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How AI Agents Will Reshape the Landscape of HR Technology

By Stephanie Clement

Agentic AI is receiving a lot of buzz among HR technology leaders and vendors, and with good reason: By 2030, Gartner predicts that 60% of HR work tasks will be completed through AI agents. However, this technology is still emerging, as are its precise use cases, impact and value in HR. The challenge for CHROs today is to understand what AI agents can do for HR and prepare to make the most of the opportunity they present.



What AI Agents Are

AI agents are autonomous or semiautonomous software entities that use AI techniques to perceive conditions, make decisions, take actions and achieve goals in their digital or physical environments.

AI agents are not digital workers. They are pieces of software that use a range of AI techniques, including GenAI and machine learning, to perform tasks. Agentic AI is differentiated from other types of AI by its autonomy: AI agents operate independently, with humans either partly or entirely out of the loop. They can perceive conditions, make decisions and act without being continuously managed by a human user.

Not all AI agents have the same level of agency. Their ability to perceive, decide and act varies depending on what they are designed to do:

- **Perception** — Can the tool figure out what you want? Can it make sense of the information and what's happening around it? At the lowest level, an agent might just notice something, like a missing form. But an advanced agent doesn't just notice. It understands why this perception matters and what could happen next, and it acts on what it notices (e.g., flagging and completing the missing form before moving to the next stage).
- **Decision** — Can the tool compare different options, solve problems and get better over time? A low-agency agent follows instructions. A strategic one weighs options, considers goals and makes smart trade-offs to arrive at the most logical decision.
- **Action** — Can it use other resources and change what it does depending on the situation? A low-agency tool simply automates tasks, but a more advanced agent can take initiative and change how it works, depending on what's happening.

Applying Agentic AI in HR

AI agents have a variety of potential use cases for HR, some of which are already available in existing HR technology, while others are on the cutting edge. Looking at three examples of low-agency, medium-agency and high-agency tools, we can see how agents can support, evolve and even transform how HR delivers value.

Low Agency: Employee Performance Review

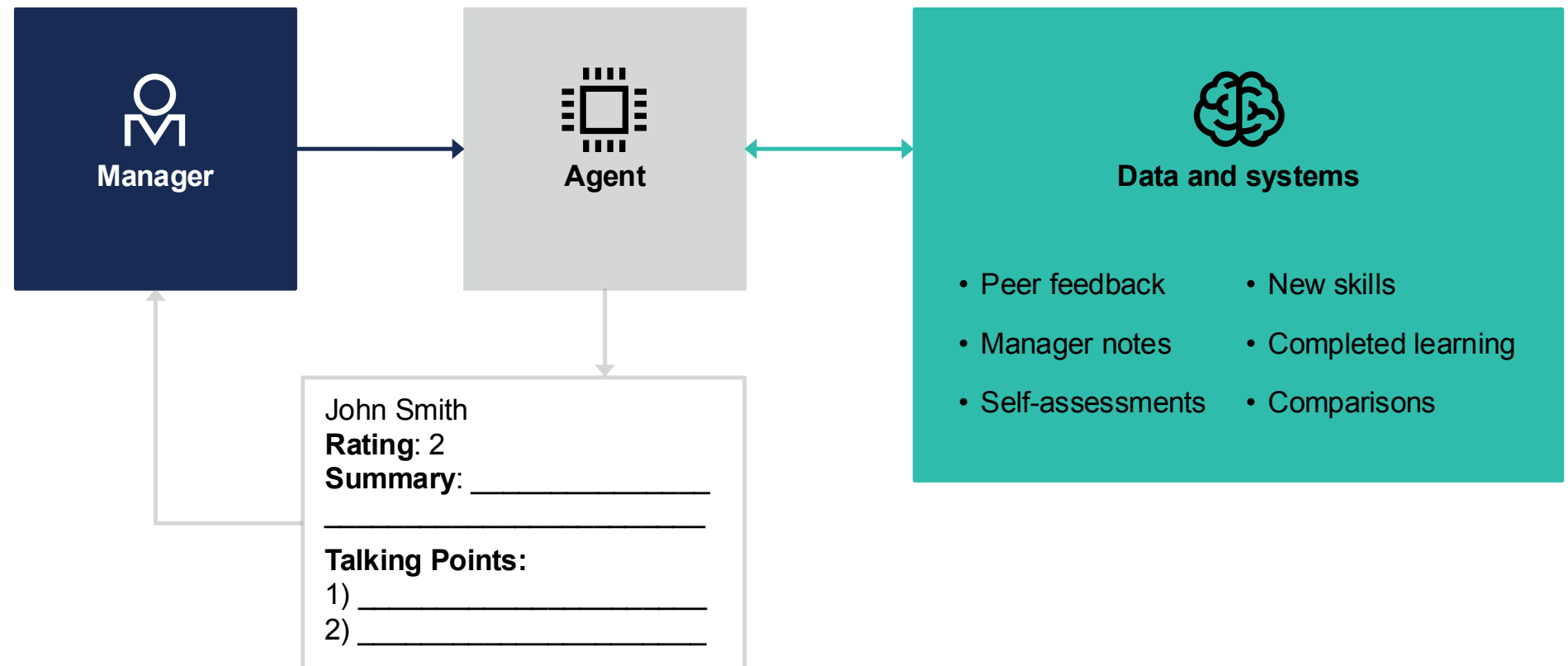
Performance management is a promising area for automation, as it takes up a great deal of managers' time and produces results that are uneven in quality and potentially biased. An AI agent can take a lot of the work out of writing performance reviews, quickly pulling data from multiple sources that would take managers hours to find

and compile manually. A manager prompts the agent to draft a performance review; the agent then gathers all of the relevant information, drafts a review, suggests a rating, and recommends talking points for the employee's performance conversation (see Figure 1).

This low-agency tool, which may already be available in your HR technology suite, is a relatively simple entry point into agentic AI. However, CHROs must still be careful when implementing it and be mindful of:

- **Data availability and quality** — An AI agent can only work well if it has the right data to work with and can access the system in which the data is stored.
- **Data privacy, security and compliance** — Sensitive employee information must be protected, not just for compliance, but to maintain trust.
- **Employee and manager adoption** — Agents must be developed in a way that encourages or even requires adoption to complete the task.

» Figure 1: Employee Performance AI Agent in Action



Source: Gartner

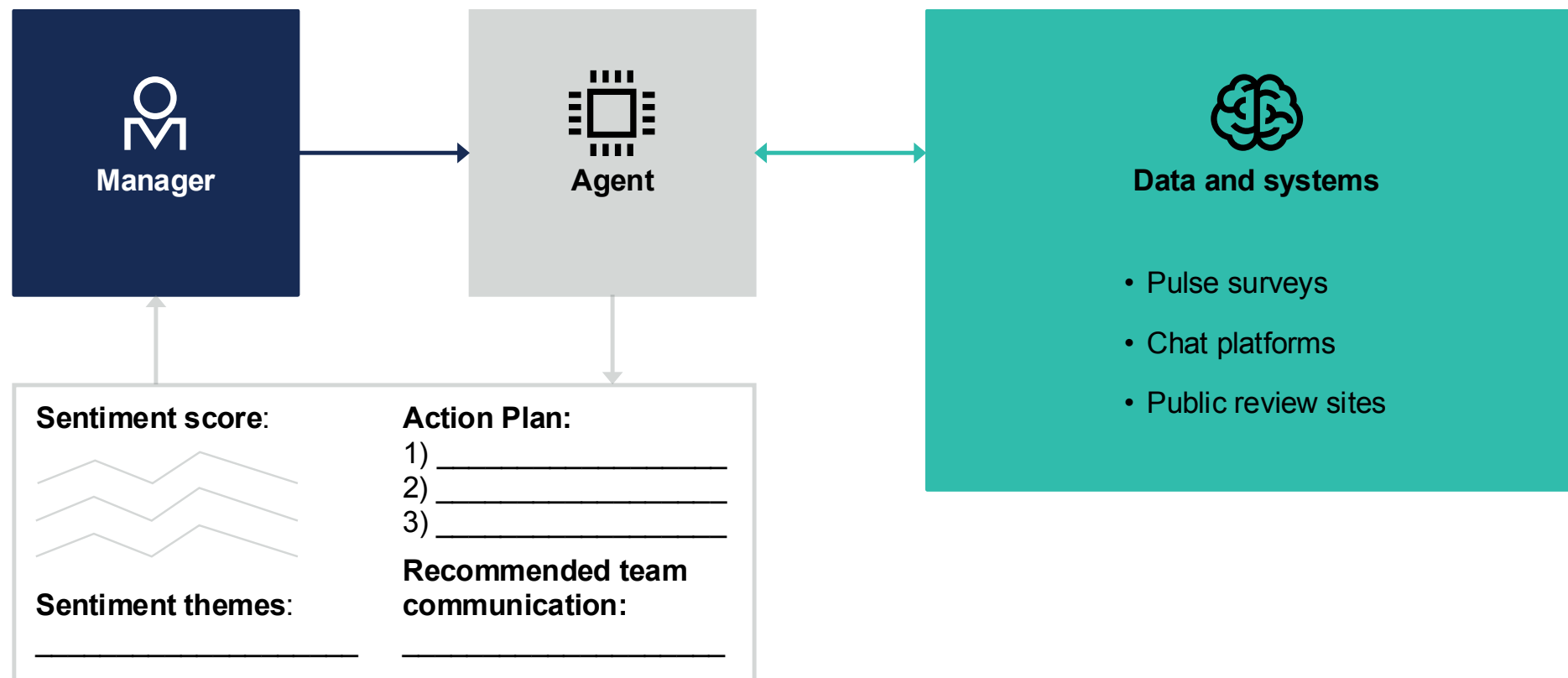
Medium Agency: Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis capabilities are already available in some voice of the employee solutions and can identify emerging issues in the workforce much faster than traditional surveys and feedback tools by drawing on a wider set of data and identifying trends and themes. For example, a manager prompts the agent with a question, such as, “How is my team feeling this month?” The agent then synthesizes the relevant information (e.g., pulse surveys, chat platforms and other employee communications) and produces a current picture of employee sentiment, complete with actionable insights, action plans and communication strategies for responding to any concerns (see Figure 2).

Pitfalls to watch out for with sentiment analysis include:

- **Data availability and quality** — If only a portion of employees respond to surveys or engage the channels being analyzed, the results may not reflect the true sentiment of the team or organization. AI can also misinterpret jokes and sarcasm.
- **Organizational context and cultural alignment** — The agent might suggest plans and communications that don’t align with your organization’s context and culture. You must ensure these outputs convey the correct tone, values and local practices for your organization.

» Figure 2: Sentiment Analysis AI Agent in Action



Source: Gartner

- **Data privacy, security and compliance** — Employee feedback must be anonymized and secure across all channels so employees feel comfortable providing honest feedback and communicating openly.

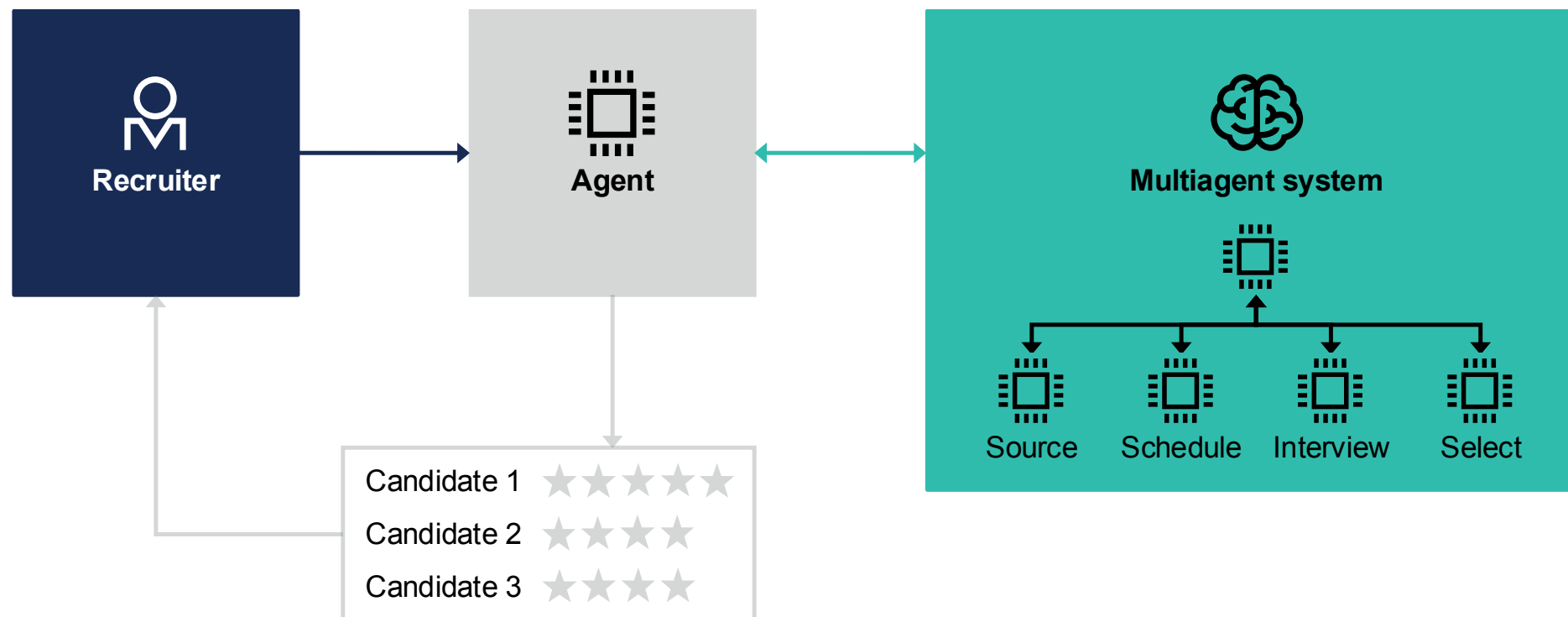
High Agency: Recruiting

In recruiting, AI agents could reduce repetitive tasks, analyze massive datasets, proactively source passive candidates and keep active candidates engaged. Recruiting is one area where we expect to see multiagent systems develop, in which agents talk to agents, handing off tasks to each other, to handle much greater complexity. These multiagent systems are not yet on the market, but they are coming soon.

The way a multiagent recruiting system works is that a recruiter prompts a conversational agent, for example, to find the top candidates for a certain role. An orchestration agent then coordinates activities among task-specific agents responsible for sourcing, scheduling, interviewing and selection.

These activities take place asynchronously, and once the system has identified the top candidates, it will return those results to the recruiter (see Figure 3).

» Figure 3: Recruiting AI Agent in Action (Multiagent System)



Source: Gartner

CHROs looking to use AI recruiting agents should bear in mind that this is a highly advanced, emerging example of agentic AI technology. Things to consider during implementation include:

- **Tech capabilities and maturity** — Capabilities vary widely among vendors, and not all features are equally mature and proven in real-world settings. Consider piloting one task-based agent before scaling up to a multiagent system.
- **Transparency and fairness** — Schedule regular audits to check for unintended bias and ensure the system is identifying diverse, high-quality candidates.
- **Candidate experience** — Watch out for overly generic or impersonal candidate communications from the agent, which can negatively affect your employer brand, and ensure it's easy for candidates to still access human support.

Getting HR Ready for Agentic AI

CHROs looking ahead to the advent of agentic AI can approach it in one of two ways:

1. **Automate the status quo** — Retain familiar processes, but insert task-based agents to help with some of that menial, administrative work. Wait and see how the technology evolves before making more fundamental changes.
2. **Reimagine HR** — Recognize that AI agents are poised to reshape how organizations do business, and proactively design a new HR operating model with new roles and workflows.

Proactively rethinking the operating model will set up CHROs for success as AI directly affects how work is done in HR. HR support roles will experience the greatest impact, especially those focused on routine, transactional work. Work in these roles will

shift to more strategic, less administrative tasks, and these employees will need to learn how to work effectively in tandem with AI agents. This shift will create new work, such as:

- AI governance and oversight
- Decision facilitation
- Continuous AI optimization

In planning for the impact of agentic AI, CHROs should not simply think about what process can be automated and how much headcount they can eliminate or money they can save by replacing human workers with AI agents. To unlock AI agents' full potential, CHROs should evaluate how they reshape HR workflows and encourage the growth of new roles and services to the organization.

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