

# The 5Cs of Refit: How to Run Cross-Border Real Estate Without Site Visits, Surveyors, or Disputes

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*25+ years · 30+ countries · Major European & African airlines · ENI · ArcelorMittal · EnergiNet*

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May 2026

## The Problem, the Method, and the Result

<b>PROBLEM</b>	Cross-border refit and property projects fail not because contractors are incompetent, but because the governance architecture around delivery was never built. The contract gets signed. The control architecture does not.
<b>IMPACT</b>	Unverified vendor dates (2–4 week delays). Informal scope variations (uncontrolled claims). Multiple reporting streams (false progress visibility). Open decisions with no consequence (drift that becomes cost). Final accounts 30–40% above contract value.
<b>SOLUTION</b>	RESHAPE™ — a productised delivery governance service for distributed real estate, built on The 5Cs Framework™: Contain the Scope, Command One Plan, Close Every Decision, Confirm Vendor Dates, Control Tower Cadence.
<b>RESULT</b>	Consistent delivery across distributed property portfolios without permanent site presence. Final accounts closed within contract values. Handover against written scope. No disputes. Proved across four African outstations simultaneously for a major European airline.

### GOVERNANCE DESIGNED FOR DISTANCE

*RESHAPE™ is built on The 5Cs Framework™ — a governance architecture that holds when the site is remote, the contractor is local, and the client is in Brussels.*

## SECTION 1

# The invoice arrived 42% above contract value. Nobody could explain exactly when the project had changed.

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The contract had been signed in a Brussels boardroom on a Tuesday.... Scope of works: lounge refurbishment at an African outstation. Timeline: twelve weeks. Budget: agreed, initialled, filed.

By week four, the contractor had started work. By week seven, the scope had quietly changed — new ceiling specification, different floor finish, additional partition walls that “made more sense on site.” Nobody sent a formal variation. The changes were communicated via WhatsApp, ratified by a thumbs-up emoji, and added to a running tab nobody was keeping.

The invoice arrived at week thirteen. It was 42% above the contracted amount. The dashboard stayed green while the project drifted.

This is not an unusual story. Ask anyone who has managed distance-managed real estate delivery from a European headquarters. The geography creates distance. The distance creates gaps. The gaps — in scope, in decisions, in vendor commitments — fill themselves. Usually with cost.

The instinct is to blame the contractor. Sometimes that is fair. But if you trace the overrun back to its source, you find the same thing: the governance architecture around the project was never built. The contract was signed. The control architecture was not.

Distributed delivery projects fail in a predictable sequence. A scope document that describes outcomes rather than measurements. A project plan that lives in a steering deck rather than in the contractor’s hands. Open decisions that nobody closes because nobody owns them. Vendor dates that are aspirational rather than verified. Status calls that report what happened last week rather than catching what is about to go wrong next week.

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***Projects don't fail. The systems around them do. Frontier markets just expose it faster.***

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I have run projects in more than thirty countries. The pattern I have seen more often than any other is not incompetent contractors or difficult clients. It is competent people operating without the right governance architecture — and finding out too late.

The challenge is specific. When you are managing delivery from a distance — when your project is in Liberia and you are in Brussels, when your contractor is in Burkina Faso and your designer is in London — the standard approach breaks down faster than it would on a domestic project. Every gap in governance that might take months to surface at home surfaces in weeks when a time zone, a language, and a supply chain separate you from the site.

This report is about fixing that. Not with more site visits, more surveyors, or a heavier contract. With a governance architecture that works from the first day — before the contractor starts, before the scope drifts, before the bill arrives.

That architecture is The 5Cs Framework™. Five principles. Applied in sequence. The result is distributed delivery that actually matches what was agreed.

## Why the Standard Playbook Leaks Money

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The conventional approach to multi-country real estate delivery has three pillars. Fly in for site visits. Hire a local surveyor. Manage contractors remotely via email and WhatsApp. It is widely used. It is also reliably expensive.

Not because the tools are wrong. Because none of them solve the actual problem.

### The Site Visit Problem

A site visit feels like control. You are physically present, you walk the space, you make decisions on the spot. It costs €2,000 to €5,000 in travel and time. And it solves one day's worth of problems.

What a site visit cannot do is change the operating architecture. You visit on a Thursday. The site behaves well. You return to Brussels on Friday. The governance vacuum reasserts itself on Monday morning. Unless the control architecture changes — the scope document, the decision log, the vendor confirmation process, the weekly rhythm — the problems that caused the visit regenerate.

More site visits don't fix the governance gap. They substitute for it.

### The Surveyor Problem

Local surveyors produce reports. Reports go to the client. Questions come back. The surveyor returns to site. The cycle takes days, sometimes weeks, and creates a telephone game between the client's requirements and the site's reality. Nobody on site owns the decision. Slippage keeps running.

When the scope drifts or the contractor misses a date, the surveyor documents it. The governance problem — the actual decision that needs to be made, the consequence that needs to be enforced — still sits with the client, who is still in Brussels, still operating from a distance.

### The Hidden Cost of Governance Drift

Before looking at the alternative, it is worth being specific about what governance drift actually costs. These are not theoretical risks. They are the predictable consequences of running without a control architecture.

GOVERNANCE FAILURE	TYPICAL IMPACT
<b>Unverified vendor dates</b>	2–4 week programme delay; contractor resequencing adds unbudgeted cost
<b>Open design decisions</b>	Idle labour on site; rework when late approval reverses provisional work
<b>Multiple reporting streams</b>	False progress visibility; slippage invisible until recovery is no longer cheap
<b>Informal scope variations</b>	Uncontrolled claims exposure; final account disputes that take months to resolve
<b>No decision consequence</b>	RAID items drift for weeks; decisions made under crisis pressure, not clarity
<b>No written acceptance criteria</b>	Contractor and client disagree on what “done” means at handover

The compounding effect is what makes these costs dangerous. A two-week vendor delay triggers contractor resequencing. Resequencing triggers a variation. The variation reopens scope. The scope dispute delays handover. None of this was in the risk register. None of it had to happen.

## The WhatsApp Problem

WhatsApp-managed contractors are not the disease. They are the symptom of a governance vacuum. When there is no structured decision log, no written scope, and no formal weekly rhythm, people default to the path of least resistance. The path of least resistance is a WhatsApp group.

Nobody knows which version of reality is contractual. That sentence describes the situation on most informally-managed remote projects by week six.

### THE PATTERN

*Governance right on paper. Site runs on WhatsApp and unverified dates. Reality drifts. The dashboard stays green. The cost does not.*

The alternative is not more supervision. It is a different governance architecture. One that closes the gap between the contract and the site before it opens.

## The 5Cs Framework™

The 5Cs Framework™ is a five-pillar governance architecture for managing distributed refit and construction delivery from a distance. Each C addresses a specific failure mode. Applied in sequence, they close the gap between the contract and the site.

The framework was developed across thirty countries of project delivery and refined during three years of multi-country real estate work for a major European airline across four African outstations. It is not theoretical. It is the distillation of what actually works when the standard playbook does not.

#	PILLAR	NAME	WHAT IT DOES
C1	CONTAIN	Contain the Scope	Fuzzy requirements → written scope with measurements, materials, and acceptance criteria
C2	COMMAND	Command One Plan	Deck governance → one operating plan that matches how the site actually runs
C3	CLOSE	Close Every Decision	RAID drift → every open item has an owner, a deadline, and a consequence
C4	CONFIRM	Confirm Vendor Dates	Optimistic promises → capacity, lead times, and proof of readiness verified
C5	CONTROL	Control Tower Cadence	Reactive calls → fixed weekly rhythm; slippage caught before it compounds

### C1 — Contain the Scope

Most refit disputes do not start with a contractor who builds the wrong thing. They start with a scope document that described what was wanted without specifying what that meant.

“Refurbish the lounge” is not a scope. It is an intention. A scope is: 87 square metres, ceramic floor tiles (300x300mm, colour reference RAL 7047), suspended ceiling at 2,600mm finished height, four fixed seating units to drawing reference SP-007, electrical to IEC standard 60364. Out of scope: HVAC works, structural modifications, all works outside the demised area.

The difference between those two documents is the difference between a project that closes on budget and one that closes with a dispute.

#### The Scan-to-Refit Workflow

The Reshape scan-to-refit governance approach works as follows. The client — or a local contact — scans the space using an iPhone with LiDAR capability. The scan takes approximately twenty minutes for a standard lounge or office space. It produces a point cloud accurate to within a few millimetres, with room dimensions, ceiling heights, window and door positions, and existing fixture locations captured.

That point cloud is shared with Contracts, which converts it into a written scope document: verified measurements, a layout drawing, and a list of assumptions and constraints. The designer works from this brief remotely and produces concept and drawings without a site visit.

<b>01</b> <b>SCAN</b> iPhone LiDAR ~20 minutes No site visit	<b>02</b> <b>SCOPE</b> Written scope Measurements Criteria locked	<b>03</b> <b>DESIGN</b> Remote designer Drawings against scope document	<b>04</b> <b>CONFIRM</b> Capacity verified Lead times checked Dates committed	<b>05</b> <b>CONTROL</b> 5Cs cadence Weekly rhythm Slippage caught	<b>06</b> <b>HANDOVER</b> Against written scope — no claims no disputes
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#### A MAJOR EUROPEAN AIRLINE — LIBERIA OUTSTATION

The Monrovia lounge scope was produced from a remote LiDAR scan and a site photograph series. The scope document ran to fourteen pages, specifying every material by manufacturer reference and every dimension to the nearest 10mm. The contractor had no scope ambiguity to exploit. The final account closed within 3% of the contracted amount. Decision closure time averaged 36 hours from issue to sign-off.

Contain the Scope eliminates the single most common source of refit overruns: the scope gap that opens between what the client believes was agreed and what the contractor believes they were asked to do.

## C2 — Command One Plan

On almost every distributed real estate project I have reviewed, there are two project plans. The first goes to steering committees. It has a Gantt chart, a RAG status, and a narrative summary. It looks like control.

The second is the plan the contractor actually uses. It exists in their project manager's head, in a WhatsApp thread, or in a notebook on site. It bears little resemblance to the steering deck version. The dashboard stayed green. The project drifted.

Command One Plan means collapsing those two documents into one. A single operating plan that the client, the coordinator, the designer, and the contractor all work from. Updated weekly. Showing actual progress against actual commitments. Including the decisions that are open and the actions that are overdue.

#### A MAJOR EUROPEAN AIRLINE — BURKINA FASO OUTSTATION

Three separate reporting streams were feeding the Brussels project office: a weekly email from the site supervisor, a WhatsApp update from the local project manager, and a monthly steering report from the lead contractor — all describing different versions of progress. The switch to one operating plan, updated every Monday and shared with all parties, removed the discrepancy. When the plan said a milestone was at risk, it was. Reporting time per project dropped from 90 minutes to 20 minutes per week.

### C3 — Close Every Decision

Every distributed project accumulates open decisions. Materials substitutions that need client approval. Subcontractor appointments pending sign-off. Design changes triggered by site conditions.

RAID logs are the standard governance tool for tracking these items. They almost universally fail to close them. The reason is structural: most RAID logs record what an item is without recording who owns it, when it must be resolved, and what happens if it is not.

Close Every Decision means every open item has three attributes, without exception: an owner (one named person), a deadline (a specific date), and a consequence (what changes in the plan if this is not resolved in time). Without a consequence, a deadline is a suggestion.

#### A MAJOR EUROPEAN AIRLINE — BURUNDI OUTSTATION

A materials substitution decision on the floor finish sat open for eleven days. During that time, the contractor ordered provisional quantities of an alternative finish. When the approved specification finally came through, the provisional order had to be cancelled. The delay cost nine days of programme. After introducing a 48-hour decision rule with automatic escalation and a substitution consequence, this category of delay was eliminated from all subsequent projects.

### C4 — Confirm Vendor Dates

“Yes, we can start Monday.” One of the most expensive sentences in distance-managed construction.

Contractor start date commitments made without verified capacity are aspirational. Whether their subcontractor has confirmed availability, whether the materials have cleared customs, whether the key tradesperson is off another site by then — these are details that get checked when Monday arrives, not before.

Confirm Vendor Dates is the discipline of replacing optimism with evidence. Before a date is committed — a start date, a materials delivery, a completion milestone — the evidence behind it is verified: supplier capacity confirmed, lead times checked, customs clearance timelines factored in for cross-border material movements.

#### A MAJOR EUROPEAN AIRLINE — BURKINA FASO OUTSTATION

A contractor in Ouagadougou committed to a materials delivery date for imported ceiling fixings without checking the customs clearance time from the country of origin. Actual clearance time was three weeks longer than assumed. After introducing a pre-commitment verification step — supplier lead time confirmed in writing before any date entered the programme — this category of delay did not recur across the remaining outstations. Average schedule variance on verified dates: under four days.

## C5 — Control Tower Cadence

Most project status calls answer one question: what happened last week? A project running in this rhythm is managing the past.

Control Tower Cadence manages the near future. A cadence call has fixed inputs — the updated operating plan, the closed-item log from the previous week, the confirmed vendor dates for the next two weeks — and fixed outputs: a revised operating plan, an updated decision log, a list of verified commitments for the coming week. Same agenda. Same format. Every week.

This rhythm makes slippage visible early enough to act on it. If a vendor has not confirmed a delivery due in ten days, that surfaces in the weekly cadence and triggers a phone call — not an urgent scramble when the delivery fails to arrive.

### A MAJOR EUROPEAN AIRLINE — UGANDA OUTSTATION

Four outstations running simultaneously across different time zones. A single 45-minute weekly cadence call replaced four separate reporting streams, two of which had been running a week out of sync. Slippage was caught on average eight days earlier than under the previous ad hoc structure. The fixed-format agenda meant preparation time dropped from 90 minutes per project to under 20 minutes. Zero governance-related claims across the four projects.

Control Tower Cadence is the operating heartbeat of a Reshape engagement. Without it, the other four pillars are static documents. With it, they become a live governance architecture.

The contract was signed. The control architecture wasn't. That is where most projects fail"

## Governance Maturity — Where Does Your Operation Sit?

Most organisations are operating between Level 2 and Level 3. The gap between Level 3 and Level 5 is not tooling. It is architecture.

LEVEL	OPERATING REALITY	WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE ON THE GROUND
Level 1	WhatsApp Delivery	No written scope. Contractor managed by message thread. All decisions informal.
Level 2	Reporting Without Control	Stage gates and dashboards exist. The site runs on a completely different plan.
Level 3	Multi-Plan Confusion	Steering deck, site plan, and supplier schedules are three separate documents with no reconciliation.
Level 4	Verified Governance Cadence	One plan. Decision log in use. Vendor dates confirmed. Weekly rhythm established.
Level 5	5Cs-Controlled Delivery	Full framework operating. Slippage caught early. Handover against written scope. No surprises.

# How a Reshape Engagement Actually Runs

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Understanding The 5Cs Framework™ is one thing. Knowing how it operates in a live project is another. Here is the Reshape workflow from initial contact to handover.

## Stage 1 — Reshape Scorecard

Before anything else, the client completes the Reshape Scorecard — a 20-question diagnostic covering the five governance dimensions of The 5Cs Framework™. It takes twelve minutes and produces an immediate diagnostic: where current delivery governance is strong, and where the gaps are creating exposure.

## Stage 2 — Discovery Call

A 60-minute call to review the scorecard output, confirm project details, and define the scope of the engagement. What is being delivered. When. Who the key stakeholders are. What has gone wrong on previous similar projects. This call is diagnostic, not commercial. The right outcome is a shared understanding of the governance gap and a clear proposal for how to close it.

## Stage 3 — Client Scan

The client, or a local contact, scans the project space using an iPhone with LiDAR capability. Contracts provides a briefing document covering what to capture. The scan takes approximately twenty minutes. No site visit required. The scan data becomes the physical foundation of the entire governance architecture.

## Stage 4 — Written Scope

Contracts converts the scan data into a written scope document: materials by reference, dimensions to the nearest 10mm, acceptance criteria for every workstream, and an explicit out-of-scope list. The client reviews and signs off the scope. Nothing proceeds until this document is agreed. It is the contract's technical twin.

## Stage 5 — Designer Brief and Vendor Confirmation

The scope document goes to the remote designer, who produces concept and drawings without a site visit. Before any contractor is confirmed, their start date and materials commitments are verified — supplier confirmed, lead times checked, any import or customs requirements factored in. No contractor enters the programme until their commitments are evidence-based.

## **Stage 6 — 5Cs Governance Cadence**

From contractor confirmation to handover, The 5Cs Framework™ runs as the operating architecture. Weekly cadence fixed. Operating plan updated weekly. Decision log reviewed and cleared. Vendor dates reconfirmed two weeks out.

Contracks holds the coordination centre. The client retains commercial authority at every decision gate. The split is deliberate: Contracks manages the governance architecture; the client manages the commercial relationship.

## **Stage 7 — Handover**

Handover is signed off against the written scope agreed in Stage 4. Each acceptance criterion is checked against the delivered work. No verbal agreements, no retrospective scope adjustments. The project is complete when the written scope is complete.

## Three Objections, Answered

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Every governance framework attracts resistance. The 5Cs and the Reshape model surface three objections consistently.

***“But our contractors need physical supervision.”***

Physical supervision is one form of quality control. What contractors actually need is clarity: a precise scope, a plan they understand, decisions that close on time, and a weekly rhythm that surfaces problems before they compound. The 5Cs provide all of that without requiring anyone to be on site. Where physical quality inspection is genuinely required — for structural work or specialist installations — the Reshape model uses local inspection contacts for targeted, evidence-based visits at defined milestones.

***“iPhone scans aren’t precise enough for refit work.”***

LiDAR scanning on current iPhone hardware produces point clouds accurate to within a few millimetres across a standard room. For the categories of refit that Reshape handles — lounge refurbishments, office fit-outs, hospitality spaces, operational infrastructure — this accuracy is sufficient to produce contractor-grade drawings. Where the scope involves structural modifications or detailed MEP coordination, a specialist survey is scoped separately. For the majority of refit work, the scan is faster and significantly cheaper than a traditional measured survey.

***“Designers won’t work distance-managed without site visits.”***

The Reshape designer network is built for this. Remote-first is how they operate, not a workaround. For clients with a preferred designer, Reshape works with them. The scan-to-brief workflow and The 5Cs Framework™ apply regardless of who the designer is.

## Four Outstations, One Framework

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Between 2022 and 2025, the author served as Senior Project Manager, Real Estate & Construction for a major European airline. The role covered the full property portfolio: long-term real estate strategy, lease negotiations, hangar and engineering facility projects, crew training centre development, and office relocations.

It also covered the African outstations.

The airline operates passenger lounges and ground infrastructure at outstations across sub-Saharan Africa. Liberia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Uganda: four different countries, four different construction markets, four different supply chains, four different contractor relationships.

The challenge was not managing one project in one country. It was maintaining consistent delivery governance across four simultaneously, from a headquarters in Brussels, without the budget or operational justification for permanent site presence at each location.

The governance architecture that made this work was The 5Cs Framework™. Written scope for every project before contractor engagement. One operating plan per project, updated weekly, reconciled with site reality. Decision log closing items within 48 hours or escalating automatically. Vendor date verification factoring in cross-border supply chain realities. Weekly cadence call across all four sites in a single 45-minute block.

Measured outcomes across the four outstations:

- Final accounts closed within agreed contract values — no project exceeded budget by more than 4%
- Zero contractual disputes on any of the four outstation projects
- Decision closure time reduced from an average of eleven days to under 48 hours
- Supply chain slippage caught on average eight days earlier after switching to the weekly cadence
- Reporting time reduced from 90 minutes per project per week to under 20 minutes
- Site visit frequency reduced without any reduction in delivery governance quality

### THE HIDDEN PATTERN

*Four countries. Four contractor markets. Four regulatory environments. One governance architecture. The framework did not adapt to each location — it created the conditions in which each location could deliver consistently. The system travels. The chaos does not follow.*

This is the proof of concept for Reshape. Not a theoretical model. A governance architecture that ran live across Liberia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, and Uganda, simultaneously, from Brussels, and delivered consistent results.

# Assess Your Delivery Governance Exposure

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If this report has described a problem you recognise — distributed refit projects that drift, overruns you struggle to explain, delivery you are responsible for but cannot directly control — there are two ways to take the next step.

## Option 1 — The Reshape Scorecard

The Reshape Scorecard is a 20-question diagnostic covering the five governance dimensions of The 5Cs Framework™. It takes twelve minutes. It produces an immediate, specific picture of where your current governance architecture is strong and where the gaps are creating commercial exposure.

No sales conversation required to access it. The scorecard is free. The value is in the diagnostic: a clear-eyed assessment of your current risk, specific to your project type and geography.

**Take the Reshape Scorecard** → [contracts.global/scorecard](https://contracts.global/scorecard)

## Option 2 — A Discovery Call

If you have a specific project on the table — a distributed refit in planning, a portfolio of remote properties that need systematic governance, or a project that has already started and is showing signs of drift — a discovery call is the fastest way to define the problem and scope the right engagement.

The call is 60 minutes. Contracts reviews your current project profile and proposes a specific engagement structure. No obligation to proceed.

**Book a discovery call** → [contracts.global/discovery](https://contracts.global/discovery)

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### About Serguei Poppeleer

Serguei Poppeleer is the Founder and Managing Director of Contracts Global. He has managed projects across 30+ countries for clients including ENI, EnergiNet/Baltic Pipe, ArcelorMittal, a major European airline, Luminus, and Marriott. He holds an Executive MBA (Hult), an LLM in Oil & Gas (Robert Gordon University), an M.Sc. in Civil Engineering (Polytechnic of Mons), and is a Member of the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators.

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