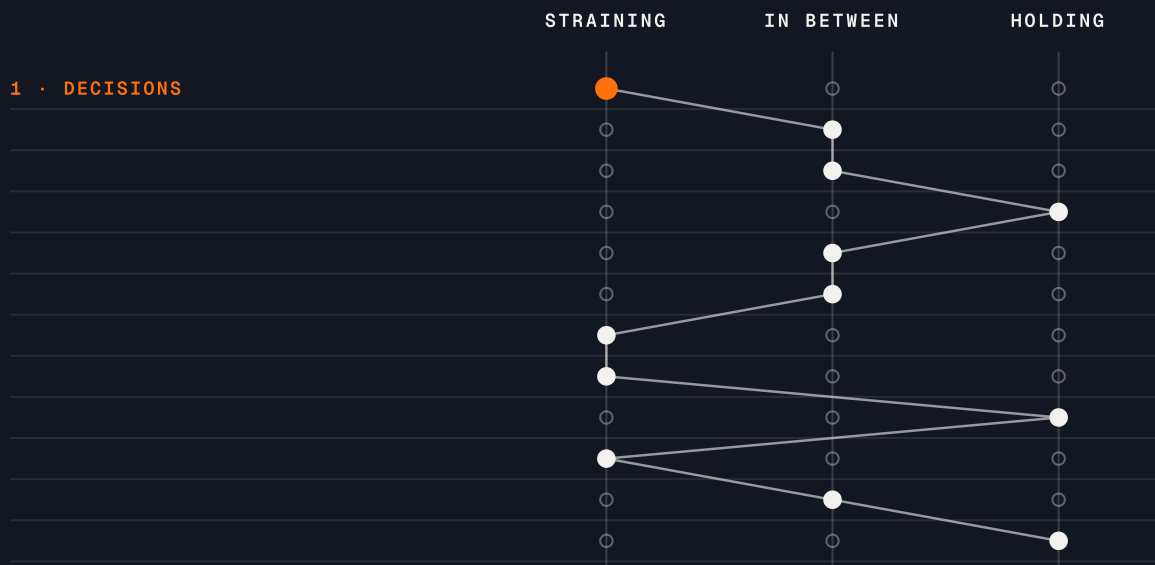




Strengthening or Straining

Is Your Structure Keeping Up With Your Growth?



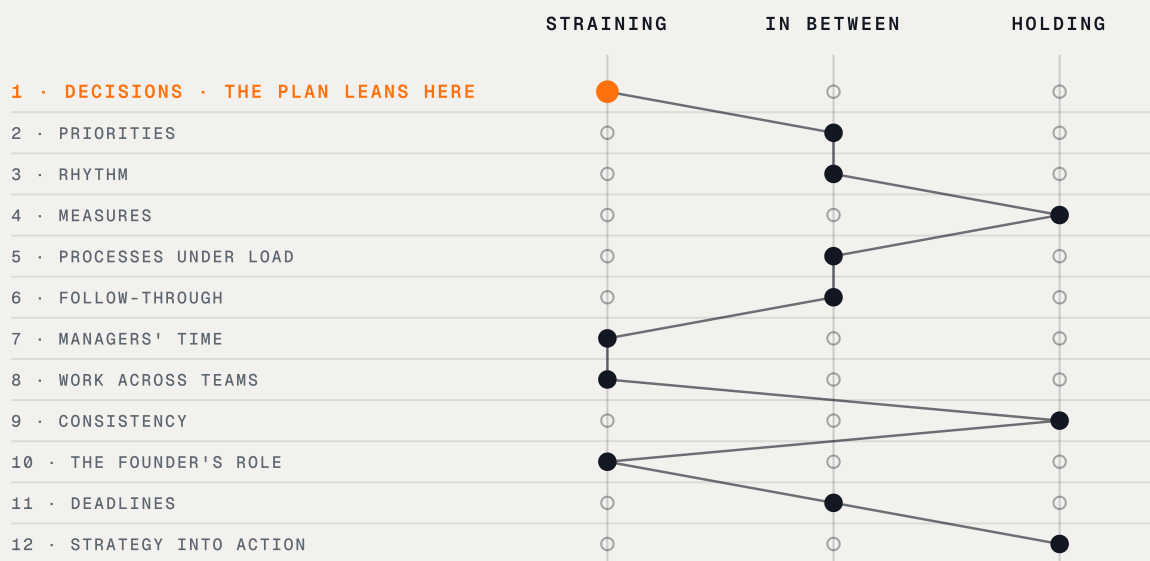
As a company grows, its structure either keeps up with the work or is carried by its people. This self-check looks at twelve areas where the difference tends to show, often well before it reaches the numbers.

THE TWELVE AREAS

- 1 Decisions
- 2 Priorities
- 3 Rhythm
- 4 Measures
- 5 Processes under load
- 6 Follow-through
- 7 Managers' time
- 8 Work across teams
- 9 Consistency
- 10 The founder's role
- 11 Deadlines and accountability
- 12 Strategy into action

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- 01 **Growth tests structure.** As the work grows and connects, structure either keeps up or is carried by people.
- 02 **Results can hide strain.** Revenue can rise while the structure underneath is straining.
- 03 **Look at behaviour, not results.** How decisions settle, how work moves, and who carries what.
- 04 **Clusters matter more than single answers.** Areas that lean towards strain together usually share a cause.
- 05 **The plan decides which areas matter.** A strained area matters most where the next stage will put weight on it.
- 06 **Change is cheaper early.** It gets harder once workarounds become the way things work.
- 07 **A self-check is a starting point.** Whether the company can carry its next stage is an operating judgment, reached against the plan.



01

Growth tests structure

As a company grows, the work does not only increase. It connects. More decisions depend on other decisions. More teams depend on other teams. The way of working that carried the company at its last size starts to carry more than it was built for.

What happens next differs from company to company. In some, the structure grows with the work: decisions settle where they belong, the rhythm holds, and growth makes the company clearer. In others, people carry what the structure cannot: decisions travel upwards, meetings multiply, and the same few people hold more and more together.

Both can look the same from outside for a long time. Results can keep improving while the structure underneath is straining, because revenue can respond faster than the way a company is built. By the time the numbers show the strain, it has usually been there for a while.

What feels like stability can be the time between strain and its effect.

This self-check is a way to look at the structure directly. It does not measure results. It looks at how the company behaves as the work grows: how decisions settle, how work moves, and who is carrying what.

02

What this check is, and is not

It is a way of looking, not a score. There is no total, no threshold and no band to land in. It has not been tested as a measurement, and it should not be read as one.

It is not a verdict. A company can lean towards strain in several areas and still be the right company for its next stage, if those areas are not the ones the plan will lean on. A company can look strong in most areas and still have a gap exactly where the plan will press.

The plan decides what matters. Read each area with the next stage in mind: what the company is trying to do next, and which parts of it that will lean on.

And it is answered from inside. That is both its value and its limit, which section 06 comes back to.

The twelve areas

For each area, there are two descriptions: what it tends to look like when the structure is straining, and what it tends to look like when the structure is holding. Most companies are somewhere between the two in most areas. Mark where your company is today, not where it intends to be.

For each area, tick one box: Straining, In between or Holding. Then tick the areas your next stage will lean on.

1 Decisions

STRAINING

Routine decisions keep travelling upwards to be settled, and work waits for the few people who can decide.

HOLDING

Everyday decisions are settled at the level they belong to, without waiting for the founder.

☐ STRAINING ☐ IN BETWEEN ☐ HOLDING | ☐ MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

2 Priorities

STRAINING

Different teams name different top priorities, and growth makes them more confused.

HOLDING

Teams name the same few priorities, and growth makes them clearer.

☐ STRAINING ☐ IN BETWEEN ☐ HOLDING | ☐ MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

3 Rhythm

STRAINING

Meetings increase while clarity falls. Planning and review happen when someone calls them.

HOLDING

Planning, doing and reviewing run on a steady rhythm that holds from one quarter to the next.

☐ STRAINING ☐ IN BETWEEN ☐ HOLDING | ☐ MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

4 Measures

STRAINING

The numbers are reviewed, but a number going wrong does not lead to action.

HOLDING

Agreed numbers have clear owners and expected responses. When one moves off course, someone investigates and acts.

☐ STRAINING ☐ IN BETWEEN ☐ HOLDING | ☐ MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

5 Processes under load

STRAINING

Normal ways of working break during ordinary busy periods.

HOLDING

The way of working remains reliable as volume rises, or is deliberately changed before the extra load breaks it.

☐ STRAINING ☐ IN BETWEEN ☐ HOLDING | ☐ MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

6 Follow-through

STRAINING

Projects start with urgency and stall before they finish.

HOLDING

Work that starts gets finished, and each cycle builds on the last.

☐ STRAINING ☐ IN BETWEEN ☐ HOLDING | ☐ MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

7 Managers' time

STRAINING

Managers spend most of their time reacting to problems.

☐

STRAINING

☐

IN BETWEEN

☐

HOLDING

HOLDING

Managers spend most of their time improving how the work runs. Firefighting is occasional.

☐

MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

8 Work across teams

STRAINING

Work between teams only moves when the founder steps in.

☐

STRAINING

☐

IN BETWEEN

☐

HOLDING

HOLDING

Work between teams follows set routes, with clear owners and a regular rhythm.

☐

MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

9 Consistency

STRAINING

Quality depends heavily on which team or manager did the work.

☐

STRAINING

☐

IN BETWEEN

☐

HOLDING

HOLDING

Quality is steady across teams, without anyone needing heroic effort.

☐

MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

10 The founder's role

STRAINING

The founder regularly reviews, corrects or redoes other people's work.

☐

STRAINING

☐

IN BETWEEN

☐

HOLDING

HOLDING

The company keeps moving when the founder is away.

☐

MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

11 Deadlines and accountability

STRAINING

Deadlines move again and again, and nothing changes in how the work is set up.

☐

STRAINING

☐

IN BETWEEN

☐

HOLDING

HOLDING

Responsibility sits with roles. When a date is missed, the cause is found and fixed.

☐

MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

12 Strategy into action

STRAINING

Decisions about direction take months to show in how people actually work.

☐

STRAINING

☐

IN BETWEEN

☐

HOLDING

HOLDING

A decision about direction shows up clearly in how people work, not only in plans or presentations.

☐

MY NEXT STAGE WILL LEAN ON THIS

How to read your answers

Look for clusters, not totals. One area leaning towards strain says little on its own. Several areas leaning the same way usually say more, because the areas tend to move together.

FEC'S READING

Three clusters often appear together:

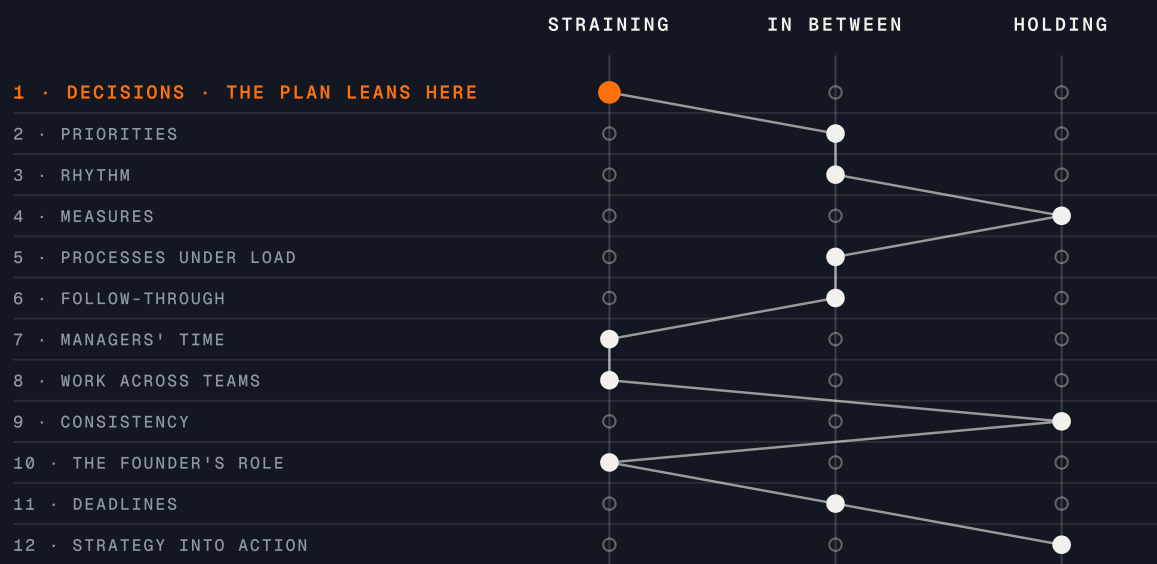
Decisions, work across teams and the founder's role. When these lean towards strain together, authority has often not moved from particular people into roles. The company runs through the people at its centre.

Rhythm, measures and follow-through. Together, these often point to a missing operating rhythm: work starts, numbers are seen, but nothing regular turns them into action.

Processes under load, consistency and managers' time. Together, these often mean the work is running on effort: it gets done, but because people push it, not because of how it is set up.

Then hold your answers against the plan. Which areas will the next stage lean on? An area leaning towards strain matters most when the plan is about to put weight on it. A new site leans on processes, consistency and work across teams. An acquisition leans on decisions and rhythm. A change of leadership leans on the founder's role.

On paper. Count how many areas you ticked Straining, In between and Holding; there is no total and no verdict. Your pressure points are the areas you ticked Straining or In between that your next stage will lean on: start there. Then list the areas you ticked Straining and, separately, In between, grouping them by cluster where they fall into one. In between is where an early problem may be forming, so list it too.



Twelve areas, each marked somewhere between straining and holding for an illustrative company. The marks make a pattern, not a score. The one orange point is a strained area that the plan is about to lean on.

05

Timing

Change is easier while the structure still responds. Early on, a strained area can often be fixed by setting it up differently: a decision right made clear, a rhythm put in place, a way of working written down.

It gets harder once the workarounds become the way things work. People adapt to the strain. Habits form around the gaps. The few people holding things together become the structure. At that point, changing an area means unwinding what has grown around it, and the work competes with delivery for the same people's time.

There is no fixed point at which it becomes too late. But the cost of change usually rises the longer strain is carried, which is a reason to look before the plan presses, not after.

06

What a self-check cannot do

A self-check is answered from inside the company, by people whose view is shaped by the way the company works. The same habits that create strain can make it hard to see. It is often hardest to see from the top, where the strain arrives already solved by someone else.

It also cannot test anything under load. It records how the company looks today, not how it will behave when the next stage presses.

So use it as a starting point. Ask the same questions of people at different levels and compare the answers; the differences are often more revealing than the answers themselves. And where the stakes justify it, look for evidence beyond the assumptions of the people closest to the plan.

Whether the company can carry its next stage is an operating judgment. It is reached by examining the company against its plan, not by a checklist. The company keeps the decision.

07

The question underneath

Every growth plan comes with a question that is rarely asked out loud. FEC asks it of every company it works with:

What does this company need to become to execute its next stage, grow stronger, and create more value through it?

Three questions answer it:

01

Can the company carry the plan?

02

What needs to change or be built?

03

How does the company become stronger through it?

For a growing company, much of the answer to the first question often shows in these twelve areas: whether the structure is keeping up with the growth, or being carried by people. The plan still decides where to look. The answer to the first question is an operating judgment. The company keeps the decision.

OPERATING JUDGMENT

PROCEED

PROCEED AFTER CHANGES

DO NOT PROCEED

When the work is done, what matters is what stays inside the company.

The intervention ends. The operating state remains.

What does this company need to become to
execute its next stage, grow stronger, and create
more value through it?

Bring us the plan.

Tell us what the company is trying to do next. Every review is handled in confidence.

fornaxec.com

welcome@fornaxec.com



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