GOTO **COPENHAGEN**

Craft software with confidence in 2026


"THE SMOOTHEST REORG
I'VE EVER SEEN"
Lessons in collaborative org design
GOTO COPENHAGEN 2026
BETTER
PRODUCT
WORK

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BETTER PRODUCT WORK

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BETTER PRODUCT WORK

THE CONVENTIONAL WAY TO BUILD PRODUCTS IS BROKEN.

We challenge convention, partnering with visionary leaders who have the conviction to build high-performing organizations.

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WHAT'S ONE WORD THAT POPS INTO YOUR HEAD WHEN YOU THINK OF A "RE-ORG"?



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DESIGNED TOO FAR FROM THE REALITY OF WORK

Leaders often lack the day-to-day, ground-level understanding of how teams actually work.



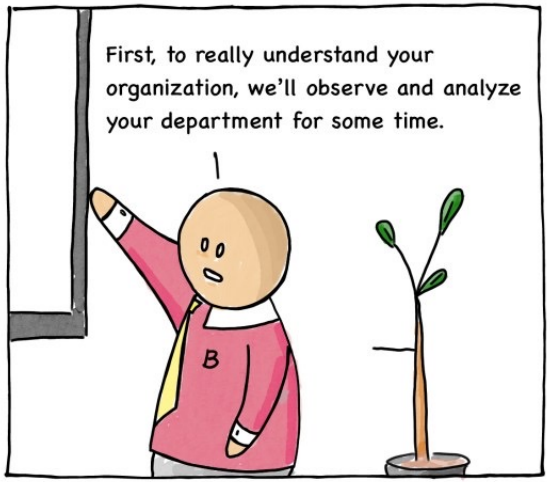
DONE TO PEOPLE, NOT WITH PEOPLE

People don't just "resist change" for the sake of it, they resist when they don't understand the purpose, when the change feels arbitrary, or when they have no agency in shaping it.

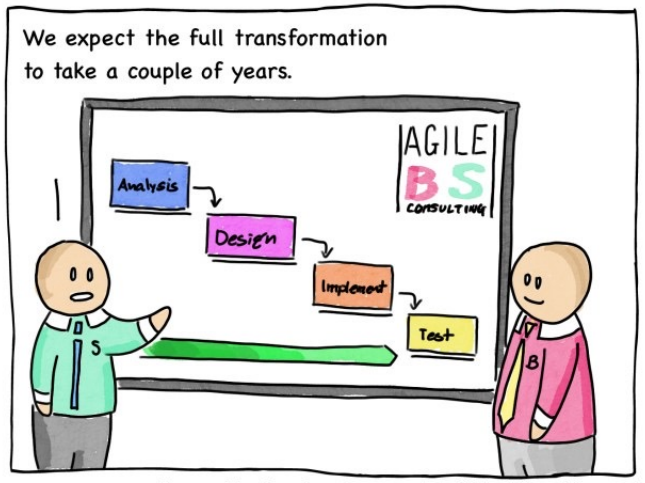


Comic Agilé







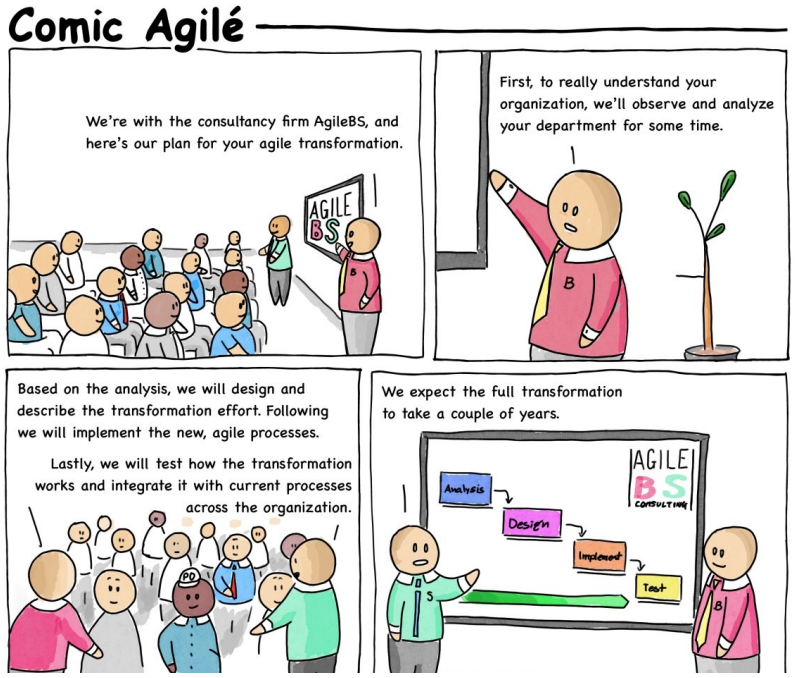


Created by Luxshan Ratnaravi & Mikkel Noe-Nygaard

BETTER PRO

TREATED AS A BIG UPFRONT PLAN, NOT AN ITERATIVE DISCOVERY PROCESS

Conventional org design assumes you can plan the "perfect" structure up front, much like old-school waterfall project management



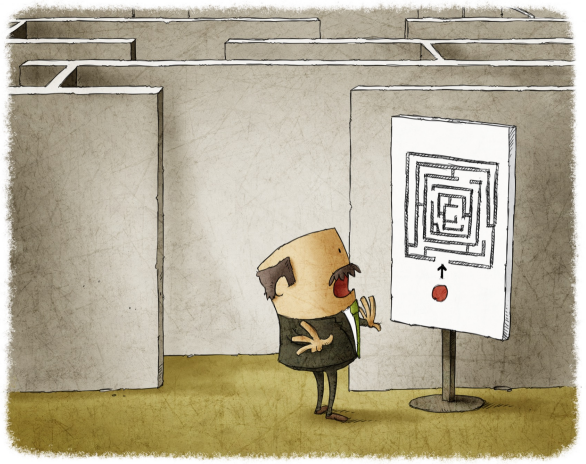
UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES: THE REORG DEATH SPIRAL

Poorly planned reorgs often cause more problems than they solve, leading to… more reorgs!



WHY DO SMART LEADERS KEEP DESIGNING ORGANIZATIONS TOP-DOWN?

- Leadership owns strategy
- Someone has to make the decision
- Sometimes layoffs or budgets aren't collaborative
- It feels faster
- It's what we've all experienced ourselves

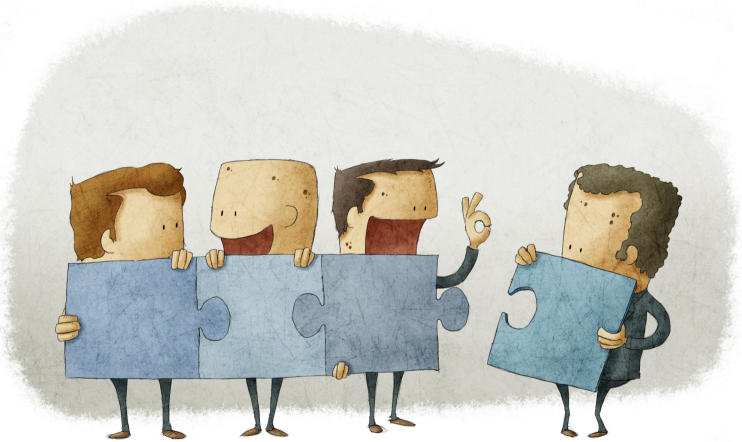


The problem isn't that leaders make decisions.

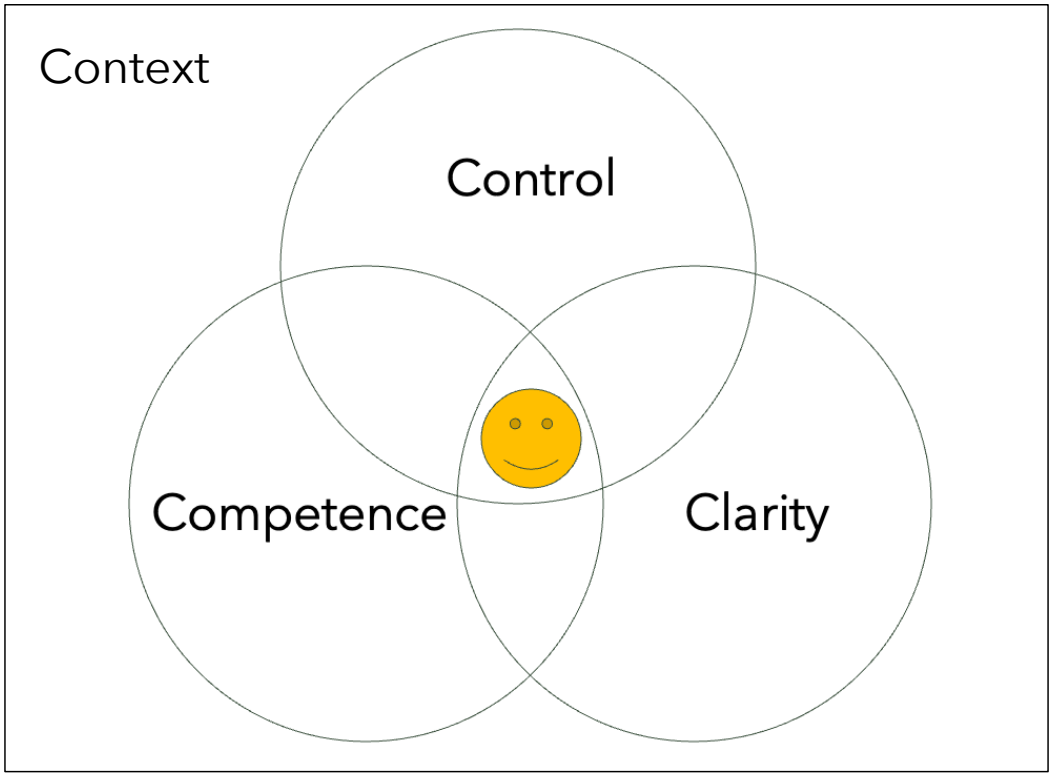
The problem is that they rarely have all the information needed to design great teams.

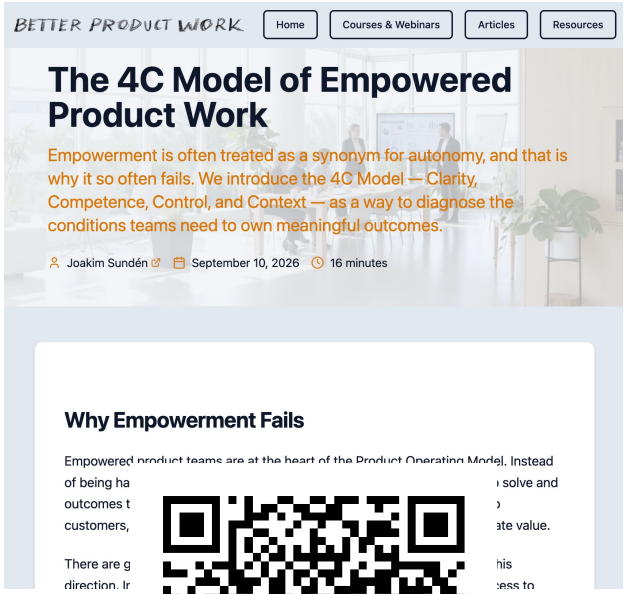
WHAT IF THE PEOPLE CLOSEST TO THE WORK HELPED DESIGN THE ORGANIZATION?





WHAT WOULD NEED TO BE TRUE FOR THAT TO WORK?

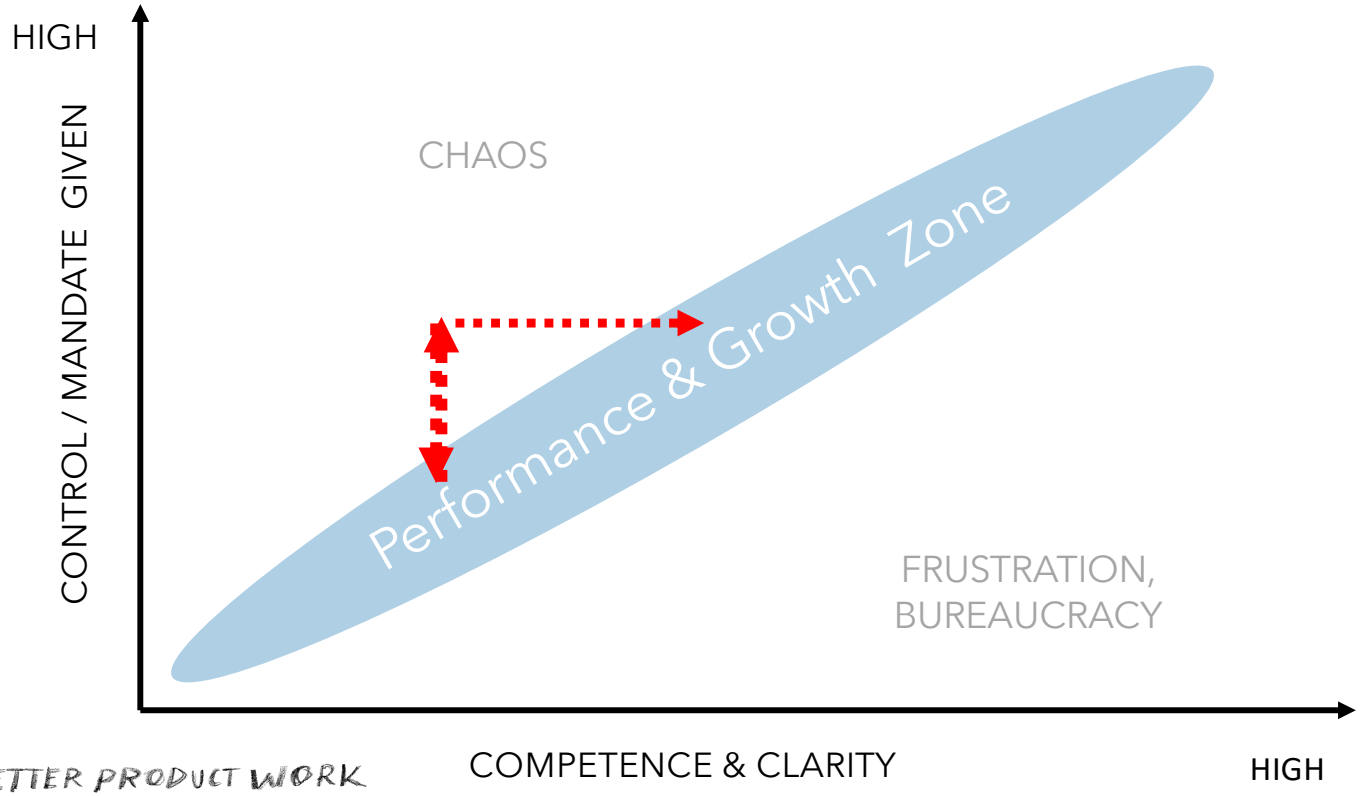




https://betterproductwork.com/blog/the-4c-model-of-empowered-product-work

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HOW DO YOU SAFELY EMPOWER PEOPLE?

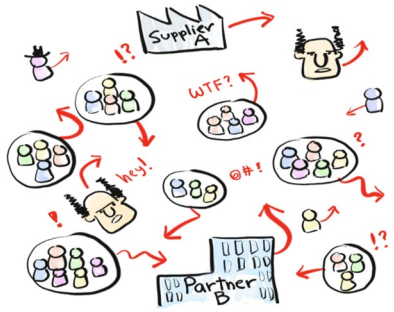




David Marquet
Turn the Ship Around

A SCALE-UP THAT HAD OUTGROWN ITS ORGANIZATION

How do we avoid THIS?



What Got Us Here Won't Get Us There

BETTER PRODUCT WORK

SUMMARY OF ASSESSMENT

- Under pressure, the org has reverted to an old school development approach, featuring top-down prioritization and management focused on task micromanagement rather than on developing people, teams, and the organization.
- As the company has grown, product development has become more chaotic and ad-hoc with unclear roles and responsibilities.





BETTER PRODUCT WORK

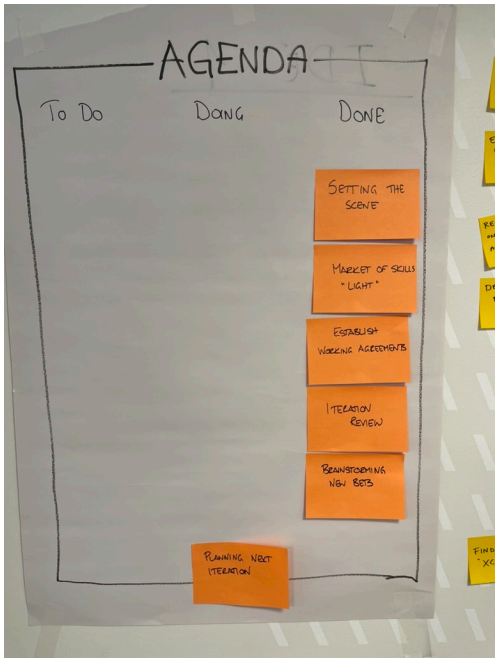
BETTER PRODUCT WORK

CHANGE HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

A small Change Team drove the process.

The whole organisation shaped the outcome.

- Diverse set of people
  - Engineering managers
  - Developers
  - Testers
  - People & Culture
  - Sales
- Model → Partner → Coach
- Transparent and iterative



GIVE PEOPLE A DESTINATION

- Introducing Product Operating Model, “what great could look like”
- Establishing what Empowered Product Teams are and how they differ from Feature Factory and Delivery teams



CO-CREATE WHAT "GREAT" LOOKS LIKE



BETTER PRODUCT WORK



TEACH PEOPLE HOW TO DESIGN ORGANIZATIONS

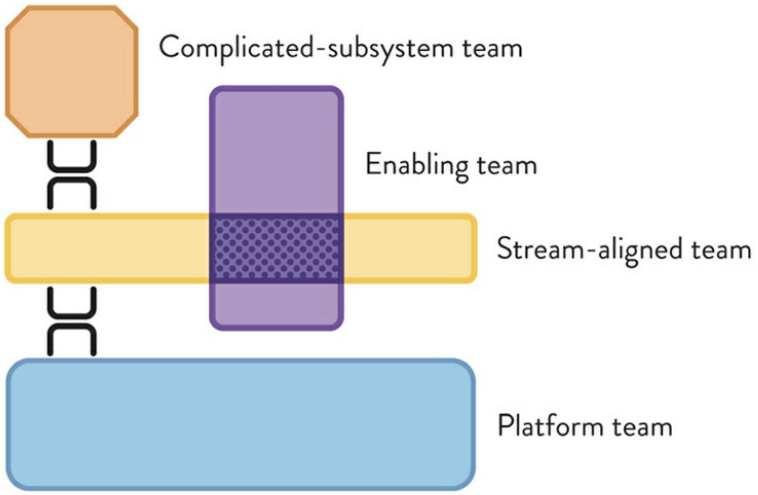
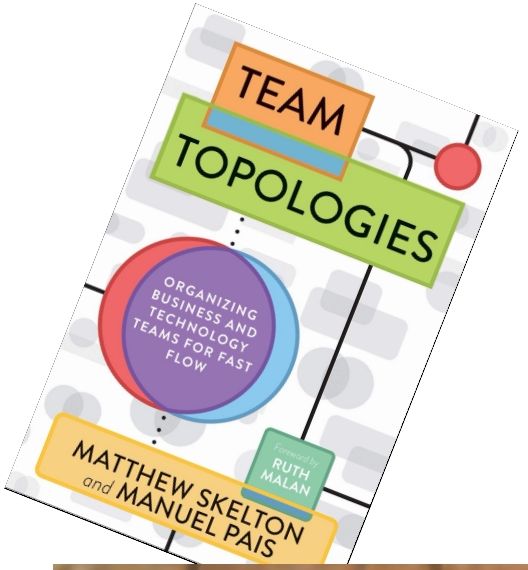
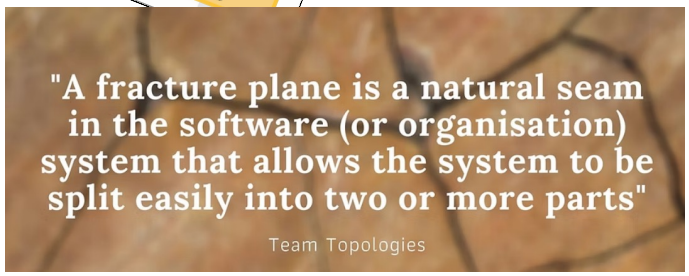


Figure 5.1: The Four Fundamental Team Topologies





BETTER PRODUCT WORK

AGREE WHAT YOU'RE OPTIMIZING FOR

Org Design Goals

- Address challenges with current setup
- Help fulfil the product vision and deliver planned initiatives
- "We want to optimize for scalability and ownership"



Heuristics and (flexible) constraints

Heuristics: rules of thumb that allow us to make a decision that has a high probability of being correct without having to think everything through

Constraints: something that limits or controls what you can do

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Heuristics and constraints

- Ownership.
  - Should make it easier to answer the question "where does discovery/development of this feature/need belong?"
- Scalability.
  - Less dependencies between teams, easy to start up new teams/business areas
- Autonomy.
  - To what degree can the team build, test and release independently? Can the team collaborate, plan, execute, and learn together daily?
- Cognitive overload.
  - Is the asset(s)/domain(s) too complex? Try to offload some to other teams. Still too complex? Should it be a complicated subsystem team?
- Optimize for 2026 vision.
  - Not for yesterday's products/org. Innovation needs to take place in all teams.
- Alignment with Business.
  - How the team relates to business outcomes and customer needs/problems.

Heuristics and constraints

- Geography/colocation. Prefer co-located to distributed, everything else equal.
- Diversity. Age, tenure, seniority, gender, experience, skill sets, introverts/extroverts, ethnicity, etc. Personal chemistry (does tha go here?)
- Team size. If more than 9, how can we split it? If fewer than 4-5, should we merge with another team or include a "lonely specialis without a home"?
- Alignment with Architecture/Technology.
- Serving different users/customer segments? Maybe split. Interna customer? Maybe platform or enabling team. External? Probably stream-aligned. Most teams should be stream-aligned

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BETTER PRODUCT WORK

Heuristics and constraints

- Consider future expansion/hiring plans. Maybe some teams make more sense to "conquer and divide", i.e., get a shared understanding of assets/domains before splitting.
- Convert Common Team Types to the Fundamental Team Topologies
  - Move to mostly stream-aligned teams for longevity and flexibility
  - Infrastructure teams to Platform teams
  - Component teams to Platform or other team types
  - Tooling teams to Enabling teams of part of the Platform
  - Align support teams to stream of change and/or stream-aligned teams
  - Most effective pattern for architecture and architects is a part-time enabling team, maybe as a virtual team from members of other teams

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EXPLORE ALTERNATIVES





STRATEGIC CONTEXT DETERMINES TEAM TOPOLOGY

Strategic Context

Business Mission / Objectives — The company's purpose and goals

Product Vision & Principles — The future you are trying to create for your customers

Team Topology — How we organize teams to best enable them to fulfill the vision

Product Strategy — The critical problems to solve NOW to move toward that vision. This is the heart of the framework.

Product Teams/ Squads

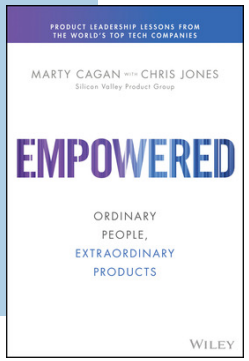
Objectives | Objectives | Objectives — Communicates those problems to teams



Discovery / Delivery | Discovery / Delivery | Discovery / Delivery

Helps us discover a solution

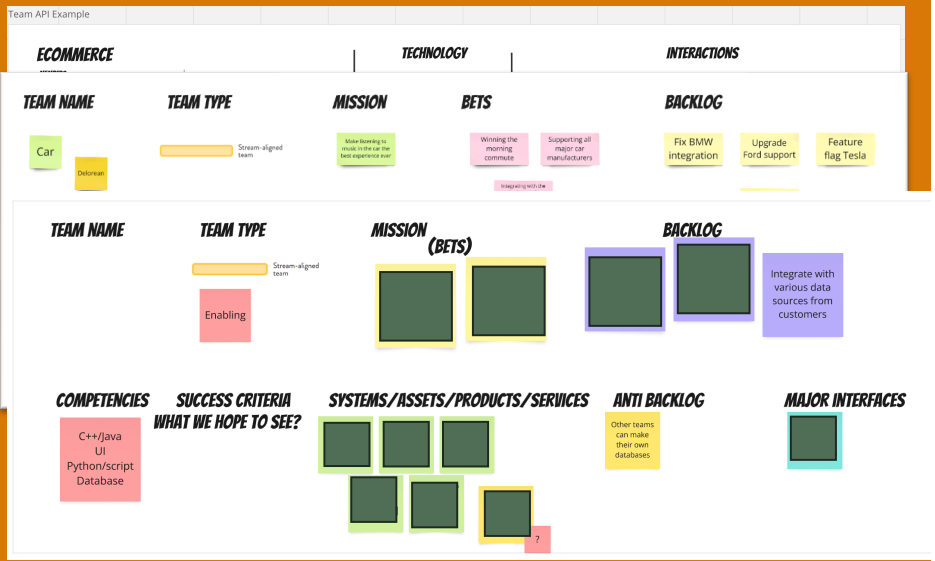
Builds that solution to bring it to market



BETTER PRODUCT WORK

MAKE TEAMS EXPLICIT

- Start with first draft mission
- Apply team types from team topologies
- Focus on competence needed to fulfil mission, not individuals
- Update template as you see fit



https://miro.com/miroverse/team-api/

EVOLVE THE DESIGN, ITERATING TOGETHER



EXPAND THE "DESIGN TEAM"

- Involving all of development
  - Teams creating their own suggestions
- Incorporate suggestions and iterate on the design
- Resulted in a co-created model for now and future



LET PEOPLE SELF-SELECT

Team Self Selection

Why self selection?

When we involve people in problem solving, they take more ownership of the solution. This is also true when forming teams. Letting employees take a large part in deciding which teams we have, and individually choose which team they should be on, leads to greater motivation and engagement.

Team members of course know the most about competence needed on a team to fulfill the team's mission. Therefore, letting people select the team they join will also result in better teams as people know what they can bring (competence, experience etc).

Designing a team doesn't necessarily mean picking the best people but rather deciding on the best combination of people based on their interdependent skills, preferences, and personalities.

In the rare case that a team won't work properly, the team members are more motivated to fix that, as they are familiar with the design goals and constraints and they have had a huge part in deciding the team's set-up. They will feel more responsible for making sure the team designs work and are successful.

Conversely, the classic way of management deciding who goes on which team has several drawbacks;

- Management seldom has all the knowledge needed to know who's needed on which team.
- Lowers engagement and motivation, as autonomy is lowered.
- Risking the case where employees blame management when the team isn't functioning instead of doing something about it.

How do we do it?

Prerequisites

We already have proposals for teams with missions, needed competencies, etc. Hopefully you have all been given a chance to participate and give feedback to these (see example card in picture below).





Sandy Mamoli and David Mole, Creating Great Teams: How Self-Selection Lets People Excel

WILL IT WORK?

Usually, people are hesitant and resist this kind of change but this time, they really welcomed and embraced it.

This was the most uneventful re-org I've ever seen. I've never experienced a re-org go this smoothly.

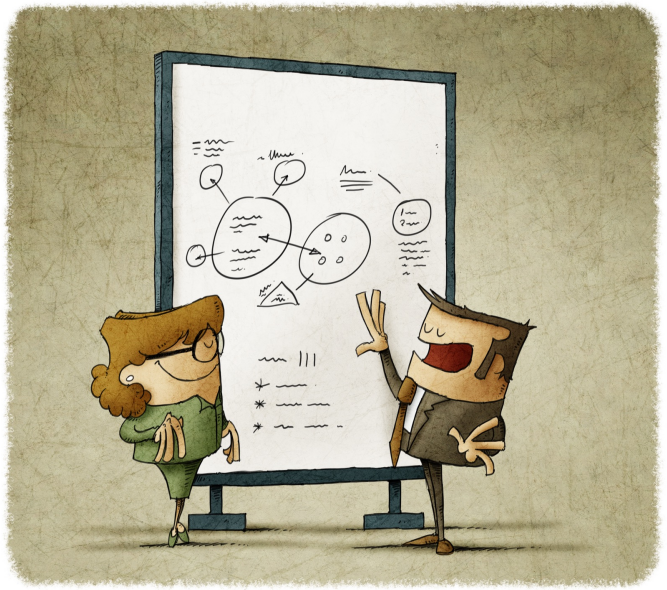


IT'S NOT THE ORG CHART

It’s the conditions around it.

We didn’t simply redesign the organization.

We deliberately built the conditions that allowed the organization to redesign itself.



CONTEXT: CHANGING THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE RE-ORG

Initially

- Traditional feature-factory mindset
- Managers assigned work and designed teams
- Re-orgs happened *to* people
- Limited workshop and collaboration culture
- Low psychological safety to challenge ideas
- Org design seen as a management activity

Later

- Transparent change process
- Cross-functional Change Team
- Frequent collaborative workshops
- Leadership actively listening and adapting
- Shared ownership of both process and outcome
- Org design became something we did *together*

CLARITY: MAKING THE PROBLEM UNDERSTANDABLE

Initially

- Why are we changing?
- What are we optimizing for?
- What does “good” look like?
- Which decisions are already made?
- Which decisions are open?

Later

- Product vision and strategic direction
- Product Operating Model
- Design goals and heuristics
- Team Topologies as a shared language
- Explicit constraints and decision boundaries

COMPETENCE: TEACHING PEOPLE HOW TO DESIGN ORGS

Initially

- Very little experience with org design
- No common language
- Discussions based on opinions
- Teams looked mostly the way they'd always looked

Later

- Team Topologies
- Fracture planes
- Team APIs
- Iterative design workshops
- Comparing trade-offs instead of defending opinions

CONTROL: GRADUALLY INCREASING PARTICIPATION

Initially

Leadership decided:

- Team structure
- Team boundaries
- Responsibilities
- Staffing

Teams mainly reacted

Later

Leadership still owned:

- Strategy, Vision, Constraints, Final decisions

Teams shaped:

- Missions, Team boundaries, Interfaces, Alternative topologies
- Their own team through self-selection

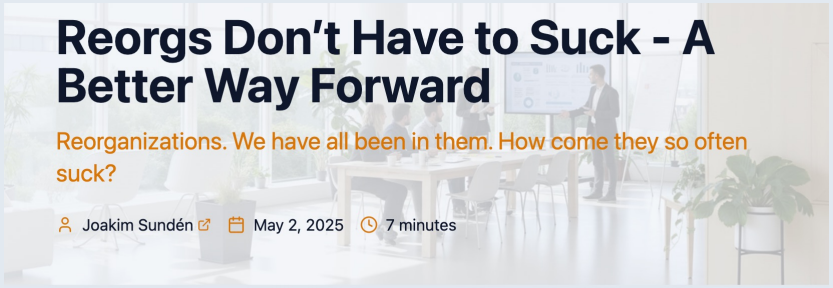
PRINCIPLES THAT MADE IT WORK

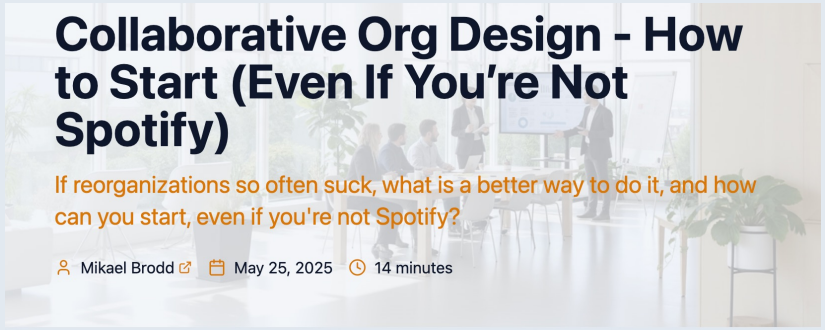
- Change the environment before changing the organization.
- Make the problem understandable before asking people to solve it.
- Teach people how to design organizations.
- Expand participation gradually.
- Treat organization design as a continuous capability, not a one-off project.



Great organization design is the result of designing the conditions in which people can design great organizations.

OUR ARTICLES ON COLLABORATIVE ORG DESIGN





Reorgs Don't Have to Suck - A Better Way Forward

Re-orgs Suck (and Why It Matters)

If you've worked at a company for more than a couple of years, chances are you've been through at least one reorg. Maybe more than one. Maybe so many you've lost count.

Collaborative Org Design - How to Start (Even If You're Not Spotify)

In the previous article, Reorgs Don't Have to Suck - A Better Way Forward, we discussed why re-orgs suck and how Spotify took another path than the traditional top-down, management driven approach.

Most re-orgs fail due to:

https://www.betterproductwork.com/

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