

OBEYA SUMMIT 2026 · PRE-SUMMIT ARTICLE

Making the Invisible Visible: How Obeya Drives Safe Execution on Complex Capital Projects

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“Obeya gave hundreds to thousands of people across multiple companies in different countries a shared daily reality — making safety, performance, and decisions visible on some of the most complex capital projects in the world.”

— Nynke Bel, ExecuteX

COMPANY / CASE PROFILE

Company: ExecuteX

Industries: Energy transition / oil & gas / food industry / industrial construction

Project scale: €100 million greenfield plants to €30+ billion megaprojects — worldwide

Geography: Worldwide

What this scale looks like:

The largest capital projects have up to 10,000 people working on a single day at peak, spread across multiple locations: multiple engineering offices, a construction site, and fabrication yards on different continents. In some cases even the owner is a joint venture between five or more international companies, and the engineering and construction contractor itself can be a joint venture as well. At the smaller end: a few hundred people on a single site. The coordination challenge is the same.

Organisational structure:

Capital projects are executed through a combination of owner teams, engineering and procurement contractors, and multiple specialist construction contractors, each managing their own sub-contractors. Sometimes the owner is a consortium of multiple companies. Structures vary from fully self-managed construction by the owner to fully contracted delivery. What they all share: multiple companies, multiple disciplines, and the need for one coherent operating rhythm to keep hundreds to thousands of people aligned and working safely.



Figure 1 LNGC Canada 2024 (source: JFJV Kitimat)

OBEYA PROFILE

Type: Physical

Implemented since: In 2017 first applied following a crisis on a €500M project requiring rapid factory rebuild without completed engineering. Continuously developed and applied across multiple capital projects since.

Purpose & scope: Capital project execution and operational

Position within organisation: Project level: site leadership through workflow

Reach: Craft workers → superintendents → site management → project director

User groups: Owner site leadership, all contractor supervisors and superintendents, engineering contractor

The structured week based on the Perfect Day:

The meeting rhythm is structured in time and across organisational levels. It is dynamic, as the project moves from engineering through construction to commissioning and start-up, the teams change, the content changes, and the rhythm adapts accordingly.

- 7.00 AM - Pep Talk: all site personnel. Daily scores of the Perfect Day in colours only, no numbers, to keep the focus on learning and improvement rather than pressure. Safety, Quality, Productivity.
- 9.30 AM - Daily stand-up: all contractors together, led by a superintendent. Each contractor updates and presents their daily plan. Joint boards and individual contractor boards.
- 2-week Lookahead - Reflect, check and look forward: contractors and engineering. Forward-looking to ensure all inputs are in place based on 4Ms: materials, methods, people, and construction equipment.
- 30 / 60 / 90-day - Readiness review: contractors and engineering, ensuring the project is ready for upcoming phases and milestones.
- Weekly Leadership team: oversees all activities. Escalations and urgent decisions are raised directly when needed, not held for the weekly meeting.

Physical setup: First floor of site portacabins, windows overlooking the construction site. No digital tools, entirely physical boards. Standing tables. Full wall coverage with plot plans using magnets to show crane positions, cherry pickers, scaffold zones, walkways, and who is working where. Open access outside meetings.

Accessibility: Open to all site participants outside scheduled meetings

OBEYA: THE OPERATING SYSTEM OF PROJECT EXECUTION



Figure 2 Structured week based on Perfect Day

URGENCY & RATIONALE

Trigger

Complex capital projects bring together multiple companies, disciplines, and hundreds to thousands of people, all working toward a shared goal. To deliver safely, on time, and within budget, every team needs to understand how their work connects to others. The opportunity is clear: when the right information is visible to the right people at the right time, projects can be delivered faster, better, safer and demonstrate stronger team performance. The question is how to make that happen consistently, across company boundaries, different locations, at scale.

Objectives

- Make the work and all handovers visible so every team can do their job well
- Connect daily workfloor activities to project leadership decision-making
- Make hazards, constraints, and commitments visible across company boundaries in real time
- Enable faster problem-solving, shift meetings from status updates to decisions and actions
- Build trust and transparency across companies for safe simultaneous operations
- Build a positive, high-performance culture: reinforce what works, not only focus on what doesn't
- Create a learning organisation, one that continuously improves through shared reflection and shared insight

Context & industry benchmark

Research by IPA (Independent Project Analysis, founded by Ed Merrow) consistently shows that 65% of large capital projects overrun cost by more than 25%, with average schedule overruns of 30–40%. These failures are overwhelmingly organisational and not technical. The engineering is solvable. The coordination is where projects fail. This is the baseline. The question Obeya helps answer is: what does it take to be in the other 35%?



Figure 3 SIMOPS part of Daily Delivery Meeting

DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

A structured approach adapted for multi-company capital project environments, applied consistently across projects in oil & gas, energy transition, and food industry worldwide.

1. Vision and strategy

Establish the Project Execution Strategy, defining how the project will be delivered, what success looks like, and how all parties will work together. This is the foundation everything else builds on.

2. Set direction and targets

Project performance targets cascaded from project director to frontline, defined in terms of Safety, Quality, Delivery and Cost and made visible to all.

3. Establish the Obeya

Dedicated physical room close to workfloor; boards organised by topic and contractor; open access outside meetings.

4. Define and launch the structured week

Daily Pep Talk at construction site, Daily Delivery Meeting; Must Wins and planning set weekly in 2 week look-ahead meeting; 30/60/90-day readiness reviews; weekly site leadership oversight meeting.

5. Let the rhythm follow the work

Cadence, meeting content, and participants adjust continuously as the project progresses. The rhythm serves the work, not the other way around.

Challenges & enablers

Resistance is predictable and universal. In every implementation, the first sign is supervisors standing as far from the boards as possible, arms crossed, reluctant to pick up a pen. The single most effective response: walk over and hand them the pen. That small gesture breaks the barrier.

The second critical rule: never solve problems in the daily meeting. When an issue is raised, identify it, name it, and take it out. Immediately after the meeting, with only the people needed in the room. Watching problems get escalated and resolved the same day is what converts sceptics. People see it working.

Go Sees were done collaboratively, always with at least two people from different contractors, focused on safety and productivity topics. This cross-company observation was new for most participants and directly built ownership and the trust that makes neutral coordination possible.

The check-out was the most powerful enabler. A fixed routine creates psychological safety, everyone knows what to expect, and the questions hold the team accountable to each other, not to a manager. Within weeks it becomes habit and teams can insert new topics overtime and further develop the culture needed.

LAYOUT, STRUCTURE & ARCHITECTURE

Physical setup

Dedicated Obeya room on the first floor of site portacabins, with windows overlooking the construction site. No digital tools just the physical boards. Standing tables. Full wall coverage. Open access for all site participants outside scheduled meetings. Leadership can see the work while standing at the boards.

Boards & panels

- Perfect Week scorecard (Safety / Quality / Productivity): positioned at site entrance, visible to all entering the site
- Daily stand-up boards: joint boards shared across contractors plus individual boards per contractor. Each supervisor updates and presents their team's daily plan.
- Must Wins board: max 5 joint priorities requiring collaboration across contractors, each with a named owner. Must Wins create shared team awareness and collective accountability, if one party fails to deliver, the whole team misses.
- 30-day lookahead: colour-coded by discipline and contractor
- Simultaneous operations board: plot plans showing scaffold and crane positions for coordinating overlapping high-hazard activities
- Actions log: owned items with clear due dates, reviewed daily

Visual elements & data ownership

Physical boards, post-its, red/green colour coding, don't use amber. Each board has a named owner responsible for daily updates. Boards not updated daily lose trust and compromise the entire system.

USE IN PRACTICE

The Pep Talk, building culture from the ground up

Each morning, all site personnel gather for the Pep Talk. Prepared daily with scores from the previous day on Safety, Quality, and Productivity — accompanied by photos and visual examples of what good looks like. The deliberate emphasis is always on what went well and why, alongside what can be improved. By reinforcing what is working, the Pep Talk builds a stronger, more positive culture than a purely problem-focused approach. Green is always communicated alongside red.

The structured week in practice

- 7.00 AM Pep Talk with all site personnel, scores in colours only, photos of what good looks like
- 9.30 AM daily stand-up with all contractors together, each supervisor presents their daily plan and updates their board
- 2-week lookahead to reflect, check, and look forward with contractors and engineering; forward-looking to ensure materials, methods, people, and construction equipment are all in place
- 30 / 60 / 90-day readiness reviews with contractors and engineering, preparing for upcoming phases and milestones
- Weekly leadership to oversee all activities; escalations raised directly when needed, not held for the weekly slot



Figure 4 Perfect Week Scores at Entrance

Interaction style

Stand-up throughout. Signal-based: respond to reds, acknowledge greens. No amber, every item is either a problem requiring action or it isn't. The daily stand-up is based on the targets and commitments set in the weekly look-ahead, the connection between short-term execution and medium-term planning is explicit.

Decision-making flow

A structured week was designed to facilitate the flow of information from workforce to leadership. With everyone on site, escalations were fast, issues raised in the morning stand-up could reach project leadership the same day, with decisions returned the following morning at the latest. For urgent safety or simultaneous operations issues, decisions happened within hours. The structured rhythm eliminated the lag that typically causes small problems to become large ones.

Simultaneous operations

The most critical coordination challenge in high-hazard multi-contractor environments is simultaneous operations. Multiple high-hazard activities happening in the same area at the same time: crane lifts, scaffolding, piping, electrical work. The simultaneous operations board uses physical plot plans with magnets, showing crane positions, cherry pickers, scaffold zones, active work fronts, lay-down areas, and walkways, making conflicts visible before they happen. Contractors move their own magnets. Everyone can see who is working where. But the board alone is not enough. What makes it truly safe is the culture of care and

camaraderie that the Obeya builds over time, contractors genuinely watching out for each other, not just their own scope.

OUTCOMES & VALUE

Tangible outcomes

- Exceptional LTI-free safety performance across millions of man hours with hundreds to thousands of people on site daily in high-hazard construction environments where the industry norm is significantly worse
- Hundreds to thousands of people coordinated daily across owner and multiple contractor organisations with faster decision-making and fewer coordination failures
- Continuous Improvement embedded as an integral part of project delivery and not as a separate initiative but as the operating model itself
- Execution partners engaged effectively regardless of contract structure

Intangible outcomes

- Collective accountability across contractor boundaries shared space removes conditions for finger-pointing
- Leadership proximity to workflow reality daily, not by exception
- Shift from status-reporting to decision-making in meetings
- Contractors engage as equal participants in a neutral space
- Measurable improvement in team morale: when focus shifted to making work flow, performance and wellbeing improved simultaneously

“After two months, the stress was gone. Work was made easier and it brought more happiness and joy.”

— Construction supervisor

CREATE FLOW THROUGH DAILY RHYTHM

Design your project for performance **from day one**.

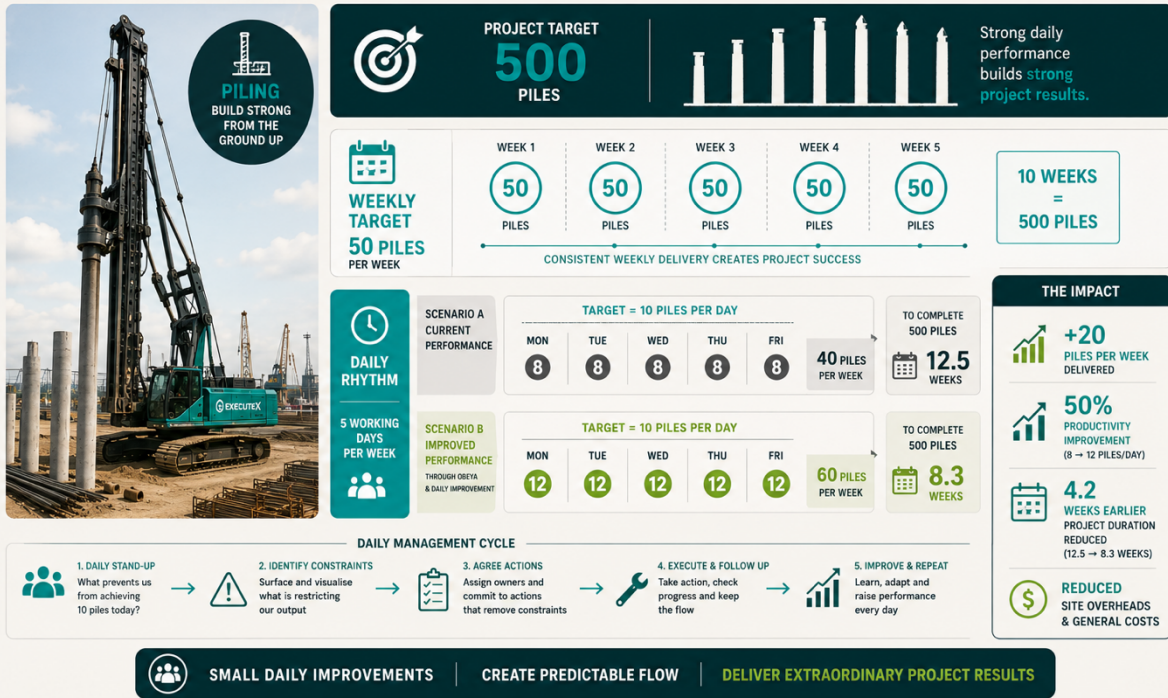


Figure 5 Cascaded targets lead to radical improvements – goals set weekly and discussed daily in DDM

Threats to sustainability

- Board discipline is the foundation. To prevent boards becoming stale, one of the standard check-out questions asks directly: was the board updated and was everyone prepared before the meeting? This single question makes board ownership visible and keeps the system honest.
- Transitions between project phases require active adjustment of the Obeya, the rhythm must follow the work
- Leadership participation must be consistent, if leadership stops attending, contractor commitment follows

Hazards experienced

- Over-reliance on key facilitators, the Obeya needs to be owned by the team, not one person
- Risk of meetings reverting to status-reporting if signal discipline isn't maintained
- Information overload if boards are not kept to the critical few

What keeps it from working — the honest truth

- It runs on discipline. Without a committed leader who maintains the rhythm, the Obeya fades. This is not a tool you install, it is a practice you maintain.
- Onboarding is continuous. Projects have turnover. Every new team member, from any company, needs to understand the system, their board, and their role in keeping it current. This never stops.
- It needs to be continuously revived. Projects are dynamic and so is the content of the daily stand-up. What was the right focus in month three is not the right focus in month eight. The Obeya must evolve with the work or it becomes a ritual without meaning.
- There is no finish line. The moment a team thinks the Obeya is 'set up', it starts to decay.

Future outlook

The approach has been applied across capital projects in oil & gas, energy transition, and food industry, from €100 million plants to €30+ billion megaprojects, worldwide. ExecuteX is developing it further as a standard delivery model for complex industrial projects, making Continuous Improvement an integral part of how projects are delivered, not something added on top.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR OBEYA

Six practical lessons from complex capital projects, applicable to any multi-stakeholder Obeya environment.

1. Map the process first - then make it visible.

Before setting up any boards, run a workshop to map the actual work process. Every project is slightly different, contractors bring their own systems, interfaces differ, handover points vary. The workshop makes these specifics visible: who hands over to whom, what each party needs before they can start, where the dependencies and risks are. Only once the process is mapped can the Obeya boards be designed to reflect reality rather than a generic template. This is the foundation everything else builds on.

2. Make work flow first - then measure it.

When the focus shifted from tracking performance to actively removing obstacles in the workflow, two things happened simultaneously: performance improved and stress dropped. Obeya is most powerful when it drives action, not reporting. One supervisor said it directly: after two months, the stress was gone.

3. In multi-company environments, the Obeya is your neutral ground.

Shared visibility removes the conditions for finger-pointing. Common goals, like Must Wins set as joint deliverables requiring cooperation across contractors, turn individual accountability into collective effort. If one fails, we all fail. But this only works if all parties are contractually expected to participate and keep information current from day one.

4. Keep signals simple - green, red, and nothing in between.

Many practitioners forget to emphasise green. Celebrating what works builds the culture that sustains performance. Equally important: remove amber entirely. Amber is ambiguous, nobody knows what to do with it. The question a signal needs to answer is binary: is this a problem, yes or no? Do you need to take action, yes or no? Anything in between consumes time without driving resolution.

5. Physical proximity changes the quality of decisions.

The Obeya room sits on the first floor of the site portacabins, with windows overlooking the construction site. Leadership can see the work while standing at the boards and this happened in practice, multiple times. A question raised in the room could be answered by looking out of the window. That proximity removes the gap between information and reality that causes so many project decisions to be made on assumptions rather than facts.

6. Ownership is built through routine, not instruction.

Every meeting ends with a standard check-out, six questions, asked every time, without exception. The team decides the colour of the day per item.

- Did we start on time and was everyone in the room on time?
- Was the planning checked and adjusted before the meeting?
- Were actions written up, SMART and on the board?
- Were actions closed?
- Impactful interventions: did you do your Go See this morning?
- Was the meeting short, concise, and finished on time?

This only takes two minutes. Questions evolve over time, when one is consistently green, it gets combined or replaced. When a question is no longer needed, it has become a habit. When enough habits are shared across the team, you have a culture. The check-out is what

turns an Obeya meeting into a commitment — and it has been running consistently for over ten years across multiple projects.

