

MANAGEMENT BRIEFING

AI Roadmap for German Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) 2026

From pilot project to controlled operations — a structured basis for executive decision-making.

2026 will decide whether AI moves from pilot into operations

In 2026, AI is no longer a matter of experimentation — it is an operational and leadership priority.

Many companies already use AI — **scaling** remains the real hurdle.

Value comes not from individual tools but from **strategy, data, processes, adoption and governance**.

Measurable value appears above all where **workflows are redesigned**.



The roadmap begins with business goals

Every AI initiative needs a measurable goal.

- Typical goals: faster customer response, less search time, better quotes, fewer follow-up queries.
- No project without a baseline, target value and owner.

Goal	KPI	Baseline	90-Day Target	Owner
Faster customer response	Avg. response time	6 hrs	< 1 hr	Sales
Less search time	Search time / empl. · day	45 min	< 15 min	Operations
Better quotes	Turnaround time	3 days	< 1 day	Back office
Fewer follow-up queries	Follow-up rate	30%	< 12%	Customer service

Example target values — defined per company in the Digital Check.

GUIDING QUESTION

What is measurably better in operations after 90 days?

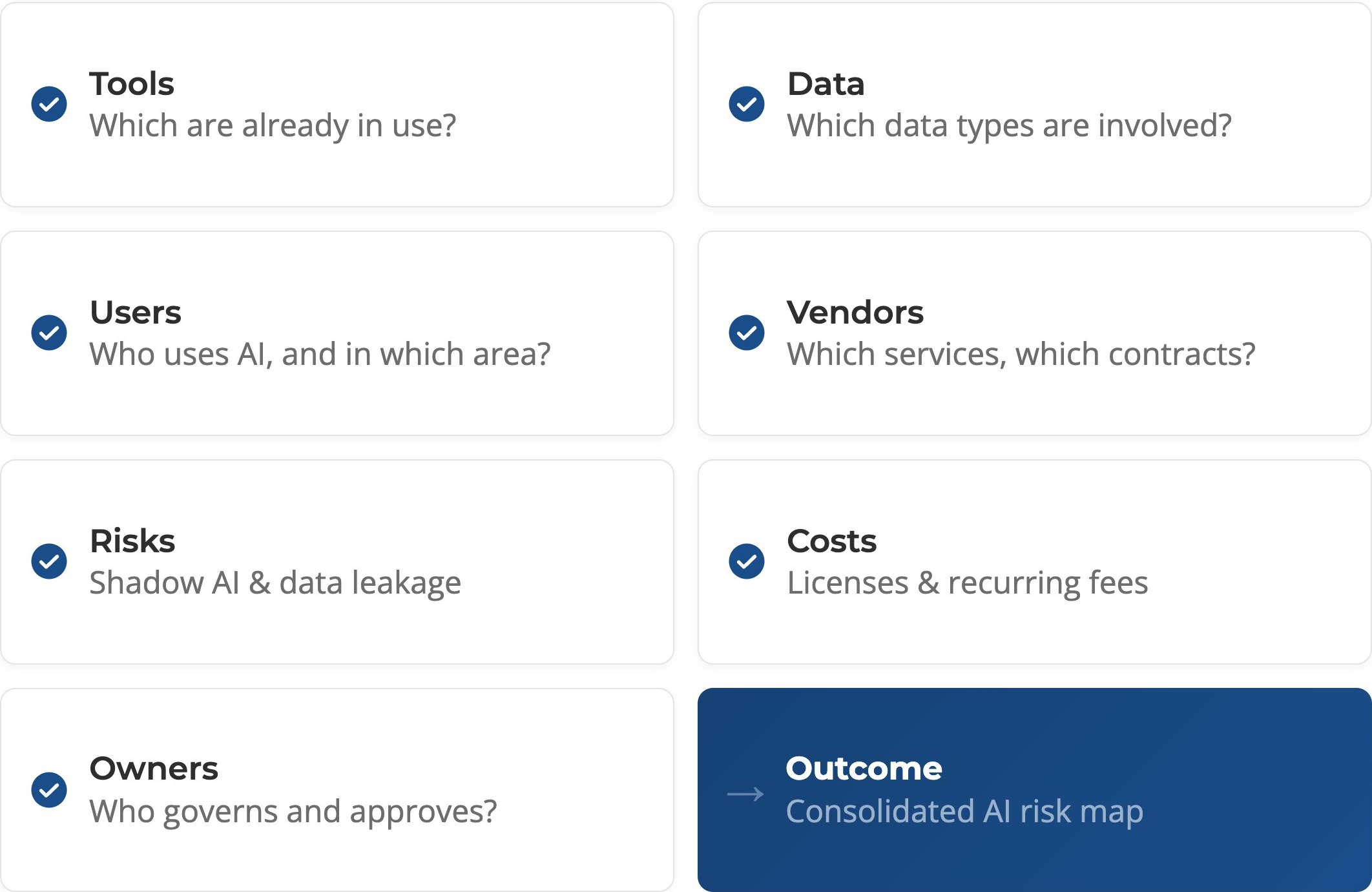
Inventory and risk map

01

Before new projects, it must be clear where AI is already in use.

- | **Shadow AI**, individual licenses and uncontrolled tools are a real risk.
- | To review: tools, data types, departments, vendors, access, costs.
- | Systematic risk management through governance, measurement and control.

Framework: NIST AI Risk Management Framework.



Prioritize use cases, don't collect them

A few strong use cases beat many half-baked ones.

Good starting points

Knowledge search, customer communication, quotes, documentation, internal assistance.

Not yet suitable

Automated decisions, legal commitments, price negotiations, personnel data.



Prioritization: Value · Data availability · Risk · Feasibility.

Making company knowledge AI-ready

Without reliable data, AI stays unreliable.

Sources: templates, quotes, policies, project documentation, FAQs, service notes.

Before use: remove duplicates, assign owners, review access, ensure content is current.

QUALITY CRITERIA BEFORE DEPLOYMENT

✓ **Current**

Kept up to date, nothing outdated.

✓ **Complete**

No gaps in the sources.

✓ **Approved**

Reviewed and confirmed for content.

✓ **Authorized**

Access managed by role.

✓ **Versioned**

Traceable revision history.

✓ **Findable**

Clearly structured and named.

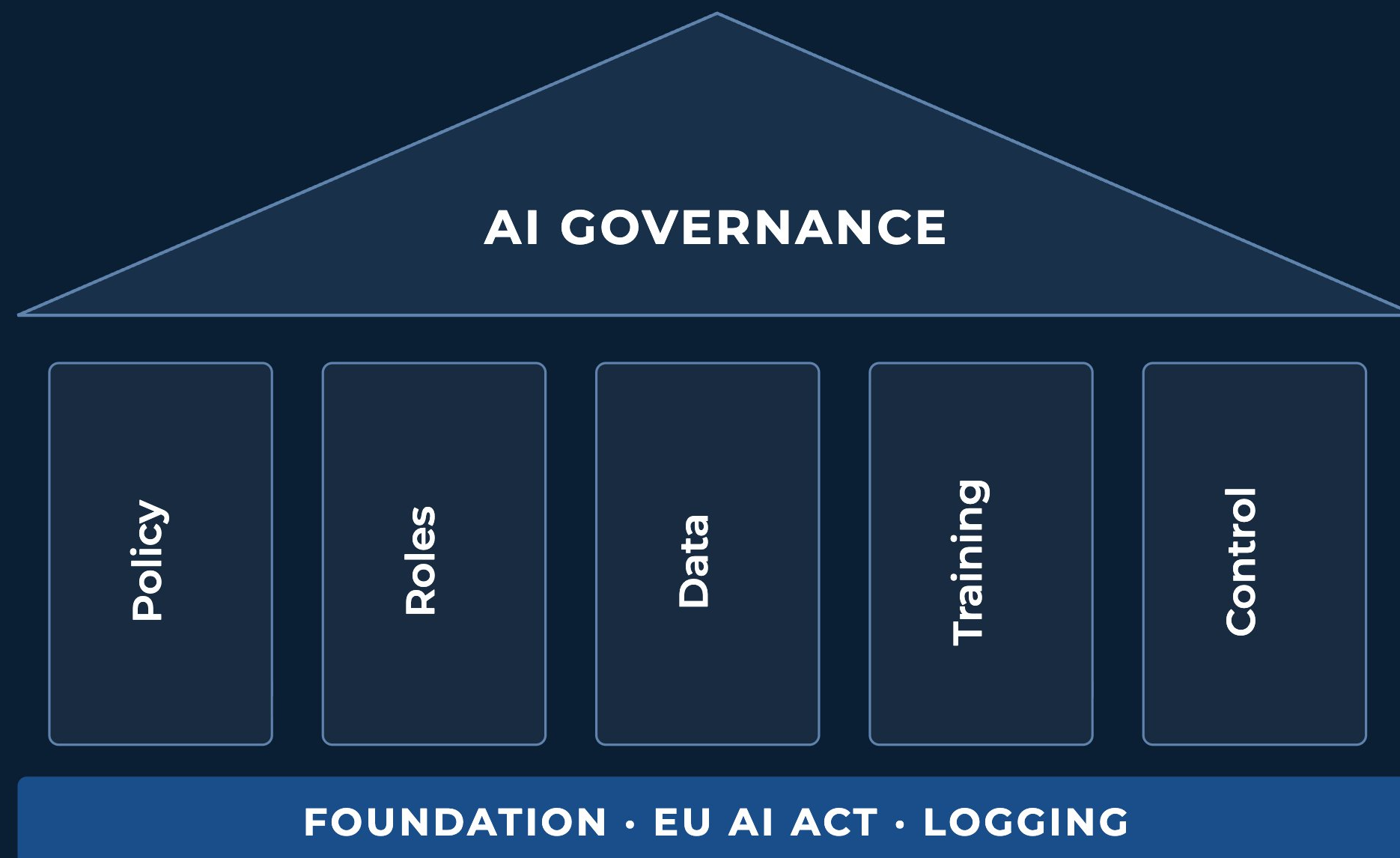
Source: Gartner — secure, scalable AI platforms & cost control, 2026.

Plan for governance and the EU AI Act

In 2026, AI needs binding rules.

The **EU AI Act** has been in force since 1 August 2024 and is largely applicable from 2 August 2026.

Article 4 requires measures to ensure AI literacy for users and operators.



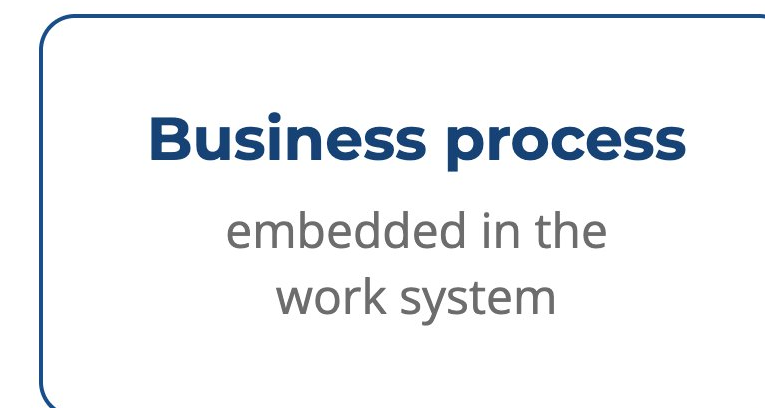
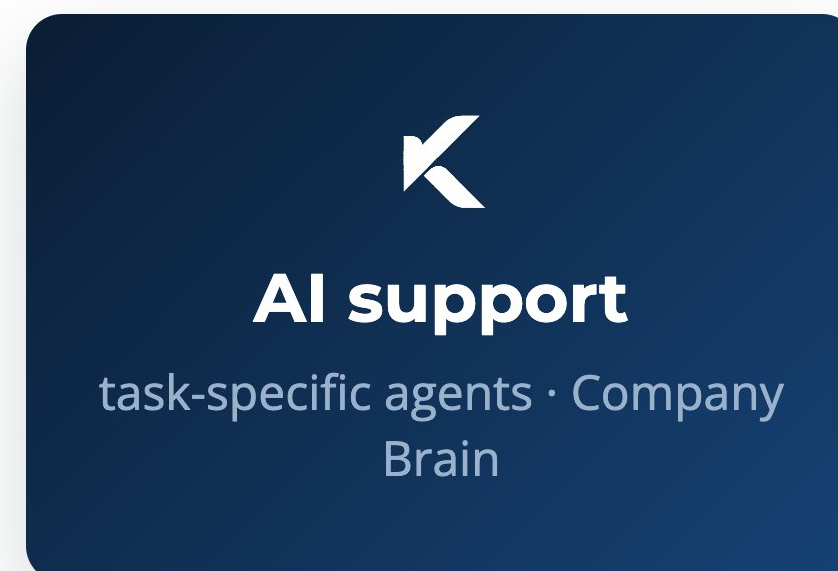
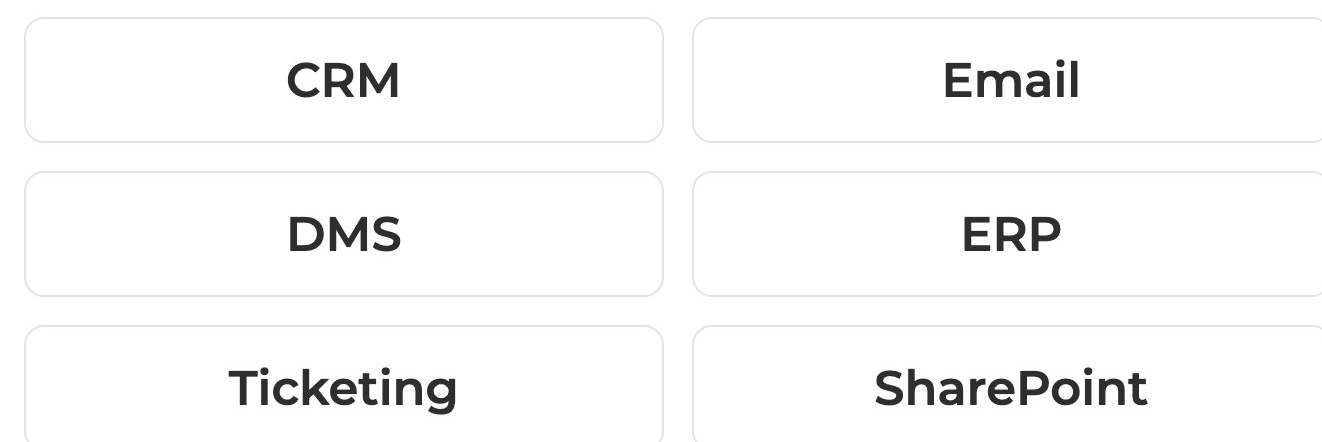
Legal framework: EU AI Act — applicable from 02 Aug 2026.

— PHASE 05 · INTEGRATION

Integration, not silos

AI must be embedded into existing work systems — otherwise it stays an extra task.

EXISTING SYSTEMS



Enable employees, govern usage

Roadmaps fail when users are not brought along.

Train hands-on: What may AI do? What may it not? How are results checked?

Managers need their own decision rules for approval, risk and value.

ENABLEMENT PROGRAM

✓ **Training**
Hands-on, not theoretical.

✓ **Practical cases**
Real tasks from daily work.

✓ **Approval paths**
Clear rules for use.

✓ **Prompt rules**
Reliable phrasing.

✓ **Error culture**
Results are always checked.

✓ **Feedback**
Feedback flows back in.

In 2026, AI literacy is not just change management but a **compliance requirement**.

Control operations, monitoring and costs

The pilot is not the goal — operations decide the ROI.

- Many initiatives remain in pilot status — without governance and a scaling model.
- The transition to production is difficult, especially in the mid-market.

Operational metric	Data source	Owner	Escalation
Response quality	Sampling / feedback	Department	Adjust prompt
Errors / hallucination	Error log	AI owner	Suspend use case
Cost / month	Billing dashboard	Controlling	Budget review
Usage / adoption	Usage statistics	Division lead	Reinforce training
Data access	Access log	Data protection / IT	Revoke access

Market view: transition pilot → production, 2026.

The 2026 roadmap on one page

Value, data, risk and operations across four quarters.

Q1 Foundation

- › Inventory
- › Risks
- › Policy
- › Use-case selection

Q2 Pilot

- › Data base
- › Pilot
- › Training
- › Data protection review

Q3 Operations

- › Integration
- › Operations
- › Monitoring
- › First scaling

Q4 Expansion

- › Portfolio decision
- › Cost control
- › Expansion

YOUR NEXT STEP

Set up your 2026 AI roadmap with structure

We assess

Use cases, data availability, risks, governance and the implementation path.

Result

A concise AI roadmap for executive leadership and departments.

Goal

Fewer experiments, more controlled value in operations.

Have your 2026 AI roadmap reviewed

KrambergAI GmbH

krambergai.com