

THE VENDOR LOCK-IN CHECKLIST

Run this before any AI commitment. The day a vendor changes its price or terms, your switching cost is organizational, not technical – so build the exits in before you roll out.

THE THREE QUESTIONS

- 1. If this vendor doubled its price or degraded tomorrow, what is our move?
- 2. Can we swap the model without rebuilding the product?
- 3. Who owns the data, the prompts, and the workflows – us or the vendor?

WHICH LAYER TRAPS YOU

MOVABLE → STUCK

Cloud / infrastructure	– movable, cloud-to-cloud
Data (warehouse, formats)	– movable, like a cloud migration
Agentic layer	– sticky: rebuild on a move
People / adoption	– stickiest: switching means retraining humans

KEEP YOUR LEVERAGE

- ☐ Own your data; abstract the model behind a gateway, so a swap becomes a config change.
- ☐ Invest in portable context and skills, not vendor-proprietary ones.
- ☐ Blend models: frontier for hard work, open-weight or small models for narrow, high-volume work.
- ☐ Put data, prompt, and workflow portability on exit into the contract.

AI lock-in is worse than SaaS or cloud – only ERP rivals it – because it embeds at the people level. Keep the exits open.