

Building control, your

The Controlled Building

Framework Document · Version 1.0 · August 2026 · CC BY 4.0

This is an open professional framework for defining operational capability. It is not a standard, not a certification, and not a declaration of conformance.

1. Definition

A controlled building is a building whose operational behaviour can be changed, safely and continuously, by the organization responsible for operating it, throughout its lifecycle, within engineering-defined safety boundaries.

A building is not controlled because it is automated. It is controlled because its operators can change how it behaves, safely.

2. Why this document exists

The problem today is not a shortage of technology. It is a shortage of operational capability. Most buildings are capable of more than the organizations operating them are able to make them do. The systems are installed, the sensors are in place, the data is being collected, and still every change to how the building behaves requires an external party, a waiting period and an invoice.

The result is buildings frozen at the settings agreed on the day of handover, while the organizations inside them continue to change. Existing professional language does not distinguish between a building that looks advanced and a building that is actually under control, and therefore cannot be used to specify the difference in writing.

3. Supporting terms

Operational logic

The set of rules determining how a building actually behaves: when a system runs, under what conditions it changes state, and how systems affect one another.

Operational change

A change to operational logic after handover, arising from an operational need rather than a fault.

Safety boundary

A range set by a qualified engineering authority, within which any operational change is permitted and safe. The boundary itself cannot be altered by the operating organization.

Operating organization

The party responsible for running the building day to day. Not the manufacturer, not the designer, not the contractor. It bears the consequences of operational behaviour, and therefore holds operational authority.

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4. Twelve principles

These principles are stated at the level of the category, not the implementation. They describe no product and depend on no architecture.

1. Visibility is not control

Being able to see what a building is doing is not the same as being able to change what it does. Monitoring is a precondition for control; it does not constitute it.

2. The building is operated as one whole

A controlled building is operated as a single entity, not as a collection of separate systems. Cross-system logic is a requirement, not an add-on.

3. Handover is a starting point

The settings agreed at handover are a baseline, not a final state. A building behaving exactly as it was configured on day one is not stable; it is frozen.

4. Engineering authority and operational authority are separate

Engineering sets the boundaries. Operations works within them. Confusing the two produces either an unsafe building or a paralysed one.

5. Safety precedes capability

A safety boundary is not subject to operational discretion and cannot be overridden. Life-safety systems operate independently and are not subordinate to operational logic.

6. Operational authority belongs to the organization

The operating organization holds both the authority and the access to change how the building behaves, including the authority to determine who within it may do so. Self-administered permissions are part of that authority, not a service provided alongside it.

7. Every change is recorded

Every change to operational logic carries a complete record: what changed, who changed it, when, and what the previous state was. A change that cannot be audited is not a controlled change.

8. Routine change requires no specialist engineering

A routine operational change is made by whoever operates the building, without writing code and without specialist engineering knowledge. Complex changes may legitimately require a qualified party. The failure is not depending on one, but being locked into a single one.

9. Change must be reversible

The ability to change without the ability to return is not control; it is exposure. Reverting to a previous state is a defined operational action, not a recovery procedure.

10. Autonomy operates within granted authority

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A system may act on its own initiative only within authority granted to it in advance by a qualified person, within safety and permission boundaries, and with full logging. Granting that authority is itself a recorded action, and it can be narrowed or revoked at any time.

11. Operational knowledge stays with the building

Logic, permissions, history, documentation and the relationships between systems belong to the building and its owner. They do not depend on one person memory and are not held in a vendor custody.

Replacing an operator, a maintenance provider or a supplier does not erase what the building knows about itself.

12. A building is measured by capability, not technology

Assessment is based on what the operating organization can actually do, not on the number of systems installed, the manufacturer, or the procurement specification. Any architecture meeting these principles meets the definition. No technology confers it by its mere presence.

5. The Controlled Building Test

Six binary questions, applied to a specific building, not to a product and not to a vendor:

1. Can the building operational behaviour be changed after handover?
2. Can its systems be operated as one whole, rather than as separate systems?
3. Does change occur within defined safety boundaries?
4. Does the operating organization hold the authority and the access to make changes, without lock-in to a single vendor?
5. Is every change recorded, auditable and reversible?
6. Is a routine operational change made without writing code and without specialist engineering?

One negative answer is sufficient.

The test is deliberately binary and examines a threshold only. There is no score and no grading, because a definition every building satisfies defines nothing.

A building that fails one question is not a failed building. It is a building whose gap is known, located and expressible as a requirement. Most buildings in service today, including advanced ones, do not meet the threshold. That is an observation about the state of the market, not a verdict on any one building.

Above the threshold a different question begins: how far a building is under control. That is a question of maturity, measured with separate instruments. This framework does not address it.

6. What this document does not claim

It is not an institutional standard. It is an opinionated document carrying no authority beyond its usefulness.

It does not address life-safety systems. Fire detection, suppression and evacuation are governed by law and code, and are not subject to operational change.

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It prescribes no architecture, protocol or vendor, and favours none.

It does not measure maturity. It establishes a threshold only.

It promises no savings, return or performance. Those are outcomes of implementation, not of definition.

7. Closing

The purpose of building technology is not to make buildings more automatic, but to increase the operational capability of the people responsible for them.

This document is offered to operators, owners, designers and contractors as an assessment tool, and as an invitation to improve the definition itself.

8. Versions and licensing

This document is intended to change. Every version is retained and remains accessible, and every substantive change is recorded. Corrections, inconsistencies and gaps are welcome.

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