

Own the Work, Fund the Risk

The rule that follows Organizational Drift

Enterprise Process Framework · Paper two of the doctrine pair

The claim. People in silos are not the problem. They are trying to do a good job with what they have. Directors want to show that their shop matters. That is human. It turns into drift when they expect “the company” to pay for whatever that ambition needs next. Nobody in the silo feels the whole bill. Divisions start competing. Appetite never fills up. Own the work. Fund the risk. If you want it, you pay for it—and you live with what it can do to the firm.

1. What the first paper said

The first paper said companies rarely die from one bad system. They die slowly. A tool here. An exception there. A process that lives in one manager’s head. After enough of that, there are two companies in the same building: the one on the slide, and the one people actually use.

This paper is the rule that follows. Not a framework to hang on a wall. A sentence you can use when someone says, “Just stand it up. The company will cover it.”

2. The rule in one sentence

If you want the outcome, you own the work, you pay for the stack, and you carry the risk for as long as the thing exists.

Own does not mean your name on a kickoff slide. Pay does not mean you approved the project and walked away. Carry does not mean “IT will watch it.” If any of those three are missing, someone else is going to inherit a mess they did not ask for.

3. Silos are not the villain. The shared bill is.

Most of the people who create drift are doing exactly what we asked them to do. We put them in a lane and told them to make that lane excellent. So, they do. They squeeze more out of the tools they have. They look for the next system that will make their number, their plant, their close, their funnel look better.

The break is the money. When the credit is local and the bill is “the company’s,” there is no reason to stop asking. Two divisions can both be right about their own world and still eat the firm alive. They do not feel like they are competing. They feel underserved. Central teams look like the people who say no. Overhead looks like a pot that should have more in it.

4. The people who run it are not the people who wanted it

We keep mixing up two jobs. One job is wanting a thing. The other is keeping the lights on around that thing.

The owner is the shop that benefits. They decide it should exist. They pay to stand it up and keep it. They accept what it can break. They have the right to kill it. That owner can be a division, a plant, a product line. It cannot be a fog named “the business.” And it cannot be IT standing in for the whole company. IT should never own all of technology. The people who use it should own it, pay for it, and answer for it.

The people who manage the estate are the professionals: networks, identity, devices, vendors, backups, the boring work that keeps a company one company. That is a craft. It is not a dumping ground. If something has no owner, no budget, and no end date, they are allowed to say no. That is not politics. That is the rule doing its job.

When both jobs land in the same inbox, every request looks like an IT problem, and every outage looks like an IT failure. That is how a service team becomes an unofficial company.

5. How IT ended up owning what it does not pay for

Technology is how the company lives now. That is why this story starts in IT even though the rule is bigger than IT.

IT began as the group that had to support whatever someone else bought. To get any control over that pile, IT fought to own the assets. That is where it went wrong. Owning the box was the only lever they had. It was also the start of a habit we never broke.

Then the company tried to be helpful. It pulled technology under one roof so every division would get “the best.” What it actually did was leave one team begging for money so everyone else could move. IT cannot keep up with every shop’s timeline and with the industry at the same time. Chips get faster. Drives get bigger. Machine learning shows up wearing an AI badge. The business wants all of it. IT is still paying to advance the new thing while the old thing is already broken.

A new CEO or a new IT leader arrives and freezes the stack so the lagging systems can catch up. On the other side of that freeze, people scream for innovation. The company gets hurt coming and going. Debt piles up. When the bill finally comes due, the board does not just write a check for years of decisions nobody funded in the moment.

IT is a service arm. It always was. Even if you outsource it, it still serves the company. That is why it sits on the P&L as the fat red line that never looks satisfied. Leaders run the numbers on their own people—benefits, retirement, tax—and wonder if a vendor would be cheaper. I spent twenty-three years building and growing a managed-services company. I get it. I do. The vendor has bills too, and a profit to make. You did not make the problem disappear. You changed who sends the invoice.

6. Treat each division like a company

Every person you hire already costs technology money. A badge. A computer. A phone. A mobile device. Licenses. The software that job needs. Right now, IT eats all of that. Maintenance adds a head. HR wants an app. Finance wants a new tool for the books. Sales will not leave a platform because it still feeds the funnel. You cannot pile that on IT forever. And we do not give them more. We cut the budget and tell them to do more with less.

So, stop treating technology as something the company hands out. Treat each division like its own company. If they need it, they pay for it. That is how you slow the appetite down. That is how you stop the meeting where everyone agrees IT is expensive and nobody can name who asked for the last ten systems.

The CIO should run IT the way you would run a firm that sells to other firms. The customers are the other divisions. They still buy through IT, so the company keeps the bulk discount. HR wants software? They come through IT and pay for the project people—the project manager, the engineer, the developer. IT uses that same motion to pay for the few things it actually owns: the network, the firewalls, the shared floor. Capital budget can help with that in some cases. It is up to every company to decide how they want to mark that line. The win is not the accounting trick. The win is that the division that consumes the thing feels the cost.

IT stops being one screaming line on the corporate budget. It becomes a line on each division’s budget. Those leaders have to manage it. Finance can look at the spend as investment instead of a headache. IT can show that the company’s own money is being used on purpose, instead of showing up every year as the department that is never full.

7. Security draws the line. IT builds the path.

Security has been the red-headed stepchild for a long time. It is technology, and it isn't. It helps Finance see risk. It helps Legal and HR with the rules. For years IT used security as the people who would say no, because IT did not have the money to say yes. Later Finance funded security because someone needed to check whether IT was telling the truth. Now the people trying to break in are using AI for a thin edge against your data and your cash. Boards are stuck splitting a pie between “keep it running” and “keep it safe.” All the while security is the ping-pong ball nobody quite wants and nobody can throw away.

Security has a purpose. It sits a little bit inside every department. Keep the two shops separate enough that IT is not grading its own paper. In a small company, security can sit under the IT director, but it has to be a real check on what goes upstairs. In a mid-sized company, the CISO and the IT director both answer to a CIO, on their own lines.

Security sets the fence: the law, the industry rules, the risk the company is willing to take. IT builds inside that fence. A list of allowed hardware and software gives IT room to chip away at old messes and technical debt. It lets IT standardize, and it keeps the workload they have to support from turning into a schoolroom of five-year-olds, each demanding their own thing their own way. That pile of one-off systems is what nobody can protect or maintain alone.

If a division will not move off something, that is not an IT morality play. That is the division digging in. Leadership sits with that shop and talks about why they cannot move, how the company still has to stay safe, and how that division will help pay to cover the risk their system creates. Replace it, or put a control around it, and say out loud what everyone is actually living with.

IT still does the technical work. Nobody is arguing that. What changes is the noose. IT is not hanging for a system it cannot kill and cannot fund. It keeps the thing running. The cost of that effort comes from the division stuck on it. After one or two ugly outages, that division will come looking for a way off the island—because now it is their money. Security tells the people at the top what keep, upgrade, or replace actually costs.

And please do not confuse a compliance report with being secure. I am not against the reports. HIPAA, ISO, GDPR, PCI—there are a thousand of them, and some of them really matter. They are a photograph. A black-and-white snapshot of a scoped set of controls on a given day. If you want to know whether the picture is any good, you need color. Color is depth. A security program you actually run and measure puts the photograph in perspective. It is not just the slice an auditor asked about. Security writes the requirements. IT builds the work. The photograph still exists. It just finally looks like the company.

8. Six things that have to stay with the same person

The first paper named six splits that grow a second company. Here is what they sound like on a Tuesday.

Keep together	What that means	What we will not do
Work and owner	Someone can still be asked, after go-live, what “done” means.	A ticket with no owner of the result. A project that ends when the builders leave.
System and owner	Nothing new comes in unless someone can also take it out.	“Just this once.” A spreadsheet that is quietly the real system.
Cost and demand	The shop that wants it sees the bill and pays it.	“The company will pay for it.” Competing divisions, one shared pot, endless appetite.
Risk and the people who benefit	The people who wanted it sign what it can do to the firm. Exceptions expire.	IT holding the risk book for behavior it cannot control.

How we work and the baseline	Be fast inside a published way of doing identity, data, devices, and change.	Every division picking a stack and calling the crash “innovation.”
Time and a real date	Workarounds have a review date. Old debt has a name on it.	A ninety-day exception in year seven. Technical debt with nobody’s name on it.

9. Pay for the thing, not the story

Most funding meetings buy a story. A platform. A transformation. A vendor who will take it off our plate. Pay for what will still be here in year four.

That is the only honest brake on a silo. A director who has to pay for what they use will still try to look good. They will just do it inside a budget they can see. A director who can send their technology bill to “the company” will keep coming back for more, and the company will keep saying there is no more. Competing shops with one purse do not settle down. They get louder.

If you are going to say something is funded, you have funded four things:

1. **Standing it up.** Design, build, move people over. The part everyone can see.
2. **Keeping it.** Licenses, support, the humans who know how it works.
3. **Controlling it.** Security, privacy, backup, audit—the cost it puts on everyone else.
4. **Getting out of it.** Money and permission to retire it. If exit is unfunded, the thing never dies, and the costs from step 3 only get deeper.

Even when you split the technology spend, you can still buy in bulk. You can still have a shared team. What you cannot have is a shared team that swallows demand it cannot see. Chargeback is one way to show the bill. It is not the point. The point is: if a division will not fund those four pieces, the thing does not come in.

10. You do not need a transformation office

Rules die when they wait for a program. These fit in the calendar you already have.

Intake. “We need a tool” is not a request. A request names an owner, a way to keep it, and a date to look again.

Exceptions. Write them down. Put a name on them. Put an end date on them. Renewing one is a decision, not a favor.

The baseline. Publish how this company does identity, data, devices, and change. Be fast inside that list. Speed outside it is how you grow a second company inside the first one.

Retirement. Everything in the building has a living owner or it is on a list with a date. Orphans are not a surprise. They are proof we did not use the rule.

After something breaks. Do not only ask which control failed. Ask who wanted the thing and who was supposed to pay when it failed. If the answer is “IT should have caught it,” we are telling the old story again: holding people accountable for something they did not want and did not ask for, while the people who demanded it never took the risk.

11. What we will not pretend

We will not pretend the company just provides technology. Divisions buy what they use. We will not pretend a meeting is alignment. We will not pretend “do more with less” is a plan for a team that already carries everyone else’s leftovers. We will not pretend a vendor makes the leftover disappear. We will not pretend a compliance PDF means you are safe. We will

not pretend an AI-drawn architecture that walked into IT is a special kind of request. Someone still wanted it. Someone still has to pay.

We also will not pretend the answer is to freeze everything. Locking the stack so last decade's debt can catch up, without sending the bill to the shops that created the lag, just hides the second company under a new slogan. Make change expensive where it belongs: with the owner. Let them choose from their piece of the pie. That is when people accept risk on purpose, instead of collecting it until it is an overwhelming burden.

12. What comes next

This paper is the rule, told through the place where the bill is easiest to see. The next papers get into the daily work of IT after ownership.

T00 — From Cost Center to Company. Run IT like a firm that sells to the other divisions. Get the red line off the corporate page.

T01 — The Ownership Inversion. How IT came to own what it was forced to support.

T02 — Fund Demand at the Source. From the badge to the SaaS tool, the shop that consumes it pays.

After that: the old debt, the allowed list, IT and security as two accounts under one CIO, why a photograph is not a program, what outsourcing actually buys, and a ninety-day start. Those papers do not replace this one. They are the same three verbs in working clothes: own it, pay for it, carry it.

13. The sentence you can actually use

If you want it, you own it, you pay for it, and you live with it.

That is the whole rule. Own is not a name on a slide. Pay is not a project approval. Live with it means the risk, the outage, and the old version still running in year seven sit with the shop that would not let it go.

The shop that uses it, buys it. IT serves. It does not own everybody's appetite, and it is not just a red line that never gets filled.

Security puts up the fence. IT builds inside it. A compliance report is a photograph. The program is the color.

Keep six things with the same name: the work, the system, the money, the risk, the way you work, and the clock. That is how you stay one company.

— End of EPF-01 —

Previous: EPF-00, Organizational Drift. Next: T00, From Cost Center to Company (8 October 2026).