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The AI Matrix Was Never a Snapshot

*Why enterprises are accelerating into the danger zone -
investing heavily in autonomy without investing in connection.*

PERSONAL POV | ESTEFANÍA MOLINA / 2026



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WHERE THIS BEGAN

A few weeks ago, I argued that AI doesn't fail to scale because of models.

It fails because decisions aren't designed to work together. The constraint is **structural, not technical**.

To make the point, I introduced a matrix that maps the **role of AI in decision-making** - automate, support, make - **against the scope of decisions involved**, from single-function to cross-functional. That matrix is where this follow-up begins.



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THE ORIGINAL FRAMING

Where AI sits - and when it *forces* an operating model shift



Structural pressure rises as decisions become both autonomous and cross-functional. The top-right is where the operating model becomes the binding constraint.



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WHAT I UNDERWEIGHTED

I treated the matrix as a snapshot.

It is, in fact a
trajectory.

A direction enterprises are moving in - whether or not they have explicitly chosen it.



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TWO VARIABLES THAT MOVE TOGETHER

As AI moves from automating tasks to making decisions, and from single-function to cross-functional, **two dynamics emerge in tandem.**

Value Potential Rises

More of the enterprise's economic logic - pricing, demand, supply, workforce, capital allocation - becomes addressable by coordinated optimization

Structural Pressure Rises

Trade-offs that previously surfaced sequentially - between people, in meetings, on quarterly cycles - now surface continuously, between systems, at machine speed

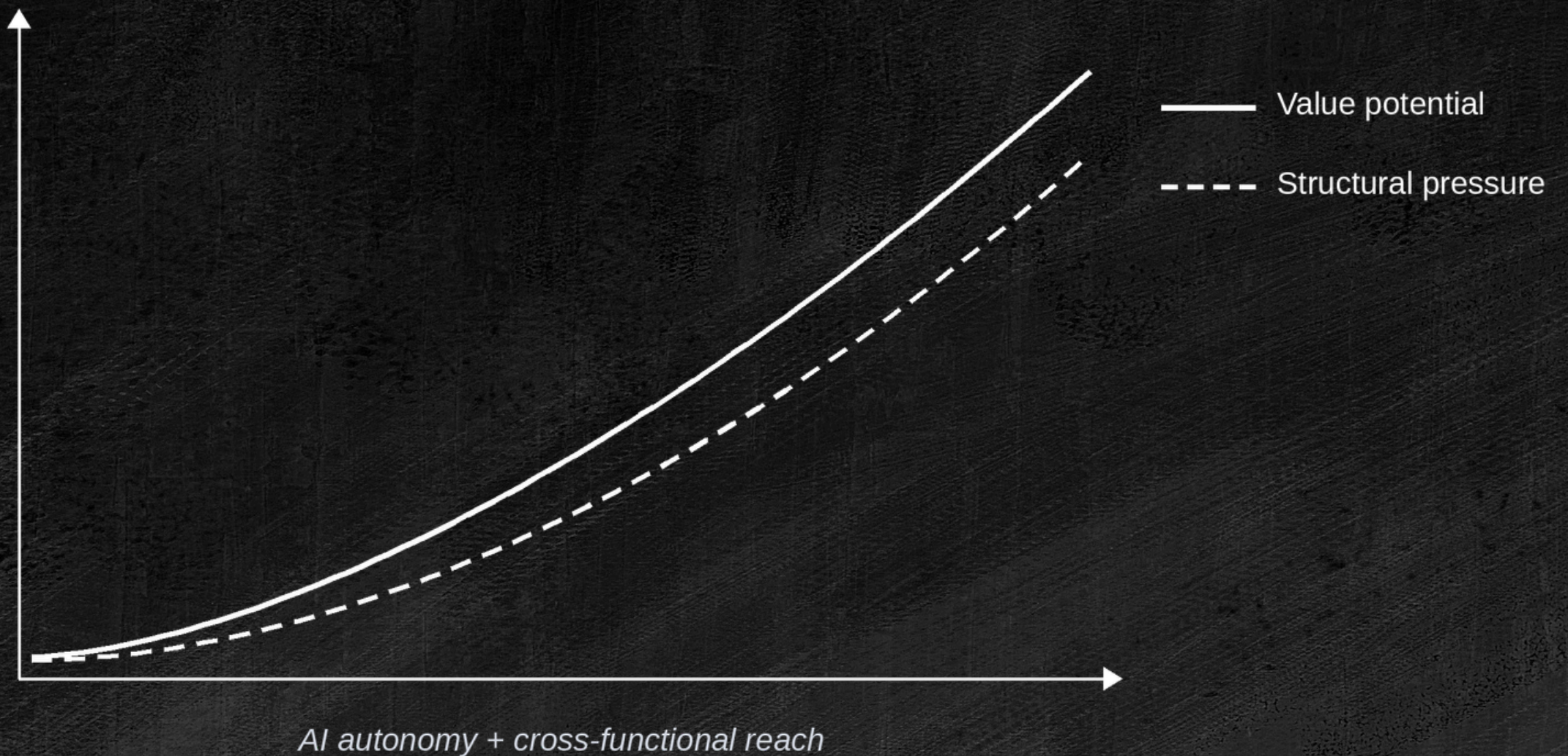
THEY ARE THE SAME CURVE



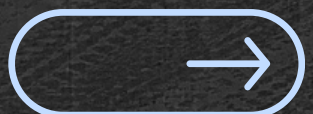
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TWO CURVES, ONE DIRECTION

Value and structural pressure rise on the same curve.



There is no version of high-value enterprise AI that does not also impose meaningful structural demands - the conditions that let AI compound value across the enterprise are the same conditions that strain a structure designed for independent, function-led decision-making.



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THE TRAJECTORY MOST ENTERPRISES ARE ON

Investment is asymmetric.

Autonomy → Heavy Investment

More agents, more automation, more decisions embedded directly into models, faster cycle times

Connection → Significantly Less

Structures, decision rights, and trade-off logic that allow those decisions to cohere across functions - most often deferred until problems become visible

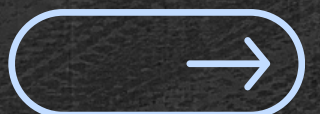
Each additional use case, however well designed in isolation, deepens the gap.



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THE DANGER ZONE

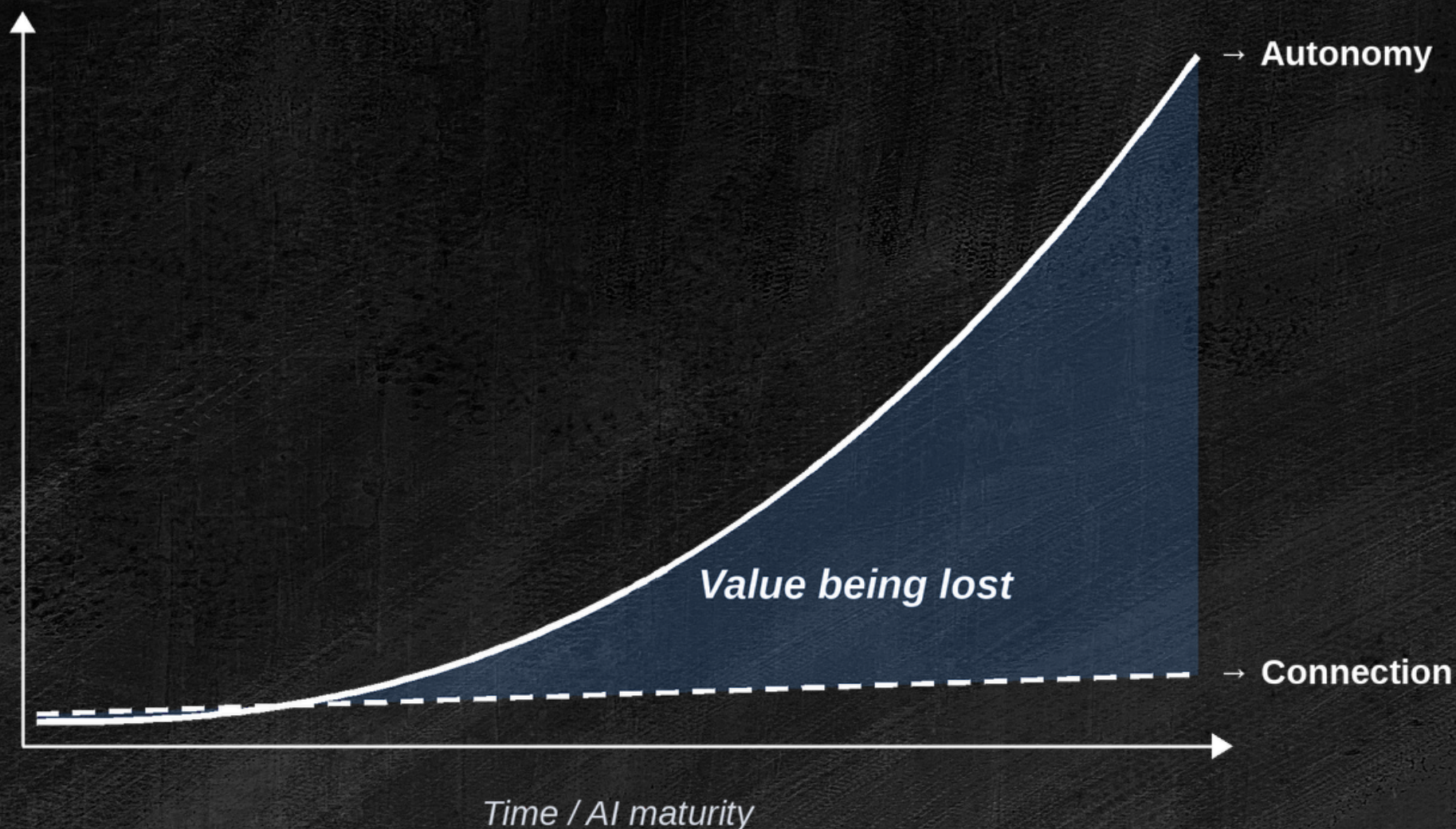
Most enterprises today, without realizing it, are accelerating toward the *danger zone* - investing heavily in autonomy without investing in connection.



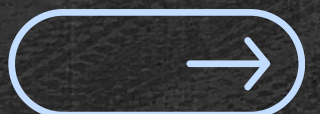
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THE GAP IN PRACTICE

**The autonomy curve is steep.
The connection curve is flat.**



The space between them is where value is quietly being lost - not through weak execution of individual use cases, but through the absence of a structure capable of holding them together.



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WHAT THE MATRIX IS ACTUALLY ASKING

Three forward-looking questions

Used as a trajectory, the matrix raises a different set of questions than the ones most leadership teams are asking today
(non-exhaustive)

- 01 | Where will our **AI portfolio** sit in 18 to 36 months - given the roadmap already in motion?
- 02 | Is the operating model **evolving** at the same rate as the autonomy curve - or is the gap between them widening with each additional deployment?
- 03 | Is the value being created **compounding** at the enterprise level - or is it being absorbed by coordination cost elsewhere in the system?



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THE STRATEGIC CHOICE

The choice is not whether to coordinate

That choice has *effectively* been made the moment AI begins to influence interdependent decisions across the enterprise.

The actual choice is whether coordination is designed in advance - while the architecture is still flexible - or imposed in retrospect, once the asymmetry has compounded.

The difference between enterprises that compound AI value and those that don't will not be located in the quality of the models. **It will be located in whether the operating model evolved alongside the autonomy curve - or lagged it.**



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Strategy consultant with over eight years of experience advising Fortune 500 executives on enterprise transformation, AI strategy, and operating model redesign across the Americas. Her work focuses on translating complex, interconnected decisions into measurable business outcomes - including engagements that identified over \$300M in AI-driven EBIT opportunity and a \$159M global operating model redesign. Originally from Mexico and based in New York, she is also a Master's in Finance candidate at Harvard.
