On Business Operating Systems

HOW THEY HELP AND WHERE TO START

At Ninety, we get how hard it is to build and run organizations. Our cloud-based Business Operating System (BOS) platform contains each of the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines needed to become great company builders.

We believe we're moving into a new age of Work — what we refer to as the Age of Understanding, or Work 8.0. The coming of this age was inevitable, but the pandemic accelerated its arrival by about ten years as so many people transitioned to remote or hybrid work models.

When we say Work, we mean finding value and purpose in our occupational roles — not just punching a time clock.

One of the most notable characteristics of Work 8.0 is that we now have an almost infinite array of opportunities to find Work. This shift will see more and more people reshuffling where and how they Work.

The good news is we've been studying company building for decades and have a well-informed, time-tested understanding of the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines needed to master great company building.

In short, great companies understand who they are, what they are, where they are, where they want to go, and what it's going to take to get there.

This guide is all about how to master a particular skill, discipline, or toolset. It's one of an array of guides associated with how to build a great company.

Across all our content, rest assured that our relentless focus will always be to simplify the hard work of aligning and focusing teams so organizations and their employees can thrive.

Gratefully,

Mark Abbott

CEO + Founder, Ninety

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Purpose

This Ninety Guide provides a detailed look at the concept of a **Business Operating System (BOS)**. Every business has a BOS; the more sophisticated ones help turn a founder-dependent business into an enduring and founder-independent company.

Upgrading a Business Operating System is a significant step in a company's development. The more advanced BOSs offer time-tested **concepts, tools, and disciplines** that help organizations grow, master critical competencies, and achieve their Visions. BOS coaches guide businesses through the BOS upgrade process. It's a methodical, designed process, one validated by tens of thousands of successful implementations and the innumerable, lasting, positive results that ensue.

The world of BOSs is large, diverse, and ever-evolving. It also happens to be one of our specialties. At Ninety, we put our knowledge to good use every day by creating — and continually enhancing — a platform that serves the more sophisticated BOSs.

If you're considering upgrading your Business Operating System, this guide can serve as a resource and potential launching pad. We're happy to share our roadmap because delivering free, high-impact company-building information is part of our mission to help organizations focus, align, and thrive.

LET'S DIVE IN.

- **Read it**

  » We've designed this guide to make it easy to quickly absorb the information. Skim for highlights, glance for big ideas, or dive in for a deeper understanding.

- **Save it**

  » Continue to use this guide as a high-value reference. Highlight, underline, or circle what's most useful. We've even left space for notes.

- **Share it**

  » The information and advice on these pages should be shared. We deeply believe that useful resources should be accessible to all.

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Essential Concepts

At Ninety, we measure organizational development through two frameworks: the **Stages of Development** and the **9 Core Competencies**. We also distinguish between a **company** and a **business**. These essential concepts help us navigate the options and opportunities provided by BOSs.

In any organization, every individual, team, and department should continually develop. Development, also known as growth or evolution, is necessary for moving past survival and into maturity and sustained success. If an organization doesn't develop, it will inevitably plateau and become stagnant — or even disappear entirely.

But how exactly do you go about developing a business? Even with a clear understanding of critical developmental targets, it's a sizeable task. By comparison, a goal like "increasing market share" may seem relatively simple.

The Stages of Development and 9 Core Competencies help us figure out where we're at — and visualize what to aim for. It's helpful to lay out these developmental stages because, on the whole, high-stage organizations that master critical competencies enjoy increased efficiency, more satisfied people, and higher valuations.

With the need to develop in mind, we've used our decades of company-building experience and data from thousands of successful organizations to identify the **five distinct Stages of Development** organizations go through on their journey to becoming enduring institutions: Survive, Sustain, Scale, Succeed, and Steward. These stages serve as the foundational framework for understanding what it takes to move from one stage to another and celebrate organizational growth.

Most new businesses start in Survival mode, but as they find a place in the market, they focus on being able to Sustain and reinforce their operations. Eventually, a business can Scale and develop a clear path to long-term viability. If done right, companies enter into the Succeed stage and no longer rely on constant involvement from their founders. In the fifth and final stage, the company has a successful structure in place, and the founder is free to focus completely on what's next.

Where does a Business Operating System fit into this journey? We've found that upgrading a BOS — with its interconnected concepts, tools, and disciplines — significantly accelerates an organization's development.

To learn more, read our or dive into our .

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STEWARD

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SUCCEED

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SCALE

2
SUSTAIN

1
SURVIVE
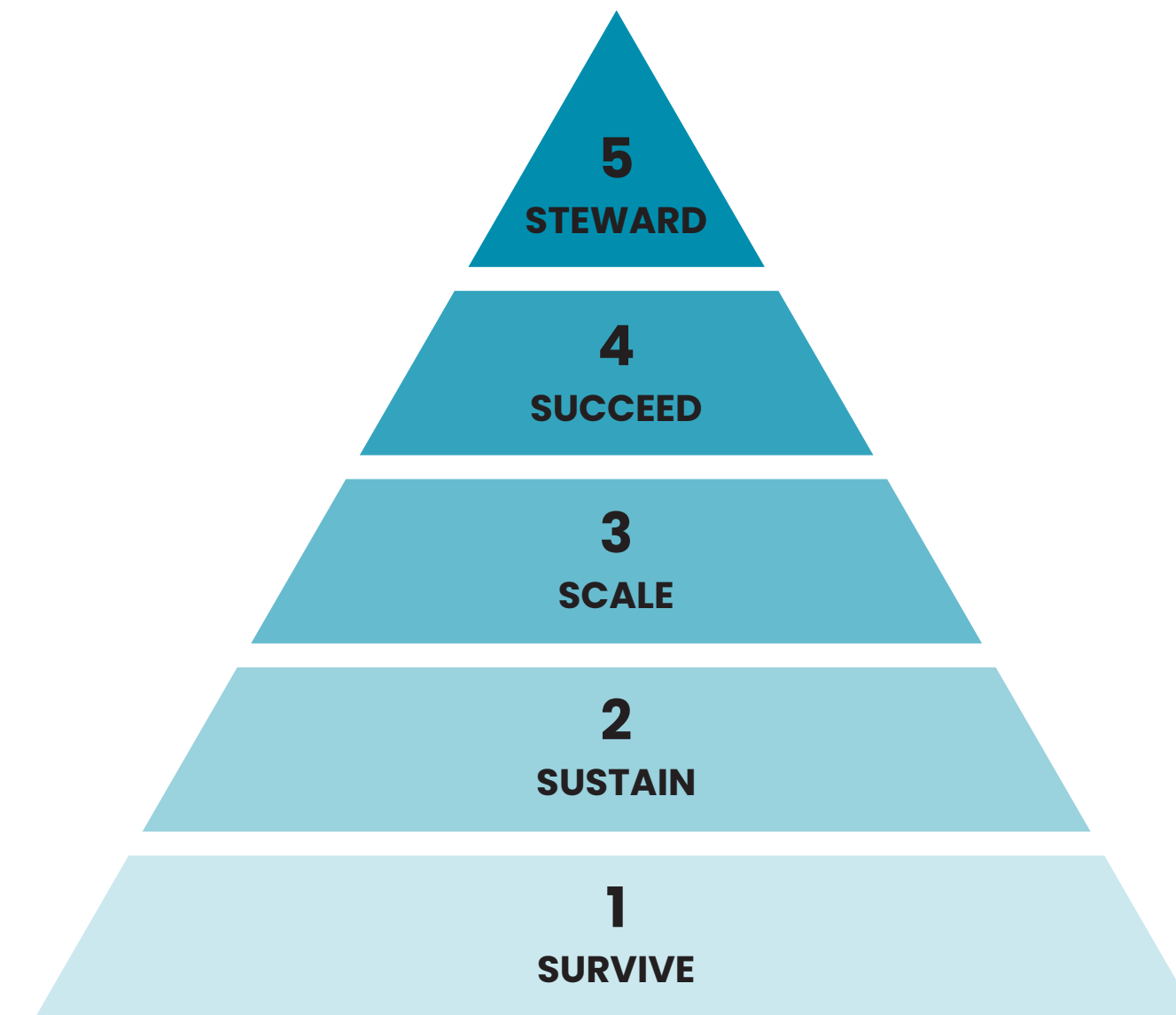
Progress through the Stages of Development is most easily accomplished through mastery of **9 Core Competencies**: Vision, Customer, Goals, People, Structure, Data, Meetings, Process, and Exit.

Because each competency represents an important facet of what's necessary to go from novice to good to great, most Business Operating Systems provide proven concepts, tools, and disciplines to help organizations master them. BOSs prioritize competencies because they are foundational to everything that will ultimately need to be accomplished on the path to Steward.

Every sophisticated BOS aims to consider the cross-functional needs of a healthy and growing organization. As a business grows increasingly competent in an area, it develops. As it develops comprehensively, it actualizes, progressing through the five Stages of Development.

To learn more about the 9 Core Competencies essential to building a great organization, read our 9 Core Competencies Brief or dive into our On Competencies Guide.

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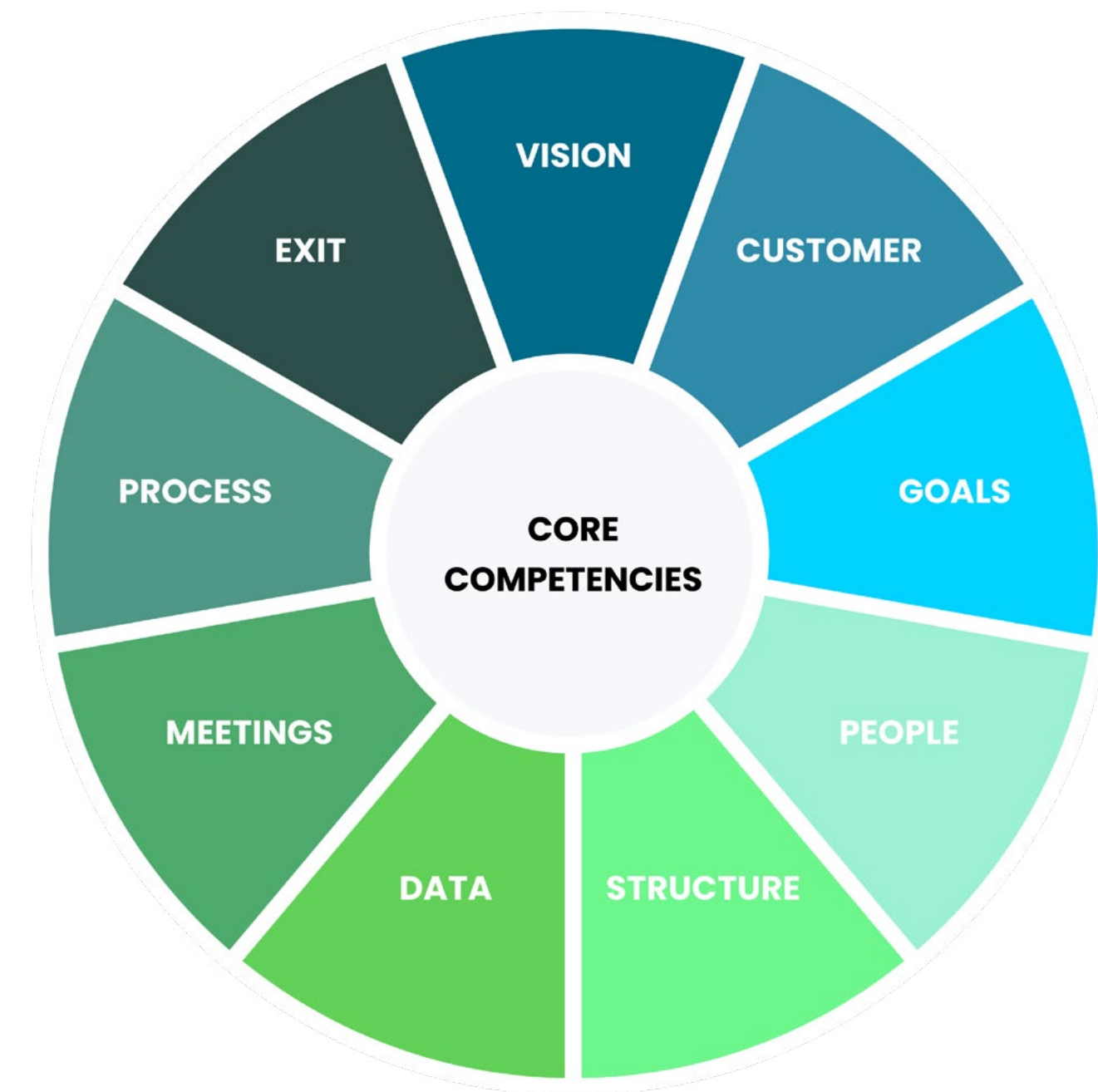
It's worth noting another central tenet of our organizational development framework: the difference between a business and a company. For many, these terms are interchangeable, each broadly representing commercial activity. We see something more vital.

Business is a general term that refers to an organization that engages in commercial activity. A business can be small or big (by its number of people or its revenue), new or old, but it exists primarily in earlier stages of development. Every commercial organization starts out as a business.

Company is a specific term that refers to a more developed business, one that has progressed to the point where it can operate effectively without its founder and later can be passed from leader to leader. Such independence is a key indicator of an organization's growth and health. A company typically exists at a higher developmental stage.

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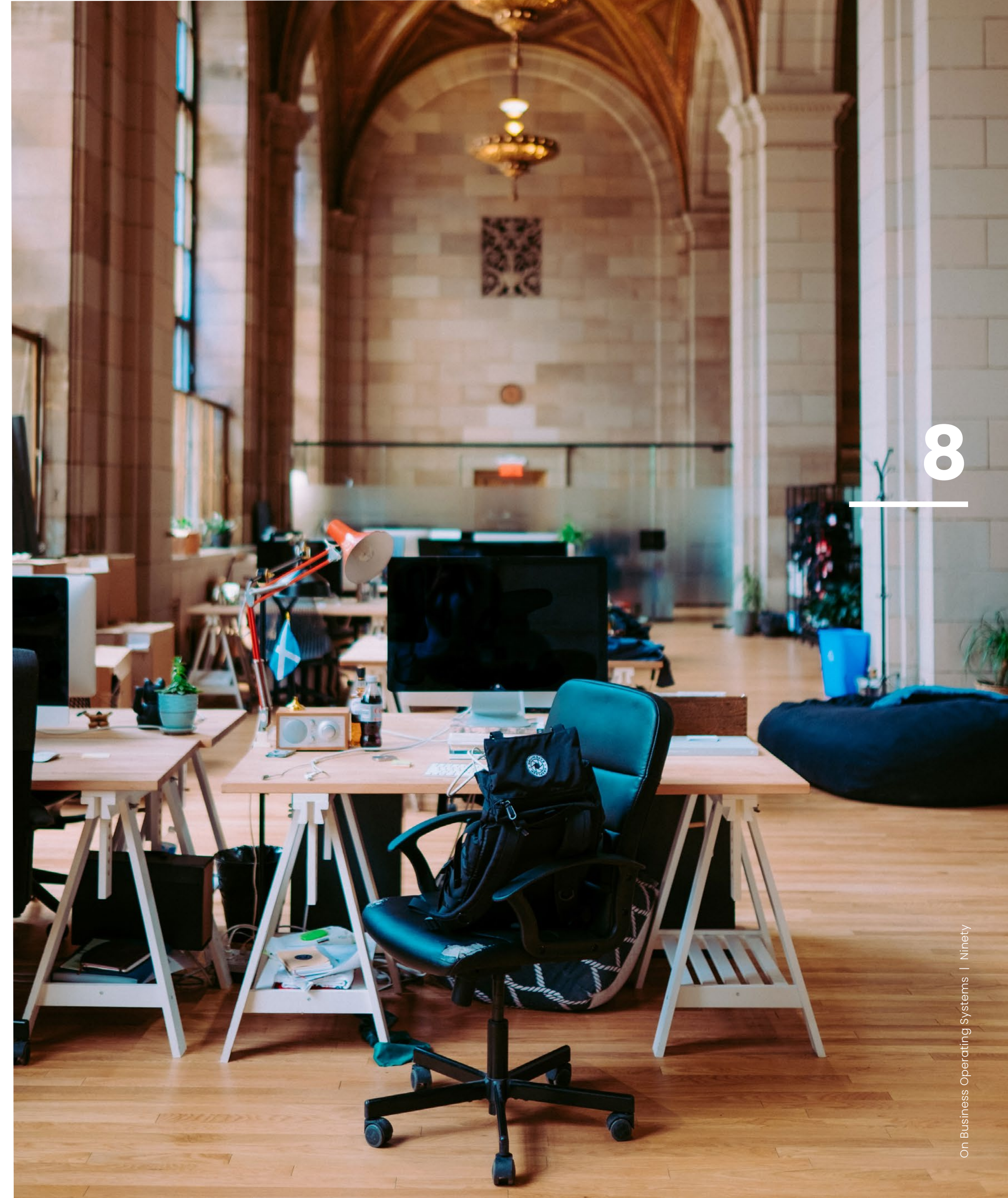
What Is a BOS?

A **Business Operating System** is, quite literally, how a business operates. It represents everything from an organization's structure to how it sets goals, hires people, runs meetings, and ensures that everyone is focused, aligned, and working toward building a thriving organization that has high-trust relationships with all its stakeholders.

Every business has some kind of BOS from day one. Some BOSs are designed by external experts to address all major elements associated with building a great company: concepts, tools, and disciplines. We'll explore different BOS profiles on the following page.

Additionally, more developed companies utilize a **BOS platform.** Today's leading BOS platforms provide every one of the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines leaders need to align and focus their teams. BOS platforms have become almost essential as companies move to ensure people can work from anywhere.
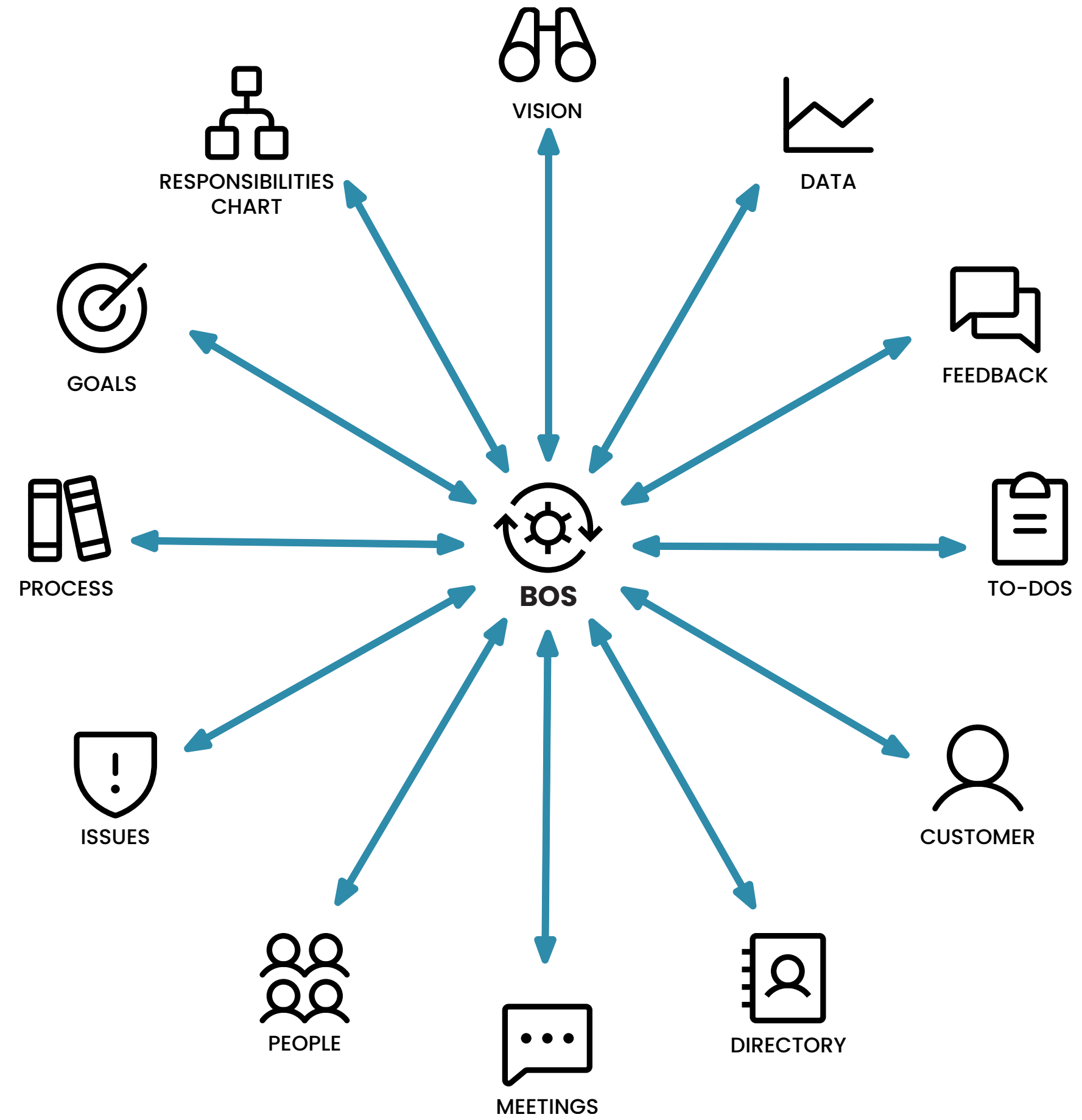
In our work, we've identified five primary **BOS profiles.** As the Business Operating System advances, so does the business.

INTEGRATED
HOLISTIC
DESIGNED
INTENTIONAL
ACCIDENTAL
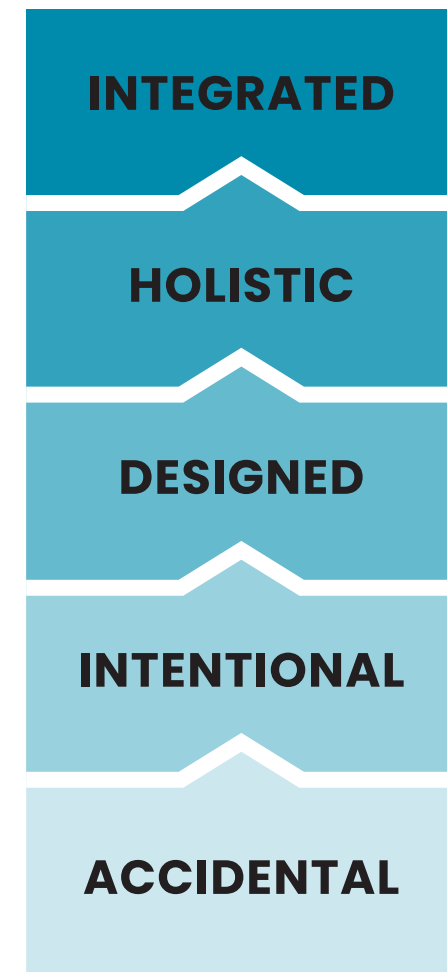
ACCIDENTAL BOS

Most businesses start with an Accidental BOS. Leaders who launch a business typically follow their own practices at the outset, and as people come on board, they follow their own practices. Soon, there are a lot of people using too many different tools to do the exact same kind of work. An **Accidental BOS** is mostly improvised, reactive, and disorganized — the business aims for survival.

INTENTIONAL BOS

As a business stabilizes and gains customers and team members, it begins to use learned experience to create a purposeful, if preliminary, operating system. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) might assemble an **Intentional BOS** using agreed-on tools and disciplines drawn from their personal or collective experiences.

DESIGNED BOS

As the organization continues to scale, the SLT might adopt a Designed BOS that has been configured by an expert in the field based on their experience with tens or even hundreds of businesses. A **Designed BOS** consists of interrelated concepts, tools, and disciplines that work best when used together.

HOLISTIC BOS

This system aims to address all the major concepts, tools, and disciplines associated with building an enduring company. For a growing company, when a need arises, there's a time-tested solution and a proven methodology for mastery ready to go. A **Holistic BOS** supports all the main business functions, enabling continuous learning and rising success.

INTEGRATED BOS

Leaders who aspire to realize their vision and actualize their business' potential employ an **Integrated BOS**, a BOS run on a cloud-based platform that combines proven concepts, tools, and disciplines with seamless data integration. The platform provides a complete cross-organizational view of KPIs, goals, responsibilities, and more. With this BOS in place, the founder or entrepreneur has likely stepped away from daily operations, confidently leaving the SLT to steward organizational success.

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Typical BOS Profile Features

Each BOS profile typically offers (or doesn't offer) a specific set of features.

KEY
◗ Partially offered ● Fully offered

BOS FEATURE	ACCIDENTAL BOS	INTENTIONAL BOS	DESIGNED BOS	HOLISTIC BOS	INTEGRATED BOS
Proven Methodology for Company Building			●	●	●
Solutions for All Main Organizational Functions			◗	●	●
All Essential Company-Building Tools			◗	●	●
Tracking of Mastery and Suggested Actions			◗	◗	●
Visibility into What's Working and What's Not			◗	◗	●
Supported by World-Class Strategic Partners			◗	◗	●
Embraces Continuous Learning				◗	●
Evolves Over Time				◗	●
All Tools Integrated with Data					●
Cloud-Based to Support Remote Work					●

Are You Ready for a BOS?

For the business looking to develop intentionally, upgrading the operating system can be immensely beneficial. However, given the work involved, it's important to take stock before starting the implementation process. You can do so by asking yourself and your team the following questions. Answering "Yes" to these prompts suggests that your organization is likely equipped to upgrade your BOS.

BOS READINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

Are we **ready to spend** 10% of our time, energy, and effort – time we normally spend **in** the business – working **on** the business? Do we collectively view this time as a valuable and necessary investment in our organization's future?

☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

1. Are we **open to learning** from outside experts and systems that can provide insights, even though these voices have not always been in the building? Are we receptive to external perspective?

   ☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

2. Are we **able to accept** that an established business operating system may be better than the organic one we've developed internally over time? Do we recognize the potential benefit of using a BOS we didn't have to invent?

   ☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

3. Are we **emotionally prepared** to relinquish ways of thinking, processes, and tools that have helped us get where we are but no longer represent the best approach to realizing our vision?

   ☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

4. Are we **willing to handle** the occasional discomfort, tension, and pain that can occur during the implementation process as our teams address our limiting factors and collectively undergo a positive transformation?

   ☐ **YES** ☐ **NO**

BOS Options

There are numerous Business Operating Systems in the market, each with its own features and methodology. Collectively, these BOSs — and the BOS platforms that power them, like Ninety — are utilized by tens of thousands of small and midsize organizations to great positive effect.

It's not feasible to present every BOS in great detail in this guide. Instead, over the next few pages, we'll briefly outline **five major BOSs, eight newer BOSs,** and **five prominent BOS platforms**.

There's a great deal of additional documentation on these systems and platforms available online, including countless downloads, influential books, coaching community feedback, and client testimonials. This guide provides an overview to help launch your own explorations.

MAJOR BOS OPTIONS
EMYTH®
SCALING UP™
THE ENTREPRENEURIAL OPERATING SYSTEM (EOS)®
THE 4 DISCIPLINES OF EXECUTION®
THE GREAT GAME OF BUSINESS®

NEWER BOS OPTIONS
Empire Operating System™
Fireproof Performance™
Gravitas Impact™
Pinnacle Business Guides™
System & Soul™
Top Teams™
True Space™
90os

PLATFORM OPTIONS
Align™
Bloom Growth™
Metronome Growth Systems™
Ninety®
Rhythm Systems™

EMyth®

Overview

EMyth was developed by **Michael Gerber**, author of *The E-Myth: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do About It* and *The E-Myth Revisited*. In addition to its BOS resources, EMyth provides coaching to owners and CEOs, and other companies owned by Gerber offer educational, publishing, and entrepreneurial mentoring services.

Model

The EMyth model identifies **three business personalities**: entrepreneurs, managers, and technicians. It further outlines six rules for a successful business, such as giving consistent value, using consistent cues, and demonstrating precision and order. Other points of emphasis include creating a picture of the ideal business and systematizing it for efficiency.

Process

As for process, EMyth offers a seven-step business development program. Steps range from establishing the founder's primary aim to defining strategic objectives and a people strategy. The **EMyth Roadmap** is designed to solve problems and help create systems to help a business grow and change.

Tools

EMyth offers several key texts, including *The E-Myth Revisited*, *E-Myth Mastery*, *Awakening the Entrepreneur Within*, *Beyond the E-Myth*, and *The E-Myth Accountant*. For resources, there's also the company's blog, which presents useful articles on a variety of related topics.

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For more information, visit emyth.com

Scaling Up™

Overview

Scaling Up was developed by **Verne Harnish**, founder of the Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO). The system is described in his book, *Scaling Up: How a Few Companies Make It...and Why the Rest Don't.* Gazelles Inc., the parent company of Scaling Up, provides certification for coaches and education, coaching, and technology services to businesses.

Model

The Scaling Up process utilizes the **4D Framework**, which focuses on four vital habits and routines: Drivers, Demands, Disciplines, Decisions. The 4D Framework is applied to **Four Foundations** needed to grow a business: People, Strategy, Execution, Cash. According to the system, every company must get these four elements right.

Process

Scaling Up coaches generally follow a **process framework**, adapting it as needed to the realities and needs of specific clients. Aspects of the process include monthly meetings and multi-day quarterly and annual off-site meetings. Other companies may instead choose to begin with the system's books, workshops, or performance platform.

Tools

Key Scaling Up resources include the One-Page Personal Plan™, Core™, Function Accountability Chart™, Process Accountability Chart™, 7 Strategic Strata™, One-Page Strategic Plan™, Rockefeller Habits Checklist™, 7 Financial Levers™, Cash Conversion Cycles™, and 4 Decisions Assessment™, among others.

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For more information, visit scalingup.com.

The Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS)®

Overview

The Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) is the brainchild of **Gino Wickman**, who authored a series of books on the system. *Traction: Get A Grip On Your Business*, the first in the series, was published in 2007. EOS Worldwide, organized as a franchisor and based in Detroit, Michigan, focuses on training and certifying EOS Implementers®.

Model

The EOS model focuses on developing what it identifies as the **Six Key Components™** of any entrepreneurial system: Vision, People, Data, Issues, Process, and Traction. Developing these areas results in a healthy, focused organization that makes continual progress toward achieving everything in its vision.

Process

There is a well-choreographed, fixed process for implementing EOS. Typically, the process consists of a sequence of off-site, full-day sessions with the organization's leadership team, facilitated by an **external Implementer**. EOS is said to take approximately 24 months to master at the senior leadership level.

Tools

To reinforce implementation of the Six Key Components, EOS offers 20 tools, including the Vision/Traction Organizer (VTO)™, The Meeting Pulse™, Accountability Chart™, People Analyzer™, GWC™, EOS Scorecard™, Rocks™, The Level 10 Meeting™, Leadership, Management & Accountability (LMA)™, and more.

For more information, visit eosworldwide.com.

The 4 Disciplines of Execution®

Overview

The 4 Disciplines of Execution (4DX) was created by **Chris McChesney**, **Sean Covey**, and **Jim Huling**, executives at Franklin Covey and co-authors of the book by the same title. Franklin Covey offers coaching services, implementation, speaking engagements, and software- and app-based tools for businesses seeking to increase strategic execution.

Model

The 4 Disciplines of Execution identifies **four disciplines** that jointly form the operating system: Focus, Leverage, Engagement, and Accountability. Incorporating this formula helps a company execute its most important priorities and create a culture of high performance.

Process

To successfully implement The 4 Disciplines of Execution, a team proceeds through five stages of behavioral change: getting clear, launch, adoption, optimization, and habits. A coach can utilize the **4DX Coaching Playbook** to lead them through this process, which often takes 6–8 weeks to launch, then another 3–4 months before quarterly summits begin.

Tools

To support implementation of The 4 Disciplines of Execution, Franklin Covey presents a variety of tools, including Wildly Important Goals (WIG)™, Team WIG Definition™, Lead Measures Definition™, Scoreboard™, Scoreboard Definition™, WIG Sessions™, and several other solutions.

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For more information, visit franklincovey.com.

The Great Game of Business®

Overview

The Great Game of Business was developed by **Jack Stack** and described in *The Great Game of Business*, originally published in 1992. The book emerged from Stack's experience in increasing the value of Springfield Remanufacturing Corporation 250 times over a nine-year period.

Model

The Great Game of Business presents **three key principles**: educating employees about the business, empowering them to make better decisions, and engaging them by providing a stake in the outcome. Doing so allows a company to create an environment where employees understand that when the company wins, they win, too.

Process

The Great Game of Business outlines a **ten-step process** to implement The Game, which can be done independently or with an experienced coach. Steps in the process include addressing the leadership team, sharing the why, opening the books, acting on drivers, and providing a stake, among others.

Tools

To help implement the key principles and other concepts, The Great Game of Business offers *The Great Game of Business*, *Get in the Game*, the Discover the Game Workshop™, Team Assessments™, and The Critical Number™. Other resources include steps to simplify financial statements, define motivators, and develop a communication cycle.

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For more information, visit greatgame.com.

Newer BOS Options

Given advancements in technology, data availability, and the modern workplace, the Business Operating System industry is rapidly evolving. The most exciting work in the field sometimes originates from newer BOSs.

While such systems do not yet have the market share of the legacy BOSs, they are active, innovative, and effective. They are developing in real-time, so it's wise to bookmark and revisit them regularly. Their potential is significant.

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PINNACLE BUSINESS GUIDES™

Co-founded in 2020 by **Greg Cleary** and **Duane Marshall**, the Pinnacle Business Guides emphasize the 5P Model: People, Purpose, Playbook, Performance, and Profit. The system includes over 50 best-in-class tools.

SYSTEM & SOUL™

Co-founded in 2021 by **Benj Miller** and **Chris White**, System & Soul addresses six aspects of business: Design, Cadence, Score, Destination, Ethos, People. Each one represents part of the System or Soul of a company.

TOP TEAMS™

Founded in 2021 by **Zack Swire**, Top Teams features seven foundational business elements: Growth, Data, Focus, Flow, Teams, Impact, Strategy. Each core component is supported by its own suite of custom tools.

TRUESPACE™

Co-founded by **Charles Fred** and **Jamee Fred**, TrueSpace presents five operating conditions necessary for a small business to grow sustainably: Alignment, Discipline, Predictability, Endurance, and Value.

GRAVITAS IMPACT™

Founded in 2018 by **Keith Cupp**, Gravitas Impact stems from 7 Attributes of Agile Work™: Leadership, Strategy, Talent, Execution, Customer, Profit, and Systems. The toolbox includes six tools for each Attribute.

90os

Launched in 2023 by **Mark Abbott**, 90os integrates seamlessly into the Ninety platform, helping companies focus, align, and thrive through mastery of the 9 Core Competencies: Vision, Customer, Goals, People, Structure, Data, Meetings, Process, and Exit.

EMPIRE™

Co-founded in 2021 by **Eddie Wilson** and **Gary Harper** and based on the pillars of Leadership, Operations, Marketing, Finance, and Personnel, Empire Operating System helps leaders scale their businesses into empires.

FIREPROOF PERFORMANCE™

Founded in 2020 by **Mike Morse** and **John Nachazel**, Fireproof Performance presents a five-step model to turn law firms from unpredictable to wildly profitable.

BOS Platforms

Earlier, we noted the substantial development that occurs as a business transitions from an Accidental or Intentional BOS to a Designed BOS. A company further develops when it moves to a Holistic BOS, which provides more comprehensive solutions.

There's one more level, one that represents the possibility of total development and organizational actualization: the company that adopts a **BOS platform** that offers the benefits of a fully integrated collection of concepts, tools, and disciplines associated with a best-in-class BOS.

Effectively integrating information to this extent requires a BOS platform that is built to enable the movement, validation, and useful visibility of data between the BOS's processes and tools. The right BOS platform brings this superpower to life.

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ALIGN™
Founded in 2012 by **Doug Wander**, Align intends to simplify strategic planning, progress tracking, and team communication. The platform provides dashboards, issue accountability tools, huddle management, and more.

BLOOM GROWTH™
Co-founded in 2015 by **Clay Upton** and **Todd Smart** as Traction® Tools to support businesses running on EOS and later renamed Bloom Growth, this cloud-based platform offers several tools, such as meeting trackers and scorecards.

METRONOME GROWTH SYSTEMS™
Co-founded in 2015 by **Shannon Susko** and **Benoit Bourget**, Metronome Growth Systems drives growth using structured strategic planning, data tracking, meeting management, and dashboards.

NINETY™
Founded in 2016 by **Mark Abbott**, Ninety helps businesses align and focus so they can thrive. The cloud-based platform powers any BOS, including EOS, Pinnacle, Empire, Fireproof Performance, and its own 90os. Its suite includes tools for meeting management, issue tracking, to-do accountability, and more.

RHYTHM SYSTEMS™
Co-founded in 2006 by **Cindy Praeger** and **Patrick Thean**, Rhythm Systems helps businesses deal with the challenges of growth, execution, and alignment. The platform supports multiple BOSs.

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Selecting a BOS

Given that your selection determines how your company operates, choosing a Business Operating System is a big decision. To assist in the decision-making process, here are several proven principles to follow, gleaned from thousands of successful BOS implementations.

- **Choose one BOS.** Part of the power of these systems is their internal coherence. Don't mix and match pieces from different systems.

- **Implement fully.** A high-quality BOS often has interrelated components that work best together. Use all for the full benefit.

- **Find the right fit.** Review the available BOSs and pick one that aligns with your business's philosophy, needs, and stage of growth.

- **Check the record.** Choose a tried-and-true BOS with a record of client success. The most used systems are popular for a reason.

- **Have conversations.** Reach out to business leaders who have upgraded their BOS. Learning from their experience can only help.

- **Get help.** Your time is limited, and it's helpful to have an outsider's perspective and expertise. Consider engaging a BOS coach.

BOS PLATFORM

Last, it's wise to determine if the BOS you're considering is supported by a BOS platform. Business Operating Systems have proven to be powerful, and BOS platforms don't just accelerate mastery — they also make necessary change more lasting and easier to implement throughout an organization.

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Takeaway

Implementing a new Business Operating System offers the benefits of time-tested concepts, tools, and disciplines necessary for organizational development, long-term growth, and sustainability. As an organization begins to master competencies and moving through the Stages of Development, its BOS parallels that ascension.

Transitioning from an Accidental or Intentional BOS to one that is Designed has substantial benefits. A fully integrated BOS — one that consists of comprehensive concepts and disciplines, seamless data integration, and a robust suite of tools — builds the foundation for what we call a great company.

Determining which BOS best matches your organization's philosophy and needs may seem daunting, but there are many experienced BOS coaches and implementers to help you choose one and put it in motion.

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Key Terms

- **9 Core Competencies** – A set of time-tested areas of expertise needed to build a focused, aligned, and thriving company: Vision, Customer, Goals, People, Structure, Data, Meetings, Process, and Exit.

- **Accidental BOS** – Often found in early-stage businesses, this operating system is mostly improvised, reactive, and disorganized.

- **BOS Platform** – A cloud-based company management application that provides all the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines leaders need to align and focus their teams.

- **Business Operating System (BOS)** – A broad term to describe how an organization operates. Every business has a BOS. Some BOSs are designed by external experts to provide the concepts, tools, and disciplines needed to build a great company.

- **Designed BOS** – A BOS built by coaching company experts that leverages company-building concepts, tools, and disciplines.

- **Holistic BOS** – This BOS aims to address all the major operational components associated with building an enduring company.

- **Intentional BOS** – An operating system created by a business' leadership team to stabilize and gain customers.

- **Integrated BOS** – This system combines a BOS with a BOS platform that supports its comprehensive concepts, tools, and disciplines and provides seamless data integration.

- **Stages of Development** – A foundational framework for measuring a company's developmental progress and charting its growth.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Thank you for taking the time to explore this guide. Now that you have a sense of how these concepts and their related tools advance a company's Vision, you may be eager to implement them in your own organization. We're here to help! Find more company-building information in our 90u Library or try Ninety today.