

Buy / Boost / Build

Choose the lightest intervention that solves the real workflow problem. Custom AI is one option, not the default.

Core idea: Start with the business need and constraints. Then compare whether to buy an existing product, boost an existing workflow/tool with AI, build something custom, run a limited pilot, or do nothing yet.

The decision path

- 1 Is the problem important enough?** If the pain is small, rare, or unmeasured, first improve the baseline or process. Do not start with technology selection.
- 2 Does an existing product solve most of the workflow?** If yes, compare buying/configuring it before creating custom software.
- 3 Is the current tool/workflow already good, but missing one useful AI capability?** If yes, boost it with a bounded assistant, retrieval layer, automation, or integration.
- 4 Is the workflow differentiated, tightly integrated, or control-heavy enough to justify custom work?** If yes, build - but only the parts that genuinely need to be custom.
- 5 Is uncertainty still too high?** Run a small pilot or discovery spike before committing to any of the three.

What each option is good at

BUY

Best when: the workflow is common, time-to-value matters, and an existing product meets most requirements.

Tradeoff: less control, vendor constraints, recurring cost, lock-in.

BOOST

Best when: users already live in a useful system/process and AI can remove a specific bottleneck without replacing it.

Tradeoff: integration limits and inherited platform constraints.

BUILD

Best when: the workflow, data, controls, or differentiation justify owning the experience and system behavior.

Tradeoff: maintenance, evaluation, observability, security, and ongoing product ownership.

Do not skip "do nothing" or "pilot first." A real problem can still be a poor automation target, and a good AI idea can still be premature because the data, process, or adoption path is not ready.

Buy / Boost / Build

Compare options with the same criteria so the recommendation is about fit, not enthusiasm.

Comparison checklist

Criterion	Questions to ask
Workflow fit	How much of the real workflow is covered, including exceptions and handoffs?
Integration	Can it connect to the systems, data, identity, and actions that matter?
Data + privacy	What data leaves the company? Retention, training use, permissions, residency, auditability?
Control	Can we define human approval, permissions, fallback behavior, and prohibited actions?
Observability + evals	Can we inspect failures, measure quality, and verify changes over time?
Time to value	How quickly can users get a meaningful improvement, not just a demo?
Total cost	Licensing + implementation + model use + support + maintenance + change management.
Lock-in + portability	How hard would it be to change vendor, model, or architecture later?
Adoption	Does the option fit how people already work, or require a new destination and behavior?

Recommendation format

Recommend: Buy / Boost / Build / Pilot / Do nothing yet.

Because: 2-3 evidence-backed reasons tied to workflow fit, value, and risk.

Main tradeoff: the most important downside you are accepting.

What would change the call: missing evidence, threshold, or constraint that could flip the recommendation.

Common trap

Comparing a polished vendor product with a hypothetical custom build as if both are equally known. Label assumptions and uncertainty.

Useful PM move

Use a small real workflow to test the leading option before broad rollout. Measure user effort, quality, exceptions, and operational burden.

The best option is the one that solves enough of the real problem with acceptable risk and ownership - not the one with the most AI in it.