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RESEARCH REPORT · APRIL 2026

The Rise of AI Agents

Enterprise Adoption, Market Dynamics, and What Comes Next

Cedral Advisory Research · April 15, 2026

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The question is no longer whether agents work. It is whether your organization is ready to operate them.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure: Cedral Advisory does not hold positions in any specific AI company mentioned in this report. This analysis is conducted independently for informational and research purposes only.

SECTION 01

Executive Summary

Artificial intelligence agents have undergone a fundamental shift. In the span of roughly 18 months, they have moved from research demonstrations and narrow proof-of-concept pilots into production-grade enterprise infrastructure. This is no longer a story about what AI might do someday; it is a story about what AI is doing right now, at scale, across industries.

The global AI agents market reached an estimated \$10.9 billion in 2026, up from \$7.6 billion the prior year. Projections from Grand View Research place the market at \$50.3 billion by 2030, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of approximately 45.8%.^[1] Meanwhile, enterprise-specific agentic AI (autonomous, multi-step business agents) is on track to grow from \$2.6 billion in 2024 to \$24.5 billion by 2030, a 46.2% CAGR.^[1]

More than half of enterprises now run AI agents in production environments, with another quarter actively scaling their deployments. Gartner projects that 40% of enterprise applications will embed task-specific AI agents by end of 2026.^[4] The transition from experimentation to operational deployment is well underway, and the organizations that move decisively now will define the competitive landscape of the next decade.

This report examines the current state of AI agents across market size, enterprise adoption patterns, multi-agent orchestration, governance frameworks, industry-specific applications, and investment outlook. We present the data as it stands, acknowledge the risks, and offer a clear-eyed view of what comes next.

SECTION 02

Market Landscape

The AI agents market has entered a period of rapid expansion, driven by improved model capabilities, falling inference costs, and growing enterprise demand for autonomous workflow execution. Several overlapping market segments are experiencing simultaneous growth.

Market Size and Growth Projections

Segment	Current Size	Projected (2030)	CAGR
Global AI Agents Market	\$10.9B (2026)	\$50.3B	45.8%
Enterprise Agentic AI	\$2.6B (2024)	\$24.5B	46.2%
Multi-Agent Platforms	Emerging	\$391.9B (2035)	N/A
Conversational AI (Contact Center)	\$80B savings by 2026	Growing	N/A

Sources: Grand View Research, Precedence Research. All figures approximate. Note that the multi-agent platforms projection (\$391.9B) extends to 2035 and encompasses a broader market category than the other segments listed, which accounts for the size discrepancy.

The broader trend here is worth noting: AI spending across all categories is expected to grow at roughly 32% year-over-year between 2025 and 2029, according to IDC.^[3] Agents represent the fastest-growing subsegment within this already aggressive expansion.

Key Market Drivers

Several factors are accelerating market growth simultaneously. First, foundation model capabilities have reached a threshold where agents can reliably handle multi-step, cross-system workflows. Second, the proliferation of low-code and no-code agent-building platforms has dramatically expanded the pool of potential builders. Roughly 80% of IT teams now use low-code tools, and building a functional agent on most platforms takes between 15 and 60 minutes. Third, the cost of inference has dropped substantially, making it economically viable to deploy agents at scale for routine enterprise tasks.

Perhaps most significantly, the democratization of agent development means that business users, not just engineers, are now creating and deploying agents. Customer service managers, finance leads, and operations teams are building agents through visual interfaces without writing code. By 2026, an estimated 40% of enterprise software is expected to be built using natural-language-driven approaches where prompts guide AI to generate working logic.^[4]

SECTION 03

Enterprise Adoption Patterns

The data on enterprise adoption tells a clear story: AI agents have crossed the threshold from experimental technology to operational infrastructure. The shift happened faster than most analysts predicted, and the limiting factors have changed accordingly.

Adoption by the Numbers

Metric	Finding	Source
Enterprises with agents in production	51%	Industry surveys [1]
Actively scaling agent deployments	23%	Industry surveys [1]
Cross-functional agent deployments	16%	State of AI Agents [5]
Plan to expand to complex use cases	81%	State of AI Agents [5]
Hybrid approach (custom + off-the-shelf)	47%	State of AI Agents [5]
Cite integration as primary challenge	46%	State of AI Agents [5]

The most telling statistic is not the 51% figure itself, but the nature of the remaining challenges. Agent adoption is no longer limited by model capability. Instead, 46% of respondents cite integration with existing systems as their primary obstacle,^[5] followed by security concerns and governance gaps. This is a sign of maturity: the technology works, and now the challenge is making it work within complex enterprise environments.

The Hybrid Approach Dominates

Rather than choosing between fully custom agents or pre-packaged solutions, 47% of organizations are taking a hybrid approach.^[5] This mirrors how enterprises have adopted other infrastructure technologies throughout history. Teams want the flexibility to move quickly with existing tools while retaining control over how agents interact with proprietary systems and workflows. The purely custom approach works for well-resourced engineering teams, but the hybrid model is where most of the market is converging.

Enterprise environments tend to surface integration, governance, and security challenges earlier than smaller organizations. Their rapid adoption suggests that AI agents are becoming foundational infrastructure rather than point solutions. The focus is shifting from building agents to operating them reliably across real enterprise environments.

SECTION 04

Multi-Agent Orchestration

The next phase of agentic AI is not about individual agents performing isolated tasks. It is about systems of agents working together, coordinated through orchestration layers that manage handoffs, resolve conflicts, and enforce policies across workflows.

Multi-agent adoption is projected to surge 67% by 2027 as enterprises connect agents across departments and functions.^[7] However, the current reality is more nuanced: roughly 50% of AI agents currently operate in isolated silos rather than as part of a coordinated multi-agent system.^[7] This fragmentation creates redundant workflows, inconsistent outputs, and what some analysts describe as 'shadow AI risk,' where uncoordinated agents make conflicting decisions across the organization.

The Orchestration Imperative

The importance of orchestration cannot be overstated. A survey found that 96% of IT leaders agree AI agent success depends on smooth data integration across systems.^[7] This near-unanimous consensus reflects a hard lesson many organizations learned the hard way: deploying agents without an integration strategy leads to fragmented operations and diminished returns.

In cloud environments, orchestration becomes especially critical. Enterprises operating across multi-cloud and hybrid setups rely on agentic AI to coordinate agents responsible for cost optimization, performance monitoring, security enforcement, and compliance simultaneously. Rather than managing these functions in silos, orchestration enables agents to collaborate, resolve trade-offs, and maintain consistency across environments.

From Solo Agents to Agent Teams

Current State	Near-Term Trajectory
50% of agents in isolated silos	67% growth in multi-agent adoption by 2027
Single-task agent deployments dominate	Cross-functional agent teams emerging
Manual coordination between agents	Automated orchestration layers maturing
Limited observability into agent actions	Agent observability platforms gaining traction

The pattern here echoes the evolution of microservices: individual components are powerful, but the real value emerges from orchestration. The organizations that invest in agent orchestration infrastructure now will have a significant structural advantage as multi-agent systems become the norm.

SECTION 05

Governance, Security, and Trust

If adoption is the accelerator, governance is the brake. And right now, the brake is lagging dangerously behind.

Only 21% of companies have a mature governance model for AI agents, according to Deloitte's State of AI 2026 report.^[6] At the same time, 73% of business and IT leaders cite security as a top concern, and an equal percentage flag data privacy.^[6] This gap between deployment velocity and governance readiness represents one of the most significant risks in the current landscape.

The Trust Equation

For enterprises, trust in AI agents comes down to three critical questions: Do we know every AI agent that exists in our organization? Do we understand what each agent is accessing? And are we confident in what it is doing when it accesses those systems?

Discovering, observing, and protecting not just every human identity but also every AI agent identity is becoming essential to responsible deployment. The organizations that master this visibility, accountability, and trust across all agent identities will be best positioned for long-term success.

Gartner's Warning

Gartner has issued a pointed warning about AI agent project failure rates.^[12] Undisciplined adoption, they argue, leads to abandoned initiatives and wasted investment. The path forward requires governed pilots in areas with documented ROI, solid data infrastructure before scaling, rigorous measurement, and the willingness to shut down what does not work. Success comes from treating agents as accountable systems with clear responsibilities, not as solutions to poorly defined problems.

Governance Metric	Finding	Ref.
Companies with mature agent governance	21%	[6]
Leaders citing security as top concern	73%	[6]
Leaders citing data privacy as top concern	73%	[6]
Early GPT-4 agents: complex web task completion	14% (vs 78% human)	[5]

96% of IT leaders agree that agent success depends on smooth data integration [7], yet only 21% of companies have a mature governance model in place [6]. This is the defining tension of the current moment: near-universal recognition of what is required, paired with a widespread failure to act on it.

The governance gap is not a reason to slow adoption. It is a reason to accelerate governance. Organizations that build trust frameworks in parallel with agent deployments will avoid the costly corrections that come from retrofitting governance after the fact.

SECTION 06

Industry Applications

AI agents are delivering measurable results across multiple industries. While adoption is broadest in customer service and IT operations, the most compelling ROI stories are emerging from supply chain, healthcare, and financial services.

Customer Service

Conversational AI is on track to save an estimated \$80 billion in contact center labor costs by 2026.^[1] Roughly 30% of customer service cases are now resolved without human intervention, and projections suggest agentic AI will autonomously resolve 80% of common issues by 2029.^[4] The economics here are straightforward: agents handle high-volume, repetitive inquiries at a fraction of the cost, while human agents focus on complex and emotionally sensitive interactions.

Supply Chain and Logistics

One notable case: a major consumer goods company improved forecast accuracy from 67% to 92% using AI-driven demand sensing, cutting an estimated 300 million euros in excess inventory.^[10] Organizations with higher AI-driven supply chain investment grew revenue 61% faster than peers without similar investments.^[10] Across the sector, the measured improvements are consistent:

Impact Area	Measured Improvement
Logistics costs	15% reduction
Inventory accuracy	35% improvement
Response to disruptions	25% faster
Manual interventions	30% fewer
Forecasting errors	18% reduction (avg.)

Healthcare

AI applications in healthcare are projected to generate up to \$150 billion in annual savings by 2026.^[13] AI-powered imaging solutions are expected to prevent up to 2.5 million diagnostic errors annually.^[14] In one pilot, 50 healthcare providers tested an AI-powered clinical assistant for ambient note generation. The results were striking: 80% adoption among the test group and a 42% reduction in documentation time, saving approximately 66 minutes per provider per day.

AI-mature organizations, those with advanced and integrated agent deployments, report 25% to 30% higher process efficiency than peers still relying on legacy automation tools. The gap widens each year as platforms learn and improve.

SECTION 07

Investment Outlook

The investment landscape for AI agents reflects both enormous opportunity and real execution risk. Capital is flowing aggressively into the space, but not all of it will generate returns.

Where the Money Is Going

Year-over-year spending on artificial intelligence is expected to grow by 31.9% annually between 2025 and 2029.^[3] Within this broader category, agentic AI represents the fastest-growing segment. In a best-case scenario, Gartner estimates that agentic AI could generate nearly 30% of enterprise application software revenue by 2035, a figure exceeding \$450 billion.^[4]

The enterprise consensus is remarkably strong: 93% of leaders believe that organizations that successfully scale AI agents in the next 12 months will gain a competitive edge over industry peers.^[8] This near-unanimity is driving aggressive investment timelines, with nearly all U.S. enterprises planning to expand AI agent usage within the next year.

Risk Factors

We would be remiss not to highlight the risks. The governance gap (21% with mature models)^[6] means many deployments are proceeding without adequate guardrails. Integration complexity remains the top technical challenge. And the performance baseline for complex tasks is still evolving: early benchmarks showed GPT-4-based agents completing only 14% of complex web tasks, compared to 78% for humans on the same benchmarks.^[5] Capabilities have improved substantially since those early measurements, but the gap reminds us that agents are not yet general-purpose replacements for human judgment in high-complexity domains.

For investors and operators alike, the key differentiator is not whether to invest in AI agents, but how to invest wisely. Governed pilots with clear ROI metrics, robust data infrastructure, and realistic expectations about current capabilities will outperform undisciplined deployments every time.

SECTION 08

What Comes Next

The trajectory is clear, even if the exact timeline remains uncertain. Several trends are converging to shape the next phase of AI agent evolution.

Smaller, Specialized Reasoning Models

The industry is moving toward smaller, domain-tuned reasoning models that are multimodal and easier to fine-tune for specific applications. Advances in reinforcement learning and fine-tuning techniques mean that enterprises can customize agent behavior for their specific workflows without training from scratch. This is a significant shift from the era of general-purpose foundation models toward purpose-built agent intelligence.

Agent Fluency as a Core Skill

By the end of 2026, fluency with agent systems is expected to be as fundamental as spreadsheet skills are today.^[15] Organizations that combine training programs with accessible tools will avoid the capability gaps that slow adoption. The human element remains essential: agents still have meaningful limitations in tasks requiring deep empathy, emotional intelligence, and nuanced social understanding.

The Autonomous Enterprise

The long-term vision is an enterprise where specialized agents handle the majority of routine operational tasks, with humans providing oversight, strategic direction, and judgment in ambiguous situations. This is not about replacing people; it is about augmenting human capability and freeing up talent for higher-value work.

The organizations that approach this transition thoughtfully, with strong governance, clear accountability structures, and realistic expectations, will be the ones shaping the competitive landscape. The technology is ready. The question is whether the organizations are.

SECTION 09

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