



BUILD VS BUY DECISION MATRIX

A practical scoring guide for deciding when to build, buy, or use a hybrid approach for AI-enabled workflow capability.

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HOW TO USE THE MATRIX

Use it to structure judgment

Use this matrix to organize a build, buy, or hybrid decision before committing to a vendor, custom implementation, or internal project. It supports judgment; it does not replace vendor review, security review, legal review, procurement review, or the operational knowledge of the team that owns the workflow.

- Start by naming the workflow, the users, the systems involved, and the decision the AI capability is expected to support.
- Apply the hard gates first: data sensitivity and confidentiality, then compliance and contractual obligations.
- If a hard gate fails, do not average it into the score. Change the architecture, change the vendor, narrow the scope, or stop.
- After the hard gates pass, score the remaining decision dimensions from 1 to 5 and compare build, buy, and hybrid paths.

Default scoring posture

EQUAL WEIGHT UNLESS THE WORKFLOW SAYS OTHERWISE

Use equal weighting as the default. Adjust weights only when the workflow has a clear reason, such as unusual integration burden, high portability risk, or a short time-to-value requirement.



SCORING MATRIX

EIGHT-DIMENSION SCORING MATRIX

Decision dimensions

DIMENSION	WHAT TO ASSESS	DECISION SIGNALS
Workflow fit	Whether an existing product supports the actual workflow, roles, exceptions, and review path.	BUILD: The workflow is specialized to the organization's specific operations or deeply embedded in existing internal logic. BUY: The workflow maps cleanly to an established product. HYBRID: The product covers the base workflow but needs custom orchestration or integration.
Data sensitivity and confidentiality	Whether the data includes confidential, regulated, privileged, customer, employee, or contract-restricted information.	BUILD: Viable only if owned architecture can satisfy the required data boundary. BUY: Viable only if vendor terms, controls, and data routing satisfy the boundary. HYBRID: Useful when sensitive paths stay owned while lower-risk layers use vendor capability.
Integration complexity	APIs, data schemas, permissions, event triggers, identity, and upstream system reliability.	BUILD: Integration is the product. BUY: Supported connectors are mature. HYBRID: A purchased tool needs custom integration glue.
Customization depth	How much behavior, workflow logic, UI, reporting, or review process must differ from default software behavior.	BUILD: Custom logic is core to value. BUY: Configuration is enough. HYBRID: The platform is useful but needs custom workflow extensions.
Internal technical capability	Whether the team can build, operate, secure, monitor, and maintain the capability after launch.	BUILD: Internal ownership is realistic. BUY: Ownership would overload the team. HYBRID: Internal staff can own orchestration while a vendor covers commodity layers.
Time-to-value	How quickly the workflow needs useful capability.	BUILD: Time pressure is low and long-term control matters. BUY: Speed matters more than deep tailoring. HYBRID: Buy the first layer while building the durable integration path.
Vendor lock-in and portability	Data export, model or provider portability, workflow migration, termination rights, and switching cost.	BUILD: Portability is strategically important. BUY: Switching cost is acceptable for the value. HYBRID: Isolate the vendor behind internal interfaces or owned data layers.
Total cost of ownership	License or usage fees, integration work, maintenance, support, governance, training, monitoring, and migration risk.	BUILD: High vendor usage costs at scale, recurring per-seat or per-transaction fees that compound over the engagement, or vendor pricing that does not track to the organization's value capture. BUY: Vendor economics are better than internal operating cost. HYBRID: Mixed ownership reduces cost without giving up critical control.



READING THE RESULT + COST-OF-OWNERSHIP TEMPLATE

Hard gates first

Data sensitivity, confidentiality, compliance, and contractual obligations are hard gates. They are not ordinary scoring categories. A vendor or architecture that cannot satisfy the required data boundary should not be rescued by high scores on speed, cost, or feature fit.

- Pass: the option can satisfy the data boundary, confidentiality requirements, and compliance obligations with evidence.
- Revise: the option may work if scope, architecture, vendor terms, or data routing changes.
- Fail: the option cannot satisfy the boundary or the evidence is not strong enough for the workflow risk.

Interpreting scores

- Build tends to fit when workflow specificity, customization depth, portability, and long-term control matter more than immediate speed.
- Buy tends to fit when the workflow is common, vendor capability is mature, integrations are supported, and the risk boundary is acceptable.
- Hybrid tends to fit when a vendor solves the commodity layer but the organization still needs owned integration, orchestration, data routing, or review logic.

Cost-of-ownership prompts

- License or usage fees: seats, calls, documents, messages, tokens, storage, or transaction volume.
- Integration work: APIs, data cleanup, permissions, identity, event flows, reporting, and testing.
- Maintenance: monitoring, prompt or workflow updates, vendor changes, model changes, and user support.
- Support and governance: training, documentation, access review, incident response, quality control, and owner time.
- Migration risk: data export, workflow portability, switching cost, termination rights, and internal knowledge capture.



ILLUSTRATIVE SCENARIOS

EXAMPLE SCENARIOS + NEXT STEP

Three workflow examples

These scenarios are illustrative planning examples, not Butler Agency engagements. They show how the same matrix can point to different decisions depending on workflow risk, ownership, integration burden, and operating context.

- Regulated workflow: hard gates are strict, confidentiality is high, review path matters, and auditability is required. Likely recommendation: build or hybrid, especially if vendor terms or data routing cannot satisfy the boundary.
- Internal operations workflow: sensitivity is moderate, speed matters, and the workflow is mostly internal. Likely recommendation: buy or hybrid if an existing tool fits the base workflow and custom integration can remain lightweight.
- Customer-facing support or intake workflow: response speed matters, quality control matters, and handoff failures are visible. Likely recommendation: hybrid when a vendor can handle common interactions but owned review, escalation, and data routing logic are still needed.

Next step

TURN THE RECOMMENDATION INTO AN IMPLEMENTATION BRIEF

After the matrix points toward build, buy, or hybrid, write a one-page brief that names the workflow, hard-gate evidence, selected path, owner, integration boundary, review path, cost assumptions, and the first decision checkpoint.