



THE Managed Services Guide

An intelligent operations model
for next-gen service delivery



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by Ali Bokhari

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FOREWORD

MANAGED SERVICES ARE ENTERING A NEW ERA

Once viewed as an administrative cost play, managed services have evolved into a strategic lever for performance, consistency, and resilience. But the real transformation is just beginning.

The next generation of managed services is being shaped by intelligent operations—where automation, AI, and specialized human expertise work in sync to deliver outcomes that matter. It's about rethinking how work gets done.

Four directional trends are reshaping the landscape

- **Digital workers** are becoming visible teammates, with defined roles and scripted personas embedded into delivery teams.
- **Agentic AI** is stepping into decision-making, triaging tasks, flagging risks, and orchestrating workflows with memory and planning capabilities.
- **Front-office domains** are emerging as the next frontier, with managed services now supporting onboarding, claims intake, and customer engagement.
- **Outcome-based pricing models** are replacing traditional rate cards, tying performance to impact and enabling co-investment strategies.

These aren't distant predictions. They're signals from the edge of what's already underway.

That's why Guidehouse created *The Managed Services Guide*: to illuminate the shifts, define the model, and explore what's next. This report outlines how modern managed services are helping organizations move faster and deliver more consistent results across industries.

Whether you're navigating talent shortages, rapid tech adoption, or increased compliance demands, managed services offer a new way forward. With AI now embedded into the core of delivery—guided by codified know-how and human oversight—the model is more adaptive, auditable, and outcome-driven than ever before.

As managed services continue to grow in complexity and impact, so must our understanding of how they're built and the value they create. This *Guide* is meant to close that gap.



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ALI BOKHARI, GUIDEHOUSE MANAGED SERVICES LEADER, HAS MORE THAN 30 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE IN GLOBAL SERVICE DELIVERY AND OPERATIONS. HE HAS LED MANAGED SERVICES TRANSITIONS AND DELIVERY MODEL TRANSFORMATIONS FOR FORTUNE 100 CLIENTS ACROSS HEALTHCARE, TELECOMMUNICATIONS, RETAIL, AND GOVERNMENT. A TRUSTED ADVISOR AND DELIVERY CENTER LEADER, ALI IS KNOWN FOR BALANCING INNOVATION WITH EXECUTION, AND FOR APPLYING ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES TO DELIVER OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE.



01 | THE SHIFT

A view of what's changed

How new pressures and new tools are remaking managed services

Leaders today face rising expectations, tighter budgets, and outdated systems—all while navigating shifting regulations and talent shortages.

Managed services offer a different way forward: A provider runs a defined slice of operations under agreed-upon service levels, bringing people and processes to deliver, report, and improve. The goal is to ensure consistency, accountability, and visible progress.

What's changing is how these services are designed and delivered. Value beats volume. Technology is embedded. Specialization is replacing generalist staffing. Location strategies are being rebalanced. Taken together, managed services are shifting from a back-office fix to a front-line lever for results.



“Managed services are shifting from a back-office fix to a front-line lever for results.”

FROM RATE CARDS TO RESULTS

Success used to be measured in heads and hours. Today, leaders want proof that they’re achieving outcomes that matter: fewer errors, faster cycles, stronger compliance. Contracts are catching up. Fees are increasingly linked to performance against clear outcomes, which in turn pushes managed services providers (MSPs) to standardize processes, tighten controls, and invest in continuous improvement. **Rate cards set guardrails, but outcomes define value.**

Transparency is the hinge. Instrumented workflows, quality checkpoints, and straightforward dashboards make progress visible and risk more easily observable. With measurement front and center, the conversation moves from “How many people do we have?” to “What value did we deliver this quarter?” That’s the mark of managed services acting as an operating lever rather than a stopgap.

THE STEADY RISE OF TECH-ENABLED DELIVERY

Technology has steadily become more directly integrated with delivery. It started with simple tools like macros and email rules. Then robotic process automation handled repeatable tasks. Workflow systems organized handoffs, and analytics made queues, cycle times, and quality visible. Cloud platforms let MSPs standardize these components and embed audit trails and role-based access. Today, technology isn’t just part of the work—it’s how the work gets done.

AI is the newest layer in this progression, not a sudden jump. Early uses of AI focused on document classification, data extraction, and quality checks under human oversight. The result: fewer handoffs, cleaner queues, faster decisions, and issues surfaced earlier.

As technology has moved from sidecar to standard kit in managed services, the value conversation has changed. MSPs now offer delivery stacks that make performance visible and improvement repeatable. Looking ahead, proprietary large language models (LLMs) will unlock deeper insights and more adaptive automation.



INSIGHT

WHAT ARE MANAGED SERVICES?

A modern definition

“Managed services” refers to an organization handing over a defined part of a business—like revenue cycle, grants management, or compliance—to a trusted third-party partner, who then runs it day-to-day using their people, tools, and expertise. In practice, it’s a model in which the partner takes full responsibility for managing, supporting, and optimizing that function so that leaders can focus on their core priorities.

Why it matters

Organizations across sectors are being asked to do more with less. Managed services help them rise to that challenge by adding capacity, embedding expertise, and modernizing how work gets done. It’s a flexible operating model that helps leaders across industries modernize operations without overextending their internal teams.

Common applications

- Hospital billing and payment operations
- Anti-money laundering
- Fraud detection and investigation
- Consumer engagement/contact centers
- Operational program management





GENERALISTS OUT, SPECIALISTS IN

Managed services have evolved as talent demands have shifted. Regulated workflows like payment integrity and financial crime analysis are more complex and less forgiving. Rules change faster, documentation expectations are higher, and missteps are costly. That environment favors depth over breadth. **Rotating generalists no longer delivers consistent results.**

Meanwhile, return-to-office requirements and data privacy rules have shrunk labor pools that remote work briefly opened up. Teams that once pulled talent from anywhere now face geographic and clearance barriers.

In response, MSPs are embedding more specialized roles into delivery models, backed by coaching, credentials, and tech-enabled tools. The goal isn't more hands. It's more targeted skillsets. Automation supports this shift by handling repetitive work and flagging exceptions, freeing up specialists to focus where human judgment matters most.

LOCATION BY DESIGN, NOT DEFAULT

Return-to-office policies and evolving data regulations are prompting a rethink of where and how work gets done. Sensitive workflows now favor more onshore delivery within managed services—often in lower-cost domestic hubs that offer time-zone alignment, linguistic familiarity, and added transparency.

At the same time, nearshore and offshore centers remain critical for scale, speed, and 24/7 coverage, especially when built on standardized processes and platform-based delivery. The shift is not about abandoning one location model in favor of another. It's about smarter orchestration.

The new playbook blends flexibility, oversight, and resilience. **Organizations are spreading work across locations** to reduce risk, align tasks to the right setting, and monitor performance more effectively. In short, location has become a strategic design choice, not just a cost decision.



INSIGHT

6 MYTHS ABOUT MANAGED SERVICES

1

“It’s just outsourcing.”

Traditional outsourcing focused on lowering labor costs. Modern managed services are about delivering outcomes using skilled teams, embedded technology, and transparent controls.

2

“It replaces jobs.”

It’s not about eliminating roles. It’s about elevating them. By offloading routine execution, internal teams can focus on higher-value work. It’s about building capacity, not cutting headcount.

3

“It’s only for back-office work.”

That was yesterday. Today’s managed services span back-, mid-, and front-office functions, including regulated and mission-critical processes.

4

“It’s not secure.”

Security isn’t an afterthought. It’s built in. Leading MSPs are required to meet or exceed strict requirements for data protection, compliance, and auditability—and that can often enhance an organization’s cybersecurity posture.

5

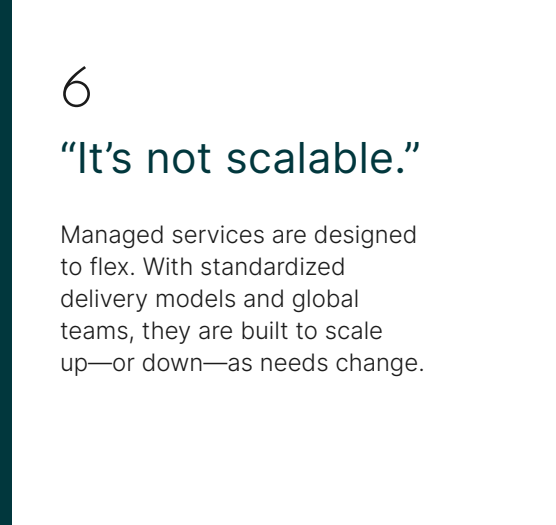
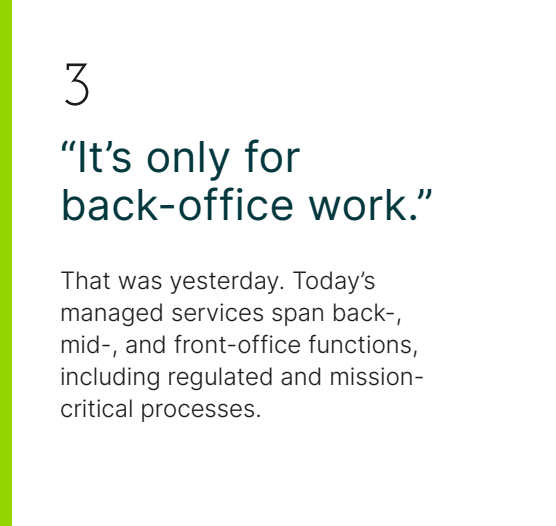
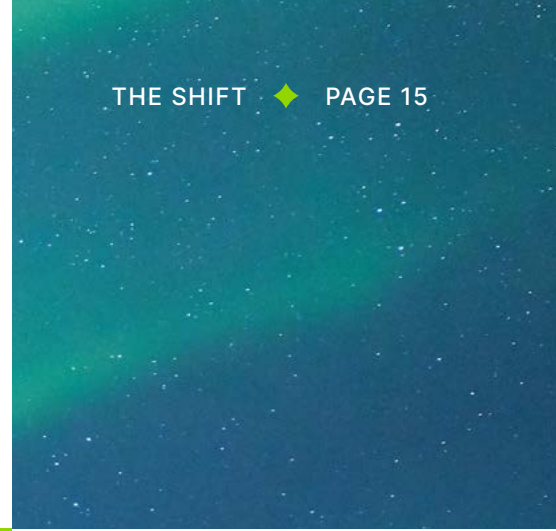
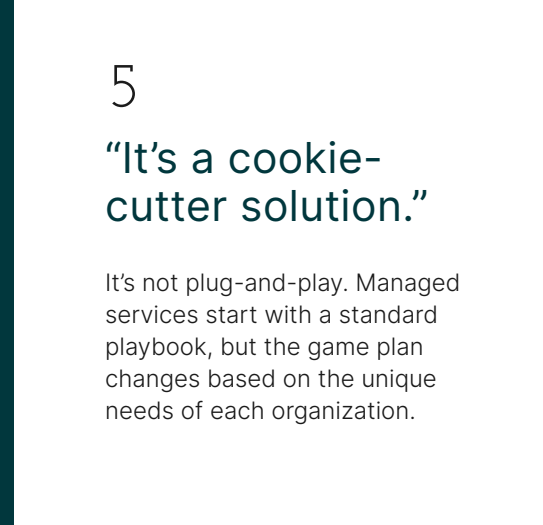
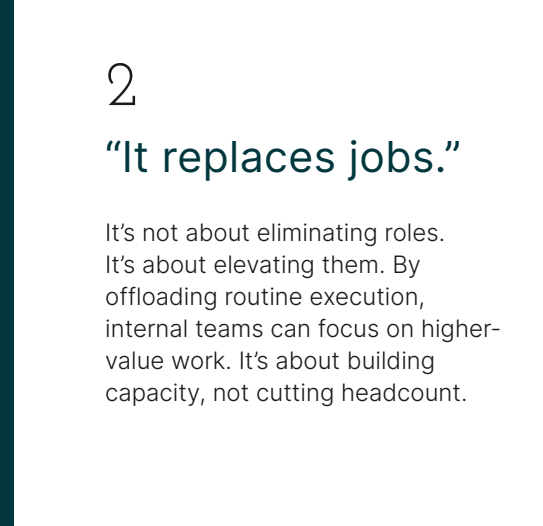
“It’s a cookie-cutter solution.”

It’s not plug-and-play. Managed services start with a standard playbook, but the game plan changes based on the unique needs of each organization.

6

“It’s not scalable.”

Managed services are designed to flex. With standardized delivery models and global teams, they are built to scale up—or down—as needs change.





02 | THE MODEL

The principles of intelligent operations

How a new set of best practices is driving performance

In the wake of so much change, a new model for managed services has emerged. It's not built on hourly output or afterthought automation. It's built for performance.

This new approach, often called intelligent operations, runs on a set of four core principles: Start with outcomes in mind, design around people and digital tools, treat data as the steering wheel, and configure through modular solutions rather than custom code. It's not one-size-fits-all, but it's repeatable—and increasingly essential. Across industries, this model is already reshaping how managed services are delivered and continuously improved.

PRINCIPLE 1

DESIGN FOR OUTCOMES AND DNA

Outcome-based intelligent operations begin with a blueprint, not bricks. Instead of tracking hours, success is measured by desired outcomes such as fewer errors, faster cycles, and stronger compliance.

The aim is to scale what an organization already does well, without losing its “service DNA”: the unique way it serves its customers or constituents.

In practice, this means capturing institutional know-how into repeatable playbooks and controls, plus value realization plans and gainshare contracts focused on impact, not headcount. Work is tracked with emphasis on things like cycle time, speed to value, and rework rates, so performance is both measurable and repeatable.

Cloud-native platforms help make this possible, with MSPs embedding dashboards and audit trails to keep results visible, while human oversight ensures judgment and care remain part of the process.

The result: proven outcomes and a consistent delivery experience that grows with a client’s business—without diluting what makes it distinct.



PRINCIPLE 2

ADD DIGITAL WORKERS TO THE TEAM

In intelligent operations, automation and AI are no longer just tools—they’re essential teammates. But a digital workforce can only thrive when paired with human experts who can monitor, override, and retrain systems. Roles are evolving, with humans recast as process specialists, exception managers, and decision owners—grounded in subject matter expertise that preserves accuracy and consistency.

Digital workers handle volume while amplifying what human experts do best. Automation creates and summarizes information at speed so people can focus on nuanced decisions and edge cases that require human judgment.

Workflows are being redesigned accordingly. Leading MSPs are bringing together automation leads, process experts, exception reviewers, and digital workers into hybrid delivery pods. Everyone works from shared platforms that track activity, flag issues, and measure performance, whether it comes from people or machines.

This orchestration is what makes intelligent operations work: technology, people, and processes moving in sync, not in silos.



INSIGHT

CHECKLIST FOR ADOPTION READINESS

Before you begin working with a managed services provider to launch intelligent operations, make sure the right pieces are in place. These actions help lay the groundwork for a smoother transition and long-term success:



- ✓ **Document all standard operating procedures.** Reduce delays by capturing a clear, detailed view of current workflows and institutional know-how upfront so MSPs don't have to reverse-engineer processes later.
- ✓ **Define key performance indicators.** Clarify the outcomes you want to achieve, like reduced backlog volume or higher financial accuracy, so your MSP can align delivery models and reporting around what matters most.
- ✓ **Establish governance structures.** Stand up steering committees, quality assurance (QA) checkpoints, and defined escalation paths early to speed decisions and prevent scope drift.
- ✓ **Develop a change management strategy.** Pair your rollout with internal messaging, training, and leadership alignment to guide mindset shifts and role changes for your people with clarity.
- ✓ **Align your tech stack.** Pre-check API compatibility, data flow structures, and access protocols to enable easy layering of managed services on top your systems. Otherwise, onboarding can become a patchwork process.
- ✓ **Identify internal champions.** Designate individuals to model new ways of working and serve as primary liaisons with the MSP while retaining a small in-house bench with domain expertise for continuity and oversight.



“In intelligent operations, automation and AI are no longer just tools—they’re essential teammates.”

PRINCIPLE 3

MAKE DATA YOUR CONTROL LAYER

In the age of intelligent operations, trust must be demonstrated. Data is how. When managed services are designed for transparency, data becomes more than just an output. It becomes a control layer. It shows what’s happening, flags what’s off track, and protects what matters most.

Gone are the days of scrambling for audit logs. **Today’s managed services are built with transparency from day one**, embedding audit trails, access controls, and model versioning directly into workflows.

This visibility is critical, especially in regulated sectors like healthcare and government. Stakeholders expect answers: How were decisions made? What went wrong? Who took action?

While handing over operational data can feel risky for clients, many contracts today mitigate concern by including onshore data residency requirements, ensuring an organization’s data is processed within national borders and governed to meet compliance standards.

When data is structured, governed, and accessible, leaders can prove impact and ensure consistency.

PRINCIPLE 4

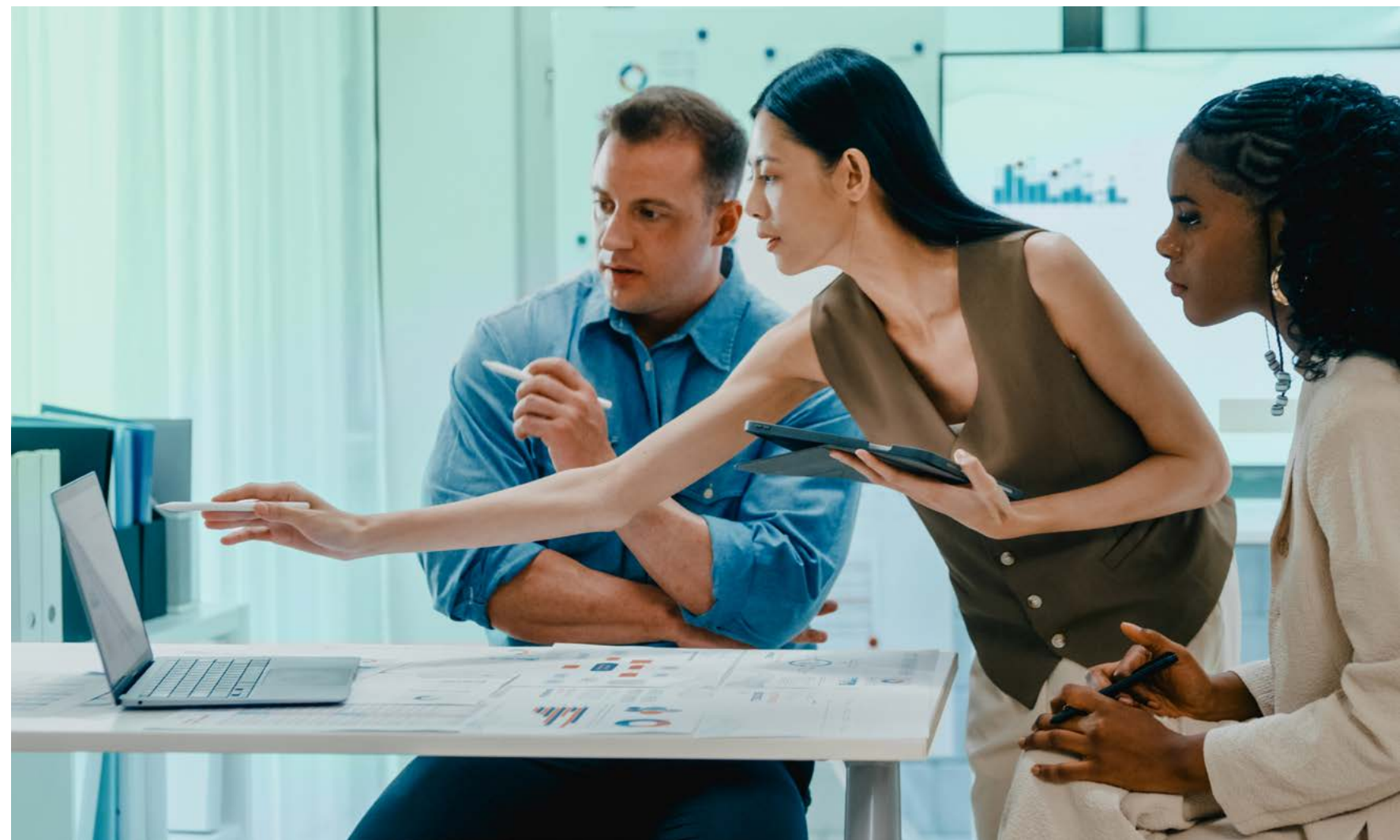
CONFIGURE, DON’T CUSTOMIZE

Speed matters—especially when organizations are under pressure to modernize. Intelligent operations prioritize configuration over customization to move quickly without losing flexibility.

Instead of writing bespoke code for every need, services draw on configurable building blocks—rules, workflows, decision tables, templates, reports—tuned to an organization’s unique ways of working. It’s not about uniform outputs. It’s about systematizing methods so delivery can remain consistent but also distinct to a client’s brand.

Configuration also accelerates onboarding and makes it easier to layer in automation since the core is built to handle structured data. **This flexibility helps avoid the fragility of one-off customizations:** less technical debt, fewer surprise regressions, and cleaner updates.

Most importantly, configuration enables a continuous improvement loop as each release, fix, and insight feeds back into the base components. The result is faster delivery, steadier performance, and a signature experience for customers and constituents without the drag of perpetual rebuilds.



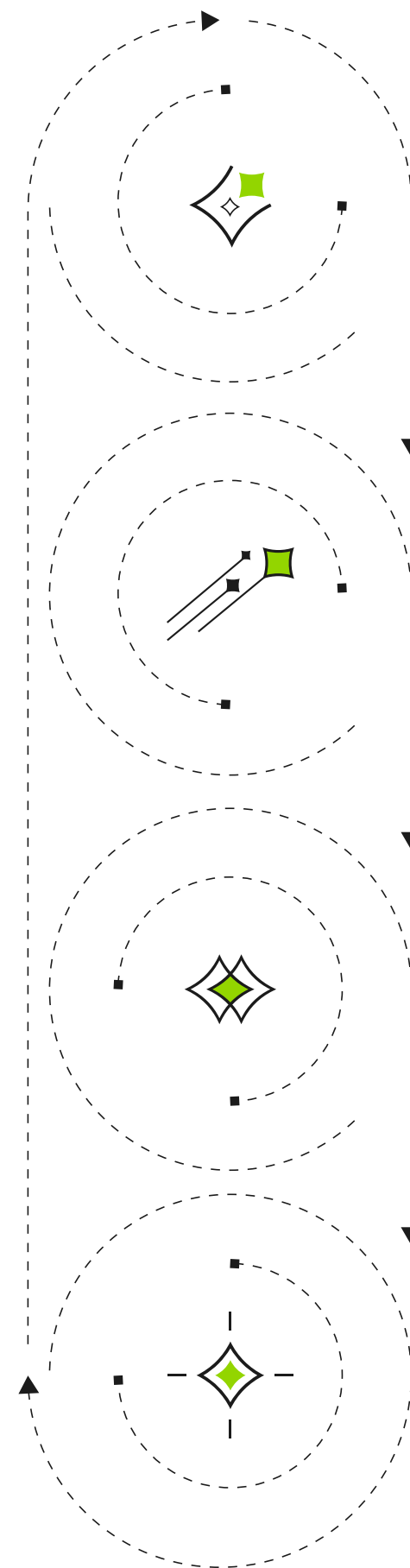
VISUALIZATION

THE ENGINE BEHIND INTELLIGENT OPERATIONS

Intelligent operations don't rely on one magic lever. They run on a coordinated system—an engine—that brings together the right talent, the right technology, and the right structure to make everything work smarter.

The infographic to the right shows how these pieces fit together: a strong foundation of essential inputs, propelled by technology tools that enhance speed and precision, executed through modern delivery methods designed for outcomes.

Because the model runs as a continuous improvement loop, each cycle improves the next. Every pass makes the system smarter, stronger, and more resilient.



1 Foundation

Baseline enablers of managed services

- Specialized talent
- Enterprise data, accessible + clean
- Compliance + governance standards
- Documented processes + SOPs

2 Accelerators

Tech tools layered on top

- AI + machine learning
- Cloud native platforms
- Embedded analytics
- Process automation

3 Intelligent operations

Processes that deliver results

- Outcomes-based workflow
- Human + digital teaming
- Data-driven oversight
- Configured delivery platforms

4 Impact

Value delivered to organizations

- Faster cycle times + scalable delivery
- Workforce freed for higher-value work
- Greater efficiency + resilience
- Reduced risk + stronger compliance



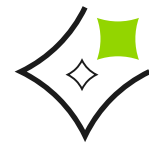
03 | THE IMPACT

The power of results

How intelligent operations are being applied across industries

Managed services aren't just another way to get tasks done. They serve as a bridge to measurable impact, linking strategic intent with day-to-day execution. That's especially valuable in functions where the stakes are high and the rules are complex, like revenue cycle management in healthcare, compliance in financial services, and customer experience via contact centers.

These are pressure-tested operations where precision truly matters, and where even small missteps can ripple through entire systems. It's in these environments, where significant shifts are already underway, that intelligent operations can truly shine by delivering real, repeatable results.



A CLOSER LOOK

PAYMENTS PROCESSING IN HEALTHCARE

WHAT IS REVENUE CYCLE MANAGEMENT?

Think of revenue cycle management (RCM) as the circulatory system of healthcare finances—vital, intricate, and unforgiving of blockages. It serves as the healthcare industry's payments processing engine, channeling every transaction from coding, claims, and denials to the final payment posting. Along the way, rules abound, exceptions multiply, and precision is nonnegotiable.

In this high-stakes environment, even small errors flow downstream, with the potential to disrupt revenue, trigger compliance risks, and erode patient and brand trust. That's why 77% of healthcare executives now outsource part or all of their RCM, relying on managed services partners to bring order, accuracy, and speed to a process where every detail matters.

WHAT'S SHIFTING?

At many healthcare organizations, the revenue cycle is under unprecedented strain, elevating its importance across operations and care delivery. What used to be a support function is now a flashpoint for financial performance, clinical sustainability, and organizational risk.

Key pressures reshaping the landscape:

- **Payer scrutiny is intensifying**, combining stricter documentation demands with evolving review practices that make it harder for generalist teams to keep pace.
- **Denials are surging**, with more than 40% of finance leaders reporting denial rates above 3%, which can lead to significant revenue loss.
- **Staffing shortfalls are worsening**, as 90% of leaders say revenue cycle workforce gaps are straining operations.

THE INTELLIGENT OPERATIONS EFFECT

Meeting today's RCM demands takes more than software upgrades or extra staff. It requires a new operating model: one that blends automation, insights, and expert-led service design to drive measurable results.

Here's how intelligent operations can change the game:

- **Flag issues before they snowball** with digital workers that scan for missing documentation, invalid codes, or aging claims—freeing up human specialists for more complex tasks.
- **Illuminate the big picture** through real-time dashboards that surface performance trends and escalation needs.
- **Fix what's broken systemically** using AI-powered denial analytics to uncover upstream issues and enable continuous improvement.
- **Manage RCM like a product**, with defined inputs, end-to-end accountability, and iterative refinements baked into the delivery model.



CASE IN POINT

TURNING THE TIDE IN REVENUE CYCLE

UAB, a leading academic medical center, set out to modernize its revenue cycle with specific goals to break down operational silos, strengthen accountability, and turn data into action.

By leveraging managed services, UAB gained the tools and visibility needed to track performance, reduce friction, and accelerate cash flow.

The medical center:

- Realized \$288M in net patient revenue enhancements and cost reductions
- Decreased initial denials as a percentage of net revenue by 18%
- Achieved a 41% reduction in hospital DNSP (discharged not submitted to payer) days

This effort shows how an intelligent operations model powered by analytics, end-to-end workflows, and shared insights can drive measurable impact in RCM.

[Explore the full story](#)

Source: [2024 Revenue Cycle Management Report](#)



A CLOSER LOOK

COMPLIANCE IN FINANCIAL SERVICES

WHAT DOES FINANCIAL COMPLIANCE COVER?

Financial compliance functions play a critical role in protecting institutions, customers, and the integrity of the global financial system. From anti-money laundering, sanctions screening, and fraud detection to Know Your Customer (KYC) guidelines, enhanced due diligence (EDD), and transaction monitoring, accuracy is everything, and regulatory stakes are high.

To manage both high-volume reviews and complex investigative work, many firms turn to managed services. With flexible access to talent and technology, the model can help organizations stay ahead of risk. A recent survey found that among firms outsourcing compliance, 74% said it improved the effectiveness of their financial crime program.

WHAT'S SHIFTING?

Today, compliance functions are more complex, scrutinized, and resource-intensive than ever. Many organizations are at a tipping point, facing challenges that signal the need for more dynamic, future-ready operations.

Key pressures reshaping the landscape:

- **Financial crime is becoming harder to track** as cyber attackers move funds through cryptocurrencies, shell structures, and identity masking tools.
- **Expertise is in short supply**, particularly at fintechs and rapidly scaling firms that can't hire fast enough or cover all domains of compliance in-house.
- **Data security concerns loom large**, as compliance teams manage growing volumes of sensitive information amid increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks.

THE INTELLIGENT OPERATIONS EFFECT

AI and automation are reshaping financial compliance, powering intelligent operations that blend human expertise with digital efficiency. This model amplifies compliance specialists' skills and accelerates time to resolution without compromising rigor.

Here's how intelligent operations can change the game:

- **First-pass reviews go digital**, with bots handling document classification, identity checks, and data extraction—freeing humans to focus on high-risk investigations.
- **False positives shrink over time** as machine learning helps surface anomalies, flag high-risk patterns, and improve signal-to-noise ratios in transaction monitoring.
- **Real-time dashboards and analytics** help compliance leaders track trends, ensure audit readiness, and identify program gaps before they become regulatory problems.
- **Secure, compliant infrastructure** enables sensitive data to stay within onshore servers while remote teams work through virtual desktops with physical security protocols.



CASE IN POINT

CLEANING UP CREDIT REPORTS AT SCALE

A major financial institution faced a daunting backlog of 800,000 auto and consumer loans needing revised payment histories, with strict compliance deadlines.

By combining managed services with automation and codified protocols, the organization brought order, control, and precision to a high-stakes challenge.

The financial institution:

- Processed 800,000+ accounts via rules-based automation and analyst review to recalculate payment histories
- Achieved a less than 1% error rate on manual processing
- Delivered full consumer credit updates well ahead of year-end compliance deadlines

This case illustrates how intelligent operations—blending automation, data tools, and specialized human expertise—can enable high-volume, compliance-sensitive reporting at scale.

[Explore the full story](#)

Source: [Guidehouse](#) and [Compliance Week Survey](#)



A CLOSER LOOK

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

WHAT DOES A MODERN CONTACT CENTER LOOK LIKE?

It's more than just rows of people answering phones. Today's contact centers are high-precision operations managing voice, chat, email, and self-service channels, often all at once. Many are supported by managed services partners, relying on sophisticated workflows, scripting, and analytics to meet rising expectations.

Far from being just support desks, they're the front lines of customer experience. Contact centers play a critical role in the moments that matter: scheduling medical visits, resolving benefits questions, responding to emergencies, and guiding people through high-stakes decisions. Getting it right requires speed, accuracy, and empathy—every time.

WHAT'S SHIFTING?

Contact centers are under pressure. As demand surges and customer experience becomes more complex, many organizations are grappling with strained staff, fragmented systems, and rising expectations across every channel.

Key pressures reshaping the landscape:

- **Skyrocketing volumes are the norm**, especially during emergencies, public health crises, or major program rollouts—leaving staff overwhelmed and callers waiting.
- **Siloed systems slow everything down**, forcing callers to bounce between departments or repeat themselves as systems don't connect or share data easily.
- **Expectations are rising quickly**, as people seek fast, frictionless support across digital and human touchpoints.

THE INTELLIGENT OPERATIONS EFFECT

What if contact centers could resolve more and escalate less without adding headcount? Intelligent operations make it possible by scaling support, guiding decisions, and delivering insight when it matters most.

Here's how intelligent operations can change the game:

- **First-pass automation handles the basics**, with AI agents and chatbots taking on high-volume, low-complexity inquiries—freeing human staff for issues that require empathy, nuance, or expert intervention.
- **Smarter triage improves handoff**, using AI-powered interactive voice response (IVR) systems to understand intent and route inquiries more accurately than menu trees.
- **Human staff get real-time support** from agent assist tools that surface prompts and recommended actions to guide them through tough calls and help resolve issues faster.
- **Leaders stay informed** with live dashboards that track call spikes, sentiment trends, and bottlenecks—enabling real-time coaching and nimble response.



CASE IN POINT

CUTTING WAIT TIMES, EARNING TRUST

A leading health system set out to reimagine its contact center not just as a scheduling hub, but as a strategic driver of consistent patient experience.

By embedding intelligent operations into intake workflows, staff allocation, and performance monitoring, system leaders created a centralized access engine with measurable impact.

The organization:

- Cut call abandonment from 7% to 3% and referral lag by 75%
- Increased appointment volume by 16.1%
- Achieved 85% of calls answered within 15 seconds

This transformation highlights how organizations working with an MSP can resolve more inquiries on the first contact while ensuring consistent customer interactions.

[Explore the full story](#)



04 | THE FUTURE

A look at what's next

How managed services will evolve in the year ahead

Managed services have evolved quickly from basic administrative support to intelligent operations. But the story doesn't end there. As the model matures, forward-looking managed services providers are already experimenting with what comes next: expanding into new functions, reshaping delivery models, and redefining how value is measured.

Four trends are shaping the near future: digital workers with defined roles, the rise of agentic AI, a bold shift into front-office domains, and outcome-based pricing at scale. These aren't abstract predictions. They're signals from the edge of what's already underway. The future of managed services is more embedded, autonomous, and strategically aligned than ever before.



TREND 1

A DIGITAL UPDATE TO YOUR ORG CHART

In the future of managed services, digital workers will appear on org charts—not as invisible solutions but as named roles within the team. You might see new leadership titles like “Head of Automation” or “Digital Workforce Lead” with responsibility for managing both human and digital staff.

Digital workers—software-powered teammates given scripted personas—will be designed to execute rule-based, repeatable tasks. Their titles will reflect their function in a straightforward way, such as “Invoice Bot” or “Triage Sorter Bot.”

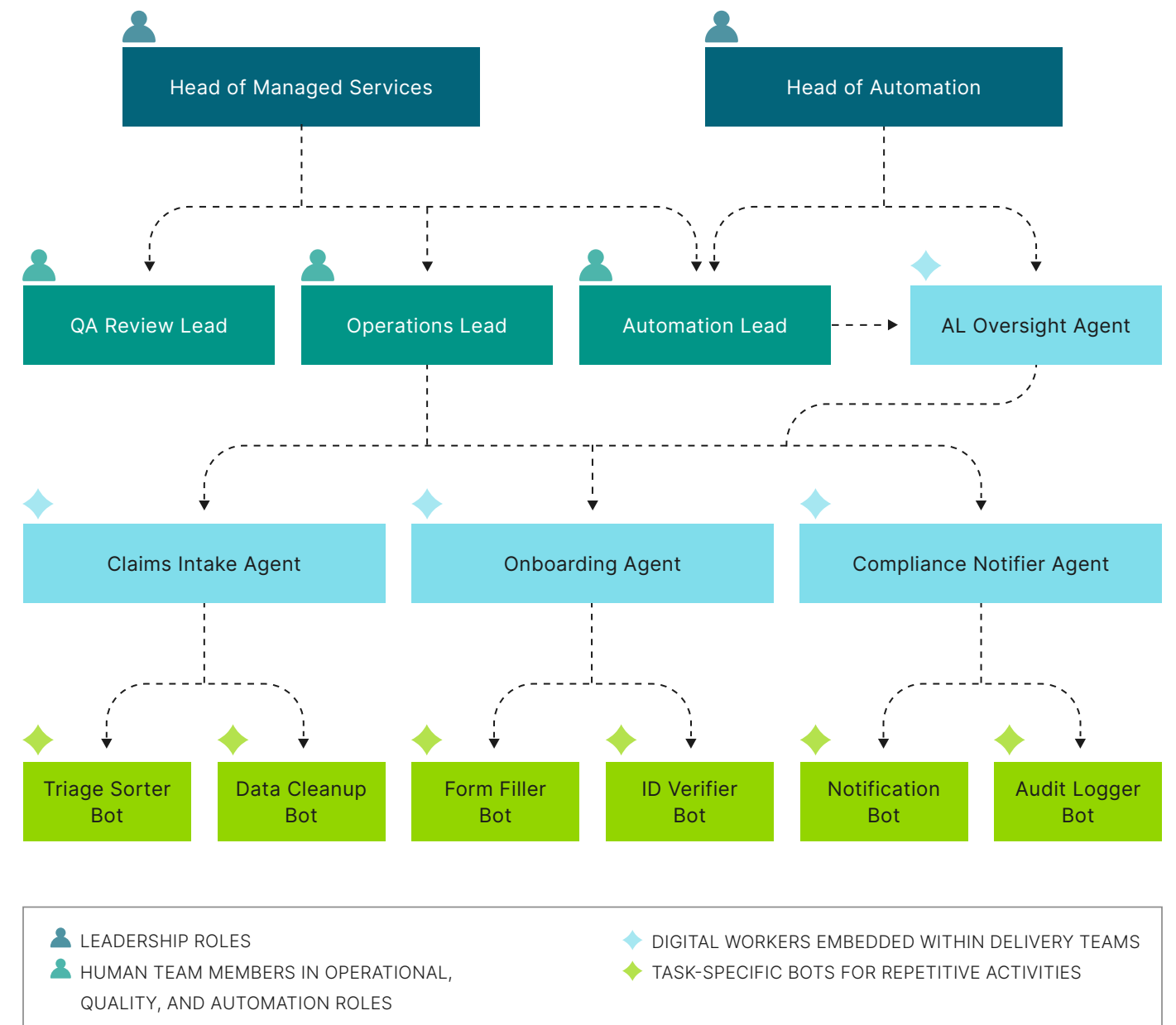
Human team members will retain titles like “Automation Lead,” “QA Reviewer,” or “Exception Handler.” Together, they’ll form **hybrid teams designed for co-delivery**, with digital and human contributors each accountable for defined workflows and outcomes.

“The future of managed services is built on partnership, not procurement.”

VISUALIZATION

A HUMAN AND DIGITAL ORG CHART

This org chart shows just one segment of a much broader managed services team, highlighting how human talent and digital workers could support healthcare service delivery.





TREND 2

AGENTIC AI TAKES THE STAGE

AI agents will also take on visible, accountable roles in managed services—handling tasks like triaging tickets, flagging compliance risks, and even managing other agents as orchestration layers evolve.

Unlike digital workers, which follow predefined rules, AI agents are adaptive actors with **memory and planning capabilities**. They can interpret context, adjust to variability, and make first-pass decisions before handing off exceptions for human judgment.

In the next wave of adoption, both MSPs and clients will assess whether agents make the right calls in complex scenarios—and whether they build the trust required for high-stakes deployment. New accountability frameworks will emerge to govern performance, auditability, and alignment with human expectations.

TREND 3

THE FRONT OFFICE AS THE NEXT FRONTIER

Managed services used to stay behind the scenes. Not anymore. Today, MSPs are handling claims intake, employee onboarding, help desk flows—even outbound communications. The drivers? Better automation. Tighter compliance. More reliable platforms. With the right tools and oversight, **even high-touch interactions can be delivered with consistency and care**. Regulated industries are starting to make the leap, trusting managed services providers to manage the “first mile” of customer experience.

The next wave is coming: real-time support powered by bots, live agents, and embedded intelligence. Front-office work won’t be replaced, but it will be reimaged with speed, precision, and accountability at the core.

TREND 4

NEW DEALS FOR A NEW DELIVERY ERA

Outcome-based contracts are already taking hold in managed services, but new forms are emerging as AI and automation reshape delivery.

Co-investment models are gaining traction: MSPs may fund initial technology (like platforms or bots) in exchange for shared savings or phased recovery. Expect to also see **agent-based billing**, where digital workers are priced by their performance—measured in speed, accuracy, or resolution rate—not just quantity. Instead of static service-level agreements, **dynamic performance tiers** will link incentives to operational targets, adjusting rewards and penalties based on *real-time* metrics.

These new models reflect a deeper shift: The future of managed services is built on partnership, not procurement, and the terms are being rewritten for agility and accountability.



ABOUT THE GUIDE

METHODOLOGY & CONTRIBUTORS

The Managed Services Guide was developed through in-depth interviews with Guidehouse leaders and consultants across our global network. These experts brought forward real-world insights grounded in their direct work with government and commercial clients across industries.



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