

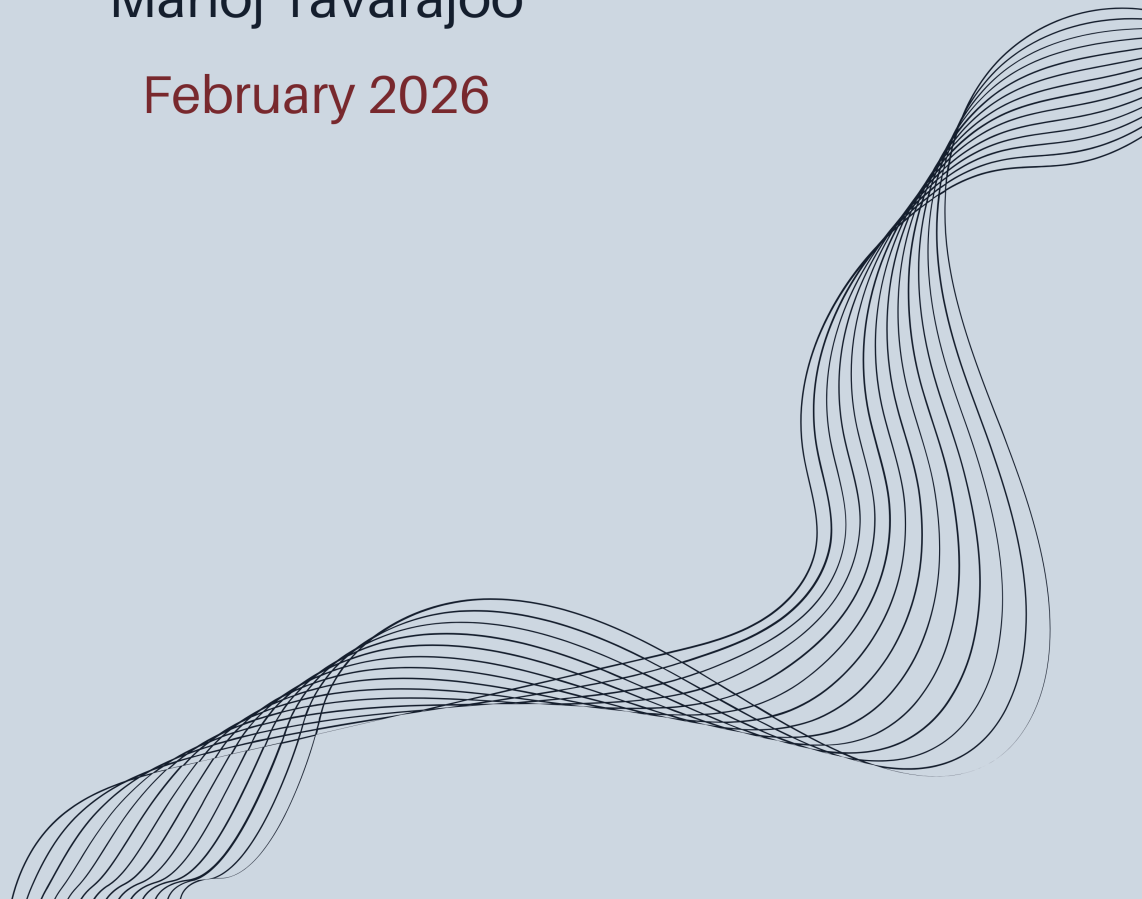


When to Standardise AI and When Not To

The AI Operating Model Playbook

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Opening context

As organisations attempt to scale AI, pressure to standardise increases. Leaders seek consistency, efficiency, and control. Platforms promise reuse and reduced risk.

At the same time, teams resist excessive standardisation. They fear loss of autonomy, slower experimentation, and reduced relevance to local contexts.

This tension often stalls progress. Too little standardisation fragments capability. Too much suppresses innovation.

Why this fails in most organisations

Many organisations approach standardisation as a binary decision. Either AI is standardised centrally or left entirely to local teams.

This framing is flawed. AI value emerges through a combination of shared foundations and local adaptation. Treating standardisation as uniform across all layers creates friction.

Standardising too early locks in immature practices. Standardising too broadly ignores contextual nuance. Avoiding standardisation altogether prevents learning from compounding.

The operating model insight

Standardisation works when applied selectively.

Certain layers benefit from consistency, including data infrastructure, core platforms, security controls, governance principles, and shared services. These enable scale and reduce duplication.

Other layers require flexibility, including use case design, model selection, decision thresholds, and operational integration. These must adapt to business context.

The question is not whether to standardise, but what to standardise and where judgement must remain local.

What this looks like in practice

Effective organisations define clear boundaries. Shared platforms and guardrails are centrally governed. Within those boundaries, teams retain autonomy to experiment and adapt.

Standards are treated as evolving assets rather than fixed rules. Feedback from execution informs refinement. Exceptions are deliberate rather than accidental.

This balance allows AI capability to scale without becoming brittle.

Common mistakes to avoid

Enforcing standardisation to regain control rather than to enable scale.

Allowing every team to define its own approach.

Freezing standards too early.

Letting standards proliferate without ownership.

What leaders must do differently

Leaders must design standardisation deliberately. They must distinguish between foundational consistency and contextual flexibility.

This requires clarity on decision rights, governance boundaries, and escalation paths. Leaders must also accept that standards will evolve as AI matures.

Conclusion

AI cannot scale without standardisation, but it cannot innovate without flexibility.

The organisations that succeed are those that standardise the right things and leave room for judgement where it matters most.



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