

Gartner Business Quarterly

Second Quarter 2026

Improve
decisions



Drive growth
with AI



Monetizing AI

With Autonomous Business

Amplify
people



Enable
autonomous
operations



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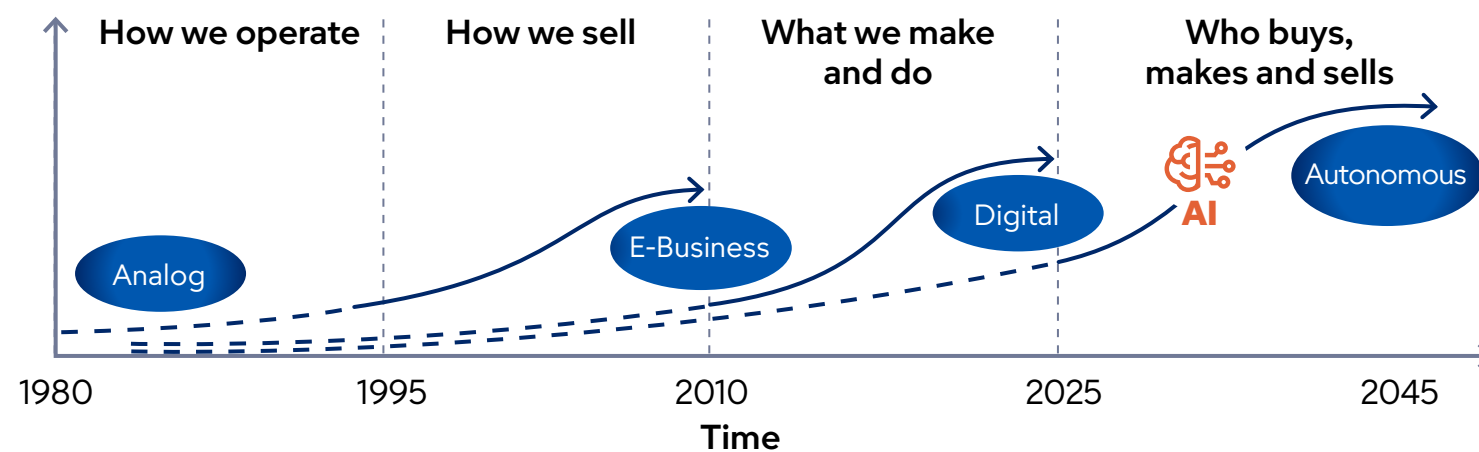
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Simulations to Make Better,
Faster Decisions

Monetizing AI With Autonomous Business

In last quarter's issue, we explored the pathway to unlocking AI value. In this issue, we continue the story by highlighting a business strategy for getting return and value for your AI investments. This business strategy is autonomous business, which at its core balances people autonomy and machine autonomy.

Over the past few decades, waves of technology-driven business transformation have shifted the focus from how an enterprise operates to how it sells, to what it makes and does, and to who buys, makes and sells. The next wave is autonomous business. It is already happening, and it will gain pace over the next five to 15 years (see Figure 1).

» Figure 1: Technology-Driven Business Transformation Over the Years



Source: Gartner

The evolution of AI, and CEO and board interest in the potential impact of AI-driven enterprise change, is the inflection point that makes autonomous business possible. But you can't take CEO and board member exuberance about AI for granted. They are increasingly asking for better returns and a clear linkage to business growth. Their initial patience meant enterprises chased use cases that, by definition, were about leveraging the technology's capabilities. These efforts have led to great learning but not great ROI. Executive leaders must create an autonomous business strategy that uses emerging AI technologies and automation capabilities **and** initially places a balanced emphasis on people amplification and efficient autonomous operations.

This issue of the *Gartner Business Quarterly* will help you prepare your enterprise for autonomous business, anticipate AI's impact on jobs, build workforce readiness, drive growth with autonomous supply chains, and boost efficiency with AI-enabled decision making. Additionally, this edition debuts a new section with data from our CEO and Board of Directors surveys relevant to the central theme and closes with a look into the future.

Autonomous business is how AI will be monetized.

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Are You Ready for Autonomous Business?

by Don Scheibenreif

Autonomous business changes how organizations operate and create value. Enterprises that delay moving toward AI-driven autonomy risk being outpaced by competitors. Those that embrace this shift will create new pathways to win.

Digital business changed *what* the organization does. Autonomous business changes *how* the organization does it.

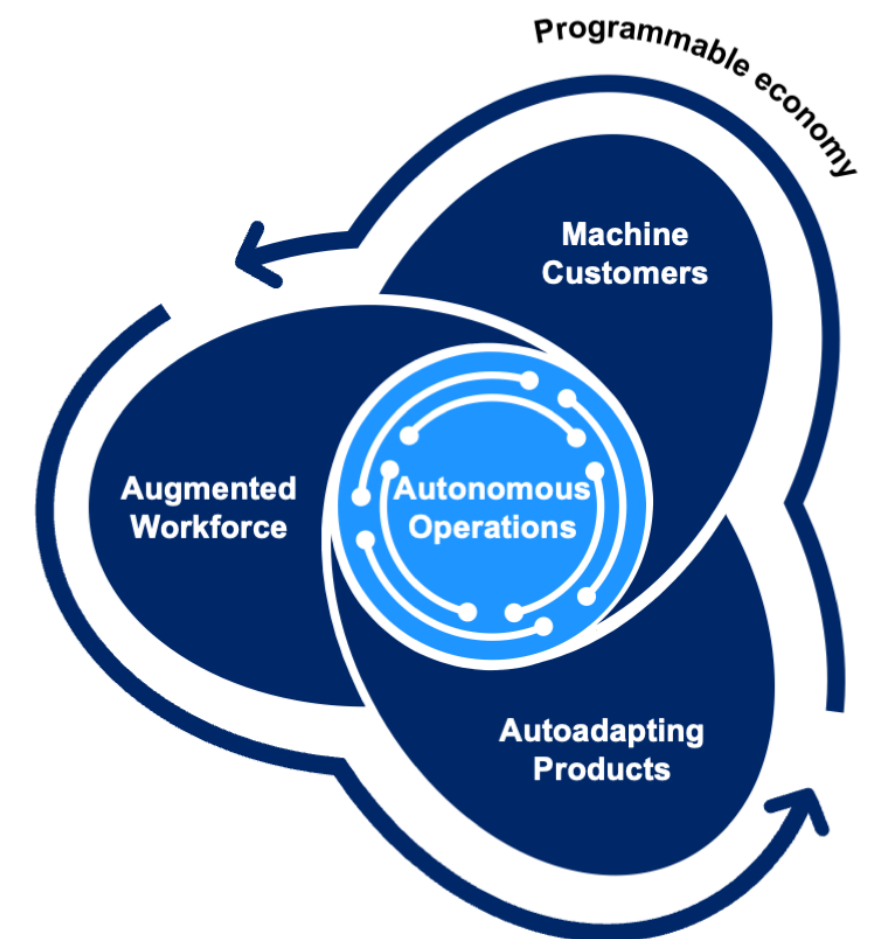
For the past decade, C-suite leaders have focused on digital business transformation, using technology to optimize what the enterprise does. Today, the rise of agentic AI and advanced robotics signals a profound shift toward a new autonomous business era that will change organizational identity and pathways to value.

Autonomous business is a strategy that uses self-improving, adaptable technology to make decisions, take action, and create new types of value by increasing both people autonomy and machine autonomy.

Five main components drive an autonomous business strategy (see Figure 1):

- **Autonomous operations:** Self-running processes that observe, decide, and act. Examples include Caterpillar’s autonomous mining trucks and SpaceX’s autonomous rockets.
- **Augmented workforce:** The combination of human experience and machine efficiency. Examples include Revvity’s use of AI agents in software development and LinkedIn’s use of AI agents in customer service.

» Figure 1: Components of Autonomous Business



Source: Gartner

- **Autoadapting products:** Products that reconfigure and personalize themselves based on context. Examples include Tesla and Google’s self-driving car platform, Waymo.
- **Machine customers:** Nonhuman economic actors that negotiate and transact. Examples include Pactum’s AI B2B negotiation platform and CarEdge, a B2C platform that can negotiate a car purchase.
- **The programmable economy:** New forms of value exchange and tokenization (blockchain). Examples include asset tokenization platforms such as Bankcow and Lofty.

Why must executive leaders make autonomous business a priority now, amid a sea of competing near-term demands? The answer lies in the threat of disruption. Eight in 10 executives think autonomous business will be the predominant form of business by 2030.¹ And 76% of CEOs view AI as the No. 1 technology likely to disrupt their industries over the next three years.² Business demands are outpacing human capacity to deliver, and cognitive scale through AI offers the only viable lever for closing this gap.

Enterprises that fail to plan for autonomy today risk being left behind by competitors who are already recalibrating their ambitions to include self-learning, self-optimizing systems. Executive leaders cannot sit back and wait until this trend stabilizes. They must get started even before the enterprise is fully ready.

Go Beyond Automation and Rethink Human Roles

To lead the transition to autonomous business, C-suite executives must be clear about two things:

1 Autonomy Is Not Just Automation

These terms are often used interchangeably, but they represent distinct strategic paths:

- **Automation** is the use of technology to perform prescribed tasks efficiently and consistently with minimal human intervention, typically following predefined rules and parameters. It requires human supervision to manage exceptions or failures.

Enterprises that fail to plan for autonomy today risk being left behind by competitors who are already recalibrating their ambitions to include self-learning, self-optimizing systems.

- **Autonomy**, by contrast, involves systems that display agency and can act independently in a dynamic environment. Autonomous systems are goal-adaptive; they observe their context, make decisions, take actions and self-correct without human intervention.

2 The Human Element: Change People’s Roles; Don’t Remove Them

Autonomous business does **not** mean a “lights out” enterprise with zero employees; it means people do different things. For example, in a future where coding is autonomous, humans will close the gap between customer needs and the software solution that satisfies them. People will need to rethink the purpose of their role and reallocate their time to better fulfill it. Individually and collectively, people will accomplish more by carefully selecting where to give machines greater autonomy, amplifying their ability to execute and have impact.

Required: Active C-Level Leadership

The shift to autonomous business is not just a technology project. It is a cross-functional business transformation that requires active C-level leadership across strategy, talent, and operations.

While the CIO is pivotal to establishing the technological foundation, the transformation must be led by the CEO and supported by the entire C-suite.

The CFO must drive the strategic vision of value and accountability, while functional leads such as the CIO and chief supply chain officer act as stewards of the process.

All C-level executives need a working knowledge of AI and autonomous technologies to guide their teams. Today, CEOs have a low opinion of their executive teams' AI savviness; for example, only 44% of chief executives consider their own CIOs AI savvy.³

» Actions

- **Set your autonomous business ambition.** Envision how autonomous technologies will change your business and operating models.
- **Build upon your digital business investments.** Use your current digital foundation to launch and accelerate autonomous initiatives.
- **Start with value.** Don't just automate for efficiency. Look for areas where autonomous business can create new types of value, such as developing autoadapting products or capturing the emerging market of machine customers.
- **Put governance first.** Establish governance frameworks early and make sure they can adapt to changing circumstances. As machines gain agency, your guardrails will keep their decisions aligned with enterprise values and regulatory requirements.

» Cautions

- **Avoid the “lights out” trap.** Work toward a human-led, agent-operated model where people set the direction.
- **Do not try to make the entire enterprise autonomous all at once.** The transition will be gradual. Start with islands of autonomy within specific operations and scale as you build trust with employees and other stakeholders.

Getting Started: The Art of the Possible

Executive leaders should not view autonomous business as a binary on/off switch but as a journey — a “metro line” where organizations can get on and off at different stations of maturity. To begin, focus on two immediate priorities:

- **Autonomous operations:** Identify processes with low variability that you can transition from simple automation (robotic process automation [RPA]) to agentic autonomy. This step creates immediate efficiency gains and builds trust in machine agency.
- **Augmented workforce:** Address the capacity gap by using AI to deliver cognitive scale. Assigning AI agents to specific tasks allows people to refocus their efforts and rethink workflows.

Success Metrics for Autonomous Business

Avoid “death by a thousand use cases.” Instead of measuring success by the number of AI pilots, evaluate initiatives based on these specific (and evolving) groups of metrics:

» Value and Efficiency

To prove the business case for autonomy over simple automation, track fundamental financial health markers:

- **Revenue per employee:** As organizations deploy AI to close capacity gaps, this ratio should increase significantly.
- **New revenue streams:** Track revenue generated specifically from new, autonomous sources (e.g., machine customers or autoadapting products) rather than just cost savings from efficiency gains.

» Operational Autonomy

These metrics measure the shift from “human-operated” to “machine-operated”:

- **Human-tech ratio:** Measure the ratio of IT spend as a percentage of operating expenses and human full-time equivalent (FTE) spend as a percentage of operating expenses. The goal is to track how human labor and technology costs shape operations and contribute to profitability or the efficient use of operating budgets.
- **Human-in-the-loop reduction:** Measure the percentage of transactions or decisions that require human intervention. Aim to reduce manual triggers or validations as the system learns and gains decision makers’ trust.
- **Cost per unit of output:** In asset-intensive industries such as mining or manufacturing, measure success by the reduction in cost per unit (e.g., dollar/ton) achieved through continuous 24-hour autonomous operations and minimal errors.

» Resilience and Quality

- **Production quality and error rates:** Leading outcomes of autonomous technology deployment include improvement in general production quality and lower error rates.
- **Switching barriers:** For technology vendors, a strategic measure of success is the ability to raise switching barriers for customers by integrating autonomous capabilities so deeply that displacing you becomes difficult.

» Technical Performance

- **Accuracy and hallucination rates:** As enterprises roll out AI agents, tracking inaccurate outputs or “hallucinations” is critical to establishing the trust required to remove human oversight.
- **Token consumption and latency:** For agentic AI specifically, track compute costs (token consumption) and speed (latency) to gauge whether the autonomous solution is scalable and cost-effective.

¹ **2025 Gartner Autonomous Business Study Survey.** This survey was conducted to understand the current state of autonomous business at enterprises. Responses were gathered online from August through September 2025 among 350 respondents in mid-level positions and above across various industries and regions, including Asia/Pacific (n = 90), Europe (n = 90) and North America (n = 170). Among the qualification to participate in the survey, respondents had to: Be involved in and have a good understanding of the AI and automation efforts at their enterprise (i.e., directly lead, contribute to, or advise AI and automation efforts in their enterprise). Qualifying organizations had been piloting or had already deployed at least one of the following: AI agents, intelligent automation or autonomous technologies. Report an enterprise-wide annual revenue of at least \$1 billion or equivalent and >= 5,000 employees. Hold a position of mid-level manager or above (Note: >50% of the sample were senior management or C-level).

² **2026 Gartner CEO and Senior Business Executive Survey.** This survey was conducted to examine CEO and senior business executive views on current business issues and areas of technology impact. 469 actively employed CEOs and other senior business executives participated in the survey that was conducted across three quarters in 2025: March through April, May through June, and October through November. CEOs (n = 330), CFOs (n = 100), COOs or other C-level executives (n = 23), and chairs, presidents or board directors (n = 16) from North America (n = 186), Europe (n = 147), Asia/Pacific, excluding China (n = 99), Latin America (n = 22), the Middle East (n = 11) and South Africa (n = 4) and organizations of various sizes (\$50 million to less than \$250 million, n = 43, \$250 million to less than \$1 billion, n = 102, \$1 billion to less than \$10 billion, n = 213 and \$10 billion or more, n = 111) participated in the survey. Survey results reflect open-ended responses categorized using an LLM-based topic modeling that was updated in 2025. As such, results are not directly

comparable to previously published research. Disclaimer: Results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

³ **2025 Gartner CEO and Senior Business Executive Survey.** This survey was conducted to examine CEO and senior business executive views on current business issues, as well as some areas of technology agenda impact. The survey was conducted from June 2024 through November 2024, with questions about the period from 2024 through 2026. One-quarter of the survey sample was collected from June through July 2024, and three-quarters was collected from October through November 2024. In total, 456 actively employed CEOs and other senior executive business leaders qualified and participated. The research was collected via 421 online surveys and 35 telephone interviews. The sample mix by role was CEOs (n = 303); CFOs (n = 95); COOs or other C-level executives (n = 39); and chairs, presidents or board directors (n = 19). The sample mix by location was North America (n = 194), Europe (n = 118), Asia/Pacific (n = 91), Latin America (n = 35), the Middle East (n = 15) and South Africa (n = 2). The sample mix by size was \$50 million to less than \$250 million (n = 32), \$250 million to less than \$1 billion (n = 122), \$1 billion to less than \$10 billion (n = 200) and \$10 billion or more (n = 102). Disclaimer: The results of this survey do not represent global findings or the market as a whole, but reflect the sentiments of the respondents and companies surveyed.

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