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The Next Order-to-Cash Revolution Begins With the Agentic Supply Chain Operating Model

By Paul Cianciolo, Chief Commercial Officer, TraceLink

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Decades of ERP, EDI, and integration investment have automated transactions but left critical business decisions to humans overwhelmed by data. Governed agentic AI is poised to change the economics of order-to-cash.

For more than 40 years, enterprises have invested in digitizing B2B commerce. They implemented ERP systems, adopted EDI standards, built integrations, connected trading partners, and automated the exchange of billions of commercial transactions.

Yet walk into the order management function of a large manufacturer today, and you will find something remarkable.

People are still doing much of the work required to ensure those transactions are completed successfully.

They investigate purchase order discrepancies. They reconcile pricing and commercial terms. They determine whether orders make sense against forecasts

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and inventory. They coordinate with customers, distributors, and logistics partners to resolve issues that their highly sophisticated systems cannot resolve themselves.

Think about that.

We have spent decades and enormous amounts of money teaching enterprise systems how to exchange transactions. But we have made far less progress teaching those systems how to conduct business together.

EDI digitized the transaction. It did not digitalize the business process.

That distinction matters more today than at any point in the history of enterprise technology.

EDI is not the problem. Neither is ERP. Both remain foundational to global commerce. The problem is the assumption that integrating systems and automating transactions is equivalent to automating the business processes those transactions represent.

It isn't.

A purchase order can move flawlessly between two enterprise systems while the business decisions required to fulfill it remain fragmented across people, applications, emails, spreadsheets, and organizational boundaries.

The transaction is digital. The business processes surrounding it remain largely manual.

And that gap has become one of the most significant opportunities for agentic AI in the enterprise.

But it also raises a more uncomfortable question.

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If companies deploy thousands of AI agents on top of the same fragmented architecture, are they transforming commerce, or simply creating the next generation of point-to-point integration problems?

Without a fundamental change in the underlying operating model, companies risk repeating decades of integration challenges at an entirely new scale. The real opportunity is to give AI agents a shared foundation for executing business processes intelligently across enterprise boundaries.

The Next Competitive Advantage Is Intelligent Commerce

The next generation of B2B commerce will not be defined by how efficiently companies exchange transactions. It will be defined by how intelligently they execute the business processes those transactions represent.

That requires more than deploying AI agents. It requires an **Agentic Supply Chain Operating Model (ASCOM)** that redefines how people, systems, trading partners, and governed agents work together, supported by an **Agentic Supply Chain Operating System (ASCOS)** that enables those processes to operate across enterprise boundaries.

The competitive opportunity is substantial: grow transaction volume, revenue, and trading-partner relationships without proportionally increasing the people, costs, and complexity required to manage them.

Companies that achieve this will gain more than productivity; they will create additional margin to reinvest in growth. They will create a scalable operating model and a growing proprietary asset of business data, context, and intelligence that becomes increasingly difficult for competitors to replicate.

Those that deploy isolated agents without changing their underlying operating

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model risk automating individual tasks while perpetuating the inefficiencies, costs, and complexity that have constrained B2B commerce for decades.

The Hidden Cost of Connected Commerce

Consider a routine purchase order.

An ERP system can validate required fields, identify configured pricing discrepancies, and apply established business rules. EDI can exchange the transaction with the trading partner.

But what happens when an order is technically valid yet commercially questionable?

Perhaps the quantity is inconsistent with the customer's forecast and recent shipments. Perhaps the order conflicts with a commercial agreement or fulfillment commitment.

The systems have exchanged and validated the transaction. Yet determining what the business should actually do may still require someone to investigate multiple systems, assemble context, consult colleagues, and communicate with the customer.

Multiply that work across thousands of orders, hundreds of trading partners, and increasingly complex commercial relationships.

The economic constraint is no longer simply the cost of exchanging transactions. It is the human capacity required to interpret, coordinate, and act on them.

This is why companies can invest heavily in digital transformation yet continue to experience operating costs and organizational complexity that rise with business growth.

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From Transaction Automation to Agentic Business Processes

Governed AI agents introduce a fundamentally different capability.

Consider an Order Validation Specialist operating within an Agentic Order-to-Cash Business Process.

Rather than simply applying another set of deterministic rules, the agent can evaluate an order against relevant commercial policies, customer agreements, inventory, forecasts, shipment history, and other business context.

It can identify situations that conventional validation might miss, investigate discrepancies, recommend actions, and prepare transaction responses. Human specialists remain accountable for decisions requiring commercial judgment, customer knowledge, or policy exceptions.

The result is not simply faster validation. It is a different allocation of work between people and digital capacity.

And the economics change.

The business can evaluate success through reduced manual investigation, faster order acknowledgement, improved decision quality, fewer downstream problems, and increased transaction throughput without proportional headcount growth.

More importantly, the same operating model can extend beyond order validation to order changes, fulfillment coordination, inventory management, procurement, logistics, and other interconnected processes.

The opportunity is to fundamentally change the economics of B2B commerce, enabling organizations to grow transaction volumes, revenue,

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and trading-partner relationships without a proportional increase in operating costs or resources.

Don't Recreate the Siloed Enterprise Systems Problem With AI

There is a dangerous assumption emerging in enterprise AI strategies: that deploying more agents necessarily creates a more intelligent enterprise.

It doesn't.

An agent operating independently within one application may improve a task while remaining disconnected from the broader business process.

If its context is equally limited, it may validate a transaction correctly yet recommend the wrong business action—overlooking customer commitments, inventory constraints, or trading-partner conditions.

Multiply that approach across functions, enterprise systems, and trading partners, and companies risk creating another generation of isolated data and automation, each with its own integrations, business logic, data dependencies, and governance requirements.

Deploying thousands of disconnected AI agents risks creating thousands of new integration problems, compounding the complexity companies have spent decades trying to overcome while introducing a new challenge: consequential business decisions made without sufficient context.

The alternative is to establish a common operating model and governed technology foundation for Agentic Business Processes.That foundation must link agents to relevant, current, and authorized business context across systems and

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trading partners.

ASCOM provides the framework for redesigning business processes around the coordinated work of humans, enterprise systems, trading partners, and agents. ASCOS provides the technology foundation to design, deploy, govern, monitor, and continuously improve those processes.

ASCOS, delivered as TraceLink's OPUS Platform, combines these capabilities with an established multienterprise digital network, enabling organizations to build on existing trading-partner integrations and transaction flows rather than reconstruct them for each new AI initiative.

The Business Intelligence Asset Most Companies Are Not Building

There is another dimension to this transformation that executives should not overlook.

Every commercial transaction generates information. But much of the context surrounding that transaction, including why a decision was made, what conditions influenced it, and how an exception was resolved, remains fragmented across systems and human interactions.

When Agentic Business Processes operate within a governed digital environment, organizations have the opportunity to systematically capture that context and the outcomes of their decisions.

Over time, this creates a growing proprietary asset of business data, context, and intelligence that can improve future decisions and support increasingly sophisticated agentic operations.

This accumulated knowledge can become a powerful source of

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competitive differentiation.

Two manufacturers may purchase the same ERP, integration software, and AI models. But they will not possess the same accumulated business context, trading-partner intelligence, or operational knowledge.

The intelligence companies accumulate through years of business decisions, transactions, and trading-partner interactions will become an increasingly powerful and enduring source of competitive advantage.

The Decision Facing Enterprise Leaders

The question for CIOs, COOs, and supply chain executives is no longer whether AI can automate individual activities within order-to-Cash.
It can.

The strategic question is whether their organizations will use agentic AI to perpetuate an increasingly complex collection of disconnected systems, integrations, and automation projects, or to fundamentally redesign how commerce operates.

The first approach produces incremental productivity improvements. The second creates the potential for sustained operating leverage, more responsive commercial relationships, and an accumulating proprietary intelligence advantage.

ERP and EDI will remain essential. But they were never designed to be the complete operating model for intelligent, autonomous commerce.

The next era of competitive advantage will belong to companies that move beyond digitizing transactions to digitalizing the business processes that link enterprises.

That is the transformation ASCOM and ASCOS are designed to enable.

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