



NO TITLE, NO PROBLEM

USING OBEYA TO GOVERN TRANSFORMATION, KEEP THE SHOP OPEN, AND BECOME A TRUSTED ADVISOR IN AN ENGINEERING-DRIVEN CULTURE

HOW A LEADERSHIP OBEYA CONNECTED STRATEGY, TRANSFORMATION, AND OPERATIONAL EXECUTION IN A FAST-GROWING ENGINEERING ORGANIZATION



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FROM STRATEGY TO EXECUTION: LEADING THROUGH OBEYA

This case study demonstrates how a relatively simple leadership Obeya evolved into a practical mechanism for governing strategy, transformation, and operational execution within a rapidly growing engineering organization.

The organization had experienced significant growth while simultaneously implementing a customized SAFe operating model. As complexity increased, strategic priorities, transformation initiatives, and operational execution became increasingly disconnected.

To address this challenge, a leadership Obeya was introduced at cluster management level. What started as a simple visual management approach gradually became the primary forum for alignment, prioritization, ownership, and leadership development.

The case illustrates both the opportunities and challenges of introducing Obeya in an engineering-driven environment, including the lessons learned from losing and rebuilding momentum along the way.



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Senior Organizational Change Manager, Agile Transformation Lead, and Leadership Coach with more than 20 years of experience helping organizations improve strategy execution, leadership effectiveness, and large-scale transformation outcomes.

His work focuses on connecting strategy, organizational change, and execution through practical leadership systems that create alignment, ownership, and measurable results in complex environments.

COMPANY/CASE PROFILE



ASML, Veldhoven, The Netherlands

- Industry-leading lithography company
- Netherlands
- 44,000+ employees
- Engineering-driven matrix organization
- Global footprint

Organizational challenge

- Rapid growth
- SAFe transformation
- Multiple competing improvement initiatives
- Lack of strategic alignment
- Leadership overload



44,000+ employees worldwide



€28.3 billion annual revenue (2024)



60+ locations across Europe, Asia, and the United States



5+ Years (60+ Trains) SAFe transformation journey

"The company almost doubled in size in five years while simultaneously undergoing a large-scale operating model transformation."

OBEYA PROFILE

What started as a simple attempt to create structure within a leadership team evolved into the primary mechanism for governing strategy, transformation, and operational execution.



Designed to create transparency, alignment, and focus across strategy, transformation, and operational execution.

- Implemented; 2024
- Type; Digital (MIRO) Leadership Obeya
- Purpose; Strategic steering, Transformation governance, Leadership alignment
- Position; ASML BL Application, Process Window Control (PWC) Cluster Leadership Team
- Users; Cluster Manager, Department Managers, HR, and Organizational Change Manager
- Meeting rhythm; Weekly
- Audience; Leadership staff only



One Leadership Team

Cluster Manager,
Department Managers,
HR & Change Manager



One Leadership Agenda

Strategy,
Transformation &
Operations



One Working Rhythm

Weekly leadership
steering &
alignment

URGENCY & RATIONALE

Objectives

Create a single leadership environment where strategy, execution, transformation activities, and continuous improvement could be discussed, monitored, and governed together.

The goal was not to implement Obeya as a framework, but to provide the leadership team with a practical mechanism to improve focus, transparency, ownership, and decision-making.



Trigger

Rapid organizational growth, combined with a large number of disconnected improvement initiatives, made it increasingly difficult to maintain alignment between strategy, transformation, and execution.

Leadership needed a more structured way to create focus, establish ownership, and steer organizational change while keeping daily operations running.

Context

The software cluster was operating within a broader enterprise transformation, including the implementation of a customized SAFe operating model. While substantial effort had been invested in improving execution within the Agile Release Trains, less attention had been given to the leadership structures responsible for governing strategy, transformation, and organizational improvement.

The Obeya was introduced as an experiment to help close that gap.

DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

1. Establish Visibility

Created a shared leadership overview of strategic objectives, improvement initiatives, operational performance, and requests for support.

2. Create Leadership Cadence

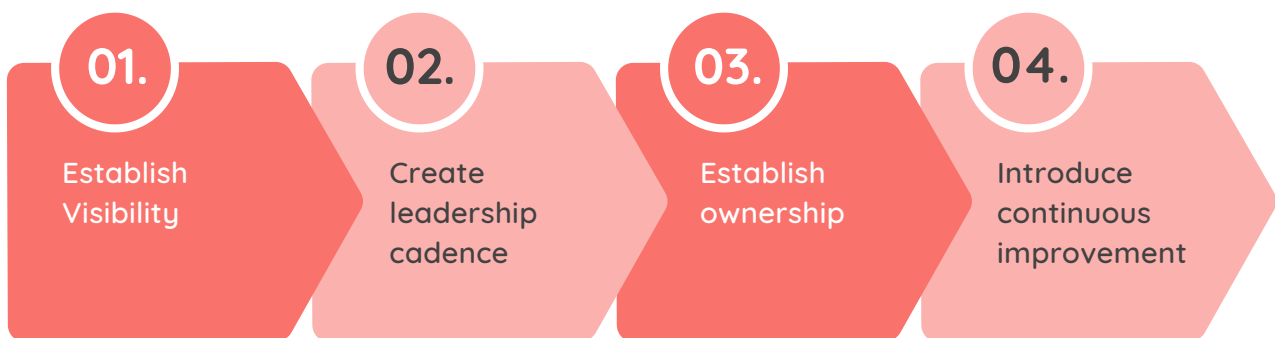
Introduced a weekly Obeya rhythm to connect strategy, transformation activities, and operational execution within a single conversation.

3. Improve Ownership & Alignment

Used the Obeya to clarify priorities, assign ownership, expose dependencies, and align leadership decisions with strategic objectives.

4. Learn, Adapt & Sustain

Continuously evolved the Obeya based on real-world use, incorporating escalation management and leadership feedback to strengthen adoption and long-term effectiveness.



Challenges

After initial success, several business escalations caused leadership to abandon the Obeya cadence and revert to reactive management.

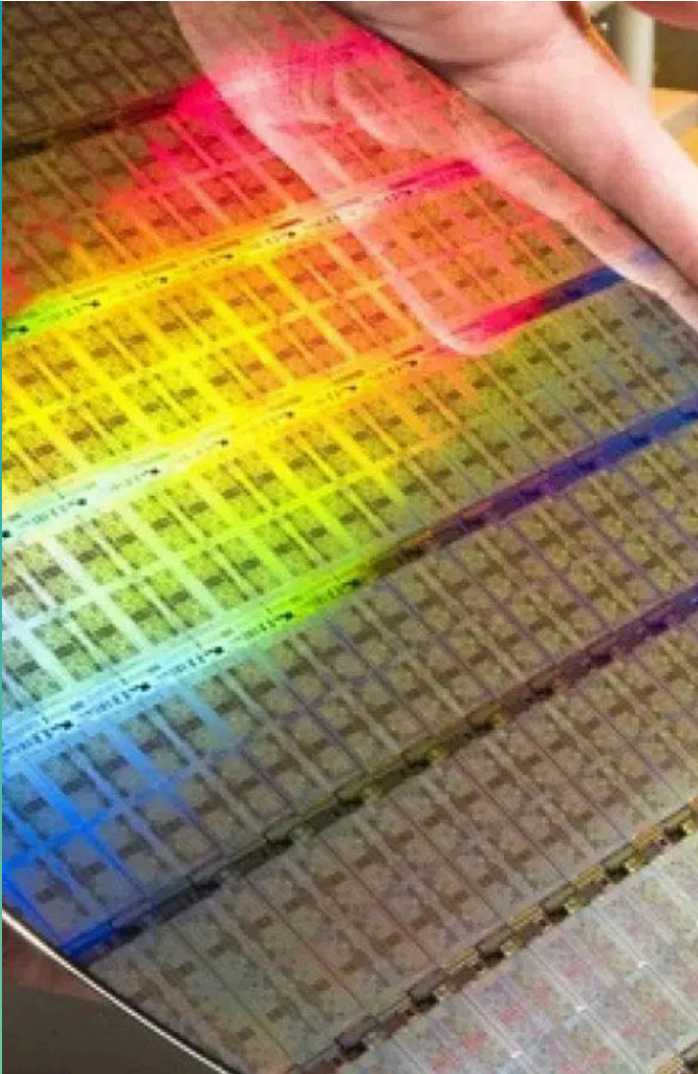
As the Obeya Builder and Host, maintaining the board and facilitating the cadence proved difficult alongside my primary responsibilities as Organizational Change Manager and SAFe transformation lead.

Enablers

Strong sponsorship from the Cluster Manager (VP) created the psychological safety and leadership commitment required to establish new ways of working.

Starting small, focusing on real business problems, and continuously adapting the Obeya based on leadership feedback helped drive adoption and long-term sustainability.

LAYOUT, STRUCTURE & ARCHITECTURE



Final Obeya Design

The Obeya was implemented as a digital MIRO-based leadership environment and evolved iteratively over time. The initial design focused on strategy, improvement initiatives, and support requests, while a dedicated escalation area was introduced later after repeated operational escalations disrupted the intended cadence and focus of the Obeya.

The final structure consisted of six primary views:

- Escalations
- Strategic Long-Term Initiatives
- Strategic Short-Term Initiatives
- Help Requests
- New (Inbox / FYI)
- Execution & Delivery KPIs

Although KPI-based steering was included in the design, its use remained limited due to concerns regarding data availability, consistency, and reliability. As a result, leadership discussions were primarily driven by initiatives, ownership, dependencies, and escalation management.



Annual Strategy Review

Define strategic direction and select long-term strategic initiatives.



Quarterly Planning

Review long-term initiatives and select short-term initiatives for execution.



Weekly Initiative Review

Monitor progress, dependencies, ownership, and requests for support.



Weekly Operations Review

Review escalations, delivery performance, and operational execution risks.

USE IN PRACTICE

FIRST IMPLEMENTATION

The initial Obeya was intentionally simple and focused on creating structure and transparency within the leadership team. The first design consisted of five areas:

- New (Inbox / FYI)
- Help Requests
- Improvement Initiatives
- Execution & Delivery KPIs
- Leadership Actions

The objective was to create a single place where strategy, improvement activities, and operational performance could be discussed together.

UPDATED DESIGN

Based on first learnings, the Obeya was redesigned to better support leadership decision-making and escalation management.

The updated structure consisted of:

- Escalations
- Strategic Long-Term Initiatives
- Strategic Short-Term Initiatives
- Help Requests
- New (Inbox / FYI)
- Execution & Delivery KPIs

The introduction of a dedicated escalation area allowed urgent operational topics to receive the necessary attention without disrupting the overall Obeya cadence.

KEY LEARNINGS

The most important lesson was that the value of the Obeya was not created by the board itself, but by the leadership behaviors and routines it enabled.

Losing the cadence temporarily demonstrated how quickly leadership teams revert to reactive management when structure and discipline disappear. The redesign strengthened the Obeya and reinforced its role as a mechanism for connecting strategy, transformation, execution, and leadership development.

FIRST MAJOR LEARNINGS

The first months revealed several important behavioral insights.

Firstly, some leaders used the New (Inbox / FYI) section to introduce topics that were personally important to them but not strategically relevant, resulting in discussions being diverted away from agreed priorities.

Secondly, discussions around KPIs frequently focused on questioning data quality and interpretation. While often justified, this exposed a lack of trust in the underlying data and highlighted the risk of making decisions based on assumptions rather than facts.

Lastly, repeated business escalations caused the leadership team to abandon the intended Obeya flow and revert to reactive management. As a result, the cadence, focus, and discipline of the Obeya gradually disappeared.

OUTCOMES & VALUE (ROI)

The most significant outcome was not the reduction in active initiatives, but the increased leadership focus and alignment the Obeya created.

By making priorities, ownership, dependencies, and requests for support transparent, the leadership team was able to make more deliberate decisions, resulting in a reduction from 29 active initiatives to 8 strategically aligned initiatives.

Tangible

- Reduced active initiatives through deliberate prioritization (29 → 8)
- Clear ownership of strategic initiatives
- Faster escalation resolution
- Improved prioritization and resource focus

Intangible

- More strategic leadership conversations
- Increased leadership alignment
- Greater transparency across departments
- Increased trust and willingness to ask for help



"We covered far more important topics in less time than during traditional staff meetings."

Director, D&E PWC Overlay and Alignment Control

CONTINUITY, RISKS & FUTURE POTENTIAL

- Loss of MIRO reduced usability and continuity.
- Sustainability depended on a small number of sponsors and facilitators.
- The Obeya strengthened alignment, focus, and transparency.

Tooling Dependency

The Obeya was implemented digitally using MIRO due to the absence of fixed workspaces and dedicated Obeya rooms.

During a company-wide cost reduction initiative, MIRO was removed from the approved IT portfolio, forcing the team to migrate to alternative tooling.

While a workaround was created using Microsoft Planner, the user experience and flexibility proved significantly less effective.

Continuity & Future Potential

Despite these challenges, the Obeya significantly strengthened leadership alignment, increased transparency, and created focus on the most important strategic initiatives. The experience demonstrated that even a relatively simple implementation can improve the connection between strategy, transformation, and execution.

The greatest opportunity going forward is not further optimizing the board itself, but embedding the underlying leadership behaviors and routines more broadly throughout the organization.

Key Person Dependency

The Obeya relied heavily on the partnership between the Cluster Manager and Organizational Change Manager, who fulfilled the Sponsor, Builder, and Host roles.

This created a significant continuity risk when organizational changes occurred.

Organizational Change

A major reorganization created uncertainty around key stakeholders and sponsorship.

As the Obeya had not yet been institutionalized, its sustainability remained dependent on local leadership commitment.

"The board created transparency. The conversations created change."

The Obeya not only strengthened leadership alignment and organizational focus. It also created the recurring interaction, trust, and shared problem-solving needed for an Organizational Change Manager to become a trusted advisor within an engineering-driven leadership team.