EXECUTIVE GUIDE

The Technology ROI Flywheel

How disciplined operators turn technology spend into compounding enterprise value, without buying more.

01 **Simplify**	02 **Standardize**	03 **Automate**	04 **Scale**

> *"ROI comes from simplification and discipline, not from buying more.*

Ganesh Ariyur
Enterprise Technology Executive & CIO · 20+ years leading transformation across Fortune 500 and PE-backed companies

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

The four-stage framework: why sequence, not spend, decides technology ROI.

Board-level questions and proof points from $2B to $20B+ enterprises.

A 20-point scorecard plus the 90-day plan to start the flywheel turning.

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THE PROBLEM

Why technology spend rarely compounds

Every board has approved a technology investment that never showed up in the P&L. The platform went live. The invoices arrived. The promised margin didn't.

After two decades running technology inside Fortune 500 and private-equity-backed companies, I've seen the same root cause behind nearly every disappointing business case: the spend landed on top of complexity instead of replacing it. New systems joined old ones rather than retiring them. Every dollar of new investment quietly paid an integration tax to the estate underneath it.

Three failure patterns account for most of the leakage:

PATTERN 1

Buying before simplifying

New platforms stacked on an un-rationalized estate. Run costs rise, and the next initiative starts in a deeper hole than the last.

PATTERN 2

Automating broken processes

Automation multiplies whatever it touches. Automate a mess and you get a faster, more expensive mess, now with a license fee.

PATTERN 3

Scaling before standardizing

Pilots that work in one business unit die in translation, because there is no common pattern to carry them across the enterprise.

> *" The fix is not more spend. It is sequence: the four stages of value creation in the right order, with no skipping ahead.*

That sequence is the Technology ROI Flywheel: **Simplify → Standardize → Automate → Scale.** Each stage lowers the cost and the risk of the one that follows. Run in order, the returns compound. Run out of order, each stage fights the ones before it.

The pages that follow break down each stage: what it means in practice, the plays that work, the questions to put to your team, and the results this discipline has produced in real enterprises.

WRITTEN FOR

CEOs & Boards · CFOs · CIOs · CTOs · CDOs · PE Operating Partners & Deal Teams · Transformation Leaders

THE FRAMEWORK

The flywheel at a glance

A flywheel, not a checklist. Each turn of the wheel is cheaper, faster, and less risky than the last, because every stage builds the conditions the next one needs.

01 · SIMPLIFY

Remove friction. Focus on what moves the needle.

Rationalize applications, platforms, and vendors down to what the strategy requires. Retire, don't wrap.

Value unlocked: lower run cost, smaller risk surface, and freed capacity to fund change.

02 · STANDARDIZE

Create repeatable patterns and playbooks.

One way to build, buy, and integrate. Shared services for shared work. Governance with teeth.

Value unlocked: predictable delivery, lower unit costs, and a foundation automation can trust.

03 · AUTOMATE

Eliminate manual work. Embed intelligence.

RPA, AI, and intelligent workflows applied to standardized processes, governed by one intake and measured in the P&L.

Value unlocked: cycle times and error rates fall; talent moves to higher-value work.

04 · SCALE

Expand what works. Compounding results.

Replicate proven patterns across units and geographies at marginal cost, funded by the savings of the previous turn.

Value unlocked: enterprise-wide returns the board can read in NPV, payback, and margin.

> *" The order is the point. Skipping a stage doesn't save time. It moves the cost downstream and multiplies it.*

STAGE 01

Simplify

Reduce the estate to what the strategy actually needs. Remove friction. Focus on what moves the needle.

Most enterprises run far more applications, platforms, and vendors than the business requires, and every redundant system taxes every future initiative with integration work, license fees, security exposure, and organizational attention. Simplification is not housekeeping. It is the highest-ROI move available to most technology organizations, because it cuts cost and risk while creating the capacity to change.

THE PLAYS

- → Rationalize the application portfolio against business capability, not usage nostalgia.
- → Collapse duplicate platforms (ERP, billing, reporting) into a single target architecture.
- → Retire technical debt deliberately: decommission, don't just wrap and hide.
- → Consolidate vendors and licenses, then renegotiate from the consolidated position.

ASK YOUR TEAM

- ? How many applications do we run, and how many does the strategy need?
- ? What share of our budget keeps the lights on versus funds change?
- ? Which three systems, retired tomorrow, would nobody miss?

PROOF FROM PRACTICE

During a $3B healthcare merger, I led the consolidation of **450+ applications into one target architecture** through an 18-month TSA exit, reducing total cost of ownership by ~20% and collapsing 13 billing systems into one. At a $2B manufacturer, 14 legacy ERPs became a single global platform, cutting IT maintenance costs 25%.

The metric that matters: keep-the-lights-on share of technology spend, falling quarter over quarter.

STAGE 02

Standardize

Turn what remains into repeatable patterns and playbooks: one way to build, buy, and operate.

Simplification creates a smaller estate; standardization makes it predictable. Common processes, reference architectures, and shared services convert one-off heroics into repeatable delivery. This is the stage most organizations underinvest in, because it looks like bureaucracy. Done right, it is the opposite: standards are what let teams move fast without asking permission.

THE PLAYS

→ Stand up an Architecture Review Board with real authority: one gate for build-vs-buy.

→ Move shared work in Finance, HR, Procurement, and IT into Global Business Services.

→ Publish reference architectures and paved-road patterns teams actually use.

→ Install the operating cadence: OKRs, KPIs, and quarterly business-technology reviews.

ASK YOUR TEAM

? Do our top ten processes run one standard way, or five?

? Who says no to a nonstandard build, and when did they last say it?

? Could a new team ship using our playbooks without a single escalation?

PROOF FROM PRACTICE

Building and scaling Global Business Services across Finance, HR, Procurement, and IT delivered **22% to 36% OPEX reductions** across multiple enterprises, with 30%+ cycle-time improvements. Architecture Review Boards I established governed $50M+ in annual technology investment through a single build-vs-buy gate.

The metric that matters: unit cost per transaction in shared processes, plus the share of delivery on standard patterns.

STAGE 03

Automate

Eliminate manual work and embed intelligence on standardized rails, measured in the P&L.

Automation pays when it lands on standardized processes. That is why it is stage three, not stage one. The same discipline applies to AI: without a governed intake for use cases (value, risk, build-vs-buy), enterprises accumulate pilots instead of returns. The goal is intelligence embedded in the flow of work, with benefits Finance can verify, not a portfolio of proofs-of-concept.

THE PLAYS

- → Target high-volume, rules-based work first: finance operations, procure-to-pay, service management.
- → Establish an AI Center of Excellence: model evaluation, build-vs-buy, use-case triage.
- → Embed copilots and agents in the flow of work rather than bolting on tools.
- → Track benefits in the P&L with Finance sign-off, not in a slide deck.

ASK YOUR TEAM

- ? Which standardized processes are still manual, and why?
- ? What was the verified payback on our last five automation cases?
- ? Who owns the harvested savings once capacity is freed?

PROOF FROM PRACTICE

Deploying **50+ RPA and intelligent-automation bots** across Finance, IT, and Procure-to-Pay streamlined 100+ processes, cut cycle times by up to 40%, and delivered $8M in annual savings. More recently, I defined an enterprise AI strategy, stood up the AI Center of Excellence, and delivered the first SAP Joule AI for HR implementation, featured by SAP.

The metric that matters: automation savings recognized by Finance, plus hours returned to the business.

STAGE 04

Scale

Expand what is proven. Let the results compound across the enterprise.

Scale is earned, not declared. When a proven pattern meets standardized rails, replication happens at marginal cost. This is where the flywheel effect becomes visible in numbers the board actually reads: NPV, payback, margin. Organizations that skip to this stage buy enterprise licenses for pilots. Organizations that arrive here properly find each expansion cheaper than the one before it.

THE PLAYS

→ Replicate proven use cases across business units and geographies on a defined playbook.

→ Fund in tranches, released against realized benefits, not annual wish lists.

→ Reinvest harvested savings into the next turn of the flywheel.

→ Report ROI in operating terms (NPV, payback, margin), never adoption statistics.

ASK YOUR TEAM

? What is our backlog of proven patterns, and the cost to replicate each?

? Are benefits from the last wave funding the next one?

? Which win from one business unit still hasn't scaled, and why not?

PROOF FROM PRACTICE

I co-led an enterprise planning transformation on Anaplan, replacing fragmented planning tools, with a joint business case projecting **$54M NPV and 1,287% ROI over four years**, recognized as one of the fastest enterprise deployments in the platform's history. Across my career, disciplined value cases have secured $85M+ to $150M in board-approved transformation funding.

The metric that matters: NPV and payback of the replication portfolio, trending up as unit costs fall.

MAKING IT OPERATIONAL

The first 90 days, then the first full year

The flywheel is an operating discipline, not a strategy deck. Here is how to start turning it.

FIRST 90 DAYS

1
Baseline the estate

Applications, spend, keep-the-lights-on versus change, vendor and license exposure. You cannot simplify what you have not counted.

2
Pick one value stream

Run the full flywheel narrow before wide: one process end-to-end through all four stages beats four stages started everywhere.

3
Stand up governance

Architecture Review Board, a benefits ledger owned jointly with Finance, and a quarterly business-technology review cadence.

4
Publish the scoreboard

Run costs, cycle times, savings recognized in the P&L. Visible numbers create the discipline the flywheel depends on.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE AFTER 12 MONTHS

→ Keep-the-lights-on share of spend measurably falling; the difference redeployed to change.

→ One value stream through all four stages, with results verified by Finance.

→ Savings from the first turn funding the second, with no incremental budget request.

→ The board conversation shifted from project status to value creation.

> *“ If Finance can't see it in the P&L, it didn't happen.*

SELF-ASSESSMENT

The Flywheel Scorecard

Rate each statement from 1 (not true) to 5 (consistently true). Total the column. Best taken independently by the CEO, CFO, and technology leader. The gaps between your scores are as revealing as the totals.

01 · SIMPLIFY		SCORE 1-5
1	We know exactly how many applications we run and what each one costs.	☐
2	Keep-the-lights-on versus change spend is measured, and trending toward change.	☐
3	Duplicate platforms are on a funded retirement path, not a someday list.	☐
4	Vendor and license spend is consolidated and renegotiated on a set cycle.	☐
5	Every new investment names the systems it will retire.	☐
02 · STANDARDIZE		
6	Our top processes run one standard way across business units.	☐
7	An architecture gate rules on build-vs-buy before money moves.	☐
8	Shared services handle common work across Finance, HR, Procurement, and IT.	☐
9	Reference patterns exist, and teams actually use them.	☐
10	A quarterly business-technology review holds owners to outcomes.	☐
03 · AUTOMATE		
11	High-volume, rules-based work is automated or on a funded roadmap.	☐
12	AI use cases pass through one governed intake: value, risk, build-vs-buy.	☐
13	Automation benefits are validated by Finance, not self-reported.	☐
14	Intelligence is embedded in the flow of work, not bolted on as tools.	☐
15	Freed capacity is deliberately redeployed, not quietly reabsorbed.	☐
04 · SCALE		
16	Proven use cases are replicated across units on a defined playbook.	☐
17	Funding is released in tranches against realized benefits.	☐
18	Harvested savings fund the next wave of investment.	☐
19	Technology ROI is reported in operating terms: NPV, payback, margin.	☐
20	The board reviews value creation, not project status.	☐

85-100
Compounding. The flywheel is turning. Protect the discipline.

65-84
Turning, with drag. Find the weakest stage. It is taxing the other three.

Below 65
Stalled. Spend is leaking. Start at Simplify. Resist the urge to buy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ganesh Ariyur

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Ganesh Ariyur has spent 20+ years leading enterprise technology and large-scale transformation at PE-backed and Fortune 500 organizations, including Gainwell Technologies, Carestream Health, McKesson / Change Healthcare, AGCO, Amgen, and Hollister, spanning companies from $2B to $20B+ in revenue.

He has delivered a $150M business and technology transformation through a $3B merger, consolidated 450+ applications into a single target architecture, secured $85M+ in board-approved transformation funding, and driven 22% to 36% OPEX reductions across multiple enterprises. His work spans SAP S/4HANA and Oracle Cloud modernization, Global Business Services, enterprise AI strategy, and post-merger integration, always anchored to value the CFO can verify.

A Chartered Accountant and gold-medalist Cost & Management Accountant by training, he brings a finance operator's discipline to technology investment. That is where the flywheel began.

- Chief Digital & Information Officer Certification
- Certified AI Business Transformation Practitioner
- Chartered Accountant
- Cost & Management Accountant (Gold Medalist)

> *" Technology ROI is an operating discipline. The flywheel is how you run it.*

CONTINUE THE CONVERSATION

If your board is asking harder questions about technology ROI, or you are sequencing a transformation and want a second set of eyes, I compare notes with CEOs, CFOs, boards, and operating partners regularly.

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