Boundaryless

# A Common Protocol for Composable, Modular Organizations

PROTOCOL SYMPOSIUM 2026 - 25 SEPTEMBER

WE CODIFIED PLATFORM DESIGN AND PLATOFRM ORGANIZING

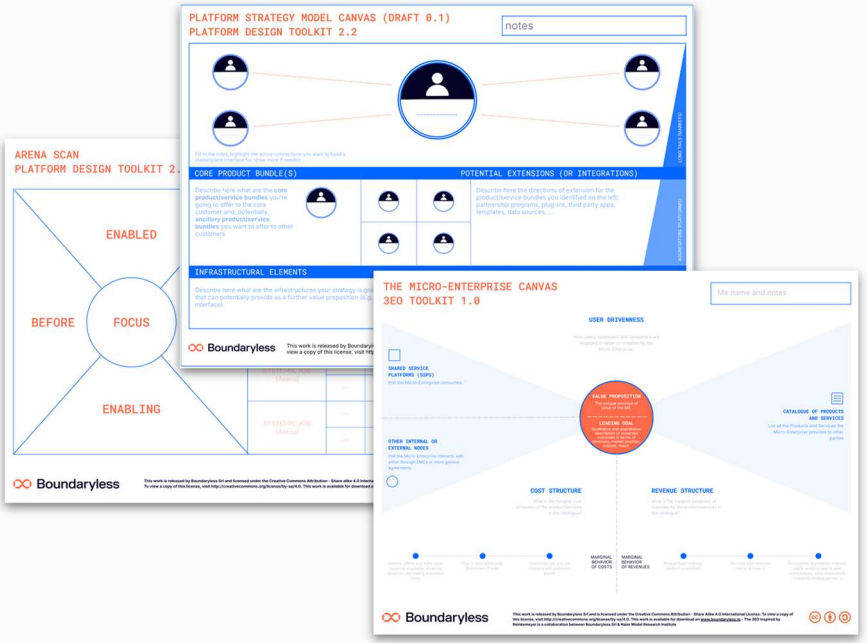
# 10+ years in product/org design, platform strategy, and operating models: recognized pioneers

2015–2019: Established platform thinking thought leadership worldwide, and defined the Platform Design frameworks and practice globally

2019–2023: Partnership with Haier Group, pioneers in codifying the concept of a Platform Organization now being widely applied worldwide (100K+ users)

2023–2025: Deep client work to develop and integrate deep heuristics for strategy-to-organizational alignment

Our work has inspired designers and Organizational developers from Fortune 500 to the most important scaleups worldwide. Even the UN.



Boundaryless

# I · The implicit organisation is being made explicit

WHERE PROTOCOLIZATION HAS NOT REACHED

# The interior of the firm is the last un-protocolized coordination layer

- This institute defines protocolization as the slow, largely invisible standardisation of human behaviour into the coordinating infrastructure of civilisation.
- That process has reached money, shipping, packets, addresses, identity, settlement.
- It stops at the door of the firm. Inside, coordination is still improvised every morning, in rooms, by people who happen to know things.
- Economics formalised the market and left the firm as a black box. This talk is about opening the box.

FRAMING BORROWED FROM THE INSTITUTE'S OWN ACCOUNT OF PROTOCOLIZATION AND OF FORMALISING PROTOCOLS THE WAY ECONOMICS FORMALISED MARKETS.

# Every organisation already runs a protocol. It is just not written down.

### What actually coordinates

- Hierarchy, as an escalation and arbitration path
- Meetings, as a synchronisation primitive
- Informal translation work by long-tenured people
- Budget cycles, as the allocation clock

### What that costs

- The rules live in people, so they leave with them
- No two units describe themselves the same way
- Nothing can be composed without a human in the middle
- The organisation cannot be read, only attended

WHY NOW

# AI cuts the costs that kept the firm implicit

### Why the firm went implicit

- Coase (1937): using the price mechanism has a cost, so inside a firm you direct instead of negotiate.
- Williamson (1975) priced it: search, bargaining, contracting, monitoring, enforcement.
- Not writing the terms down was the economising move, and for a century it was correct.

### What changes, and what does not

- AI collapses the costs on the left: search, drafting, comparing, monitoring, translating.
- Two pressures land at once. Volatility outside wants faster recombination. Agents inside cannot read a room.
- What stays expensive: what a unit is, the terms on which two combine, keeping that true as things move. That residue is the protocol.

COASE, “THE NATURE OF THE FIRM” (1937). WILLIAMSON, “MARKETS AND HIERARCHIES” (1975).

WHY THE UNIT IS WORTH STANDARDISING

# Independent traditions converge on the same archetypes

- Core units carry the differentiating work and face the market. Supporting units serve other units inside, on terms. Generic units provide what everyone needs. Several schools of organisational design arrive at this triad in their own dialects.
- Convergence under independent derivation is the usual sign that a primitive is real rather than fashionable.
- Two institutions, working from different methods, reach the same conclusion: McKinsey's survey of executives calls it deep-seated flexibility, and BCG's 2050 scenarios make it the one capability that pays off in every future.
- Neither says how. Organisational modularity, units that can be recombined on declared terms, is the operational form of that flexibility, and it is what the standard types.

| | MARKET-FACING<br>DIFFERENTIATING | INTERNAL<br>SERVES OTHER UNITS | GENERIC<br>EVERYONE NEEDS IT |
|---|---|---|---|
| O2A | **Core unit** | **Supporting unit** | **Generic unit** |
| Rendanheyi, 3EO | User ME | Node ME | Shared services |
| Org Topologies | Adaptive | Delivery | Resource |
| Team Topologies | Stream Aligned Teams | Platform / Enabling Teams | OOS |
| Domain-driven design | Core subdomain | Supporting subdomain | Generic subdomain |
| Wardley | Explorers | Villagers | Town planners |

KRIVKOVICH ET AL., THE STATE OF ORGANIZATIONS 2026 (MCKINSEY). LANG ET AL., BEYOND TOMORROW: FOUR SCENARIOS FOR 2050 (BCG HENDERSON INSTITUTE). LONG FORM IN THE FORTHCOMING WHITEPAPER.

THE ORGANISATION AS AN INTELLIGENCE

# The future? Organisation as an Intelligence... but it needs a world model it can read

- Dorsey and Botha's 'From Hierarchy to Intelligence' reads the company as one intelligence, rather than a hierarchy that happens to use some.
- An intelligence is only as good as its world model. The company world model is the structural map: what do we have, who owns it, on what terms can it be used.
- Today that model exists nowhere. It is smeared across org charts, budget files and the memory of long-tenured people.
- O2A (Open Organisation Alliance) positions itself as the standard that world model is compiled from: a typed description an intelligence, human or artificial, can actually load.

DORSEY AND BOTHA, 'FROM HIERARCHY TO INTELLIGENCE', BLOCK, MARCH 2026.

Boundaryless

# II · O2A, the object

WHAT THE OBJECT IS

# O2A: one open language, three domains, versioned by evidence

- O2A (Open Organisation Alliance) is a semantic standard: an ontology of what an organisation is made of, and a grammar of the terms on which its parts combine. Technology-agnostic, implementable by anyone.
- One language with three domains, **Topology**, **Portfolio** and **Strategy**, kept as bounded contexts of the same model. An adopter can take any subset.
- It grows additively over a published canon: nothing existing is modified, only extended, and every extension enters with documented field evidence behind it.
- It is governed as a commons, by an alliance rather than a vendor, and the talk presents it as the language, without version numbers.

THE CANON IS PUBLIC AND INSPECTABLE AT DOCS.BOUNDARYLESS.IO/O2A.

THE SCOPE

# Three domains, and the map is still moving

## 01
### Topology

How the organisation is built and run: units and their types, the hierarchy, wallets, the contracts they sign, the ledger of what happens. The most immediate domain, and the first to stabilise.

## 02
### Portfolio

The offering side: offerings and their natures, where the taxonomy lives, costs and prices, and the rules by which offerings depend on and compose with each other.

## 03
### Strategy

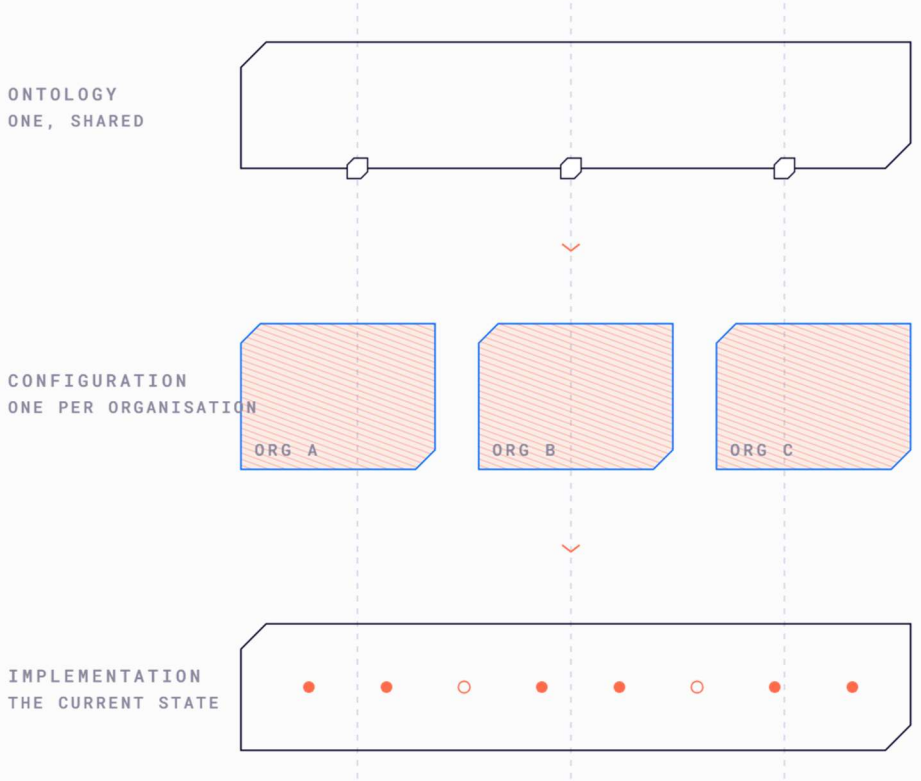
The loop over the graph: instruments and heuristics produce readings, bets and validation, written back where they can be audited. The domain we are pushing into now.

THREE PROFILES, ONE PER DOMAIN. TOPOLOGY AND PORTFOLIO DESCRIBE THE ORGANISATION AND SERVE ITS WORLD MODEL MOST IMMEDIATELY. STRATEGY IS HOW THE ORGANISATION ARGUES WITH ITSELF.

ONE STANDARD, MANY ORGANISATIONS

# Ontology, configuration, implementation

- **Ontology**: the standard itself — the types, the relations, the invariants, and three kinds of truth kept apart. Shared by everyone, owned by no one.
- **Configuration**: where an organisation writes itself into the ontology — its unit types, its offering natures, its customers and needs, its contract policies. Artifacts, versioned like anything that matters.
- **Implementation**: the running organisation — the actual units, offerings, contracts and ledger events, recorded against the configuration and readable back at any moment.

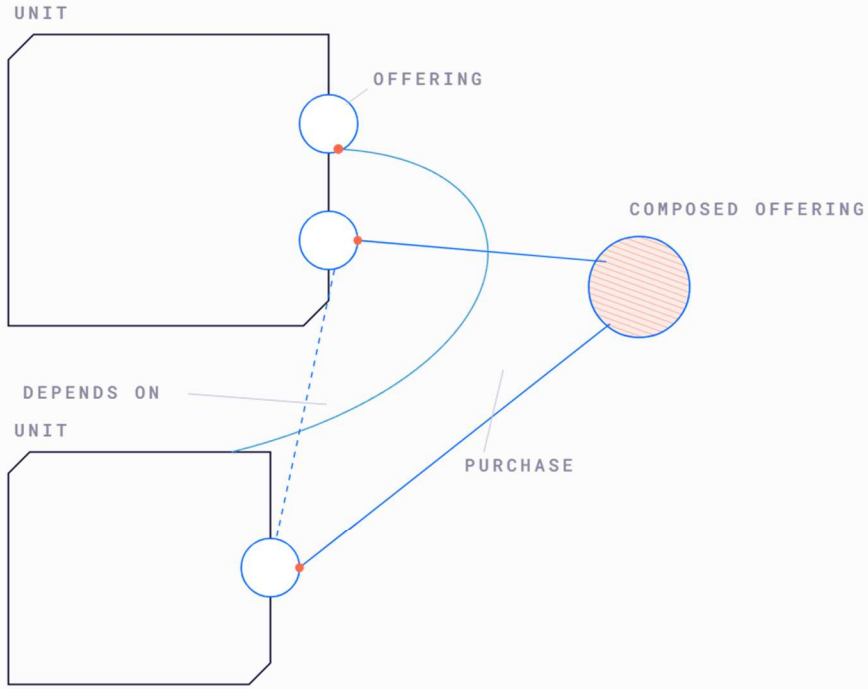



THE CONFIGURATION LAYER IS WHY ONE STANDARD DOES NOT FLATTEN EVERY ORGANISATION INTO THE SAME SHAPE.

FIRST HALF OF THE PROTOCOL

# An alphabet that types the organisation

- **Unit**: the accountable part. It sits in a rooted hierarchy, exposes offerings, and signs contracts. It is the unit that consumes, never the service.
- **Offering**: what a unit exposes to others, internal or external. The offering is where the line lands, which is what makes internal exchange countable.
- **Relationship**: how units and offerings connect — hierarchy, ownership, provision, and the contracts that carry economic terms.




THREE TYPES, EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE MODEL IS BUILT FROM THEM.

THE FIRST DOMAIN, AND THE GOVERNANCE-FRAMING LAYER

# Topology: units, contracts, and the layer that governs them

01

## Units with types and lifecycles

A unit is typed by its configuration and moves through a lifecycle. It has a wallet, a mandate, and an economic envelope assigned by governance: what it is allowed to be.

02

## Contracts and the ledger

Three contract primitives carry every economic relationship. The ledger records events, and economics are computed from them rather than stored as opinions.

03

## Milestones and oracles

Effects inside a contract are gated by milestones, and oracles supply the evidence that a milestone was met. This is the governance-framing layer: what happens is bounded by what was agreed.

GOVERNANCE IS NOT A SEPARATE DOCUMENT. IT IS THE PART OF THE GRAPH THAT SAYS WHICH EFFECTS ARE ALLOWED TO FIRE.

SECOND HALF OF THE PROTOCOL

# Three primitives carry most if not every economic relationship

## 01
### Purchase

One unit buys an offering from another. The internal case is the one that matters: it makes a shared service a counterparty rather than an overhead.

## 02
### Revenue split

Two or more units share what a flow produces, on a declared routing rule, rather than on an allocation decided elsewhere.

## 03
### Investment

One unit funds another against a future claim. It operates on a unit that already exists; it never conjures one.

ONE LIFECYCLE FOR ALL THREE: DRAFT, SIGNED, ACTIVE, TERMINATED. MILESTONES GATE EFFECTS INSIDE AN ACTIVE CONTRACT.

PROOF BY DECOMPOSITION

# Instruments that look bespoke are sentences in the grammar

| Instrument | Reads as | What was actually bespoke |
|---|---|---|
| **Haier's Rendanheyi mechanisms** | **Internal purchase** plus **revenue split**, gated by **milestones** | The parameters, not the structure |
| **Joint venture** | **Revenue split** that constructs a unit at signature | The governance wrapper around it |
| **Product bundle** | **Composed offering** with a linked **revenue split** | The pricing, not the mechanism |
| **Shared service with a chargeback** | **Internal purchase** against a **published offering** | Usually nothing at all |
| **Curated solution catalogue** | A **template commitment** with a named curator; components keep their own prices | The recipe, not the terms |
| **Solution with a shared P&L** | **Joint sale** settled after shared costs; only the margin is divided | The settlement rules, not the structure |

IF THE INSTRUMENTS DECOMPOSE, THE GRAMMAR IS WORKING.

MOST COMPOSITION NEEDS NO CONTRACT

# The graph knows which links are legal

### The base dynamic

- A unit buys offerings as inputs and resells at its own price: the base dynamic, how the system breathes.
- The dependencies are still declared, as typed edges: this offering requires that one, or encapsulates those.
- Declared edges make impact analysis and composed cost computable, counting everything once.

### A worked case: extension requires platform

- An extension offering declares that it requires a platform offering. The graph holds no extension with nothing under it.
- Natures are the schema, offerings are the facts: a solution admits modules, a platform admits extensions.
- Where the facts diverge from the schema, the graph returns a diagnosis.

THE DEPENDENCY GRAPH IS ALSO WHAT AN AGENT READS BEFORE IT COMPOSES ANYTHING.

THE THIRD DOMAIN, EXPLICITLY A WORK IN PROGRESS

# Strategy is the open frontier: instruments today, an abstraction taking shape

### The instruments, today

- Maps, canvases and heuristics — drawn for now from the Boundaryless body of knowledge — run over the graph and produce readings.
- A reading becomes a bet, with a validation criterion and a kill condition written at birth; decision records write outcomes back.
- This much already works as graph work: strategy that can be read, and judged, later.

### The abstraction underneath, emerging

- A base layer of strategic elements is taking shape: flywheels, product value propositions, marketplaces and extensions.
- Under those, the quantities that make them arguable: liquidity assumptions, unit economics, the efficiency of go-to-market channels.
- The open question is whether this domain can follow the same rules as the descriptive two — typed, additive, evidence-gated. We do not know yet.

PRESENTED AS DIRECTION. IT IS THE DOMAIN FURTHEST FROM STABLE, AND THE ONE MOST WORTH ARGUING ABOUT HERE.

LEGIBILITY

# The same explicit substrate serves people and software

### For people: adaptability

- Recombine units without renegotiating everything from scratch
- Terms survive the departure of the person who knew them
- A reorganisation becomes an edit to a graph, with a diff

### For agents: reliability

- Machine-readable terms are the precondition of delegation
- An agent can be bounded by a contract instead of by hope
- What an agent may do is a property of the graph, not of its prompt

ONE ARTEFACT, TWO READERS. IT IS NOT BUILT TWICE.

FIELD EVIDENCE, ANONYMISED, WITHOUT THE NUMBERS

# Where this has been tried

- A large regulated enterprise restructuring a very large IT organisation: the measurement half first, a catalogue of offerings with billable interfaces, showback, unit economics, and a ladder from measuring to pricing to autonomy.
- A foundation running its operating model on the runtime since the spring: units, offerings, contracts and milestones on one screen, with the economic events underneath.
- A mobility company modelling its company world model in the language, and beginning to model the world it serves as the other half.
- A leading Middle East fintech and one of Italy's largest system integrators are earlier on the same arc, and several more engagements sit behind them: the same language, entered from different domains.
- Every extension in the current release came out of one of these engagements. That is what evidence-gated versioning means in practice.

Boundaryless

# III · The protocolizing entity

THE REFLECTION DRIVING OUR OWN ARCHITECTURE

# A vendor holding a protocol: how should it act?

01

## The situation

We build Orchestrion, the runtime that operates a model written in O2A. A firm that finds itself developing a protocol has to decide what it opens, and why.

02

## The thesis

Software is no longer the competitive advantage. Open-sourcing the runtime would be a liability rather than a signal: a governance model without the community to sustain it. The scarce thing is the language.

03

## The move

Open core, open language: the standard is a commons, the APIs are open, portability is guaranteed, the runtime is ours. The bottleneck today is ontology, so that is what has to be shared.

THE INSTITUTING PROCESS

# A standard exists only when it is shared

- A protocol held by one organisation is a convention. It becomes a protocol when a second entity adopts it and a third can rely on the first two agreeing.
- The intention behind O2A is to converge different organisations around one standard for the company world model, and to treat that convergence as an instituting process: the alliance is the entity the process brings into being.
- This answers the question this room asks of every protocol: who earns the right to write it? Nobody, in advance. The right is constituted by adoption, and stewardship follows adoption rather than preceding it.
- That is why the standard is early enough to be argued with. An instituting process that is finished has already failed.

INSTITUTIONS ARE MADE BY THE ENTITIES THAT AGREE TO BE BOUND. THE ALLIANCE IS THAT AGREEMENT GIVEN A NAME.

CUSTOMER WORLD MODELS

# Turn the same language outward and you get ecosystem engineering

- Everything so far describes an organisation from inside. The customer world model is the counterpart: the domains, ecosystems and needs an organisation serves, modelled in the same discipline.
- Organise the approach around the problems of an ecosystem rather than of one firm, and the same mechanics appear at a larger scale: a shared vocabulary, declared dependencies, terms on which participants compose.
- The open question is whether that produces coalition dynamics: whether logistics, pharmaceuticals or mobility can converge on a shared description of their problems the way this standard asks firms to converge on a description of themselves.
- We see the first signs in three sectors, where actors have begun treating a shared language as their go-to-market. Whether it institutes, or fragments, is exactly the kind of question protocol studies is for.

CONTEXT ENGINEERING INSIDE THE FIRM, ECOSYSTEM ENGINEERING OUTSIDE IT. SAME GRAMMAR, DIFFERENT SUBJECT.

WHERE I AM UNSURE

# The questions worth this room

- Everywhere we work we meet the same dynamics: the same implicit layer, the same bespoke instruments decomposing into the same grammar. Recurrence is the argument for standardising.
- So the honest question. How much of organising is standardisable at all, and what, in practice, resists protocolization?
- Venkatesh Rao reads the fusion of AI, blockchains and protocols as a new nature growing through the economy. This attempt lives at the protocol layer, is integrating agentic access, and expects settlement to land on a ledger: how does his vision complement, or correct, a first move this modest?

Boundaryless

# Capture the real organisation as a contract graph.

PROTOCOL SYMPOSIUM 2026 - 25 SEPTEMBER