The Middle Way:

A New, Actionable Method for
Cloud Optimization

In a recent survey, <u>90% of senior decision-makers agreed that the cloud</u>—combined with cloud-enabled technologies like AI, IoT, and analytics—serves as a "force multiplier" for businesses and organizations. However, that same survey also revealed an "innovation gap": while companies prioritize digital transformation, many are not achieving the innovation they seek.

Investing in a large, multifaceted modernization project should result in transformational change. When it does not, technology teams can feel stuck and understandably frustrated. Where and why does this disconnect occur? And how can leadership break the log jam? One key reason is that many leaders try to force transformation to happen all at once.

But transformation doesn't need to be an "all or nothing" proposition. By examining your systems at an "atomic" level—bit by bit—you can begin to prioritize migration, making the process manageable and effective. We call this method "The Middle Way"—a practical, achievable plan for transforming your applications in manageable stages.

Four Steps to Finding the Middle Way:

1. **Understand the "Why":** What drives your motivation for moving to the cloud/optimization/transformation?

2. **Take stock of your resources and timeline:** What are this initiative's internal and external limitations?

3. **Break down your applications at the atomic level:** Examine the value and effort of optimizing each application.

4. **Prioritize each application for optimization:** Finalize a plan that is both possible and achieves your organization's objectives.

We suggest a cloud-migration approach that will break the cycle of unsuccessful innovation efforts, helping technology leaders achieve transformation and see business results quickly. We call it "The Middle Way."

1 Understand the "Why"

"Which apps should we transform first?"

This question becomes a stumbling block for many organizations—and that's because it's the wrong question to start with. Before you can prioritize which applications should be optimized, your team must align on why you sought to optimize in the first place. This is the motivation behind every digital transformation. Common motivations include greater security, agility, or the ability to use data to drive decision-making.

To determine your unique "why," you need to figure out how optimization aligns with your organization's purpose. For example, will migrating help you better serve your customers by providing enhanced security and reduced lag times? Or maybe transformation will give you a technical edge over your competitors by enabling you to provide a better product line?

Once your team aligns on the technical and organizational motivations for optimization, you can prioritize migrating applications that serve your organization's best interest, rather than optimizing for optimization's sake.
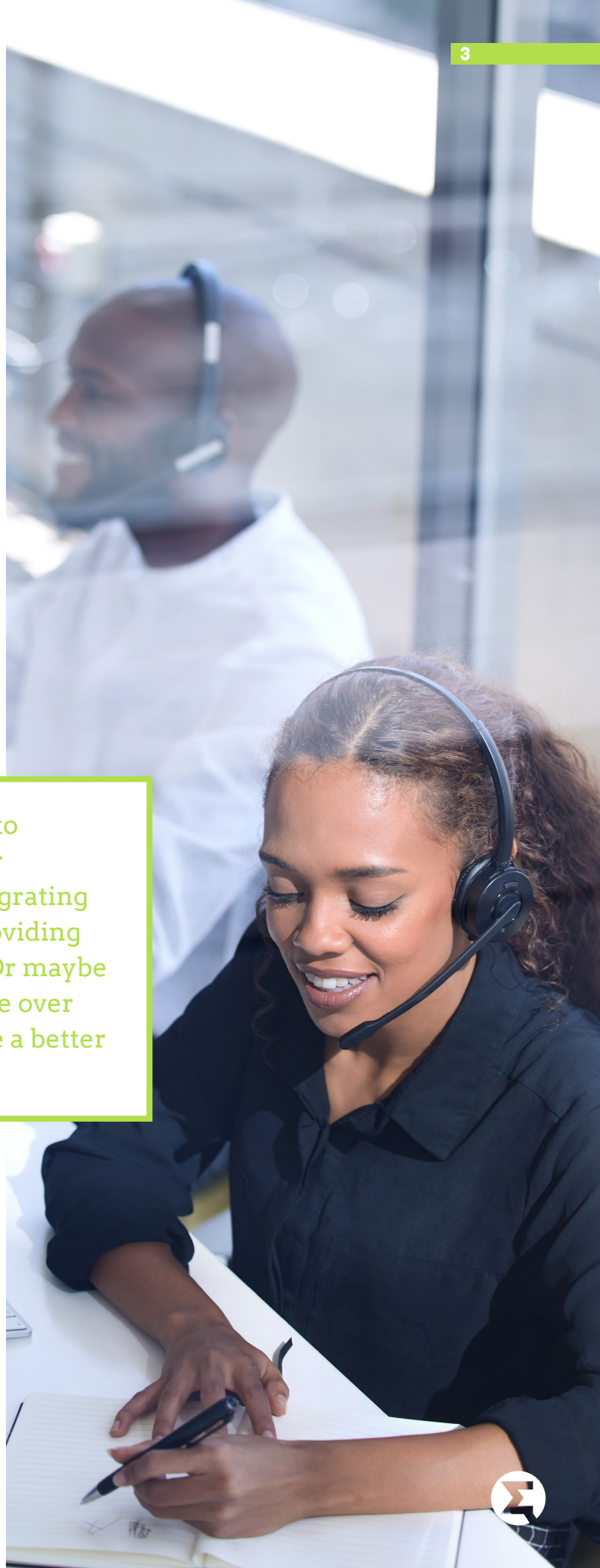
② Take stock of your resources and timelines

Every organization has concrete limitations regarding budget, staff, and time. These constraints provide tangible "guardrails" on cloud transformation—it's simply not feasible to do it all at once. But being realistic about your resources isn't necessarily a negative. In fact, it can empower you to make stronger decisions about your transformation and where your focus should be.

To better understand your resources, ask yourself:

» How many technicians are available for this project? How much time can they spend on this work?

» What training do they need to get started?

» And of course, how much do we want to spend—keeping in mind other operational priorities and budget required to grow your business?

In addition to being pragmatic about resources and budget, look across your organization to identify disruptions or obstacles that may impact your timeline. These disruptions include things like:

» Internal events that create a deadline for optimization—like the expiration of an existing SLA or an annual conference where you want to make a big announcement.

» External or customer events that your organization should respond to. These include competitor product launches—you want to ensure your product line is ship-shape when the competition goes to market—or customer budget cycles.

» Functional and technical dependencies that will limit your organization's ability to take your technology offline, such as an on-demand streaming offering that must be available to customers 24/7.

Remember that transformation doesn't occur in a vacuum. By anticipating internal limitations, external timelines, and market forces that impact your ability to optimize, you can prioritize and take control. This brings us to our next step.

③ Evaluate your technology at the atomic level

By now, you've done the homework required to embark on The Middle Way. You've aligned on your "why," you've decided on a realistic budget and timeline for optimization, and you've identified internal and external events that will impact your path toward optimization. Now comes the fun part: diving down to the "atomic level" of your technology infrastructure.

We're used to thinking about our technology as a complete system. However, to achieve a realistic "middle way" and kick off optimization, we must examine each application—and later, each application layer—individually. Breaking this into two steps makes this process easier:

» **Determine value:** What is the unique value of each app to your organization? Ask yourself:

  » Will optimizing this app help my organization better achieve its purpose or mission? Will it help us serve our customers or community? Will it give us an edge over our competition?
  » Are there any significant changes planned for this application? How old is this application? Do I expect to sunset it in the near future?
  » Would optimization resolve any pain points or result in operational load reduction? Is it critical for this application to scale easily and quickly?

» **Determine effort:** After figuring out the value of the app, assess the effort required to transform it.

  » What level of budget, staff, and time is required to optimize this application or application layer?
  » Which functions and applications are dependent on this application?
  » Is the code readily available for this application? Is my team familiar with the code if minor changes are needed?
  » Does the existing code work with the new framework?

(4) Prioritize each application for optimization

After you've examined each application, you can sort your applications into the Middle Way Optimization Chart below. We recommend physically recreating the chart so you can get an accurate visual. Which applications would require more effort to optimize? Which applications would drive the most value if optimized or are necessary for your business to function?

Urgency / Value

Worth The Time

Quick Wins

Effort, High to Low

Don't Bother

Extra Credit
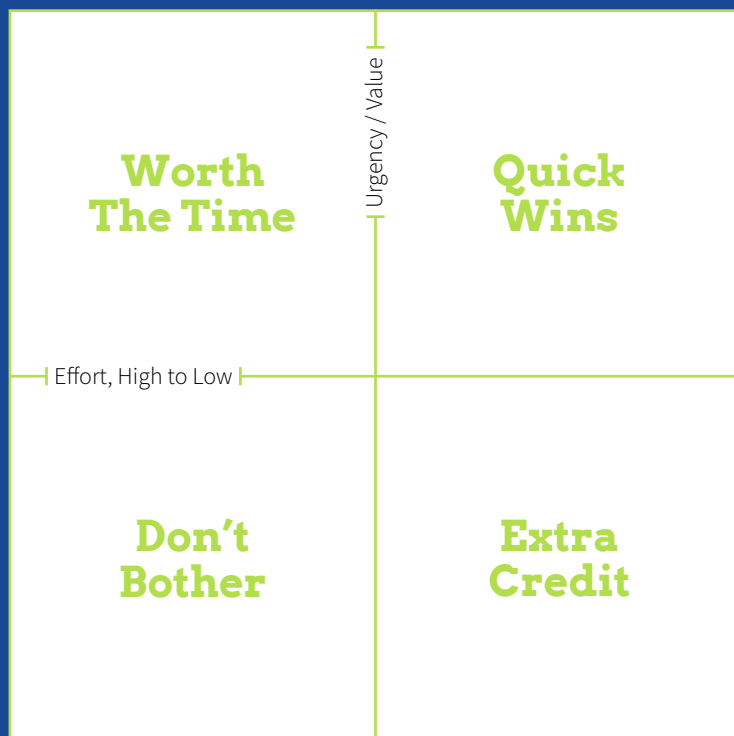
Middle Way Optimization Chart:

» **Quick Wins:** Business-critical applications that are relatively simple to migrate will be placed on the top-right. These applications are "quick wins" your team should plan to knock out early in the process.

» **Don't Bother:** On the bottom-left, you'll find applications that are difficulty to migrate that are no longer business-critical. Optimization plans for these applications should be cancelled.

» **Worth the Time:** Applications on the top-left are critical to your organization, but resource-heavy. How can your team make sure you have the people, budget, and time to migrate these applications?

» **Extra Credit:** Finally, the applications on the bottom right do not provide as much value to your business, but are simple to optimize. Only plan to migrate these applications if budget, time, and staffing resources are available.

As you sort your applications onto the graph, your "middle way" will become evident. Applications whose optimization would be high value but low effort are a great place to start. You'll show your return on investment immediately by focusing on these "quick wins." Optimization projects in the top right quadrant—that are valuable but take more effort—can be carefully planned over time. By using the "middle way" method, you won't hinder your progress by getting bogged down in these thornier initiatives.

The Cardinal Rule:

Low-value projects should be deprioritized or even removed from the plan entirely. There is no reason that every application must be optimized.

You and your team should carefully examine any project that is low on the value axis. Even if it seems simple, all optimization efforts require some amount of time, budget, and human resources. Low-value projects should be deprioritized or even removed from the plan entirely. Remember: there is no reason every application must be optimized.

Finally, once you've determined which applications should be prioritized, you can break down the transformation process even further. Look at each application layer-by-layer and ask your team the same value and effort questions as above. You may find opportunities to further simplify your plan by optimizing some application layers and not others.

Learning to Choose the Mean

In technology—as in poker—going "all-in" on optimization can be risky unless you're holding the IT equivalent of a royal flush. Why bet it all when you can win through incremental, iterative change?

At Enquizit, we chose the name "The Middle Way" to reference this philosophical concept—also called "the golden mean." This concept harks back to Socrates, who taught his students to "choose the mean and avoid extremes on either side." Too often, optimization is positioned as a choice between extremes—doing it all or doing nothing. We know digital transformation is imperative. However, if you try to do it all, you risk stymying your team in a lengthy and unwieldy initiative it can't afford. Our "middle way" enables you to find your organization's golden mean so that you can quickly execute high-value optimization efforts that support your customers and community and help your company meet its goals.

Socrates and The Middle Way

"…let him know how to choose the mean and avoid the extremes on either side, as far as possible…For this is the way of happiness.

—Socrates, from Plato's The Republic

Enquizit is an AWS Premier Consulting Partner with deep knowledge and experience in data management strategies that can transform your business. To learn more about how we can help you modernize your data strategy, go to enquizit.com.