

THE BUDGET IS RUNNING ON ANXIETY.

The fear of being late is making leaders buy the wrong things

Being late costs less than buying wrong. The parts of AI that cannot be bought quickly later are the parts anxiety skips.

THREE THINGS THIS COVERS

01 What the fear produces

Four purchases made before anyone names the decision they should improve

02 What being late costs

Smaller than it feels, and in a different place than people look

03 An order of operations

Five steps that protect a budget from its owner's anxiety

THE FEAR ARRIVES WITH A DEADLINE

Most fears about AI are vague. This one has a date on it.

- **A competitor's press release**
- **A vendor price that expires at quarter end**
- **A board meeting five weeks away**

A deadline asks for an action that can be reported. The fastest one is a purchase.

BUYING BEFORE UNDERSTANDING

64%

**of CEOs say the risk of falling behind
drives investment before they
understand the value**

Only 37% say fast and wrong beats right and slow. IBM Institute for Business Value, 2025 CEO Study, 2,000 CEOs in 33 countries.

WHAT THE PACE LEAVES BEHIND

50%

say the pace of recent investment left them with disconnected, piecemeal technology

Only 25% of their AI initiatives delivered the expected return, and 16% scaled enterprise-wide. IBM, 2025 CEO Study.

FOUR PURCHASES ANXIETY MAKES

01 A platform before a use case

A team then has to find work for a cost already incurred

02 Licences for everyone

Broad adoption on the report, a stalled dashboard in practice

03 An agent that is a relabelled product

Gartner estimates about 130 of thousands of agentic vendors are real

04 A pilot sized to be announced

It succeeds as a slide and teaches nothing

LATE COMPARED WITH WRONG

Following is usually cheaper than leading.

What being late costs

You pay less for access

You buy a more mature product

You read the early buyers' cancellations first

What buying wrong costs

Renewals nobody owns

Integration to unwind

Data held on terms nobody read

Credibility with your own people

AN ORDER OF OPERATIONS

1 Name the decision

Which decision improves, who makes it, and the number that shows it

2 Check readiness

Data, skills, process ownership, leadership attention

3 Check the data

It exists, someone owns it, and it can leave on your terms

4 Pilot with an exit written in advance

A stopping rule agreed before the pilot starts

5 Sign a contract you can leave

Short term, clear exit, your data returned

THE PRACTICAL RULE

Be early on the foundations and late on the purchases.

These take a year or more to build, and none of them can be bought at the last minute:

- **Clean, owned, well-described data**
- **A team that can evaluate a model's output**
- **A governance process that approves a use case in weeks**

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Anxiety buys products. It skips the decision the product was meant to improve.

Before the next purchase order, write down the decision it improves and the number that will show it. If that takes more than a day, the purchase was not ready.



Terence Kok

AI & Innovation Strategist

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