



# Opportunity in Crisis:

Survival & Success Through  
Strategic Organization Design

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# Leading in Times of Crisis

The coronavirus pandemic upended the world as we know it. Beyond the devastating loss of health and human life, COVID-19 forced millions of people to isolate themselves from family, friends and their communities, working remotely or not at all. Businesses faced an equally difficult position. Around the globe, operations screeched to an unexpected stop, millions of people were laid off, and the world economy experienced enormous disruption.



During times of crisis – be it COVID-19 or another event – it is vital that organizations examine their current strategies and determine what actions they must take to survive. Leaders may be tempted to wait until the crisis has passed to take stock of their organization and determine how to move forward, but this can leave them dangerously behind the competition. Instead, we believe leaders should take strategic action during a crisis to prepare their companies to face new realities and confront challenges. By continuing work on critical objectives, organizations can improve their outcomes and help provide stability for their employees and the customers who depend on them.

In the next few pages, you'll learn how to adjust and realign your organization in response to a crisis using strategic organization design and key building blocks from our book, [Mastering the Cube: Overcoming Stumbling Blocks and Building an Organization that Works](#). You'll also learn methods for continuing critical work, even when your team cannot meet face-to-face.



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# The Power of Strategic Organization Design

When facing a major disruption, leaders must ask themselves where they want to be after the crisis has passed and determine a clear strategy to achieve those goals, whether that means making strategic reductions or preparing for growth. By taking the right actions during a crisis, your organization will be better positioned to meet its objectives.

Irrespective of whether your organization is in growth or survival mode, having a clear organization design will be key to accomplishing your objectives. Strategic organization design means examining all elements of the organization, connecting choices and capabilities to strategies, and ensuring alignment within the leadership team.

## Through strategic organization design, you can:

- Capitalize on your team's capabilities
- Adjust to market-driven complexities, and
- Optimize your resources (whether people, technologies, or finances)

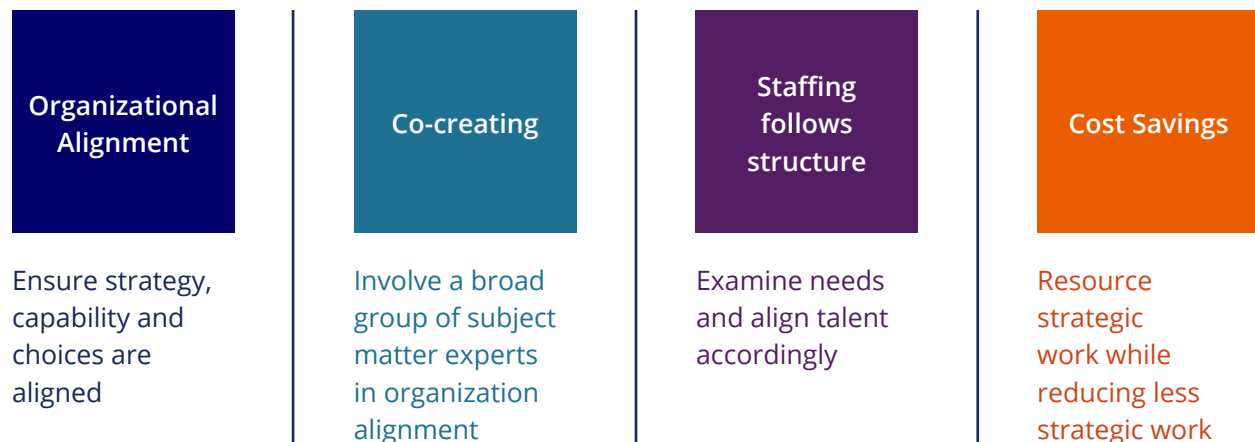
Organization design is especially important during a crisis. It allows leaders to appropriately adjust and realign the organization in response to ever-changing marketplace and/or environmental conditions. Successful organization design ensures your company can execute certain work activities effectively if they are tied to strategy, while completing other work activities efficiently if they are necessary, but do not effectuate the organization's strategic initiatives.

Face-to-face interaction between teammates is critical during the strategic design process. Working together promotes in-depth discussion and spontaneous brainstorming. It creates an environment where body language and subtle cues can become integral to the discussion and its meaning. In-person interaction is always optimal, but as we'll discuss later, technology has removed many limitations when meeting face-to-face is not an option.

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# Building Blocks of Success

In *Mastering the Cube*, we explore key building blocks that are vital for successful organization design. We've outlined four areas here that are essential in times of economic crisis:



- 1. Organizational alignment:** Ensure that you have a clear strategy – that you know what differentiates you in the marketplace – and that you have the capabilities to support that strategy. All of your organization systems: your work processes, structure and governance, information and metrics, people and rewards, continuous improvement and leadership and culture should be aligned to the strategy. When strategy, capabilities and choices are aligned, you can deliver winning marketplace results.
- 2. Co-creation:** We support and embrace what we help create, thus involving a broad group of leaders and subject matter experts in organization alignment efforts is crucial. Take the opportunity to assemble a broad team of internal, strategic-minded subject matter experts that understand your organization's inner workings and can bring new perspectives, ideas and strengths to the table.

During a crisis, day-to-day work may have slowed, providing your team with the bandwidth to focus on strategic initiatives. Utilize this time to focus on the work bestselling author Stephen R. Covey referred to as not urgent, but important – the long-term planning and strategy development that allows organizations to differentiate themselves and thrive. This work often gets pushed by the wayside when leaders are forced to focus on what Covey described as the onslaught of “urgent and important” work – deadline-driven projects and daily tasks that leave

little time for strategic planning. By taking this time to collaborate on critical, long-term initiatives with a range of experts, you'll be able to chart a clear course for the future.

**3. Staffing follows structure.** In good times and bad, organizations should plan their ideal design and then determine what talent is needed. Unfortunately, too many organizations do just the opposite—they attempt to fit people into positions that they just don't need or that don't deliver the necessary results. It is also important to remember that taking staffing actions could fundamentally alter an organization's operations and could even have unintended consequences, such as disrupting multiple divisions in an organization. Use this time to review how organizational change will impact your operations.

Ways of working have changed forever for most organizations post COVID-19. How your organization prepares for this and proactively positions itself will be a differentiator in the marketplace. Companies must reevaluate how to manage work activities in an environment where both employee and customer expectations have changed; where employees are used to working remotely with increased autonomy and customers expect seamless digital transactions.

**4. Cost savings through resourcing strategic work while reducing less strategic work.** During a major disruption, it's important to assess areas of non-strategic work for possible reductions, while at the same time ensuring that you preserve and protect your organization's key objectives. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, Apple closed storefronts around the world. But what the tech company didn't stop was product design and launches. Apple continued to focus on what mattered most strategically to its long-term sustainability: product design.

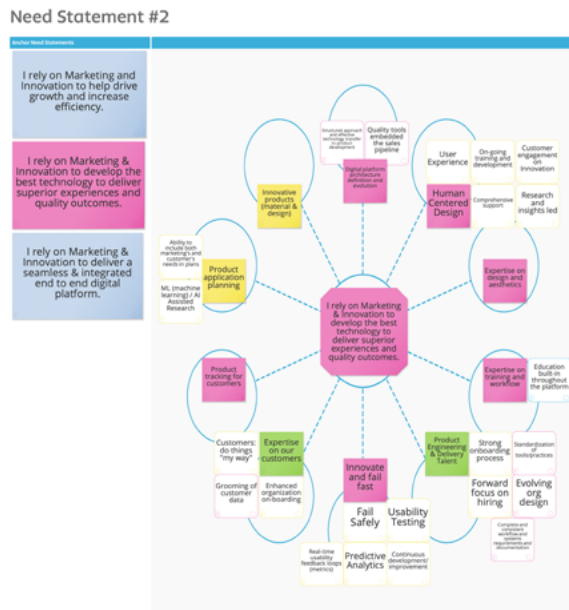
During a crisis, executives should reduce unnecessary areas while strengthening critical areas. Cutting across the board to maintain a sense of fairness could weaken the overall organization. Focus attention and resources on strategic work and reduce less strategic work.



# Find New Ways to Move Critical Work Forward

Finding a change partner to help guide your team through a major disruption can be the key to a successful long-term outcome. Using the proven [AlignOrg Method](#), we help guide teams through strategic conversations, long-term planning and organizational redesigns.

## CAPTURE, ORGANIZE AND PRIORITIZE IDEAS



## TURN YOUR IDEAS INTO DIFFERENTIATED DESIGNS



AlignOrg Solutions has invested in adapting our approach so we can facilitate organization redesigns in situations like COVID-19, when organizations are forced to work remotely. For times when in-person facilitation isn't possible, organizations can work virtually with us to move strategic organization transformation forward.

Our [Virtual Facilitation Platform](#) (VFP) capitalizes on videoconferencing technology coupled with interactive proprietary strategic design methodologies that help

business leaders carry out highly successful strategic designs in spite of not being face-to-face. Virtually facilitated design sessions utilize robust technology that allow your team to engage in interactive discussions, brainstorming sessions and breakout meetings. You can create subgroups for in-depth planning and create virtual spaces where your team can offer suggestions, provide feedback and coalesce around ideas. Real work can take place when virtual facilitation is combined with the right tools.

When face-to-face facilitation isn't possible, organizations can utilize our approach to strategic organization transformation in a virtual environment.

- Our facilitation process uses AlignOrg Solutions' robust tools and methodology
- Participants can join from anywhere using a computer with internet access
- Global teams can convene quickly, with flexibility in scheduling
- Our platform goes beyond video conferencing, allowing for dynamic on-screen partnering, brainstorming, and strategy development

If your team can't meet in-person due to a crisis, limited travel or scheduling ability, our proven method coupled with advanced interactive technology will guide your organization through the complex process of organization design.





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# Seeing Light Through the Storm

The COVID-19 crisis has disrupted business as we know it, but it isn't the first major economic disruption we've faced, and it won't be the last. The decisions you make today will determine what your organization looks like after the crisis is over. Instead of sitting by and waiting for the storm to pass, leaders should be examining their organizations and preparing to push strategic initiatives forward. It is through strategic organization transformation that leaders can position their company to come out ahead, ready to confront new realities and conquer challenges.



You don't have to face these difficult discussions or make these decisions without a process. Too much hangs in the balance. These are the times when a proven approach, a robust tool set and experienced facilitators can help take tough strategic decisions to the next level and ensure that organizational performance is secured now and into the future. With the right tools and the right approach, your organization can emerge from disruption stronger than before.

*AlignOrg Solutions' Virtual Facilitation Platform allowed us to move critical organization design work forward with meaningful group participation and without delay while we worked remotely.*

*Connecting by video enabled us to have valuable and engaging conversations to support the work. The virtual collaboration tools allowed us to work together effectively in large groups and in smaller breaks-outs, with the added benefit of being able to return to the material to review and reflect between working sessions.*

Heidi Meyer | Sr. Director  
Human Resources, Diabetes Group | Medtronic



*We were all set to go with our face-to-face organization design workshop when the coronavirus struck, putting a swift end to those plans.*

*We spoke to AlignOrg Solutions, and they confirmed that we could proceed with our workshops remotely. The facilitation and methodology used by the AlignOrg Solutions team was excellent. The virtual technologies were easy to navigate and created a seamless experience, enabling us to interact and complete activities in small groups just as if we were in a face-to face session.*

**Lynn Vike | Senior HR Director, Business Partner**  
**Align Technology, Inc. (Invisalign®)**

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# Case Study: Strategic Organization Design in Action

Before COVID-19 impacted businesses across globe, a large global corporation contacted AlignOrg Solutions and requested we help improve their strategic organization design. The process began in December 2019, just a few months before the pandemic disrupted the world. This company was at a crossroads, having made decisions that resulted in revenue loss and made the organization unprofitable. We were asked to help analyze the situation and develop a new strategic plan to move the company forward.



Prior to the pandemic, we were meeting in-person for these high-impact discussions. Just as the momentum was growing, COVID-19 brought all face-to-face design team work to a halt. This company's leadership worried that progress would be lost but was unsure how – or if – they could resume work during the pandemic. We reassured them that it was not time to stop work on their critical objectives — on the contrary, it was time to push on the gas. We began meeting virtually using robust meeting technology, which allowed us to facilitate design workshops and advance the organization's turnaround. Today, the company's blueprint for future success is in place and they are set to act as economic conditions return to normal.

AlignOrg Solutions is a consulting firm that specializes in helping clients clarify strategy, design and align organization systems and choices, and lead transformational change to drive growth and marketplace success. Using our powerful methodology and a flexible approach that engages leaders and employees in decision making, we assist many of the most well-respected and successful organizations around the world with achieving real, transformational change. The expertise we bring is grounded in the practical realities of everyday business challenges and is designed to create insight and action.

To learn more about AlignOrg Solutions and our work and thinking, please visit [www.alignorg.com](http://www.alignorg.com).

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