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Designing the Future:  
The Transformational Role of  
Organization Design Centers of  
Excellence

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IMPACT THAT  
MATTERS**  
*since 1845*

In today's fast-paced business world, change is constant, and the ability to adapt is now a critical determinant of success. Organization design (OD) emerges as a key strategic capability that enables adaptability. However, while 92% of leaders prioritize organizational redesign, only 11% feel confident in their ability to execute it successfully (Deloitte HC Trends Report, 2021). To tackle this sustainably, businesses are increasingly building in-house OD capabilities through an OD Center of Excellence. This article explores the journey of establishing an OD CoE, examines the role it can play to transform and continuously evolve an organization, and shares best practices on how to do it right.

The critical importance of organization design (OD) is well established. Research increasingly highlights its transformative impact on accelerating growth, improving decision-making, optimizing costs, boosting innovation, and enhancing employee satisfaction.

Yet, many organizations remain stuck in legacy structures too rigid for today's fast-changing business landscape. As change accelerates, businesses need to move from steadfast to adaptable structures, making OD a continuous strategic necessity rather than a periodic obligation. To drive this shift, organizations need a dedicated role that continuously and intentionally drives this responsibility across the organization.

### **OD Center of Excellence (CoE): A strategic imperative to unlocking business goals**

At its simplest, an OD CoE is a specialized team dedicated to optimizing how a business operates, evolves, and adapts in a dynamic environment. At its core, an OD CoE focuses on seamlessly connecting business strategy with organizational capability, leveraging analytics for continuous improvement, and orchestrating high-impact design initiatives that unlock organizational potential.

By embedding this critical expertise within the organization, an OD CoE enables agility, helping the business quickly adapt to ongoing market shifts and maintain competitiveness through nimble organizational changes. It applies a systems-thinking approach, integrating adjustments across structures, processes, rewards, and people. By avoiding siloed interventions, the CoE minimizes friction, addresses root causes, and creates value for all stakeholders.

Perhaps most importantly, an OD CoE bridges the gap between the design and its user - the people of the organization. Rather than treating OD as a periodic, disruptive exercise, an OD CoE fosters continuous evolution through ongoing feedback and iterative refinements. Much like modern product design, this approach keeps the organization responsive, enhances employee experience and performance, and reduces the costs typically associated with large-scale reorganizations.

This overview explores the journey of establishing a robust OD CoE, offering practical methods, best practices and actionable insights for implementation. Let's explore how this forward-thinking approach is becoming a cornerstone of modern organizational success.



## The OD CoE Journey



### Explore

*Laying foundation and nurturing an OD Community*



### Formalize

*OD CoE is a recognized entity within the organization*



### Master

*OD CoE is integrated into the broader ecosystem*

## Building an OD CoE Step by Step

Building an OD CoE is a transformative journey that often unfolds in stages. Creating a CoE that genuinely delivers value requires patience, dedication, and intentional effort. By taking a phased approach, organizations can create a sustainable and high-impact OD capability. Organizations are often at different stages of their journey, but each phase is a crucial milestone in establishing a resilient and high-performing OD CoE. Companies typically progress through three key phases when establishing an OD CoE.

### PHASE 1: Exploration and community building

This initial phase centers around raising awareness and building foundational knowledge of OD within the organization. Typically, this starts under the leadership of HR or corporate strategy and evolves into community building. Building a network of engaged OD practitioners through informal forums, regular meetings, and collaborative platforms fosters shared learning and establishes the foundation for a unified approach to OD. This sense of community equips practitioners across the organization with the fundamental knowledge and experience needed to support initiatives and monitor organizational health within their respective areas.

However, as employees leave or transition, valuable knowledge can be lost. Additionally, since OD is not their primary responsibility, practitioners may find it challenging to address the organization's evolving needs proactively.

At this point, many organizations recognize the importance of centralizing OD knowledge and expertise. This shift ensures continuity, standardizes OD practices, and creates a dedicated team to drive the organization's development and evolution. It marks a critical turning point in advancing to the next level of organizational maturity.

#### **Practical Case 1: Setting the beat for change**

A global tech organization, for instance, recognized that equipping HR Leaders and HR Business Partners (HRBPs) with OD knowledge and skills was essential to driving meaningful organizational improvements. They launched OD bootcamps and advanced masterclasses, complemented by a community where HR professionals could exchange best practices and ideas. Over time, they realized that sustaining relevant, up-to-date knowledge and applying it at scale required a more dedicated approach. To address this, they appointed an OD Lead responsible for providing HRBPs with the right methods and tools while guiding the OD community to drive key organizational initiatives

### PHASE 2: Formalizing the OD CoE

In Phase 2, organizations recognize the need to establish a formally recognized entity within the organization, equipped with a defined mandate and delivery model to own the OD agenda. This stage marks the shift from an ad-hoc initiative to a strategically integrated function, supported by dedicated leadership commitment and resources.

Key elements should include:

- Establishing clear guidelines and metrics to drive organizational effectiveness and efficiency.
- Establishing a governance process to streamline and standardize organizational change in line with organizational principles.
- Establishing learning material and playbooks to enable OD practitioners across the company to co-drive initiatives.
- Enhancing data quality and leveraging data to generate organizational insights that can be used for strategic decision making.

Phase 2 is particularly helpful in establishing OD as a permanent capability. It focuses on standardizing and optimizing design practices, fostering a structured and cohesive approach to OD, and building a foundation for leveraging data to monitor and assess organizational health. At this stage, companies often recognize the need to shift from a reactive to a proactive approach, requiring the CoE to enhance its capabilities and adopt new, more integrated ways of collaborating with the business. This progression sets the stage for the transition to Phase 3.

#### **Practical Case 2: Establishing the foundations for lasting impact**

In line with this shift from ad-hoc to a more deliberate approach, a leading beverage company serving the EMEA region established an OD CoE following an enterprise-wide transformation. The CoE was tasked with ensuring the successful implementation of the new design, meeting key targets, and sustaining the benefits and lessons learned from the transformation. Leveraging OD digital tools, it enabled HRBPs across countries in accurately implementing the new structure and tracking progress against targets. It also established a governance process to uphold the design's principles and guidelines, while maintaining flexibility for the organization to evolve. As the organization transitioned to a stable state, the OD CoE began expanding its team and deepening its expertise, building on strong foundations and credibility to drive ongoing organizational improvement.

### PHASE 3: Mastering OD capabilities

In its most advanced phase, the OD CoE evolves into the organization's central nerve center, enabling leaders to systematically translate business vision into operational reality while building lasting organizational resilience. It goes beyond structure and processes to embed itself in the day-to-day challenges, decisions, and opportunities of the business, ensuring that organizational effectiveness is continuously optimized. It moves beyond traditional metrics, leveraging advanced analytics such as network analysis and organizational sensing to uncover deep insights into collaboration, agility, and workforce dynamics. By identifying patterns in how work actually happens, it provides data-driven recommendations that strengthen decision-making and business performance.

As OD CoEs mature, they expand their scope to not only respond to change but to anticipate and shape it. To be successful in doing so, they embed synergistic functions such as workforce management, change management, and people analytics, broadening their influence to enable holistic problem-solving and drive evolution across all components of the organization. They adopt a forward-looking 'Future of Work' perspective, applying strategic workforce planning to ensure the organization remains competitive and prepared for long-term shifts. They look outward, scanning for emerging trends in designing a skills-based organization, AI's impact on work and the workforce, and emerging organizational models, while internally identifying opportunities to strengthen capabilities and enhance ways of working.

#### **Practical Case 3: Integrating complementary capabilities**

In line with this evolving focus, organizations are increasingly integrating Organizational Design (OD) with other capabilities such as workforce management, change management, and people analytics. For instance, a global bank has leveraged advanced analytics, including network analysis, to gain deeper insights into workforce dynamics, thereby enhancing organizational agility. Similarly, a retailer in the Benelux region merged change management with OD, resulting in smoother transitions during organizational changes and improved implementation of new initiatives. Additionally, a telecommunications company integrated OD with its workforce planning and skills development capabilities, ensuring structures meet current demands while strategically developing future capabilities.

### Key success factors for establishing an impactful OD CoE

From our experience, successfully establishing an OD CoE requires focus on six key factors that will guide the journey from inception to strategic enabler.

**1. Setting the Vision:** Unlocking the full value of an OD COE requires a clear and purposeful strategy, as well a clear mandate. This begins with defining a vision that aligns with the organization's unique needs and ambitions. A company pursuing transformation goals, for example, will require a different approach than one focusing on improving efficiency. To succeed, the OD CoE must be fully integrated into the business and recognized for its strategic importance. Without a clear vision and a well-defined role, the CoE risks becoming overly operational, limiting its broader impact.

This diminished influence can lead to exclusion from critical decisions, ultimately undermining its ability to support the organization's long-term success.

#### **2. Obtaining strategic and executive sponsorship:**

Securing sponsorship from the company's leadership is essential for the CoE to effectively drive the organization's strategy and uphold its credibility. A business-driven approach, where every resource and initiative aligns with strategic priorities, ensures the CoE is perceived as a value-generating function rather than a cost center. From our experience working with CoEs we observed that those backed by C-Suite executives and strategically positioned within the company, typically have a greater impact and influence, enhancing their ability to be a value-add partner to the business. This commitment, combined with targeted leadership training, accelerates the CoE's efficiency and effectiveness, enabling it to drive sustained organizational success

**3. Aligning scope with organizational needs:** Clearly defining the CoE's role within the organization is crucial to its success. An effective OD CoE does not adhere to a one-size-fits-all approach but adapts to the evolving needs of the organization. It takes on multiple roles, depending on the specific requirements at each stage of the journey. Some of these roles may include:

- **Trainer:** building organizational design capabilities through tailored training.
- **Method Owner:** developing frameworks and toolkits to standardize approaches
- **Integrity Owner:** safeguarding organizational principles and ensuring compliance.

- **Analyst:** leveraging data to enable effective decision-making and effective management.
- **Subject-Matter-Expert:** offering on-demand expertise to address specific organization design challenges.
- **Partner:** working closely with business units to execute organization design initiatives from start to finish.
- **Driver:** identifying and executing high-impact design initiatives proactively.

Organizations must be deliberate in defining the roles they choose to take on, and ensure they align with the business's most urgent priorities.

#### 4. Positioning the OD CoE in the organization:

Companies often grapple with where to position the OD CoE within their organizational structure. We've seen CoEs placed within both HR and Strategy functions. For example, a consumer goods company housed its CoE within its Strategy Department to align more closely with its evolving operating model, while a global retailer positioned it within its HR Department to strengthen its connection to workforce insights and people strategies. While there's no universally right placement, the CoE should be positioned where it can have the greatest strategic impact, leverage the most relevant capabilities, and maintain close proximity to key stakeholders and critical relationships that enable it to drive meaningful outcomes.

#### 5. Integrating technology and data for evidence-based decisions:

Technology is a game-changer for OD CoEs, enabling deeper insights and more effective decision-making. While core HR systems provide a foundational framework for managing essential data, advanced tools are often needed to analyze organizational structures and dynamics. For example, a global financial services firm is integrating OD tools with its Human Resource Information System (HRIS) and equipping its workforce to use these tools in daily operations. This allows them to track, monitor, and measure organizational health against key criteria. Additionally, they are leveraging analytics to identify underlying issues, run simulations to assess the impact of organizational changes, and develop strategic plans for leadership continuity and talent transitions.

OD tools like Orgvue enhance workforce analysis and organizational modeling, offering powerful capabilities when integrated with core HR systems. By adopting these technologies, OD CoEs can simplify complex data, generate timely insights, and strengthen their partnership with the business to drive strategic objectives.

**6. Cultivating talent and partnerships to drive the OD CoE's success:** The success of an OD CoE does not solely depend on its strategy and a well-defined role, but on the quality and experience of its talent and its ability to forge effective partnerships.

Attracting top-tier talent with specialized skills is essential, including data analytics for driving insights, strategic stakeholder management to navigate complex organizational dynamics, compelling storytelling to influence and engage, and systems thinking to address challenges holistically. These skills are not only in high demand but also scarce, making them critical for addressing complex organizational challenges and delivering impactful results.

In addition to exceptional talent, effective partnerships within the organization are vital. Collaborating closely with leadership is key to aligning OD initiatives with the strategic direction of the organization, ensuring buy-in, and driving transformation from the top. Partnering with HRBPs, on the other hand, is crucial for understanding the talent landscape and aligning OD efforts with the evolving needs of the workforce, ensuring that people strategies are synchronized with organizational goals.

Finally, connecting with the external ecosystem offers the OD CoE opportunities to enhance capabilities such as advanced analytics, stay on top of emerging trends and continuously develop its skills, and obtaining expertise and capacity support when it is required the most.

#### **Practical Case 4: Partnering with OD experts**

An organization in the consumer industry was faced with an increasing demand for organizational design expertise, by the business. They sought to build in-house capabilities and leverage technology to enable data-driven decision-making. However, they dealt with many challenges in quickly sourcing the right talent and they did not have readily available experience with OD technologies. They partnered with a professional services provider via an Organization Design as a Service (ODaaS) type of support, and formed a joint team enabled by Orgvue to:

- Set up the design of an OD CoE
- Deploy OD methodologies, tools and best practices in co-delivering OD initiatives
- Conduct ongoing data analysis using Orgvue, to track key metrics and analyze pain points, model future state scenarios and assess impact, and provide recommendations for improvements
- Provide trainings to HRBPs to embed OD into their daily work

Through this hands-on approach, the organization was able to address ongoing needs while ensuring they simultaneously built long-term in-house OD expertise to drive continuous improvement.

## Contact us for expertise and tools

If you are ready to discuss your ambitions, explore how others have successfully navigated this path, or require support in setting up and managing your OD capabilities, we have the expertise and tools to assist you. Reach out to learn more about how we can help tailor strategies that align with your organization's unique goals, ensuring you are well-equipped for future challenges.

## End notes:

- [Orgvue platform | Solve your strategic business challenge | Orgvue](#)
- [2021 Global Human Capital Trends | Deloitte Insights](#)
- [Linking Organizational Design and Workforce Planning | Deloitte US](#)
- [Enterprise Adtability | Deloitte US](#)
- [Organization Network Analysis \(ONA\) | Deloitte US](#)

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