

Branches, not secrets

You go looking for the one process and find ten of them, none written down, all living in someone's head. A person runs on judgment and fills those gaps without noticing. **An agent runs on rails.** It does exactly what the process says and nothing it doesn't, and it cannot infer that this vendor is a special case unless the special case is **written down as a rule.**



THE FOUR MOVES THAT ACTUALLY STANDARDIZE A PROCESS in order

- I

Make it visible
The real process on one page, exceptions included.
- If your map has no ugly branches on it, it isn't a map. It's a wish.
- 2

Kill the exceptions you can
Most of them have no good reason left.
- Half your exceptions are scar tissue: a special path granted in 2019 for a person who has since left.
- 3

Codify the ones that survive
Turn folklore into a written rule.
- "Over this amount, second approval." A rule an agent can follow is a rule a human wrote down on purpose.
- 4

Make it the default
One standard way, unless a codified reason says otherwise.
- Not one way that lives in a document nobody opens. One way that is actually how the work runs.

Visible, reduced, codified, default. **Notice the model never entered the conversation** – all four moves are operations. ("Forty-seven" is a figure of speech from the episode, not a statistic. The real number is whatever your own count comes back with.)

WHAT AN AGENT DOES WITH AN EXCEPTION NOBODY WROTE DOWN two outcomes

It stops dead
A human now babysits every run – which is precisely the manual work the automation was meant to remove.

It doesn't stop
Worse. It applies the happy path to a case that needed an exception and pays the invoice that should have been held.

AI doesn't ask for the missing rule. It picks one. **The gap in your process becomes a decision the machine makes for you** – and the exceptions were never counted, because to the people running it there is no exception. There's just "how we do it".

"But our business is too complex to standardize." That objection is what keeps the mess alive. Standardization is not the absence of exceptions. It's the difference between an exception that is a **written rule** and one that is a **rumour**. You're not removing the judgment, you're moving it out of one person's head and into the system once, so it's the same every time instead of different depending on who is in that day.

Monday morning YOUR FIRST MOVE

Don't buy a tool. Don't draw a diagram. Take the one process you're most tempted to automate – the boring, high-volume one – and **count the paths**. Pull twenty or thirty real cases from last month and trace what actually happened to each, not what the document says should have.
One, two or three distinct routes and you're ready, go automate it. Fifteen and you just found your project, and it isn't an AI project. The document is the story. The count is the truth.

OPERATOR INSIGHT · LAYER 3

Standardize before you automate - or you don't get one process running fast, you get forty-seven. The chaos, industrialized.
"Your AI maturity will never exceed your operational maturity."

Free

Score your own processes – the AI-Ready Operations Assessment runs all five layers as a readiness check, on a scale from "ad hoc" to "AI-ready". vihrenlabs.gumroad.com/l/rmkje