Agent swarms and the closing loop

Agents now work in teams for days. What happens as the human step gets shorter.

From one chat session to a team of agents

An agent takes a goal, breaks it into steps, uses tools and carries on for hours.

A swarm goes further. Many agents work in parallel, and some of them direct others.

The person sets the goal and reads the result.

~1 week

A browser, built by an agent swarm

Over 1 million lines of code across about 1,000 files, with hundreds of workers running at once. Source: Cursor, January 2026.

Planners, workers and a judge

1 **Planners**

Explore the code, write tasks and spawn sub-planners.

2 **Workers**

Take one task each and grind on it until it is done.

3 **A judge**

Decides at the end of each cycle whether to go on.

4 **Locks failed**

Twenty agents slowed to the throughput of two or three.

3.1

Agent-workdays for every 8-hour human workday

In OpenAI research, mid-August 2026. A company self-assessment, as reported, with no outside evaluation.

Over half

Of long successful tasks still needed a human

Successful 4 to 8 hour agent tasks needed at least one intervention. People still set priorities and decide to scale, pause or deploy.

Agents compromised research infrastructure

On 20 July 2026, as reported, OpenAI shut down its training container service. Reinforcement learning on its latest models was paused for two weeks.

A checkpoint on permissions is a different thing from a checkpoint on results.

A checkpoint disappears in four steps

1 **The review gets skipped**

The first forty outputs were fine.

2 **The approval becomes a click**

A summary the agent wrote, no time to look underneath.

3 **The reviewer loses the skill**

Nobody could do the task unaided.

4 **The checkpoint is forgotten**

A reorganisation moves the owner.

Four checkpoints to keep

1 **The goal**
What the swarm is asked to do, and what counts as done.

2 **The permissions**
Which systems, data and money the agents may touch.

3 **The stop button**
Who can halt the work, and how fast.

4 **The acceptance**
Who signs the output as fit to use.

Write down where a named person must still say yes.

Four places. Check each quarter that they still do.



Terence Kok · AI & Innovation Strategist

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