POWERING SUCCESS

HOW FINANCE AND OPERATIONS DRIVE SME GROWTH



CONTENTS

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
II. INTRODUCTION	5
III. DESIGNING ROBUST FINANCE SYSTEMS	7
IV. TAKING THE PULSE OF SME IRELAND PART 2	9
V. THREE KEY CONCEPTS EXPLAINED	11
VI. OPTIMISING OPERATIONS FOR GROWTH	18
VII. TAKING THE PULSE OF SME IRELAND PART 3	20
VIII. THREE KEY CONCEPTS EXPLAINED	22
IX. CONCLUSION: BUILD THE ENGINE BEHIND THE STRATE	GY 27



I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fitzgerald Power ADDING VALUE. ALWAYS.

Strategic ambition without execution is a missed opportunity. While many Irish SMEs recognise the importance of strategic planning, few have the financial management systems and operational discipline required to bring their plans to life.

Fitzgerald Power's survey of over 80 Irish SME leaders revealed clear execution gaps:

- Only 52% of SMEs use a dynamic forecasting model.
- Just 27% have a defined process for tracking key performance indicators (KPIs).
- 36% have no formal HR function in place.

These gaps reflect a broader issue: most SMEs operate without the financial clarity or structural maturity required to scale. Strategy may set the destination, but **finance and operations power the journey.**

This second whitepaper in the Strategy 360 series explores how ambitious SMEs can unlock growth and resilience by strengthening their financial infrastructure and operational foundation.

Key components include:

- **1. Rolling budgets**: Updating budgets and forecasts regularly to reflect real-time data.
- **2. Scenario modelling**: Running best-case, management-case, and base-case forecasts.
- **3. Cash flow management**: Maintaining 3–6 months of working capital as a liquidity buffer.
- **4. Funding strategy**: Understanding the cost of capital across all available sources including senior lenders, equity, State grants, etc.

To deliver its strategic goals, SMEs need a dependable, repeatable operating system. This operating system should include the following elements:

- 1. A regular operating cadence.
- 2. Clear ownership.
- 3. Accountability mechanisms.

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE STRATEGY 360 SME SURVEY

52%

OF SMEs USE A DYNAMIC FORECASTING MODEL

27%

HAVE A DEFINED PROCESS FOR TRACKING KPIs

36%

HAVE NO FORMAL HR FUNCTION

II. INTRODUCTION

WHY EXECUTION IS EVERYTHING

Fitzgerald Power ADDING VALUE. Throughout this paper, we will continue to follow the journey of Cloudtech Limited, a successful but founder-led technology firm that realised its systems were not built for scale.

A strategic plan without effective execution is like a map without a vehicle. Many SME leaders in Ireland are clear on where they want to go, but they lack the financial visibility and operational structure required to get there efficiently or at all.

In Fitzgerald Power's **Strategy 360** SME survey, significant gaps emerged between strategic intent and execution capability:

- Many businesses are still relying on annual static budgets and spreadsheet forecasting.
- Operationally, most SMEs lack documented processes, scalable systems, and clearly defined roles across teams.

These aren't just technical gaps, they are strategic vulnerabilities. Finance and operations are often viewed as 'back-office' functions. In reality, they are **strategic multipliers** and essential prerequisites for valuation maximisation, long-term resilience, and founder freedom.



Robust finance systems are critically important for SMEs. These systems provide the backbone for sustainable growth, operational efficiency and financial resilience.

When designing their finance system, SMEs should consider:

- 1. Management Information: Regular, accurate Management Information (MI) is the cornerstone of effective, real-time decision making. It helps management teams assess progress against the strategic plan and identify operational deficiencies.
- 2. Rolling 12-month Cash Flow Forecast: All investment decisions should be supported by clear understanding of cash flow peaks and troughs
- **3. Tailored KPIs:** Clarifying trends by providing leading and lagging indicators showing the strategy is on track



What gets measured gets managed.

PETER DRUKER **AMERICAN MANAGEMENT GURU**





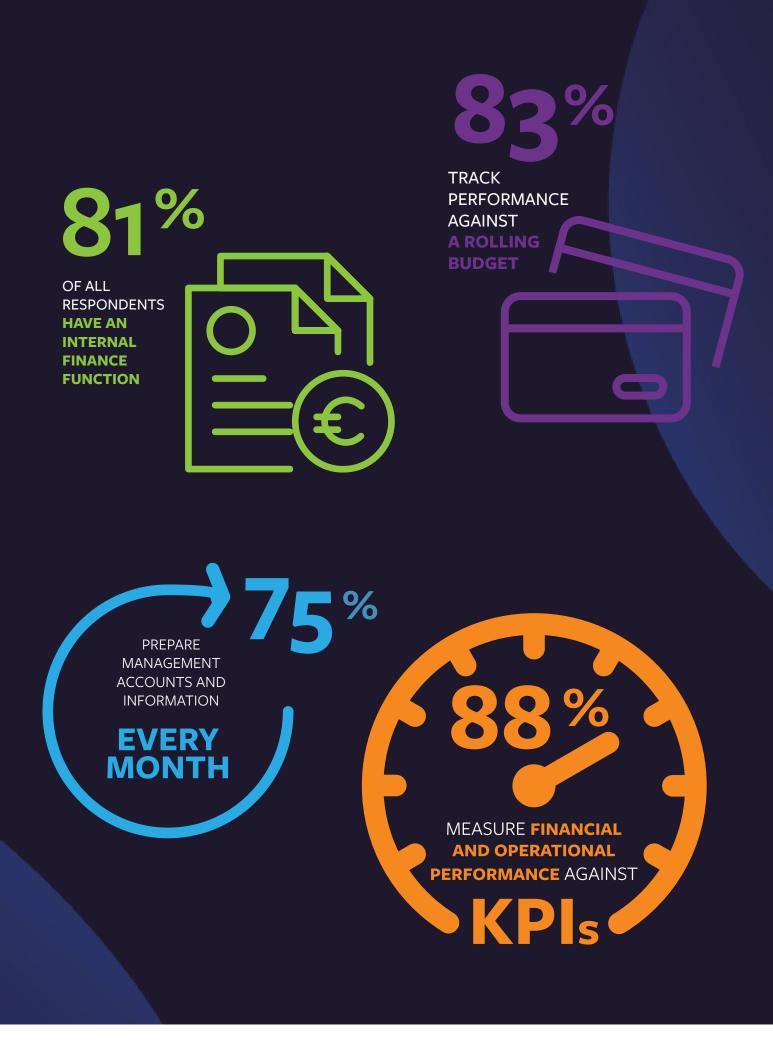
Financial planning should be aligned with strategic priorities such as hiring and expansion decisions. Dynamic models and forecasts help to cement this alignment.

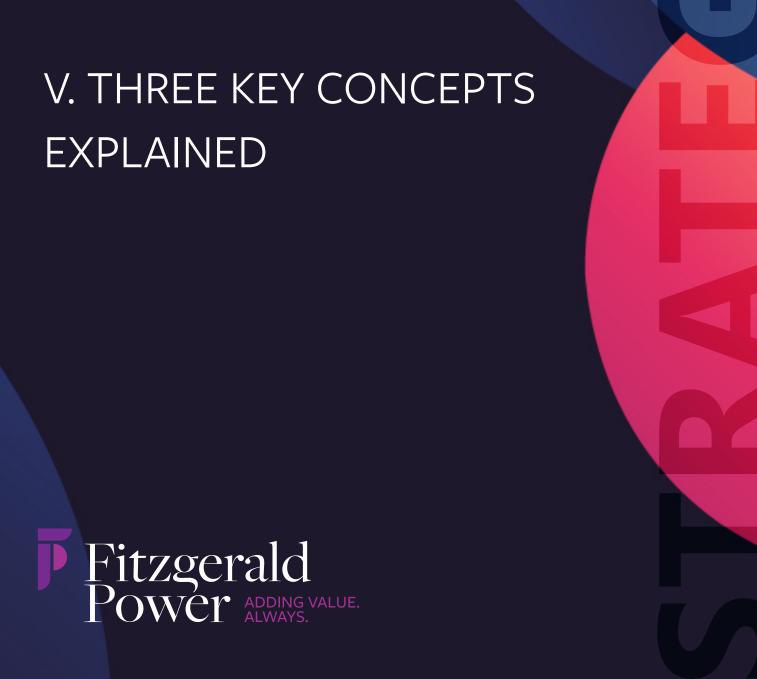
JENNIFER POWER PARTNER, FITZGERALD POWER

IV. TAKING THE PULSE OF SME IRELAND

PART 2: STRATEGIC FINANCIAL PLANNING







1. Management Information: Data-Driven Decision Making

Regular Management Information (MI) is essential for SMEs who hope to operate effectively in today's competitive environment. It provides the visibility and insights needed to make smarter decisions, drive performance, and manage risks proactively. It also helps leadership teams ascertain whether or not their strategic objectives have been met.

The table below outlines the key benefits to SMEs of maintaining consistent, high-quality management information:

Table: Key benefits to SMEs of maintaining consistent, high-quality management information

	Benefit	Description
1	Better Decision Making	Timely, accurate MI gives leaders clear visibility of financial health, operations, and risks, enabling data-driven decisions instead of assumption-based decisions.
2	Improved Financial Control	Regular reports (e.g. cash flow, margins, costs) help SMEs manage liquidity, control expenses, and boost profitability , flagging issues early for quick action.
3	Clearer Strategic Planning	MI provides the hard facts needed to set goals, track progress, and adjust strategies , ensuring SMEs stay agile but aligned with long-term plans.
4	Greater Accountability and Focus	Regular performance metrics foster a culture of ownership and help teams focus on key priorities through clear KPIs and dashboards.
5	Enhanced Investor and Lender Confidence	Professional, consistent MI improves SME credibility with banks , investors , and funding bodies , helping access financing faster and easier.
6	Early Warning System	MI highlights potential risks (like churn, margin pressure, cash burn) early enough to act upon, protecting the business from major shocks.
7	Operational Efficiency	Tracking operational KPIs (e.g. service times, satisfaction) reveals bottlenecks and process improvements, boosting efficiency and service quality.

2. Rolling 12-Month Cash Flow Forecast: Understanding Peaks and Troughs

A rolling 12-month cash flow forecast is a critical financial tool that helps maintain visibility over future cash requirements. It helps businesses anticipate shortfalls, plan investments, and manage operations with greater financial control.

The table below outlines the key components that should be included in an effective cash flow forecast:

Table: Key components that should be included in an effective cash flow forecast

	Benefit	Description
1	Opening Cash Balance	The cash available at the start of the month – carried over from the previous period.
2	Cash Inflows (Receipts)	All expected cash coming into the business, including customer payments, grants, tax refunds, and loan drawdowns.
3	Sales Receipts Timing	Projected timing of incoming payments based on customer credit terms (e.g. 30/60 days).
4	Other Income	Non-sales-related inflows, such as investment income, asset sales, or government support payments.
5	Cash Outflows (Payments)	All planned cash out, including supplier payments, payroll, rent, utilities, taxes, loan repayments, and other operating expenses.
6	Seasonal Adjustments	Adjustments for predictable seasonal changes in sales or costs (e.g. higher sales in Q4, slower cash collections in August).
7	Capital Expenditure (CapEx)	Expected cash outflows for major asset purchases (e.g. new equipment, IT infrastructure)
8	Debt Servicing	Scheduled repayments of loans, interest payments, and lease obligations.
9	Tax Payments	Projected VAT, PAYE/PRSI, and corporate tax payments based on forecasted profits and revenues.
10	Contingency Allowance	Buffer for unexpected expenses or delayed receipts (usually a conservative margin built into forecasts).
11	Closing Cash Balance	Calculated as: Opening Balance + Inflows - Outflows - representing the forecasted end-of-month cash position.
12	Rolling Update Process	At the end of each month, actual results replace forecasts, and the forecast rolls forward to cover the coming 12 months.

3. Tailored KPIs: The Indicators of Success

Maintaining financial visibility is critical for SMEs to ensure sustainable growth, profitability, and liquidity. Tracking a balanced mix of leading and lagging financial KPIs enables proactive management of revenue, cash flow, and operational efficiency.

The table below includes a sample of key finance-focused leading and lagging KPIs that help SMEs anticipate challenges and measure financial performance over time:

Table: Key finance-focused leading and lagging KPIs

Туре	КРІ	Description
Leading KPI	Sales Pipelines Value €	Total value of open opportunities – predicts future revenue inflows.
Leading KPI	Average Deal Size €	Indicates the scale of future revenue if pipeline opportunities close.
Leading KPI	Number of New Sales Leads	Tracks future sales growth potential before revenue is realised.
Leading KPI	Invoice Processing Time (Days)	Faster billing can speed up cash collections – influencing future cash flow.
Leading KPI	Customer Payment Terms (Days)	Monitoring negotiated payment terms can predict future cash inflows and liquidity.
Leading KPI	Forecasted Monthly Recurring Revenue (MRR) Growth %	Predicts future revenue stability and scalability for subscription or contract businesses.
Lagging KPI	Total Revenue €	Measures actual income received from clients – past period's sales.
Lagging KPI	Gross Profit Margin %	Shows profitability after direct costs have been incurred.
Lagging KPI	Operating Cash Flow €	Measures actual cash generated from business operations.
Lagging KPI	EBITDA Margin %	Measures operating profitability before interest, tax, depreciations and amortisation.
Lagging KPI	Debtor Days (ARDO)	Measures how long customers take to pay – impacts realised cash flow.
Lagging KPI	Net Profit Margin %	Reflects final bottom-line profitability after all costs and taxes.

Cloudtech Limited: Leveraging Management Information for Smarter Growth

Cloudtech Limited's founder Brenda had to admit that Cloudtech's financial management was largely backward looking. Forecasts were static, and budgets were based on last year's figures plus 10%. There was no formal cash buffer policy, and the business hadn't explored growth-funding options.

Despite a strong regional presence and trusted service delivery, the company faced key challenges:

- Limited real-time cash flow forecasting
- Difficulty linking operational activities to long-term strategic objectives
- Gaps in tracking new market opportunities – e.g. compliance services, Managed Security Services
- Limited early-warning signals for emerging risks such as market saturation and new competition

Objective

It was difficult to confidently execute proactive scaling, diversification, and future-proofing without tightly integrated MI and forecasting. Cloudtech's management team knew they needed to address this shortcoming.

Putting a System in Place

Cloudtech's finance team implemented an integrated MI and cash flow system directly supporting its long-term strategic pillars.

Maximising Horizon 1 strengths:

 Strengthened tracking of revenues, sales pipeline, new-client leads, gross margin and EBITDA from existing service lines, which enabled better understanding of and helped to protect and extend
 Cloudtech's core business

Exploiting Horizon 2 opportunities:

 Introduced new KPIs for emerging service lines, including closed Managed Security Service Provider deals and compliance project revenue, to monitor expansion into adjacent markets

Accelerating the flywheel:

 Embedded MI around client lifetime value, net promoter scores, and internal reinvestment metrics to systematically fuel client trust and organic growth

Mitigating weaknesses and threats:

 Added new visibility into brand reach metrics, revenue pipeline diversification across sectors and regions, and investments into future technologies

Future-proofing the business:

 Developed forecasting models for emerging tech adoption to assess readiness for Horizon 3 opportunities



More specifically, the MI pack included the following leading and lagging KPIs:

TYPE	KPI	DESCRIPTION
Leading KPI	Sales Pipelines Value €	Total value of active sales opportunities – predicts future revenue growth and expansion into adjacent markets (e.g. MSSP, Compliance)
Leading KPI	Forecasted (MRR) Growth %	Early signal of future revenue stability and client contract expansion
Leading KPI	Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) / Net Promoter Score (NPS)	Immediate feedback on service quality – predicts client retention and flywheel momentum
Leading KPI	Innovation Investment Ratio	% of revenue reinvested into technology innovation (e.g. Al-driven IT services, advanced cybersecurity) – critical for future-proofing (Horizon 3)
Lagging KPI	Total Revenue €	Measures realised sales performance over a given period – outcome of Horizon 1 and Horizon 2 efforts
Lagging KPI	Gross Profit Margin %	Tracks profitability after direct service delivery costs – critical for financial health and reinvestment capacity
Lagging KPI	Client Retention Rate %	Measures ability to maintain client relationships – lagging indicator of service excellence and brand trust
Lagging KPI	Operating Cash Flow €	Measures liquidity generated from operations – validates financial sustainability and supports strategic growth investments

The final element of this integrated finance solution was a rolling 12-month cash flow forecast, which ensured that day-to-day operations and future growth initiatives could be resourced without jeopardising Cloudtech's liquidity.

The Impact

The benefits for Cloudtech were immediate and tangible:

- Enhanced financial control: Early identification of cash flow surpluses and gaps supported strategic investments in new services and technology.
- Greater accountability: Department heads were able to align team KPIs with company-wide objectives, improving performance and transparency.
- Better decision-making: Data-driven insights enabled smarter investments in cybersecurity and cloud services.
- Proactive strategic execution: The
 MI system enabled Cloudtech to make
 informed, confident decisions aligned
 with each growth horizon. For example,
 the process revealed a growing demand
 for managed security services, shaping
 the firm's Horizon 2 growth strategy.
- Growth acceleration: Clear measurement of emerging service areas led to faster scaling of new revenue streams.
- Risk mitigation: Improved risk visibility helped Cloudtech adapt its client acquisition and service development strategies in real time.
- Future readiness: Early investment planning for Al-driven managed services and advanced cybersecurity positioned Cloudtech ahead of competitors.

Bringing it all Together

This integrated MI approach allowed Cloudtech's leadership team to strengthen its core services, strategically expand into adjacent markets such as Managed Security Services and compliance solutions, and invest early in future technologies like AI-driven IT management and predictive cybersecurity services.

Monthly MI reviews enabled smarter cash flow planning, early identification of investment needs, and proactive management of client satisfaction and retention.

As a result, Cloudtech not only improved its financial control and operational discipline but also accelerated its strategic flywheel—building momentum through continuous reinvestment in talent, innovation, and market expansion.

VI. OPTIMISING OPERATIONS FOR GROWTH



Operations underpin a business's scalability. Without strong systems, even the best strategy will falter. SMEs must embed repeatability, efficiency, and accountability across functions.

When building an operating system, SMEs should consider:

- 1. Operating cadence: Establish a regular rhythm of meetings, planning cycles, and check-ins to drive momentum, create alignment, and ensure the organisation stays focused on strategic goals.
- 2. Ownership: Clearly assign responsibility for specific outcomes, ensuring every initiative or process has a directly accountable individual who can make decisions and drive results.
- 3. Accountability mechanisms: Establish transparent systems such as goalsetting frameworks, progress tracking and review processes to measure performance consistently and course-correct quickly when needed.

SMES THAT MANAGE GROWTH EFFECTIVELY DO SO BY BUILDING A SCALABLE OPERATING SYSTEM

- LORCAN TIERNAN, CHAIRMAN, FITZGERALD POWER









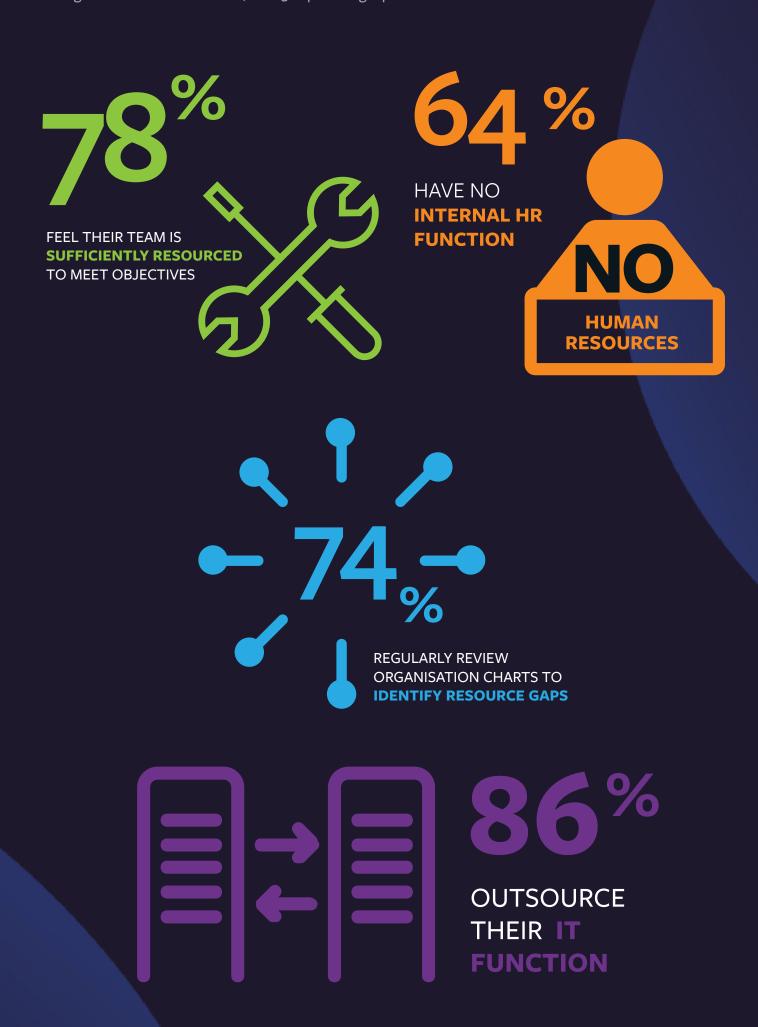
Concentrate on what will produce results rather than on the results, the process rather than the price.

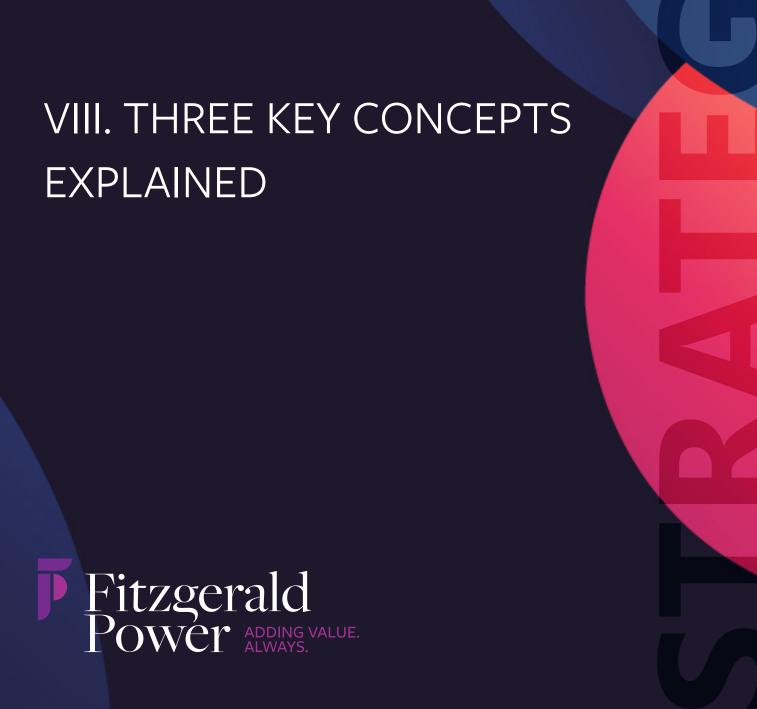
- BILL WALSH

VII. TAKING THE PULSE OF SME IRELAND

PART 3: OPTIMISING OPERATIONS







1. Operating Cadence

An operating cadence is the deliberate rhythm of meetings, planning, communication, and review that keeps the business moving forward consistently.

- Why it matters: Growth companies are dynamic, and without structured touchpoints, communication breaks down, priorities drift, and people lose focus.
- Operating Cadence Examples:
 - » Annual strategic planning offsite: Set the big-picture vision and priorities.
 - » Quarterly objective setting and review: Align teams on measurable objectives.
 - » Quarterly business reviews with direct reports: Track progress against key metrics and KPIs.
 - » Weekly leadership team meetings: Focus on tactical blockers and cross-team updates.
- Principle: If properly planned and supported by clear agendas and followup action logs, meetings are work, not interruptions. As Peter Drucker once said 'A good operating cadence creates predictability and reduces chaos.'

2. Ownership

Ownership means clearly assigning who is responsible for driving outcomes, decisions, and results.

- Why it matters: Ambiguity kills execution. If everyone owns it, then no one owns it.
- Ownership Examples:
 - » Assign a Directly Responsible

- **Individual (DRI)** for every key project, process, or deliverable.
- Define roles and responsibilities clearly – i.e. job descriptions, decision rights etc.
- » Create a simple 'single-threaded' ownership map for major initiatives. This concept was popularised by Amazon.
- **Principle:** Ownership is about empowerment, not micromanagement. The person accountable must have the authority to act.

3. Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability mechanisms are the systems, tools, and processes that measure whether individuals and teams are delivering on their commitments.

- Why it matters: Without visible accountability, good intentions deteriorate into inconsistent performance.
- Accountability Examples:
 - » OKRs (Objectives and Key Results): Publicly track quarterly goals and key results.
 - » Team member scorecards: Metrics dashboards reviewed weekly or monthly.
 - » Performance reviews: Structured feedback loops tied to goals and values.
 - » Post-mortems / retrospectives: Regular reviews after projects or incidents to capture lessons learned.
- **Principle:** Accountability should be frequent, transparent, and focused on learning, not punishment.

Cloudtech Limited: Putting Operating Structures in Place

In September 2022, Cloudtech was a strong regional MSP, trusted by local clients but facing operational challenges typical of many Irish SMEs, including:

- Ad-hoc management decision making
- Key-person dependency
- Limited scalable systems

Objective: To prepare for national growth, and eventually enable an exit, Brenda and her leadership team recognised the need to professionalise Cloudtech's operations across three key elements:

Operating Cadence: Rhythm and Focus

Starting point: Cloudtech operated reactively, with meetings scheduled irregularly, mostly responding to issues rather than proactively managing performance or planning for growth.

Action taken: Brenda and her leadership team introduced a structured operating cadence built around quarterly, monthly, and weekly rhythms, including:

• Quarterly strategic reviews:

- » Review overall business performance against goals
- » Adjust strategic actions as required for the next 90 days
- » Deep dive into emerging technology trends to future-proof offerings

Monthly leadership meetings:

 Standardised agenda covering sales pipeline, project delivery KPIs, financial health, and customer satisfaction scores (NPS) » These were disciplined meetings and lasted no longer than 90 minutes

Weekly Team Huddles:

- » Quick, 30-minute operational meetings
- » Focused on tactical blockers and immediate priorities

Before implementing this operating cadence structure, the team spent its time reacting to daily noise. Afterwards, everyone knew the pulse of the business.

2. Ownership: Clarifying Accountability at Every Level

Starting point: Ownership of critical business functions like sales, client relationships, or service delivery was informal. Many decisions bottlenecked with Brenda, and key client relationships were heavily founder-dependent.

Action taken: Cloudtech restructured roles and clarified Directly Responsible Individuals (DRIs) for key areas:

- Head of Sales:
 - » Full ownership of new business pipeline and client renewal processes
- Service Delivery Manager:
 - » Ownership of SLA performance, customer onboarding, and service escalations
- Finance Lead:
 - » Ownership of monthly financial reporting, including normalised adjustments (removal of non-core, owner-related expenses)

Additionally, Brenda appointed a General Manager to begin succession planning and reduce founder dependency. Every strategic initiative now has a named DRI for outcomes, budgets, and deadlines.

3. Accountability Mechanisms: Making Performance Transparent

Starting point: Cloudtech's reporting was sporadic, backward looking, and mostly operational. e.g. the number of helpdesk tickets closed with little strategic insight, such as client lifetime value and recurring revenue trends.

Action taken: Cloudtech implemented clear accountability systems:

Monthly MI Packs:

- Including rolling financial forecasts, not just historical accounts
- » KPIs for revenue, EBITDA margin, recurring revenue %, client churn, etc

Quarterly OKRs (Objectives and Key Results):

- » Each department created OKRs that were aligned with the overall company goals
- » Progress is tracked and discussed in leadership meetings

• Performance dashboards:

» Simple dashboards visualising key metrics (traffic-light system: green/ on-track, amber/at risk, red/off-track)

Post-mortems for missed targets:

» Every major miss triggers a short review to identify causes, lessons learned, and preventative steps

The team now knows where it stands every month.

4. The Impact

Following the introduction of a clear operating cadence, ownership and accountability mechanisms, Cloudtech's leadership team began to see immediate results:

- Predictable momentum: Regular meeting rhythms and strategic planning cycles keeps everyone moving in sync, reducing the risk of losing focus over busy periods
- Improved alignment across teams:

 Cross-functional meetings and shared

 OKRs helped break down silos and
 ensure that all departments were
 working toward common goals
- Reduced firefighting and increased forward planning: Instead of reacting to daily problems, teams can anticipate challenges and proactively allocate resources where needed
- Quicker and more effective decisionmaking: With clearly assigned ownership, decisions are no longer bottlenecked at Brenda's desk and can be made at the right level in the organisation
- Accountability is visible across teams:
 Performance dashboards and scorecards make it easy to track who is delivering on their commitments and where additional support is needed
- Brenda could begin stepping back from day-to-day operations, focusing instead on growth and strategy:
 Delegating operational ownership freed Brenda to invest time in partnerships, market expansion, and technology innovation opportunities

- The leadership team can spot risks and opportunities earlier: Monthly reporting and forward-looking KPIs give early warning signs of emerging issues, enabling faster course corrections.
- Focus shifted from activity to outcomes: Teams are measured not just on their busyness but on their real impact on business performance.
- Cloudtech began operating with real data-driven discipline, making it far more attractive to future owners: The new operating system demonstrates to potential buyers that Cloudtech is a scalable, professionally managed business with strong growth potential.

Bringing it all Together

By embedding a structured operating cadence, clear ownership, and strong accountability mechanisms, Cloudtech transformed itself from a reactive, founder-dependent business into a scalable, data-driven MSP.

Regular rhythms improved focus, clear ownership accelerated decision-making, and transparent accountability fostered performance.

Together, these foundations position Cloudtech for sustainable national growth and increase its attractiveness to future investors or buyers. IX. CONCLUSION: BUILD
THE ENGINE BEHIND THE
STRATEGY



In the race to scale and succeed, SMEs can't rely on vision alone.

Strategy without execution is just intention. Financial discipline and operational excellence are the engines that turn plans into performance and ambition into value.

The **Strategy 360** framework helps SMEs move beyond reactive decision making by embedding:

- Real-time financial insight through forecasting and KPIs
- Operational structure that reduces dependency and increases scalability
- A culture of accountability and continuous improvement

Cloudtech Limited shows what's possible when finance and operations are treated as strategic assets, not back-office functions.

Over 24 months, the company:

- Increased profitability
- Boosted recurring revenue
- Reduced cash flow volatility
- Strengthened team performance and succession depth

These improvements didn't just enhance day-to-day efficiency, they directly elevated the company's valuation and made it more attractive to acquirers.

WHAT COMES NEXT:

Strategy 360 Part 3 From Growth to Legacy

In the final whitepaper of this series, we focus on what comes next: exit planning, valuation maximisation, and tax structuring. We'll explore how SMEs can:

- Build a plan for shareholder transition or sale
- Manage the key levers that drive exit valuations
- Structure ownership in a way that protects and retains value
- Prepare for buyer due diligence and succession readiness

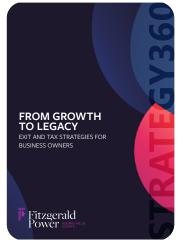
The entrepreneurial arc ends with a transition; however great exits happen by design, not by chance.

Other whitepapers in this series



Part 1

Future-Proofing Your Business: Why Strategy Comes First



Part 3

From Growth to Legacy: Exit and Tax Strategies for Business Owners

How can we help?

Our team is dedicated to providing you and your business with the absolute best financial advice out there. We approach each and every case from a fresh perspective, working with you to find tailored solutions that leave your business stronger than ever. With our expert analysis, we translate figures into a language you can understand. Using timely, reliable advice, our experienced team of experts devise sophisticated plans to encourage cost efficiency and growth. If you would like to discuss this research, contact our team at Fitzgerald Power today.



Stuart Fitzgerald sfitzgerald@fitzgeraldpower.ie



Jennifer Power jpower@fitzgeraldpower.ie

EMAIL JENNIFER

Head OfficeGreyfriars
Waterford
X91 K2WV

T: (0)51 870152 F: (0)51 871214 Waterford

Saint John's Parish Hall Catherine Street Waterford X91 X827

T: (0)51 870152 F: (0)51 871214 Dublin

50-56 Merrion Road Dublin Do4 V4K3

T: (0)1 4693739 F: (0)51 871214



