A SERIES · TEN POSTS

Inside the Company

Corporate or owner-run? A framework in ten posts.

Muhammet Şafak • October 3, 2026



SERIES · 1–5

Ten posts

01 **Corporate or Owner-Run?** size isn't the divide

02 **How Decisions Get Made** chain or one signature?

03 **Process: Armor or Shackle?**

04 **Role Boundaries** everyone does everything

05 **How Knowledge Flows** hallway or document?



SERIES · 6–10

Ten posts

01	**Performance, Promotion and Pay**	there's always a negotiation
02	**Meetings and Reporting**	visibility theater
03	**A Crisis**	where character shows
04	**What Breaks as a Company Grows**	from owner-run to corporate
05	**Which Company Fits You?**	a phase, not an identity



It isn't size.

The type of company you work for determines how much of your work is really yours.

Four axes that separate them

Where are decisions made?

Does a role decide, or a person?

How much is written down?

Not just code: is the reasoning behind decisions written?

Who is the cost of a mistake charged to?

When something blows up, is the first thing sought a cause, or a person?

How long is the time horizon?

Is the company thinking about this quarter, or three years?

> Corporateness is the ability to separate a decision from a person. An owner-run company is one where the decision stays with the person.

— **Muhammet Şafak** Corporate or Owner-Run?

One-way door, two-way door

CRITERION	ONE-WAY DOOR (DECIDE SLOWLY)	TWO-WAY DOOR (DECIDE FAST)
Examples	Data model core, a contract, a hire	Library, folder structure, screen layout
Owner-run company's mistake	Twenty minutes: "we'll fix it later"	Usually behaves correctly
Corporate's mistake	Usually behaves correctly	Forms a committee, stalls three months

Split the decision from the person.

An approval chain doesn't prevent mistakes; it slows them down and spreads them around. The institution's memory should outlive the memory of whoever made the decision.

> Process is spreading the cost of a past incident over the future, in instalments.

— **Muhammet Şafak** When Is Process Armor, and When Is It a Shackle?

When do you add process?

The same mistake a third time

Once is coincidence, twice is bad luck, three times is a pattern.

Critical work sits with one person

"Only Ahmet knows how that works" isn't a joke, it's a risk report.

The team has grown

In a team of five, process is unnecessary because coordination happens at the table anyway. At twenty-five, it doesn't.

Does the same mistake keep happening?

If not, that's real agility. If so, what you call "agile" is indifference.

> A capable person gets pulled into every gap, and the reward is more gaps.

— **Muhammet Şafak** Role Boundaries: where there's no job description, everyone does everything

Three lines for every critical piece of work

D

Decides

Who says "yes/no"?

E

Executes

Whose calendar hours go into this work?

I

Informed

Who must know, or the work blows up?

A verbal boundary isn't a boundary.

Close the gap; make it visible that you closed it. Without the second sentence, the first isn't a sacrifice, it's a cover-up.

Not the decision. The reasoning.

What the person who arrives six months from now needs isn't your decision, it's your constraint.

What to write, and where

- [ ] We chose X because constraint Y existed.
- [ ] We had ruled out Z because W.
- [ ] Anywhere works: a pull request description, a task comment, the team channel.



Why is it like this?

In a healthy place, the answer points to a document. In an unhealthy place, the answer points to a person.

> Having a system didn't change the outcome; it only changed the language of the negotiation.

— **Muhammet Şafak** Performance, Promotion and Pay

06 · PAY

Two desks, two languages

CRITERION	CORPORATE	OWNER-RUN COMPANY
What a raise is made of	Band, rating and calibration	Last three months, loyalty, cash that day
What it produces	Defensibility	No system, so the narrative is everything
Its price	No exceptional reward for exceptional work	Proximity is leverage
Your job	Put good work in the system's language	Remind

06 · THE CONCLUSION

Pay isn't a reward. It's a negotiation.

And the negotiation has already started, whether you've noticed or not.

07 · THE AUTHOR'S OBSERVATION

Two extremes, the same theater

11 h

Meetings per week

No decision was made in any of them

3×

The same information

Told to different people in different rooms

4

"What are you up to?" a day

No meetings, endless interruptions

40 min

A five-minute question

They have to rebuild the structure in their head

07 · A PRACTICAL DISTINCTION

Three kinds of meeting

KIND	PURPOSE	WHAT COMES OUT?	NECESSARY?
Decision	Make a choice	A decision and its owner	Yes, short
Discovery	Understand the problem	A better question	Yes
Status	Report the state of things	A record	Often no

07 · THE TEST

A decision, or a record?

Is this meeting producing a decision, or just a record?

Fear stretches time to detection.

And time to detection is the real cost of a crisis.

A culprit, or a procedure?

CRITERION	OWNER-RUN COMPANY	CORPORATE
Reflex	Looks for who's at fault	Produces a procedure
Its logic	Decision in a person, so fault in a person	Decision in a role, so fault in the system
Its price	Speed breeds fear; fear kills reporting	The postmortem can turn into a performance

How was this possible?

The real test comes six weeks after the crisis: the measure isn't what was said, it's what has actually changed six weeks later.

09 · NOT A LAW, A PATTERN I'VE SEEN

What breaks as a company grows

APPROXIMATE THRESHOLD	WHAT BREAKS	WHAT YOU FIRST HEAR
~10 people	The owner can't see everyone anymore	"I wasn't aware."
~30–40 people	Middle management is born	"There's someone responsible for that team, let me ask them."
~100 people	Departmental silos	"They're our internal customer."

09 · THE SAME THING BREAKS ON EVERY ROW

Informal coordination.

What used to get solved in the corridor can no longer be solved in the corridor. Processes aren't the cause of that need, they're the consequence.

No right type, only a wrong match.

A company type isn't an identity, it's a set of constraints.

What do you ask, what does it measure?

QUESTION	WHAT IT MEASURES
1. Who can reverse this decision?	Whether decisions live in a person or a role
2. Is there a process you've removed in the past year?	Whether the process is alive or dead
3. What was the first question asked in the last serious outage?	Fear or curiosity
4. Who makes promotion decisions, and on what evidence?	Whether effort is measured

What do you ask, what does it measure?

QUESTION	WHAT IT MEASURES
5. How often does the founder/owner get into the codebase?	Whether the handover has happened
6. What unwritten rule exists here?	The honesty of the culture
7. Why did the last three people leave?	Whether the company knows itself
8. Who declares a piece of work "done"?	The clarity of boundaries

> **Choosing knowingly beats enduring blindly.**
>
> — **Muhammet Şafak** Which Company Fits You?

THE DECISION ABOUT WHERE YOU ARE

Who can reverse this?



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If the answer is you, everything else is detail.