



OBEYA
association

GETTING MORE OUT OF OBEYA: HOW GREAT OBEYA REALLY BEGINS



AUTHORS

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CREATE SHARED FOCUS AND INSTANT BUY-IN BEFORE STARTING THE OBEYA

Shared understanding first.
faster decisions, stronger
ownership, and better
performance after

This case study is part of our ongoing effort to improve how organizations prepare for effective Obeya collaboration and decision-making.

By sharing the Obeya Genkan (玄関) approach, we aim to make the preparation visible before even entering the Obeya. Through short, visual and brain friendly working sessions, your organization can clarify goals, surface assumptions, define meaningful measures, and create shared understanding before execution even begins.

Across 100+ complex projects, this approach consistently led to fewer meetings, faster decisions, stronger ownership, and less unnecessary work.

For us, this work is about helping organizations make better decisions in complex environments - where we accept real human behavior and strengthen performance through visual collaboration, shared focus and optimal use of healthy brain patterns.



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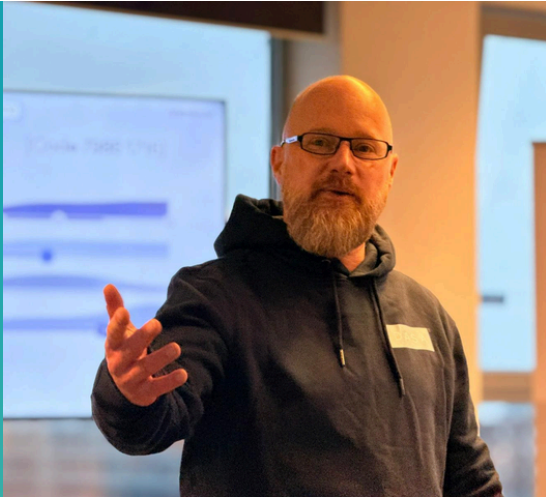
The Netherlands

Bas Vermeulen and Mark de Deugd are organization transformers, speakers, and meetup organizers who help organizations improve collaboration, leadership, and decision-making through visual facilitation, brain-friendly methods, and practical organizational change.

“The method makes problems that feel too big or too vague suddenly concrete and actionable.”

— Jesper

WHERE OBEYA GENKAN WAS DEPLOYED



Portbase, KLM, ANWB, Baker Hughes and more

- Industries: Logistics, mobility, aviation, and energy services
- Organization size: 100 to 50,000+ employees
- Structures: Hierarchical, matrix, and networked
- Scope: National to global

These organizations operate in complex, fast-moving environments where multiple teams, stakeholders, and priorities intersect. These environments often led to:

- Long discussions without clear decisions
- Different interpretations of goals and metrics
- Delayed execution due to hidden misalignment
- and much more waste

Therefore we introduced Obeya Genkan (玄関), a structured, visual preparation phase before entering the Obeya. Results:



Clarified the goal behind the goal in 90% of cases. The remaining 10% meant: back to the management board!



Translated strategy into meaningful metrics - 85% of cases



Surfaced risks and dependencies early - 90% of cases



Agreed on scope and first actions together - 100% of cases

OBEYA GENKAN, BUILT IN REAL COMPLEXITY



- Developed through years of visual planning and brain-friendly collaboration methods since 2017
- Used in physical (50%), online (40%), and hybrid (10%) environments
- Applied across strategic, tactical, product, architecture, team-level and general challenges
- Helps clarify goals, metrics, risks, dependencies and planning before execution begins
- Used by leaders, teams, departments, stakeholders, and external partners
- Most effective in projects with uncertainty, complexity, and many moving parts



Used since 2017

Visual planning and collaborative decision-making in complex environments



Best for complex projects

Where multiple teams, stakeholders, risks, and priorities need to move together



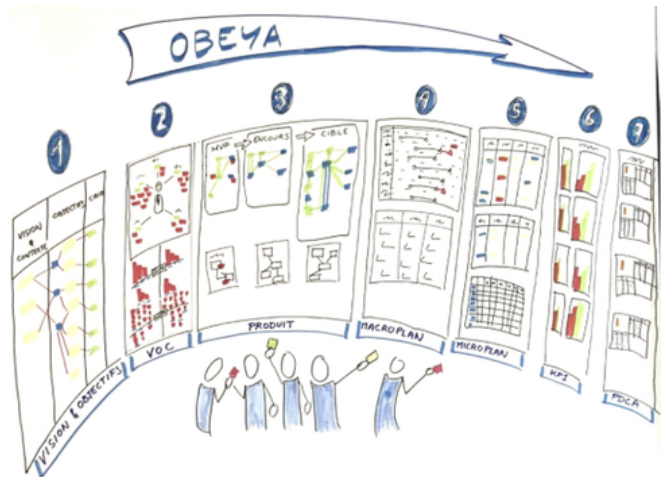
Works best Physical, and Online

Used in strategic, tactical, product, architecture, and delivery contexts.

THE GOAL BEHIND OBEYA GENKAN

How the method helps prevent misalignment and waste

If we don't watch ourselves, walls fill up with charts, KPIs, and sticky notes, but clarity remains elusive. Commitment appears on paper but not in action. And the unspoken question lingers: Are we actually aligned or just standing in the same room? We created a method that solves these misalignments and removes unproductive meetings. But foremost we introduce a brain-friendly approach and lower tension on people from the start.



What does it prevent

- Misalignment: teams moving fast but in different directions
- Beautiful solutions that solve the wrong problem
- Delayed decisions, rework and stress

What does it add

- Clarifies the underlying goals
- Translates goals into clear, measurable outcomes
- Creates space to surface risks, concerns, and dependencies early
- Gradually builds scope, alignment, and shared ownership
- Stimulates creativity to solve the real problem

Why does Obeya Genkan work

Because clarity, risk awareness, and alignment are built before the real work begins.

HOW OBEYA GENKAN WORKS

- Start with a complex challenge
- Bring the owner of that project and people with knowledge of various trades together
- Work in a visual way
- Learn this method by doing, not by explaining
- Use brain friendly workshop methods

A Genkan session usually starts small, with a few people and rough ideas.

Together, the group gradually shapes:

- clarity
- measurable goals
- risks and dependencies
- and first actions toward delivery



Challenges & enablers

What does not help:

- One 'hero' that has the ultimate solution in mind.
- Or worse, in a 80 page slide deck
- Skipping right into the solution
- Not writing anything down

What does help:

- Different perspectives
- Concerns made visible early
- Building on the ideas of your colleagues

- Time between sessions for ideas to mature
- Giving the silent colleagues a voice

Ignite your creativity

Creativity is born when people feel free to express their thoughts - however silly, incomplete, or far-fetched. We need creativity in the process. But beware! Creativity is smothered when you try to put it into a 30-minute time box. That's why the Genkan works in short, iterative sessions.

MAKE THINKING VISIBLE



All you need is space

Obeya Genkan works in physical, hybrid, and online environments.

The format matters less than the ability to think visually together.

What teams need is:

- room to explore ideas
- space to embrace uncertainty, such as risks and concerns
- visible connections between goals, decisions, and actions
- and enough structure to make complexity understandable

The structure is intentionally simple and not polished - you might even call it ugly. The goal is not to impress people with the design of it. The goal is to help people think together.

“The value was never the board itself. The value was what we achieved together because of it.”

- Michael



Walls, lots of it



Thoughts, lots of it



Sticky notes, lots of it



Colleagues with a dose of friendship toward each other, lots of it

GOOD IDEAS NEED RHYTHM



HOW THINKING EVOLVES

The first session rarely solves the problem. Instead, teams gradually create:

- shared understanding
- clarity on the real goal
- visibility of risks and dependencies
- and confidence in the direction ahead

Between sessions, ideas mature, assumptions shift, and better solutions emerge naturally.

HOW THE RHYTHM WORKS

- The first session might hurt a bit: what you thought is the goal is most often not the goal
- Second meeting - a week later - dives deeper
- Third meeting hashes out a detailed plan
- Repeat until you can't resist any longer to actually carry out this project, plan or idea



DON'T MEET - THINK VISUALLY, TOGETHER

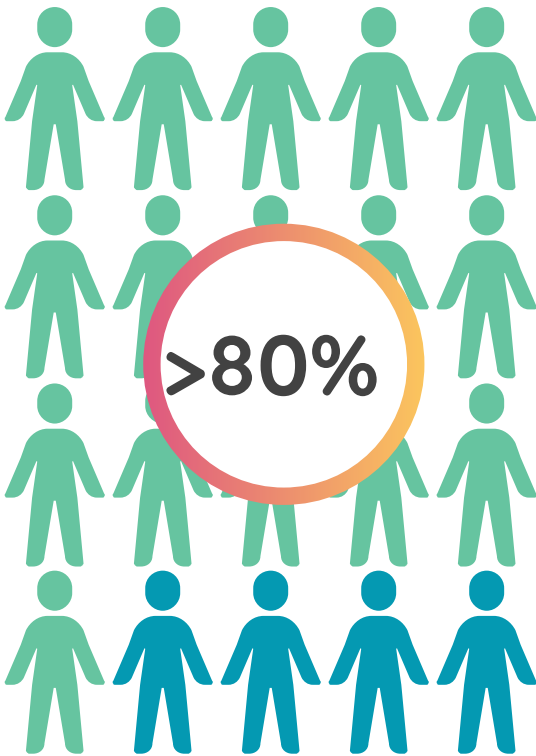


THE RIGHT GOAL IS HALF THE SOLUTION



USE THE GROUP'S COLLECTIVE MIND

A STUDY: ROI OF THE GENKAN



Genkan doesn't just make teams plan faster, it prevents wasted effort by improving alignment and better decisions upfront.

Alignment & Shared Understanding

- >80% of our own testimonials highlight improved alignment, arriving at better, easier and lower impact solutions.

Efficiency Gains (our own experience + external research)

- 10–30% reduction in development discussions - fewer clarifications needed in build phase
- +28% increase in strategy understanding (literature)
- 20–40% less rework / scope changes due to better upfront understanding
- Faster project start due to minimal preparation required

Better Decisions, Less Waste

- Early identification of risks, dependencies, unknowns
- Increased likelihood of “no-go” decisions before build
- 60–90% improvement in communication & alignment (multi-study pattern)

Sources:

- Bititci, Cocca & Ates (2015) - Impact of Visual Performance Management Systems
- Aasland & Blankenburg (2012) - Virtualizing the Obeya (ICE Conference)
- Canonico et al. (2018) - Dealing with knowledge in a product development setting
- Canonico et al. (2020) - Obeya and knowledge socialisation (Fiat Chrysler cases)
- Singh (2026) - Governing Performance in the Age of AI (Obeya Association case study series)
- MIT Sloan Management Review / TCS (2025) - Decision architectures and performance (cited in AI paper)
- Deloitte (2019, 2026) - Decision maturity and performance research (cited in AI paper)
- Gartner (2024–2027 projections) - Cost of poor decisions & AI decision impact (cited in AI paper)
- Obeya Research Landscape overview (17 studies compilation)
- Liker & Morgan (2006) - Toyota Product Development System (Obeya concept)
- Tyagi et al. (2015) - Lean tools and knowledge creation
- Andersson & Bellgran (2009) - Spatial design and communication in production



“By creating shared understanding first, the Genkan worked even better than intended: fewer meetings, better decisions, and real ownership from day one.”

~ Portbase

HOW TO MESS UP YOUR OBEYA GENKAN

Obeya Genkan improves decision-making, buy-in and better solutions by creating shared understanding before execution. Research and practice both show that collaboration only works when the right conditions are met.

Across our cases, four recurring failure patterns appeared:



A weak problem definition and preparation results most often in poor outcomes:

- Sessions drift into broad discussions and no clarity is gained
- Teams generate ideas but fail to tackle the real issue

If there is no follow-up this method degrades

- No ownership or updates after the session will lead to a wasted workshop and a waste of time

Low participation or unsafe culture results in low quality

- Dominant voices take over and quiet participants disengage. The real solution is not presented

Poor facilitation

- Sessions stay in brainstorm mode and there are no clear actions or decisions. Important ideas are not written down

What helps:

- Start with a broad challenge and a focused goal
- Make thinking visible by writing down every thought
- Create space for quieter voices
- Make sure to plan the next workshop before leaving the Genkan
- Have an experienced facilitator run the session, always

“We found better solutions because people started thinking about the whole problem together - not just their own part.”

— Willem

“Shared understanding turned out to be far more important than jumping straight into solutions.”

— Fred

GREAT OBEYA STARTS WITH GENKAN

Shared understanding first. Faster decisions, stronger ownership, and better performance after

The best Obeya rooms are not built by filling walls with information.

They are built by creating shared understanding before execution begins. Obeya Genkan helps teams slow down just enough to think together first - making goals, risks, assumptions, and decisions visible before pressure, deadlines, and delivery take over.

That is where faster decisions, stronger ownership, and better performance begin.

OUR INVITATION

If your Obeya still feels like reporting instead of decision-making, start before you create the Obeya room itself. Create shared understanding. Think visually together. And let the Obeya become a place where strategy turns into coordinated action.



What you gain with Obeya Genkan:

- Better solutions emerged when people shaped the problem together
- Risks surfaced earlier and became easier to manage
- Teams spent less time discussing and more time deciding
- Ownership grew naturally through co-creation



~40%
less meeting overhead



90% early risk visibility



In 8 out of 10 cases
better decisions emerged



100% clear ownership &
next actions