



What We Build For

The laws • in nine hard lines

The ceiling

The weakest layer sets the ceiling for all the rest.

01 Strategy	<i>Purpose – the thread through all six</i> A purpose that costs nothing decides nothing. A real strategy is a thing you pay for.
02 Discovery	You cannot plan your way to a thing no one has built.
03 Portfolio	One clock cannot govern two kinds of work.
04 The boundary of the firm	Half of building well is deciding what not to build.
05 Operating structure	A team is small enough when the whole picture fits in one room.
06 The human conditions	Safety is the freedom to say the expensive thing.

What it asks of you

Integrity is visible only under cost.

The book in nine hard lines, each with a question to ask of your own organization — what to carry into the room when the pages are not with you. Each line is a verdict; each question is the test.

The ceiling

Which of the six questions below do you least want to answer? That is your ceiling. Start there. When it holds, look again.

Purpose — the thread through all six

Name a decision it changed this quarter. If you can't, it is decoration.

01 Strategy

What did you give up for it? If you can't name the loss, you have a plan.

02 Discovery

What are you most afraid to be wrong about — and when did you last test it cheaply? If never, you are planning, not discovering.

03 Portfolio

What clock does your newest bet run on? If it is the quarter's, you already know how it ends.

04 The boundary of the firm

What are you building that you should have bought — and what did you hand away that only you could have built?

05 Operating structure

Can the people on it hold the whole problem between them? If not, it is a queue, not a team.

06 The human conditions

When did someone last tell you something you didn't want to hear? If you can't recall, the room has gone quiet.

What it asks of you

What did the last honest thing cost you? If nothing, it hasn't been tested.

Where they meet

Not laws, and not counted among the nine: the seams between them. The value is not in any one layer but in what happens between two, and a seam cannot be installed one side at a time.



Strategy × structure

Could a team use the strategy to refuse something this week, without asking?



Strategy × the portfolio

Is your split between today's business and tomorrow's bets a choice, or last year's budget?



Discovery × the human conditions

Who last stopped something because of what they learned — and what happened to them?



Discovery × the portfolio

Is your newest bet judged by what it learned, or by a plan written before it knew anything?



Strategy × the boundary

Is what you build yourself the thing you call your edge?



Purpose × the boundary

Does anyone outside your walls bring you knowledge because they care about the problem?



Purpose × the human conditions

When people disagree here, is it about what the work is for, or about who wins?



Above the six: ownership × strategy

Would your hardest refusal survive a quarter where it costs the owners money?

The answers are yours. The reasons, their limits, and what to do where you stand are the book:
whatwebuildfor.com