

How much should your AI agent decide alone?

Earned autonomy. An agent does not get independence because the tool ships with it. Autonomy is a property of the decision, not of the agent: set the level by the cost of a wrong call, and let one agent hold a different level on each decision.

Five levels. Each one states what the agent may do and what a person still does.

1	Retrieve. Fetches the numbers and cites the source. It decides nothing. A person reads them and makes the call.
2	Prepare. Assembles the option set and the evidence behind each option. A person chooses.
3	Recommend. Proposes one action and shows its reasoning. A person approves or rejects it, case by case.
4	Act with approval. Executes, but only once a named owner confirms. Every action is logged against that name.
5	Bounded action. Executes alone inside written thresholds. Outside them it stops and escalates. A person owns the thresholds.

Higher is not better. Matched is better.

The same agent can sit at level 5 on reorders and level 2 on markdowns.
Move a decision up only as the evidence earns it.