Flat Growth Guide

The below flowchart of considerations to ponder when growing a flat organization is based on our scientific expertise.

We believe that the below checklist/guide may be useful for you to contemplate if you find yourself in the above scenario. We recommend you print out the guide so you can view pages 2 and 3 as a two-page spread and align pages 2 and 3 vertically so that the horizontal arrows meet.

We are happy to provide this checklist to you free of charge for as long as you honor our copyrights (below).
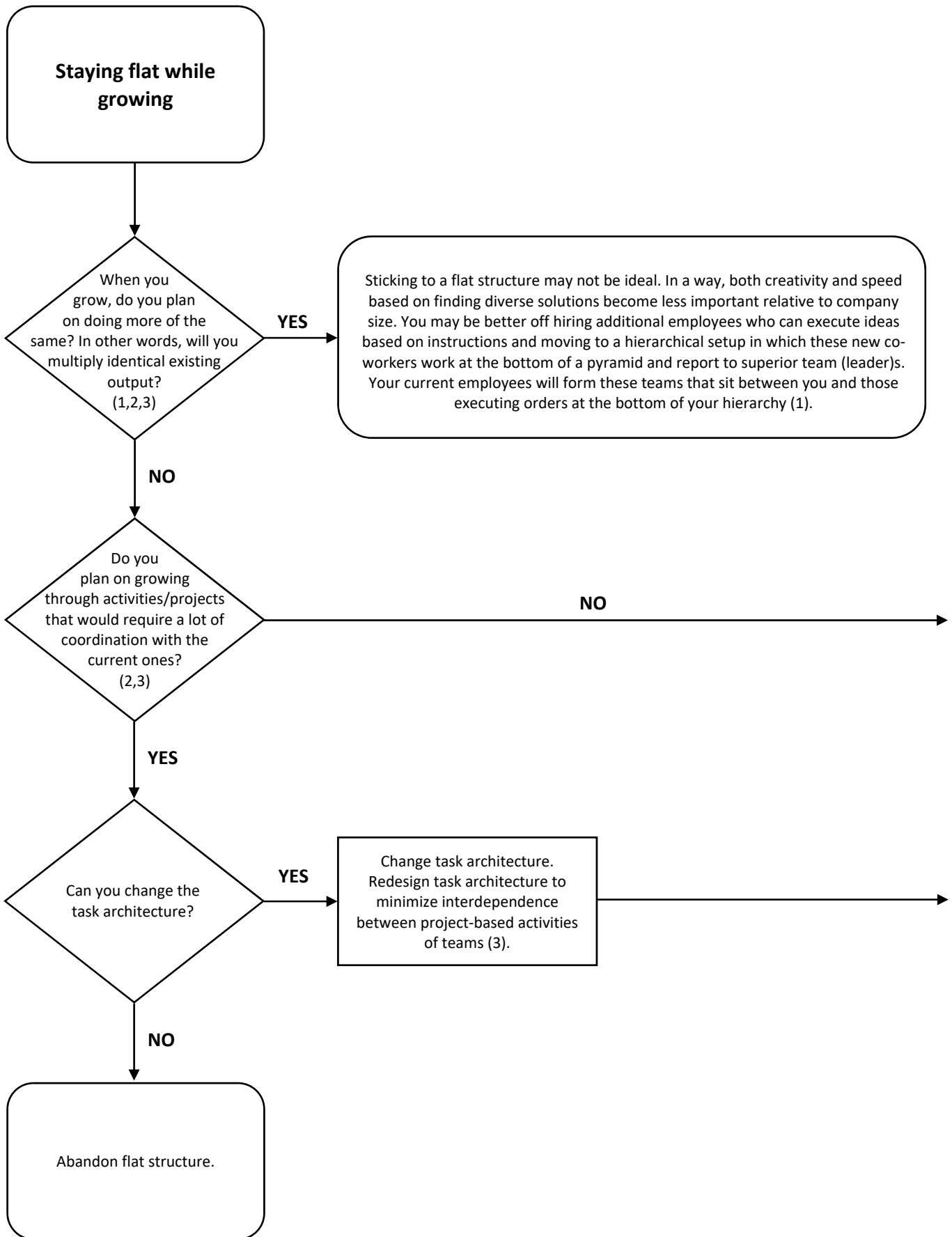
Please note that we assume no further responsibility for the success or failure of your (re-)organization based on our guide should you attempt it.

In particular, note (1) that we cannot exclude that in your individual case further considerations may be relevant that did not enter the process of drafting the checklist; (2) that misunderstandings in using our guides may prevail; (3) that implementing the thoughts expressed in our guides is imperfect.

The chapters referenced in the legend to our guide refer to the book

M. Reitzig, 2022, *Get better at flatter*, Palgrave Macmillan.

We encourage you to read the book to better understand the nature of our guide.

Staying flat while growing

When you grow, do you plan on doing more of the same? In other words, will you multiply identical existing output? (1,2,3)

YES

Sticking to a flat structure may not be ideal. In a way, both creativity and speed based on finding diverse solutions become less important relative to company size. You may be better off hiring additional employees who can execute ideas based on instructions and moving to a hierarchical setup in which these new co-workers work at the bottom of a pyramid and report to superior team (leader)s. Your current employees will form these teams that sit between you and those executing orders at the bottom of your hierarchy (1).

NO

Do you plan on growing through activities/projects that would require a lot of coordination with the current ones? (2,3)

NO

YES

Can you change the task architecture?

YES

Change task architecture. Redesign task architecture to minimize interdependence between project-based activities of teams (3).

NO

Abandon flat structure.

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Checklist for designing your organization

Design fits:

☑ Provide existing employees with the rights to take design decisions (task division, task allocation, (potentially) rewards distribution, information exchange, and exception management) within the scope of their projects. Ensure that these project teams will not grow beyond a critical size (1).

☑ Provide guidance, support, and a playfield that facilitates their work (3).

    ☑ Implement a sanctioning system that detects and sanctions freeriding or cherry-picking of tasks

    ☑ Ensure that you can spend enough time offering autonomy support to the teams

        ☑ Share information required to build architectural knowledge as needed

        ☑ Reduce your role to feedback partner

        ☑ Manage expectations as your span of control may become very wide. Direct reports will not receive as much time from you as they did before

        ☑ Show humble leadership

    ☑ Potentially offer structured procedures for effective and efficient conflict resolution within teams

People fits:

☑ Rely on existing and recruit new employees who rank high on personality traits that help with the high delegation (4). As far as possible, select

    ☑ Agreeable, honest, and humble employees to foster collaboration, as well as

    ☑ Conscientious and proactive people, the more so you rely on delegation in task division, task allocation, and rewards distribution, with a

    ☑ High need for achievement, the more so you rely on delegation in task division and task allocation and potentially a

    ☑ High locus of control, the more so you rely on delegation in managing conflicts.

(1) For questions pertaining to this part of the decision tree, see chapter 8 for details.
(2) For questions pertaining to this part of the decision tree, see chapter 7 for details.
(3) For questions pertaining to this part of the decision tree, see chapters 5 and 6 for details.
(4) For questions pertaining to this part of the decision tree, see chapters 3 and 4 for details.