



OBEYA
association

HOW OBEYA RESTORES DECISION QUALITY IN COMPLEX ORGANISATIONS



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THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER DECISIONS ARE ACTUALLY MADE IN THE OBEYA

Many organisations build rooms for collaboration. Few build rooms for decisions.

As complexity grows, the ability to decide clearly, quickly, and collectively becomes a decisive organisational capacity. Yet in many organisations, important decisions still happen outside the room, after meetings, or between disconnected functions.

This article by Sidsel Winther Storaas argues that Obeya creates real value when it operates as a decision system rather than a discussion space. The difference lies in how the room is designed: what issues are raised, who holds authority, how trade-offs are handled, and how ownership is followed through.

Readers gain a practical framework for improving Obeya practice and sharper language for decision quality.



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Sidsel Winther Storaas works at the intersection of quality management, systems thinking, and organisational performance. Her work explores how leadership systems, governance structures, and decision processes shape behaviour, learning, and results in complex organisations.

This report presents Obeya as a decision system that makes priorities visible, strengthens ownership, and restores coherence between strategy, execution, and accountability.

Obeya shifts value creation from sharing information to making better decisions.

OPERATING THE ROOM

What excellence looks like

- Clear cadence with disciplined routines
- Decisions made where the work is visible
- Owners leave with clear commitments
- Daily priorities linked to strategy
- Learning improves the room over time



Operating rhythm

The room runs on a clear cadence where priorities, performance, and improvement are reviewed together. Participants arrive prepared, decisions are made in real time, and ownership is visible.

Learning is built into the rhythm. Actions are followed up, results are reviewed, and the room improves through each cycle. Strategy and execution stay connected week after week.

Why this matters

Many organisations try out collaborative architecture, such as Obeya, but keep old behaviours. Real value and performance emerge when cadence, authority, ownership, learning, and follow-up work are part of one system. The room becomes part of the management system rather than another meeting forum.

Source: Obeya Association Scan Framework, Level 5 descriptors

THE PROBLEM IN PRACTICE



Many organisations create collaboration spaces.

Few redesign how decisions are made

Boards create visibility. Meetings create motion. Decisions often happen elsewhere.

Teams share updates and review progress, while priorities remain unclear and trade-offs stay unresolved.

The room looks active, while the management system remains unchanged.

01

57% operate at low decision maturity

Few organisations teach decision skills or provide decision tools. (Deloitte, 2026)

02

72% say data blocks decisions

More information does not guarantee better judgement. (Oracle, 2023)

03

Watch for ownership drift

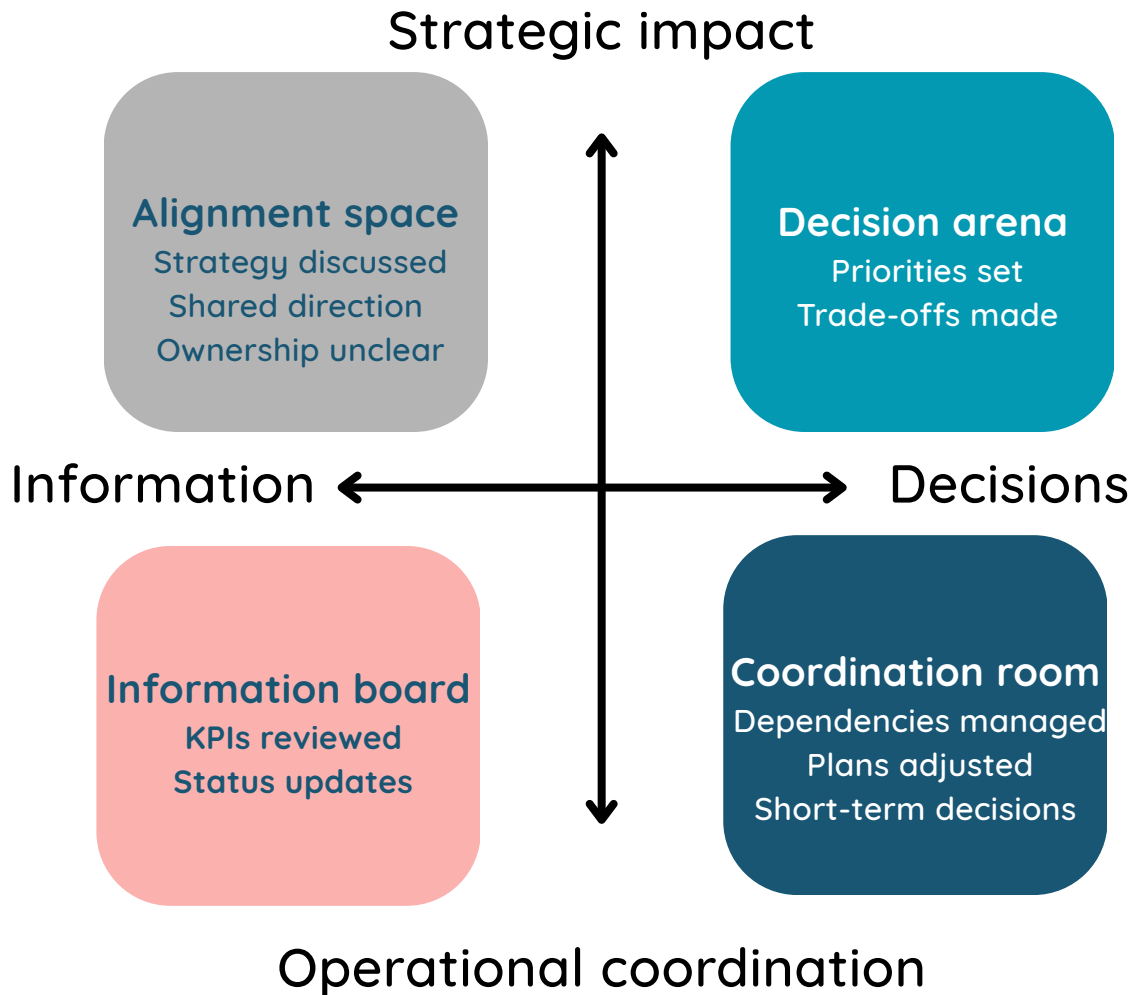
When everyone attends, yet nobody owns follow-up.

04

Watch for decision leakage

Important choices happen after meetings or in other forums.

FROM INFORMATION BOARDS TO DECISION ARENAS



Challenges & enablers

Many organisations inherit rooms built for reporting rather than decision-making. Existing meeting routines, unclear ownership, and fragmented authority often keep Obeya at a coordination level. Teams may meet regularly without changing how priorities are set or followed up.

Progress starts when leaders bring real trade-offs into the room. Decision rights need to be explicit. Ownership must be visible. Clear escalation paths allow unresolved issues to move quickly to the right level.

From room to system

The model shows four common ways organisations use Obeya. Some rooms mainly share information. Others coordinate work across teams. More mature rooms support strategic alignment, while the strongest versions function as decision arenas.

The key difference is whether decisions are actually made in the room. When authority, ownership, and follow-up become visible, Obeya starts to operate as part of the management system.

EVIDENCE FROM PRACTICE

Maturity level:

2.9



The case in brief

This case comes from one of Europe's largest processing facilities, an industrial site operating in a highly complex environment with many interdependencies, operational constraints, and improvement priorities.

The organisation already had a mature Lean culture, a well-designed Obeya room, strong routines, visual management, and disciplined follow-up. During the scan, one simple intervention changed behaviour immediately.

Small gold bars were used to mark approved improvement proposals directly on the site map. This changed how the room worked. Decisions moved into the room, ownership became clearer, and progress became visible.

High-complexity setting
Many competing priorities and dependencies.

Strong starting point
Existing room discipline and visual routines.

Small intervention
Gold bars marked approved improvement projects.

Visible effect
Decisions moved faster, ownership was clearer, and follow-through increased.

MOVING UPWARD

HOW TO MOVE FROM BOARD TO ARENA

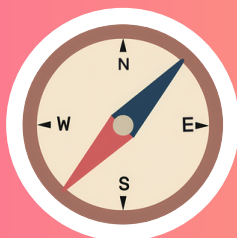


REDESIGN THE ROOM

- Bring real trade-offs into the room
- Clarify decision rights
- Make ownership explicit
- Use escalation paths when needed
- Follow and track decisions visibly

FROM BOARD TO MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

Many organisations meet regularly without changing how priorities are set or followed up. Progress starts when the room becomes part of the management system rather than a parallel discussion forum.



DECISION RIGHTS
Who can decide what?

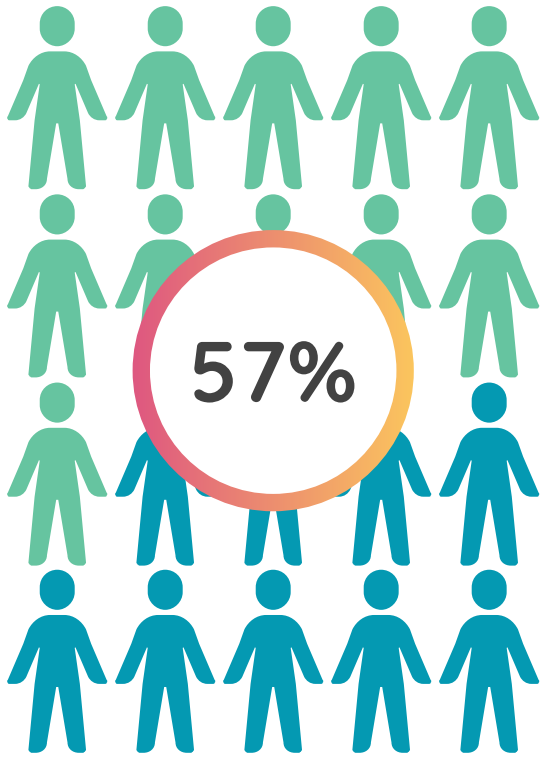


OWNERSHIP
Who drives progress forward?



FOLLOW-UP
What gets reviewed next?

DECISION ARCHITECTURE



57% of organisations operate at low decision maturity

What low maturity looks like

- Unclear decision rights
- Slow escalation paths
- Too many forums
- Weak ownership after meetings
- Decisions revisited repeatedly

More data is not enough

- More information, less clarity
- Decisions delayed while waiting for more data
- Analysis replaces ownership
- Signals compete for attention
- Speed drops as complexity rises



FROM ROOM TO
MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

How Obeya improves maturity

Obeya can improve decision maturity when the room becomes part of the management system. Clear authority, visible ownership, structured escalation, and disciplined follow-up help organisations move faster with better alignment.

Decision quality rarely improves through more data alone. It improves when decision processes become visible, repeatable, and trusted.

FROM ROOM TO MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

- Faster decisions across functions
- Clearer priorities and trade-offs
- Stronger ownership and follow-through
- Better alignment between strategy and execution
- More learning through visible review cycles

STRATEGY

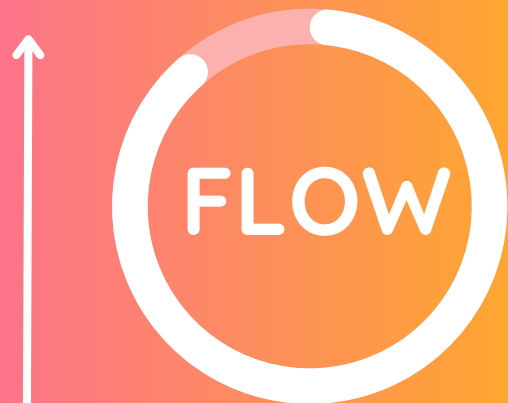
Obeya creates value by making strategic priorities visible rather than keeping them fragmented across functions. The room allows leaders to bring forward the issues that matter most and address trade-offs while the right people are present.

Shared visibility improves alignment across teams and levels.

Accountability

Accountability grows when ownership is explicit, and decisions are captured in the room. People leave with clear commitments.

Follow-up becomes part of the operating rhythm, and unresolved issues can be escalated quickly. Responsibility becomes visible over time.



Execution speed

Execution improves when dependencies, constraints, and progress are reviewed in a clear cadence. Actions move faster because issues are surfaced early and discussed where work is visible.

Teams gain one shared place to coordinate across boundaries. Progress can be followed from one cycle to the next.

Obeya creates value when strategy, execution, and accountability work together in one visible management system.

BEYOND THE ROOM

Culture can support decisions. Structure determines where they happen.

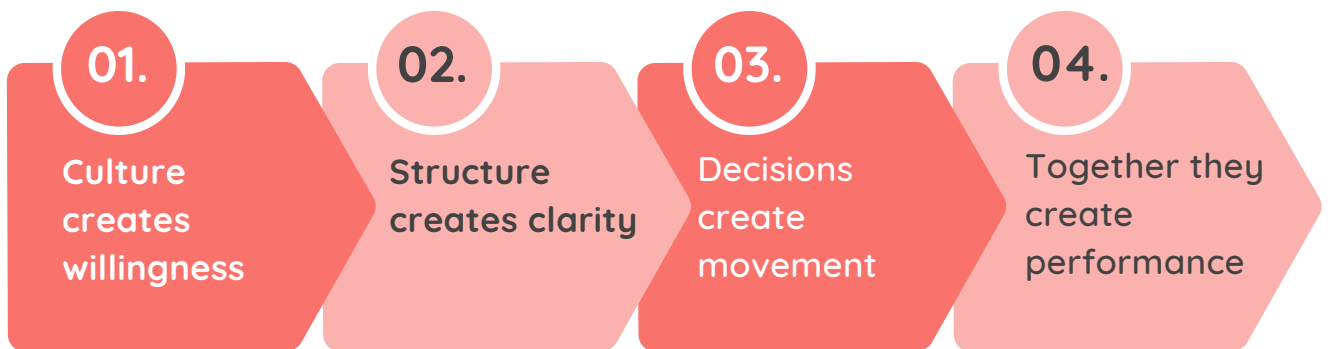
Culture matters. Structure decides.

- Openness matters
- Trust matters
- Psychological safety matters
- Yet unclear structure still blocks decisions

Behaviour follows structure more than intention

Many organisations respond to decision gaps with cultural initiatives alone. They strengthen openness, collaboration, and psychological safety. These are valuable conditions.

Yet rooms still stall when authority is unclear, ownership is vague, and decision paths are undefined. Behaviour follows structure more than intention.



What keeps it working

As organisations scale, rooms risk becoming reporting spaces again. Strong cadence, clear authority, disciplined ownership, and leadership commitment keep Obeya effective.

Final reflection

High-performing organisations combine human strengths with clear operating structures. Trust grows when people know how decisions are made, who owns what, and how progress is reviewed.

This is where humanity meets performance.