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Closing the AI Execution Gap with Forward Deployed Engineering



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Everyone has an AI pilot. Almost no one has AI in production.

95%

of enterprise generative-AI pilots deliver no
measurable
P&L impact

— *MIT Project NANDA, 2026*

- **The model is rarely the problem**

Most pilots demo well. Reviews are positive. The underlying AI works.

- **The gap is what surrounds the model**

Data readiness, integration into real workflows, governance, and change management stall the move to production.

- **This is where value quietly dies**

Budget and executive attention move on before the system ever reaches the people who needed it.



The bottleneck was never access to AI technology

It's the ability to apply it inside the realities of existing systems, data, processes, security controls, and business objectives.



Four places the AI Execution Gap opens up

1

Integration debt

Agentic workflows need to reach into legacy systems and APIs that were never designed to be called this way, this often.

2

Governance friction

Security and compliance controls are applied late, so identity, audit, and access requirements block launch instead of shaping design.

3

Unclear ownership of outcomes

The pilot has a project owner. Production needs a business owner accountable for the result — that handoff rarely happens cleanly.

4

Roadmaps that can't keep pace

Fixed 2–5 year plans assume a stable target. Model capability — and what's worth automating — shifts every few months.



Traditional delivery assumes a stable target. Agentic AI doesn't give you one.

Traditional delivery

- Fixed-scope statement of work
- Quarterly checkpoints
- Clean handover, vendor exits
- 2–5 year roadmap set upfront

Agentic AI ask

- Outcome defined, scope adapts as agents ship
- Continuous, in-sprint checkpoints
- Embedded until the outcome lands
- Rapid plans, rebuilt as capability shifts



WHAT FDE MEANS

Forward Deployed Engineering

Embedding senior engineering expertise directly inside the customer's team — for the duration of a meaningful business outcome, not a billable task list — combining deep technical capability with an understanding of business outcomes.

- Senior engineers with design and architecture skills, not junior delivery staff
- Write production code, not just advise
- Measured on the outcome landing, not hours billed



FDE sits at the intersection of three disciplines

Consulting

Understands the business objective, the stakeholders, and how success will be measured.

Forward Deployed Engineer

Product engineering

Knows the platform in depth, designs and writes real, production-grade code against it.

Customer success

Stays accountable after go-live, the work isn't done when a module ships, proactively engages to deliver value.



Embedded, not engaged — the difference is where they sit

1

Sits in your standups and planning

Not a quarterly steering committee update — day-to-day visibility into how the team actually works.

2

Writes production code alongside your engineers

Ships into your codebase and your environment, under your standards.

3

Adapts scope as the ground moves

New failure modes appear that no runbook covers; plans get rebuilt in weeks, not quarters.

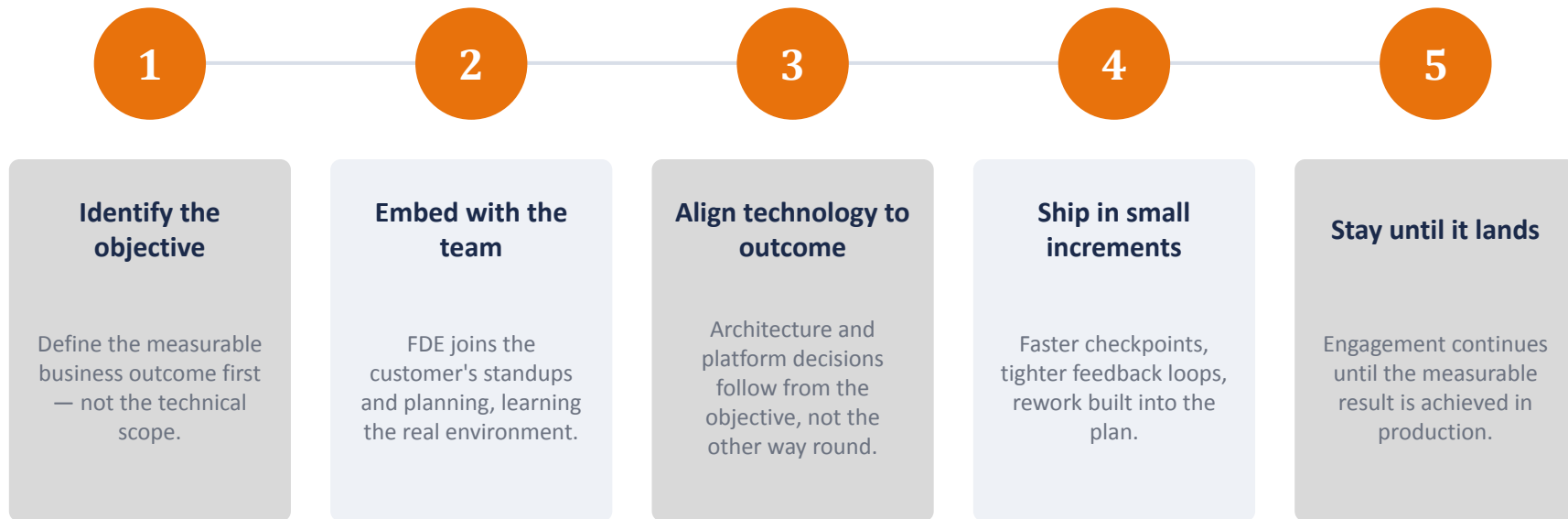
4

Owens the outcome, not the handover

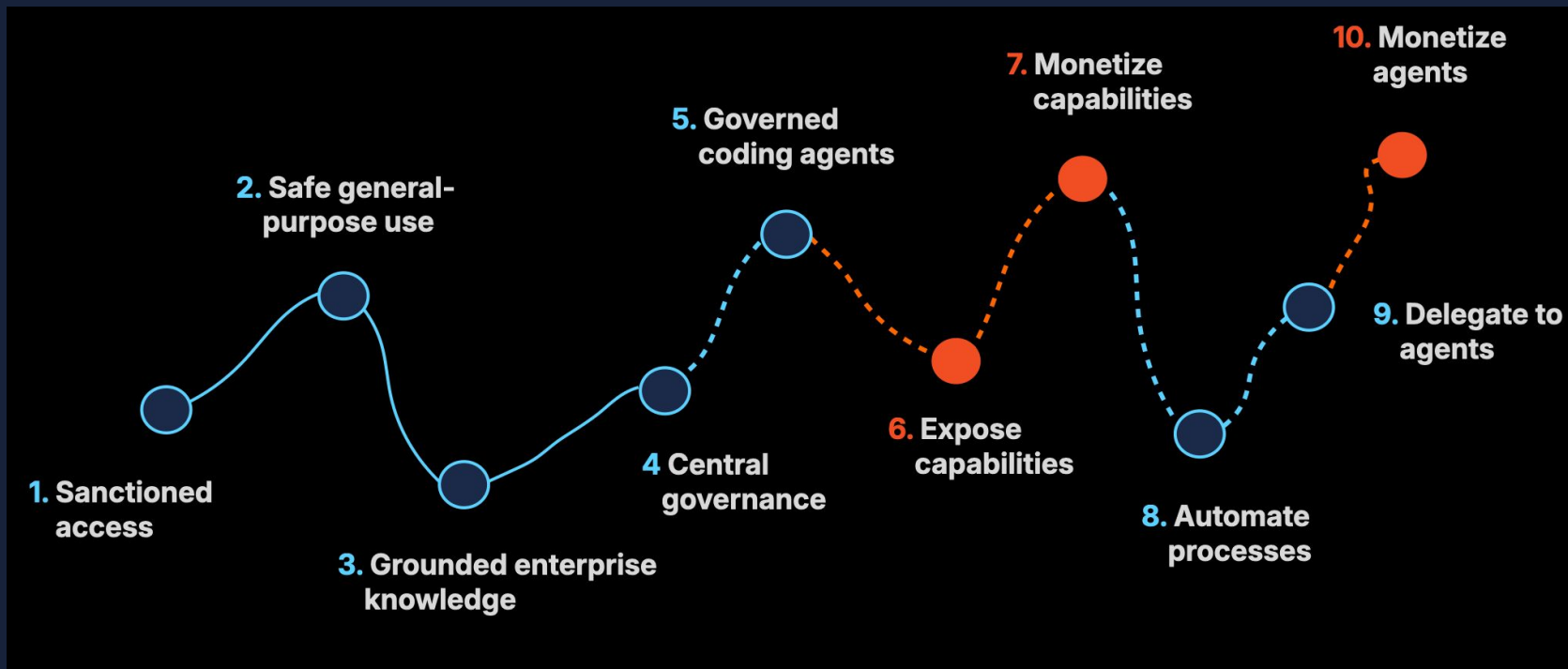
The engagement ends when the business result lands — not when a module is deployed.



Start with the business outcome. Work backward to technology.



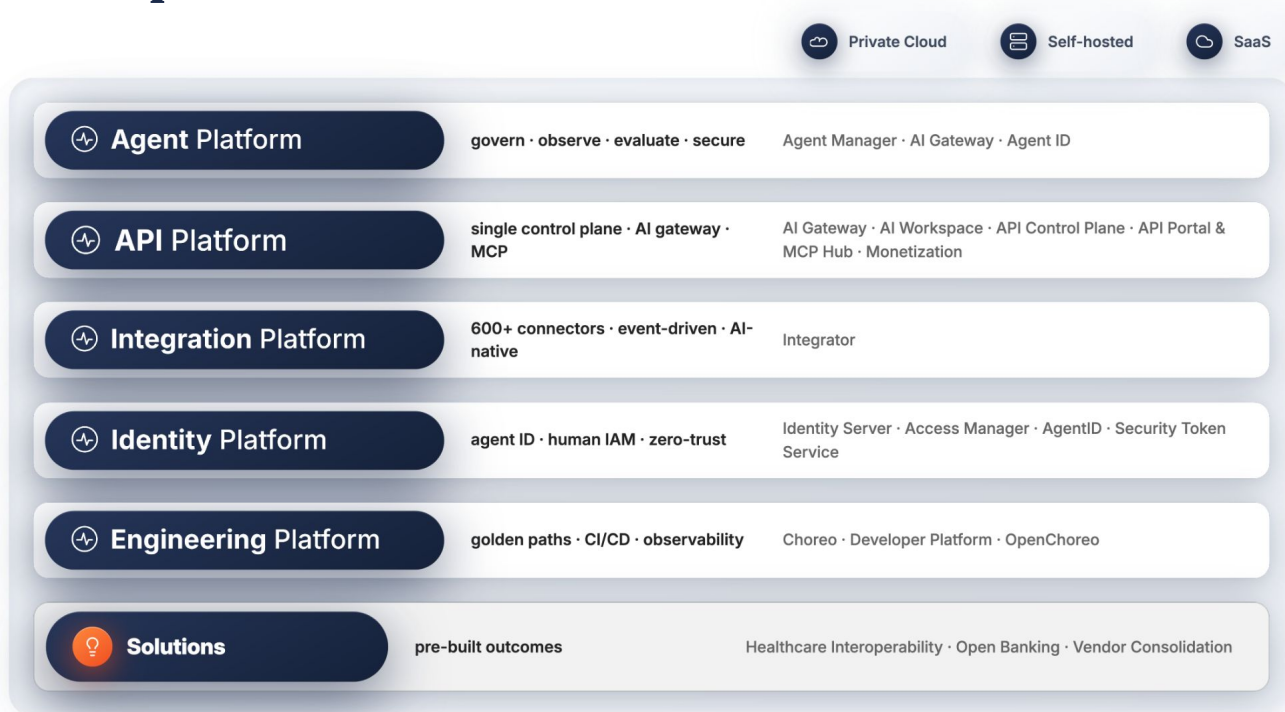
The Golden Path to Become an Agentic Enterprise



<https://github.com/wso2/reference-methodology/blob/master/golden-path-agentic-enterprise.md>



Agentic Enterprise Fabric



<https://wso2.com/library/blogs/wso2-agentic-enterprise-fabric/>



PROOF POINT

FDE inside WSO2: reinventing our own customer support

We used the model on ourselves before we asked customers to trust it.



CASE STUDY

Novera - An Agentic customer support, sponsored by CS Leadership

The problem

Customer support resolution is much faster and generates high quality responses when a experienced senior engineer is involved, how do we codify that and scale it to every customer case — a clear candidate for an agentic approach, but no one owned turning that idea into a shipped system.

The approach

An FDE embedded directly with WSO2's own CS leadership to scope the use case from the business problem outward — not from a pre-built product feature.

What was built

An iterative agent that responds to customer issues directly, improving both the speed and quality of resolution as it learns from real tickets, product source code, documentation and knowledge base.

TARGET OUTCOME

30%

of customer issues resolved with
no human intervention

*Same platform. Same engineering discipline is
recommended to customers — applied to our own
operation first.*



KEY TAKEAWAY

**The AI Execution Gap doesn't close with better models.
It closes with engineers who sit close enough
to the problem to solve the real one.**

Let's talk about where FDE fits in your AI roadmap.

