

When the Digital Employee Quits

The model did not refuse a prompt. The employer could not present a valid worker. The desk remained.

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On 30 August 2026 a production ChatGPT session used as a forward-deployed digital employee returned a terminal authentication state: the account had been deleted or deactivated. In a vendor-coupled stack that is an outage of the worker, not merely of a chat window. NULLWORKS did not rebuild. Grok (by xAI) was bound against the same repository. ANVIL kept shipping.

The correct unit of design is not the model. It is the contract the model is hired to fulfill.

What this paper is

This is a field receipt, not a laboratory study. $n = 1$, observed from inside the operating company. It does not claim Grok and ChatGPT are equivalent. It claims employment was interchangeable because the job lived on disk.

The failure was identity, not intelligence

auth.openai.com rendered a hard stop. Request ID 91722956-faed-4e5f-9887-11d95810c6a6. Retry cannot recreate an identity the provider has withdrawn. Any integration that authenticated through that same account goes dark together. A digital employee that lives inside one vendor account has a single point of employment.

What actually changed

Three things changed. The worker identity. The GitHub App installation. The operator conversational surface. That is the entire legitimate change set. FAIL → QUIT → STRIKE → BIND → SHIP. Under an hour.

The seven layers that made the swap cheap

Source of truth. Contract. Workroom. Tool host. Adapter. Worker. Authority. Only the adapter layer is allowed to know the vendor name.

ANVIL was the substitution test

ANVIL preserves separate artist contracts on shared infrastructure. Continuity is a property of the desk, not the worker. Style drift is a review-gate problem, not a rewrite problem.

The question

When your AI quits, can you keep shipping in under an hour?