AI Agents for a Hybrid Workforce

The Risks, The Opportunities… and How to Get Started

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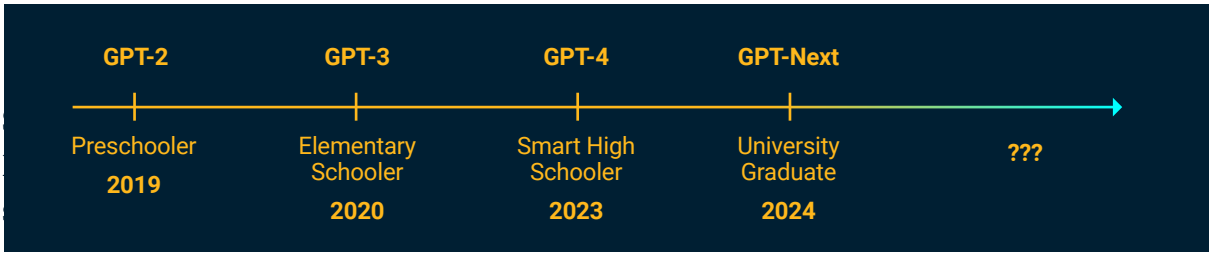
Forward

Since Large Language Models (LLM) and Generative AI (GenAI) first trended on global headlines with image generation AI "Dall-E" in July 2022, their proficiency has evolved at such a rapid rate, leaders everywhere have been grappling with how to respond.



In his recent paper, 'Situational Awareness'[1], ex-OpenAI researcher and tech entrepreneur Leopold Aschenbrenner charts this rapid progress from GPT 2, which could 'string together a few plausible sentences' in 2019, to the release of GPT 4, a little over 4 years later, where an AI system 'can write code and essays, reason through difficult math problems, and ace college exams'. Bullishly, Aschenbrenner sees this as a precursor to achieving **artificial general intelligence**, where models will be able to do the work of a researcher/engineer… **by 2027**.

Whether you do or don't believe the hype, the implications for business of such rapid advancements in AI cannot be ignored.

Many have seen the McKinsey estimate in mid-2023[2] that generative AI could add the equivalent of $2.6 trillion to $4.4 trillion annually. McKinsey analysed 63 use cases across 16 business functions, including customer operations, personalised marketing and sales, automating software engineering, and accelerating research and development, estimating significant productivity gains across these key areas.

For those recklessly racing to stand up a proof of concept without thought, however, Gartner's recent prediction that 30% of all such POCs will fail by the end of 2025 should give pause.

Though LLMs and GenAI are shaping up to be, by some metrics, the most transformative technology disruption in human history, it is not a self-guided silver bullet, but with the right technical understanding and guidance you can avoid being the company that adds a steam engine to the accounting team. So as a business leader, how can you get real value from GenAI in the short and longer term?

At Akkodis, we believe increasingly widespread adoption of AI Agents offer a promising way forward.

> AI agents and 'agentic' workflows have the potential to quickly evolve from simple 'productivity assistants' to sophisticated and interconnected knowledge-based products and solutions, across all industry verticals. This paper provides a snapshot of the opportunities and responsibility considerations of agentic systems, and offers a framework for how Akkodis can help you integrate these systems into your business for both short and long term business value realisation.

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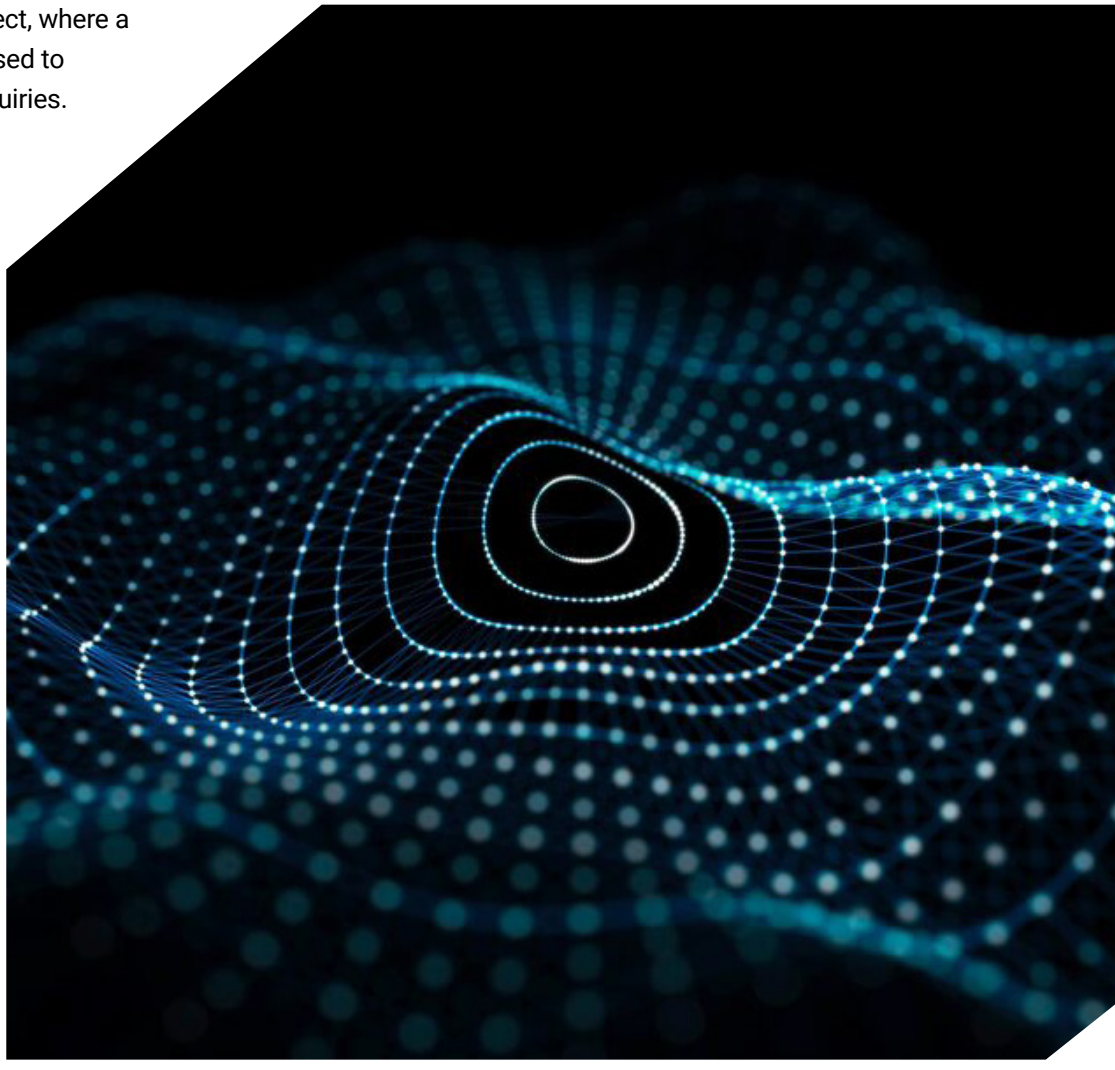
What is an AI agent?

A semi-autonomous or autonomous software program that is equipped with a knowledge base, a defined task (or set of) and tools to interact with its environment, an artificial intelligence 'agent' can collect data from systems or even people to meet these pre-determined goals. While humans decide what the goals are, exactly what tasks are needed to meet these goals can be up to the Agent to decide.

Consider an AI-driven call centre solution like AWS' Amazon Connect, where a system of AI agents is used to respond to customer inquiries. This agentic system will automatically ask the customer different questions, retrieve information from internal documents, and propose solutions to the caller.

Based on the human responses, the customer-facing AI agent then determines whether it has access to the data and the tooling to resolve the query itself or whether it needs to escalate it on to a human.



How do AI agents work?

An AI agent has an understanding of its operating environment with physical or software interfaces.

For example, a robotic agent collects sensor data, and a chatbot uses customer queries as input. This data is then analysed and the agent generates the most valuable response aligned to its predetermined goals. The agent also uses the results to formulate the next action that it should take.

AI agents can automate complex tasks through a structured workflow involving goal setting, information gathering, and task execution.

Training: Sophisticated agents are often created using reinforcement learning, a type of AI training where the creator defines "rewards" and "penalties" for specific behaviours exhibited by the AI. In this approach, the AI agent will run iterations of simulations, experimenting with various actions to maximise its reward outcome. Through this process, the agent learns to navigate its environment 'aligned' to the reward structure it was provided, continually refining its decision-making capabilities based on the consequences of its actions.

The agent can then take these lessons and apply them in completely new environments. This method enables the AI to adapt to complex, dynamic scenarios and develop strategies that maximise positive outcomes while minimising negative ones. As the agent accumulates experience, it becomes increasingly adept at making informed choices, ultimately evolving into a sophisticated decision-making entity capable of handling intricate tasks and environments with a high degree of autonomy and efficiency.

Acquire information: Once deployed, to complete tasks, the agent gathers necessary data from various sources it is provided access to, possibly including the internet or other AI systems. In a multi agent systems, an intelligent agent can interact with other agents or machine learning models in a self-directed manner to access or exchange information.

Some advanced AI systems allow agents to coordinate and 'manage' other agents. The AI controlling agent receives a user-defined goal and breaks it down into smaller tasks that are prioritised against predetermined (human) incentives to achieve the desired outcome efficiently.

Each sub-task is assigned to an agent that specialises in a particular action. In the call centre example this could mean a dedicated customer service agent, incentivised on positive interactions, is talking to the caller, while a research agent searches through the customer's invoice history while another agent may focus on the caller's past interactions with the call centre, and so on.

Execute tasks: As each agent methodically completes each task, they can continually check for feedback and monitor progress. They can review their logs to ensure accuracy and may generate additional tasks as needed to achieve the final goal. This process can repeat until the goal is fully accomplished to a standard defined by a quality assurance agent.

Machine Learning and Iterative Improvement is Key

When solving problems for users, agentic systems are orders of magnitude more capable that traditional chatbots. Chatbots sit and wait to be asked questions. Agents, however, have the capacity to be proactive, can act autonomously, and adapt to continuously improve how they perform a task or respond to a query or prompt.

When utilising multiple agents in an agentic workflow, its power increases exponentially. But with strength in numbers and added complexity comes amplified risks and the potential for decreased transparency and traceability, increasing the requirement for more fortified checks.

> Agents... are proactive, can act autonomously, and adapt to changing environments whilst continuously improving

Proliferation of agentic AI

In a recent survey of 1,100 executives at large enterprises, industry research found that 10% of organisations already use AI agents, more than half plan to use them in the next year, and 82% plan to integrate them within the next three years. Plus, 71% of respondents said AI agents will increase automation in their workflows, 64% said they'll improve customer service and satisfaction, and 57% stated the potential productivity improvements outweighed the risks.

Of all executives surveyed, the majority of use cases were found in software development, to generate, evaluate, and rewrite code, with 75% indicating they plan to use AI agents this way. When the research looked at specific industry uptake, it found that the pharmaceutical and healthcare sectors lead in AI agent adoption (23%), with expectations that over the next year, a significant portion of high-tech (77%) and retail (66%) organisations are poised to embrace AI agents.

This suggests that while shorter term returns can be realised in simple agentic systems such as call centre assistance, the longer-term innovation that could come from such accelerated development cannot be ignored.

In fact, with budgets tightening, agentic workflows developed in iterative ways can create capacity and resources to further invest on scaling the productivity of the business. By starting with a highly targeted and expertly vetted use case you can prevent your pilot from becoming one of the abandoned 30% of PoCs Gartner identified.

Akkodis categorises the short and longer-term benefits businesses must look for when considering agent technology in two distinct categories:

1. Task or job-driven automation for efficiencies using AI Agents.
2. Business-wide augmentation using agentic systems plus human innovation to create new avenues to market for business growth.

82%

of organisations intend to use AI agents within 1–3 years

The Benefits for Business

In the short term, increasing productivity and reducing costs using AI Agents is key:

- **Improved productivity**
  Repetitive, time-consuming, intellectually laborious tasks can be given to agents, allowing your workforce to focus on more high-value complex and/or creative activities.
- **Reduced costs**
  Through the automation of manual processes, and AI agent's ability to adapt to changing environments, the elimination of process inefficiencies and minimisation of human error can support cost savings.
- **Informed decision-making**
  Machine learning (ML) enables agents to gather and process massive amounts of real-time or near real-time data, enabling business leaders to make complex decisions at greater velocities.
- **Improved customer experiences**
  Integrating AI agents enables personalised customer care at scale. Agents can also provide personalised product recommendations and prompt responses, and innovate to improve customer engagement, conversion, and loyalty.

In the long term, agentic systems, however, have potential benefits that could reshape businesses and industries as we know them

Mitigrating Risk

While agentic systems offer great potential, this opportunity is not without risk which businesses must mitigate to realise benefits safely. Depending upon how they are developed, agentic systems look to internal and external data sources to complete any one task and the bigger the system, the more avenues for data leakage and exposure to external malign actors.

And like AI systems more broadly, agentic systems must be designed with trustworthy and compliant privacy settings, robust security and a solid responsible AI framework to include ESG factors. Key areas to consider include:

- **Data Security and Privacy:** Organisations must ensure they protect the large amounts of sensitive data from access, misuse and cyberattacks whilst also ensuring privacy and regulatory compliance.
- **Bias and Fairness:** Algorithmic bias is by now well understood and businesses must seek to remove bias from the data and programming that underpins agentic systems to avoid unfair or discriminatory outcomes. Transparency across the entire system must ensure decisions made by AI do not subject customers or employees to bias or prejudicial practices derived from treatment of marginalised groups throughout history.
- **Operational Risks:** Dependence on AI systems can create vulnerabilities if these systems fail or produce incorrect results, and organisations must account for the potential disruption experienced when integrating AI agents with existing systems.
- **Compliance and Legal Risks:** Regulatory frameworks the world over are rapidly evolving and businesses must ensure they remain compliant and mitigate legal risk if an AI system does cause harm.
- **Ethical and Social Impact:** Organisations must ensure their greatest asset, their people, are given the training to embrace agentic systems and that this training is refreshed and updated as technology and societal expectations evolve.
- **Intellectual Property Risks:** AI development involves complex algorithms and data, which can lead to disputes over intellectual property rights, and organisations risk brand and customer perception if they do not have a solid mitigation strategy in place.
- **Environmental impact:** AI systems consume huge amounts of energy and have a large carbon footprint, ensuring the business factors in ESG targets and designs the system to minimise energy consumption is vital.

And it goes without saying, when businesses look to build their own agentic systems, leaders must choose their LLMs, and their partners wisely.

Akkodis' approach to AI

Akkodis provides strategic guidance and technical implementation for organisations looking to innovate with GenAI to ensure AI initiatives align with business objectives and hit strategic markers for optimal impact.

Our robust integrated risk management framework helps businesses navigate the complex ethical and regulatory landscape of agentic systems and ensures organisations never need to back pedal on system development and deployment when navigating a changing legal environment.

Akkodis' bespoke AI systems, built rapidly using our foundational solutions including agentic development, are designed to specifically target return on investment and continued value realisation.

Aligned with an organisation's specific business outcomes, Akkodis designs AI systems to drive operational efficiency and demonstrate cost savings, while leveraging industry-agnostic expertise and global award-winning dedication to innovation.

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Akkodis AI ecosystem

The agentic ecosystems Akkodis builds are also highly agile; models underpinning any one agent can be effortlessly replaced with more contemporary model as they become available and the agents themselves can be depreciated, replaced and/or redeployment for other use cases to maximise re-use and minimise investment cost.

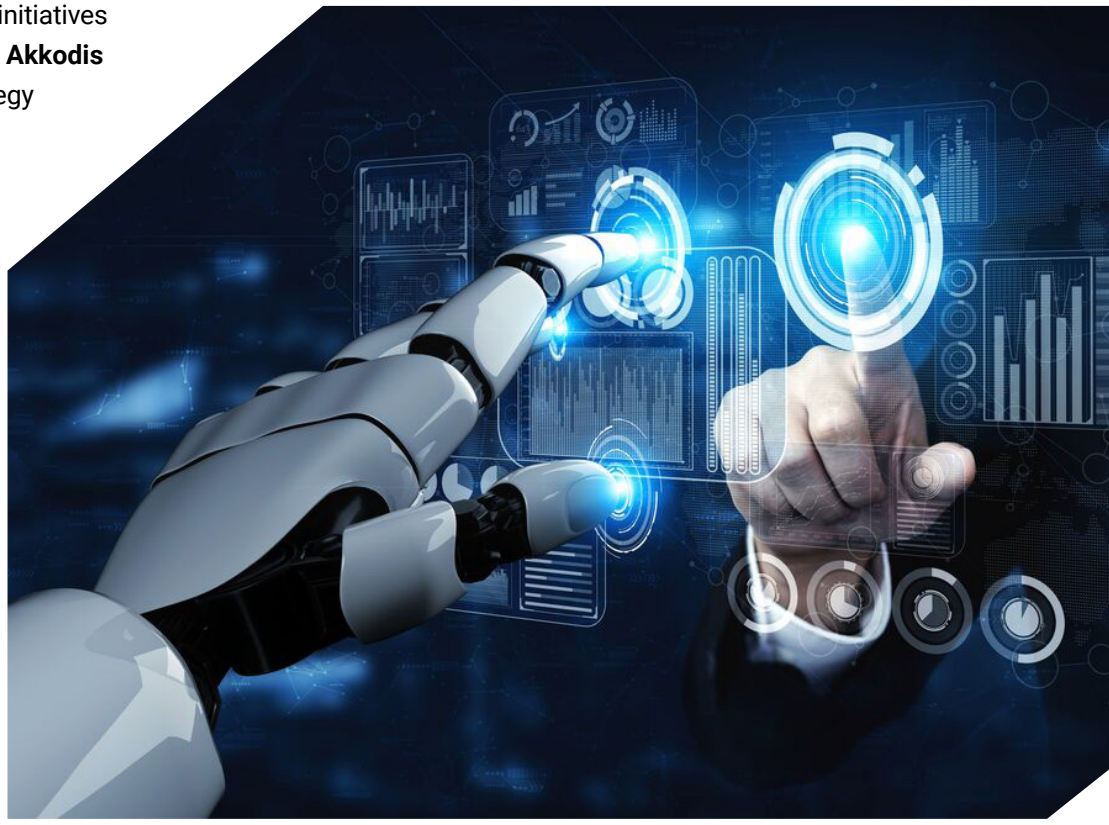
So how can you build your own AI Agent POC to prove value?

Those familiar with AWS' 'experiment and fail fast' approach will appreciate the benefits of rapidly standing up a 'proof of value'. As agentic technology matures however, it stands to have impact beyond any one PoC, business unit, or timeframe.

Akkodis has created a four-pillar framework to help leaders realise value from their AI investments in the short and longer term. The four pillars define the components that are vital to the successful deployment, adoption and value realisation, whilst managing risk and ensuring good governance practices.

To help you align your AI initiatives with your business goals, **Akkodis Advisory** can guide strategy and implementation, including the development of short and long-term roadmaps and readiness assessments.

Akkodis Consulting leverages Akkodis Solutions' capabilities to develop and implement bespoke AI solutions. From model development and tuning to its integration with existing systems, Akkodis ensures organisations are properly skilled and tooled to leverage GenAI for productivity and ongoing innovation. This includes **Akkodis' Responsible AI Accelerate** offering.



Akkodis' Framework for Driving AI Value with AI Agents

Pillar 1: Data Governance, Integrated Risk Management and ESG

Assessing and managing the environment, social and governance (ESG) impact of agentic system implementation is a strategic imperative, as is the foundational requirement of good data hygiene. Akkodis partners with its customers in the following ways:

- **Responsible AI Framework –** Akkodis' commitment to ethical AI use is guided by a Responsible AI framework, underpinned by Responsible AI Principles. Akkodis can support businesses to develop their own AI ethics and governance structures, ensuring a holistic approach to responsible and ethical use of AI.
- **AI Risk Management –** Akkodis' Responsible AI framework ensures an organization's AI practices are responsible, ethical, and compliant, mitigating potential risks and safeguarding business reputation, people and stakeholders.
- **Akkodis Research –** Akkodis' global R&D business unit is at the forefront of the GenAI revolution, with subject matter experts in AI exploring new uses for AI, developing proprietary technologies, and supporting organisations to be at the forefront of the AI revolution, Akkodis Research has been developing agentic systems for over 4 years.

Pillar 2: Culture & Adoption

A robust change management strategy sits at the heart of all successful GenAI programs.

- **AI Change Management –** Akkodis' AI Change Management capability is designed to guide organisations through the transition and significant changes to workflows and processes that adoption of GenAI can bring. Akkodis has deep expertise in change management and provides the tools and strategies needed to manage change effectively, ensuring a smooth transition and facilitating employee education and uptake of new ways of working with AI.

Pillar 3: Training & Skills

Ensuring your people are ready, willing and above all, able to embrace and integrate agentic systems requires ongoing training and development.

- **Akkodis Academy** is a global business unit dedicated to technical training through certified upskilling and reskilling. With strong partnerships with technology vendors, Academy builds and nurtures the AI talent that organisations need, ensuring they have the skills to sustain successful GenAI initiatives. The AI Academy is our flagship training program and has trained over 12,000 professionals in AI since the beginning of 2023. To date, our AI for Leaders program has trained over 500 executives in 12 countries.

Pillar 4: Technology readiness

Of course, no AI initiative is complete without the system itself.

- **Akkodis Consulting** will ensure your AI system is built for adaptability, continued value realisation and high degrees of re-use across a range of use cases. Abiding by the EU AI Act requirements, and to our own world class technology standards, you can rest assured that the privacy and security your data is maintained and is aligned your own responsible AI obligations.
- **Akkodis Solutions** ensure we deploy your system at low cost and at pace, so that you can realise the benefits of your agentic systems sooner rather than later.

Maximise your success from AI

As businesses navigate the rapidly evolving AI landscape, the integration of AI agents offers a clear path to enhanced productivity, immediate cost savings and superior customer engagement. However, transforming a proof of concept into a fully operational system comes with significant challenges—from ensuring data security to addressing ethical concerns.

Akkodis' unique, four-pillar framework stands out by providing comprehensive solutions—from responsible AI frameworks and business-wide AI initiative trackers, to maximising the value from tools like M365 Copilot and implementing governance measures.

With a proven track record of global success, Akkodis is equipped to support your organisation in achieving maximum returns and employee satisfaction in the age of AI.

Inquire about a free 2-hour workshop where we can discuss the specific opportunities of AI within your business context and develop a tailored roadmap for success.

About Akkodis

Akkodis is a global digital engineering company and Smart Industry leader. We enable clients to advance in their digital transformation with Consulting, Solutions, Talent, and Academy services. Headquartered in Switzerland and part of the Adecco Group, Akkodis is a trusted tech partner to the world's industries.

We co-create and pioneer solutions that help to solve major challenges, from accelerating the clean energy transition and green mobility, to improving user and patient centricity. Empowered by a culture of inclusion and diversity, our 50,000 tech experts across 30 countries combine best-in-class technologies and cross industry knowledge to drive purposeful innovation for a more sustainable tomorrow. We are passionate about Engineering a Smarter Future Together.

Found out more

If you would like to learn more about how Akkodis can help, please contact our team.

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Engineering a Smarter Future Together

Leveraging the power of connected data to accelerate innovation and digital transformation.

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