

# Implementing AI Is the Starting Line

Most organizations have implemented AI. Fewer are operating it. The gap between deployed and operated is where outcomes disappear.



**L5 Team**

August 2, 2025

Ask the leader of any mid-market technology, professional services, or healthcare organization whether they have implemented AI. Almost all of them will say yes. Ask them what their AI is producing right now, which agents are running, what each one is accountable for, and whether anyone reviewed the outputs last week. The conversation gets quiet.

This is the defining gap in enterprise AI in 2026. Not the implementation gap. The operation gap.

## Three states, one destination

Every organization with an AI investment exists in one of three states.

### Piloting.

AI features are enabled. Proofs of concept are running in sandboxes. Someone from the platform vendor or a consulting firm helped stand up a demo. Leadership has seen the technology. The question on the table is whether to commit.

### Implemented.

AI went live. There was a go-live meeting, a launch announcement, maybe a training session. The agents are deployed and technically active. The team is using the platform. This is where most organizations are, and where most organizations stay.

### Operated.

AI agents are running in production with someone accountable for their outputs every week. Performance is measured against defined baselines. Drift is caught before it compounds. New use cases advance on a roadmap with defined outcomes. The platform produces results that the organization can show a board or a CFO.

The distance between implemented and operated is not technical. The technology at go-live and the technology six months later are the same. What changes is whether anyone is running it.

- **<10%** L5 customers reach the Operated state without an active operator driving the transition. [1]
- **6mo** Typical time before AI agent performance visibly degrades without a weekly operating cadence.
- **600+** Production environments L5 has operated. ACT is extracted from what actually worked across those environments.

## What the operation gap costs

The operation gap is not visible on a dashboard. It shows up as ticket volume that is higher than it should be. Deflection rates that peaked at go-live and have been declining since. Leaders asking why the AI investment is not producing the savings the vendor projected. Platform utilization

reports that show the features are enabled but adoption is low.

None of these symptoms are labeled "AI is not being operated." They are attributed to other causes: seasonal volume, team turnover, product changes, vendor roadmap delays. The real cause is simpler. Nobody is watching the agents. Nobody is tuning them. Nobody is accountable for what they produce.

*"You built an agent and walked away. What do you think is happening to the prompts that the agent is doing? Who is watching it? Somebody needs to monitor it, somebody needs to govern it."*

*Pulkit Keshar, COO, L5*

The agents that were accurate at go-live drift as the environment around them changes. Teams restructure and routing logic becomes stale. Processes evolve and knowledge articles go out of date. New use cases emerge and the agent has never seen the issue type before. Each of these is individually small. Together, over six to twelve months, they represent the full erosion of what the implementation was supposed to produce.

## Why implementation is not enough

The platform vendors do not operate your AI. That is not their job. Their job is the product. Zendesk builds the deflection capability. ClickUp builds the automation framework. Workday builds the AI interface. Getting those capabilities to produce outcomes in your specific environment, for your specific team, against your specific business metrics, is a different function. No platform vendor does that. They cannot.

The large implementation partners implement and leave. The engagement ends at go-live. The project team rolls off. What happens to the AI after the handoff is not their accountability. Advisory decks do not run weekly Drives. Implementation teams do not tune agents in week 14.

### The Operation Gap

The operation gap is the space between a successful AI implementation and a producing AI environment. It is created when the function responsible for implementation ends at go-live and no function picks up the ongoing work of governing, tuning, and improving AI agents after deployment. Most organizations have implemented AI. Most are sitting in the operation gap.

## What operating AI actually requires

Operating AI is not the same as maintaining software. Stable software runs on its original configuration indefinitely. AI agents operate in a dynamic environment where the inputs change constantly: team structures, process documentation, issue types, user behavior. The agent has to change with the environment, or it stops producing outcomes.

Running AI in production requires a weekly cadence. Not monthly. Not quarterly. Weekly, because drift compounds in weeks, not quarters. The cadence has to include performance review, logic adjustment, knowledge maintenance, and outcome measurement. Each cycle has to produce a specific output: one concrete change to the agent configuration that is live in production by the end of the week. The following week measures whether it worked.

This is what L5 calls a Drive. Every Operate engagement runs a Drive every week. The Drive has a defined output agreed before it begins. The output is measured after it closes. The following Drive picks up from there. The model does not wait for a problem to be reported. It reviews the system proactively and acts before drift becomes visible to end users.

The structural difference between reactive support and active AI operation is the cadence. Weekly Drives mean the system is reviewed, adjusted, and measured before problems compound into visible failures.

## The NOC analogy for technical buyers

For leaders who know infrastructure: an AI Operator is the equivalent of a Network Operations Center for your AI workflows. A NOC monitors uptime and responds when systems go down. An AI Operator monitors outcomes and acts when agents drift. Same operating discipline. Different accountability. The NOC became standard because nobody believed that deployed infrastructure would run itself indefinitely without active monitoring. AI is no different.

## The question worth asking now

Are you piloting AI, implementing AI, or operating AI for outcomes?

If the honest answer is implementing, the follow-up question is who is accountable for the operation. Not who owns the platform license. Not who managed the implementation project. Who is running a Drive on your AI agents this week, reviewing their performance, and shipping one concrete improvement by Friday.

If nobody is, you are in the operation gap. The implementation was the starting line. The race has not started yet.

## Sources

1. L5. ACT Maturity Model, internal delivery data. 2026. Fewer than 10% of customers reach Level 5 (AI Operated) without an active operator driving the engagement.