FRAMEWORK · COMPANION · V1.0

External relationships

What changes with customers, regulators, auditors, providers, and partners

Bearing north · Third piece · PDCA+ v2.0 · Public Review

The framework's structural commitments produce strategic consequences in the organisation's relationships with parties outside its boundaries. Five counterparty categories — customers, regulators, auditors, providers, partners — each acquire a different quality of relationship when the substrate is in place. The shifts are often the most strategically consequential effects of the framework, and the least visible until they are named.

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Builds on the structural absence and inside the organisation · extends the argument outward · honest about consequences that follow from structural choices, not promotional about them

From the inside to the outside

The previous piece named what changes inside the organisation when the structural absence is addressed. This piece extends the argument outward. The framework's structural commitments produce consequences in the organisation's relationships with parties outside its boundaries — customers, regulators, auditors, providers, partners — that are often the most strategically valuable effects of the framework and the least visible to leadership until they are named. The internal consequences affect how the organisation operates; the external consequences affect what business the organisation can do and what relationships it can sustain. Both matter; the external ones tend to compound faster in strategic value.

The relational consequences share a structural property: they all derive from the substrate's capacity to make the organisation's compliance posture demonstrable on demand rather than reconstructable on request. When a counterparty asks the organisation a compliance question — about its current state, its historical practice, its specific obligations, its evidence for a particular control — the answer changes from "we will assemble that for you" to "here is what we hold and how to read it." The shift looks small in any single interaction. Across many interactions, with many counterparties, over years of relationship, it produces a different kind of organisation in the marketplace.

This piece treats five counterparty categories in sequence. Each section follows a consistent shape: the current shape of the relationship in most organisations, what changes when the substrate is in place, what specifically the substrate contributes, and what does not change. The intent is to make the strategic consequences visible without slipping into advocacy. The reader's decision about which of these consequences to pursue, and how, remains entirely theirs.

One framing matters from the start. The relational consequences are not promotional claims about what the framework lets the organisation do. They are structural consequences of the substrate doing structural work that the absence of substrate required individuals and reactive processes to do. The consequences materialise whether or not the organisation deliberately pursues them, and they accumulate whether or not anyone recognises that they have accumulated. The piece's contribution is to make them visible so that the organisation can recognise the strategic asset it has built, and use it deliberately rather than by accident.

Customers

COUNTERPARTY · **Customers**

Current shape: *Customer compliance questions arrive as discrete demands; the compliance function assembles evidence each time; the relationship is transactional and reactive.*

What changes: *Customer questions become queries against held substrate; evidence is presented rather than assembled; the relationship moves from "we will show you" to "you can see whenever you want."*

Customer relationships have changed substantially in recent years for organisations that handle sensitive data, operate in regulated industries, or supply into regulated supply chains. Customers increasingly demand demonstrable compliance, not just claimed compliance. They run their own compliance assessments, require evidence submissions, audit their suppliers directly, and use third-party assessment firms to provide ongoing assurance. The cost of these customer-driven demands has grown to rival the cost of regulatory compliance in many organisations.

In substrate-free operation, each customer demand triggers an evidence-assembly project. The compliance function pulls staff from current work to compile what the customer asked for, in the form the customer expects, against the customer's specific timeline. Each customer's demands are addressed as their own project. The work does not compound across customers; the next customer's similar demand triggers a similar project. The organisation's customer-facing compliance work scales linearly with customer count and with each customer's demand intensity.

Under substrate operation, customer demands become queries against substrate content that already exists. A customer asks for evidence of authentication-control operation across the last quarter; the substrate produces it directly because the evidence has been continuously held. A customer asks about the organisation's data-handling practices for a specific category of information; the substrate produces the relevant control objectives, current implementation, and effectiveness observations. A customer wants to understand the organisation's compliance posture against a specific regime; the substrate traces from regime intent through obligations to current evidence in a form the customer's own compliance function can consume.

What the substrate contributes specifically

The capability is not just "faster evidence assembly." It is qualitatively different evidence presentation. Customers receiving substrate-based responses can ask follow-up questions and receive follow-up answers in the same conversation rather than waiting for the next assembly cycle. Customers can verify evidence for themselves through their own technical staff because the substrate's audit trail supports their independent verification. Customers can include the organisation's compliance posture in their own substrate operations if both organisations have substrates of compatible shape. The interaction shifts from one-time demand-and-response to continuous-availability.

This affects customer acquisition substantially. RFP responses can include genuine current-state evidence rather than promises about future state. Sales cycles that previously stalled at the security-review stage can advance because the security review's evidence demands are immediately satisfiable. New customer onboarding compresses because the compliance verification that customers do at onboarding becomes a substrate query rather than a multi-week project.

It affects customer retention through a different mechanism. Customers who have come to rely on the organisation's compliance demonstrations integrate those demonstrations into their own ongoing operations. The cost of switching to a different supplier includes the cost of rebuilding the integration with the new supplier's evidence presentation. Substrate-based suppliers become stickier in their customer relationships because the customer's compliance operation has come to depend on the supplier's substrate capabilities.

It affects the depth of customer relationships. Customers that previously remained at arm's length because compliance friction made deeper engagement expensive begin to engage more substantively when compliance friction is largely absent. Strategic conversations about joint product development, integrated operations, or shared services become tractable that were previously blocked at the compliance-feasibility stage.

What does not change

The substrate does not eliminate the customer's right to ask hard questions, to require specific evidence forms the substrate may not have considered, or to demand custom assessments. Some customers — particularly large primes and heavily regulated buyers — have evidence expectations that the substrate's general capabilities will not meet without adaptation. The work of adaptation is structural rather than reconstructive, but it is still work. The substrate makes customer compliance demands manageable; it does not make them trivial.

> **THE CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP SHIFT, IN ONE SENTENCE**
> *Customer compliance demands move from per-interaction projects to substrate queries; evidence is presented rather than assembled; the relationship moves from transactional response to continuous availability; and the cumulative effect is faster customer acquisition, stickier retention, and deeper relationships than substrate-free operation can sustain.*

Regulators

COUNTERPARTY · **Regulators**

Current shape: *Regulatory submissions are assembled each cycle; regulatory questions trigger evidence projects; regulators form impressions of the organisation across years that the organisation can rarely see.*

What changes: *Submissions reflect substrate state continuously; regulatory questions are answerable from the substrate directly; the organisation's regulatory standing improves because the substrate makes its compliance posture demonstrable on demand.*

Regulators have long memories and discriminating judgement. They distinguish, often informally and without articulating the distinction explicitly, between organisations that scramble for each submission and organisations that produce evidence as a property of normal operation. The distinction affects oversight intensity, sanction exposure, the level of constructive cooperation available during inquiries, and the regulator's disposition toward the organisation across years.

In substrate-free operation, regulatory interactions follow a familiar pattern. A submission deadline approaches; the compliance function pulls together the required documentation; the submission is filed; the regulator reviews and may ask follow-up questions; the organisation responds to the questions with another round of assembly work. Between cycles, the regulator's impression of the organisation accumulates — the quality of submissions, the timeliness of responses, the consistency between current statements and prior statements, the coherence of the organisation's compliance posture over time. The accumulated impression matters, often more than any individual submission does.

Under substrate operation, regulatory submissions reflect substrate state continuously. The submission is no longer a reconstruction of historical state for a specific moment; it is a snapshot of substrate state at the time of filing. Follow-up questions are answerable from the substrate directly, often within the same business day rather than weeks later. Statements made in submissions remain consistent with statements made in subsequent interactions because both derive from the same substrate. The regulator's accumulated impression of the organisation shifts toward seeing an entity that is structurally competent at compliance rather than periodically capable of producing compliance artefacts.

What the substrate contributes specifically

Three specific changes matter for the regulatory relationship. First, the auditability of submitted evidence is substantially stronger because the substrate's change record provides traceable history of the evidence over time. A regulator inquiring about whether a particular control was operating effectively six months ago can examine the substrate's historical state for that period directly, rather than relying on assembled artefacts that may or may not reflect what was actually true at the time.

Second, the coherence of submissions across regimes improves substantially. Organisations operating under multiple regimes typically submit similar evidence in different forms to different regulators, with the formal differences sometimes producing apparent inconsistencies that the regulators notice and remember. Substrate-based submissions derive from one operational reality, with regime-specific addressing layered on top. The coherence is structural rather than negotiated.

Third, the speed of regulatory response improves. Regulators dealing with substrate-based organisations experience them as cooperative, prompt, and well-organised — not because the organisation has more compliance staff but because the substrate makes prompt response operationally tractable. The regulator's experience accumulates into a disposition that affects how subsequent inquiries are framed, how concerns are raised, and how potential sanctions are considered.

What does not change

The substrate does not change what the regulator demands. Regulatory requirements remain what they are; obligations remain what they are; the regulator's judgement about whether the organisation is meeting its obligations remains the regulator's. The substrate makes the demonstration of compliance more tractable; it does not change the standard against which compliance is judged. Organisations that are not substantively compliant cannot use the substrate to appear compliant; the substrate's transparency works against the organisation in those cases just as it works for it in the cases where compliance is genuine.

> THE REGULATOR RELATIONSHIP SHIFT, IN ONE SENTENCE
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> *Regulators experience substrate-based organisations as structurally competent at compliance rather than periodically capable of producing compliance artefacts; submissions become coherent across regimes; follow-up questions are answerable promptly; and the accumulated regulatory impression improves over years in ways that affect oversight intensity, sanction exposure, and constructive cooperation.*

Auditors

> COUNTERPARTY · **Auditors**
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> **Current shape:** *Audits are reconstruction exercises; the audit cycle disrupts operations; findings emerge from sampling that the organisation cannot anticipate; audit fees and timeline reflect the reconstruction work both sides must do.*
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> **What changes:** *Audits become inspections of held substrate; the audit cycle is shorter and less disruptive; findings are predictable because the substrate has already surfaced anything substantial; audit fees and timeline reflect the inspection work both sides actually do.*

Audit firms have their own incentives and limitations. They are paid by audit time; they staff audits with consultants whose hours are billable; they conclude audits with findings that justify the engagement. None of this is sinister — it is the structure of the audit profession.

But it produces an audit experience that, in substrate-free operation, is expensive, disruptive, and often produces findings whose relationship to actual organisational risk is uncertain.

In substrate-free operation, the audit cycle works as follows. The audit firm arrives; the compliance function assembles the requested evidence; the auditors sample what they have been given; findings emerge from what the sampling reveals. The sampling is the auditor's instrument for finding things; the organisation's preparation cannot anticipate what will be sampled or what will be found; the findings often surprise both sides. The audit's cost reflects the reconstruction work the organisation does to prepare and the sampling work the auditors do to find findings. Disruption to operations during the audit period is substantial.

Under substrate operation, audits become inspections of held substrate. The auditor's evidence requests are satisfied by substrate queries that the organisation has already used for its own operational purposes. The auditor's sampling becomes more substantive because the substrate's history is fully accessible — the auditor can examine the state at any past point in time, follow the chain from any regime requirement to any evidence, observe the organisation's substrate-change record to see what has changed when and under what authority. The audit becomes a substantive inspection of the organisation's compliance state rather than an exercise in reconstruction.

What the substrate contributes specifically

Three changes are worth naming. First, the disruption to operations during the audit period decreases substantially. The compliance function does not have to assemble; the operational teams do not have to suspend current work to support assembly. The audit happens largely in parallel with normal operations rather than disrupting them.

Second, findings become predictable rather than surprising. The substrate's own continuous observation has surfaced any substantial inadequacy before the auditor arrives; the auditor's findings either confirm what the organisation already knows or identify edge cases the organisation can address constructively. The auditor's role shifts from finding hidden problems to verifying the organisation's own self-knowledge. This is a stronger position for the organisation and, paradoxically, a more useful position for the auditor — the audit's findings reflect actual organisational state rather than reconstruction artefacts.

Third, the cost structure of audits changes. Audit firms still bill for time, but the time they need is substantially less because the inspection work is structurally efficient. Some firms adapt quickly to substrate-based clients and offer different engagement models; others remain attached to traditional reconstruction-heavy audits and gradually lose ground. The organisation can choose audit relationships based on the firm's substrate-readiness rather than only on tenure and reputation.

What does not change

The substrate does not eliminate the need for auditors. Independent verification remains valuable; the auditor's external perspective remains worth paying for; the audit findings provide assurance that internal observation alone cannot. What changes is what the audit costs in time, money, and operational disruption, and what value the audit produces relative to those costs. Organisations adopting the substrate should expect to continue paying for audits but to receive substantially better value from each.

> **THE AUDITOR RELATIONSHIP SHIFT, IN ONE SENTENCE**
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> *Audits become inspections of held substrate rather than reconstruction exercises; disruption to operations falls substantially; findings become predictable rather than surprising; and the auditor's role shifts from finding hidden problems to verifying the organisation's own self-knowledge — which produces both a stronger position for the organisation and a more substantive product from the audit.*

Providers

> COUNTERPARTY · **Providers — the supply chain in both directions**
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> **Current shape:** *Upstream (the organisation as customer of its suppliers): supplier compliance is verified through assessments, contractual representations, and periodic reviews; supply-chain compliance is one of the most expensive and least confident parts of the operation. Downstream (the organisation as supplier to its customers): flow-down obligations from primes compound across the supply chain in ways that smaller suppliers struggle to manage.*
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> **What changes:** *Upstream: supplier substrate state can be queried where suppliers also operate substrates; supplier verification becomes a substrate operation rather than a project. Downstream: flow-down obligations attach to the substrate coherently; the organisation absorbs flow-down complexity through binding additions rather than through new programmes.*

Provider relationships are bidirectional and asymmetric. The organisation is a customer of its own suppliers, demanding compliance from them. The organisation is a supplier to its own customers, demonstrating compliance to them. Both sides of the relationship are affected by substrate operation, but in different ways. Treating them separately matters because the dynamics differ.

Upstream: the organisation as customer

Most organisations spend substantial effort verifying that their own suppliers are compliant with the regimes the organisation operates under. Defence suppliers must verify their sub-suppliers' security posture. Financial-services firms must verify their fintech partners' regulatory compliance. Healthcare organisations must verify their data-handling partners' privacy practices. Pharmaceutical companies must verify their contract-manufacturing partners' quality systems. Supply-chain compliance verification has grown into a substantial cost centre in most regulated organisations, often with limited confidence in the verification's effectiveness.

In substrate-free operation, supplier verification is largely paper-based. The supplier completes questionnaires; the organisation reviews the answers; periodic audits or assessments verify a sample; the relationship is governed through contractual representations that may or may not reflect operational reality. The verification is expensive, slow, and often produces stale information by the time decisions are made on it.

Under substrate operation — particularly when both the organisation and its supplier have substrates — supplier verification can become a substrate operation. The supplier exposes specific substrate state to the customer; the customer queries the supplier's compliance posture against agreed control objectives; verification happens through continuous observation rather than through periodic projects. The relationship between organisation and supplier becomes one of compliance partnership rather than periodic adversarial verification. This is not yet common in 2026 because supplier-side substrate maturity is uneven, but it is structurally available and is becoming more common as substrate adoption spreads through supply chains.

Even when only the organisation has a substrate, the verification work improves. The organisation can address its supplier-verification work through its substrate's chain architecture, with supplier obligations bound to specific Control Objective Records and supplier evidence linked to those obligations. The verification becomes coherent across many suppliers in ways that substrate-free verification cannot achieve.

Downstream: the organisation as supplier

Flow-down obligations from prime contractors and large customers have grown substantially in the regulated economies of the past decade. Defence primes flow down CMMC and DEFSTAN requirements. Financial-services platforms flow down their own regulatory obligations to their fintech vendors. Healthcare networks flow down HIPAA-equivalent expectations to their data-handling vendors. The flow-downs compound across the supply chain; smaller suppliers receive flow-downs from multiple primes, each with its own interpretation of the underlying regime, each demanding its own evidence forms.

In substrate-free operation, each flow-down arrives as a new compliance programme. The smaller supplier scrambles to meet the new prime's requirements without disrupting its existing prime relationships. Programmes accumulate; the supplier's compliance function grows substantially; the operational complexity of serving multiple primes with overlapping but distinct flow-downs becomes substantial. Many smaller suppliers reach a complexity ceiling and either decline new prime relationships, exit prime relationships they have, or accept the compounding cost as the price of supply-chain participation.

Under substrate operation, flow-down obligations attach to the substrate coherently. A new flow-down requirement is bound as a new regime; the substrate identifies which existing control objectives satisfy the new requirements and which gaps remain; the supplier absorbs the new flow-down through substrate additions rather than through a new parallel programme. The complexity ceiling moves substantially upward; the supplier can serve more primes with overlapping flow-downs without compounding operational cost beyond what each prime is actually paying for. Small suppliers with mature substrates can compete for prime relationships that would be unreachable for substrate-free suppliers of equivalent size.

THE PROVIDER RELATIONSHIP SHIFT, IN ONE SENTENCE

Upstream supplier verification becomes substrate operation rather than periodic project; downstream flow-down obligations attach to the substrate coherently rather than producing parallel programmes; and the organisation's capacity to participate in regulated supply chains as both customer and supplier expands substantially without compounding operational cost.

Partners

COUNTERPARTY · Strategic partners

Current shape: *Partnership relationships frequently founder on compliance friction that neither party anticipated; joint ventures stall at integration; alliances limit themselves to surfaces that avoid compliance entanglement; technology partnerships work around compliance rather than through it.*

What changes: *Compliance friction becomes substantively addressable; joint ventures can structure their integration around substrate compatibility; alliances can pursue deeper engagement when compliance demonstration is mutually feasible; technology partnerships can integrate at substrate level for substantially deeper operational coupling.*

Strategic partnerships are different from supplier or customer relationships because both parties usually want depth that purely transactional relationships cannot support. Joint ventures, alliances, integration partnerships, technology partnerships — these are relationships where both parties commit substantial resources, share substantial information, and depend on each other's competence in ways that ordinary customer or supplier relationships do not require. Compliance friction is particularly costly in these relationships because the friction often prevents the depth both parties wanted.

In substrate-free operation, partnership integration repeatedly encounters compliance walls. Joint ventures want to share customer data but cannot because the regulatory posture of one party is unclear to the other. Alliances want to integrate operations but cannot because each party's compliance state is reconstructable only through projects that take longer than the alliance's strategic window. Technology partnerships want deep operational integration but settle for shallow API integration because deeper integration would require compliance verification both parties find too expensive. The partnership relationships that do form often operate at substantially less depth than either party wanted, with the unrealised depth representing strategic value that was on the table and could not be captured.

Under substrate operation, particularly when both parties have substrates of comparable maturity, partnership integration becomes substantively different. Joint ventures can structure their integration around substrate compatibility — agreeing in advance which control objectives are shared, which substrate elements need to interoperate, which compliance regimes will be addressed jointly. Alliances can pursue deeper engagement because compliance demonstration is mutually feasible at substrate level. Technology partnerships can integrate at substrate level for substantially deeper operational coupling than substrate-free partnerships can sustain.

What the substrate contributes specifically

Three patterns matter. First, the compliance feasibility of partnership options becomes evaluable. Before committing to a partnership, both parties can characterise what substrate integration would require, what compliance gaps would need to be closed, what regimes would be jointly addressed. Partnerships that would have stalled at compliance discovery can be entered with full visibility into compliance integration cost.

Second, the depth of partnership integration becomes a strategic variable rather than a compliance ceiling. Partners can choose to integrate deeply because deep integration is structurally tractable, or to integrate shallowly because shallow integration is sufficient for their goals. The depth becomes a deliberate choice rather than a default imposed by compliance friction.

Third, partnership relationships become trust-based in a structural sense. Both parties can verify each other's compliance posture continuously rather than periodically, which means trust between partners derives from observable structural commitments rather than from contractual representations alone. This kind of structural trust is more durable than the contractual trust that compliance-friction-laden partnerships have to settle for.

What does not change

The substrate does not make partnerships easy. Partnership success requires strategic alignment, cultural compatibility, complementary capabilities, and many other things the substrate has nothing to do with. What the substrate addresses is the specific category of partnership friction that derives from compliance complexity. Removing this friction does not guarantee partnership success; it makes partnership success addressable on its other merits, which substrate-free operation often does not.

> **THE PARTNER RELATIONSHIP SHIFT, IN ONE SENTENCE**
> *Partnership integration becomes substantively addressable rather than blocked by compliance friction; the depth of partnership becomes a strategic variable rather than a compliance ceiling; and trust between partners becomes structural rather than contractual — which makes partnership relationships more durable and more substantive than substrate-free partnerships can sustain.*

What ties the five together

The five counterparty categories share a structural property worth naming explicitly. In each case, the substrate's contribution is to make the organisation's compliance posture demonstrable on demand rather than reconstructable on request. The mechanism differs across counterparties — customers query substrate state, regulators receive coherent submissions, auditors inspect held content, providers integrate at substrate level, partners structure deeper relationships around substrate compatibility — but the underlying capability is the same. The organisation that can demonstrate its compliance posture on demand has a different relationship with every external party than the organisation that has to reconstruct its compliance posture each time.

This is what the trust architecture piece at the end of this bearing will develop more substantively. The substrate produces trust as a structural property because the organisation's compliance state is observable to those who need to observe it, by mechanisms that do not depend on the organisation's word or on assembled artefacts that may or may not reflect operational reality. Trust under these conditions is qualitatively different from trust that depends on representations, attestations, or periodic verifications. It is more durable, more substantive, and more strategically valuable than the trust substrate-free organisations can sustain.

The strategic consequence is that organisations with mature substrates acquire a quality of external relationship that organisations without substrates cannot match through any amount of effort. Compliance staff cannot manufacture this quality through harder work; tooling cannot produce it through smarter dashboards; communications cannot create it through better narratives. The quality derives from the structural commitment of holding compliance reality as substrate, and the alternative ways of operating cannot reach the same place. This is one of the most consequential strategic effects of the framework, and one that affects every external relationship the organisation has.

What this piece is not

Three honest framings before the next piece to this bearing picks up the economics.

First, the piece is not arguing that every external relationship improves immediately upon substrate adoption. Counterparties form impressions over years; the impressions update slowly; the strategic value of relational shifts accumulates over time rather than appearing at the moment of adoption. Organisations that adopt the framework expecting immediate improvement in customer perception, regulatory standing, audit costs, supplier relationships, and partnership opportunities will be disappointed. Organisations that adopt the framework expecting these relationships to improve substantially over the years following adoption will see it materialise. The trajectory matters more than the moment.

Second, the piece is not arguing that the relational consequences make the framework worth adopting on their own. The framework's primary contribution remains management-system integration; the relational consequences are downstream effects worth naming because they affect strategic value substantially. An organisation considering adoption should evaluate it primarily on its integration value and view the relational consequences as additional strategic return on an investment whose primary justification is elsewhere.

Third, the piece is not arguing that substrate adoption transforms the organisation into something its competitors cannot match. Competitors can adopt substrates too. What matters is the trajectory: organisations that adopt early enjoy years of compounding relational value that organisations adopting later cannot retroactively acquire. The asymmetry is in timing, not in some inherent unmatchability of substrate-equipped organisations. Late adopters will catch up structurally; they will not catch up in the relational asset that compounds with substrate maturity.

Closing

This piece has named what changes in the organisation's relationships with five categories of external counterparty when the framework is in place. Customers experience continuous availability rather than reactive response. Regulators encounter structural competence rather than periodic capability. Auditors inspect rather than reconstruct. Providers — both as customers and as suppliers — interact at substrate level rather than through paper-based verification. Strategic partners can structure deeper relationships because compliance friction is substantively addressable. In each case, the substrate's contribution is the same: making the organisation's compliance posture demonstrable on demand rather than reconstructable on request.

The five counterparty categories taken together produce a kind of organisation in the marketplace that substrate-free operation cannot produce. Faster customer acquisition, deeper customer retention, improved regulatory standing, lower audit cost and disruption, expanded supply-chain capacity, more substantial partnerships. None of these is a feature claim about what the framework does; each is a structural consequence of holding compliance reality as substrate. The cumulative strategic value is substantial, and most of it is invisible to leadership until the consequences are named explicitly — which is what this piece has set out to do.

The next piece in towards North picks up the economics: how the cost structure of compliance changes once the framework is in place, what the financial conversation about substrate investment should look like, how the shift from reconstruction-cost to stewardship-cost affects budgeting and ROI conversations, and how the amortisation of substrate investment across regimes changes the math of regulatory expansion. The economics piece grounds the strategic narrative in language that supports the financial conversation with the CFO, the audit committee, and the board's finance perspective.

> **WHAT THIS PIECE ESTABLISHED, IN ONE SENTENCE**
> *The framework's structural commitments produce consequences in five categories of external relationship — customers, regulators, auditors, providers, partners — each shifted in shape by the substrate's capacity to make the organisation's compliance posture demonstrable on demand rather than reconstructable on request, with cumulative strategic value that compounds over years and produces a quality of external relationship that substrate-free operation structurally cannot match.*