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Organize Work to Beat Competition

Ten principles for building resilient, efficient, and innovative organizations

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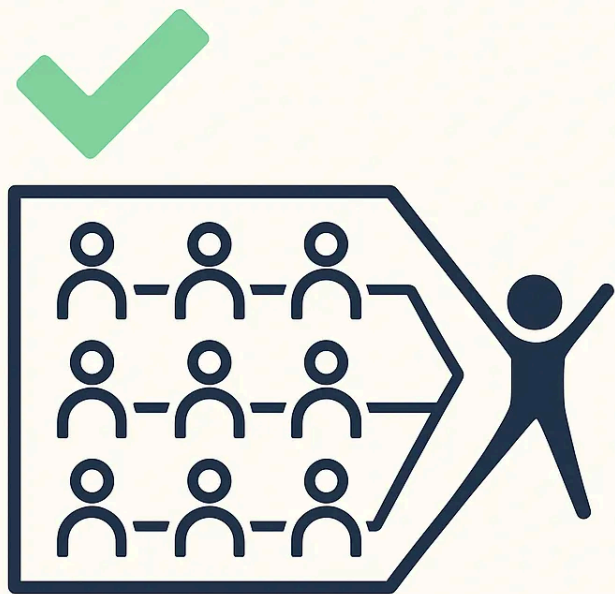
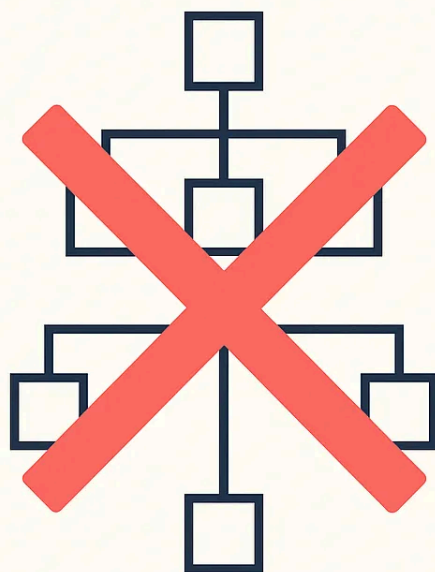
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Improve productivity and reduce waste by organizing right.

These are the ten key conditions for achieving an effective work organization within a company or corporation.

1. All resources are aligned with the business processes.

2. The number of legal units is minimized.
3. Processes are measured, and all data are transparent and visualized.
4. People who prioritize influence resources.
5. Work is agile.
6. Internal time isn't tracked.
7. Well-selected pairs do most real work.
8. Facilitator-led physical workshops are used for all cooperative investigation, problem-solving, and design activities.
9. Planning, supervising the execution or operation, and controlling activities are done with online tools.
10. AI is utilized everywhere as a competent online support tool.

These conditions are not only about efficiency — they are about building organizations that are resilient, innovative, and truly competitive.

Here's what that looks like in practice:

1. Align all resources to the business processes.

In many companies I have worked with, organizational layers tend to accumulate. Market units, legal entities, processes, agile teams, programs, and cross-functional structures. Each adds hierarchy, confusion, and friction. Decision-making slows down, and accountability blurs.

A more effective model is to align resources with business processes. Processes are inherently stable and value-creating. When people, roles, and systems are aligned with them, performance and innovation naturally improve. Complexity fades, waste decreases, and decision-making speeds up. Clarity drives creativity.

2. Minimize the number of legal units.

I see advantages to having different legal entities within a corporation in a given country, but for a single business with standard processes, we need only one legal

entity. The drawbacks are far greater, inhibiting resource utilization and restricting dynamic capabilities. Creating multiple legal entities, primarily for tax or legacy reasons, creates governance and measurement challenges. Fewer legal entities lead to better financial performance, as complexity comes at a cost.

3. Measure processes, and make all data transparent and visualized.

We can't manage what isn't measured. It is the business process performance we need to measure. We are all involved in decision-making. Thus, process value measurements should be easily accessible for all. And since business processes are equivalent to the organization, company management, process control, and business control are the same. Visualization improves decision-making and clarity, increases participation and motivation.

4. Make people who prioritize influence resources.

In some agile and other organizational frameworks, prioritizing functions (such as the Product Owner) is often disconnected from owning and managing coworkers and resources (formal leadership and the economy). We also observe a trend in which managers have a significant competence gap in subject-matter expertise compared to their coworkers, often acting primarily as coaches. Although the coaching leadership style is effective, prioritizing doesn't work well under these conditions. It should be restructured. People who prioritize must be able to influence resources. Effective management practices and transparent decision-making processes are closely linked to higher productivity. There is evidence that fewer layers, clearer spans, clearer roles, and proper authorities improve the ability to make and enforce decisions.

5. Ensure work is agile.

Agile means flexible and should not add organizational complexity. True agile is lean and is based on common sense. Read the Agile Manifesto and use what you genuinely believe in — do not introduce Agile frameworks that add an extra organizational layer, such as SAFe, as they constrain work and do not work effectively.

6. Don't track internal time.

Too much time is wasted on time reporting — data that is seldom or never analyzed or used for any good purposes unless you charge per hour. Time logging reduces job satisfaction, increases feelings of surveillance, and increases stress. Instead of time-tracking, measure outcomes and value delivered in the business processes.

7. Work in carefully selected pairs.

The most productive and cost-efficient way to work is in pairs. There are two cases. In the first case, we have two highly competent individuals working together intensively for a period, depending on the tasks. They have partly overlapping competencies, enabling them to understand each other fully and apply their expertise effectively. The other case is when a specialist and a junior person collaborate, transferring knowledge as they provide value. At Scania, we often paired senior and junior engineers.

The other option is to work in small teams, keeping each team as small as possible, since the number of communication paths increases exponentially with $n(n-1)/2$, where n is the number of team members. It is actually worse than this because each member has their own frame of reference and competence limits, and, secondly, their time is usually split rather than focused.

8. Use facilitator-led modeling workshops.

Utilize facilitator-led modeling workshops for investigative, problem-solving, and design activities, including architectural work. Professionally led co-creation workshops, where all members are physically present, working standing up, and fully engaged and enthusiastic, are by far the most effective. This is the most effective format for providing a comprehensive range of decision-support materials.

9. Use online tools to plan, lead, and control.

For time planning, leadership routines, supervision, and control, asynchronous online tools are most effective. Try to avoid unnecessary meetings that waste time. Use group meetings primarily for decision-making and to provide a basis for informed decisions.

10. Use AI wisely and widely.

Utilize AI to its fullest potential for speed, quality, knowledge, structure, writing, and illustration. Ensure the entire business process adds value through AI, not just your own one-off work. For instance, use AI to analyze process performance metrics in real time.

Organizations that master these principles won't just be more efficient — they'll be more adaptive, human, and future-ready.

The winners of tomorrow will not be the biggest or richest. They'll be the best organized.

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💬 *If you recognize the above challenges in your own organization, let's connect here or on LinkedIn — I'd be happy to exchange ideas.*

About the Author



Gunnar Östberg, Business Transformation Architect, CEO, Business Clarity.

Gunnar is an M.Sc. computer engineer with 40 years of experience in **business and IT-driven transformation**. He has worked with global giants like Ericsson and Scania, as well as nimble high-tech firms. Passionate about sound architectural principles and systems thinking, Gunnar writes to expand perspectives and deepen insight. Through his consultancy, Business Clarity, Gunnar helps organizations evolve ideas into sustainable systems and products, transforming their business

through structured, principle-based innovation. His focus areas include pragmatic architecture, business modeling, and delivering real impact.

Sources

The contents of this story are based on my absolute conviction, drawn from 40 years of experience as an employee, entrepreneur, middle manager, and senior management consultant.

They are also supported by research.

1 Align all resources to the business processes

Hammer, M. (2007). *The Process Audit*. *Harvard Business Review*, 85 (4), 111–123.

<https://hbr.org/2007/04/the-process-audit>

(Defines a method for auditing and improving business processes to align structure and performance.)

vom Brocke, J., & Rosemann, M. (eds.) (2015). *Handbook on Business Process Management 2: Strategic Alignment, Governance, People and Culture*. Springer.

<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-642-45103-4>

(Shows how aligning organizational resources to processes drives efficiency, agility, and value creation.)

Kohlbacher, M., & Grünwald, S. (2011). “Process orientation: Conceptualization and measurement.” *Business Process Management Journal*, 17 (2), 267–283.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/14637151111122347>

(Demonstrates that process orientation correlates strongly with performance and innovation.)

Sabherwal, R., Hirschheim, R., & Goles, T. (2001). “The dynamics of alignment.” *Information Systems Research*, 12 (1), 11–134.

<https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.12.1.11.9714>

(Introduces the idea of “structural alignment,” showing that an organization’s structure and resources must support its strategic mission — structure follows strategy.)

Example citations: **A business-process-centric organization improves performance and innovation** (Hammer 2007; vom Brocke & Rosemann 2015).

2 Minimize the number of legal units

McKinsey & Company. (2018). *The Costs of Complexity in Financial Institutions*.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/financial-services/our-insights/the-costs-of-complexity-in-financial-institutions>

(Shows how legal-entity complexity increases governance cost and reduces agility.)

OECD. (2017). *Complexity and Efficiency in Multinational Corporate Structures*. OECD Economics Department Working Paper.

(Analyzes efficiency losses from multi-subsidiary structures and argues for simpler corporate setups.)

Example citations: **Reducing legal entities decreases governance complexity and enhances financial performance** (McKinsey & Company 2018; OECD 2017).

3 Measure processes and make all data transparent and visualized

Kaplan, R. S., & Norton, D. P. (1992). "The Balanced Scorecard — Measures That Drive Performance." *Harvard Business Review*, 70 (1), 71–79.

<https://hbr.org/1992/01/the-balanced-scorecard-measures-that-drive-performance-2>

(Introduces performance measurement through balanced KPIs linking strategy to operations.)

Few, S. (2012). *Show Me the Numbers: Designing Tables and Graphs to Enlighten*. Analytics Press.

(Explains how visualization improves comprehension, alignment, and motivation.)

Example citations: **Transparent process measurements and visualizations foster alignment and better decision-making** (Kaplan & Norton 1992; Few 2012).

5 Ensure work is agile

Dikert, K., Paasivaara, M., & Lassenius, C. (2016). “Challenges and success factors for large-scale agile transformations.” *Journal of Systems and Software*.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jss.2016.07.006>

(Shows that large-scale frameworks add complexity and often hinder agility.)

Rigby, D. K., Sutherland, J., & Takeuchi, H. (2016). *Embracing Agile*. *Harvard Business Review*, 94 (5), 40–50.

<https://agileforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/R1605B-PDF-ENG.pdf>

(Focuses on flexibility and lean principles rather than rigid frameworks.)

Example citations: **True agile work emphasizes flexibility and lean principles over rigid frameworks** (Rigby et al. 2016; Highsmith 2009).

7 Work in carefully selected pairs

Hannay, J. E., et al. (2009). “The effectiveness of pair programming: A meta-analysis.” *Information and Software Technology*, 51 (7), 1110–1122.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infsof.2009.02.001>

(Finds that pair programming improves quality, learning, and efficiency through collaboration.)

Example citations: **Work in pairs boosts productivity and knowledge transfer while minimizing communication overhead** (Cockburn & Williams 2001; Hannay et al. 2009).

10 Use AI wisely and widely

Brynjolfsson, E., & McElheran, K. (2016). “The Rapid Adoption of Data-Driven Decision Making.” *American Economic Review*, 106 (5), 133–139.

(Shows that firms using analytics and AI for decisions outperform peers in productivity and accuracy.)

Brynjolfsson, E., et al. (2025). “Generative AI at Work: Experimental Evidence from 5,000+ Customer Support Agents.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics*.

<https://academic.oup.com/qje/article/140/2/889/7990658>

Working-paper version: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w31161>

(Empirical study showing large performance gains from generative-AI support in operations.)

Raisch, S., & Krakowski, S. (2021). “Artificial Intelligence and Management: The Automation–Augmentation Paradox.” *Academy of Management Review*, 46 (1), 192–210.

<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2018.0075>

(Explains how AI augments human reasoning and decision-making rather than replacing it.)

Example citations: **AI integration across processes enhances speed, quality, and competitive advantage** (Brynjolfsson & McElheran 2016; Raisch & Krakowski 2021).

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