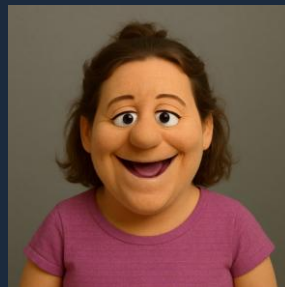




Copilots, Chaos and Control: Getting Real About AI Productivity



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The Challenge

Every organisation is asking the same question: where does AI add real value, and where does traditional automation deliver more for less?

Cost

Are we spending on AI where automation would cost less?

Value

Are we using AI where it genuinely creates new capability?

Growth

Are we building solutions that scale without constant rework?



Three Scenarios, Three Lessons

01

Automate, Don't Cogitate

Invoice processing where Power Automate outperforms M365 Copilot on cost and reliability

Power Automate Wins

02

Let AI Think

Report drafting from unstructured data where Copilot is the best solution

Copilot Wins

03

Better Together

Meeting actions to structured tasks where Copilot + Power Automate combine for best value

Combined Solution



SCENARIO 1

Automate, Don't Cogitate

Fault Report Processing

When a process is highly structured, repetitive, and needs zero human judgement, Automation is typically faster, cheaper and more reliable in what it does.



The Demo: Vendor Invoice Processing

What happens today

- Job requests arrive via email as PDF attachments
- Faults team manually opens each one
- Key fields are typed into the ERP or spreadsheet
- Engineers are booked via email
- Average processing time: 12 minutes per job request

Two approaches compared

M365 Copilot Approach

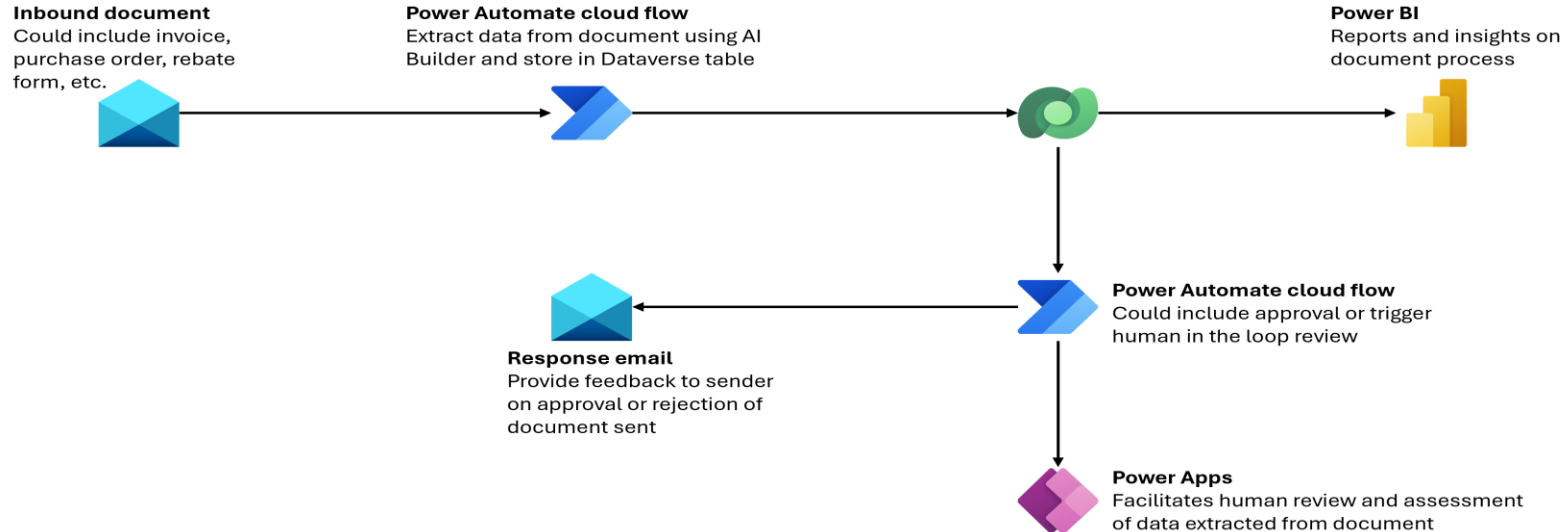
User prompts Copilot to read each job request, extract fields, and Human populates a table. Requires a person in the loop every time.

Power Automate Approach

Flow triggers on email arrival, AI Builder extracts fields, data lands in Dataverse, approval routes automatically. No human touch needed.



Architecture: Power Automate Invoice Flow





Value Analysis: Why Power Automate Wins Here

Benefits

- Runs 24/7 without human intervention
- Consistent, auditable results every time
- Scales from 10 to 10,000 job requests without extra cost
- No per-user AI licensing needed
- Built-in error handling and retry logic

Risks of Using Copilot Here

- Requires a person to prompt every single time
- AI output varies — same invoice may extract differently
- Per-user Copilot licence cost for a repetitive task
- No audit trail of the extraction logic
- Cannot run unattended or overnight

Value for Leaders

- Cost: Power Automate Premium is significantly lower per-process than Copilot licences
- Maintenance: Flow runs are logged, versioned, and easily updated
- Growth: Adding new job request types means adding a template, not retraining staff



SCENARIO 2

Let AI Think

Drafting a Client Proposal from Unstructured Data

When the task requires understanding context, synthesising information from multiple sources, and producing original content, M365 Copilot excels.



The Demo: Client Proposal from Messy Inputs

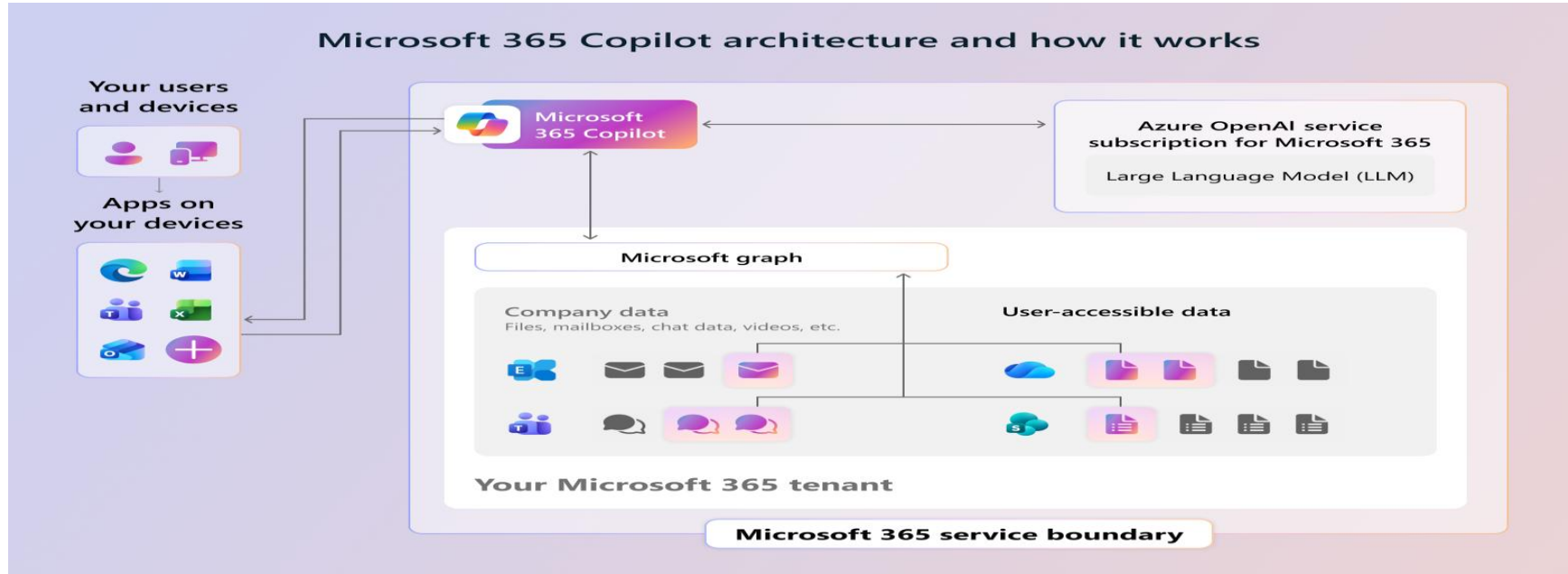
The situation

- A field engineer needs to create a report following a site visit.
- The content includes, parts used, description of work done including photos.
- Further work needs to be captured including parts, skills and additional details
- Time taken and miles driven

Why Power Automate can't do this

- No structured data to route — inputs are unstructured text
- Requires semantic understanding and reasoning, not rule-based logic
- Output needs to be original prose, not data movement
- Every report is unique — there is no repeatable path
- This is cognitive work, not process execution

Architecture: M365 Copilot Grounding





Value Analysis: Why Copilot Wins Here

Benefits

- Reduces report creation time from hours to minutes
- Synthesises across documents, transcripts, and emails in one prompt
- Grounds responses in your own tenant data via Microsoft Graph
- Human stays in the loop to review and refine
- Learns from your organisational context over time

Risks of Automating This

- Power Automate cannot reason over unstructured data
- Building a flow for every report format is impractical
- No two reports follow identical logic paths
- Automation would produce rigid templates, not tailored content
- Maintenance burden grows with every edge case

Value for Leaders

- Cost: Copilot licence pays for itself if each user saves 2+ hours per week on synthesis
- Maintenance: No flows to maintain — the AI adapts to new inputs naturally
- Growth: New field engineers produce quality reports from day one



SCENARIO 3

Better Together

Meeting Actions to Structured Tasks

AI understands the conversation and extracts intent.

Power Automate takes that intent and executes reliably across systems.



The Demo: From Meeting to Action in Minutes

How it works

- 1 The Brain:** Copilot reads the Teams meeting transcript and extracts action items, owners, due dates, and risks
- 2 The Handoff:** Copilot passes the structured data to a Power Automate plugin or connector
- 3 The Hands:** Power Automate creates Planner tasks, updates Dataverse records, and posts a summary to Teams

Why neither tool alone is enough

Copilot alone: Can extract the actions but cannot reliably create tasks in Planner, update Dataverse, and notify a channel in a governed, repeatable way.

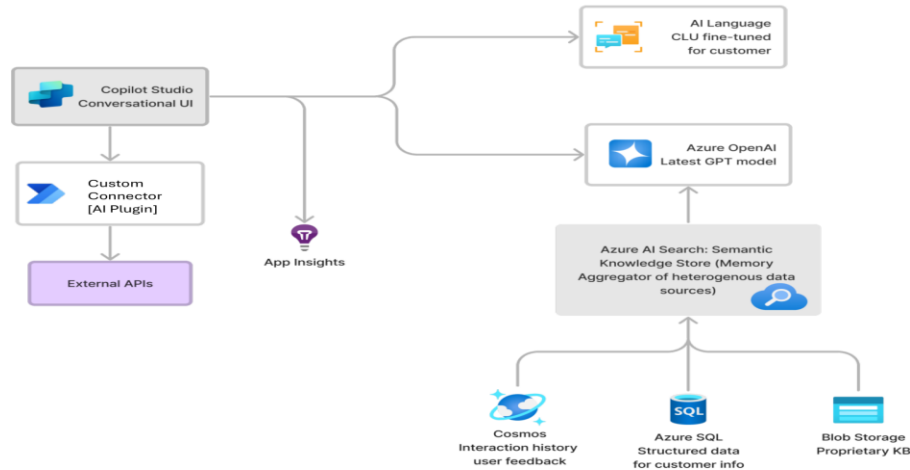
Power Automate alone: Can create the tasks but cannot understand a free-form transcript to identify what the actions actually are.

Demo tip: Run a quick mock meeting, show Copilot extracting actions, then show the Planner board populating automatically via Power Automate.



Architecture: Copilot + Power Automate

Sample reference architecture: chatbot in Copilot Studio with Azure extensibility





Value Analysis: Why Combined Wins Here

Benefits

- AI handles the cognitive work — understanding messy conversation
- Automation handles the precise execution across multiple systems
- Human stays in the loop for review before execution
- Governance built into the flow, not dependent on user discipline
- Entire process takes minutes instead of hours of admin

Risks to Manage

- Two technologies to licence and maintain
- Plugin configuration requires initial technical investment
- AI extraction accuracy must be validated for your domain
- Change management needed for teams to trust the handoff
- DLP policies must cover both Copilot and Power Automate

Value for Leaders

- Cost: justified when the alternative is hours of manual admin after every meeting
- Maintenance: Copilot adapts naturally; the flow handles the deterministic steps
- Growth: pattern replicates to any meeting-to-action scenario across the business



The Decision Framework

Ask these questions before choosing your approach

Question	Power Automate	M365 Copilot	Both Together
Is the input structured?	Yes — data fields, forms, files	No — free text, transcripts	Mix of both
Does the process vary each time?	No — same steps, same logic	Yes — judgement needed	AI decides, flow executes
Does it need to run unattended?	Yes — 24/7 background	No — human triggers it	AI triggers, flow runs
Is the output original content?	No — data routing, records	Yes — drafts, summaries	AI creates, flow distributes
What matters most to the business?	Cost reduction, consistency	Quality, speed of thought	Best of both: speed + control



Cost and Scalability at a Glance

~£30

**M365 Copilot
per user / month**

Best for knowledge workers
who synthesise and create

~£12

**Power Automate Premium
per user / month**

Best for process workers
and unattended operations

2-5x

**ROI multiplier
when combined**

AI handles understanding;
automation handles execution

Prices are approximate UK list prices as of April 2026 and may vary by agreement.

Governance, Maintenance, and Growth

The real cost of a solution is not the build — it is the years of running it.



Governance Checklist

- DLP policies must cover both Copilot and Power Automate connectors
- Environment strategy separates dev, test, and production
- CoE Starter Kit monitors flow usage, errors, and Copilot adoption
- Managed Environments enforce sharing limits and solution checker
- Audit logging captures both AI prompts and flow run history

Building for Growth

- Power Automate: reusable child flows reduce duplication
- Copilot: prompt libraries standardise quality across teams
- Combined: patterns become templates others can adopt
- ALM pipelines promote tested solutions from dev to production
- Citizen developers extend solutions with guardrails in place



Key Takeaways

- 1 Not every problem needs AI.** Structured, repetitive processes run better and cheaper as automated flows.
- 2 AI excels at cognitive work.** Synthesis, reasoning, and content creation are where Copilot pays for itself.
- 3 The best solutions combine both.** AI understands intent; automation executes it reliably at scale.
- 4 Governance is non-negotiable.** DLP, environment strategy, and monitoring apply equally to AI and automation.
- 5 Build for the long term.** The cheapest solution to build is not always the cheapest to maintain and grow.