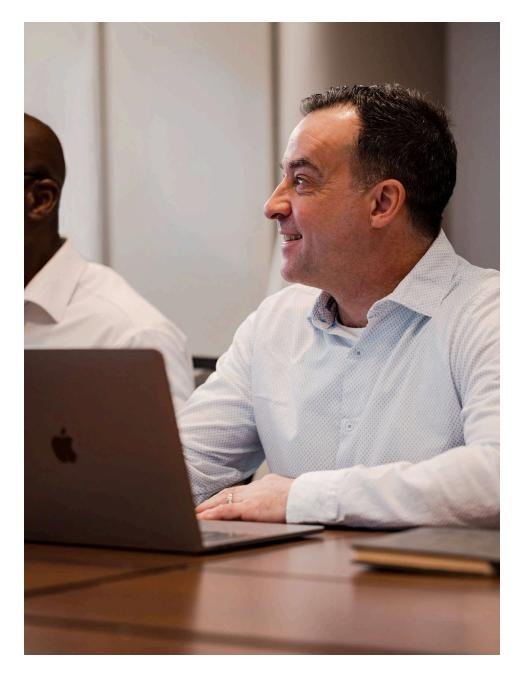# Foundation Setting Session

By Sergiu Simmel and Tommy Mains

Introduction

Any organization can dramatically improve in 60 days by intentionally and systematically upgrading its Business Operating System (BOS). The Foundation Setting Session is part one of the three-step process we recommend for initiating your upgrade. During the session, you and your Senior Leadership Team (SLT) will embark on a journey of mastering four key time-tested concepts, tools, and disciplines:

- Org Chart

- Company Rocks

- Company Scorecard

- Weekly Team Meetings

Change is always challenging, and changes in an organization's (BOS) are no exception. It's important that the SLT begins this journey ready to experience immediate improvements. We recommend the ramp-up phase of a BOS upgrade consist of three sessions, separated by approximately a month. Between these sessions, SLT members practice what they've learned while continuing to attend to their day-to-day responsibilities.

Context

A strong BOS contains all the essential concepts, tools, and disciplines an organization needs to scale its operations. We've identified five different BOS profiles with increasing

levels of capability. The most advanced three (Designed, Holistic, and Integrated BOSs) are particularly effective at focusing, aligning, and helping teams to create thriving organizations.

Moving from an Intentional or Accidental BOS to a higher level requires persistent effort and a willingness to change.

Foundation Setting Session Agenda

1. Objectives — The session starts with the facilitator (BOS coach or SLT member) introducing the five types of BOS, explaining why it's time for an upgrade, and sharing the meeting objectives.

2. Check-In — Next, each member of the SLT shares:

- Two recent wins (one personal and one professional).

- Their specific expectations for the day.

3. Hitting the Ceiling — Here, we introduce the five **Stages of Development** typically associated with turning a business into an enduring company. We also explain why most organizations alternate between periods of smooth development and unsettled states as they scale each stage. We call these transitional moments "hitting the ceiling."

The facilitator then shares nine skills the SLT must master to deal with these challenges successfully:

- **Envision** — The ability to accurately predict the organization's future. Leaders should use this skill to create the **Focus Filters** used by the organization to make the best decisions possible.

- **Structure** — The ability to effectively identify functions and organize. This skill enables leaders to implement the right structure for their organization, starting with its **Core Functions** (such as Marketing) and continuing with all sub-functions (such as paid search).

- **Delegate and Elevate** — The ability to delegate tasks, even critical ones, to team members and empower them with the necessary resources to succeed; then, to elevate yourself to complete more strategic, long-term work.

- **Systematize** — The ability to continuously document, ingrain, and refine the Core Processes your organization performs to operate at its best.

- **Simplify** — The ability to overcome the complexity inherent in a growing organization by simplifying the ways the organization thinks, communicates, and operates.

- **Coach** — The ability to go beyond leading and become a coach to your team members by improving their skills for their current Seat and helping them achieve their career aspirations.

- **Be a Storyteller** — The ability to inspire team members with your clear and compelling **Vision** for the organization.

- **Set and Achieve Goals** — The ability to accurately forecast targets for your goals to create a pattern of completing most of your goals and motivating your teams to do their best work.

- **Execute** - The ability to consistently and predictably **Get Smart Things Done** (GSSD) throughout the organization.

4. Responsibilities — We now introduce the first foundational tool: the **Org Chart**.

Our approach starts by defining the organization's Core Functions (departments) without specifying who will lead each one.

Then, we dig into the next level of detail by specifying each function's top roles, accountabilities, and responsibilities. We then drill further into a department by defining its main sub-functions using the same method.

Once we have a decent first pass, we place SLT members into one or more **Seats** (a role or position), starting with the functional leaders. We also deal with potential irregularities, such as empty Seats, people sitting in several Seats, or people who need a Seat.

Don't worry about putting every person in the company into a Seat yet. We leave the task of completing the Org Chart as homework for department leaders.

5. Rocks — Next, we identify the top 90-day priorities for the organization (Company Rocks) and one to five priorities for each team member (Individual Rocks). The facilitator collects **Rock** candidates from each member of the SLT and guides them through narrowing the field of Company Rocks down to three to seven. Then we address the Individual Rocks.

Ultimately, the entire SLT should agree on the top priorities for this period. Participants should **make their Rocks SMART** and complete them by the **Goal Setting Session**, typically 60 days after the **Foundation Day**.

6. Data — Next, we introduce the **Company Scorecard**. Most SLT **Scorecards** contain 10–20 weekly-reported **Key Performance Indicators** (KPIs) that show an objective pulse on the organization's performance. Scorecards are works in progress. We recommend agreeing on up to three KPIs for each department. Each KPI is assigned an owner and a weekly target that helps identify when we may have an **Issue**.

7. Meeting Cadence — Finally, the SLT agrees to commit to a suite of accountability, planning, development, and Issue-solving meetings that follow a fixed cadence. The first meeting to master is the **Weekly Team Meeting (WTM)**.

8. Conclude — Celebrate your progress and ask SLT members if the meeting met their expectations. Each SLT member rates the quality of the meeting on a scale from one to ten. Ratings assess the effectiveness of a meeting in terms of completing the objectives, resolving questions, respecting the time allotted, and meeting expectations.

Hopefully Helpful Hints

Perfection is the enemy of progress. Attempting to produce the "perfect" Org Chart, the first set of Company Rocks, or Scorecard is counterproductive. Instead, focus on completing the first iteration to 80% strong and refining each over time.

Apply the same process to complete the Org Chart. We focus on the organization's primary and sub-functions during the Foundation Setting Session. Depending on the stage of your business, most of these functions are comprised of three layers: department leader, team leaders, and team members. The head of each department follows the same process in defining their department's sub-functions.

Use a coach to guide your Senior Leadership Team. While upgrading your BOS can be done from within the organization, it's a long, complicated, and often challenging process. We recommend engaging the services of an external BOS coach whose focus is guiding Senior Leadership Teams through the process. A neutral, experienced coach can convey critical information without bias and ensure that every SLT member's voice is heard and considered. A good coach is a teacher, a facilitator, and a guide that helps the SLT distinguish the forest from the trees.

Takeaway

The Foundation Setting Session lays the groundwork for a successful BOS upgrade. Senior Leadership Teams build an Org Chart, identify Rocks, establish a Scorecard, and initiate a meeting cadence with Weekly Team Meetings. The Foundation Setting Session is the first stage of this journey — the Vision and Goal Setting Sessions round out the 90 days needed to be well on your way to becoming a great company.

What's next? Visit the **90u Library** or **try Ninety today**.

Tagged with: **Brief**, **Meetings**