

The Organizational Foundation for AI ROI

Executive Report – July 2026

"Team Topologies is the vital foundation for AI adoption because it provides the organizational architecture for rapid value flow, and the discoverable clarity of boundaries and mission that AI needs to work well."

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Executive Summary

AI acts like an amplifier. Make sure you are amplifying the right things.

The deployment of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is reshaping the landscape of modern enterprise, yet the market is sharply divided on actual financial returns. Procuring AI licenses and deploying tools into existing bureaucratic structures will not guarantee a financial return; in fact, it will often accelerate the accumulation of technical debt and maintenance costs.

The 2026 DevOps Research and Assessment (DORA) report^{*} confirms that the greatest returns on AI investment stem from a strategic focus on the underlying organizational system rather than the AI tools themselves. This report outlines the core findings of the 2026 DORA research, explains its broad applicability to all knowledge work, and details why implementing the principles of Team Topologies is the non-negotiable foundation for securing a return on investment (ROI) from AI.

<https://cloud.google.com/resources/content/dora-roi-of-ai-assisted-software-development>

About this report

by Matthew Skelton, co-author of Team Topologies
Prepared for: CEOs, COOs, CIOs, and Chief AI Officers

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AI is an amplifier - the SDLC points the way for all knowledge work



"AI delivers value ONLY when the organization has the stewardship boundaries, practices, and governance to enable rapid value flow. The rest is theater."

– Matthew Skelton, co-author of Team Topologies

While the 2026 DORA report on AI ROI explicitly focuses on software delivery, its findings are highly relevant to knowledge work as a whole.

Software development is fundamentally a specialized form of knowledge work that relies heavily on **encoding business intent, managing information flow, and team collaboration**. The software engineering industry is merely leading the way in understanding AI ROI because it possesses long-established feedback loops and telemetry to precisely measure outcomes as part of the Software Development LifeCycle (SDLC).

However, the organizational foundations required for rapid, sustainable value delivery – such as **managing cognitive load, creating clear workflows, and aligning teams** – have generalized well beyond software delivery.

AI acts as an organizational amplifier. It magnifies the strengths of high-performing, well-aligned organizations, but it will equally amplify the dysfunctions, bottlenecks, and bad practices of struggling ones. Therefore, any enterprise engaging in knowledge work must **reshape its organizational architecture to achieve ROI from AI adoption**

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Key findings from the 2026 DORA report

The 2026 DORA report on ROI from AI highlights several critical economic and operational realities regarding AI adoption:

1. The J-Curve of AI value realization

Even organizations with effective organizational architecture should anticipate a temporary productivity dip – a "J-Curve" – when adopting AI. This dip is driven in part by a "verification tax": the increased time humans must spend reviewing and auditing the massive volume of AI-generated output for accuracy and security (until this reviewing and auditing is moving into self-service internal platforms guided by Team Topologies patterns).

2. The instability tax and downstream chaos

AI accelerates the volume and velocity of generated work. If an organization lacks mature internal platforms and streamlined pipelines, AI will merely create localized pockets of productivity that pile up into downstream bottlenecks, causing increased system instability. Generating more code or output without automated oversight ultimately erases ROI.

3. The five strategic priorities for maximizing AI value

To move past the J-Curve and capture ROI from AI, DORA identifies five strategic priorities:

- **Align strategy from the top:** AI strategy must be championed by the executive suite and unified with the broader business strategy, rather than siloed under an AI head.
- **Elevate data quality:** Organizations must **curate data** and knowledge systems to ensure AI agents access **accurate business context**.
- **Prioritize by value:** Organizations must prioritize AI use cases based on user value and financial impact.
- **Invest in human capital:** Upskilling staff is vital. The goal is empowering people to become **effective stewards of value flow**.
- **Optimize infrastructure:** Enterprises must provide internal platforms managed as product that reduce cognitive load and accelerate the flow of value.

How the DORA findings are embodied in Team Topologies



The core enablers of AI ROI identified by the 2026 DORA research – internal platform quality, workflow clarity, and team alignment – are the exact systemic principles championed by the Team Topologies framework.

Treat internal platforms as products

DORA research highlights that a high-quality internal platform is the "primary connective tissue for AI value". This embodies the Team Topologies approach of treating all internal platforms as managed products with proper internal users, designed specifically to accelerate value flow by reducing human cognitive load.

Align teams to value flow

DORA recommends anchoring AI velocity in user value by starting with user needs and working backwards. Team Topologies facilitates this by structurally aligning teams to continuous flows of value and eliminating handoffs between teams. This architectural shift provides clear objectives for Agentic AI and fundamentally changes the organizational conversation from managing cost to delivering user value.

Cultivate AI-accessible data ecosystems (Data-as-a-Product)

For AI to be effective, it needs clean, domain-aligned APIs and curated data ecosystems. Influenced by Team Topologies, techniques like Data Mesh treat data as a self-service product. When data is curated, formatted, and governed by the team stewarding that specific service, it becomes highly accessible and digestible for both humans and AI agents.

Conclusion – why Team Topologies is a vital foundation for AI adoption

Ultimately, AI acts as an unforgiving mirror to an organization's structural health. In traditional, hierarchical, and bureaucratic organizations, AI will simply generate waste faster. Ironically, the adoption of AI is forcing enterprises to pivot toward more humane, empowered organizational structures capable of true end-to-end stewardship.



"Team Topologies ... offers something Agentic AI desperately needs – but cannot invent on its own: clear boundaries, stable interfaces, aligned domains, a culture of collaborative ownership. [Team Topologies is] ... the infrastructure for agency itself."

— Stuart Winter-Tear, AI advisor and author of UNHYPED

- **Clear boundaries:** Long-lived stewardship of services and value streams – "bounded agency"
- **Stable interfaces:** Clarity from X-as-a-Service self-service capabilities from a platform
- **Aligned domains:** End-to-end, scoped execution with AI and human teams
- **Collaborative ownership:** Team Interaction Modes help detect and negotiate needed ownership changes

Team Topologies is the vital foundation for AI adoption because it provides the organizational architecture for rapid value flow, and the discoverable clarity of boundaries and mission that AI needs to work well.

Without the stewardship boundaries and cognitive load management provided by Team Topologies, the "verification tax" will overwhelm employees, and isolated productivity gains will vanish into downstream chaos. By encoding practices for rapid value delivery, automated guardrails, and platform thinking into the very structure of the enterprise, **Team Topologies creates the essential architecture required to successfully navigate the route to AI ROI** and unlock sustainable, measurable financial returns.

Team Topologies Enterprise Transformation Package

Accelerate the transition to a AI-native model
via Team Topologies materials, training, and
expert guidance

The Enterprise Transformation Package from Team Topologies sits alongside and amplifies the work of internal and external enablement partners and vendors, enhancing their effectiveness and reach.



"At Telenet group, the shift came when we stopped treating transformation as consulting sessions and started building content infrastructure ...

High-quality materials aren't 'nice to have' - they're the operating system for transformation at scale"

– Barbara Arnst – VP Transformation, Telenet group

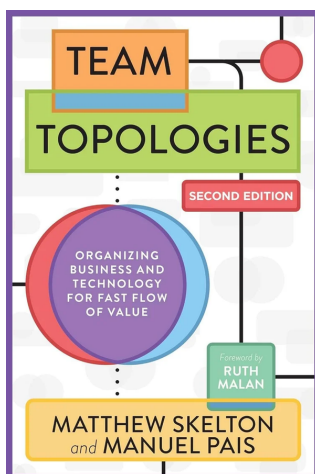
Telenet used a content infrastructure package similar to the Team Topologies ETP to help accelerate and guide their transformation.

Accelerate your transformation today:
teamtopologies.com/etp



Team Topologies is the leading approach worldwide to organizing business and technology for fast flow of value.

Based on the books by Matthew Skelton and Manuel Pais, the Team Topologies patterns and techniques have delivered ROI measured in the \$billions since 2019, giving leaders and practitioners a clear framework for organizational architecture that is optimized for rapid value flow and AI success.



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