



TOOLKIT — FIELD GUIDE

The Operating Cadence.

Three touches a week, five numbers, and the six conversations that decide whether any of it survives contact with a Tuesday.

Companion to the Operating Cadence workbook.
Read this once. Live in the workbook.

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This will make things look worse before it makes them better.

That is not a disclaimer. It is the mechanism.

For the first two or three weeks, the numbers this system produces will be embarrassing. Carryover at 70%. Blocks two weeks old with nobody's name on them. A record lag measured in *weeks* rather than days. People will look at that and conclude the cadence is making things worse.

It is not. Those numbers were already true. They were simply distributed across eleven people's heads, where nobody had to hold all of them at once and feel what they added up to. The only thing that changed is that they are now in one place, with a date on them.

**The first honest week always looks like a crisis. It is not a crisis.
It is a measurement, and you have never had one before.**

If you cannot get past that fortnight, do not start. A cadence abandoned in week two is worse than no cadence at all, because now everybody has learned that measurement is something this organisation flirts with and then quietly drops when the reading is unflattering. That lesson is expensive and it takes about two years to unteach.

Who this is for

Founders and operators running somewhere between four and forty people, where the work has outgrown the founder's memory but not yet earned a full-time programme manager. The specific failure this addresses: everyone is working hard, nothing is obviously broken, and yet the same three things have been nearly finished for a month.

Who this is not for

Teams whose problem is money, market, or a product nobody wants. A cadence will not save you from those, it will only tell you faster. That is worth something, but be honest with yourself about which problem you actually have before you spend eight weeks on this one.

The workbook does the arithmetic. This does the argument.

Nothing in here is repeated in the spreadsheet, and nothing in the spreadsheet is repeated in here. If you only ever read one of them, read this one and build your own sheet.

Your weekly meeting is not a cadence.

A meeting is a place people go. A cadence is a rhythm that changes the record. Most organisations have the first and believe they have the second.

Here is the test, and it is unkind on purpose. **Cancel the meeting for three weeks and change nothing else. Now ask what is different about what is written down.**

If the answer is "nothing, we just talked less" — that meeting was never a cadence. It was a status ritual. Useful for morale, occasionally, and completely inert as an operating mechanism. You could replace it with a group message and lose nothing but the calendar block.

A cadence is not defined by how often you meet. It is defined by what is different in the record afterwards.

This distinction matters because almost every attempt to fix operating problems starts by adding meetings, and almost none of them start by asking what the existing meetings change. Adding a second weekly status call to an organisation whose first one changes nothing produces an organisation with two meetings that change nothing, and a slightly angrier team.

What a meeting is genuinely good at

Surfacing things somebody was reluctant to write down. Reading a room. Making a decision that needs three people in agreement inside four minutes rather than three days of email. These are real and they are not nothing.

What a meeting is structurally bad at

Remembering. A meeting produces a shared understanding that begins decaying the moment people walk out, and is fully gone in about nine days. This is not a discipline failure. It is how memory works. Every system that depends on people reliably remembering an unwritten thing for more than a week is a system with a countdown on it.

So the cadence is not three more meetings. It is three moments where the record is forced to catch up with reality, wrapped in just enough meeting to make that happen.

The record is the discipline. Everything else is decoration.

Not the meeting. Not the tool. Not people trying harder. The record, and specifically how fast it learns that something changed.

Consider what actually goes wrong in a team that is working hard and still losing time. Almost never is it that somebody did not do the work. Overwhelmingly it is one of these:

- Something finished and nobody downstream found out for nine days.
- Something got stuck and the person who could unstick it did not know they were the person.
- A decision got made in a hallway, and three weeks later the same argument ran again from the top, because nobody could produce the reasoning.
- Two people were doing versions of the same thing, and both of them were right about what they had been asked to do.

Every one of those is a record problem wearing a people costume. Not one of them is fixed by asking anybody to care more.

This is why the number we care most about is the least glamorous one in the workbook: **record lag**, the number of days between something finishing in reality and the board finding out. It sounds like an administrative metric. It is actually the whole thing.

A board with a record lag of six days is not a board. It is a newsletter about a place you used to work. Every decision made from it is made from a description of last Tuesday, and everyone reading it knows that, which is why they check with people directly instead — which is exactly the coordination cost you were trying to remove.

Why the tool is not the answer

People reach for software here, and software is genuinely useful, but a tool cannot fix a record lag. A tool is a container. If the habit is to update it on Friday afternoon for the week just gone, a better tool gives you a more beautifully rendered six-day lag. Teams migrate between project tools every eighteen months and carry the same lag across each one, which should be telling.

Why "just be more disciplined" is not the answer either

Because it works for roughly five weeks, which is long enough to convince everybody it was working and short enough that nobody notices exactly when it stopped. Discipline that depends on remembering is not discipline. It is enthusiasm, and enthusiasm has a half-life.

The move is to make updating the record something that happens *inside* a thing that is already happening, rather than a separate act requiring separate willpower. Which is what the three touches are for.

Forty-five minutes a week, total. Not one minute of it is a status update.

Each touch has exactly one job. The most common way this system fails is one touch quietly absorbing another's job, so the jobs are worth stating plainly.

Monday — Expose

15 MINUTES

The job: find out what is actually stuck, rather than what people would prefer you believed. Nothing gets solved here. Solving is Wednesday's job and letting it happen on Monday is how a fifteen-minute touch becomes fifty.

You ask:

- What is actually stuck right now?
- What is going to be stuck by Friday if nothing changes?
- What moved since Friday that we have not written down?

Where it breaks: everyone says "on track". If four people in a row report nothing stuck, the second question is not landing. Ask it again with names in it — "Priya, what is going to be stuck by Friday?" — because the general version gives everyone permission to assume somebody else will answer, and they will all take it.

Wednesday — Resolve

20 MINUTES

The job: clear what Monday surfaced. Midweek is chosen deliberately — a block cleared on Wednesday still has two days to move. A block cleared on Friday has taken the week off already.

You ask:

- What is still stuck from Monday?
- What decision is actually required, and who makes it?
- Who is unblocking it, and by what date?

Where it breaks: the touch turns into a working session. Cadence surfaces and assigns; it does not solve. If something needs forty minutes of four people's time, book that — but book it, do not let it eat the touch while everyone else sits there learning nothing and resenting it.

The job: make the board true. This is the touch everyone skips, and skipping it compounds — because Monday's entire value depends on the board being current when you walk in. Skip Friday and Monday becomes forty minutes of rebuilding what happened, out loud, from memory, badly.

You ask:

- What actually shipped or closed?
- What did we learn that changes next week?
- What carried over, and specifically why?

Where it breaks: "why it carried" becomes "we ran out of time". That is not a reason, it is a summary. If an item carries over three weeks running with the same non-answer, the item is wrong, not the week.

Update the board during the touch, not after it.

A board updated afterwards is a meeting with homework, and homework does not get done. If the recording is deferred, you do not have a cadence — you have a standing appointment where people take turns sounding busy.

Five numbers, and why they are not the five you were expecting.

There is no velocity here, no burndown, no percentage complete. Those measure output against a plan. These measure whether the plan and the reality are still in the same room.

THE NUMBER	WHAT IT ACTUALLY DETECTS	WHY NOT THE OBVIOUS ONE
Carryover rate	The share of live work already older than a week. Above 40%, your weekly plan is fiction and the room knows it.	Velocity tells you how much you did. Carryover tells you whether you can predict anything, which is the thing you are actually short of.
Oldest block	The single longest-standing block, in days. Past a week it stops being a block.	Counting blocks flatters you. One eleven-day block is worse than six two-day ones and averages hide exactly that.
Blocked with no date	Items marked blocked where nobody has committed to a date for unblocking them.	The cheapest number on the sheet to fix and the most revealing that it needed fixing. A block with no date has no owner.
Record lag	Days between finishing in reality and the board finding out.	Percentage complete is a guess about the future. This is a fact about the past, and it is the only one that tells you whether the board can be trusted.
Days silent	How long an item has gone untouched. Past a fortnight it is not paused, it is abandoned.	Nothing else catches quiet death. Items do not get cancelled in this failure mode, they just stop being mentioned while still occupying room in everyone's head.

Every one of these is designed to be uncomfortable rather than impressive. A metric you would happily put on a slide is usually a metric that has stopped telling you anything.

Read them together or not at all

Individually each of these can be gamed in about four minutes. Carryover drops beautifully if you stop putting real things on the board. Record lag looks superb if nothing ever finishes. Read as a set they are much harder to fake, because improving one dishonestly worsens another, and that tension is doing deliberate work.

The trend matters more than any single week. One week is noise — somebody was on holiday, a customer escalated, a deal landed. Four weeks is a shape. That is the entire reason the workbook has a Trend sheet, and the entire reason ten seconds on a Friday is worth more than the hour you will otherwise spend arguing about whether things feel better.

Six things people say, and what to say back.

This is where cadences actually die. Not in the design — in the eleven seconds after somebody says something reasonable-sounding and everyone nods.

“It’s basically done.”

WHAT IT MEANS The work is 80% done and the remaining 20% is the part nobody has looked at closely. “Basically done” has been the status of more overdue projects than every other phrase combined.

WHAT YOU SAY “What is left?” Then wait. The answer is either a list of three concrete things — in which case fine, it is nearly done — or a pause, in which case it is not nearly done and now everyone knows.

IF YOU DON'T It stays “basically done” for four more weeks and the board reports it as healthy the entire time.

“I’m blocked on Dana.”

WHAT IT MEANS Very often: Dana does not know. A meaningful share of blocks are one unsent message, and the person is not lying — they genuinely experience it as blocked, because from where they sit it is.

WHAT YOU SAY “Does Dana know?” Nine times out of ten this ends the block on the spot. The tenth time it becomes a real escalation, which is also a good outcome, and either way it took eight seconds.

IF YOU DON'T A one-message block ages into a two-week block, and eventually into a story about Dana.

“Let’s take that offline.”

WHAT IT MEANS

Sometimes it is correct and the touch should not absorb a working session. Sometimes it means “I would rather this not be witnessed.” The two are indistinguishable in the moment, which is exactly why it works.

WHAT YOU SAY

“Fine — who, and by when?” Offline is allowed. Offline with no name and no date is where items go to die quietly, and it is the single most common exit route from a functioning cadence.

IF YOU DON'T

It resurfaces in three weeks, unchanged, and somebody says “I thought we took that offline.”

“It’s on track.” — with carryover at 60%

WHAT IT MEANS

Not that anyone is lying. Each individual item genuinely feels on track to the person holding it. The aggregate is the thing nobody is holding, and it is the thing that is not on track.

WHAT YOU SAY

Read the number out loud. Not accusingly — just say it. “Carryover is 60%, which means most of what we committed to three weeks ago is still open. What should we not have committed to?” You want the room arguing with the number, not with each other.

IF YOU DON'T

You have built a measurement system and then declined to use it, which is worse than not having one, because now it has your endorsement.

“We don’t need to write it down, we just discussed it.”

WHAT IT MEANS

The speaker will remember. That is true and irrelevant — they are not the risk. The risk is the four people who were not there, and the version of the speaker who exists in nine days.

WHAT YOU SAY

“Then it takes ten seconds.” Writing it down is only ever an argument when the decision is not actually settled. If a decision genuinely resists being written in one sentence, you have found something more useful than a note.

IF YOU DON'T

The identical argument runs again next month, from the top, with nobody able to produce the reasoning — so it gets re-litigated rather than revisited.

“This is just more process.”

WHAT IT MEANS	Usually the honest objection, and usually earned. This person has survived two or three previous systems that were introduced with enthusiasm, consumed time, produced nothing, and were quietly abandoned without anyone admitting it.
WHAT YOU SAY	Agree with them, then bound it. "You are right that most of this stuff is overhead. Give me four weeks. If carryover has not moved, we stop and I will say so in this meeting." Then actually do that. Nothing buys credibility like a named exit you honour.
IF YOU DON'T	They comply visibly and disengage privately, which is the most expensive outcome available, because it looks like adoption.

The first four weeks, without the optimism.

Starting all three touches at once is the most reliable way to kill this inside a fortnight. Adoption is the constraint, not design. Add one at a time and let the boring bit arrive before the hard bit.

WEEK 1

Monday only. Nothing else.

Just surface. No fixing, no assigning, no working session. Expect it to be ugly and say so out loud on the way in — the fastest way to make honesty safe is to promise the first reading will be bad and then be visibly unbothered when it is.

WEEK 2

Add Friday.

Recording, not reporting. Ten minutes. Friday is second rather than Wednesday deliberately: Friday is what makes Monday cheap, and a cheap Monday is what buys you permission to add a third touch at all. This is also the week the resistance arrives — see the previous page.

WEEK 3

Add Wednesday.

Now the loop closes. This is the week people stop rebuilding context and start moving blocks, and the week you get your first real decision out of the system — usually one that has been quietly pending for a month.

WEEK 4

Start measuring.

Your first honest carryover number. It will be worse than you expect and that is the baseline, not a verdict. Write it down. In six weeks it is the only evidence you will have that anything changed, and memory will otherwise tell you a flattering story.

One person owns the cadence. Not a committee, and ideally not the founder.

A cadence run by the founder becomes a status report to the founder within three weeks, because everyone in the room is answering a slightly different question than the one being asked. If it must be the founder at first, name the date you are handing it over, and hand it over.

When to loosen it, and when to kill it entirely.

Three touches is a starting position, not a personality. A cadence that never loosens is overhead with good manners, and people stop showing up to good manners.

MOVE	ONLY WHEN	THE CATCH
3 → 2	Carryover under 25% for four straight weeks <i>and</i> no block has gone undated.	Drop Wednesday, not Friday. Friday is load-bearing and dropping it is how teams end up back where they started while believing they still have a cadence.
2 → 1	Average record lag at or under one day for six weeks <i>and</i> nothing has gone silent.	At one touch the record has to be maintained continuously rather than in the touch. Only teams who have genuinely internalised it survive this, and most who try it at week eight have not.
Straight back up	Carryover clears 40% two weeks running.	None. Do it immediately and without ceremony. Loosening is reversible, and treating it as reversible is exactly what stops it becoming a status symbol nobody will give up.

And the version nobody writes down

If you have run this honestly for eight weeks and nothing has moved — carryover flat, record lag flat, the same three items carried the entire time — then stop running it. Genuinely stop.

A cadence measures coordination. If coordination was never your binding constraint, it will faithfully report that nothing is improving while the actual problem sits somewhere else entirely: too few people, an unfunded quarter, a product that has not found anyone, or one person whose decisions everything waits on and who is not going to change. A rhythm cannot fix any of those, and continuing to run one while it fails to is a fairly expensive way to avoid naming what is really going on.

Eight weeks of honest measurement that concludes "this is not the problem" is a good outcome. You have eliminated a suspect, cheaply, and you have the data to prove it to someone else.

The failure mode to actually fear is not stopping. It is running a cadence indefinitely, badly, as a substitute for a conversation somebody senior does not want to have. That version has a calendar invite, a spreadsheet, an owner, and no effect whatsoever, and it can survive for years because it looks exactly like rigour from the outside.

One discipline out of a stack, not a philosophy.

The Operating Cadence is the operating half of **Discipline Stacking** — the idea that capability is built by layering a small number of practices that hold each other up, rather than by adopting a framework wholesale and hoping the culture arrives with it.

The reasoning behind keeping the record current in the same pass as the work — rather than as a reporting activity that happens afterwards — is **Closed-Loop PM**. That is the principle underneath the record lag number, and the reason it is treated as the primary measurement rather than an administrative one.

Both are written up at cnnectd.work. Neither is required to run this. The cadence works fine as a standalone habit and quite a lot of people run it that way, having read none of the rest.

What we actually think

Most operating advice fails because it is sold as a transformation and delivered as a slide deck. The unit that actually works is smaller and much less impressive: one rhythm, held for two months, with the numbers written down. It is not exciting. It does not photograph well. It is roughly the whole thing.

Four weeks in, send the file back.

The last sheet in the workbook is Snapshot. Six of the numbers on it fill themselves in from your own board — carryover, oldest block, blocked with no date, record lag, items silent, items flagged. Three boxes are yours to write.

Fill those in and email the workbook to connect@cnnectd.work. We read it before we talk, which means the first conversation starts from your actual numbers rather than an hour spent reconstructing them out loud while everyone nods.

And if the numbers say your cadence is holding, we will tell you that and go away. It happens more often than you would expect, and it is a perfectly good outcome for everybody involved.

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