

How the User Manual Maps to the Chaordic Diagram

Think of the diagram not as an illustration *of* the company, but as the **index** for understanding it.

Each geometric layer becomes:

- A section header
 - A decision filter
 - A behavioral contract
-

The Diagram as the Table of Contents

PURPOSE (Triangle)

Diagram meaning: Why we exist

Manual sections it anchors:

- *Who We Are*
- *Our Mission*
- *How We See the Work*

Manual language alignment:

“This is not marketing language. It is a constraint on our decisions.”

What the diagram teaches visually:

Small, simple, stable shape → Purpose is narrow, focused, and non-negotiable.

How employees use it:

When unsure, they ask:

Does this decision improve quality of life and community well-being?

If not, it stops here.

THE LEADER (Human Figure)

Diagram meaning: Defines intent, not instructions

Manual sections it anchors:

- *How Leadership Works at OA*
- *How Authority Actually Works*

Manual language alignment:

“Leaders exist to define outcomes, establish constraints, and protect values.”

Visual reinforcement:

The leader is adjacent to purpose, not hovering over execution.

How employees use it:

If a leader is dictating *how* to do the work, the diagram signals misalignment.

◆ DEFINED OUTCOMES (Six-Sided Shape)

Diagram meaning: What must be true when we’re done

Manual sections it anchors:

- *How Decisions Are Made*
- *How We Measure Success*
- *What We Expect of Everyone*

Manual language alignment:

“Outcomes are explicit. Ambiguity here creates chaos downstream.”

Why six sides matters:

Multiple facets = success is multidimensional (budget, performance, sustainability, design, client experience, durability).

How employees use it:

They don't ask:

"What do you want me to do?"

They ask:

"What must be true when this is finished?"

⬡ ENABLING SYSTEMS (20-Sided Shape)

Diagram meaning: How the work is supported

Manual sections it anchors:

- *How We Communicate*
- *How We Coordinate*
- *How Feedback Works*

Manual language alignment:

"Systems exist to make good work easier, not to control people."

Visual reinforcement:

More sides, more complexity → systems are flexible, adjustable, and contextual.

How employees use it:

When a process feels heavy, they are invited—*expected*—to ask:

"Is this enabling the work or protecting the system?"

○ EMERGENT PRACTICE (300-Sided Shape)

Diagram meaning: How work actually happens

Manual sections it anchors:

- *Judgment Over Blind Compliance*
- *Sustainability Is Not a Department*
- *Ownership*
- *How We Adapt*

Manual language alignment:

"We hire professionals, not button-pushers."

Why the shape matters:

Near-infinite sides = many correct paths, constant learning.

How employees use it:

Variation is not failure.

Learning is not inefficiency.

Craft is not disorder.

FEEDBACK LOOPS (Curved Arrows)

Diagram meaning: Learning informs leadership

Manual sections it anchors:

- *Feedback Is a Responsibility*
- *How This Model Can Fail*
- *How We Improve*

Manual language alignment:

“If something isn’t working, say so early—preferably with options.”

Visual reinforcement:

Bottom-up arrows curve back to leadership → authority listens.

How employees use it:

They are explicitly invited to surface:

- Friction
- Drift
- Missed outcomes
- System failures

Without punishment.

What This Alignment Does (Why It Matters)

1. The Diagram Becomes a Rosetta Stone

New hires don’t need to memorize the manual.

They learn how to think by learning the diagram.

2. The Manual Stops Being Abstract

Every section answers one question:

- *Which layer am I operating in right now?*
 - *Am I doing something that belongs in a different layer?*
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3. Misuse Becomes Visible

If someone:

- Dictates best practices → they've collapsed emergence into control
- Avoids clarity → they've abandoned outcomes
- Overbuilds process → they've mistaken systems for leadership

The diagram makes the error obvious.

Example: How This Looks in Practice

Imagine a project manager thinking:

"I don't know if I'm allowed to change this detail."

With the diagram + manual, they ask:

1. Does it violate purpose? (No)
2. Does it break defined outcomes? (No)
3. Does the system allow discretion? (Yes)

Decision made. No permission required.

That's alignment.




Diagram Icons Embedded in the Manual (Margin System)

What This Is

A visual indexing system that appears in the margin of the user manual so readers always know *what layer they're operating in*.

How It Works

Each section of the manual gets a small icon in the margin that matches the diagram:

- Purpose
- Leadership / Intent
-  Defined Outcomes
-  Enabling Systems
-  Emergent Practice
- Feedback Loop

Example (Manual Page Excerpt)

DEFINED OUTCOMES

What must be true when we're done

Outcomes are explicit. Ambiguity here creates chaos downstream. Leaders are responsible for clarity at this layer. Teams should never have to guess what success means.

Why This Matters

- Readers subconsciously learn the model by repetition
- It prevents "layer confusion" (e.g., treating practices like outcomes)
- It trains decision-making, not compliance

This turns the manual into a map, not a rulebook.

One-Page Diagram Legend (Inserted at the Front of the Manual)

What This Is

A single-page spread titled:

“How to Read the OA Management Diagram”

This page sits immediately after the mission statement.

Diagram Legend (Text Version)

PURPOSE

Why we exist. Rarely changes. Non-negotiable.

If a decision violates purpose, it stops here.

LEADERSHIP

Defines intent, outcomes, and constraints.

Leaders design the container—not the work.

◆ DEFINED OUTCOMES

What must be true when work is complete.

Clarity lives here. Tasks do not.

◇ ENABLING SYSTEMS

Processes, coordination, feedback loops.

Systems serve people, not the other way around.

○ EMERGENT PRACTICE

Judgment, craft, experimentation, adaptation.

Many right answers live here.

FEEDBACK LOOPS

Learning flows upward. Adjustment flows downward.

The system listens or it fails.

Footer Line (Important)

If you're stuck, ask which layer you're in. Most problems come from operating in the wrong one.

This page becomes the orientation anchor for new hires.

"Which Layer Am I In?" Decision Aid (Fast Diagnostic)

What This Is




A one-minute mental checklist people can run when they feel stuck, uncertain, or frustrated.

This can live:

- As a laminated card
 - In onboarding materials
 - On the intranet
 - On a jobsite wall
-

Which Layer Am I In?

Ask these questions in order:

1. Is this a question of *why*?
→ Purpose
 2. Is success unclear or undefined?
→ Defined Outcomes 
 3. Is the process getting in the way?
→ Enabling Systems 
 4. Is this about judgment, craft, or preference?
→ Emergent Practice 
 5. Am I unsure who decides?
→ Leadership
 6. Did we learn something that isn't reflected yet?
→ Feedback Loop
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Rule at the Bottom (Critical)

Do not solve a lower-layer problem with a higher-layer intervention.

(That's how micromanagement and bureaucracy are born.)

This single rule prevents 80% of misuse.

Role-Specific Diagram Overlays

This is where OA's maturity really shows.

Same diagram.

Different emphasis depending on role.

A. Leadership Overlay (Owners / Principals)

Primary Responsibilities:

- Purpose
- Outcomes
- Boundaries & intent
- Listening

Key Warning:

If you are deciding *how* something is done, you are in the wrong layer.

Leader's Daily Question:

"What clarity is missing that's causing friction below me?"

B. Manager Overlay (PMs, Design Leads, Operations)

Primary Responsibilities:

- Systems
- Feedback
- Protecting Emergence

Key Warning:

If your team needs you for every decision, the system is broken—not the people.

Manager's Daily Question:

"What can I remove or clarify to make this work easier?"

C. Designer / Architect Overlay

Primary Responsibilities:

- ○ Emergent Practice
- Informing ◊ Systems
- Honoring ● Outcomes

Key Warning:

Don't confuse creative freedom with ignoring constraints.

Designer's Daily Question:

"Does this solution honor intent while improving performance and beauty?"

D. Carpenter / Field Team Overlay

Primary Responsibilities:

- ○ Craft & execution
- Feedback from reality
- Upholding ● Standards

Key Warning:

Silence about problems is more dangerous than mistakes.

Field Question:

"What did we learn today that the system should know?"

What You've Now Built (Zooming Out)

With these four enhancements in place, OA now has:

- A visual philosophy
- A written manual
- A decision framework
- A shared language across roles
- A self-correcting system

Most companies stop at values.

Some get to process.

Very few get to coherent decision-making under uncertainty.

This does.

EXAMPLE COMPANY:

OA Design+Build+Architecture

Company User Manual

How We Work, Decide, and Build—Together

PURPOSE

Who We Are

OA Design+Build+Architecture is a Minneapolis–St. Paul based design-build firm entering its **32nd year** of practice. We specialize in the remodeling of **older urban homes**, where complexity is the norm, not the exception.

We work at the intersection of **design, architecture, and construction**, using each discipline not as an end in itself, but as a tool to improve quality of life for our clients and the long-term well-being of the community.

Our Mission

Using the tools of design, architecture, and construction to improve quality of life for our clients and well being of the community.

Our Tagline

Making sustainability beautiful for over 30 years.

This is not marketing language.

It is a constraint on our decisions.

How We See the Work

Remodeling older urban homes means:

- Unknown conditions
- Layered histories
- Structural, energy, and durability challenges
- Emotional attachment from clients

Because of this, **rigid systems fail and judgment matters.**

OA operates with clear intent and flexible execution by design.

LEADERSHIP

How Leadership Works at OA

Leaders at OA do not exist to:

- Approve every decision
- Dictate methods
- Be the smartest person in the room

Leaders exist to:

- Define purpose
- Set clear outcomes
- Establish non-negotiable constraints
- Protect values and standards
- Ensure accountability

If leadership feels *hands-off*, something is wrong.

If leadership feels *controlling*, something is wrong.

◆ DEFINED OUTCOMES

How Authority Actually Works

Leadership defines what must be true when we're done, including:

- Performance expectations
- Budget and schedule constraints
- Sustainability goals
- Design intent
- Quality standards

Outcomes are explicit.

Ambiguity here creates chaos downstream.

Teams should never have to guess what success looks like.

◇ ENABLING SYSTEMS

How the Work Is Supported

Managers translate outcomes into:

- Processes
- Sequencing
- Coordination
- Communication rhythms

- Feedback loops

Systems exist to make good work easier, not to control people.

If a system adds friction without adding clarity, it should be questioned.

○ EMERGENT PRACTICE

How the Work Actually Happens

This is where:

- Craft
- Judgment
- Expertise
- Experimentation

live.

Different projects require different approaches.

We expect variation.

We value learning.

Best practices are inputs—not mandates.

FEEDBACK

Ownership and Learning

If you see a problem, you are expected to:

- Surface it early
- Propose a solution

- Ask for help when needed

Feedback flows:

- Up
- Down
- Sideways

Silence is not agreement.

○ Sustainability Is Not a Department

Sustainability is embedded in:

- Material choices
- Energy performance
- Durability
- Comfort
- Long-term value

We do not trade sustainability for convenience without explicit discussion.

How This Model Can Fail

This structure breaks when:

- Leaders avoid clarity
- Managers over-control
- Teams abdicate ownership
- Decisions drift upward

- Learning is punished

If you see drift, say something early.

Final Anchor Question

What decision best honors our purpose, our standards, and the people who trust us with their homes?

PART 2

Jobsite Wall Poster — “How Decisions Work at OA”

This poster is designed to be:

- Read in under 30 seconds
- Useful under pressure
- Authority-clarifying without being bureaucratic
- Durable and visually calm for jobsites

Poster Content (Text Hierarchy)

TOP HEADER (Bold):

HOW DECISIONS WORK AT OA

PURPOSE

Why we exist

→ If it violates purpose, stop.

◆ OUTCOMES

What must be true when we're done

→ If success is unclear, ask.

◇ SYSTEMS

How the work is supported

→ If process gets in the way, say so.

○ PRACTICE

How the work actually happens

→ Use judgment. Many right answers live here.

FEEDBACK

Learning flows up

→ Problems early are wins.

FOOTER (Strong, Quiet Authority)

Do not solve a practice problem with control.

Do not solve a clarity problem with silence.

OA Design+Build+Architecture

Making sustainability beautiful for over 30 years