


Chapter 5

The Sentient Core: AI-Powered Digital Twins and Unified Data Fabric for Logistics

Suzan Fouad Bakr

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-8104-7328>

Faculty of Commerce, Al-Azhar University, Egypt

Abdelrhman A. Gamil

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8680-5182>

Faculty of Engineering, Ain Shams University, Egypt

Roba Gamal

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3525-2550>

Faculty of Engineering, Cairo University, Egypt

ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses the fragility of the modern supply chain, arguing that reactive operational paradigms are untenable amid global disruptions. It proposes a new architectural blueprint for an autonomous, self-optimizing supply chain: the Sentient Core. The central argument is that realizing the potential of advanced and agentic AI requires a coherent architecture with a single source of truth and a dynamic simulation environment. This architecture is achieved through the synergy of two foundational pillars: an AI-Powered Digital Twin and a Unified Data Fabric. The chapter details a seven-layer implementation framework, analyzes challenges like data governance and legacy system integration, and presents a phased “crawl, walk, run” methodology. The validity of this architectural pattern is demonstrated through real-world case studies. The chapter concludes that the Sentient Core is a strategic and technological imperative for building the resilient, intelligent, and competitive supply chains of the future.

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INTRODUCTION

The modern supply chain is a paradox of extraordinary complexity and profound fragility. It is a sprawling, global network of manufacturers, suppliers, logistics providers, and retailers, all working in concert to move goods from raw materials to the end consumer. Yet, as the events of the early 2020s have starkly demonstrated, this intricate web is susceptible to cascading disruptions from every conceivable vector: pandemics, geopolitical conflicts, trade policy shifts, climate events, and sudden spikes in consumer demand. For decades, the prevailing operational paradigm has been one of reaction. Planners and logisticians, armed with siloed data and backward-looking analytics, have become masters of firefighting—expediting shipments, reallocating inventory, and manually adjusting production schedules in a constant battle against unforeseen variability. This approach, while a testament to human ingenuity, is no longer sustainable. The speed and scale of modern disruption have outpaced our capacity to react effectively.

This chapter's central mission is to provide a comprehensive architectural blueprint for a new operational paradigm, moving beyond point solutions. It argues that the transformative power of technologies like Agentic AI cannot be realized as isolated tools. Their true value is unlocked only when they are built upon a coherent architecture that provides two fundamental pillars: a single, unimpeachable source of truth and a dynamic, virtual environment for simulation and orchestration. The failure to achieve widespread, impactful AI adoption in logistics to date stems not from a deficiency in individual AI models but from a fundamental architectural deficit. Deploying a sophisticated AI on a fragmented, siloed data foundation cripples its ability to make systemic, optimized decisions, akin to asking a brilliant strategist to command an army with outdated maps and no communication lines. The root cause of failure is not the algorithm but the environment in which it operates.

This chapter posits that the synergistic combination of an AI-Powered Digital Twin and a Unified Data Fabric form this essential foundation. This integrated construct, termed the 'Sentient Core', acts as the supply chain's central nervous system. Within this system, the Unified Data Fabric functions as the primary neural network, transmitting real-time information, while the AI-Powered Digital Twin serves as the 'cerebrum'—the cognitive center for simulation and learning. It is within this virtual sandbox that AI agents are trained, strategies are stress-tested, and the organization builds the deep, institutional trust required to cede control to autonomous systems. By architecting this Sentient Core, organizations can finally move beyond the endless cycle of reaction and begin to build the truly predictive, resilient, and autonomous supply chains of the future.

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