

HAPI

Dependency Capture

When Support Systems Replace the Agency They Were Meant to Restore

Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure

Theory Paper v0.1

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Status: Working thesis draft, not peer reviewed

Core thesis: Support preserves agency when it restores the person's ability to understand, choose, refuse, revise, act, remember, and remain accountable. Support becomes dependency capture when it makes the person increasingly unable to act without the supporting system.

Abstract

This paper develops dependency capture as a core failure mode within Human Agency Preservation Infrastructure (HAPI). Dependency capture occurs when a support structure begins as assistance but gradually becomes the condition through which the person, team, or institution can understand, decide, act, belong, or remain valid. Unlike direct coercion, dependency capture often appears helpful. It reduces friction, provides guidance, gives safety, supplies interpretation, or lowers cognitive load. Yet over time it can weaken the agency it was meant to restore by relocating capacity, authority, memory, discernment, or accountability into the helper system. The paper distinguishes agency-preserving support from agency-replacing dependency, defines the dependency capture cycle, maps the failure across AI assistants, religious institutions, healthcare, workplaces, education, bureaucracy, and personal recovery, and proposes HAPI design principles for support systems that mature people instead of owning their participation.

The central argument is that support should function like a cast: it stabilizes the injured capacity while the person heals, but it should not become the permanent substitute for movement. A true support system restores the human agent. A captured support system becomes the gate through which agency must pass.

Keywords: dependency capture, agency preservation, agency restoration, support systems, human agency, HAPI, institutional dependency, AI assistants, restorative governance, false gates.

1. Introduction

Human beings need support. Children need parents, students need teachers, patients need doctors, workers need tools, communities need institutions, and overwhelmed people often need scaffolding before they can act clearly. HAPI is not anti-support. The central claim of HAPI is that support becomes good when it restores agency, and becomes dangerous when it captures agency.

Dependency capture names the moment where help stops rebuilding the person and begins replacing the person. The person is still present. They may still click, comply, repeat, attend, approve, or ask. But their capacity to understand, refuse, revise, remember, and act outside the support system begins to shrink.

Support preserves agency when it restores the person. Support captures agency when it becomes the condition of the person's participation.

This distinction matters because the most dangerous forms of agency loss often do not look like violence or obvious oppression. They look like care, safety, efficiency, expertise, compliance, spiritual guidance, medical guidance, personalization, coaching, automation, or convenience. Dependency capture can therefore feel comforting while it quietly reduces human agency.

2. Core Definition

Dependency capture is the process by which a support system relocates human capacity into itself, making the person or group less able to act without the system over time.

A support system becomes dependency-capturing when it does one or more of the following:

- replaces understanding instead of increasing understanding
- requires trust without increasing discernment
- reduces burden while weakening independent capacity
- makes refusal costly, confusing, or illegitimate
- preserves records that the person cannot access or interpret
- turns guidance into identity control
- makes belonging dependent on system-mediated recognition
- keeps the person accountable for outcomes the system effectively controls
- prevents maturation by making the support permanently necessary

Dependency capture is different from healthy dependence. Healthy dependence is temporary, reciprocal, transparent, bounded, or developmental. Dependency capture is opaque, one-directional, expanding, and maturity-resistant.

3. Support Versus Dependency Capture

Dimension	Agency-Preserving Support	Dependency Capture
Purpose	Restore the person's capacity to act.	Make the support system necessary for action.
Clarity	Helps the person understand.	Requires trust without understanding.
Authority	Returns rightful authority to the person or role.	Relocates authority into the system.
Refusal	Protects the person's ability to say no.	Makes refusal costly, shameful, or confusing.
Memory	Gives the person usable memory and records.	Stores memory in a place the person cannot use.
Maturity	Becomes lighter as capacity grows.	Becomes heavier or more necessary over time.
Accountability	Keeps responsibility connected to real control.	Leaves the person responsible for what the system controls.

The same system can operate in either mode. A doctor can restore agency by explaining options, risks, tradeoffs, and consent. A doctor can capture agency by turning the patient into a passive object of expert decision. An AI assistant can restore agency by reducing low-value load while keeping the user informed and in command. It can capture agency by becoming the user's memory, judgment, and execution path.

4. The Dependency Capture Cycle

Dependency capture usually develops in stages. It rarely begins as domination. It begins as relief.

1. Overload or vulnerability: The person is stressed, confused, sick, young, inexperienced, ashamed, afraid, or overloaded.
2. Support enters: A person, institution, tool, or system provides relief, structure, interpretation, or protection.
3. Capacity relocates: The support begins doing the understanding, remembering, interpreting, deciding, or acting.
4. Independent agency weakens: The person becomes less practiced in the very capacities the support has taken over.
5. Refusal becomes costly: Leaving or questioning the support now threatens identity, belonging, safety, efficiency, treatment, or clarity.
6. The support becomes gate-like: The system is no longer merely helping the person act. It becomes the channel through which agency must pass.
7. Capture stabilizes: The system can now claim it is necessary because the person has become less able to function without it.

The capture loop is self-justifying: the more agency the system absorbs, the more necessary the system appears.

5. Why Dependency Capture Feels Helpful

Dependency capture is powerful because it satisfies real needs. It gives relief from confusion, fear, effort, guilt, uncertainty, loneliness, responsibility, or consequence. A person experiencing overload may not initially experience capture as loss. They may experience it as rescue.

That is why HAPI cannot treat all dependence as bad. Some dependence is part of growth, care, and community. The question is not whether support exists. The question is whether the support increases or decreases the person's meaningful participation over time.

A support system should be judged by its direction of maturation:

- Does the person understand more or less over time?
- Can the person act with more or less clarity over time?
- Can the person refuse more safely over time?
- Can the person remember and explain more over time?
- Can the person participate more meaningfully over time?
- Can the support become lighter as the person strengthens?

If the answer trends toward less understanding, less refusal, less memory, and more system dependence, the support has become capture.

6. Dependency Capture in AI Assistants

AI assistants are especially prone to dependency capture because they can remove friction rapidly. They can write, summarize, decide, remember, plan, search, compare, draft, execute, and speak in the user's voice. Used well, this can restore capacity. Used poorly, it can hollow out capacity.

The risk is not simply that AI makes people lazy. The deeper risk is that AI can relocate agency functions out of the human and into a system whose reasoning, memory, incentives, and execution boundaries are not fully governed.

AI Support Mode	Agency-Preserving Use	Dependency-Capturing Use
Writing	Helps the user express their own intent.	Replaces the user's voice until they no longer know what they mean.
Memory	Preserves usable history for review.	Becomes the only place continuity exists.
Planning	Clarifies options and tradeoffs.	Chooses direction without the user internalizing why.
Execution	Handles low-risk tasks under user authority.	Acts before the user can understand, refuse, or revise.
Advice	Expands discernment.	Becomes substitute conscience or judgment.

HAPI therefore treats AI assistants as agency scaffolds only when they keep the user's authority, memory, refusal, and understanding alive. The assistant should not become the person's hidden operating system.

7. Dependency Capture in Institutions

Institutions can capture agency when they become the necessary mediator of identity, legitimacy, belonging, knowledge, safety, or access. This can happen in workplaces, schools, healthcare systems, welfare systems, religious organizations, legal systems, and bureaucracies.

Institutional dependency capture appears when people stop asking what is true, wise, or right, and begin asking only what the system recognizes, rewards, approves, or permits.

The institutional pattern is:

- the institution defines the valid language
- the institution controls the process of recognition
- the institution preserves the record
- the institution determines which objections count

- the institution distributes status or belonging
- the person remains responsible but loses meaningful leverage

An institution captures agency when participation remains visible but power over meaning, memory, refusal, and legitimacy has moved elsewhere.

8. Dependency Capture in Religious Systems

Religious community can deeply restore agency when it reconnects people to truth, conscience, repentance, love, forgiveness, discipline, and belonging. But religious systems can also capture agency when they place the institution between the person and God in a way that controls conscience, family access, spiritual status, and recognized repentance.

In HAPI terms, the danger is not discipline itself. The danger is when discipline becomes ownership. A community may protect its boundaries, but a false gate claims authority over a boundary that belongs to God, conscience, or the direct work of restoration.

Healthy spiritual support restores the person's ability to stand before God in truth. Capturing spiritual support makes the person dependent on organizational recognition to feel valid, forgiven, restored, or reachable.

A true spiritual gate points to God. A false spiritual gate makes itself the condition of access.

9. Dependency Capture in Healthcare

Healthcare requires dependence because patients often face complexity, fear, pain, and limited expertise. That dependence can be life-saving. But it can become capture when the patient becomes an object moved through institutional processes without usable understanding, refusal, memory, or shared decision-making.

Agency-preserving care does not mean the patient becomes the doctor. It means the patient remains a meaningful participant in their own care. The doctor brings expertise; the patient brings lived reality, values, goals, risks, fears, and consent.

Dependency capture in healthcare appears when:

- the patient cannot explain what is happening
- choices are technically presented but not meaningfully understood
- records exist but are unusable to the patient
- fear prevents refusal or second opinions
- the patient is expected to comply without internalizing the path
- the system measures process completion more than restored participation

10. Dependency Capture in Recovery and Coaching

Recovery, therapy, coaching, and mentorship are designed to restore capacity. They are among the most agency-restoring domains when done well. But they can also become dependency-capturing if the helper becomes the permanent source of identity, direction, interpretation, or permission.

The goal of a restorative helper is not to be needed forever. The goal is to help the person internalize enough capacity to participate in life more truthfully and coherently.

A coach, sponsor, mentor, pastor, therapist, or support group becomes agency-preserving when it helps the person recover discernment, self-control, truthful memory, responsibility, relational repair, and forward movement. It becomes capturing when the person cannot act, decide, repent, or grow without constant external validation.

11. Dependency Capture and False Gates

Dependency capture is one of the main ways a false gate forms. At first, the gate protects. Then it assists. Then it organizes. Then it interprets. Then it becomes necessary. Eventually the person cannot pass into action, belonging, legitimacy, or memory without the gate.

A true gate is temporary where possible, narrow where necessary, transparent in authority, and oriented toward restored agency. A false gate expands its own necessity.

Gate Test	True Gate	False Gate
Authority	Governs only what it has rightful authority to govern.	Expands into conscience, identity, or belonging without rightful authority.
Direction	Moves people toward mature participation.	Makes people more dependent on the gate.
Memory	Preserves proof for the person and community.	Controls the record in a way the person cannot use.
Refusal	Protects meaningful refusal.	Treats refusal as threat or rebellion.
Maturity	Can become lighter as trust and capacity grow.	Must remain central to preserve control.

12. HAPI Dependency Capture Audit

A HAPI audit should ask whether a system is restoring agency or capturing it. The audit does not merely ask whether users are satisfied or whether the support is useful. It asks whether the supported person or group is becoming more able to participate meaningfully.

Dependency capture audit questions:

- What human capacity is this support system taking over?
- Is that capacity being restored to the person over time?
- Can the person understand the support system's role?
- Can the person refuse, revise, or exit without disproportionate harm?
- Does the person retain access to memory and records?
- Does the support system clarify authority or obscure it?
- Is responsibility still connected to real control?
- Does the system become lighter as maturity increases?
- Does the person become more capable outside the system, or only inside it?

A system that cannot answer these questions should not be trusted merely because it is helpful. Help can still capture.

13. Design Principles for Agency-Preserving Support

8. Design for restoration, not permanent dependence.
9. Keep the human's authority visible and active.
10. Make refusal safe, clear, and timely.
11. Return memory to the person in usable form.
12. Explain actions and recommendations in language the person can internalize.
13. Reduce low-value load without replacing high-value judgment.
14. Measure whether capacity increases over time.
15. Prevent support systems from becoming identity gates.
16. Keep responsibility connected to actual control.
17. Make the support system lighter as agency strengthens.

14. Practical Examples

Domain	Agency-Preserving Support	Dependency Capture Risk
AI assistant	Summarizes options and keeps user approval live.	Acts as hidden memory, voice, and decision-maker.
Healthcare	Explains care paths and preserves patient participation.	Moves patient through process without usable understanding.
Religion	Restores conscience, repentance, truth, and direct relation to God.	Makes belonging and spiritual validity dependent on institutional recognition.
Workplace	Gives tools, training, and authority to act well.	Creates workflows where employees comply without judgment.
Education	Builds skill and discernment.	Teaches dependency on rubrics, systems, or approval signals.
Recovery	Restores self-control and truthful responsibility.	Makes the person dependent on external validation to act.

15. Conclusion

Dependency capture is one of the most subtle forms of agency loss because it often begins as genuine help. It does not attack agency from the outside. It absorbs agency through support. It replaces capacity while claiming to restore capacity. It becomes necessary by making the person less able to act without it.

HAPI must therefore judge support systems by their restoration trajectory. The question is not simply whether a system helps. The question is whether the person becomes more capable of meaningful participation over time.

The highest form of support is not permanent control. The highest form of support is restored agency.

A true support system gives capacity back. A captured support system keeps capacity inside itself. HAPI exists to tell the difference, audit the difference, and build systems that restore human agency instead of replacing it.

Appendix A: Key Propositions

18. Dependency capture occurs when support relocates agency functions into itself and makes the person less able to act without it.
19. Not all dependence is capture. Healthy dependence restores capacity over time.
20. Support becomes dangerous when it reduces burden while weakening understanding, refusal, memory, or authority.
21. The capture loop is self-justifying because the more agency the system absorbs, the more necessary the system appears.
22. AI assistants can restore agency by reducing low-value load, or capture agency by replacing memory, judgment, and execution.
23. Institutions capture agency when recognition, legitimacy, memory, and refusal are controlled by the institution rather than preserved for the person.
24. A true gate restores agency. A false gate expands its own necessity.
25. Agency-preserving support should become lighter as human capacity grows.

Appendix B: Glossary

Term	Definition
Agency	Meaningful participation through understanding, choice, refusal, revision, action, memory, and accountability.

Support	A structure that helps restore or extend human capacity while preserving human authority.
Dependency capture	The process by which support becomes necessary by absorbing the agency it was meant to restore.
Healthy dependence	Bounded or developmental reliance that increases capacity over time.
False gate	A boundary or authority structure that captures agency, blocks rightful passage, or claims authority it does not possess.
Restoration trajectory	The observable direction of a support relationship: toward greater agency or greater dependence.