

The 2026 AI operating-model checklist

The five moves that turn an AI tool list into an operating model, on one page you can take into a planning meeting.

BEFORE YOU BUY ANOTHER TOOL

- ☐ Write the business outcome first, in one sentence, before any tool is named
- ☐ Name the team whose work the outcome changes, not the software it runs on
- ☐ Confirm the outcome is one you already measure, so return on investment (ROI) is provable later

BASELINE, SO THE PILOT CAN BE JUDGED

- ☐ Record today's cost, cycle time, and quality for the target workflow
- ☐ Set the threshold the pilot must clear to graduate past a trial
- ☐ Decide who reads the result and who can kill or scale the pilot

REDESIGN THE WORKFLOW, NOT JUST THE STEP

- ☐ Map the whole workflow, then move the AI to the slowest, most repeated step
- ☐ Remove the handoffs the tool makes redundant, do not automate them in place
- ☐ Rewrite the role, so a person reviews and decides rather than produces

EMBED GOVERNANCE THAT SPEEDS THE TEAM UP

- ☐ Assign decision rights for when AI execution becomes the default
- ☐ Write the review rule as a gate the work passes, not a form it fills in
- ☐ Log what the model did, so a bad call can be traced and corrected

BUY TO THE SPEC, LAST

- ☐ Shortlist tools against the outcome and the workflow you just redesigned
- ☐ Run the baseline test on each, and keep the one that clears the threshold
- ☐ Re-baseline every quarter, because the model and the market both move