A NEW CATEGORY IS COMING

The Biggest Category in AI That Nobody's Talking About

Why AI Workforce Management will define the next decade of business

Dave Albertson
CEO & Co-Founder, ManageAI · March 2026

> "The first wave gave companies tools. The second is giving them workers. The third? A way to manage them."
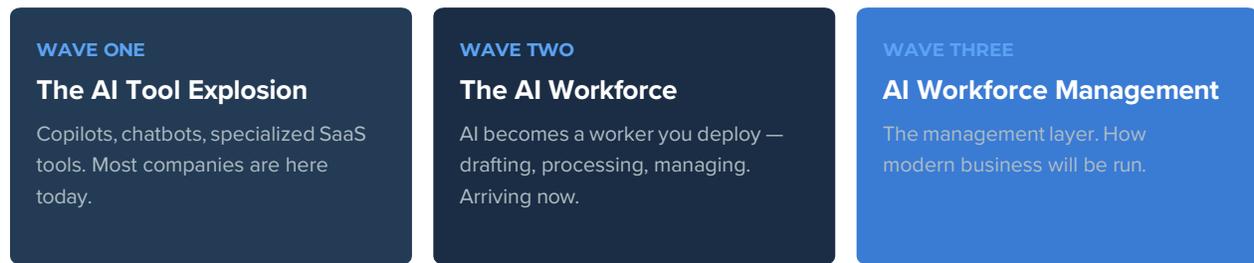
DAVE ALBERTSON · MANAGEAI

Everyone is prepping for the wrong wave.

For the past two years, the business world has been overwhelmed by wave one of artificial intelligence. ChatGPT. Copilots. SaaS AI-powered everything. Every vendor on earth added "AI" to their product page, every board started asking about it, and every CEO scrambled to prove they had a strategy, or hoped that their team running a bunch of tool experiments was "figuring it out."

Wave one is real. It matters. It's created unbelievable technology and opened our eyes to a world of new possibilities. But it's not the big business story.

That third wave, AI Workforce Management, is going to be one of the most consequential categories in the next era of modern business. And almost nobody is talking about it yet.

Let me explain.

WAVE ONE	WAVE TWO	WAVE THREE
The AI Tool Explosion	**The AI Workforce**	**AI Workforce Management**
Copilots, chatbots, specialized SaaS tools. Most companies are here today.	AI becomes a worker you deploy — drafting, processing, managing. Arriving now.	The management layer. How modern business will be run.

Three Waves and a BIG Blind Spot

Wave one is the AI tool explosion: the copilots, the chatbots, the hundreds of specialized AI SaaS tools, and the advancement of the core models and technology themselves.

This wave has Wall Street asking if we're in a bubble. It has business leaders asking, "Is this tech really ready? I've got a lot of promising experiments but no measurable business outcomes yet." This is where most companies sit today. An MIT study laid a great foundation for explaining the why behind some of the flop in commercial impact during this wave:

> *MIT Media Lab, "The GenAI Divide: State of AI in Business 2025"* — nanda.media.mit.edu/ai_report_2025.pdf
> *Manage AI, "The 5% Playbook"* — manageai.io/playbook/

Wave two is the AI workforce. This is where AI stops being a tool you use and starts working more like a worker you deploy. Instead of a chat interface answering questions for your team, you'll have AI teammates drafting proposals, processing invoices, managing compliance filings, coordinating schedules, and proactively building research.

For those closer to AI, this wave is happening now. For those still caught in wave one, it's going to arrive faster than they expect. Anyone who's spent real time with Claude or the latest frontier models,

whether their company has fully adopted them or not, has probably already had the "wow" moment of seeing AI handle full, complex tasks with just a little context and setup.

When I get excited about what our agents are doing and talk about it with our software engineers, they say, "Welcome to the world we've been living in for a while." But that's exactly why this wave is accelerating. The capability that started and was intentionally focused toward engineering by some of the early tech pioneers is now landing across every business function.

Because wave two is tall, big, and just starting to break, almost nobody is talking about what comes right behind it.

> **"The moment AI starts performing real work, a new problem appears immediately. Who manages the work? Who ensures it's done correctly? Who's accountable when it isn't?"**

Let me make this concrete. A B2B marketing agency deploys an AI agent to manage client deliverables across multiple accounts: campaign briefs, competitive analyses, go-to-market plans. Within a week it's generating more output than their strategy team could produce in a month. On day ten, a team member saves a file to the wrong client folder. With no guardrails defining which knowledge belongs to which account, the agent uses part of a confidential campaign strategy in a competitor's brief. The competitor sees their rival's positioning. Now the agency has a confidentiality breach, two accounts at risk, and a legal conversation nobody planned for.

Who reviewed the output before it went to the client? Who was accountable for what the agent had access to? Who retrains it so it doesn't happen again? This isn't a technology failure. The AI did exactly what it was set up to do. This is a management failure, and it's the kind of failure that will define wave three.

Wave three is AI Workforce Management. The management layer. The way modern business will be run. Your approach to wave three will determine whether your AI workforce compounds business value, or just creates expensive chaos.

The Question Nobody's Asking

I've had this conversation dozens of times now. I sit across from a CEO or COO of a midsize company and ask a simple question: If we deployed ten AI agents tomorrow, who would manage them?

The room goes quiet every time. They have an answer for who manages their sales team. They have an answer for who manages their accounts. But AI? The most transformative technology of their careers? It's technology, so if there is an IT leader in the room they may perk up and expect their name to get called. But the silence from the CEO or COO is the signal. It tells you everything about where this market is headed.

Right now, many midsize companies we work with handle AI in one of two ways. In the first scenario, they buy a tool, assign their most tech-curious employee to "figure it out," and hope for the best. That person already has a full-time job. They're not an AI expert. They don't have a management framework. They burn out or the initiative dies. Leadership blames the technology's readiness or a vendor's support.

In the second scenario, they have a small, overworked tech team already buried under an ambitious and underfunded technology roadmap, now being asked to define the AI stack and policy for the entire company. Business leaders see tools on social media every day and point back to the tech team with skepticism: "When are we going to get this deployed?" The tech team is critical to AI enablement, but they shouldn't be the ones deciding what this new workforce does.

> **"The pattern is the same every time. AI doesn't have a technology problem. It has a management problem."**

A Category That Doesn't Exist Yet, But Will Define the Decade

We have named it plainly: AI Workforce Management. Not AI consulting. Not AI SaaS. Not an AI agency that builds automation or agents and walks away. This is something fundamentally different.

AI Workforce Management is the discipline of deploying, onboarding, managing, and optimizing AI agents as members of your workforce. It includes defining what each AI worker owns. Setting the rules, goals, and boundaries they operate within. Structuring the knowledge they're allowed to use. Building the human-in-the-loop systems that keep accountability with people. Monitoring performance. Iterating on workflows. Treating AI with the same management rigor you'd apply to any team.

This is not a feature of an AI platform. It's an entire operating discipline, and it doesn't exist in a mature and organized form beyond what some early adopters have built for themselves.

Think about what happens every time a company hires a human employee. There's a job description. An onboarding process. A manager. Performance reviews. Escalation paths. Accountability structures. An HR function that oversees the whole system. Now think about what happens when a company deploys an AI agent today. None of that exists. The agent gets pointed at a task, maybe given a prompt, and turned loose. No onboarding. No management framework. No one accountable for the outcome.

Hiring a Human Employee	**Deploying an AI Agent Today**
ONBOARDING Job description. Onboarding process. Manager assigned.	**ONBOARDING** Pointed at a task, maybe a prompt, turned loose. No structure.
ACCOUNTABILITY Clear chain. Manager owns output.	**ACCOUNTABILITY** Unclear. Nobody owns the outcome when it goes wrong.
PERFORMANCE Regular reviews. Goals tracked. Feedback loop.	**PERFORMANCE** Almost never measured. Success rarely defined.
KNOWLEDGE Scoped. HR/IT manages access.	**KNOWLEDGE** Often unrestricted. No guardrails on data.

> **"You would never run a human workforce this way. But it's exactly how every company is running its AI."**

Larger Than HR. As Foundational as IT.

Ask yourself a simple question: why does HR exist? Not the department. The entire industry. Recruiting. Staffing. Workforce management. Training. Benefits. Compliance. Hundreds of billions of dollars globally. All of it exists for one reason: managing human workers is complex, critical, and never-ending.

Now ask the next question: what happens when AI workers join that workforce? This isn't a hypothetical. We can start observing it now. Every new model release makes AI more capable, which is only going to increase the pace and size of this wave daily. Many companies have started aggressively scaling their workforces. Just not with humans.

Picture a midsize company with 100 human employees and 500 AI agents. The management complexity doesn't shrink. It multiplies. Every one of those agents needs a role, boundaries, knowledge access, performance monitoring, and someone accountable for its output.

> **"Every company that has employees will eventually have AI employees. And every AI employee will need to be managed."**

That infrastructure will be as foundational as HR and IT have been for human workforces, and it will grow as fast as the AI workforce itself. That's the market.

There are companies building AI models. Companies building AI tools and platforms. Companies selling AI consulting. Companies running AI agencies. But the management layer? Very few are building a business and discipline focused on that, beyond the leading AI companies who are building solely for themselves.

We've seen these patterns before. When financial complexity scaled beyond what a bookkeeper could manage, companies didn't buy a better spreadsheet — they built a finance function. When companies scaled past the point where managers could handle "people stuff" on the side, HR emerged. Not a feature of management, not an add-on — an entirely new operating discipline. AI Workforce Management is following the same trajectory. The work is scaling. The management hasn't caught up. A new discipline is forming.

Why This Moment Matters

Categories don't wait for companies to be ready. They emerge whether anyone is prepared or not. Three things are converging right now that make AI Workforce Management not just inevitable, but urgent.

First, AI agents are good enough to own real work. We're past the demo stage. The latest models can perform end-to-end tasks across business functions at a level that creates genuine value. The technology isn't the bottleneck anymore, because the underlying models are already capable of executing real workflows today.

Second, the management gap is becoming visible. Companies that deployed AI early are hitting the same wall: ownership is unclear, context is fragmented, success isn't measured, governance is reactive. The pattern is so consistent it's almost mechanical. Fortune 500 companies leading in AI adoption are working toward solving this at scale. For the broader landscape of small and midsize growth businesses, an understanding of how to manage AI at this level is almost entirely absent.

Third, the compounding advantage is real. Organizations that figure out AI management early don't just perform better once. They improve continuously. Each AI agent deployed makes the next one faster and easier. Each workflow automated builds institutional knowledge. The gap between companies that manage AI well and those that don't is going to widen every quarter from here.

Research backs this up. The companies operationalizing AI, the top 5%, are seeing returns an order of magnitude higher than companies still experimenting. The difference isn't better models or bigger budgets. It's management discipline.

95%	**10×**	**Q1**
FAIL TO OPERATIONALIZE AI	HIGHER RETURNS FOR THE 5%	THE GAP WIDENS EVERY QUARTER
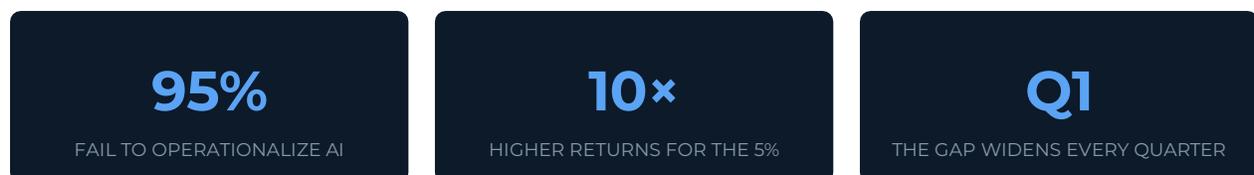
You Are Not in a Technology Race. You Are in a Management Race.

Unless your business is big tech or frontier model building, technology is not the race you must win. Most of the business world is still stuck on wave one. They're debating which AI tools to buy, which models to use, which vendor has the best demo. They're solving last year's problem.

> **"The companies that win the next decade aren't the ones with the best AI, or even the first to adopt an AI workforce. They're the ones who know how to manage it."**
>
> **DAVE ALBERTSON · MANAGEAI**

The AI-forward companies are building AI workforces and starting to get real impact. One of the outcomes this wave is creating, and will continue to, is the corporate layoffs you keep seeing in the news. Some early CEOs shied away from saying these were AI-related. In recent weeks, more and more are admitting it. This wave will continue to build.

But as fast as wave two hits, wave three will be right behind it. Great leaders with the best management systems will win the future, same as they always have. Only now the system must be built for AI, not solely for humans. That means onboarding AI agents with the same rigor as human employees. Defining roles, goals, and boundaries. Building knowledge systems that give AI trusted context to work from. Designing workflows where humans and AI collaborate with clear accountability. Monitoring performance. Iterating constantly.

> **"This means treating AI as a workforce, not a software subscription."**

This is the shift. And the category that enables it, AI Workforce Management, is going to be one of the largest, most consequential categories in the next era of enterprise technology and management consulting.

The next major category in enterprise AI won't be another tool. It will be the systems companies use to manage AI as part of their workforce. That category is emerging now. And outside of the techno-bro talk and shiny new tech hype videos we are bombarded with on social media, it's the conversation that matters most for the leaders actually running businesses.

MANAGE AI

DEPLOY AND OWN YOUR AI WORKFORCE

Wave three is what we built ManageAI to solve for midsize growth businesses. Not another AI SaaS tool. Not an AI consulting firm.ManageAI is the first AI Workforce Management company, purpose-built to help businesses deploy, own, and manage AI workforces.

Our model is unique in this space. We onboard AI teammates into our clients' own cloud infrastructure. The data never leaves their environment. The knowledge stays inside their walls. They own the AI workforce we build for them. We help them manage it.

We call it "Deploy and Own Your AI Workforce."

As AI workforces grow, every companywill need the infrastructure and discipline to manage them. The companies that figurethis out firstwill compound that advantage for years. We're building the category around that belief, and we're building it now.

Ready to build and manage your AI workforce?

LEARN MORE AT MANAGEAI.IO →

The biggest category in AI is the one nobody's talking about yet. We are.