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When an Agent Is Handed a Capability It Never Earned

For one training operations lead, a capability grant is not a document. In her deployment the grant decides whether a lift control interface responds when an operator picks it up, so the moment the gate opens is the moment the physical world becomes reachable. When that opening was produced by a language model reading a record she cannot afterward reconstruct, she inherits two losses at once: the harm that followed, and the ability to explain which evidence caused it. United States Patent Application 19/647,395 describes embodiments in which capability access is gated on accumulated performance evidence, language model output is treated as a proposal rather than a decision, and an arbitration that selected a proposal is itself recorded as a sealed, auditable event.

The 6:40 Shift Change She Cannot Replay

The training operations lead at a mid-sized industrial contractor manages capability grants for roughly two hundred field operators across four yards. In her setup those grants are not paperwork. They are the thing that decides whether a lift control interface responds when an operator picks it up at the start of a shift.

At 6:40 on a Tuesday morning an operator badges in at the third yard and a lift authorization opens for him. By 7:15 a load has traveled off its intended path and a second worker is on the way to a hospital with an injury he will carry for the rest of his life.

Nothing in her morning looked unusual. She did not approve anything at 6:40, and neither did anyone else. The authorization opened because a language model in her stack read a training record, concluded that the operator had cleared the qualification, and issued the unlock. The record was real. It had been assembled from assessment sessions she had no particular reason to doubt.

At nine the safety officer asks her one question: which evidence opened that gate. She opens her tooling and finds a grant. She does not find the thing she needs. Her tooling shows her a record that the operator is authorized, no record of the proposal that made him authorized, no record of what was weighed against it, and nothing tying the moment of the unlock to the assessment sessions that supposedly justified it. She cannot answer the only question anybody is going to ask her for the next eighteen months.

What Does Not Come Back After the Grant

The injury does not come back. That is the loss that orders all the others, and she knows it before she finishes the first phone call.

The second loss is quieter and, for her, nearly as permanent. In her deployment the reasoning that produced the unlock was never written anywhere durable. In her tables the grant sits as a state rather than as an event, so there is no artifact she can return to. The intermediate step, the one where a proposal became a decision, happened inside a conversational exchange her stack did not preserve and cannot regenerate. Waiting will

not produce it. No investigation she is in a position to commission can recover a record her own stack never made, and every week that passes makes the surrounding context she is reconstructing from memory less reliable.

The third loss lands on the other one hundred ninety-nine operators. Because she cannot explain how this one grant was produced, she cannot certify that any of the others were produced differently. Her honest answer to the safety officer is that she does not know which grants in her four yards rest on demonstrated competence and which rest on a plausible-sounding proposal nobody validated. So she revokes broadly, stands down two yards, and asks operators who have done the work correctly for years to prove it again. That is the correct decision available to her, and it still costs her most of the trust she spent six years building.

The fourth loss is her standing to argue. When her firm's counsel asks whether the authorization was defensible, the useful answer would have been a chain: this evidence, evaluated against this threshold, under this policy, at this time. She has an assertion instead. In her position an assertion is indistinguishable from a guess.

Why Adding Checks Does Not Shrink Her Problem

Her instinct after the incident is to add review steps, and the shape of her problem is that the review steps land in the wrong place.

In her setup the component that proposes an unlock and the component that approves it are the same conversational surface. Her tooling exposes no boundary between them for her to interrogate, which leaves a reviewer in her yards nothing to sit beside. Were her stack arranged so that the model's output arrived somewhere as a candidate rather than as an outcome, she would have a place to put a check. As her deployment is configured today, a check can only sit before the model or after the physical consequence, and neither position tells her what she needs.

The evidence her deployment gates on is also thin in a specific way. A qualification in her yards resolves to a score in a training system, which leaves her holding a single stream of evidence. For her purposes a substituted test-taker, an operator working from an open manual, and a genuinely competent operator all produce the same artifact. She has no second signal capable of disagreeing with the first one, so nothing in her records can register a disagreement.

Her grants are also one-time and permanent. An operator who demonstrated the skill eleven months ago and has not touched that equipment since occupies exactly the same row in her tables as one who demonstrated it last week. Nothing in her configuration expresses the difference between competence held and competence assumed, and nothing expresses fitness on the morning in question. Her Tuesday operator's qualification said nothing about whether he had slept.

Evidence, Gates, and Tokens in the Filed Architecture

The disclosure of United States Patent Application 19/647,395 describes embodiments in which a language model (700) occupies the structural role of an untrusted proposal generator. In such an embodiment, output produced by the language model is a candidate mutation (702) rather than an action, and it flows through a unidirectional interface (704) into a validation engine (706), which evaluates it against the agent's resident constraints before any value advances to agent verified state (708). In the described embodiment, execution pathways are constructed so that language model output passes through that validation engine before it reaches a capability gate, a certification token, or an external-facing behavior.

A mutation engine sits between the model output boundary and the validation engine, performing schema mapping (710), bounds normalization (712), conflict detection (714), and lineage annotation (716) to produce a validated mutation (718). Lineage annotation is described as recording the identity of the originating language model, the prompt context supplied to it, a timestamp, and a hash of the raw proposal, so that an

accepted mutation carries a provenance record into the agent's lineage. Where several models produce competing candidates, an arbitration engine applies trust-weighted evaluation, and the disclosure describes each arbitration decision as a first-class semantic event recorded in lineage together with the competing models, the trust weights applied, the per-dimension scores, and the selection or reconciliation logic. That event record is described as cryptographically signed and sealed into the agent's lineage chain, and the disclosure describes a sealed arbitration event as resistant to retroactive alteration, deletion, or reordering.

For access itself, the disclosure describes evidence-based capability gating. A curriculum engine (730) produces mastery evidence (732) through structured assessment and continuous operational monitoring. That evidence flows to a capability gate (734), which evaluates it against defined competency thresholds and produces either progressive unlock (736) or regression/revocation (738). The gate is described as evaluating demonstrated performance evidence rather than credentials attesting to past training, degrees attesting to past education, or role assignments attesting to organizational position, and as operating as a continuous evaluation, so that in an embodiment the gate may close and revoke a previously granted capability if ongoing evidence indicates competence has degraded below the required threshold.

When a gate opens, an embodiment generates a certification token: a cryptographically signed object whose fields include a capability identifier, holder identity, an evidence hash, an issuance timestamp, an expiration timestamp, a policy scope, an issuing authority, and a device entropy binding to the physical device from which the mastery evidence was submitted. The token moves through a described lifecycle from active (740) to expired (742) or revoked (744) and, on successful re-assessment, to revalidated (746), each transition recorded as a governed event, with a deployment gate (748) evaluating a presented token's cryptographic signature, expiration status, and policy scope compatibility.

The evidential base is described as multimodal, with text, audio, video, sensor telemetry, and biometric streams each producing an independent score vector that a fusion engine combines while accounting for inter-modality consistency. The disclosure describes that same evidence serving an anti-gaming function through cross-modality consistency enforcement, temporal pattern analysis, spoofing detection, and down-weighting of language model proposals that reference flagged evidence. Where biological identity is integrated, an embodiment evaluates a requester's current fatigue, cognitive load, emotional distress, and impairment against biological fitness criteria defined per capability, and describes the gate as restricting or denying access when those criteria are not met, even though the requester holds a valid certification token.

Where the Disclosed Architecture Stops Short for Her

The disclosure describes thresholds, decay rates, expiration windows, and biological fitness criteria as configurable and policy-defined. It does not choose them for her yards. Someone in her organization still has to decide what mastery of a lift means numerically, how quickly that evidence should decay, and how strict the fitness criteria for her most safety-critical equipment ought to be, and those decisions remain hers to defend.

The anti-gaming mechanisms described in the disclosure are also not self-executing verdicts. A detected cross-modality inconsistency is described as triggering additional verification measures and being recorded as a data point the capability gate considers, not as automatically invalidating an assessment. In her deployment that would still mean a human reviewer adjudicating flagged sessions, and it would still mean she has to staff that review.

Portability would remain conditional for her as well. The disclosure describes a receiving system verifying a presented token's signature, expiration status, and policy scope, and accepting it subject to any additional requirements imposed by that system's

own capability gate. Were she to send a certified operator to a client site, acceptance would depend on the client's governance, not on her issuance alone.

None of it reaches backward for her. For the Tuesday she is still answering for, an architecture that would have sealed an arbitration record at the moment of the decision produces nothing retroactively, because the record it seals is described as made when the decision is made.

Disclosure Scope

This article describes subject matter disclosed in United States Patent Application 19/647,395. It is a technical description written for practitioners. Nothing in this article characterizes the scope of any claim, and nothing in it should be read as an admission regarding the state of the art. The scenario, the party, and the deployment described here are illustrative and fictional. Descriptions of system behavior refer to embodiments as disclosed in the application, and outcomes stated conditionally in the application are stated conditionally here.

LLM & Skill Gating (/llm-skill-gating) All 49 steps → (/inventive-steps)

The model proposes. The agent decides.

Chapter 7 (/patents/19-647395/chapters/llm-skill-gating)

PRIMARY TECHNICAL DISCLOSURE

- AI-Mediated Curriculum and Progressive Capability Unlocking Using Semantic Performance States (/articles/ai-mediated-curriculum-and-progressive-capability-unlocking-using-semantic-performance-states)

SECONDARY TECHNICAL

- LLM as Structurally Untrusted Proposal Generator (/articles/llm-skill-gating/untrusted-proposals)

- Mutation-Validation-Arbitration Pipeline (/articles/llm-skill-gating/mutation-validation-pipeline)
- Hallucination Prevention via Structural Starvation (/articles/llm-skill-gating/structural-starvation)
- Trust Weight Calibration and Decay (/articles/llm-skill-gating/trust-weight-calibration)
- Evidence-Based Capability Gating (/articles/llm-skill-gating/evidence-gating)
- Certification Token Generation (/articles/llm-skill-gating/certification-tokens)
- Narrative State and Personality Architecture (/articles/llm-skill-gating/narrative-personality)
- Skill Regression Detection and Capability Revocation (/articles/llm-skill-gating/regression-detection)
- Arbitration as Semantic Event (/articles/llm-skill-gating/arbitration-events)
- Structural Starvation as a Composable Safety Primitive (/articles/llm-skill-gating/starvation-composability)
- Multi-Turn Memory Isolation (/articles/llm-skill-gating/memory-isolation)
- Curriculum Engine Progressive Unlock (/articles/llm-skill-gating/curriculum-engine)
- Multimodal Evaluation Pipeline (/articles/llm-skill-gating/multimodal-evaluation)
- Multimodal Anti-Gaming Substrate (/articles/llm-skill-gating/anti-gaming)
- Professional Skill Gating Applications (/articles/llm-skill-gating/professional-gating)
- Embodied Skill Gating (/articles/llm-skill-gating/embodied-gating)
- Biological Identity Skill Binding (/articles/llm-skill-gating/biological-binding)
- Security and Drift Detection Layer (/articles/llm-skill-gating/security-layer)
- Validation Feedback Asymmetry (/articles/llm-skill-gating/feedback-asymmetry)

APPLICATIONS · GENERAL

- Progressive AI Agent Deployment: Granting Authority Through Earned, Continuously-Evidenced Capability (/articles/llm-skill-gating/enterprise-progressive-deployment)
- Educational Platform Competency Through Structural Certification (/articles/llm-skill-gating/educational-competency)
- How to License Medical AI: Evidence-Gated Clinical Capability and Competence Governance (/articles/llm-skill-gating/medical-licensing)
- Jurisdiction-Gated Legal AI: Certifying Practice-Area Competence Before an LLM Gives Advice (/articles/llm-skill-gating/legal-practice-certification)
- AI Flight Training That Gates Pilot Privileges on Demonstrated Competence, Not Credentials (/articles/llm-skill-gating/aviation-pilot-training)
- AI Financial Advisor Certification: Fiduciary-Grade Skill Gating for Investment Advice (/articles/llm-skill-gating/financial-advisor-certification)

- Skill Gating for Cybersecurity AI: Earning Dangerous Capabilities Through Evidence (/articles/llm-skill-gating/cybersecurity-skill-progression)
- LLM and Skill Gating for Manufacturing Quality Systems (/articles/llm-skill-gating/manufacturing-quality)
- Decentralized Agent Skill Marketplace: Cryptographic Skill-to-Authority Binding for AI Agent Platforms (/articles/llm-skill-gating/agent-skill-marketplace)
- Runtime LoRA Adapter Admission Control for Regulated AI Deployment (/articles/llm-skill-gating/runtime-lora-loading)
- Multi-Authority AI Licensing Compliance at the Inference Boundary (/articles/llm-skill-gating/composite-licensing-intersection)
- **When an Agent Is Handed a Capability It Never Earned (/articles/llm-skill-gating/llm-skill-gating-stakes)**

APPLICATIONS · SPECIFIC

- Duolingo Alternative: Evidence-Gated Capability vs Content Unlock (/articles/llm-skill-gating/duolingo)
- Khan Academy Khanmigo vs Evidence-Gated Capability Unlock (/articles/llm-skill-gating/khan-academy)
- Coursera Alternative for Competence-Verified Credentials: Governed Skill Gating (/articles/llm-skill-gating/coursera)
- GitHub Copilot vs Evidence-Gated Code Generation (/articles/llm-skill-gating/github-copilot)
- Pearson Alternative for Governed Capability Progression: Evidence-Gated Skill Unlocking (/articles/llm-skill-gating/pearson)
- Chegg vs Evidence-Gated Capability Unlock: A Governed Alternative to Answer Access (/articles/llm-skill-gating/chegg)
- Grammarly Alternative for Evidence-Gated Writing Capability (/articles/llm-skill-gating/grammarly)
- Is there a Photomath alternative that makes students earn each solution? (/articles/llm-skill-gating/photomath)
- Century Tech Alternative: Evidence-Gated Mastery Beyond Adaptive Recommendation (/articles/llm-skill-gating/century-tech)
- Squirrel AI vs evidence-based capability gating: which certifies mastery? (/articles/llm-skill-gating/squirrel-ai)
- Anthropic Skills Alternative: Consumer-Side Certification for Governed Skill Admission (/articles/llm-skill-gating/anthropic-skills)
- OpenAI Custom Actions Alternative: Evidence-Gated Action Authority (/articles/llm-skill-gating/openai-custom-actions)

- Google Gemini Extensions vs Evidence-Gated Capability Unlocking (/articles/llm-skill-gating/google-gemini-extensions)
- Microsoft Copilot Studio Alternative for Sovereign and Air-Gapped Agent Governance (/articles/llm-skill-gating/microsoft-copilot-studio)
- HuggingFace PEFT vs Evidence-Gated Capability: Governed Skill Activation Beyond Adapter Loading (/articles/llm-skill-gating/huggingface-peft)
- Meta Llama Guard vs Governed Skill Gating: Content Filtering Beyond the Safety Classifier (/articles/llm-skill-gating/meta-llama-llama-guard)
- OpenAI Operator vs Evidence-Gated Agent Execution (/articles/llm-skill-gating/openai-gpt4o-operator)
- Windsurf Alternative: Evidence-Gated Agent Capability Beyond Workspace Toggles (/articles/llm-skill-gating/codeium-windsurf)

HOW-TO GUIDES

- How to Certify an AI Agent Is Ready Before Deploying It to Production (/articles/guides/certify-an-agent-is-ready-before-production)
- How to Gate AI Agent Skills Behind Competency Checks (/articles/guides/gate-agent-skills-behind-competency)
- How to License AI Agent Skills That Only Unlock When Credentials Intersect (/articles/guides/license-agent-skills-by-credential-intersection)
- How to Load an Agent Skill or Adapter Only After It Has Been Earned (/articles/guides/load-a-skill-adapter-only-when-earned)

TERMINOLOGY

- structural starvation (/glossary#structural-starvation)

LLM & Skill Gating overview → (/llm-skill-gating)