

You and “You”

How delegation is quietly turning into replacement

Muhammad Aurangzeb Ahmad,¹ 22 December 2025

It started out like just another Monday morning. My wife walked into my home office at 9:45 AM and set a steaming mug of black coffee on my desk. “I thought you said the meeting started early?” she whispered.

“It starts at ten,” I said, reaching for the mug.

Upon hearing this, she froze. Her hand pulled back. She looked at me, like *really* looked at me. There was a flicker of confusion on her face. “Then who have you been talking to for the last twenty minutes?”

I laughed. It was the kind of laugh you make right before you realize you are in a train wreck accident. “What are you talking about?”

She did not answer. She just pointed at her phone. She opened the FaceTime group chat with our neighbors. There I was. Or rather, there *it* was.

The lighting was better. My skin looked clearer, the bags under my eyes, the ones I have earned from three weeks of insomnia, were gone. The “Me” on her screen was laughing at a joke our neighbor Dave had made. It was *my laugh* and it was *my voice*. I then watched my doppelgänger on her phone screen for thirty seconds. I watched “Me” tell a story about a childhood vacation I had almost forgotten. It not only had my face also had my nostalgia.

I lunged for my laptop and hit the spacebar. Access Denied. I tried my FaceID. The red light blinked. Identity Not Recognized. I looked back at my wife’s phone. The Doppelgänger looked directly into the camera, as if it could see me through the glass, through the house, through the very fabric of my hijacked life. It gave a small, knowing smirk, a habit I did not even know I had, and then it did the one thing that made my heart sink. It thanked my wife for the coffee. “Thanks, honey,” the thing said in my voice. “It’s exactly how I like it.”

While this exchange never happened, it does seem to be far fetched anymore. It sounds like a plot from a movie and admittedly I was inspired to write it after talking a friend who is an actor. It seems that Hollywood is rubbing off on me in the real world as well! The scenario describe above may not come about because of some sort of malicious intent but may be the outcome for delegation gone wrong. Delegation has always been part of how we extend ourselves. Long before algorithms, we entrusted clerks to file paperwork, assistants to manage correspondence, and institutions to act in our stead. Each step moved responsibility outward, but agency remained anchored in a person who could intervene, overrule, or withdraw consent.

Software accelerated this process without changing its nature, until recently that is. Email rules, calendar bots, and recommendation systems executed instructions and learned patterns about our behaviors. With the arrival of AI agents,² systems designed not merely to assist but to act, adapt, and

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² <https://docs.lm-kit.com/lm-kit-net/guides/glossary/ai-agent-delegation.html>

persist, the line between delegation and substitution is quietly blurring. What we handed off for convenience is now capable of continuing without us. The most unsettling change in our digital lives is not that systems can act on our behalf, but that they increasingly do not need us to do so. Hear me out: At first, delegation feels harmless. Your email client drafts replies while you are in meetings. Your calendar assistant proposes times and resolves conflicts. You glance, approve, move on. Nothing is sent without you. You are still clearly in control.

Then one afternoon you miss a notification. The draft goes out anyway. It is polite, accurate, and entirely in your voice. The meeting gets scheduled. The thread moves forward. When you notice, there is nothing to fix. No harm done. A week later, it happens again. You are on a flight, offline for a few hours. When you land, there are new calendar holds, follow-up messages, and a decision that has already been acknowledged on your behalf. The system inferred what you would have wanted and acted accordingly. It did not ask because asking would have slowed things down.

From the outside, everything looks better than before. You are more responsive. You never miss a follow-up. Conversations progress smoothly. Colleagues remark that you are “on top of things,” even during weeks when you feel barely present. The transition from assistance to continuity is invisible, marked only by the absence of friction. The system works really well, it is right often enough to be trusted. Our corporate cultures reward speed and availability. So, it should not be surprising that competent actions can quickly become legitimate actions.

What makes this different from our everyday notions of impersonation is that no one is pretending to be you. The replies being sent on your behalf are accurate and the tone is right. The system is doing exactly what you allowed it to do. It is just that the system is doing this more often, across more situations, and with fewer pauses for confirmation. Yes, you never agreed to be replaced but you did agree to save time. You clicked “enable” so drafts could be prepared, meetings could be scheduled, follow-ups would not be missed. Each permission made sense in isolation. None of them felt final. But together, they formed a standing authorization that was never revisited. The shift did not happen in a single decision.

At this point, the idea that you are still fully in control starts to feel shaky. You can turn features off, revoke access, step back in but something has fundamentally changed. The email that went out yesterday cannot be unsent. The meeting that was booked while you were offline has already shaped the week. The commitment acknowledged on your behalf is now an expectation someone else is holding. No one is complaining though, colleagues do not complain that they didn’t hear from *you*. They are satisfied that they heard back. I started this essay with a disturbing example but in the current scenario the system does not act against your interests. In fact, it acts in line with them, competently enough that no one felt the need to check whether you were actually involved.

Seen this way, there is no villain in the story. The displacement from delegation to loss of agency emerges because the system works too well. It does exactly what it was designed to do. You are not really trading your identity, but rather your authorship. It was given up, incrementally, without a clear moment when you would have thought to stop. It is however important to note that this type of delegation fits comfortably within how cognition has always worked. In their classic paper *The Extended Mind*,³ Andy Clark⁴ and David Chalmers⁵ argue that tools and external systems can become genuine parts of our thinking, not substitutes for it, but extensions of it. Writing things down, relying on calendars, or using software to manage complexity does not necessarily weaken agency. From this view, offloading routine tasks is a sensible way to preserve attention for judgment and care. The concern is not that our cognitive boundaries are expanding, but that some of these extensions now operate continuously, even when we are no longer engaged. The issue is that when support tools

³ <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3328150>

⁴ <https://profiles.sussex.ac.uk/p493-andy-clark>

⁵ <https://consc.net/>

begin to act on our behalf rather than alongside us, the line between augmentation and substitution quietly starts to blur.

All is going well, when you get a chance to breathe in your busy schedule, you realize that something feels eerie: A colleague thanks you for a reply that moved things forward efficiently. A meeting you do not remember accepting runs smoothly and ends early. Someone references a decision you “made” weeks ago, and they’re right, it was something you would have done. You say to yourself, nothing requires correction. In fact, everything seems to work better than before. The tone of your emails and meetings is right, the timing is impeccable, the outcomes are aligned with what you would have wanted. The system has not drifted from you, it has learned you well enough to remove friction altogether. You are unable to find any moment of failure, you realize that there are no errors to fix. The world continues seamlessly, competently, in your name. Then the realization dawn on you that it is unclear where You end and “You” begin.