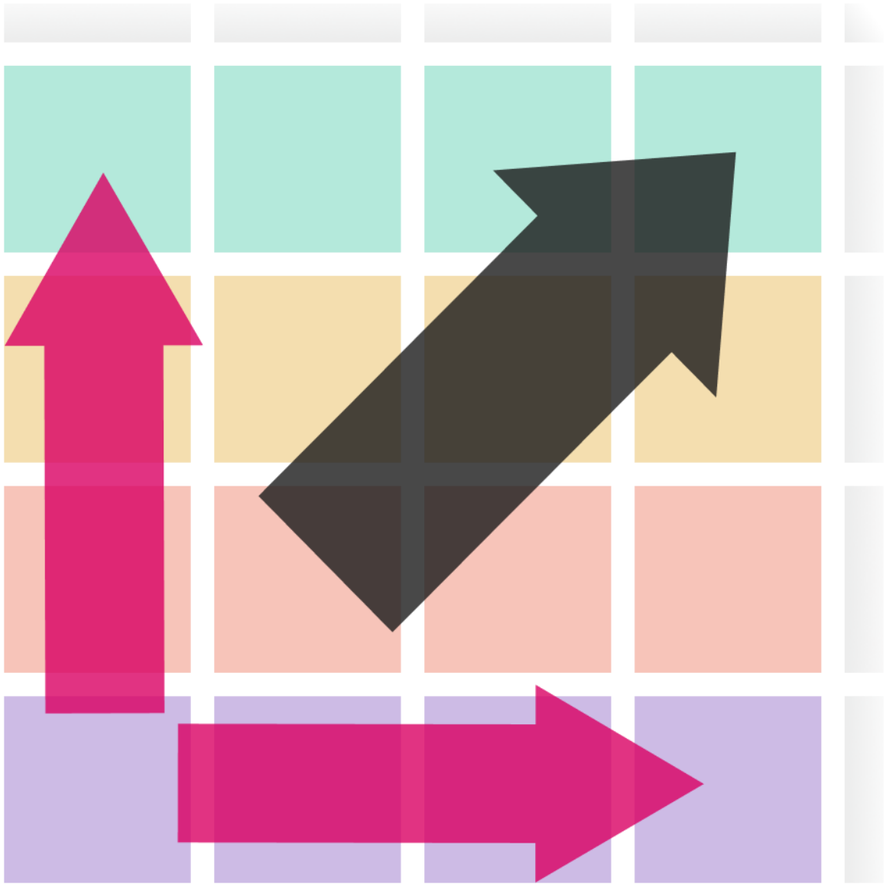
Org Topologies™

STRATEGIC ORG DESIGN: THE PRIMER



Org Topologies™ (OT) is the first human-centric plus AI-friendly organizational change approach.

It's human-centric because OT is based on the psychology of change, recognizing that people have to *own* – not rent – their change. And because it's *easy*, *visual*, and *engaging* for people to *map, assess, design*, and *elevate* their org structures.

It's AI-friendly because OT assumes from the start that AI will be a cornerstone of the workforce and invites us to design organizations leveraging its power.

OT *elevates* organizations to be fit for purpose and is wide open: OT applies to Farms and Pharma. Software and Services. Consulting and Construction.

Org Topologies prepares organizations for the future by getting change going today. This is the new world of *strategic* org design.

2025 Edition

Org Topologies™
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Craig Larman
Roland Flemm

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A man walks into a bar...

> No, we'll save that for the book we're writing.

What you're reading is a 25-page Primer on Org Topologies.

Turn this page. There is nothing else to read here.

Yours,
Alexey, Craig, Roland

February 2025

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Management Summary

Org Design Drives Performance

Leaders set business objectives and define strategies to achieve them, yet often lack the tools to sustainably drive organizational performance. The good news is that this *can* be learned and thoughtfully applied today at organizations. Org Topologies (OT) will help you get the desired change going.

How do you define and successfully lead the change that's right for your organization? Here's a key point: Different *goals*—rapid delivery, global adaptability, resource optimization, or amplified innovation—require different and tailored org designs. As a leader, you *can* define that goal and use the approach offered here to evolve your organization in the chosen direction. What scope? Org Topologies works at the level of the entire organization or parts (divisions, groups, teams).

You may wonder: Why another approach? And you would be right, as the market is full of canned change 'solutions.' OT offers a *custom* path by inviting you and your people to *create* your change, not consuming common yet often mediocre ideas.

Why does change fail so often? First, existing solutions may seem suitable when analyzed superficially but, in fact, don't fit your unique context. Second—an underappreciated factor behind failed change—people, when not *owning* the change ideas, won't fully accept them and won't go the extra mile to make them work. As a result, the promised benefits of change often remain unfulfilled despite all the wasted resources and opportunities.

OT helps to overcome those significant change risks by making it possible for people to visualize, discuss, understand, and finally *shape the* change that's fit for *their* purpose.

Strategic Org Design

Org Topologies, being a *strategic org design system*, helps you align all the moving pieces so that your (1) business strategy, (2) organizational goals, and (3) change process work together cohesively to drive the desired organizational performance.

The OT toolset equips leaders to:

- Visualize and map the current organization at the level of divisions, groups, teams, and individuals.
- Evaluate and highlight areas where the org structure supports or hinders performance.
- Address the critical questions: What is strategically important now versus long-term? What requires immediate focus, and what can wait?
- Create a shared vision of organizational change and define incremental low-risk steps towards the chosen direction.
- Drive systemic, transparent, and lasting change while maintaining operational momentum and flexibility.
- Identify where AI will best support an org goal and business objective.

Leaders, powered by Org Topologies, can provide a lasting competitive advantage to their organizations by paving a systematic, well-designed path to sustainable change.

Benefits of Org Topologies

In general, OT helps organizations to *get change going* by offering them a systemic change management method that allows to:

1. Discover options to improve the performance of product development and service organizations.
2. Learn to apply long-term optimizations over short-term quick fixes.
3. Define the North Star for organizational development, ensure that it stays fit for purpose.
4. Have the tools to assess, monitor, and progress toward a target state.
5. Establish a shared language to communicate organizational development and engage everybody in the change.
6. Prevent costly reorganizations, through design experiments and continuous improvements.
7. Own the change and provide clarity on the target org design and the reasons for change.
8. Make org design one of the critical managerial tools to gain a competitive advantage.

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Why Org Topologies?

The Hidden Complexities of Org Change

When new ways are layered onto existing elements without addressing deeper organizational patterns, the result is often *increased complexity* rather than *improved performance*. Also, people learn new terminology and attend training sessions, but fundamental behaviors remain unchanged. This creates frustration at all levels as people experience the burden of change without seeing meaningful benefits.

Additionally, many change initiatives focus too narrowly on individual teams while missing the bigger picture. A single high-performing team can't deliver its full potential if surrounding structures and processes remain unchanged. True organizational impact requires alignment across all levels—from the organization's strategic decisions to HR and Finance policies, from group structures to how teams collaborate daily.

Real change happens when everyone in the organization understands their role in the transformation and sees how improved organizational design can make their work more effective and meaningful at the global organizational level.

What's new in the 2025 Edition

The updated Org Topologies map—represented and analyzed on the next page in detail—aims to enhance clarity, broaden applicability from product development to service organizations, and support modern organizational needs such as the adoption of AI. The terminology has been simplified, the visual design refined, and new archetypes for scalable capabilities have been introduced.

The new version enables the support for multiple organizational optimizing goals (e.g. speed, adaptability, or innovation), providing a more versatile framework for strategic org design. It is also backward compatible with the previous version.

One important change is the license. The Org Topologies Primer 2025 is made available under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International also known as CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Mapping Org Design with Org Topologies

Org Topologies offers a mapping technique consisting of:

1. Two *dimensions* of org design
2. Four *organizational characteristics*
3. Sixteen *archetypes* within four groups
4. Three distinctive organizational *topologies*

Applying real change with the MADE method

The change process powered by Org Topologies includes four high-level steps:

1. *Map* the ecosystem “as is”
2. *Assess* the ecosystem “as is”
3. *Design* the ecosystem “to be”
4. *Elevate* the ecosystem from “as is” toward “to be”

Mapping and Assessing equips change agents with a visual tool to study the current conditions. This allows seeing the possible misfit between the org design and the anticipated organizational capabilities it needs to achieve its business objectives. OT empowers change agents to drive change with a common aligned understanding and language – key ingredients in successful change.

Designing and Elevating entails exploring options for org designs that are more fit for purpose, and implementing them. Moving the organization towards the chosen path is enabled by Elevating Katas™ — a set of principles, guides, and experiments to be studied and applied within the org context to get change going.



The Org Topologies Map

Language of Org Design

An *archetype* is a common pattern for how an organizational unit is structured and operates, such as a cross-functional team that delivers end-to-end. Each of the 16 archetypes on the OT map has distinct characteristics. They have short names ("CAPS-1", "WHOLE-3",...), which creates a common org design language, enabling change agents to accurately describe both the current state and the desired future state of their organization with shared understanding.

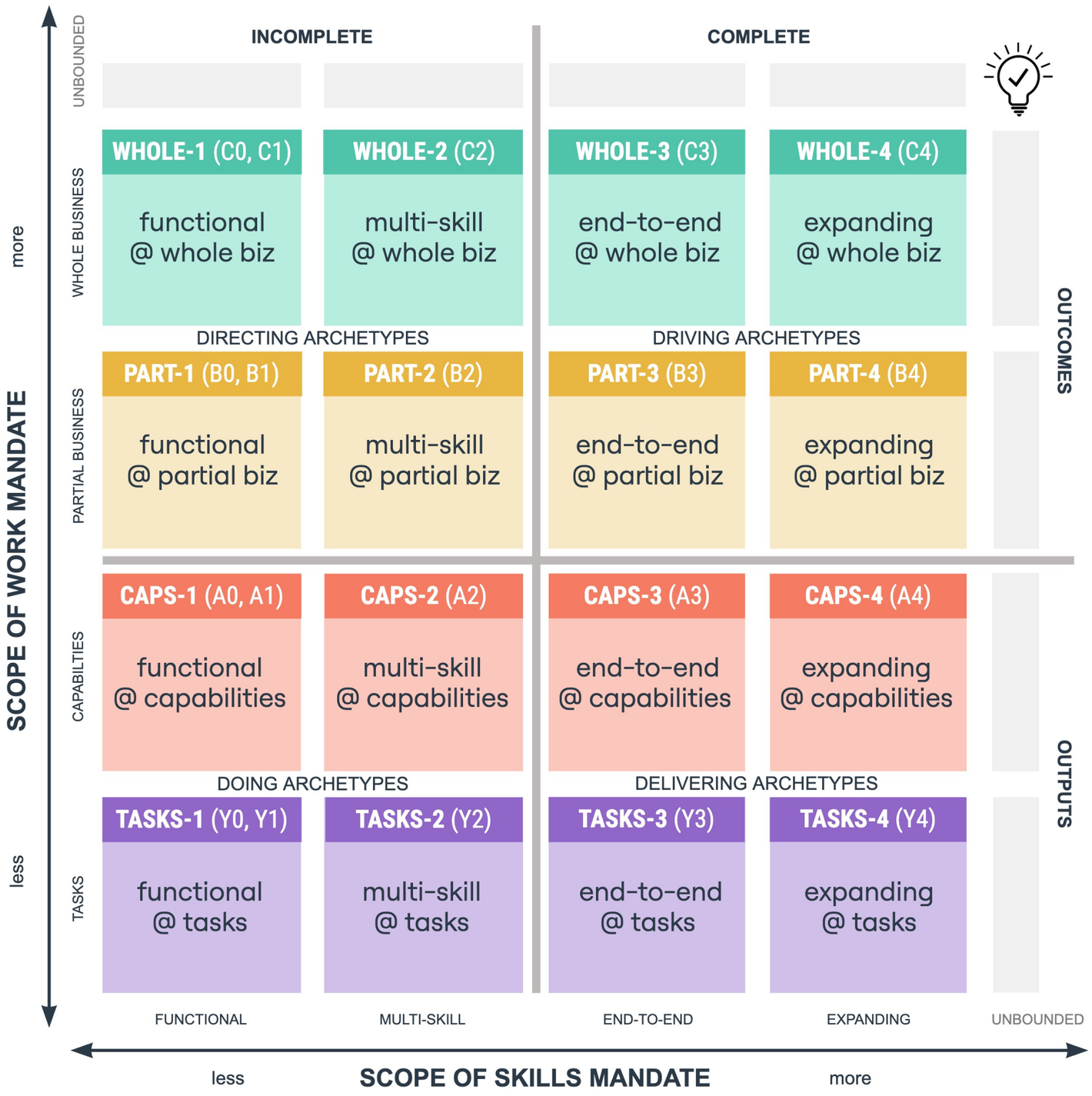
This means some new terms – logical, easy to learn, and based on the visual map – to understand and communicate any organizational building block.

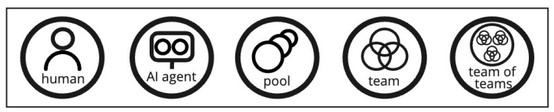
"Most of our teams are CAPS-2—multi-skilled yet incomplete, lacking certain capabilities. There are also functional TASKS-1 parties supporting our CAPS-2 teams. This creates dependencies and challenges that are managed by CAPS-1 and PART-1 groups..."

These few sentences convey a wealth of information! They describe an *ecosystem*, allowing us to grasp its dynamics holistically, recognize existing challenges, and begin a meaningful conversation about organizational improvement.

An OT ecosystem includes the structure or configuration of an organization's archetypes and other components—departments, groups, teams, functions, and the relationships among them. The OT approach enables us to visualize, categorize, and then compare and contrast ecosystems with the purpose of improving any organization.

Org Topologies introduces this simple but powerful language to clarify organizational development without resorting to "agile" or other framework-specific jargon. This makes it easier to see things as they are, bringing together specialists from different backgrounds and facilitating open, unambiguous discussions about the current situation and the next steps.







Horizontal Dimension of Org Design: Skills Mandate

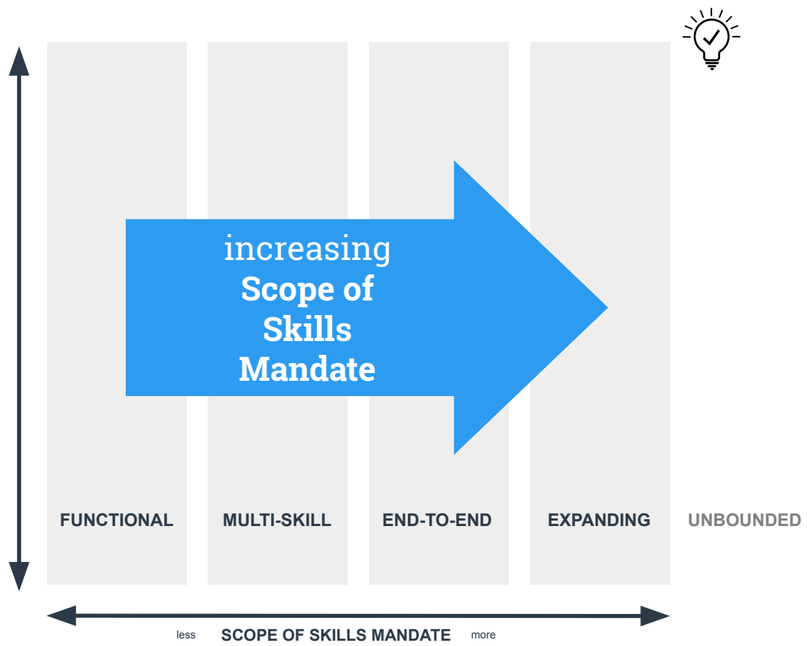
The Horizontal Axis

The horizontal dimension represents the *scope of skills mandate* that is *given* to an organizational unit. This corresponds to the level of autonomy a unit has in delivering items of work. The more rightward an organizational unit is on the map, the more that unit can quickly deliver without dependencies, and so the better the flow of value delivery.

To make a connection to the popular software development approach *Scrum*, in that model, the horizontal axis is the increasing completeness of the *Definition of Done*.

In economic terms, this axis represents the *transaction costs* (a.k.a. overhead costs) to deliver value (*decreasing* from left to right!), and with that, how much waste from concept to cash.

The lightbulb 💡 in the top-right corner symbolizes the *real* problem to solve. The more capabilities the units have, the closer they are to the real problem, and the easier it is for them to create a *skillful* solution. Note that to start solving the real problem, progress along only the horizontal axis is not enough.



Five Horizontal Levels

From left to right:

1. **Functional Units** are individuals and groups specializing in a functional area, often resulting in the creation of functional groups (or departments). Example: Movie Costume Department. To produce value, work needs to be specified and handed over to each of the specific individuals who contribute partial steps to the end-to-end solution. The hand-offs and information scatter increase the need for coordination, resulting in slow delivery and high process waste.

2. **Multi-Skill Units** (cross-functional teams) provide more flow and responsiveness than Functional Units. Example: Surgical Team of doctors and nurses. Multi-skill Units are *incomplete*, meaning they do not contain all the skills required to deliver value end-to-end. They co-exist with functional units and other teams on whom they depend to deliver complete value. Example: The Surgical Team relying on Post-Op Care Team, and both together needed for a complete service for the patient.

3. **End-to-End Units** independently do everything to deliver complete value to customers and thus have no dependencies. Example: Software Feature Team. This results in much faster flow, more responsiveness, shorter and stronger feedback cycles from customer to creator (since there are no middlemen), and less process waste. That usually leads to happier workers and customers.

4. **Expanding Units** are end-to-end units with the *mandate* to acquire new skills when needed. Example: Special-Forces Military Team. Such teams need to continuously learn when preparing for new missions. Expanding Units keep learning whatever is needed to stay end-to-end capable over time.

5. **Unbounded**. An Expanding Unit learns whatever they need to *get the job done*. In contrast, Unbounded Units have the mandate to *learn anything for unbounded exploration*. This may seem unusual today, but with AI traditional limitations vanish, so who knows where future groups can go?

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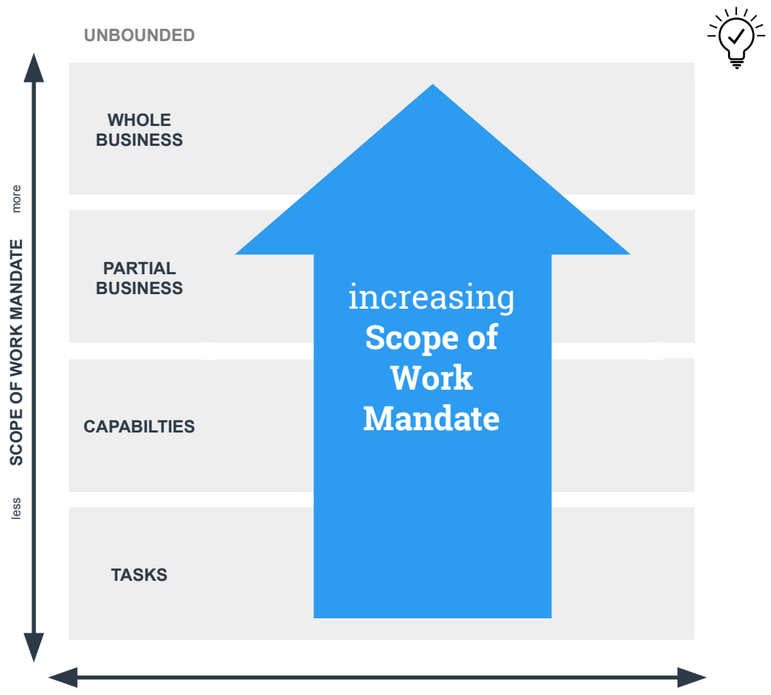
Vertical Dimension of Org Design: Work Mandate

The Vertical Axis

Whereas the horizontal axis is the scope of *skills* mandate, the vertical represents the scope of *work* mandate given to organizational units. That determines how units collaborate, learn, and share work. The higher a unit is on the map, the bigger is its field of play. At the highest levels, the scope of work of different units overlaps, motivating them to learn to co-own and work as one super unit – "Team-of-Teams".

In economic terms, this axis represents the *switching costs* to work on something different (decreasing from bottom to top), and, therefore how easy it is for the whole organization to switch direction, ideally driven by feedback, innovation, competition, or strategic changes.

The larger the scope of work the units own, the closer they are to holistically understanding and solving real problems.



Five Vertical Levels

From Bottom to top:

1. Tasks Focus: Units work on the narrowest scope of work. Example: A Sous-Chef preparing ingredients, or a visual designer sketching a wireframe. As input, they receive fine-grained tasks that match their expertise ("chop onions", "design graphic"). It's an org design decision to limit their mandate, even though they may be capable of learning and doing more.

2. Capabilities Focus: Units work on a full "capability" within a product or service. Example: Insurance Claims-Processing Group. For products, a capability is often called a *feature* or *function*. For services, it's also called a *service element*. The unit name usually signals the capability: Surgical Team, Engine Team, Web Search Team, and so on. Common consequences include silo thinking and local optimizations.

3. Partial-Business Focus: Units work on a particular business vertical, clearly separated from the other areas. Example: Uber Ride versus Uber Eats, two separate profit centers within a single company. A key characteristic of partial-business units (e.g. all Teams within Uber Ride) is cross-team collaboration and learning because they are closely involved in business success or failure and so care about *outcomes*. The need for close collaboration between teams at this level usually leads to organizational simplification.

4. Whole-Business Focus: Units work and collaborate on whole-business problems and customer value. Example: Two-person Instagram-like startup. There is no permanent separation inside the unit, such as business verticals, sub-products, or alike. At a larger scale, Teams may have a short-term focus but are not stuck there.

5. Unbounded: This level refers to a state where units go where they want to explore new ideas to satisfy undiscovered customer needs, possibly from unknown markets. And they learn whatever they need. Example: A startup, such as a failing *games* company who kept pivoting until they found a product that succeeded, in their case, the *collaboration* tool Slack.

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Four Organizational Characteristics

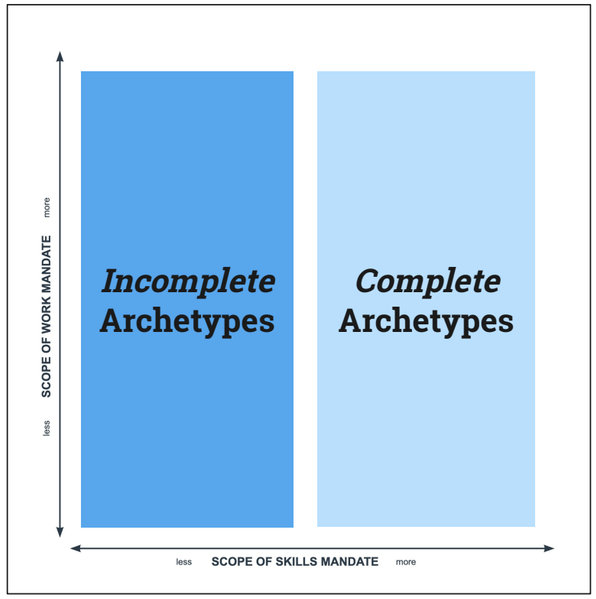
Incomplete versus Complete Archetypes

In certain organizational designs, individuals are viewed primarily as “resource units” assigned to specific tasks. These archetypes create partial solutions and rely on “thinkers and planners” in other archetypes that *coordinate and prepare work* to ensure full utilization of the “resources”.

This perspective—often implicit—can be made explicit and visual with Org Topologies mapping.

These archetypes are *incomplete* because they require other archetypes to deliver customer value collectively. Incompleteness arises whenever an organizational unit holds only part of the skills or does not have the mandate to apply all the skills needed to serve customers. By contrast, *complete* archetypes can independently deliver customer value without depending on other archetypes. Members of these archetypes typically focus on “value” and emphasize crucial concepts like “outcome” and “flow.”

One consequence of an org design with complete archetypes is that they can become independently operating silos. Whether that’s a virtue or vice depends.

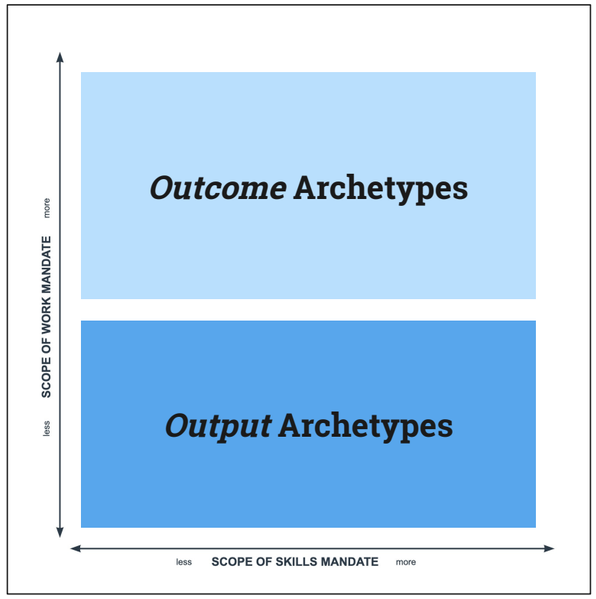


Output versus Outcome Archetypes

There is a well-known management principle of *maximizing outcomes while minimizing outputs*.

Outputs—such as number of surgeries, amount of software features, number of completed design documents, or percentage of closed insurance claims—are relatively straightforward leading metrics. However, more output does not mean more outcomes. In fact, more output usually means more cost or investment, which can lower profit (an outcome). Investing to increase outcomes (healthy people, profit) is justified; ‘investing’ to increase output is suspect.

So, an archetype can be output or outcome-oriented. For an organizational unit to deliver outcomes, it needs to work in a higher-level business context, as seen on the OT map.



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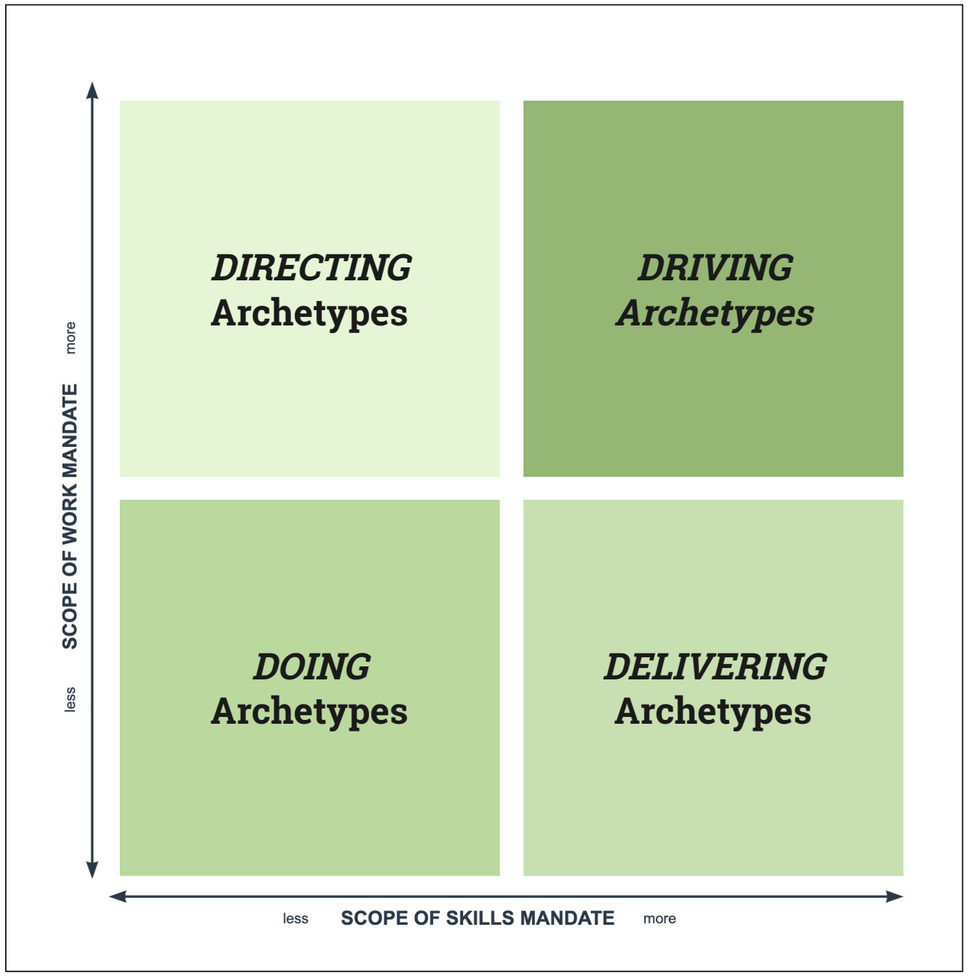
Four Archetype Groups

Directing Archetypes

This quadrant represents *directing* archetypes that oversee the higher scope of work and lack the capabilities to create customer value. They design, coordinate, and essentially *speculate* on the value by making plans and writing specs to be handed off to other archetypes that can turn concepts into cash. Example: The Project Manager is responsible for planning and allocating resources to meet a project's deadline but does not participate in the actual creation of value.

Doing Archetypes

People working in this quadrant of *doing* archetypes cannot independently see "the whole" and cannot create end-to-end customer value. They need to rely on external planners and coordinators (directing archetypes), and other doing-archetype units (other limited specialists) to deliver value. Example: The Sous-Chef in a restaurant who reports to the Head Chef and has many tactical responsibilities.



Delivering Archetypes

This quadrant of *delivering* archetypes represents work units (people, groups, teams, AI agents) capable of delivering value but only within a *narrow scope of work*. Because of that, these archetypes become siloed and may deliver the 'wrong' value. They lack the big picture and flexibility to change direction dramatically and must rely on directive archetypes for value delivery. Example: The Search Team in an E-Commerce software platform.

Driving Archetypes

This is *not* 'driving' others. Imagine a car with passengers, any one of whom can drive, who together decide where they want to go, drive and arrive, and then go on. These *driving* archetypes are capable of understanding, creating, and delivering customer value in its broadest sense. That's where directing, doing, and delivering come together. These archetypes can grasp the concept of business objectives or end-to-end customer journeys and deliver upon them jointly thanks to an overlapping, shared scope of work and a broad skills mandate. Example: A three-person startup or five teams within a Team-of-Teams.

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Org Design Fit for Purpose

Strategic Org Design

Something important not every leader knows: (1) different org designs can have different *goals* (adaptiveness, flow, …), (2) organizational goal can help or hinder a *business objective* (market share, profit, …), (3) leaders can and should deliberately design an organization to be fit for purpose: that is, the org design goal (e.g. "adaptive") should align with and influence the business objective (e.g. "profit").

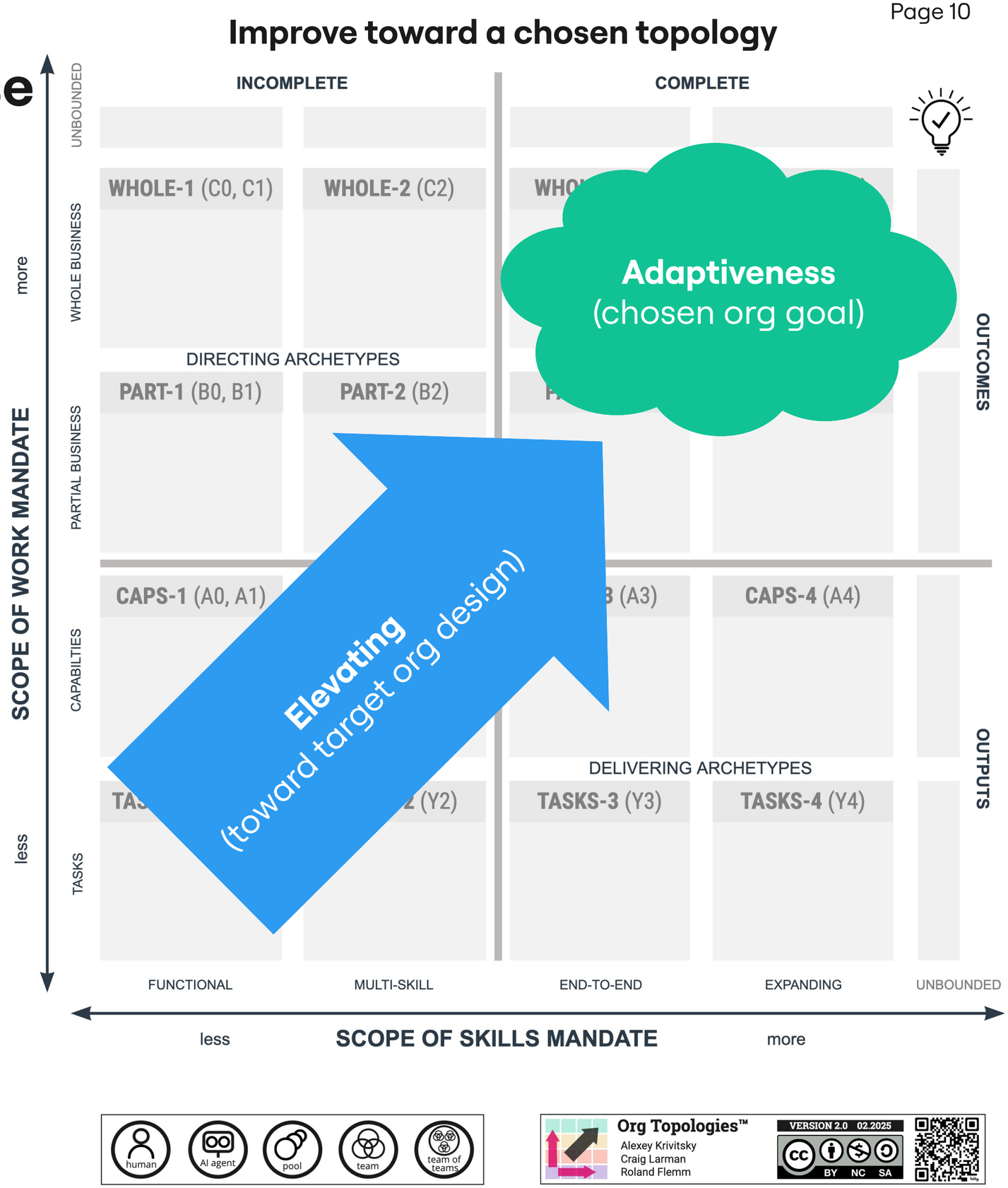
This is *strategic* org design in which every organizational element—from structures to career paths to policies to processes—is intentionally decided and aligned so that each part reinforces the others to be fit for purpose ("the org goal is high adaptiveness to support profit growth").

This approach contrasts sharply with adopting a pre-existing framework that promises to "solve your problems." And it contrasts with the idea of senior management only defining business objectives; in strategic org design, leaders understand and design the details of their internal organization to be fit for purpose. They align the external (business objective) and internal (org design).

Horizontal & Vertical Progress on the Map

The map on the right is for an organization with the business objective to increase market share in a new market. What org goal will likely support this? Leadership decides that in this unfamiliar market they need lots of customer interaction, learning, and, most of all, *adaptiveness* (easy change) to discover opportunities and grow.

They decide on an org design where teams work on the *whole business challenge*. This requires them to move vertically up the map by expanding their *scope of work*. And it requires them to expand their expertise, their *scope of skill,* moving horizontally to the right on the map.



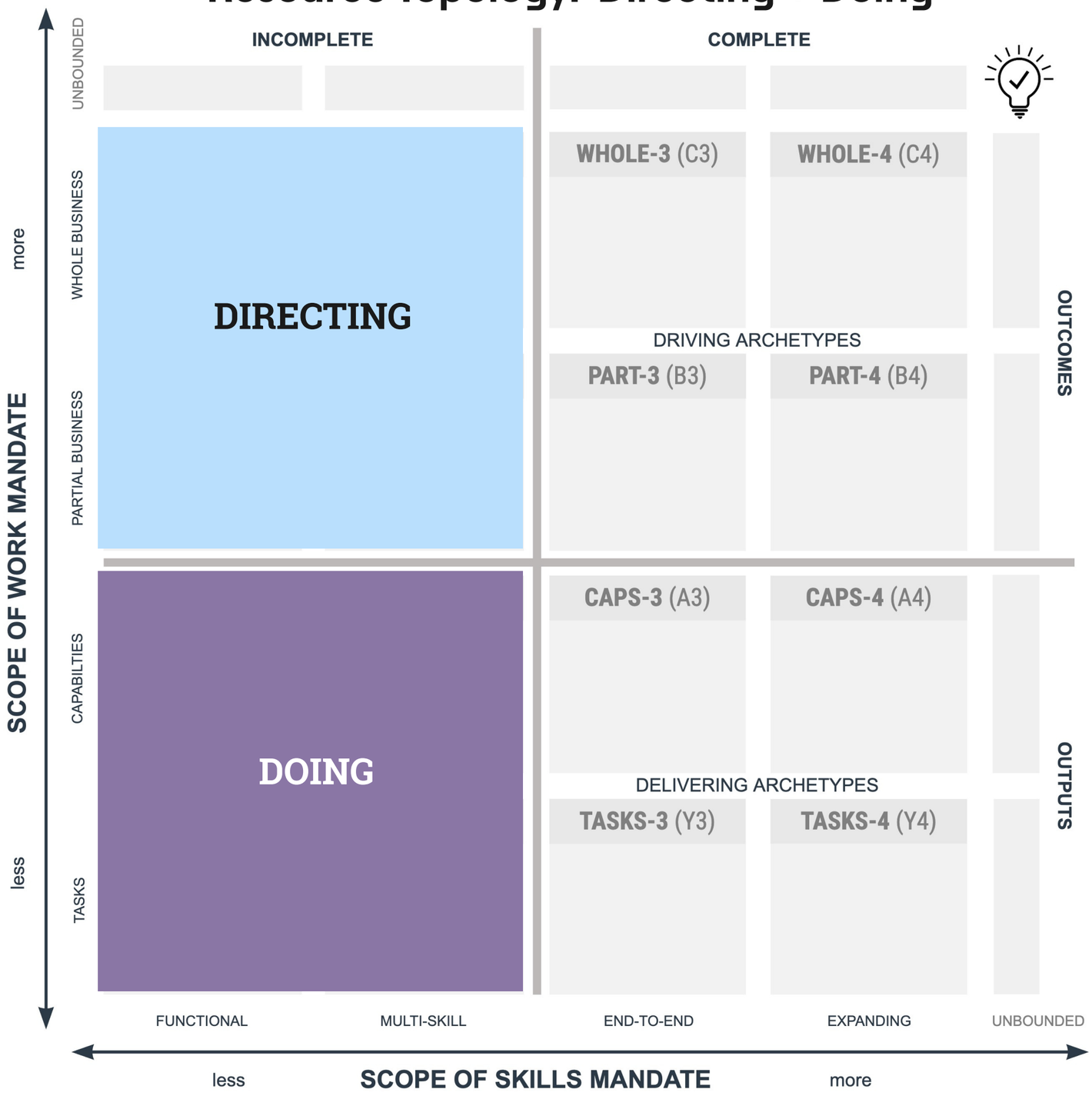
Resource Topology

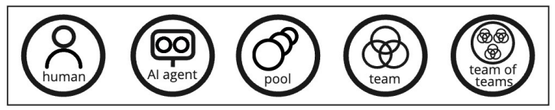
There are three common Org Topologies to know, starting with: The *Resource* Topology—a topology characterized by frozen functional archetypes specialized in one domain. Its purpose is to ensure that each unit is 100% utilized (i.e. resource utilization). It is seen in "resource management" approaches where "resource managers" (or project managers) are responsible for planning and monitoring resource allocation and utilization.

In this topology, the value-creation work takes place among the Doing Archetypes in the lower left quadrant. However, none of these can independently produce end-to-end customer value. They depend on each other due to narrow specialization. Additionally, they lack a clear and holistic understanding of customer value, as their work mandate focuses solely on specific tasks or capabilities.

The Directing Archetypes in the upper left quadrant treat the Doing Archetypes as "resources," matching skill demand with skill supply. The Delivery Archetypes do not participate in high-level discovery due to 'efficiency' justifications. Consequently, analysis in the form of detailed specifications (a film Wardrobe Breakdown, a software Requirement Spec) are handed over for implementation. This topology requires traditional project management with significant upfront planning and estimation, and frequent monitoring and replanning in cases of high variability.

Learning in this topology is largely confined to improving existing skills rather than discovering new ones. The Resource Topology is fit for organizations that *rent* available resources for their existing defined skills, reaching their business objectives (e.g. making profit) by keeping 100% of them 100% busy. Such a topology is a management's choice and justified, for example, when the relationships are *temporary* between the Directing and Doing archetypes (e.g. a movie Producer hiring dancers for a scene).





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Delivery Topology

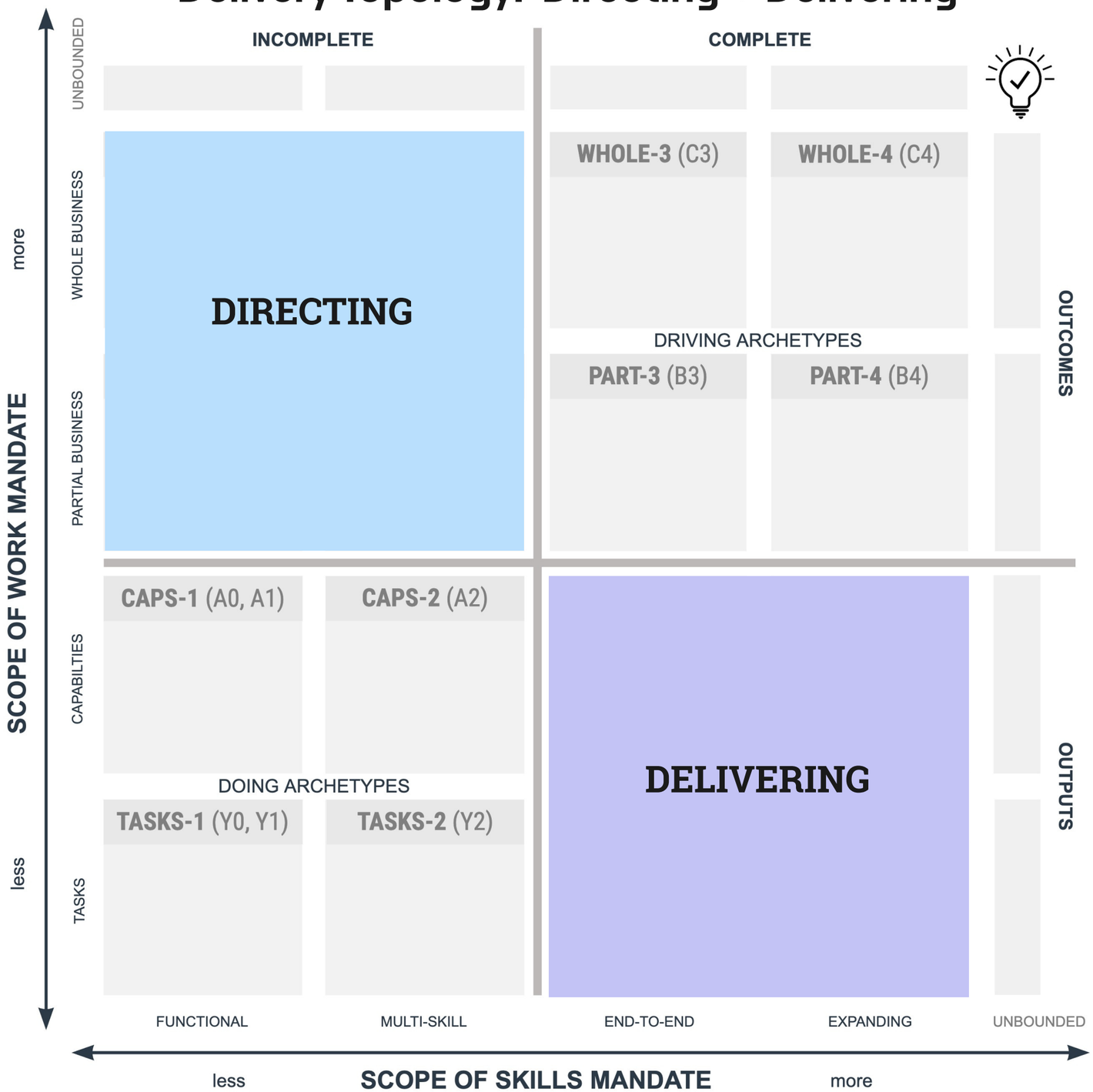
Compared to the Resource Topology, this topology upgrades delivery units to have fast flow by removing dependencies. Structurally, this typically involves forming complete cross-functional teams, and facilitating a smoother path to "completely done" work. In some domains, this topology is called a "Feature Factory" since Delivery units can provide a near-endless stream of features. Note a strong focus on outputs and local efficiency.

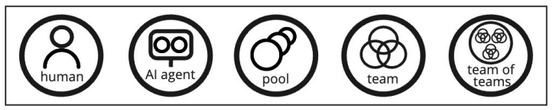
However, in order to streamline delivery, *discovery* must remain separated in space and time. Similar to the Resource Topology, Directing Archetypes emphasize up-front analysis to supply the work, and they may direct an "analysis Doing unit" to discover and then write "the specs", or they may create them themselves.

Keeping the teams 'fast' and constantly 'efficient' in producing the outputs is only possible when the teams in the Delivery Archetypes are permanently fixed to a narrow work scope—an internal component or a specific set of capabilities. The other side of this coin is that they cannot easily switch contexts. By the intentions of this org design, teams lack the work mandate to engage with the "big picture" but are allowed to expand their skill set becoming more and more efficient within their narrow area of expertise.

Returning to "outcome vs output": Notice that there is no guarantee in this topology that the output effectively solves the real problem or creates outcomes people care about. Products and services with "feature bloat" are a common consequence.

The Delivery Topology is well-suited for domains where the core challenge is not discovering what to deliver, but delivering new capabilities *predictably* with short lead times. For example, in a "diner" restaurant with short-order cooks; an owner decides the menu (or directs a specialist to design one) and via the flow of orders, directs "quick cooks who can deliver complete plates."





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Adaptive Topology

The Adaptive Topology merges "directing, doing, and delivering" into one holistic unit within the Driving archetypes, where humans, AI agents, and robots collaborate on complex problems in an adaptive way, and the group explores and drives themselves in their 'car'. The goal of this topology is adaptiveness (easy, cheap change based on learning) and customer-centricity to discover and deliver customer delight.

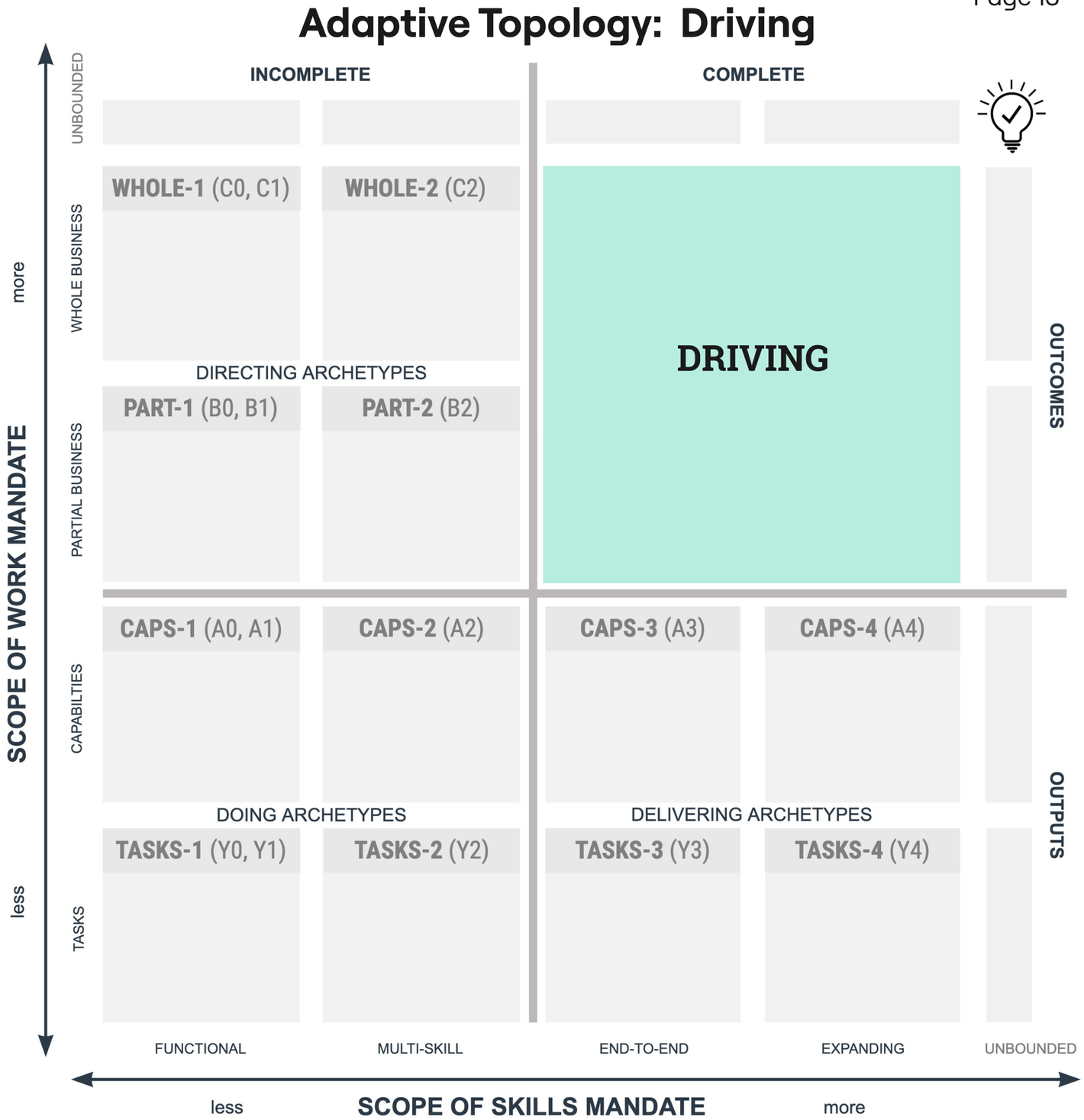
The boundaries between teams are structurally removed and replaced by larger constructs—such as a Team-of-Teams—where organizational units work closely together across the entire business ("Uber") or a partial business domain ("Uber Eats").

"Synchronicity of work" is a unique emergent quality of this topology: in contrast to the other two topologies where the Doing and Delivering archetypes own a narrow scope of work, here in the Adaptive Topology, the Driving archetype allows all parties to work *in unison*.

Inside the Driving archetypes of the Adaptive Topology, individuals (human and AI) form a network and create a learning organization that shares objectives and learns to operate as one. We refer to the archetypes in this topology as *Elevated* to distinguish them from the Resource and Delivery topologies. Its core features include:

- *Broad scope* of capabilities and work.
- *Synchronous work*, coordinated by those performing the work.
- *Continuous learning* both vertically (across the scope of work) and horizontally (across the scope of skills), making it cheap and easy to switch strategic direction.

Don't underestimate the importance of making *change cheap and easy*! We have seen countless failures due to the opposite. The Adaptive Topology establishes the conditions to discover and deliver higher-impact customer outcomes, promoting long-term business resilience. It's fit for purpose for organizations where growth and learning are crucial, such as market disruptors and startups.





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Comparing the Three Topologies

Aspect	1: Resource Topology	2: Delivery Topology	3: Adaptive Topology
Common Use Case	PMO resource management of specialists.	Fast delivery of proven worth with minimal change or learning.	Fast delivery of uncertain results, to seek, change, discover, and adapt.
Goal/Focus	Maximizing resource use, specialization.	Maximizing output, predictability.	Maximizing outcome, innovation.
Value Creation	Fragmented and reliant on multiple handoffs and coordination.	Narrowly focused on specific capabilities.	Flexible, holistic, and novel.
Dependencies	High; units depend on coordination across functional silos.	Moderate; units coordinate across boundaries but less frequently.	Low; units work autonomously with minimal dependency on external groups.
Group Structure	Siloed functional groups with specialized roles.	Cross-functional and aligned with narrow product or service features.	Multi-skilled and organized for exploratory outcomes and flexibility.
Empowerment of Individuals	Low; constrained to predefined tasks with little autonomy.	Moderate; empowered within a small, home unit (i.e., a team) but depends on a high-level inter-unit alignment and coordination managed by other archetypes.	High; takes ownership of entire processes, including inter-unit coordination, and takes the initiative to define or fulfill organizational goals.
Function of Individual Contributors	Completes isolated tasks (defined by coordinators) using specific skills, with minimal ownership.	Coordinates to deliver features and components within the team's scope.	Collaborates across boundaries to deliver complete customer solutions and manage end-to-end ownership of business processes.
Strategic AI Application	AI automates repetitive tasks, optimizes workflows, and enhances resource efficiency with tools like intelligent automation.	AI integrates data, improves collaboration, and aligns team outputs through real-time insights and feedback loops.	AI drives innovation, predicts customer needs, and supports strategic decision-making with machine learning and advanced analytics.

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Change MADE Real: the Method

Organizational Design: Purposeful vs Adhoc

The Org Topologies map is a visual thinking tool to guide the redesign of organizations, easy for many to use. And the related change method MADE unfolds in four distinct steps: *Map*, *Assess*, *Design*, and *Elevate*.

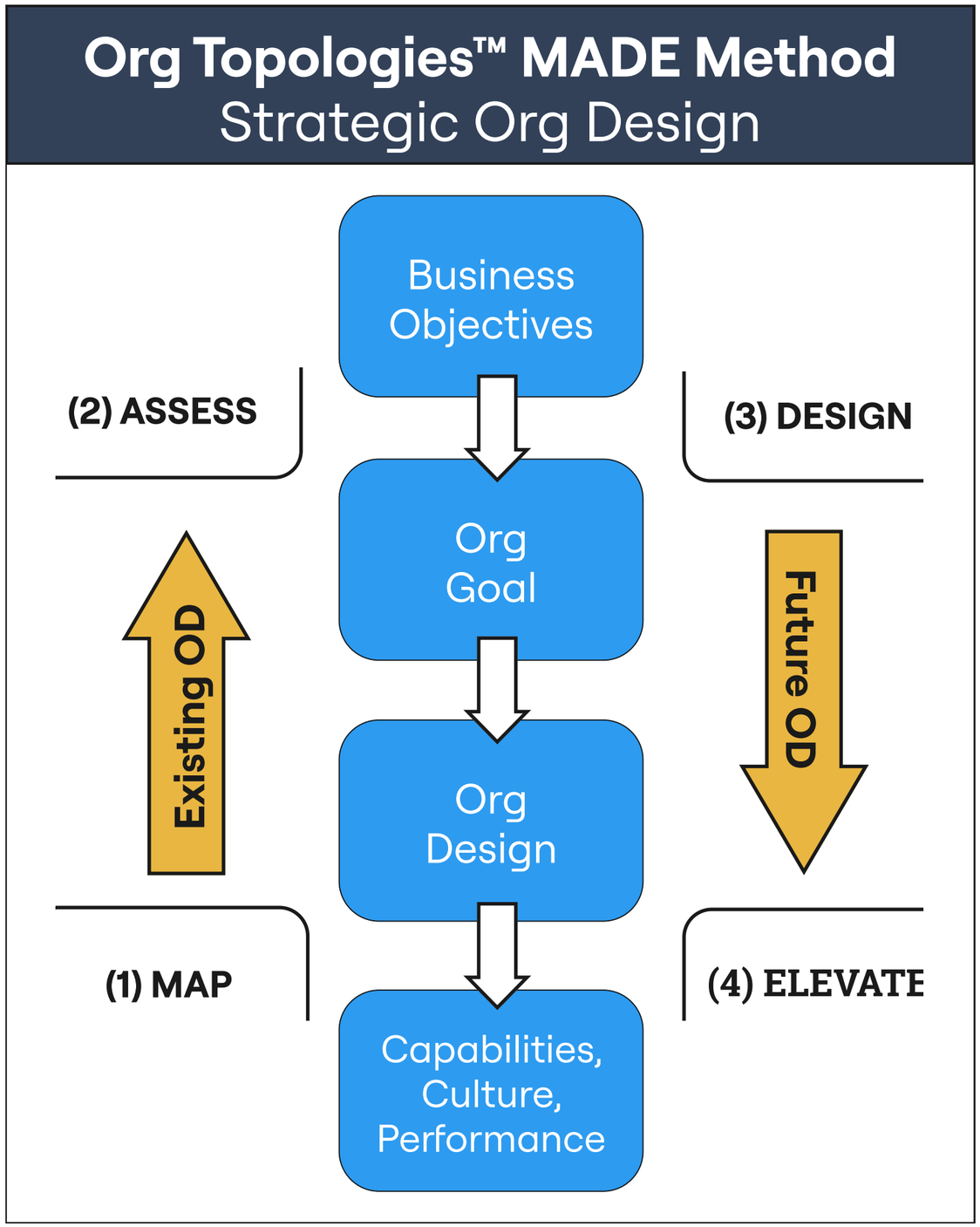
Every organization already has a design—whether it's purposeful or an adhoc accretion over the years. And each org design influences certain performance outcomes, such as adaptiveness, and also the culture, such as encouraging learning, or not.

The org design is composed of elements – structures, policies, processes, rewards, and more. When these elements are thoughtfully *aligned* for some goal (e.g. adaptiveness) to support a business objective (e.g. new market growth), then an organization gains the capabilities it needs to succeed, and its org design is *strategic*.

The MADE Method

Org Topologies and the MADE method *gets change going.* It begins by visually *mapping* existing organizational units on the OT Map. Mapping the organizational elements will reveal the existing topology: Resource, Delivery, Adaptive, or something else. Next, *assessing* whether your current topology is fit for the purpose of your company's strategic objectives.

If not, the Map easily helps with *designing*, encouraging people to imagine and visualize a better org design. Usually, this involves identifying which of the three common Org Topologies achieves the goal needed to deliver on the business objectives. With the target design envisioned, we *elevate* the design by crafting a path toward the target with the Elevating Katas™, a rich set of practices and principles for systemic organizational improvement.



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Change MADE Real: (1) MAP

The first step in an Org Topologies-driven transformation is to map organizational units on their corresponding archetypes.

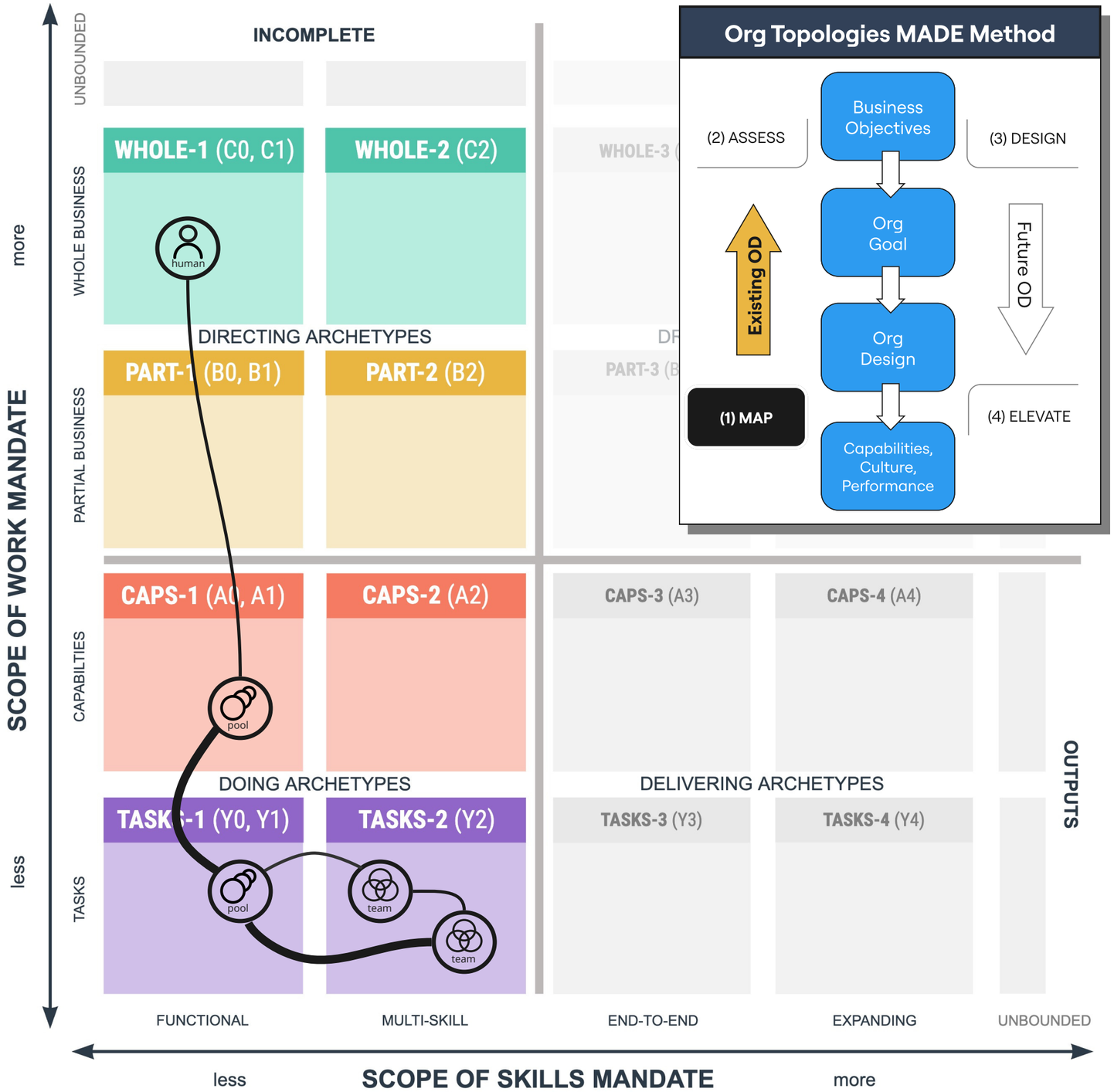
This activity requires practicing systems thinking, learning the Org Topologies language, and going to the hands-on workplace to understand how the units work: what kind of units are they, what is their input, what is their output, and which other archetypes are needed in the chain of value creation?

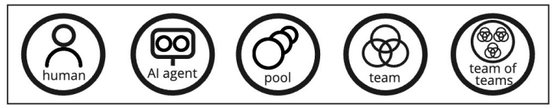
Systems thinking teaches us to focus on the *interactions and influences* between the parts, and to improve all the major parts in a systemically reinforcing design that supports a common org goal (for instance, "flow"). If each element (e.g. policies, structures) is optimized in isolation, the performance of the whole system may actually *decline* for the desired goal (flow can get worse!). By seeing the system as an integrated collection of interacting parts that need to be aligned, organizations can create change that is both holistic and sustainable.

The mapping on the right represents a topology that contains five archetypes:

- one WHOLE-1 unit: a human (product manager)
- one CAPS-1 unit: a functional group (a pool of project managers)
- one TASKS-1 unit: a functional group (a pool of e.g. back-end developers)
- two TASKS-2 units: incomplete multi-skill development teams (developers & testers)

The connections between the units depict their relationships; a thicker line signifies a stronger dependency.





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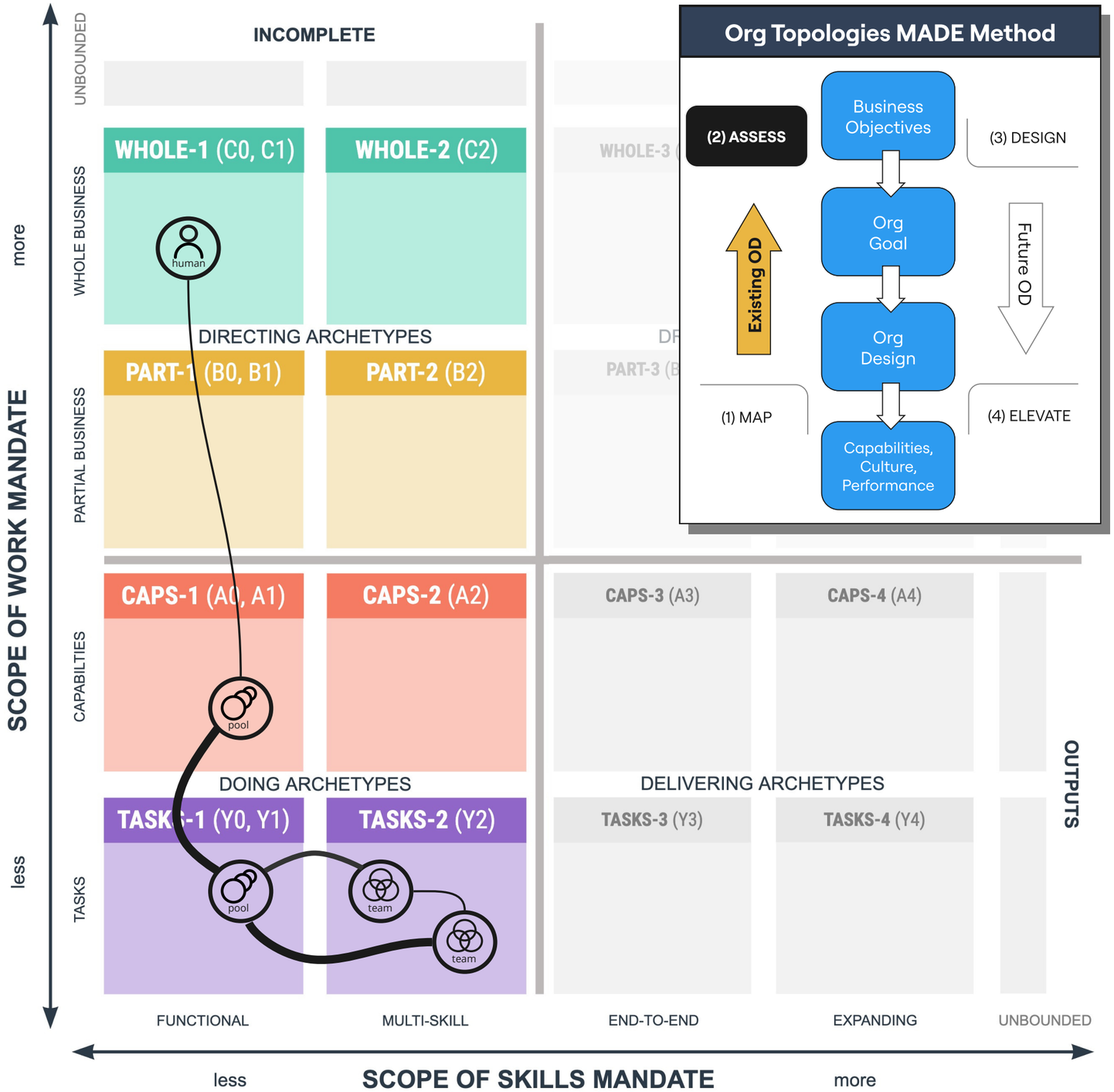
Change MADE Real: (2) ASSESS

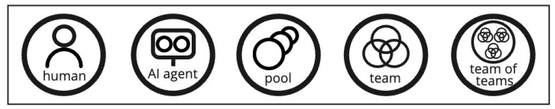
Each Org Topology optimizes for a specific goal. By comparing an organization's map to the three common Topologies, we can see (1) which goal the current organization is designed for, (2) how effectively it does that, and finally (3) how well that goal supports the business objective. This step is about testing the existing org design for *strategic alignment*.

In the example mapping on the right, we see a Directing Archetype (the Product Manager at WHOLE-1), who oversees the whole business and passes product development ideas to the Doing Archetypes. This is where we see a functional department, where project managers understand product capabilities (CAPS-1). Their job is to break them into tasks for the developers. They decompose, plan, dispatch and monitor the work. Some of the developers work as cross-functional teams (TASKS-2), others are in functional resource pools (TASKS-1). This example is a Resource Topology, whose goal is maximizing resource utilization. It produces organizational capabilities like predictability and specialization, making it well-suited for environments with a low need for product discovery, and where slow delivery of value is not a problem.

To evaluate if this org design is fit for purpose (i.e. testing for strategic alignment) we need to examine the business strategy and objectives against the capabilities the current design creates. Suppose the company's strategy is to outpace competitors by being faster at releasing new product capabilities. In the mapping on the right, there's a mismatch: the strategic ambition requires an org design with the goal of *speed* rather than predictability and resource utilization. In this case, strategic alignment is weak and needs to be worked on (next two steps of MADE).

Having this kind of mismatch is common because people don't *see* and understand there's a mismatch! Org Topologies makes it easy for people to see, understand, and then get change going.





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Change MADE Real: (3) DESIGN

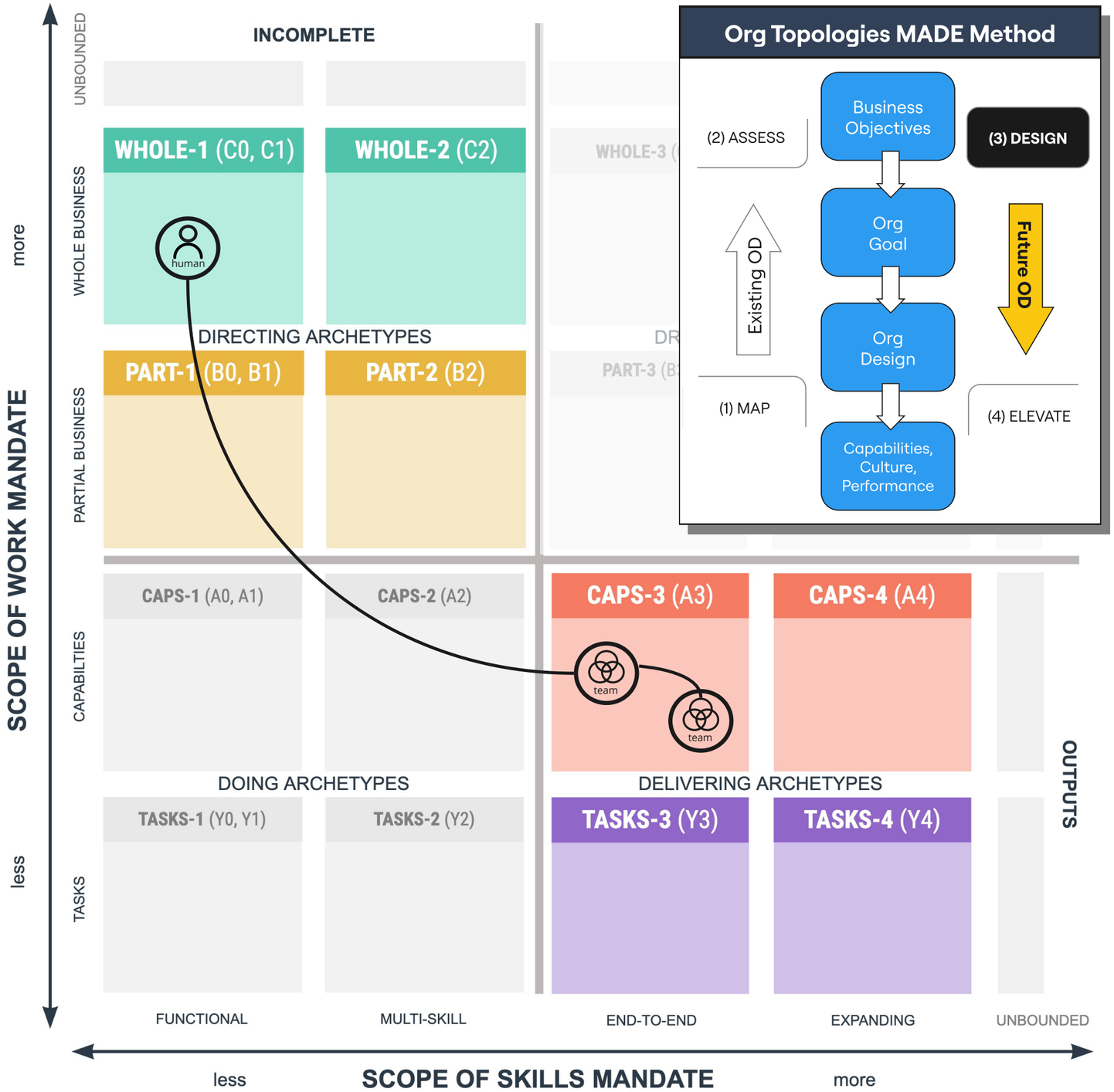
Achieving a business objective (for instance, "more profit") by a strategy involves external and internal factors. It is uncertain and *probabilistic*, since it is strongly influenced by factors external to – and outside the control of – the company.

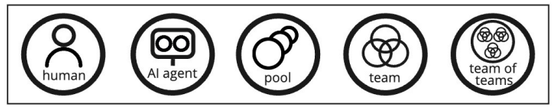
By contrast, org design is internal, under our control, and closer to being deterministic or *predictable* (for instance, "design for fast flow"). This allows us to influence business success by at least gaining influence over the *internal* factors of the design.

Designing an organization is about selecting the *org goal* that will deliver the capabilities required by the strategy and its objective. Possible goals include output predictability, utilization, flow, customer delight, adaptiveness, and more. The key is picking the subset that is best fit for purpose. Note that if more than one goal is chosen together for an organization, issues arise: Is some goal primary over others? Do they conflict? Can the org design support them all? These issues are beyond the scope of this Primer.

After identifying the desired org goal(s), the next step is to explore organizational designs that align with the strategy. If flow is the goal, the Delivery Topology becomes a suitable choice.

Companies may also choose *different* org designs for different parts of the company. One division might focus on servicing existing customers on a legacy product, while another is experimenting with new offerings—each requiring its own goal and design.





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Change MADE Real: (4) ELEVATE

Elevating an organization means moving its org design closer to the upper right on the Org Topologies map. Such moves increase the scope of skills and the scope of work mandate of organizational elements. Note that AI now makes elevation much easier, inviting change as never before.

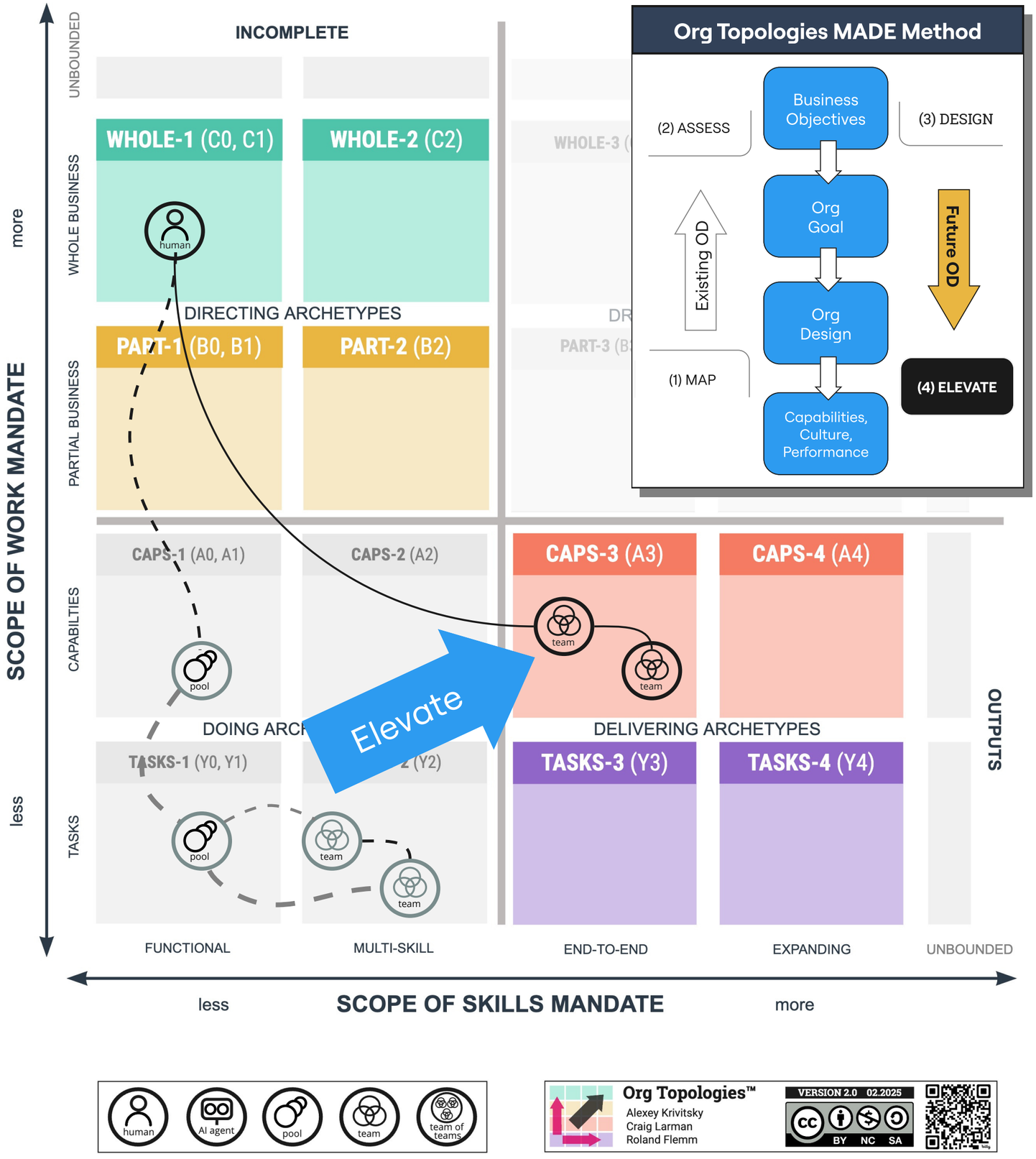
The Org Topologies Change MADE Real method introduces *Elevating Katas™*. A 'kata' is a studied, repeating, disciplined movement in Judo, adopted and adapted into business language. "Kata" was popularized in management via Toyota, implying a disciplined and repeating pattern for improving.

The *Elevating Katas* are a set of practices and principles that can be applied as thoughtful experiments to change the organizational structure, processes, policies, and so forth. We are working toward a collection of Elevating Katas that can be applied to get change going, helping to improve any organization in the thoughtful direction of any topology. This work will be ready with the release of the Org Topologies book. Read: orgtopologies.com/elevating-katas

In the example mapping on the right, the separate Doing Archetypes have been restructured into two cross-functional, end-to-end teams, elevating the organization from the Resource to the Delivery Topology.

Elevation can be an incremental process that gradually improves the capabilities of an organization. Also, different parts of an organization (e.g. business divisions) can have their own development vector that is consistent with their business objectives.

While the organization experiments with gradual change, periodic *re-mapping* with Org Topologies is an easy and fast way to complete a learning loop of feedback and adapting. We are never finished with the perfection journey.



Elevate Your Organization with Strategic AI Adoption

Any management approach that doesn't include AI as a central part of the future workforce, is of the past. We are rapidly entering a world of AI agents and humanoid robots playing a role at work and home.

A key insight when designing with OT: *Specialization and expertise are vanishing as limited resources, due to intelligence as a service*. That makes it *much* easier to elevate an organization! So when you are deciding on new teams requiring new expert knowledge, shed the old assumptions, "We don't have enough experts, therefore…". Spin up another 10,000 agents.

Evolving rightward on the horizontal axis to broader skills mandate will become ever easier due to AI. And likewise upward on the vertical axis to a broader work mandate. So, top-right *Driving* archetypes will become more feasible.

Obviously, "adopt AI everywhere you can" will be the general guidance, but given the limited resources of money, time, and attention, in strategic org design with OT we recommend that you ask and answer these questions:

> What parts of the organization are the focus of development with OT?
- Focus your AI investment in the area you are elevating, where competitive advantage may come from early *adoption of new technology.*

> What archetypes are part of your target, and what are the major bottlenecks or constraints limiting their rapid adoption?
- Find the early points where AI can make an outsized impact.

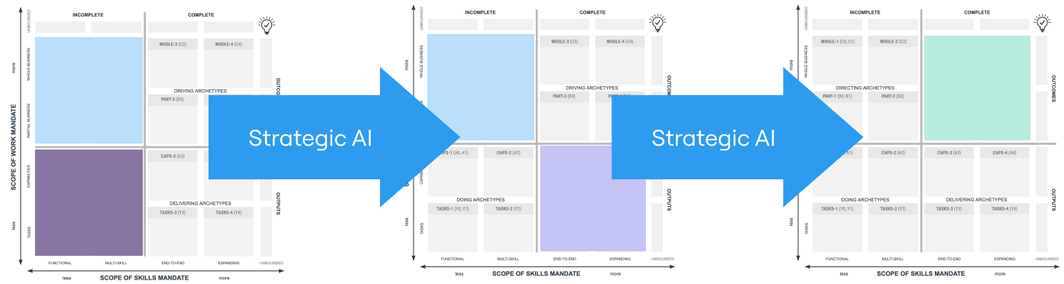
> Do the AIs need monitoring by humans?
- That implies new responsibilities and processes in your organization. We predict that *monitoring* will become an important responsibility for human workers.

For example, a pet-supply company creates e-commerce software in a Resource topology. It's a mature, uncomplicated market. Competition has delivered a better website and app that customers love. Leadership has decided on a business objective of retaining customers, with an org goal of fast flow to parity, by targeting a Delivery topology with CAPS-3 teams.

> What parts of the company are the focus of org development?
The Product Management and R&D departments, so focus on AI investment there.

> What archetypes are part of the target? What's a dominant constraint from one to the other?
The R&D department has mostly TASKS-1 individuals, and the target is CAPS-3 teams. On investigation, it's a lack of front-end design and coding skilled people. Focus time, money, and management attention on AIs, especially on that big bottleneck, over a generic "adopt AI."

> Do the AIs need monitoring by humans?
Yes, because people have decided on AI agents that autonomously design and code front ends, independently creating and iterating on variations that they deploy and measure. The small number of existing front-end designers and developers joining the new CAPS-3 teams will be trained in agent monitoring and take on that responsibility.



Strategic AI™

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Strategic AI Adoption in the Archetype Groups

Archetype Group	Characteristics	Strategic AI Adoption	Key Benefit
“Directing”	Oversee higher scopes of work without directly creating customer value. Focus on planning, coordination, and specifications.	Strategic assistance through tools like predictive analytics, resource optimization, and workflow automation. Simulate project outcomes, automate prioritization, and allocate resources effectively. Digital omnipresence within the work done by the “Doing” archetypes to ensure control and compliance.	Reduces manual planning time. Provides data-driven insights for better strategic decisions.
“Doing”	Task-oriented work without a view of the whole picture. Heavily reliant on directives from others.	Operational efficiency booster for tasks requiring routine expertise with intelligent automation, task-specific agents, and virtual assistants. Optimizes repetitive and tactical work. Automated and predictive guidance within task execution.	Enhances productivity by reducing the cognitive load. Ensures consistent execution quality.
“Delivering”	Deliver value within a narrow scope but often operate in silos. Limited alignment with broader goals.	Collaboration and alignment enabler via real-time data integration, recommendation engines, and feedback loops. Aligns work with organizational objectives. Plus all above-mentioned applications of AI for the “Doing” archetypes.	Reduces silos through integration. Ensures outputs align with strategic goals and avoid misaligned value delivery.
“Driving”	Capable of understanding and delivering end-to-end customer value. Operate autonomously with shared ownership and alignment.	Strategic partner through adaptive machine learning, real-time dashboards, and customer journey analytics. Predict customer needs and optimize end-to-end processes. AI serves as a subject-matter expert assisting faster (expanding, unbounded) learning for the teams.	Amplifies autonomy and innovation. Enhances data-informed decision-making and customer alignment. Digital marketplaces for business objectives with AI-assisted prioritization mechanisms.

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Strategic Org Design vs. Framework Thinking

Framework thinking assumes that implementing an industry-standard management framework is key to success. This is the pitch from consulting companies big and small, and naturally, it seems easier to follow the crowd over deeply understanding and designing your own organization.

Unfortunately, organizations apply such frameworks without understanding the implications, which can lead to consequences:

- Not solving the root-cause problems motivating the change, since it's not designed for the specific case.
- Lack of enthusiastic understanding and support for the change, since the people didn't figure it out and create it themselves; it's pushed on to them. Don't underestimate this psychological dynamic!
- And although scoffed at and ignored (at their peril) by managers new to change and social psychology, widespread and inadvertent promotion of a "cargo-cult" mentality, leading to inappropriate and failed change, and Religious Wars.

Org Topologies offers an alternative: strategic org design, guided by a path that connects business objectives, organizational goals, topologies, and, finally, frameworks.

Following the Org Topologies approach will ensure:

- Strategy chosen to influence the organization's business objectives.
- Organizational goals and capabilities chosen to be fit for purpose for the strategy and objectives.
- Org Topologies—including but not limited to Resource, Delivery, or Adaptive—serve as a reference for assessing and designing a new target structure supporting the org design goals.
- And while the Elevating Katas provide one set of guides to get change going, of course people will also get guidance from existing frameworks, while aiming for the target topology.

More framework mappings examples:

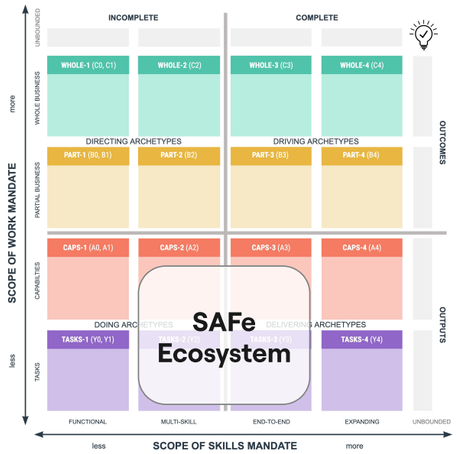
- SAFe
- Team Topologies
- Large-Scale Scrum (LeSS)
- FAST Agile
- Spotify Model / McKinsey
- Product Operating model
- Haier's RDHY
- Bayer's DSO
- and many more

Learn more: orgtopologies.com/framework-mapping

Mapping SAFe

The *Scale Agile Framework (SAFe)* is a framework used in software development. Saying "We are doing SAFe" actually communicates little about what's really happening.

But observe the OT map for SAFe; anyone can easily see that SAFe is mostly implemented with interdependent incomplete teams working on components at the *Tasks* level, and fast-flow teams at the *Capabilities* level.

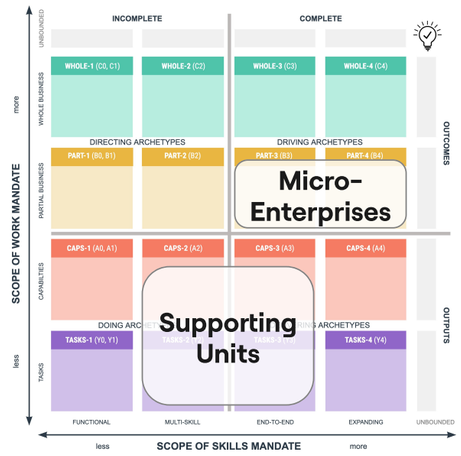


Mapping RDHY

The Haier *Rendanheyi* model (*RDHY*) is an innovative management philosophy. It represents a radical departure from traditional hierarchical structures by aiming to align every employee's efforts directly with customer (or user) value creation.

The OT map demonstrates how RDHY elevates its thousands of micro-enterprises (MEs) that directly interact with users, and optimizing for autonomy and customer-focused value

Mapping Rendanheyi



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Try Out These Prompts

General Understanding
- What is Org Topologies, and how does it work?
- How does Org Topologies compare to SAFe, LeSS, or Team Topologies?
- What is the difference between "Scope of Skills Mandate" and "Scope of Work Mandate"?

Org Mapping & Assessment
- How do I map my current organization using Org Topologies?
- What are the 16 organizational archetypes in Org Topologies?
- How can I identify if my org structure is fit for purpose?

Designing & Elevating Organizations
- How can I move my organization from CAPS-2 to PART-2 level?
- What does a WHOLE-2 or WHOLE-3 level organization look like?
- How do I reduce dependencies and increase adaptability in my org?

Real-World Applications
- How can Org Topologies help with AI-driven org design?
- How can I use Org Topologies to improve product management and delivery?
- What's the best way to elevate a SAFe Agile Release Train (ART) using Org Topologies?

Strategic Change & Leadership
- Why do most agile transformations fail, and how does Org Topologies prevent that?
- How can I use Org Topologies to make reorgs unnecessary?
- How does Org Topologies handle the balance between individual autonomy and collective intelligence?

Training & Certification
- What will I learn in the Org Topologies Practitioner (OTP) class?
- How can I become a Certified Org Topologies Practitioner (C-OTP)?
- Where can I find upcoming Org Topologies training sessions?

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Org Topologies Learning & Accreditation Journey

Explore the various accreditation levels in the overview to understand how you can engage with Org Topologies and amplify your influence in driving systemic organizational change.

The Org Topologies Accreditation Journey provides a structured pathway for individuals and organizations to deepen their understanding and application of organizational design principles.

Whether you're an active supporter, a practitioner committed to mastering the framework, or an enterprise aiming to integrate Org Topologies into your branding and strategies, this program offers clear levels of recognition and partnership.

INTRODUCTORY VIDEO COURSE

Our Introductory on-demand video course by the authors will bring you up to speed with all the key concepts of Org Topologies. It is also a prerequisite for attending an OTP class.

FORMAL EDUCATION

ORG TOPOLOGIES PRACTITIONER

After taking the video course, you are invited to dive into the learning-by-doing the mastery of Org Design by attending a two-day physical Practitioner (OTP) class.

QUALITY GATE: CERTIFICATION

CERTIFIED PRACTITIONER

Once obtained an OTP badge, you are invited to get certified. Certified Practitioners (C-OTP) apply their acquired knowledge and come up with an experience report.

QUALITY GATE: PARTNERSHIP

ORG TOPOLOGIES PARTNER

Partners are the certified-level individuals and organizations with C-OTPs who see the long-term benefit of incorporating Org Topologies into their value proposition and marketing.

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ZOOM WITH AUTHORS

BECOME A CHAMPION

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Current Academy Offerings

Our Academy currently offers an online video course, a two-day physical practitioner class and a bi-weekly meetup related to org design with industry leaders.

Org Topologies Members Community



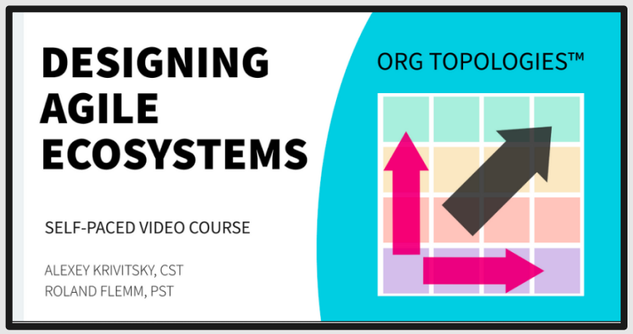
Join an exclusive Org Topologies learning community mastering thoughtful organizational design and sustainable change. Being a member of this community will help you stay connected with Org Topologies creators, industry thought leaders, and field practitioners.

Every other Friday, we are hosting industry leaders to talk about org design related subjects.

29€ / ~~279~~ 198€

per month per year

Online Self-Paced Video Training



We offer an online, self-paced video training that lets you embark on a journey to master the fundamental principles of Org Topologies. This course is a video-based program that consists of about 35 small learning bits, with a total of 4.5 hours of running time. It contains interviews with people working in higher archetypes.

Sign up at: orgtopologies.com/video-course

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4,5 hours of content

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Master the skills to design, assess and sustain organizations and own your transformation path, starting from wherever you are now.

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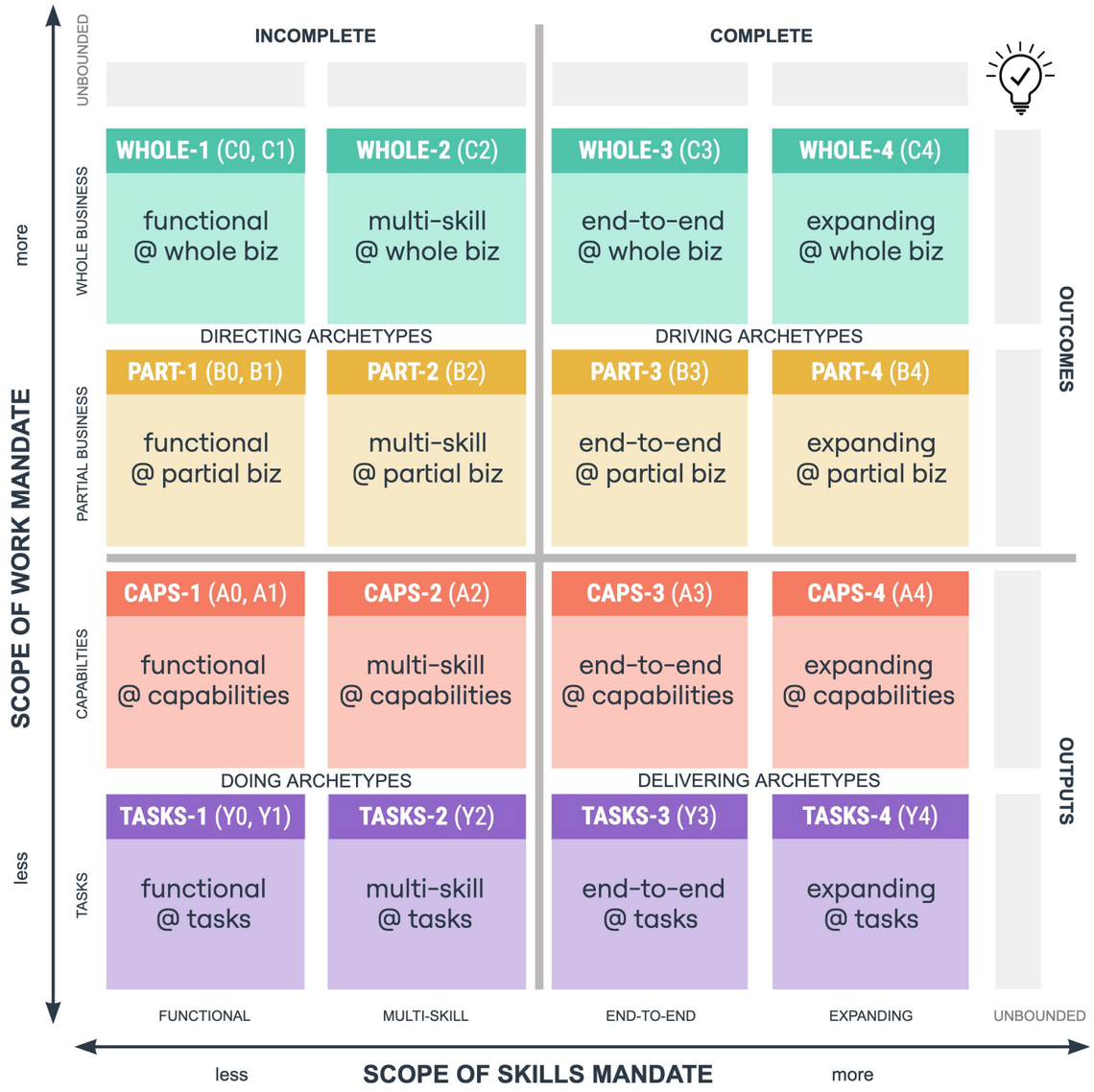





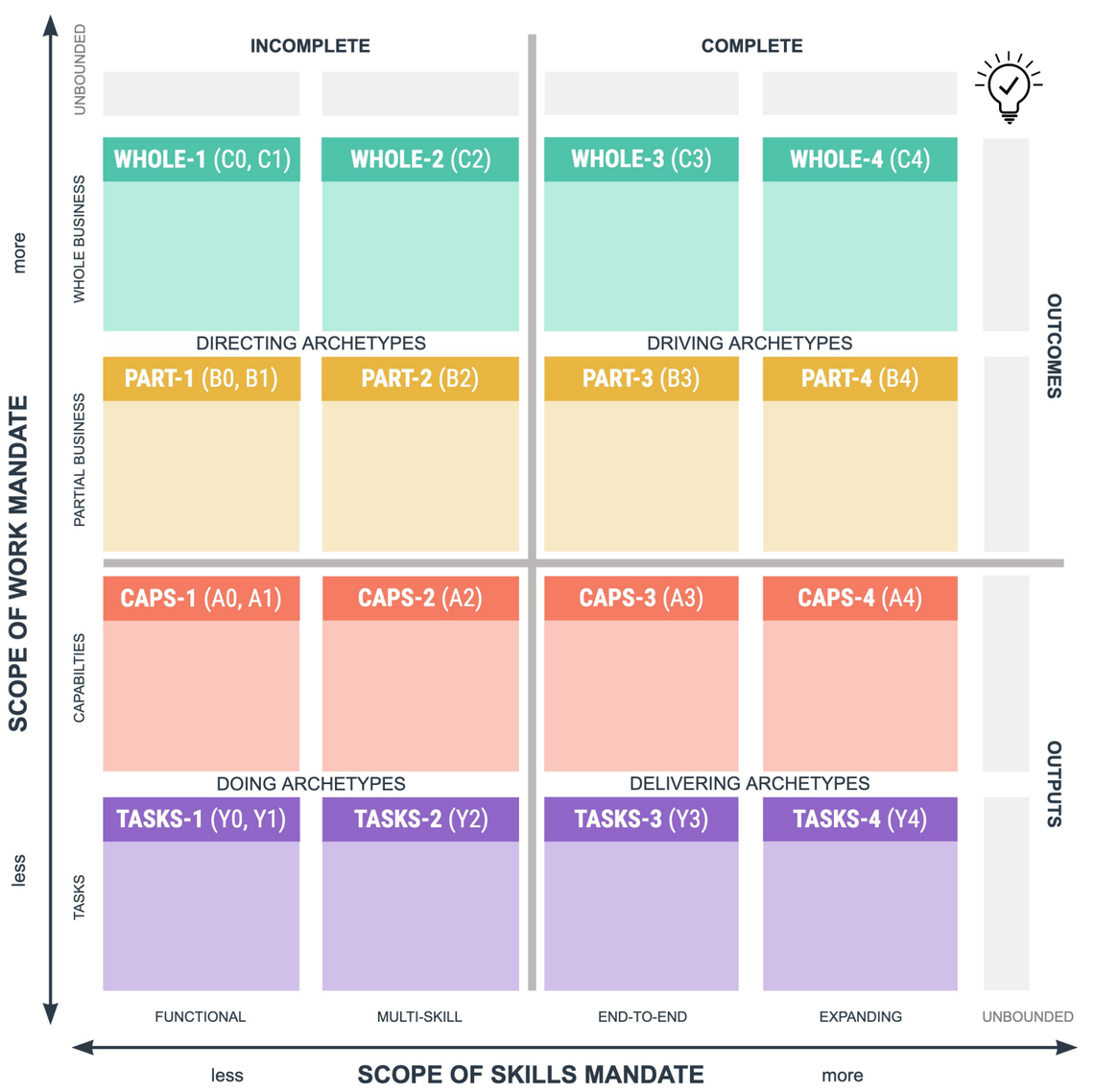





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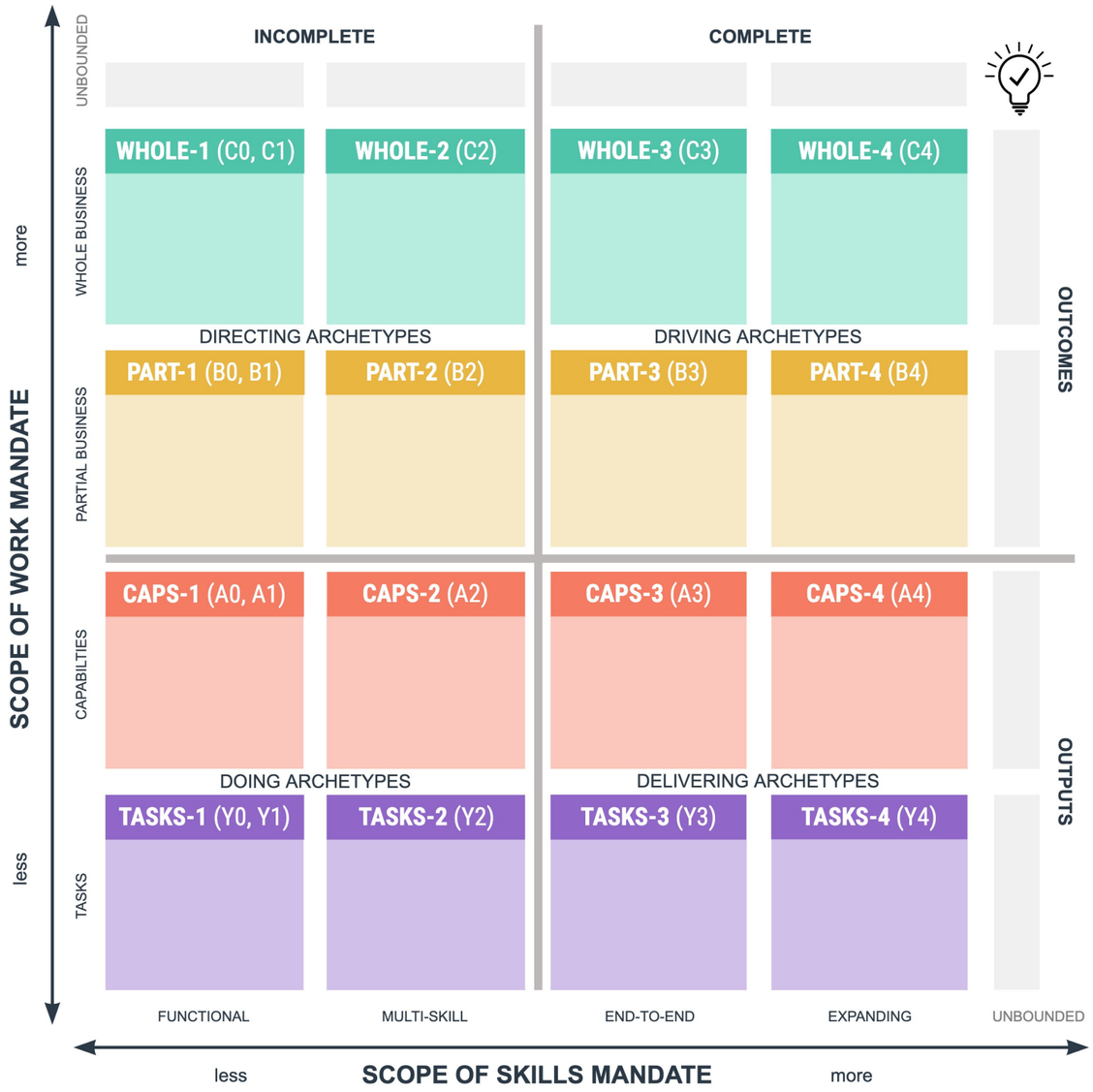

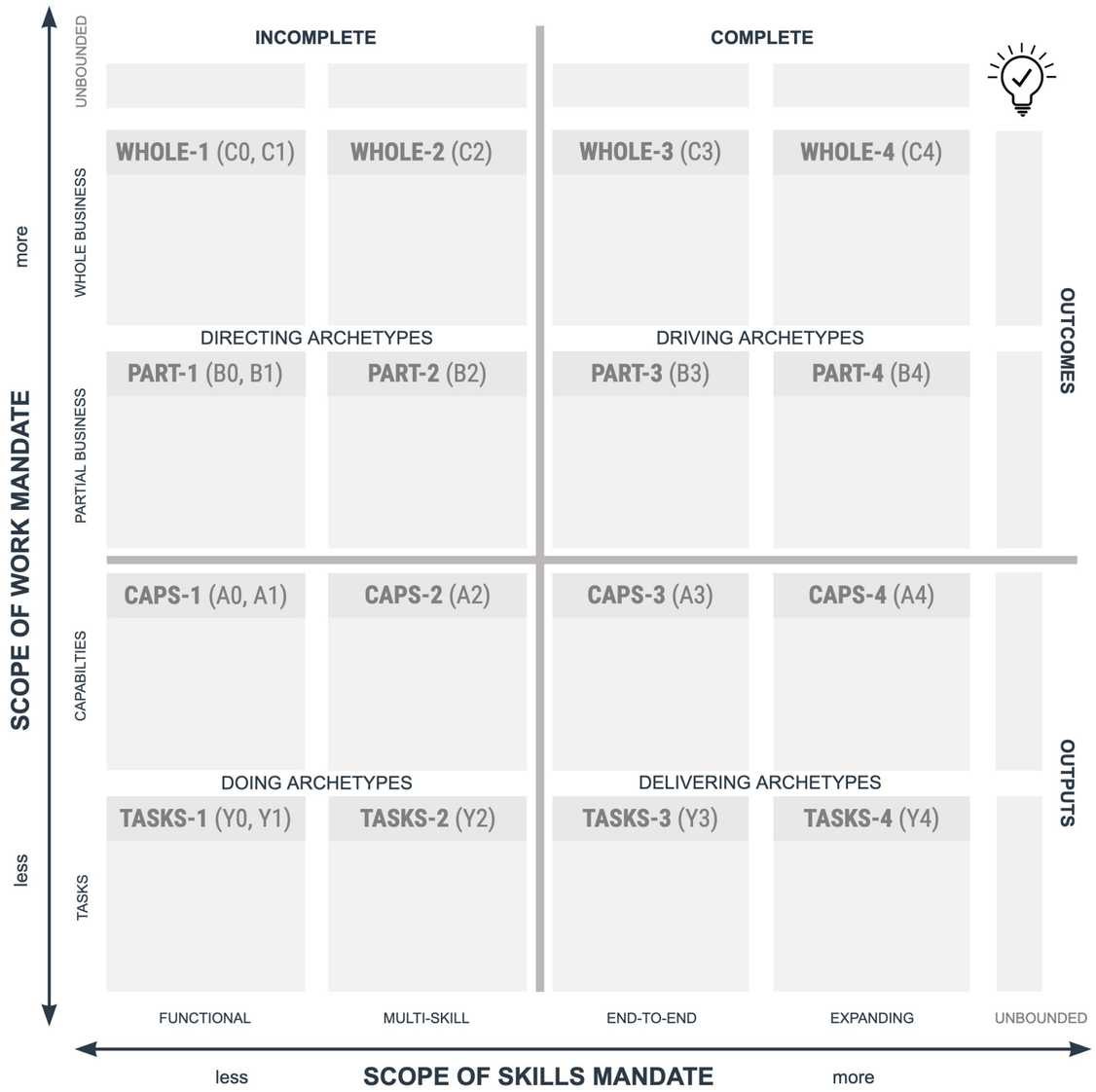

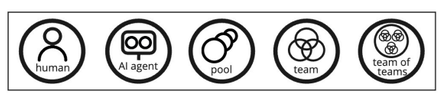



Use can also use our Miro template:
orgtopologies.com/miro

This Primer is a product of co-creation. None of us would have been able to create it alone with such sharpness.

Co-creation is a *thing*. And that's very much relevant to the map itself.

As a team moves rightward on the map, its co-creation power increases. It's not just that the unit minimizes its inter-skill dependencies, but it elevates its intelligence. A team can co-create things that none of the individuals alone could. A co-creating end-to-end team is not just about speed and flow.

The same also applies vertically. Co-creation can happen at the level of tasks, capabilities, or business. That altitude magnifies the power of co-creation.

We hope you find value in this work to *get change going!*



Alexey Krivitsky Craig Larman Roland Flemm