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LAY THE FOUNDATIONS

BOOK II — BUILD • VOLUME 1 OF 3

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BECOME. BUILD. AUGMENT.



VOLUME 1 OF 3

BOOK II — BUILD

LAY THE FOUNDATIONS

Turn Ambition into a Solid Entrepreneurial Project

Toussaint Kadio N'GUESSAN

BEXTIO Editions

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Toussaint Kadio N'GUESSAN

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PART I — THE CALL TO BUILD

Understanding Why Humans Build

CHAPTER 1

BECOMING A BUILDER: FROM LEARNING TO CREATION

Knowing is not enough. Understanding is not enough. Having skills is not enough. A person can read for ten years, accumulate degrees, master several tools and understand their field extremely well — yet never turn that capability into something that actually exists in the world: a business, a product, a school, a software program, a farm, a laboratory, an association, a method, an infrastructure or an institution.

There is therefore a fundamental difference between becoming capable and using that capability to build. This is precisely the transition between BECOME and BUILD. The first movement was about developing the capabilities of the individual. The second begins when the individual asks a different question: “Now that I can learn, think, act, cooperate and decide, what am I going to create with that capability?”

The builder appears at this point. A builder is not simply someone who knows. A builder progressively transforms understanding into reality.

1.1 — THE WORLD IS FULL OF KNOWLEDGE THAT HAS NEVER BEEN TURNED INTO ACTION

We often know at least part of what should be done. We know that a problem exists. Sometimes we can even identify a plausible solution. Yet something is still missing: the construction itself.

Consider a city where thousands of people lose several hours every week completing an administrative procedure. The problem is known. Civil servants know it. Citizens know it. Entrepreneurs know it. Engineers could probably imagine solutions.

But until a reliable solution is designed, tested, organised, financed, deployed and maintained, the problem continues to exist. Knowledge of the problem has not solved it. That knowledge was necessary. It was not sufficient.

A society does not progress only because of what it knows. It also progresses through what it becomes capable of turning into systems, products, organisations and institutions.

1.2 — BUILDING MEANS MOVING SOMETHING FROM IDEA TO REALITY

A construction often begins in an invisible form: an idea, an intuition, an observation, a frustration or a vision. It then has to pass through several transformations.

IDEA → DEFINED PROBLEM → HYPOTHESIS → FIRST SOLUTION → TEST → CORRECTION → ORGANISATION → VALUE CREATED

The builder works precisely across this distance: between “This should exist” and “It exists, it works and it actually produces a result.”

That distance may be short for a small project. For major infrastructure, it may require years, thousands of people and billions of dollars. But the fundamental nature of the problem remains similar: turning a possibility into an organised reality.

1.3 — AN IDEA IS NOT YET A CONSTRUCTION

We sometimes assign great value to the idea itself: “I have an extraordinary idea.” But an idea still faces very few constraints. In our imagination, it can be perfect, fast, profitable and elegant.

Construction meets reality. The customer does not understand. The price is too high. The technology does not work as expected. An authorisation is missing. Raw materials cost more. People use the product differently from what we imagined. Funding arrives later than expected.

That is precisely why building is different from imagining. An idea can be evaluated for its intellectual coherence. A construction will eventually be evaluated by reality.

This does not reduce the value of ideas. It clarifies their role. The idea opens a possibility. Execution begins to show whether that possibility can become real.

1.4 — A BUILDER IS NOT DEFINED BY THE SIZE OF WHAT THEY BUILD

The word builder may evoke towers, dams, multinational companies or major institutions. But building often begins on a much smaller scale. A person who creates a small business capable of serving fifty customers well is building. So is someone who creates a workshop employing five people, a method that helps farmers reduce a loss, a better-organised school or a useful digital tool.

Size is therefore not the first criterion. A more fundamental question is: "Does a capability now exist that did not exist before?"

A service now exists. A problem is handled better. People can now do something they could not do before. Building begins there.

1.5 — THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CREATING AND MERELY STAYING BUSY

Activity is visible. Construction is not always immediately visible. A person can hold twenty meetings, send one hundred messages, attend several events and work twelve hours a day. That proves they are active.

It does not necessarily prove that they are building. We have to ask: What exists today that did not exist before? Which capability has increased? Which problem is better solved? What result has been produced?

EFFORT → RESULT → DURABLE CAPABILITY

The builder therefore seeks to turn effort into results and, when possible, results into durable capability. This distinction will become central throughout this book.

1.6 — THE BUILDER'S FIRST ACT IS TO SEE A PROBLEM AS SOMETHING THAT CAN BE BUILT ON

Two people observe the same difficulty. The first says, "This is really badly organised." The second asks, "What could be built to improve this situation?"

They see the same problem, but they do not develop the same relationship with reality. The builder does not deny the difficulty or turn every problem into a positive slogan. The builder tries to

understand the cause, the people affected, the constraints, the available resources and the solutions that have already been attempted.

Then comes a more demanding question: “Is there a useful intervention that we can actually build?” That question demands far more than saying, “I have an idea.”

1.7 — NOT EVERY PROBLEM SHOULD BECOME YOUR PROJECT

The world contains an immense number of problems. You cannot solve all of them. Your city has problems. So does your country, your sector, your organisation and your family.

Choosing to build therefore also means choosing what you will not build. A problem can be important without being your problem to solve. You may lack the skills, resources, legitimacy, interest or time required.

A mature builder does not try to become the saviour of every problem they observe. They look for the place where their capability can genuinely become useful.

1.8 — THREE QUESTIONS FOR IDENTIFYING A CREDIBLE PROJECT

Before building, three simple questions can already eliminate many illusions.

IS THE PROBLEM REAL?

Not merely interesting. Real. Who experiences it? How often? With what consequences?

WOULD AN IMPROVEMENT CREATE VALUE?

For whom? How could that value be observed?

DO WE HAVE A CREDIBLE WAY TO BEGIN?

Not necessarily all the resources. But enough to observe, test, learn and begin building.

We will return to each of these questions in much greater depth.

1.9 — THE BUILDER DOES NOT ALWAYS BEGIN WITH A BUSINESS

Building does not automatically mean creating a commercial company. A construction can be scientific, social, technological, educational, cultural, institutional or economic.

A researcher who creates a laboratory is building. A doctor who organises a healthcare system is building. A teacher who develops a method that others can use is building. An entrepreneur who creates a business is building. A community that establishes a collective irrigation system is building.

The fundamental mechanism remains the same: organising capabilities so that they can produce a result over time.

A business will nevertheless be a particularly important form of construction in this book, because it can coordinate people, resources, technologies, capital and processes in order to create economic value.

SINGLE CASE STUDY — MUHAMMAD YUNUS / GRAMEEN BANK

1.10 — MUHAMMAD YUNUS AND GRAMEEN BANK: TURNING AN OBSERVATION INTO AN INSTITUTION

In Bangladesh, Muhammad Yunus observed that very poor people remained dependent on informal lenders because they lacked access to bank credit. His decisive contribution was not merely to describe the problem, but to search for a form of action that could be tested.

1.11 — THE OBSERVED PROBLEM: EXCLUSION FROM FORMAL CREDIT

The obstacle was not an absence of economic activity. It lay, among other things, in the mismatch between conventional lending rules and the situation of people who lacked conventional collateral.

1.12 — THE FIRST TEST WAS DELIBERATELY LIMITED

Yunus began with a small-scale experiment around Jobra. The experiment did not yet prove that a national model was viable. Its role was to test a hypothesis and observe real behaviour.

1.13 — FROM A LOCAL TEST TO A FINANCIAL INSTITUTION

The project developed in stages before Grameen Bank became an independent bank in 1983. Scaling the initiative transformed a personal effort into a regulated organisation.

1.14 — THE CONSTRUCTION REQUIRED RULES, TEAMS AND REPAYMENT DISCIPLINE

A durable institution does not rest on an intention alone. It requires processes, governance, teams, risk management and continuous adaptation to observed results.

1.15 — WHAT THE CASE ACTUALLY DEMONSTRATES

The case illustrates the central movement of this chapter: observe a problem, test a limited response, organise the necessary capabilities and build an institution that no longer depends on a single person. It does not remove the need to examine the outcomes and limits of microcredit rigorously.

1.16 — THE BUILDER TURNS PERSONAL SKILL INTO EXTERNAL CAPABILITY

Suppose you know how to program. That skill exists within you. You build a software product. Part of that skill now exists in a product.

You train a team that can maintain the software. The capability now exists within an organisation. You create a platform that other companies use to operate. Your initial skill has been transformed into external infrastructure that other people can use.

**PERSONAL SKILL → CREATION → PROCESS → TEAM → SYSTEM →
COLLECTIVE CAPABILITY**

This is one of the most important movements in this book.

1.17 — BUILDING MEANS MAKING A CAPABILITY LESS DEPENDENT ON YOU

Imagine an excellent consultant who can serve twenty clients. Every assignment depends directly on that person. If they become ill, the activity slows down. If they stop working, almost all of the capability disappears.

Then the consultant turns part of their knowledge into a method, documentation, training, tools and a team. Other people can now produce part of the result. The consultant no longer possesses only a personal skill. They are beginning to build a system.

Building therefore often means externalising part of our capabilities into something that can continue to function beyond our immediate effort.

1.18 — A BUSINESS IS A CONSTRUCTION OF CAPABILITIES

Look at a business differently. It is not merely a name, a logo, a registration number or a bank account. A business begins to take real form when it possesses a repeatable capability to understand a need, obtain resources, produce a solution, sell it, deliver it, get paid, learn and repeat the cycle.

**PROBLEM → SOLUTION → CUSTOMER → VALUE → REVENUE →
RESOURCES → GREATER CAPABILITY → NEW VALUE**

This system is far more important than the administrative existence of the business.

1.19 — THE BUILDER THINKS IN SYSTEMS, NOT ONLY IN EVENTS

An event succeeds: a sale, a training programme, a campaign or a project. But what happens next? The builder asks, "How can we reproduce this result without starting entirely from zero?"

If a sale works, what produced it? Can the process be documented? If a team completes a project successfully, what did it learn? Can that knowledge be reused? If a customer is satisfied, what created that satisfaction? Can that mechanism be built into the system?

ISOLATED RESULTS → REPEATABLE CAPABILITIES

Building therefore means progressively turning isolated results into repeatable capabilities.

1.20 — NOT EVERYTHING NEEDS TO BECOME A LARGE ORGANISATION

Another mistake would be to assume that every construction must grow, employ thousands of people or become international. It does not.

A small, profitable, useful and well-managed business can be an excellent construction. A local association can fulfil its mission perfectly without becoming global. A craft business may deliberately remain small.

The appropriate size should be consistent with the mission, the model, the ambition and the available resources. The objective of BUILD is therefore not “become as large as possible”. It is to build something sufficiently solid and appropriate for the result you are trying to produce.

1.21 — THE BUILDER ACCEPTS THE MATERIAL REALITY OF THE WORLD

A vision can be ambitious. But building requires working with costs, deadlines, skills, materials, people, laws, technologies and errors.

The builder must constantly translate “We want...” into “For this to happen, what must actually exist?” Then: Who will do it? With which resources? In what order? How will we know that it works?

Vision provides intention. Construction imposes architecture.

1.22 — THE BUILDER LEARNS TO THINK IN DEPENDENCIES

Suppose you want to open a factory. You have the building, but not enough electricity. You have electricity, but no machinery. You have the machinery, but no technicians. You have the technicians, but no raw materials. You have all of that, but no distribution.

The factory still does not produce its final value. A construction is therefore rarely an independent collection of elements. It is a system of dependencies.

The builder has to learn to see what depends on what, what is blocking the whole system and what must come before something else. We will develop this logic in the chapters on systems, resources, teams and execution.

1.23 — BUILDING BEGINS BEFORE THE MONEY

Money matters. Some constructions require considerable capital. But the builder’s first act is not necessarily “find money”. It may be to understand the problem precisely, produce evidence, identify the

required skills, build a prototype, find a first user, obtain an authorisation or secure a partner.

In some projects, these elements can then make financing more credible. The builder therefore learns to ask: "What is the next condition that has to become true for the construction to move forward?" Sometimes that condition is financial. Sometimes it is not.

1.24 — BUILDING ALSO BEGINS BEFORE PERFECTION

Waiting until you have the best logo, the best office, the best technology, the best team, all the financing and every answer can become a sophisticated way of never starting.

The opposite extreme is no better. Launching anything without sufficient preparation can destroy capital, trust and time.

The builder has to find a more rigorous point: prepared enough to test something useful, but not so demanding that impossible certainty is required before any contact with reality.

Construction often progresses through versions.

1.25 — FROM THE FIRST VERSION TO A DURABLE CONSTRUCTION

A first version makes learning possible. But it is not necessarily durable. An entrepreneur may begin with a spreadsheet, a phone, manual messages and a small team. That may be enough for the first customers.

Then the scale changes. A system that worked with ten customers becomes fragile with ten thousand. Building therefore involves several stages.

MAKE IT WORK → MAKE IT REPEATABLE → MAKE IT ROBUST → SCALE UP

Failing to distinguish between these stages produces many errors.

1.26 — THE BUILDER IS NOT THE PERSON WHO POSSESSES EVERY SKILL

Building a complex system requires different forms of knowledge. A founder cannot simultaneously become the best engineer, accountant, salesperson, lawyer, designer, operations manager and cybersecurity specialist.