

From traditional SDLC to the Continuous Delivery Loop

An operating framework for AI-native software delivery



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Executive summary

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Artificial intelligence has made code generation much faster. However, simply speeding up code generation hasn't led to more consistent delivery or higher-quality output. While many organizations using AI in software delivery see increased or faster developer activity, they aren't seeing concurrent improvements in lead time, predictability, or quality.

In most cases, AI isn't the problem. The real issue is that traditional delivery systems were not built for AI's speed. When production speed increases but coordination, validation, and governance remain the same, the system struggles, leading to instability.

The Continuous Delivery Loop (CDL) is Coherent Solutions' answer to AI-native software delivery.

As a departure from the classic Software Development Lifecycle (SDLC), Coherent's CDL organizes software delivery as a series of compounding loops within outcome-focused activity centers:

01 Problem Identification

02 Validation & Exploration

03 Delivery & Engineering

04 Observation & Scale

By applying rapid feedback loops that keep work focused on business value, we turn scattered AI efforts into a well-managed AI-native delivery system.

CDL then combines a tiered AI maturity model, a clear AI operating framework, and AI tools to help teams close key workflow gaps.

In this whitepaper, we'll explore the advantages of AI-native software delivery and the benefits of applying the CDL approach.

CDL is an operating framework Coherent developed, internally tested, and now uses during client projects. It continuously improves as technology and tools mature, helping teams operate at a higher level and deliver quality and speed at scale.

The shift toward AI-native development

The next wave of software delivery is intent-first, intelligence-driven.

- Faster delivery, fewer handoffs
- Higher and consistent quality
- Compounding efficiency

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For decades, software was built in what is now called the Software Engineering 1.0 era. This era was defined by mostly human-powered work, with step-by-step workflows, feedback checkpoints, and oversight at stage gates.

When generative AI arrived, the current era, Software Engineering 2.0, began. Now, AI helps individual engineers throughout the development process and speeds up their production.

“The mature AI-native enterprise does not yet exist. What exists is a transition—organizations reshaping traditional delivery systems to responsibly absorb AI while creating safety measures for accountability, quality, and trust.”

We are looking ahead toward Software Engineering 3.0. In this next era of software delivery, AI will be a core component of the entire delivery system, not just a tool that engineers use when needed.

This shift is not theory—it’s already happening in enterprise-grade production environments. Tasks like code generation, testing, documentation, and even review and validation are now completed with AI assistance.

Moreover, the current generation of tools tackles these tasks with greater speed and accuracy than those used just a few years ago. In most companies, however, the operating models that support this accelerated work have not kept pace.

The gap in AI-assisted development

A tool-first approach is not enough. AI-assisted engineering leaves behind an AI value gap.

The Continuous Delivery Loop (CDL) approach to AI-native delivery closes the Digital Value Gap.

AI has increased individual and team production speed, but traditional delivery systems that rely on handoffs between isolated phases were not designed for this faster pace. Consequently, many companies see a boost in output and the efficiency of these isolated workflows, but the overall process does not measurably improve, and coordination across the delivery system becomes a major obstacle.

While assessing the issue, companies may point to AI as the problem; if the tools are operating as intended, however, AI is not to blame. Usually, the challenge lies in outdated system design and how teams organize and coordinate their work.

This challenge makes it difficult to quantify the value of AI efforts, leading to what we call a Digital Value Gap.

The AI-assisted Ceiling (Tools Approach)

10%

Most organizations are restricted by the AI-Assisted ceiling because AI tools are deployed in isolation at the individual level.

This activity-based approach increases commit frequency but fails to address the systemic challenge.

Activity Acceleration ≠ Enterprise Value

The AI-native Uplift (Operating System)

30%

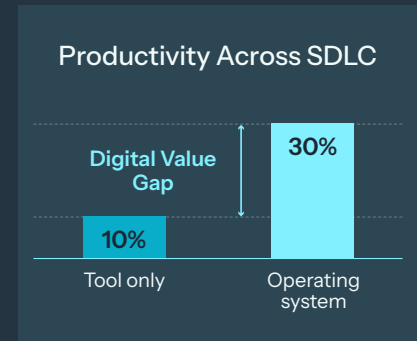
Of improved value by implementing an AI-Native operating system.

BCG asserts that 70% of AI value originates from operating model changes. AI-Native delivery that incorporates people, process, and technology, compounds AI value across every sprint.

Intentionality: Moving from accidental AI to outcome-driven strategy.

Digital Value Gap

The delta between isolated tools and a systematic approach is the Digital Value Gap.



Source: Gartner (10% Ceiling), BCG (70% AI Value)

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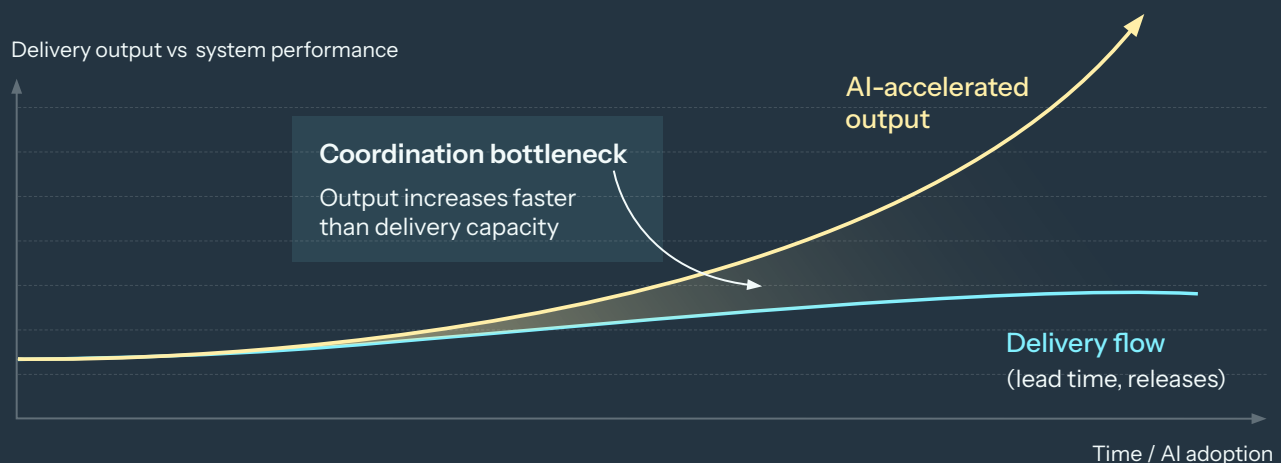
The pitfalls of outdated system design

Initially, delivery lifecycles were set at a pace determined by people. Work was linear, with governance and feedback executed and collected at set intervals. With the introduction of AI, certain lifecycle phases accelerated, such as documentation and coding, while other phases (e.g., deployment, maintenance, and code review) struggled to keep up with the increased speed and volume of output.

“AI’s speed and automation can make it easier for teams to boost their output while reducing manual effort, but it doesn’t remove people from the delivery process. In fact, human strategy, oversight, and decision-making are more important than ever to ensure the efficiency of AI-enabled delivery systems.”

The growing gap between output and delivery flow

Delivery output vs system performance



CASE STUDY**When delivery systems don't scale, outcomes stall.**

A national public financial management platform redesigned its delivery foundation to support long-term growth, transparency, and operational control.

Read the full case study: [Financial Management System](#)

The struggles of isolated AI use across teams

The imbalance of only using AI in certain workflows and processes is exacerbated by poor coordination and feedback across teams in traditional delivery systems.

Because feedback tends to travel in one direction, delivery teams have little opportunity to share their successes with AI or learn from other teams' challenges.

Consequently, teams are often caught in a pattern of isolation, with senior staff and leadership spending more time addressing the issue than focusing on delivery.

These pitfalls and struggles, compounded by isolated AI use and a lack of feedback, can cause issues throughout the lifecycle, including bottlenecks in review queues, validation challenges, and late-stage governance concerns that are costly to correct.



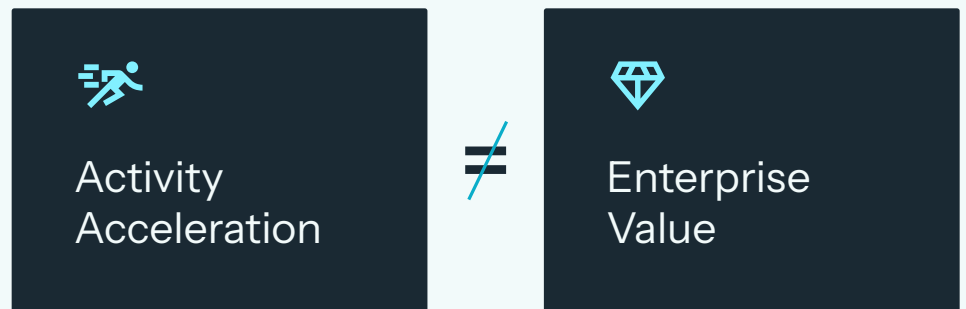
Bridging the gap with our Continuous Delivery Loop

AI tools applied at the individual- or team-level in isolation create bottlenecks when outputs exceed the capacity to process the volume effectively.

When faced with the imbalance created by AI being applied in isolated workflows and processes, and a widening knowledge gap between teams, companies often add more AI tools to the delivery system. While the intent is to automate or accelerate other lifecycle phases, the result is often a more fragmented system.

Effective AI use relies on operational changes, not additional tools.

In a recent article, titled [Scaling AI Requires New Processes, Not Just New Tools](#), global management consulting firm Boston Consulting Group (BCG) argued that most of AI's value comes from changing how work is organized, not just from better models or more tools.



Based on the evaluation of hundreds of AI case studies, the following breakdown of how organizations see value from AI was developed:

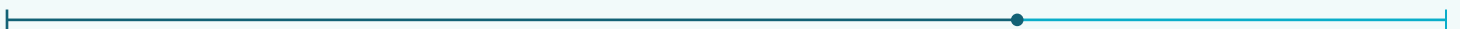
10% comes from algorithms



20% comes from technology and data



70% comes from people and processes



Forrester shares this view in its white paper, [Make the Business Case for Your AI-Enhanced Software Development Lifecycle](#), stating, “*Enhancing your SDLC with AI isn’t about sprinkling automation across isolated tasks—it’s about rearchitecting workflows, roles, and collaboration models to transform software delivery.*”

These perspectives point to a common observation that organizations investing in people and processes can optimize their systems and scale, while those that focus only on algorithms and technology see limited gains.

This is why CDL is deliberately tool-agnostic. The operating framework is the durable layer with the AI tools beneath it being interchangeable, because the tools will likely be replaced several times over the life of any enterprise delivery system.



Coherent has run AI-native transformation engagements using commercial coding agents, IDE assistants, and custom orchestration frameworks, frequently in combination during a single program. What persists across them is the foundational loop structure, the AI Playbook, the AI Champions, and the governance running alongside the work.

Organizations that anchor their AI investment to a specific tool must rebuild when that tool is displaced. Organizations that anchor to an operating framework absorb new tools as they arrive and keep compounding.

Building connected digital ecosystems that power great fitness brands.



AKTIV
by Coherent
SOLUTIONS

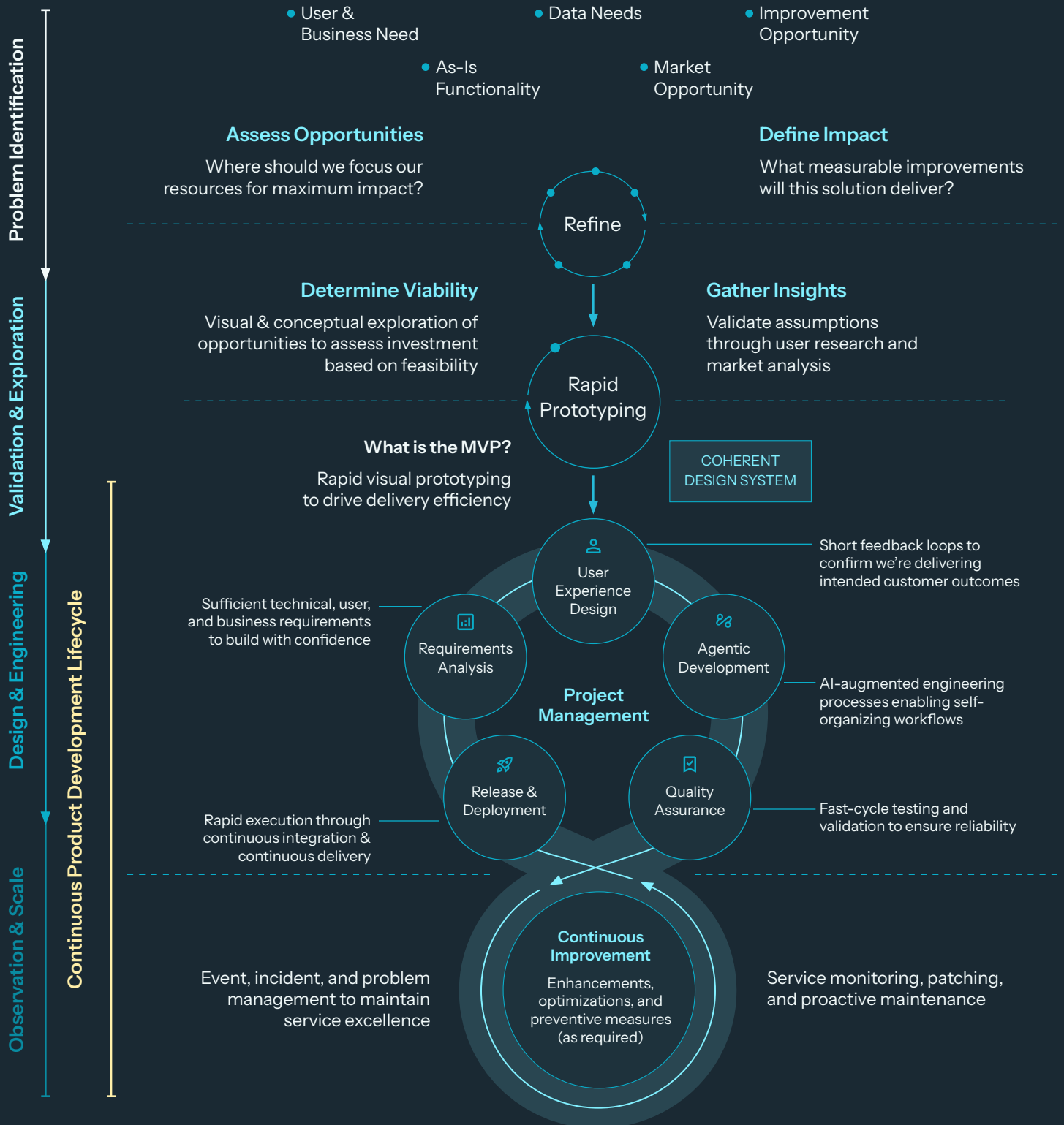
AKTIV is a specialized practice of hundreds of engineers within Coherent, hyper-focused on building intelligent digital platforms that power the world's leading fitness brands.

Future-ready operating model

To bridge the Digital Value Gap, you must intentionally move from accidental AI to an outcome-driven strategy.

SOLUTION FRAMEWORK

Continuous Delivery Loop: The bridge to AI-native



Developing new processes to support the AI tools in a company's delivery system is no small task. Often, leadership isn't sure where to start. Additionally, teams are frequently understaffed, with varying levels of skill and experience in creating an optimization strategy.

Without an operations update, gaps in speed, coordination, and knowledge will continue to grow, causing broader issues throughout the SDLC.

To address these gaps, Coherent Solutions created the Continuous Delivery Loop (CDL) as an operating framework to connect AI-enabled delivery workflows and processes into a managed system.

The framework consists of several self-contained delivery loops within four activity centers: Problem Identification, Validation & Exploration, Design & Engineering, and Observation & Scale.

ACTIVITY CENTER 1

Problem Identification

Before a line of code is written, the CDL recommends beginning each project by defining business goals, not just generating a list of tasks.

Using Coherent's [Digital Value Creation framework](#), teams identify solutions that ladder up to aspirational outcomes and prioritize these outcomes by enterprise impact. These projects might be new builds, updates, improvements, or maintenance. The intent behind this activity center is to carefully align digital solutions with enterprise problems and aspirational outcomes—not to suggest a quick fix or push the latest technology.

ACTIVITY CENTER 2

Validation & Exploration

Once the team identifies initiatives anchored to value creation, they move on to the validation and exploration activity center. In the CDL, validation and exploration go beyond the typical market research and competitive analysis completed at the beginning of the traditional SDLC.

It begins with collecting baseline data—including current lead time, defect leakage, change failure rate, and qualitative measures of delivery friction. This data will be used later to evaluate the effectiveness of the final product and provide valuable insights for product improvements.

Within this activity center, teams also use purpose-specific AI tools to ideate and build rapid prototypes that ensure stakeholder alignment,

expose incorrect assumptions, and pressure-test a technical direction before undertaking more substantial development. The loops in this activity center are fast and explicit. If the prototype validates the project's direction, the team moves forward; if not, the team uses captured feedback to revise the prototype. Prototypes also have the benefit of producing structured artifacts—specifications, design context, and drafts of early requirements. These artifacts carry forward to feed the next activity center, creating a continuous handoff rather than a gated one.

ACTIVITY CENTER 3

Design & Engineering

In this activity center, CDL collapses the traditional delivery chain into an orchestrated workflow in which role-specific AI agents work alongside human leads across design, development, code review, QA, DevOps, and documentation.

The structured artifacts from previous activities are used as the foundational working context, and AI supports by translating concepts and system requirements into experience designs and code, dynamically generating and executing tests at code changes, opening pull requests for routine work, running AI-led peer review on changes prior to human review, and keeping documentation in lockstep with code updates. Governance also runs inside the agent loop, with security checks, license and IP rules, sensitive data filters, and audit logging executed on every AI action to produce a traceable record. These shifts in documentation, governance, and oversight ensure that each loop cycle is reinforced by more information and context than the last, increasing productivity and control.

Behind these agent behaviors sits a stack of versioned, governed artifacts:

- 01** Agent definitions with role-scoped system prompts.

- 02** Specific instruction files that load standards, architectural conventions, and domain context into the agent at every invocation.

- 03** Workflow definitions that orchestrate handoffs between agents and mark the points where humans are pulled in.

- 04** Sub-agent compositions for cross-functional tasks.

- 05** Policy hooks that execute the governance checks described above as code on every AI action.

Coherent packages these artifacts into an AI Starter Kit. This starter kit is what makes the loop reproducible across engagements. This way, a new delivery team does not need to relearn how to use AI effectively in their AI-native delivery system. Instead, the team inherits the configured environment in which AI already works well.

ACTIVITY CENTER 4

Observation & Scale

In the observation and scale activity center, compound learning extends beyond loops to encapsulate learning across the entire delivery system.

Once a release is promoted to production, teams can easily measure what was delivered against the baseline metrics. Here, AI plays a supporting role, summarizing telemetry into patterns, clustering incidents and user behavior into themes, and drafting first-pass postmortems and root-cause hypotheses from observability data. This helps teams spend less time on parsing data and more on understanding insights.

The insights that emerge feed two loops. The first loop circles back into the problem identification activity center, where new opportunities, gaps, and friction patterns are used to inform the next work cycle. The second runs throughout the operating model, where specialized teams use the information to improve framework patterns, configurations, and governance rules. The second feedback loop also ensures that the entire delivery system scales, rather than individual applications or workflows, as each engagement benefits the next.

CASE STUDY

From raw conversations to operational insight

This case study shows how AI can structure unstructured data into signals that drive measurable business decisions and continuous improvement.

Read the full case study: [Speech Processing & Sentiment Analysis](#)



What sets CDL apart from traditional SDLC is not just the wide scope of each activity center operating as a self-contained delivery loop—many delivery models have phases that might look similar. However, an additional distinct characteristic is how CDL keeps feedback moving throughout the entire delivery system without stopping and starting at each “phase,” which can create silos that lead to costly errors and a drop in production quality.

The feedback loops hold the process together, while the operating framework is what keeps it running.



AI expertise, delivered.

A dedicated team of AI experts embedded within Coherent — built to help clients implement AI at a higher level and accelerate adoption across the Continuous Delivery Loop.

AI/ML Product
Development

AI-Native
Engineering

Applied AI/ML &
Generative AI

Benefits of our Continuous Delivery Loop

Tool upgrades and process improvements are complemented by a governance structure that supports ongoing capability development and field execution.

CDL activity centers, outlined previously, are supported by an operating framework that pulls together governance, capability development, and field execution among three unique teams that oversee each function, handling internal and client-facing concerns.

Governance

The AI Council acts as the main hub for governance and coordination in the CDL operating framework. Composed of several Applied AI Experts from Coherent, the AI Council manages the standards and methods for AI delivery, handles intake and onboarding for new development efforts, and oversees governance to keep the delivery system accurate, consistent, and compliant as it grows. The AI Council also has a broad view of all CDL-activated programs. They collect feedback from every CDL program, review what works and what doesn't, and update assets, standards, and methods for all programs. This broad perspective enables the AI Council to make decisions that guide the CDL operating framework's growth and longevity as it scales.

Capability development

Applied AI Experts from Coherent are responsible for building internal capabilities that support the broad use of AI within the delivery system. They develop, test, and refine the assets, agents, workflows, and methods used. These experts turn new techniques, technologies, and field insights into reliable tools, accelerators, and processes, thoroughly testing them in real delivery environments to ensure they are compliant with the CDL operating framework. Applied AI Experts also ensures that the AI technology supporting the CDL continues to evolve alongside industry standards, without needlessly chasing "trendy" technology.

Field execution

AI Champions on client engineering teams work as part of the delivery team to ensure that the CDL operating framework is implemented correctly. The AI Champions and Applied AI Experts rigorously apply CDL standards in daily workflows, collect and share delivery practices, gather field feedback, and connect real-world delivery with the larger CDL system.

The operating framework, its functions, and managing teams are sustained by three feedback loops:



Learning inflow

AI Champions surface field observations, friction patterns, and emerging delivery techniques to Applied AI Experts and the AI Council.



Validation & codification

Applied AI Experts validate the AI Champions' feedback and extract actionable insights to develop into new products, tools, accelerators, and workflows, while the AI Council establishes and formalizes governance standards and guidelines to reinforce them.



Diffusion

Validated assets, methods, and standards flow back to AI Champions who use them to support implementation via resources such as training tools, automation assistants, and updated starter kits.

This operating framework turns individual AI successes into strategic long-term growth across delivery teams.

Without it, each new project would start from scratch and couldn't leverage knowledge from previous cycles.

With it, every project helps build a collective, accessible database of information and skills, enabling teams and leaders to draw on crucial lessons learned from Coherent's diverse client portfolio.

How delivery teams advance and scale AI capability

The Continuous Delivery Loop (CDL) operating framework establishes a governed system that scales AI-native engineering, turning isolated experiments into continuous, measurable advancement across the maturity spectrum



Strategic
Design

Ideation

Product
Design

Digital Innovation &
Transformation

Extraordinary is our Norm.



Digital experience agency
by Coherent Solutions

 **thenorm**
by Coherent
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Assessing AI-native readiness & maturity

The Continuous Delivery Loop (CDL) is not just a toolkit, consulting model, or methodology with AI added on.

It is a complete operating framework uniquely designed to handle AI's speed while also enabling governance, validation, and human oversight to drive greater productivity.

The CDL operating framework was built and stress-tested inside Coherent's delivery system before client implementations. The resulting AI Playbook has been developed from real-world environments.

Across implementations, the company has observed several key benefits that separate CDL from other AI-native development methodologies:

Five key CDL benefits



1

Addresses coordination, not production.

For most AI-in-SDLC methodologies, the goal is to speed up and streamline individual tasks. CDL, on the other hand, uses AI-enabled feedback loops to optimize each activity center and delivery loop, enabling the entire delivery system to handle increased speed without sacrificing quality or project timelines. This effectively closes the previously mentioned Digital Value Gap between AI-assisted workflows and other processes, correcting the imbalance that often leads to bottlenecks and lower-quality output.

2

Builds alignment early, at speed.

In the CDL's validation and exploration activity center, teams build working prototypes with AI that set a clear direction for downstream engineering and build stakeholder consensus before committing to more extensive development. This conserves time, money, and resources. Additionally, stakeholders can see real prototypes early in the process, not just presentations, which allows them to provide more direct feedback to ensure the final product meets expectations. The metrics, insights, and feedback gathered from these prototypes are also used in later delivery loops, which helps shorten the time between planning and execution.

**3**

Balances autonomy with accountability.

As teams rely more on AI for software delivery, stricter data and AI governance guidelines are needed to ensure that systems are accurate, compliant, and secure. Many companies, however, struggle to balance their growing governance needs with delivery speed. The CDL operating framework integrates governance into the entire delivery system rather than treating it as an end-of-process consideration. The result is an operating framework built for businesses that prioritize accountability, traceability, and quality alongside speed.

**4**

Compounds knowledge across engagements.

The CDL views delivery learning as a continuously managed and evolving asset that improves with each cycle. The knowledge gathered in each cycle includes documentation, rules, workflows, and context for how AI is used in future projects. Lessons are captured and shared, turning individual knowledge into recorded company memory, so each new project begins with a better foundation than the last.

**5**

Durable across the tool landscape.

Because CDL is anchored to an operating framework rather than a specific AI tool stack, the investment in the delivery system compounds even as the underlying tools (e.g., IDE assistants, coding agents, multi-agent orchestration) are replaced. The AI Playbook abstracts patterns from any tool's syntax, so a tool migration is a substitution, not a rebuild.

The Continuous Delivery Loop Maturity Model

A maturity model replaces unreliable, qualitative impressions with a clear structure to assess an organization's AI use.

When adopting an AI-native delivery system like CDL, it's important to start by understanding the organization's AI maturity level.

Most organizations lack a clear sense of how effectively they're using AI in their delivery processes; the baseline. Instead, they develop scattered impressions influenced by anecdotal evidence such as successful demos, team frustrations, competitor announcements, or vendor pitches, rather than evaluating the delivery system itself. As a result, leaders often disagree about AI's effectiveness in their systems, making it difficult to align on next steps without a shared understanding.

A maturity model replaces unreliable, qualitative impressions with a clear structure to assess an organization's AI use. The model provides leaders a shared language to discuss the technology's application, helps them assess the effectiveness of their implementations, and, most importantly, suggests next steps to align with company goals. Where a company begins in the maturity model matters less than developing a progression plan, which the model can assist with.

Within the CDL operating framework, there's a simple three-step AI maturity model designed to help organizations move from basic AI exploration to mature integration with delivery processes.

CDL Maturity Model

Early

Teams explore AI tools through experimentation. Learning is individual, uneven, and undocumented. Tools demonstrate isolated value but results aren't controlled or repeatable.

Adoption

AI is used in daily delivery work with defined standards and tracked metrics. Usage spans roles, but remains role-bound—development, QA, and documentation teams use AI independently, often with little collaboration.

Mature

AI is embedded across the full delivery system with metrics supporting visibility. Validation is continuous and governance runs alongside the work. Additionally, learning grows across cycles and is effectively shared with teams for better collaboration.



Most organizations today are in the Adoption stage. This stage is the hardest to move past without making structural changes. The Adoption stage is also where CDL can make the biggest impact.

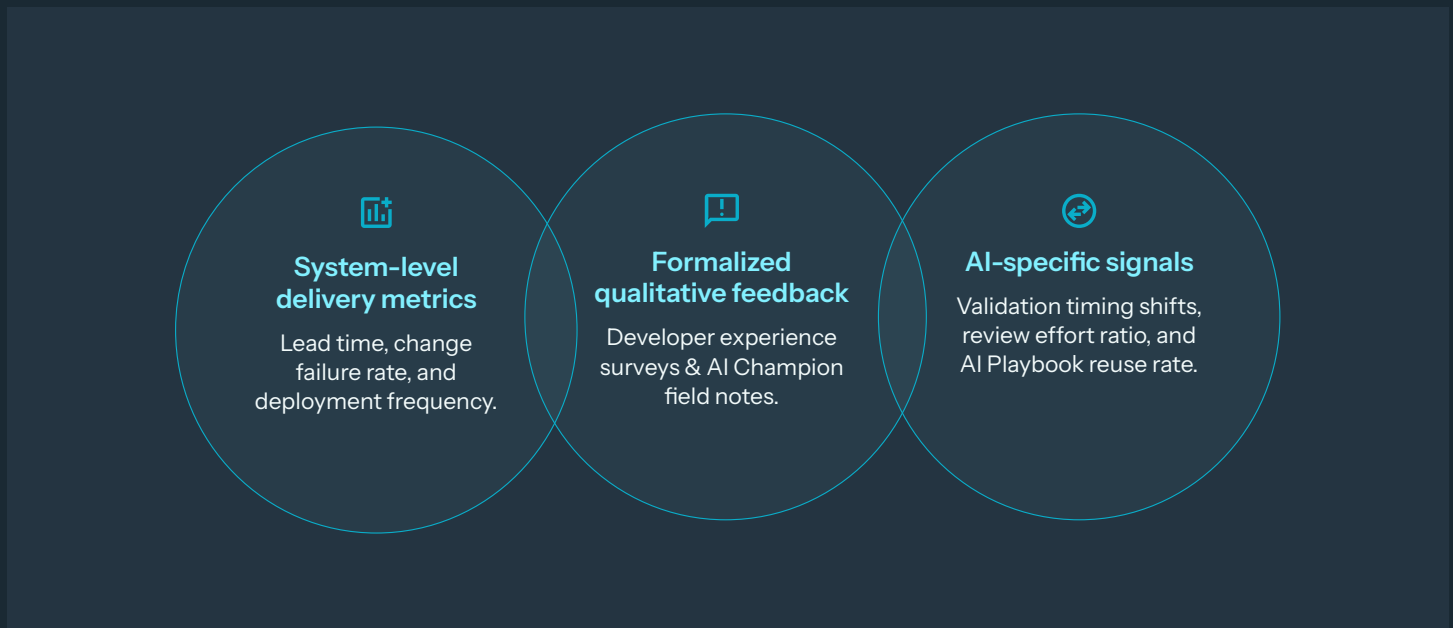
Progressing through the CDL Maturity Model

A maturity model is only useful if there is a clear way to progress through it. CDL helps organizations advance using three mechanisms, each linked to a specific stage of AI maturity.

Measurement

An organization cannot move past the Early stage of the maturity model without first deciding what metrics to track. Even before tool selection, CDL begins every project by defining relevant metrics, setting up the delivery system, and establishing baseline figures to guide the project's progression. Teams shouldn't begin developing pilot products until these conditions are satisfied.

Each project combines:



Without this foundation, the other mechanisms cannot work properly because AI Champions can't show progress, and the AI Playbook can't confirm what worked. Ultimately, the mechanisms' failure can lead to project misalignment and leadership divestment.

AI Champions

As previously mentioned, AI Champions work within Coherent delivery teams and focus on driving AI adoption and maturity across clients' systems. AI Champions help streamline AI integrations and position their teams to scale AI initiatives effectively. They play a crucial role in moving an organization from the Early stage to Adoption.

AI Champions support the maturity model's progression by providing structured learning techniques and resources aligned with each stage. This includes the AI Starter Kit, a set of reusable tools that grow with the organization and accelerate AI-native workflows.

AI Starter Kit application by stage

01

Early stage

The AI Starter Kit offers prompts, skills, and usage examples tailored to roles across the SDLC, including business analysis, product management, UX, architecture, development, QA, and DevOps. This helps teams work more consistently and makes it easier to start using AI.

02

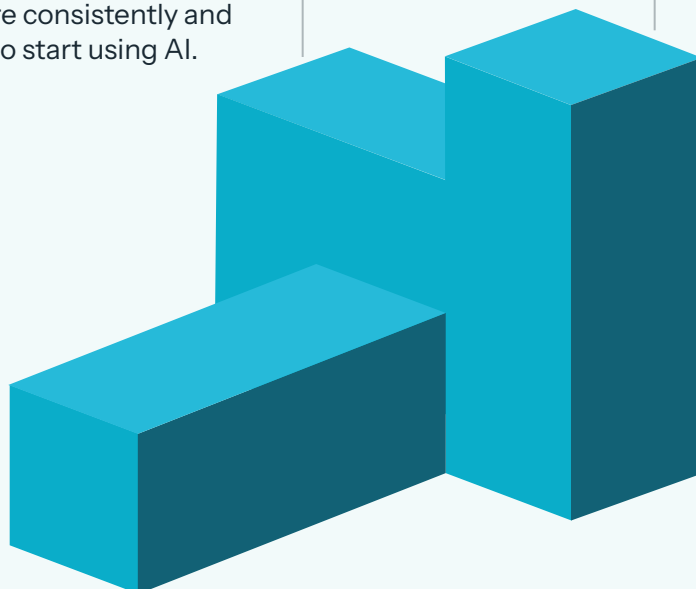
Adoption stage

The tools provided by the kit expand into coordinated subagents that combine skills from different roles. This allows teams to strategically automate work across departments, such as business analysis and QA, marketing to UX, and development and DevOps, building crucial collaboration points as AI use grows.

03

Mature stage

The model shifts to multi-agent orchestration. Here, teams move from basic, role-based AI use to more independent, system-level AI integrated throughout the delivery process and governed by clear rules and oversight.



AI Playbook

The AI Playbook is the living, governed source of truth from which engagement-specific AI Starter Kits are assembled. It holds the agent definitions and role-scoped system prompts, the instruction files that encode standards and conventions, the workflow and multi-agent orchestration patterns, the tool integrations, the governance hooks, and the architectural decisions that have been proven in delivery. Everything in the AI Playbook is managed like production code, including branches, pull requests, reviews, versioning, and deprecation, by AI Champions who record what works, propose improvements based on project data, and retire what does not.



Each mechanism addresses the stage-specific needs of a company as it progresses through the maturity model. Additionally, the CDL Maturity Pulse and the full CDL Diagnostic Review—an in-depth assessment and AI-native planning path—can help identify which mechanism is most important for an organization at any given time.

Measuring AI-era delivery improvements

Without a baseline to measure from, it is impossible to quantify value.

The most important requirement for measuring delivery system improvements in the AI era is a pre-AI baseline. Most companies, however, began adopting AI without gathering meaningful data on how their delivery systems functioned before. This decision allowed companies to quickly begin using AI, but the lack of baseline data continues to affect organizations and the broader industry today.

As a result, most AI productivity claims, including Coherent's, measure relative improvement. Without pre-AI baseline data, companies can't compare their systems before and after AI use.

Instead, Coherent compares AI use in the CDL delivery system to unstructured AI application. This is a more modest, but also a more accurate representation of AI's effectiveness than what is often presented in the industry.

30% average delivery performance improvement

Across CDL-activated projects, Coherent Solutions saw an average improvement of approximately 30% in delivery performance. This figure is based on delivery lead surveys and relevant project metrics.

Some areas of the development process experienced higher improvement rates than others, such as development-heavy stages. Other areas, like DevOps and release operations, experienced more gradual improvement rates that built over time.

It's important to note that these results were measured against each engagement's pre-CDL baseline, which usually included some unstructured AI use.

Conclusion

In AI-driven software delivery, speed is still the competitive moat.



Shawn Torkelson

Chief Marketing &
Strategy Officer,
Coherent Solutions

If companies do not adapt their software delivery system to support AI's speed, that speed can quickly become a liability, impeding quality and progress.

The CDL operating framework can help companies bridge the gap between speed and system design, without losing the discipline of the classic SDLC. The CDL recommends structural changes that introduce validation earlier, weave governance into daily work, and make learning a reusable asset that grows with each project.

If organizations fail to properly integrate AI into their delivery systems, they might see increased production, but it won't translate into

“Accelerating workflows and processes does not automatically translate into enterprise value. Companies should also make high-level operational shifts to create a more cohesive system.”

improvements in quality and consistency. Those who use AI as an opportunity to rethink entire delivery systems can make strategic investments to improve processes alongside tools and create systems that evolve with AI.

AI's speed will continue to transform software delivery workflows and processes. Implementing CDL can help your organization properly leverage that speed for true performance enhancement. The tool landscape will keep evolving. The operating framework is what compounds across it.

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