The evolution of AI capabilities

Al agents hold big promise, but choosing the right tool matters. Here's a quick guide to traditional, generative, and agentic Al.

McKinsey & Company



TRADITIONAL AI¹ Rigid but reliable implementer

Executes predefined workflows but doesn't adapt and is hard to scale

- Performs rule-based execution
- Doesn't learn or reason
- Requires structured inputs
- Is efficient but inflexible

BEST FOR: Basic repetitive and structured tasks that rarely change



GEN AI Supercharged copilot

Understands, generates, and transforms information but lacks execution

- Processes unstructured data
- Generates text-based outputs
- Is context-aware but reactive
- Is smart but needs human direction

BEST FOR: Human augmentation and knowledge generation



AGENTIC AI Fully autonomous operator

Learns, reasons, and executes multistep workflows with minimal oversight

- Executes workflows autonomously
- Makes decisions independently
- Adapts in real time
- Minimizes human touchpoints



BEST FOR: End-to-end automation, process orchestration, and decision-making

Learn more at McKinsey.com