Run, Enable, Drive.

Leading technology in mid-sized companies: three layers, three questions and one grid for clear ownership.

Dr Jeremy Celestin Schönwälder
A point of view from practice

schoenwaelder.ch

SUMMARY

A small technology organisation cannot be everything. It has to know what it runs, what it builds on and what it builds itself.

Mid-sized companies lead technology with few people, on platforms they do not own, and with expectations that grow every year. Run, Enable, Drive is the operating model I use to lead my own organisation. It assigns every task to one of three layers and gives each layer a mandate, a metric and an owner.

3
layers: run, build on, build new

3
questions to assign every task

1
metric per layer that the business understands

0
products and contracts without an owner in the business

Three statements

1. **Running, building on and building new are three different mandates.** Mix them, and you measure new things on operating cost and operations on innovation targets.
2. **Build yourself only what sets the company apart and has no standard solution.** Everything else is bought or solved on existing platforms.
3. **Every layer needs an owner in the business.** The technology organisation delivers. It does not silently take accountability for what belongs to a business function.

> **For context.** This paper describes a method from practice, not a study. I designed and introduced the model in a company within a corporate group. The transfer to mid-sized companies is my assessment. The research on ownership is covered in Point of view 01, "Ownership beats budget".

Few people, platforms owned by others, growing expectations.

Three conditions shape technology in mid-sized companies. Each is manageable on its own. Together, and without structure, they make everything equally urgent.

CONDITION 1

Small teams

A few people cover what corporations staff whole departments for. Every hour spent on an individual request is missing elsewhere.

CONDITION 2

Platforms owned by others

ERP, customer management and the digital workplace come from large vendors. The company does not own these products and has little influence on their roadmap. It therefore has to be a very clear customer.

CONDITION 3

Growing expectations

Automation, data and AI are added without anything being taken away. The budget rarely grows at the same rate.

What happens without structure

The technology organisation becomes a collection point. It runs systems, fulfils individual requests, leads projects that belong to business functions and carries costs that are not its own. The executive team sees only one figure: IT cost. What it is spent on and what it achieves remains unclear. The result is a discussion about the level of cost instead of its effect.

How it differs from a familiar model

Many know Gartner's classification "Run, Grow, Transform". It sorts spending by purpose and is therefore a budget view. Run, Enable, Drive sorts work. The guiding questions are: who owns the platform, and are we building on it or building new? From this follow, for each layer, a mandate, a metric, a sourcing logic and an owner.

> Run, Enable, Drive is a leadership logic, not a chart of accounts. The budget view follows from it, not the other way round.

Three layers, three mandates.

The layers build on one another. Without reliable operations there is nothing to build on. Without existing platforms, every in-house development becomes too expensive.

	MANDATE	METRIC	SOURCING	OWNER IN THE BUSINESS
Drive Shape	Build new what sets the company apart and has no standard solution.	Effect on the business: revenue, customer experience, licence costs removed	Own product with a focused partner. Ownership stays in-house.	Executive team and a named product owner
Enable Empower	Build applications and automation on existing platforms. No platforms of our own.	Hours saved per year	Small in-house team with one product owner	Business function with named key users
Run Operate	Provide infrastructure, network, workplace, licences and security reliably and economically.	Stability, security, cost per unit	Buy standards and services, keep on-site support	Finance and operations

Figure 1: Run, Enable, Drive at a glance. Own illustration.

Three questions for assignment, in this order

1	Does it keep day-to-day operations secure and available?	**Run**
2	Can it be solved on a platform we already have?	**Enable**
3	Does it set us apart in the market, and is there no standard for it?	**Drive**
	None of the three applies?	**Do not do it**

The fourth answer is the most important. It protects a small team from initiatives that are neither necessary nor differentiating.

Each layer is led differently.

Run Operate

Run is the place for reliability, not ambition. The rule here: standardise, simplify, buy as a service. The network is one example. A service provider can take over the lifecycle of the equipment. On-site support stays in-house, because production depends on it. The same principle applies to device fleets and licences: usage data shows what is needed, the rest is removed.

Enable Empower

For a small team, Enable is the layer with the greatest leverage. The platforms are in place and paid for: ERP, low-code tools, customer management. A small development team builds applications on them and automates processes. A product owner fills the backlog together with the business functions. Steering uses a single metric the business understands: hours saved per year. Every backlog item carries this value before work begins. The boundary is clear: no platforms of our own are created. Enable also means speaking to platform vendors with one voice, which is to bundle, justify and rank requirements.

Drive Shape

Drive is the exception and should remain so. We build ourselves only what sets the company apart in the market or what no vendor delivers at a reasonable cost. Typical cases are the company's own website as its most important digital brand and sales channel, or a specialist application that replaces an expensive licensed solution. The maturity path is: build, prove, scale. Every Drive initiative has an accountable person in the business and a goal that can be expressed in revenue, cost or customer experience.

> **Where the model stands today.** In my organisation it is in place and structures leadership, budget and reporting. Steering by hours saved is recent, and robust multi-year figures are not yet available. What I describe here is the method, not a track record.

Four decisions that turn out differently.

1 **Costs follow whoever causes them.**

The fixed technology share sits with the technology organisation, business consumption with the business function. A licence that fulfils a procurement requirement belongs on procurement's cost centre. This is more than accounting: whoever carries the cost checks the need.

2 **Coordination only after commitment.**

The technology organisation coordinates cross-functional initiatives only once every business function provides named people with committed days. Otherwise it silently takes on an accountability it cannot fulfil.

3 **The business ranks, technology delivers.**

For enhancements there is a capacity envelope, not a spending target. Within it, the business functions rank their own requirements. The conversation shifts from "more budget" to "what first".

4 **No owner, no continued operation.**

Every product and every contract has an accountable person outside technology. If there is none, the product is reduced or ended. This also applies to tools nobody uses in depth.

What the executive team gains

It sees, for each layer, what funds are used for, what they achieve and who stands behind them. One figure, IT cost, becomes three conversations.

Run	Enable	Drive
What do operations cost us, and are they economical?	How much time do we give back to the business?	Where do we build something that sets us apart?

Five typical misallocations.

1 **Business costs on the IT cost centre.**

Licences, content or services of a business function run through technology because they involve software. Result: nobody checks the need.

2 **Products without an owner.**

An application keeps running although nobody outside technology is accountable for it. Result: running costs without a sponsor.

3 **IT as project lead for the business.**

A business initiative is handed to technology because a system is involved. Result: the requirements remain unclear, and so does accountability.

4 **Enable as mere mediation.**

The layer is reduced to passing requirements on to vendors. Result: the greatest lever, building on existing platforms, goes unused. The opposite mistake also occurs: own platforms emerge within Enable.

5 **Vendors in the wrong place.**

Technology holds contracts whose service is consumed by a business function. Result: renewals without a usage check.

A touchstone

Two questions reveal misallocations quickly: who would notice if the product were switched off tomorrow? And who would be willing to pay for it? If the answer is "nobody" twice, it belongs on none of the three layers.

Self-test for boards and executive teams.

Six questions. Every no shows where the conversation should begin.

☐	Do we know what share of our technology cost goes to operations, to enablement and to in-house development?	YES / NO
☐	Does each of the three layers have its own metric that the executive team also understands?	YES / NO
☐	Does every digital product and every major contract have a named accountable person in the business?	YES / NO
☐	Do the business functions carry the cost of what they consume?	YES / NO
☐	Can we justify why we build ourselves what we build ourselves?	YES / NO
☐	Did we deliberately end something in the past year?	YES / NO

Further reading

Point of view 01: "Ownership beats budget". Findings from 19 corporations on why clear ownership achieves more than dedicated funds. Available at schoenwaelder.ch.

The classification "Run, Grow, Transform" originates from Gartner and is mentioned here for differentiation only.

About the author

Dr Jeremy Celestin Schönwälder is responsible for technology, IT and digital products at a Swiss watch manufacturer. He previously held senior roles at Henkel, IKEA, Amazon and Telefónica. He holds a doctorate from HHL Leipzig and a dual MBA from Durham University and EBS.

jeremy@schoenwaelder.ch · schoenwaelder.ch

This text reflects the author's personal view, not that of his employer. © 2026 Jeremy Schönwälder.