



AI Literacy Lab



Bykov-Brett
Enterprises

A LEADER'S GUIDE

The AI Ladder

Automation to Agentic

Four rungs, from a fixed automation up to a system that improves itself.
What each rung adds, how to recognise it, & why climbing is a trade rather
than an upgrade.

Turn Intent Into Impact.



The four rungs

Every rung adds one thing the rung below cannot do. The pill marks where the AI actually sits.

01

Automation

Trigger, tasks, output. Fixed.

A fixed path someone drew in advance. Some steps may use AI, the route never changes.

AI inside steps only

02

Assistant

Query, tasks, response. Straight line.

New content every time, but still a straight line. A person carries the work onward.

AI writes the answer

03

Agent

Plan, execute, reflect. Loops.

The model gets a job, then loops: decide, use a tool, check the result, until it is done.

AI picks every step

04

Agentic

Loop plus learn. Compounds.

The same loop, but each run changes how the next one plans. Usually several agents working together.

AI plans, acts & learns

01 Automation



The filled steps are the AI. The route between them is not.

Someone drew this path in advance & it runs the same way every time. An AI may write a step, but nothing here decides which step comes next, so a case nobody drew has no route to follow.

WHERE YOU SEE THIS

A clip arrives in a chat. It is downloaded, described once by a vision model, filed into the library under the right year, & a confirmation goes back. Four steps, same order, every time.

02 Assistant



The AI writes the answer. It still cannot choose what happens next.

You ask, it answers, & a person carries the answer onward. The content is new every time, which is what makes it feel clever, but the shape is still a straight line with no way to check its own work or fetch what it was not handed.

WHERE YOU SEE THIS

A caption writer. One brief goes in, one caption comes back, & a person reads it & decides whether to post it. No tools, no second look, no memory of last week.

03 Agent

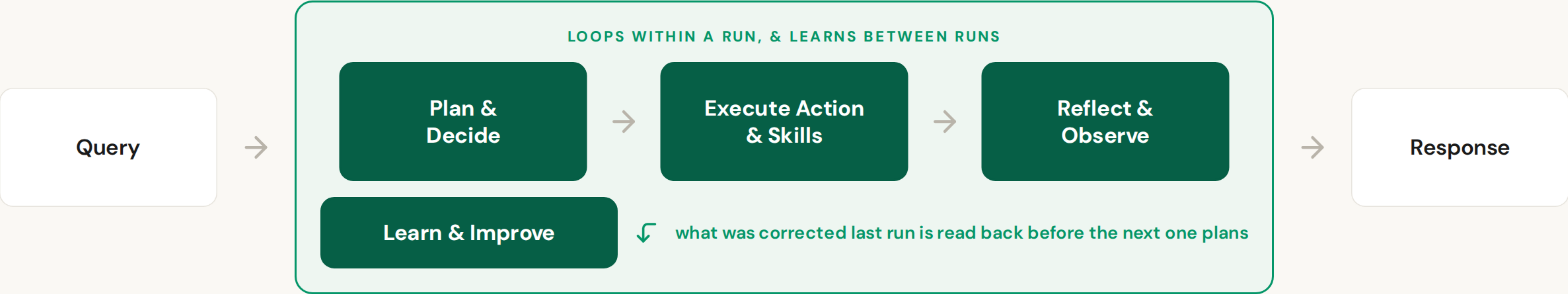


The model is handed a job & a set of tools, then it decides its own next step, acts, & checks what came back. It reacts to what it finds, which is exactly why you cannot predict the route in advance.

WHERE YOU SEE THIS

A research job handed to an agent. It searches the knowledge base, opens what it finds, cross-references it against live records, & keeps going until it has grounded material to write from.

04 Agentic



Several agents usually run this together, each seeing what the others found.

Same loop as the rung below, with one addition that changes everything: the run leaves a record behind, & the next run reads it. That is the whole difference. It is also the rung where a wrong lesson quietly becomes permanent.

WHERE YOU SEE THIS

A video editor that learns. Every correction made to its cuts is kept, then read back into the next round of decisions before it chooses which takes to keep.

How to tell them apart

Four tells for spotting which rung you are actually looking at, & how each one breaks.

Automation

THE TELL

Same steps run every time, in the same order, whatever the input looks like.

FAILS WHEN

The input falls outside the path it was built for, & nothing adapts.

A scheduled pipeline that runs the same chain every morning.

Assistant

THE TELL

One prompt in, one generated answer out, then a person takes it from there.

FAILS WHEN

It writes something plausible but wrong, & nothing downstream checks the claim.

A caption writer: one brief in, one caption out.

Agent

THE TELL

Repeated tool calls with visible reasoning between them, not one single answer.

FAILS WHEN

It loops on the wrong tool call, or hits the turn limit before finishing.

A research job that searches, reads & cross-references until it has enough.

Agentic

THE TELL

Its choices shift over time, shaped by what you kept & cut on earlier runs.

FAILS WHEN

A stale lesson never gets retired, so it repeats one mistake with confidence.

An editor that reads your past corrections before choosing this week's cuts.



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Which rung does your problem actually need?

The rungs are not a quality ranking, they are a control trade. Every rung up buys adaptability & spends predictability.

Most business problems are still an automation problem wearing an AI costume.

For the full framework & worked examples: ailiteracylab.ai/resources

AI

Drafted with AI assistance, then edited & fact-checked by a person. Every example is a real system from this platform.