

CHAPTER 4

Cloud Adoption Framework in Practice

The Roadmap to Value

“Strategy without execution is the hallucination of success. Execution without strategy is a nightmare.”

EXECUTIVE PERSPECTIVE

I once sat across the table from a Chief Information Officer who had just received board approval for an eighty-million-euro cloud transformation programme.

“We have the budget,” she said. “We have executive support. We have the technology strategy. What we don’t have is confidence that we know how to do this without creating chaos.”

Her concern was justified. The organisation operated across fourteen countries. Decades of technical debt had accumulated through twelve distributed datacentres. Previous modernisation attempts had delivered infrastructure without value, technology without transformation.

This time needed to be different.

What she was describing—and what Nordic Ventures Group faces—is the gap between strategic intent and executable methodology. Organisations can articulate why transformation matters. They struggle to connect that understanding to the daily decisions that determine whether transformation succeeds.

Microsoft’s Cloud Adoption Framework addresses this gap. But it succeeds only when treated not as a technical reference document but as an operating model for enterprise change.

The framework provides the structure through which strategy becomes governance, governance becomes architecture, and architecture becomes measurable business value. Without such a framework, transformation initiatives fragment into disconnected projects, each optimising locally while the enterprise drifts strategically.

In this chapter, we deconstruct the framework journey for Nordic Ventures Group and demonstrate how organisations move from strategy to governance to realise their transformation objectives and transform IT into a strategic business enabler.

WHY THIS CHAPTER MATTERS

Enterprise cloud transformation fails more often than it succeeds.

This statement should concern every technology leader. Research consistently demonstrates that the majority of digital initiatives underperform expectations. Budgets expand. Timelines extend. Promised value remains perpetually in the future.

The technology typically works. The methodology is what fails.

The Cloud Adoption Framework addresses this failure pattern by providing a comprehensive, sequenced approach that connects business strategy to technical implementation. It ensures that organisations do not merely migrate infrastructure but actually transform their operating model.

For the Trusted Advisor, mastery of this framework is essential. It provides the common language through which conversations with executives, architects, engineers, and finance leaders become coherent. It establishes the checkpoints that ensure transformation remains aligned with business objectives. Most importantly, it creates the accountability structures that distinguish successful programmes from those that merely consume budget.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon completing this chapter, the reader will be able to:

1. Explain the six phases of the Cloud Adoption Framework and their interdependencies
2. Connect each framework phase to specific business outcomes
3. Apply the framework to rationalise a complex application portfolio
4. Design landing zone foundations that enable enterprise-scale governance
5. Establish continuous governance and management practices for sustained transformation

ACADEMIC FOUNDATION

The Cloud Adoption Framework synthesises insights from several complementary disciplines that have shaped modern thinking about technology strategy and organisational transformation.

Enterprise Architecture as Strategy

Jeanne Ross, Peter Weill, and David Robertson demonstrated that enterprise architecture provides the operating foundation for executing business strategy (Ross, Weill, and Robertson, 2006). Their research established that architectural maturity directly correlates with business agility and operational efficiency. Organisations with coherent technology platforms consistently outperform those with fragmented systems, regardless of the specific technologies employed.

The Cloud Adoption Framework operationalises this insight by positioning the landing zone as the strategic foundation upon which all subsequent transformation depends. The landing zone is not merely technical infrastructure; it is the architectural embodiment of organisational standards, governance policies, and operational practices.

Digital Transformation Research

George Westerman, Didier Bonnet, and Andrew McAfee showed that successful digital transformation requires simultaneous attention to technology capability and organisational change (Westerman, Bonnet, and McAfee, 2014). Organisations that excel at technology but neglect organisational dynamics create what the researchers termed “fashionistas”—companies with sophisticated technology initiatives that fail to generate business value.

The framework reflects this research by integrating governance, skills development, and operating model design alongside technical implementation. Each phase addresses both technical and organisational dimensions.

Strategic Mapping

Simon Wardley’s work on situational awareness and strategic mapping provides techniques for understanding the evolution of technology components and making appropriate sourcing decisions (Wardley, 2016). These concepts inform the framework’s approach to application rationalisation and the distinction between commodity services and differentiating capabilities.

Value Realisation

Research by John Thorp established that technology investments create value only when benefits are actively managed rather than assumed to materialise automatically (Thorp, 1998). The Cloud Adoption Framework incorporates this principle through its emphasis on measurable outcomes and continuous governance.

REAL ENTERPRISE STORY

The Framework That Prevented Failure

The transformation programme was eighteen months old and in crisis.

A European manufacturing conglomerate with operations in nineteen countries had launched an

ambitious cloud initiative. The approach had been project-driven: individual business units selected workloads for migration based on technical readiness and available budget.

The result was fragmentation at scale.

Multiple landing zones existed with inconsistent governance. Identity was scattered across several directories. Network connectivity varied by region. Security controls were implemented differently in each environment. Cost visibility was limited, and the organisation could not demonstrate whether transformation was delivering value.

“We’ve migrated over two hundred workloads,” the programme director told me, “and I cannot tell you whether we’re better off than when we started.”

The intervention required restructuring the entire programme around the Cloud Adoption Framework—not as a reference to be consulted occasionally, but as the operating model governing every decision.

Strategy established clear business drivers: cost reduction, regulatory compliance, and international expansion capability. These drivers became the criteria against which all subsequent decisions were evaluated.

Plan conducted comprehensive assessment of the application portfolio. This analysis revealed that thirty percent of applications could be retired immediately—eliminating unnecessary migration effort that would have consumed resources without creating value.

Ready consolidated the multiple landing zones into a single enterprise foundation with consistent governance, security, identity, and networking. This consolidation required rework, but the alternative—continued fragmentation—would have been far more expensive.

Adopt sequenced migrations according to business value and risk, ensuring that each wave delivered measurable outcomes rather than merely technical completion.

Govern and Manage established continuous oversight, ensuring that the transformed environment remained aligned with business objectives and that value

realisation could be demonstrated to executive leadership.

The restructured programme delivered its cost-reduction targets. More importantly, it created a foundation that could scale with the business rather than constraining future growth.

The lesson was clear: methodology determines outcome. Technical capability without strategic framework produces technical artefacts without business transformation.

THE CLOUD ADOPTION FRAMEWORK JOURNEY

The Cloud Adoption Framework organises transformation into six interconnected phases. Each phase serves a distinct purpose, but the phases are not strictly sequential. Organisations typically iterate across phases as understanding deepens and circumstances evolve.

Strategy

Strategy defines business drivers and establishes executive alignment around transformation objectives. The outcome is shared understanding of why transformation is necessary and what success looks like.

This phase is where the Trusted Advisor earns or loses the right to guide the transformation. The discipline to invest time in strategy alignment—rather than rushing toward technical implementation—distinguishes advisors who create lasting value from those who merely deliver projects.

Plan

Plan assesses the digital estate and develops a modernisation roadmap. The outcome is clarity about which workloads will move, in what sequence, and through what approach.

For organisations like Nordic Ventures Group, with approximately one hundred eighty applications including one hundred forty legacy systems, this phase prevents

the mistake of treating migration as an undifferentiated technical exercise.

Ready

Ready builds landing zones that provide a secure and scalable foundation. The outcome is an enterprise platform capable of hosting production workloads with appropriate governance, security, and operational capability.

The landing zone is not merely infrastructure. It is the architectural embodiment of organisational standards. Every workload deployed to the platform inherits these standards automatically.

Adopt

Adopt executes migration and modernisation activities. The outcome is business value realisation through workloads operating on the new platform.

This phase is where most organisations want to begin. The framework insists they arrive here only after the preceding phases have established the foundation for success.

Govern

Govern manages risk and compliance across the transformed environment. The outcome is sustainable growth with appropriate controls.

Governance in cloud environments must be continuous, automated, and measurable. Manual governance cannot scale with the velocity of cloud deployment.

Manage

Manage operates and optimises the environment continuously. The outcome is continuous improvement and ongoing value realisation.

Transformation is never finished. The environment must evolve with business requirements, technology capabilities, and organisational learning.

FRAMEWORK 4.1: THE CLOUD ADOPTION FRAMEWORK PHASES

Phase	Business Objective	Key Activities	Expected Outcome
Strategy	Define business drivers	Identify motivations, define outcomes, align leadership	Executive alignment
Plan	Assess digital estate	Inventory applications, rationalise portfolio, map dependencies	Modernisation roadmap
Ready	Build foundation	Design landing zones, establish governance, configure connectivity	Enterprise platform
Adopt	Migrate and modernise	Execute migrations, validate functionality, measure outcomes	Value realisation
Govern	Manage risk	Implement controls, monitor compliance, enforce standards	Sustainable growth
Manage	Operate and optimise	Monitor performance, respond to incidents, improve continuously	Continuous improvement

STRATEGY: DEFINING THE NORTH STAR

Before a single server is migrated, the organisation must establish why transformation is necessary.

Strategy is not a document produced by consultants. It is the shared understanding among executive leadership about what the organisation is trying to achieve and why the current operating model is insufficient.

I have observed organisations invest months in detailed migration planning before achieving this shared understanding. Invariably, they discover that different executives hold different assumptions about objectives, priorities, and success criteria. The resulting misalignment undermines every subsequent decision.

For Nordic Ventures Group, the strategic objectives are clear.

Cost Optimisation

The organisation seeks to move from a capital-intensive datacentre model to a flexible cloud operating model. Twelve distributed datacentres represent duplicated infrastructure, fragmented support, and recurring capital requirements. Consolidation can simplify this cost structure while improving capability.

Market Leadership

Beyond cost, the organisation needs the agility required for continued international expansion. The current technology landscape constrains the speed at which new markets can be entered and acquisitions can be integrated. A modern platform should accelerate rather than impede growth.

Compliance as Competitive Advantage

Compliance matters just as much: embedding NIS2 and GDPR requirements into the operating model rather than treating compliance as an afterthought. Strong compliance posture creates customer confidence, simplifies regulatory interactions, and enables expansion into markets with stringent requirements.

TRUSTED ADVISOR INSIGHT

The strategy phase is where the Trusted Advisor earns or loses credibility with executive leadership.

Technical consultants often attempt to accelerate through strategy toward technical implementation. They view strategy discussions as delays rather than foundations. This impatience reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how transformation succeeds.

Strategy establishes the criteria against which every subsequent decision will be evaluated. Should this application be retired or migrated? The answer depends on strategic objectives. Should this governance control be implemented? The answer depends on strategic risk tolerance. Should this investment be prioritised? The answer depends on strategic alignment.

Without clear strategy, these decisions become political negotiations rather than rational analyses. With clear strategy, they become straightforward applications of agreed principles.

The test of strategy completeness is simple: can every member of the executive leadership team articulate the same transformation objectives in consistent terms? If different executives describe different priorities, strategy work is incomplete.

Time invested in strategy alignment reduces rework, prevents scope creep, and creates the executive sponsorship required to sustain transformation through inevitable challenges.

PLAN: RATIONALISING THE DIGITAL ESTATE

Nordic Ventures Group operates approximately one hundred eighty applications, including one hundred forty legacy systems, across twelve datacentres.

Migrating everything without analysis is a recipe for failure.

I have witnessed organisations attempt this approach. They create migration factories that process workloads efficiently without discriminating between applications

that create value and applications that should cease to exist. The result is expensive modernisation of technical debt.

The Cloud Adoption Framework encourages deliberate decisions based on business value, technical feasibility, risk, and lifecycle.

The Six Rs of Rationalisation

Retire eliminates systems that no longer create sufficient value. For Nordic Ventures Group, this includes legacy reporting applications that have been superseded by modern analytics capabilities. Retired systems create immediate value by eliminating ongoing costs without requiring migration investment.

Retain keeps systems temporarily in their current location, typically because dependencies or constraints prevent immediate migration. For Nordic Ventures Group, this includes specialised factory systems that require careful transition planning.

Rehost moves systems to cloud infrastructure with minimal modification. This approach, sometimes called lift-and-shift, provides rapid migration but limited optimisation. It creates value through infrastructure consolidation but does not address application-level technical debt.

Replatform optimises systems with moderate changes during migration, taking advantage of managed services without fundamental redesign. For Nordic Ventures Group, this includes SAP and Dynamics workloads.

Refactor redesigns systems to leverage cloud-native capabilities. This approach requires greater investment but creates greater value. For Nordic Ventures Group, this includes AI and analytics platforms.

Replace substitutes existing systems with software-as-a-service alternatives. This approach is appropriate for commodity capabilities that do not differentiate the organisation.

The objective is not migration. The objective is business value. Each rationalisation decision should be evaluated

against the strategic objectives established during the strategy phase.

FRAMEWORK 4.2: APPLICATION RATIONALISATION CRITERIA

Assessment Dimension	Key Questions
Business Value	Does this application directly support strategic objectives? Does it create competitive differentiation? What is the consequence of application failure?
Technical Feasibility	What is the current architecture and supportability? Can it operate effectively in cloud infrastructure? What dependencies exist?
Risk Exposure	What compliance or regulatory requirements apply? What security controls are required? What availability requirements exist?
Economic Impact	What is the current total cost of ownership? What is the expected cost in target state? What is the migration cost?

READY: BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

The Ready phase is where the Blueprint of Scale becomes reality.

I use this phrase deliberately. A landing zone is not merely a collection of technical configurations. It is the architectural blueprint that will shape every subsequent deployment, every governance decision, every operational practice.

Organisations that underinvest in this phase discover their mistake months or years later, when they face the choice between accepting inconsistent governance or

undertaking expensive rework to establish the foundation they should have built initially.

Landing Zone Components

Governance encompasses management group hierarchy, subscription design, resource organisation, naming conventions, tagging standards, and policy definitions. These elements determine how resources are organised, controlled, and reported.

Security encompasses security baselines, threat protection, vulnerability management, encryption standards, and security monitoring. These elements establish the security posture that all workloads inherit.

Identity encompasses directory services, authentication methods, authorisation models, privileged access management, and identity governance. Identity is the control plane for cloud environments; its design has implications for every other component.

Networking encompasses connectivity architecture, network segmentation, traffic inspection, DNS services, and hybrid connectivity. These elements determine how workloads communicate with each other and with external systems.

Cost Management encompasses budget structures, cost allocation, resource tagging, usage monitoring, and optimisation practices. Without these elements, cloud costs become unpredictable and unaccountable.

Operational Excellence encompasses monitoring and alerting, backup and recovery, patch management, incident response, and change management. These elements determine how the environment will be operated after migration.

NORDIC VENTURES GROUP: LANDING ZONE REQUIREMENTS

For Nordic Ventures Group, the landing zone must accommodate specific requirements that reflect the organisation's complexity.

Multi-Country Operations

The landing zone must support operations across fourteen European countries with appropriate data residency, regulatory compliance, and regional autonomy within enterprise standards. Different countries have different requirements; the architecture must accommodate this variation without fragmenting governance.

Manufacturing Integration

The landing zone must provide secure connectivity to five production facilities, supporting operational technology integration while maintaining appropriate segmentation between IT and OT environments. Manufacturing environments have different security and availability requirements than corporate systems.

Existing Investment Integration

The landing zone must integrate with SAP, Dynamics 365, Microsoft 365, and existing identity infrastructure. The organisation has invested heavily in these platforms; the landing zone should amplify their value rather than creating parallel capabilities.

Scale and Agility

The landing zone must support rapid provisioning of new environments for expansion and acquisition. When the organisation enters a new market or acquires a company, the technology platform should accelerate integration rather than constrain it.

ADOPT: MIGRATION AND INNOVATION

Transformation occurs through two parallel streams: disciplined migration and targeted innovation.

These streams serve different purposes and require different approaches. Conflating them leads to confusion about objectives, inappropriate methods, and disappointed expectations.

Migration

Migration methodically moves workloads from existing datacentres to the cloud platform. The focus is on workloads that contribute most to technical debt, consume excessive operational resources, or block strategic initiatives.

Migration is not merely a technical activity. Each migration wave validates that the landing zone functions as designed, that operational processes are effective, and that business value is being realised.

The most dangerous migration is the one that succeeds technically while failing to deliver value. I have observed organisations migrate hundreds of workloads efficiently while failing to exit any datacentres. The cloud costs accumulated while on-premises costs continued unchanged.

Innovation

Innovation uses Azure capabilities to create new value that was not possible with the previous operating model. For Nordic Ventures Group, innovation opportunities include optimising factory operations through predictive maintenance, accelerating AI initiatives for quality improvement, improving decision-making through integrated analytics, and enabling new business capabilities through modern development practices.

Innovation should be staged appropriately. Organisations that pursue aggressive innovation before establishing solid foundations often create complexity without capturing value. The framework recommends proving the platform through migration before scaling innovation initiatives.

GOVERN AND MANAGE: CONTROL IN A CHANGING WORLD

Transformation is never finished.

This statement may seem obvious, but its implications are profound. Many organisations treat transformation as a programme with a defined end state. They invest heavily in migration, celebrate completion, and then

discover that the transformed environment requires ongoing attention they have not planned for.

Governance must become continuous, automated, and measurable.

Digital Guardrails

Effective governance in cloud environments requires automated controls that prevent non-compliant configurations rather than merely detecting them after deployment.

Azure Policy enforces organisational standards across all resources, preventing deployment of non-compliant configurations before they occur.

Management groups organise subscriptions into a hierarchy that enables consistent policy application and access control at scale.

Role-based access control ensures that identities have only the permissions required for their responsibilities, implementing the principle of least privilege.

Policy as code enables governance definitions to be version-controlled, tested, and deployed through the same disciplined processes used for application code.

Continuous Financial Operations

Achieving cost-reduction targets requires ongoing attention to cloud economics. Cloud costs are variable; they respond to consumption patterns, pricing changes, and resource decisions.

Financial operations, or FinOps, establishes the practices, processes, and cultural changes required to manage cloud costs effectively. Without FinOps, organisations discover that their business case assumptions diverge from actual experience.

FRAMEWORK 4.3: GOVERNANCE MATURITY MODEL

Maturity Level	Characteristics
Initial	Governance is reactive and inconsistent. Controls exist in some areas but not others. Compliance is achieved through manual effort.
Developing	Governance policies are documented but inconsistently enforced. Some automation exists. Compliance monitoring is improving.
Defined	Governance policies are comprehensive and consistently applied. Automation enforces standards. Compliance is continuously monitored.
Managed	Governance is measured and continuously improved. Controls are regularly validated. Evidence is automatically generated.
Optimising	Governance enables rather than constrains innovation. Controls adapt to changing requirements. Compliance is maintained with minimal friction.

THE BOARDROOM CONVERSATION

The Chief Financial Officer leaned forward in her chair.

“I’ve heard many technology presentations that promise transformation. Most of them delivered projects. Some of them delivered platforms. Very few delivered business value. How is this different?”

It was the right question—the question that every Trusted Advisor should welcome rather than fear.

“The difference,” I replied, “is that we’re not proposing to build technology. We’re proposing to build capability.”

I walked to the whiteboard and drew a simple diagram.

“Technology is what we deploy. Capability is what the organisation becomes able to do. The Cloud Adoption Framework distinguishes between them by insisting that every technology decision traces to a business outcome.”

I pointed to the first phase. “Strategy ensures that we agree on what outcomes matter before we discuss what technology to implement.”

I moved to the second. “Plan ensures that we understand our current estate well enough to make intelligent decisions about what to migrate, modernise, or retire.”

The third. “Ready ensures that we build a foundation capable of supporting enterprise-scale operations, not just initial migration.”

The fourth. “Adopt ensures that we realise value as we execute, not merely at some theoretical future date.”

The fifth and sixth. “Govern and Manage ensure that the value we create is sustained rather than eroded.”

The CFO nodded slowly. “And the cost reduction target?”

“Cost reduction is an outcome of the transformation, not its objective. If we pursue cost reduction directly, we optimise individual systems. If we pursue capability, cost reduction emerges naturally from consolidation, rationalisation, and operational efficiency.”

She smiled. “That’s the first time a technology presentation has made business sense to me.”

EXECUTIVE REFLECTION

The Cloud Adoption Framework succeeds when it becomes the organisation’s operating model for cloud transformation rather than a reference document consulted occasionally.

Consider whether your organisation demonstrates the following characteristics.

Does strategy drive technology decisions, or does technology drive strategy?

Can every migration initiative trace its justification to documented business objectives?

Is the landing zone treated as a strategic asset deserving continuous investment?

Is governance automated, continuous, and measurable?

Is value realisation actively tracked and reported to executive leadership?

Organisations that answer affirmatively to these questions are positioned for sustained transformation success. Those that cannot should address these gaps before scaling migration activities.

EXECUTIVE CHECKLIST

Strategy Alignment

1. Business drivers are documented and accepted by executive leadership
2. Success criteria are defined in measurable terms
3. Executive sponsorship is confirmed and visible

Portfolio Understanding

1. Application portfolio is inventoried completely
2. Rationalisation criteria have been applied to each application
3. Dependencies are mapped and understood

Foundation Readiness

1. Landing zone design is complete and validated
2. Governance, security, identity, and networking standards are defined
3. Operational processes have been validated through pilot deployments

Execution Planning

1. Migration roadmap is sequenced according to business value and risk
2. Innovation initiatives are staged appropriately

3. Skills and capacity are confirmed

Governance Sustainability

- 1. Governance controls are automated
- 2. Compliance is continuously monitored
- 3. Cost management practices are established

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Principle	Implication
Frameworks create confidence	Methodology reduces uncertainty and increases probability of success
Strategy must guide execution	Cloud transformation begins with business drivers, not technology selection
Landing zones are strategic assets	A weak foundation creates future complexity, cost, and risk
Governance enables innovation	Appropriate guardrails create freedom for teams to move quickly within safe boundaries
Transformation is continuous	Success requires ongoing optimisation, not merely initial implementation

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TRUSTED ADVISOR PRINCIPLE

Frameworks reduce uncertainty.

Leadership creates direction.

Architecture enables execution.

Governance sustains progress.

Business value justifies every investment.

The Trusted Advisor never forgets which one comes first.

Now that leadership understands the transformation framework, one question inevitably follows: How do we justify the investment?