

SMART WORKFORCE AI | WHITE PAPER

Skills for Agentic Work

The practical capabilities people need when AI agents become part of delivery.

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Which human skills become more important when agents take on parts of research, analysis, drafting, and workflow execution?

Agentic work changes the location of skill. The differentiating capabilities are not limited to tool familiarity. They include framing a situation, selecting and testing evidence, defining authority boundaries, judging quality, handling exceptions, and turning work into an accountable client decision.

This white paper is an evidence-informed point of view. It synthesizes published standards and research with practitioner observations of enterprise design and delivery. It does not present proprietary survey results, commissioned vendor research, or market forecasts.

Who this is for	Executives, fractional leaders, consultants, architects, delivery leads, and analysts who are responsible for turning AI ambition into accountable work.
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The central position

Generic AI training can create useful vocabulary, but it rarely prepares someone to perform in a live client or operating environment. Practical enablement must be tied to the work people are expected to do and the artifacts they must produce under real constraints.

A strong skills model makes capability observable. Instead of asking whether someone is AI-ready, assess whether they can frame a use case, supervise an agent, evaluate an output, manage evidence, communicate trade-offs, and complete a handoff that another person can use.

Four questions to examine

01 | Frame the work

Translate a broad request into an outcome, decision, workflow boundary, evidence need, and set of constraints. Good framing prevents an agent from producing a large amount of activity around the wrong problem.

02 | Supervise and evaluate

Define quality criteria, review representative outputs, recognize failure patterns, and decide when the human should approve, correct, escalate, or redesign the work.

03 | Manage evidence

Use trustworthy sources, preserve context, record assumptions, and distinguish a supported conclusion from a useful hypothesis that needs further testing.

04 | Deliver and hand off

Turn the work into a decision brief, architecture, roadmap, operating model, or control pack that a sponsor and delivery owner can inspect, use, and improve.

What leaders and practitioners can do next

- + Build enablement around observable delivery capabilities rather than generic proficiency labels.
- + Give practitioners client-entry, evaluation, evidence, and handoff toolkits.
- + Create supervised practice against realistic delivery situations.
- + Use peer review and client outcomes to strengthen the skills model over time.

Working principle

Use repeatable structures to make the right questions visible. Adapt them to the client, the evidence, the level of responsibility, and the consequences of getting the decision wrong.

How to read this paper

Smart Workforce AI white papers are designed as practical research briefings. The analysis is intended to support discussion and design work; it is not legal, regulatory, investment, or implementation advice. Readers should test the implications against their own obligations, architecture, data, and operating context.

Selected reference sources

- Microsoft, 2026 Work Trend Index: Agents, human agency, and the opportunity for every organization, 2026.
- NIST, Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework: Generative AI Profile, 2024.
- NIST, Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0), 2023.
- ISO/IEC 42001:2023, Information technology - Artificial intelligence management system.

Editorial standards

Every public paper identifies its author and publication date, separates observation from recommendation, and avoids vendor placement fees. Where a claim depends on a current source, the source should be reviewed before a decision is made.

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