

The Pragmatic Middle Ground: Why Hybrid Autonomy Gets SMEs Further Faster

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY & CORE TAKEAWAY

Hybrid autonomy – one human lead plus autonomous followers – is already live in China's logistics: 45,000 kilometres driven, 29% lower freight costs, without waiting for perfect full autonomy. The reason for this success: the pragmatic middle ground uses what's technically mature today, gathers data for tomorrow, and avoids the trap of endless pilot projects. For Swiss SMEs, the same logic applies: don't automate everything at once; capture real value step by step – and move faster than those waiting for the infallible system.

CONTEXT & EXECUTIVE RELEVANCE

Since early 2025, China's highways have been running convoys that show how automation actually works: one human steers the lead truck, followed by up to four driverless trucks in formation – autonomously guided, but not left alone. Pony.ai, KargoBot and SANY have deployed this 1+N platooning on routes longer than 400 kilometres, now covering 45,000 kilometres and transporting nearly 500 TEU of freight. The result: 29% lower cost per kilometre, 195% higher profit per vehicle, 80% less personnel on predictable routes.

The trick isn't the tech alone – lidar, cameras, V2V communication exist elsewhere too. The trick is the decision not to replace the human, but to position them smartly: in the lead truck, handling construction zones, chaotic toll plazas and all the long-tail scenarios that still overwhelm autonomy today. The follower trucks handle the standard scenario – straight ahead, lane-keeping, distance control – with L4 precision. The system isn't an end state, but the economically sensible intermediate step: it pays off today while gathering the data that enables the next step.

CORE ACTION ITEMS

- 01 Identify the middle mile in your processes: where is the flow predictable, repetitive, clearly structured?
- 02 Automate there, keep the human at the interfaces where judgement, context and flexibility are needed.
- 03 Gather data in live operation: every hybrid run shows you where the machine performs stably – and where it doesn't yet.
- 04 Expand incrementally: when the machine reliably masters a new situation, give it more responsibility.

SWISS COMPLIANCE & ARCHITECTURE GUIDELINES

- ☑ Full compliance with revised Swiss Data Protection Act (revDSG).
- ☑ Zero vendor lock-in on closed proprietary models.
- ☑ Seamless integration into Abacus, Bexio and M365 ecosystems.

Non-Binding Process Analysis

Let us review in 20 minutes where AI agents create immediate measurable efficiency in your workflows.

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