

Before AI Saves Time: Who Owns the Error?

By Jeffery A. Garfield · October 5, 2026 · 4 minute read · Edition 1.0

AI can accelerate a draft. Reliable results still depend on sources, review, decision authority and a clear response when something goes wrong.

A useful AI tool can make a difficult task feel suddenly manageable. The first draft arrives. The summary is readable. The next step seems obvious. Then comes the question that belongs beside every promise of speed: who checks what happens next?

That question is about the work surrounding the answer. A draft becomes consequential when somebody relies on it, sends it to a customer, uses it in a decision, or allows it to trigger another action. The quality of that handoff deserves as much attention as the quality of the text.

What the evidence establishes

The National Institute of Standards and Technology's AI Risk Management Framework 1.0, published January 26, 2023, is voluntary guidance. Its GOVERN function calls for clear responsibilities, communication and accountability across the organization. It also distinguishes the roles people play in using and overseeing AI. These are risk-management practices, not a determination of legal liability. [1]

NIST's July 26, 2024 generative-AI profile identifies the risk of confidently presented false content. Among its suggested actions are checking generated sources and citations, evaluating performance in relevant conditions, and documenting errors and near misses. A plausible answer therefore needs an evidence check appropriate to its use. [2]

An illustrative situation

Hypothetical example—not a reported incident. A small service business uses AI to prepare a customer proposal. The draft is clear and persuasive. It also promises a delivery date taken from an outdated internal document. An employee checks the grammar, forwards the proposal, and moves to the next assignment.

The customer schedules other work around that date. When the business discovers the mistake, the original drafting task has become a scheduling problem, a service problem and a conversation about trust.

Now imagine a different handoff. Before the proposal leaves, a named employee checks the price, availability and delivery date against current records. The approver can see the source. If any material fact remains uncertain, the draft stays inside the business until the uncertainty is resolved.

The tool has the same writing capability in both examples. What changes is the operating structure around it.

The Infrastructure Literacy lens

Interpretation. Look beneath the visible answer and examine five connections: the source of information, the person checking it, the person authorized to act, the people affected, and the route for correcting a mistake. Those connections help explain why identical software can produce very different practical results in two organizations.

A statement such as “a human reviews everything” leaves several questions unanswered. Does the reviewer have the original material? Do they know which facts matter most? Can they reject the output? Is enough time allowed for a meaningful check? A review step has value when somebody can actually perform it.

This perspective also changes how we count efficiency. Drafting time is one part of the work. Checking, revising, explaining and repairing also consume time. An organization can learn more from tracking the whole assignment than from celebrating how quickly the first screen fills with words.

Make one handoff clearer

A practical recommendation. Choose one recurring AI-assisted task and write a short working note. Identify the inputs allowed, the output expected, the checks required before use, and the person with authority to approve it. Add the circumstances that should stop the process and the person who handles an exception.

Keep the note proportional to the task. Reorganizing a personal reading list and preparing a customer commitment have different consequences. Start with the consequence, then decide what evidence and review the work deserves.

Keep a few examples of both useful results and mistakes. A correction that disappears into somebody's inbox teaches the next employee very little. A brief record of what failed,

how it was found and what changed can turn an error into usable organizational memory. This is an operating suggestion, not a certification or a claim that all AI risk can be eliminated.

Questions worth asking

- What decision will this output influence?
- Which facts must be checked against an authoritative source?
- Who can approve, refuse or stop the next action?
- If the answer is wrong, who will notice first—and who will respond?
- Are we measuring time saved after review and correction?

The next time an AI result looks finished, pause at the handoff. Ask what would make it ready to use. That small question brings the surrounding system into view.

Scope and source date: Educational analysis researched October 5, 2026. The cited NIST editions are dated 2023 and 2024. NIST's current overview says AI RMF 1.0 is being revised; this paper does not treat those editions as a complete account of every later development. It evaluates operating responsibility, not legal liability or any particular AI product. [3]

Sources & scope

1. **NIST — Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework (AI RMF 1.0)**, NIST AI 100-1 January 26, 2023; GOVERN 2-3 and Appendix C
2. **NIST — Artificial Intelligence Risk Management Framework: Generative Artificial Intelligence Profile**, NIST AI 600-1 July 26, 2024; sections 2.2, MS-2.5-003 and MG-4.3-002
3. **NIST — AI Risk Management Framework overview**
Undated living page; reviewed October 5, 2026

The public sources support the documented facts. The hypothetical examples and Infrastructure Literacy interpretation are educational analysis by the author.

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<https://nvlpubs.nist.gov/nistpubs/ai/NIST.AI.600-1.pdf>

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