Build vs buy in the AI era: a decision framework for leaders

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Build-or-buy has always been a question about what is core to your business. AI changes some of the costs, but not the logic.

TL;DR The short version

- Build or buy is still a question about what is core to your business; AI changes some costs but not the logic.
- Build what sets you apart, buy what everyone needs, and be honest about whether you can keep the skills.
- AI lowers the cost of writing code but not of owning it, so buy the commodity layer and keep a clean seam to the part you build.

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Questions to ask

- **Is it a differentiator?** Build what sets you apart; buy what everyone needs.
- **Do we have the skills, and will we keep them?**
- **What is the total cost,** including running, updating and supporting it?
- **What is the exit?** How hard is it to leave a vendor, or to hand over what you built?
- **What data is involved,** and where may it go?

What AI changes

- It lowers the cost of writing some code, but not of owning it.
- It makes models, not just software, something you can buy.
- It adds new ways to depend on a vendor: models, prompts and data.

A middle path

Buy the commodity layer, build the part that carries your logic and data, and keep the seam between them clean so either side can change.

Related credential: Portfolio Technical Practitioner. Explore the exam facts and syllabus.

Sources and further reading

1. IICTP. Portfolio Technical Practitioner credential page. iictp.org/certifications/pftp.

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