AI Automation Levels Spectrum

Type: Decision Framework

Target Audience: AI Product Managers, Designers, Governance Teams

This framework helps designers choose the appropriate balance of human and machine control for specific tasks. Use to determine automation level during AI system design.

The Six Levels of Automation

Level	Name	Human Role	AI Role	Example
1	Manual	Full control	None	Traditional hiring decision
2	Suggestions	Selects from options	Presents alternatives	Spell-check suggestions
3	Recommendations	Approves/rejects	Recommends best option	"You might also like..."
4	Passive Oversight	Intervenes if needed	Acts by default	Spam filter with whitelist
5	Autonomous + Notify	Informed observer	Full action + reporting	Automated fraud block with alert
6	Full Autonomy	None	Complete control	Algorithmic trading

Decision Framework

Use impact level to guide automation selection:

Impact Level	Recommended Levels	Requirement
HIGH IMPACT (rights, safety, livelihoods)	Level 1-3	Mandatory human approval
MEDIUM IMPACT (significant but recoverable)	Level 3-4	Human override available
LOW IMPACT (minor, easily corrected)	Level 4-6	Monitoring sufficient

Selection Criteria

Factor	Lower Automation (1-3)	Higher Automation (4-6)
Stakes	High (life, liberty, livelihood)	Low (convenience, efficiency)
Reversibility	Irreversible decisions	Easily reversed
Frequency	Infrequent, unique cases	High volume, routine

AI Reliability	Uncertain or untested	Proven accuracy
Regulatory	Regulated domain	Unregulated
Expertise	Human expertise crucial	Human adds little value

EU AI Act Alignment

Article 14 - Human Oversight Requirements:
High-risk AI systems must allow effective human oversight. Levels 5-6 are generally inappropriate for high-risk categories. The human must have both authority AND competence to override.

AI System: _____

Selected Automation Level: [ ] 1 [ ] 2 [ ] 3 [ ] 4 [ ] 5 [ ] 6

Justification: _____

Assessed By: _____ **Date:** _____