tool Layer

Connects the agent to:

- Databases.
- APIs.
- Enterprise software.
- Search systems.
- Communication tools.

8.5 Execution Layer

Carries out approved actions.

8.6 Monitoring Layer

Evaluates actions and outcomes.

8.7 Human Oversight Layer

Intervenes when predefined thresholds are exceeded.

9. Agentic AI in Human Resources

Potential applications include:

- Recruitment coordination.
- CV screening assistance.
- Interview scheduling.
- Employee onboarding.
- Training recommendations.
- HR query management.
- Workforce analytics.

However, employment-related decisions can have significant consequences.

AI should therefore not independently make sensitive employment decisions without appropriate human review and governance.

10. Agentic AI in Finance

Financial workflows may involve:

- Invoice processing.
- Expense verification.
- Financial reporting.
- Payment reconciliation.
- Fraud-alert investigation.
- Budget monitoring.

An agent could identify an invoice, compare it against procurement records, verify approval status, and prepare the transaction for human authorisation.

High-value financial transactions should generally remain subject to explicit approval controls.

11. Agentic AI in Customer Service

An agentic customer-service system could:

1. Receive a customer request.
2. Identify the issue.
3. Search the knowledge base.
4. Review customer history.
5. Recommend a solution.
6. Execute authorised account actions.

7. Escalate complex cases.

This changes customer service from simple conversational automation to workflow orchestration.

12. Agentic AI in Supply-Chain Management

Supply-chain agents could potentially monitor:

- Inventory levels.
- Supplier performance.
- Delivery schedules.
- Market conditions.
- Demand forecasts.

The system could identify a shortage and initiate procurement workflows.

However, autonomous procurement requires carefully defined financial and contractual limits.

13. Agentic AI in Knowledge Management

Organisations possess large volumes of unstructured information.

Agentic systems can potentially:

- Search documents.
- Summarise information.
- Compare policies.
- Identify missing information.
- Prepare reports.
- Route tasks.

This could transform organisational knowledge management from passive document storage into active knowledge orchestration.

14. Agentic AI and Decision-Making

One of the most significant organisational changes concerns decision-making.

Traditional model:

Human → Analyse → Decide → Execute

Agentic model:

Human → Define Objective → AI Analyse/Plan → AI Execute Within Limits → Human Monitor

This does not necessarily eliminate human authority.

Instead, it redistributes decision-making across humans and machines.

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15. Levels of Autonomy

Organisations should distinguish different levels of AI autonomy.

Level	AI Role
0	No autonomy
1	Recommendation
2	Assisted execution
3	Conditional autonomy
4	High autonomy with monitoring
5	Broad autonomous operation

The appropriate level should depend on:

- Risk.
- Reversibility.
- Financial impact.
- Legal implications.
- Safety.
- Data sensitivity.

16. Risk-Based Autonomy

Not every organisational task should receive the same degree of autonomy.
A useful principle is:

Higher Risk → Lower Autonomous Authority

For example:

Task	Suggested Autonomy
Meeting scheduling	High
Document classification	High
Internal report drafting	High
Routine inventory alerts	Moderate–High
Supplier selection	Moderate
Financial transfers	Low
Employee termination	Very Low

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Task	Suggested Autonomy
Safety-critical decisions	Very Low

17. Accountability Challenge

Traditional organisational accountability assumes that humans make decisions.
Agentic AI complicates this model.
Consider:

Employee → AI Agent → External System → Business Outcome

If the AI makes an incorrect decision, possible accountability questions include:

- Who designed the system?
- Who deployed it?
- Who authorised the action?
- Who monitored it?
- Was the agent operating within its permissions?
- Was the organisation's governance adequate?

AI should not become an accountability black hole.

18. Accountability Framework

This paper proposes five accountability layers.

Layer 1: Developer Accountability

Responsibility for model and system design.

Layer 2: Organisational Accountability

Responsibility for deployment decisions.

Layer 3: Managerial Accountability

Responsibility for defining authority and monitoring.

Layer 4: Agent-Level Traceability

Records of actions, tool calls, and decisions.

Layer 5: Human Escalation

Clearly defined mechanisms for transferring difficult decisions to humans.

19. Auditability

Agentic systems should maintain comprehensive audit trails.
A useful record should capture:

- Objective.
- Input.
- Retrieved information.
- Actions.
- Tools used.
- Decisions.
- Errors.
- Escalations.
- Final outcome.

This allows organisations to reconstruct what happened after an incident.

20. Human-in-the-Loop Governance

Human oversight remains essential for high-impact workflows.
A suitable architecture is:

AI Agent → Risk Assessment → Low Risk: Execute
AI Agent → Risk Assessment → High Risk: Human Approval

This enables automation without abandoning human accountability.

21. Human-on-the-Loop

In some environments, continuous approval may be inefficient.
Instead, humans can monitor agent performance and intervene when necessary.
This approach is known as human-on-the-loop.
It is appropriate where:

- Decisions are frequent.
- Individual actions are relatively low-risk.
- Actions are reversible.
- Strong monitoring exists.

22. Agentic AI and Organisational Innovation

Agentic AI can create innovation in several ways.

Process Innovation

Redesigning workflows around AI-enabled coordination.

Product Innovation

Creating AI-enabled products and services.

Business-Model Innovation

Providing autonomous or semi-autonomous services.

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Organisational Innovation
Redesigning roles and structures around human-AI collaboration.

23. From Automation to Process Reinvention
Simply adding AI to existing processes may produce limited benefits.
Organisations should ask:
If AI can perform this entire workflow, should the workflow itself still exist in its current form?
This can lead to process reinvention.
For example, instead of:

Employee searches → Copies information → Updates spreadsheet → Sends email
an agent could perform:

Request → Retrieve → Analyse → Update → Notify
subject to appropriate controls.

24. Agentic AI and Employee Roles
Agentic AI is likely to change rather than simply eliminate many roles.
Employees may increasingly focus on:
- Strategic decisions.
- Relationship management.
- Exception handling.
- Creative problem-solving.
- AI supervision.
- Ethical judgement.

New roles may also emerge, such as:
- AI workflow designer.
- Agent supervisor.
- AI governance specialist.
- AI operations manager.
- Human-AI process architect.

25. Skills Transformation
Organisations will require employees who understand both domain processes and AI capabilities.
Important skills include:
- AI literacy.
- Process analysis.
- Data governance.

- Critical thinking.
- AI risk management.
- Workflow design.
- Prompt and instruction design.
- Agent supervision.

26. Cybersecurity Risks

Agentic AI introduces new cybersecurity concerns.

An agent may possess access to multiple systems.

If compromised, it could potentially:

- Access sensitive information.
- Send unauthorised communications.
- Modify records.
- Execute transactions.
- Trigger downstream processes.

Therefore:

Agent Capability Must Be Matched by Agent Security.

27. Excessive Permissions

Agents should receive only the permissions required to perform their assigned tasks.

This follows the principle of:

Least Privilege

For example, an agent responsible for scheduling meetings should not have access to financial-transfer systems.

28. Prompt Injection and Tool Manipulation

Agentic systems that retrieve information from external sources may encounter malicious instructions embedded within documents or webpages.

This creates additional risks because the agent may have the ability to act on retrieved information.

Protective mechanisms should include:

- Input validation.
- Tool restrictions.
- Permission boundaries.
- Source verification.
- Sandboxed execution.
- Human approval for sensitive actions.

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29. Data Privacy

Agentic workflows may access multiple sources of organisational data.

Privacy risks increase when agents combine:

- Employee data.
- Customer records.
- Financial information.
- Internal documents.
- External databases.

Organisations therefore need clear policies defining:

- What the agent can access.
- Why it can access it.
- How long information is retained.
- Who can review agent activity.

30. Agentic AI Governance Framework

The proposed governance framework consists of seven components:

1. Purpose Definition
2. Authority Boundaries
3. Access Controls
4. Human Oversight
5. Auditability
6. Risk Monitoring
7. Continuous Evaluation

This can be represented as:

Objective → Authority → Action → Monitoring → Escalation → Audit → Improvement

31. Agent Registry

Large organisations may eventually operate hundreds of AI agents.

A central Agent Registry can track:

- Agent identity.
- Business owner.
- Purpose.
- Permissions.
- Data access.
- Connected tools.
- Autonomy level.
- Performance.
- Risk classification.

This can become an important component of AI governance.

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32. Agent-to-Agent Collaboration

Future organisations may deploy multiple specialised agents.
For example:

Sales Agent → Finance Agent → Operations Agent → Compliance Agent

Each agent performs a specific function.
However, multi-agent systems create additional governance challenges because errors can propagate across agents.
Therefore, inter-agent communication must be monitored and controlled.

33. Organisational Agentic Architecture

A conceptual architecture can be represented as:

User / Business Goal
↓
Orchestrator Agent
↓
Planning Engine
↓
Specialised Agents
↓
Enterprise Tools & Databases
↓
Execution
↓
Monitoring & Risk Engine
↓
Human Oversight
↓
Audit & Learning

34. Strategic Risk Matrix

Risk	Impact	Recommended Control
Incorrect action	High	Human approval
Excessive permissions	Very High	Least privilege
Data leakage	Very High	Access controls
Hallucination	High	Retrieval and validation

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Risk	Impact	Recommended Control
Cyberattack	Very High	Security monitoring
Accountability gap	High	Clear ownership
Agent failure	High	Recovery mechanisms
Process dependency	Medium–High	Human fallback
Model drift	Medium–High	Continuous evaluation
Employee resistance	Medium	Training and change management

35. Proposed Agentic Workflow Maturity Model

Level 1 — Experimental

AI agents used for isolated tasks

Level 2 — Assisted

Agents support employees within predefined workflows.

Level 3 — Integrated

Agents interact with multiple organisational systems.

Level 4 — Autonomous

Agents execute substantial workflows independently within defined limits.

Level 5 — Adaptive Organisation

AI agents dynamically coordinate workflows while humans maintain strategic governance.

36. Business Value

Agentic AI can potentially improve:

- Operational efficiency.
- Response times.
- Customer experience.
- Employee productivity.
- Process consistency.
- Knowledge accessibility.
- Decision support.
- Innovation capacity.

However, productivity gains should be evaluated against:

- Implementation costs.

- Governance costs.
- Security risks.
- Employee adaptation.
- Monitoring requirements.

37. Questionnaire

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree

No.	Statement
1	Agentic AI can significantly improve organisational productivity.
2	AI agents can automate complex multi-step workflows.
3	Organisations should redesign workflows rather than simply automate existing processes.
4	Human oversight remains important for high-risk AI decisions.
5	Clear accountability structures are necessary for autonomous AI systems.
6	AI agents should operate within predefined authority boundaries.
7	Agent activity should be fully auditable.
8	Agentic AI can stimulate organisational innovation.
9	Employees will require new skills to work effectively with AI agents.
10	Agentic AI governance should be integrated into organisational strategy.

38. Future Directions

38.1 Autonomous Enterprise Systems

Organisations may increasingly use networks of AI agents to coordinate routine operations.

38.2 Personal AI Agents

Employees may receive personalised AI agents capable of managing schedules, information, workflows, and communications.

38.3 Multi-Agent Organisations

Specialised agents may collaborate across organisational departments.

38.4 Self-Optimising Processes

AI agents may continuously analyse workflows and recommend or implement improvements.

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38.5 AI-Native Organisations

Future organisations may be designed around human-AI collaboration from the beginning rather than adding AI to legacy processes.

39. Recommendations

Organisations adopting agentic AI should:

1. Begin with clearly defined and measurable workflows.
2. Classify tasks according to risk.
3. Establish explicit agent authority limits.
4. Apply least-privilege access.
5. Maintain comprehensive audit trails.
6. Implement human escalation mechanisms.
7. Separate low-risk and high-risk autonomous actions.
8. Conduct continuous security testing.
9. Establish clear business ownership for every agent.
10. Train employees in AI supervision.
11. Maintain human fallback mechanisms.
12. Periodically review whether the agent's autonomy remains appropriate.

40. Discussion

Agentic AI represents more than another stage of workplace automation.

It potentially changes the fundamental architecture of organisational work.

Traditional organisations are structured around employees performing sequences of tasks.

Agentic organisations may increasingly be structured around goals, agents, workflows, and human oversight.

This creates significant opportunities.

An employee may no longer need to individually coordinate every step of a complex administrative process. Instead, the employee can define the desired outcome while an AI agent coordinates routine activities.

However, increased autonomy introduces an important paradox:

The more autonomous an AI system becomes, the more important governance becomes.

An organisation cannot simply delegate responsibility to an AI system.

The organisation remains responsible for determining:

- Where the system can operate.
- What it can access.
- What decisions it can make.
- What actions require approval.
- Who monitors it.
- What happens when it fails.

Consequently, agentic AI should be viewed as an organisational capability rather than merely a software product.

41. Conclusion

Agentic AI has the potential to fundamentally reshape organisational processes by moving artificial intelligence from passive assistance towards goal-directed action.

AI agents can potentially plan tasks, use tools, interact with enterprise systems, coordinate workflows, and execute routine activities with limited human intervention.

This creates opportunities for significant improvements in productivity, customer service, process efficiency, knowledge management, and innovation.

At the same time, autonomy introduces substantial challenges involving accountability, cybersecurity, privacy, employee roles, decision-making, and organisational governance.

The central principle emerging from this analysis is that autonomy should be risk-calibrated rather than maximised.

Low-risk, reversible processes may be highly automated, while high-impact decisions should retain meaningful human control.

The future organisation is therefore unlikely to be either entirely human or entirely autonomous. Instead, it will increasingly consist of human professionals working alongside networks of specialised AI agents, with humans providing strategic direction, ethical judgement, oversight, and accountability.

Successful organisations will consequently be those that combine technological capability with thoughtful process redesign and robust governance.

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