

The devil in the detail: why transformation efforts fail



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Having a great vision and plan is important, but the fact remains most transformation efforts will fail at the execution stage!

In this article we look at two areas; 'Getting the Right Balance' and 'Handling the Blockers'.

The most common reason for this is that leaders often underestimate the magnitude of change. Change leaders can misjudge the importance of engaging the entire organisation and the need for leadership focus and implementing robust processes.

The negative effects of unsuccessful initiatives can be damaging for the organisation, leading to resistance and scepticism to future change initiatives.

But, with the right experience and the ability to anticipate what can happen, combined with the right tools to manage the process of change, there is a lot you can do to overcome barriers and get the results you need.

Getting the right balance

So, for a transformation programme to be successful you need strike the right balance between improving processes and developing people. Trying to implement change with an unequal balance of effort in both areas will constrain the development of a culture where Continuous Improvement can be established and allowed to flourish.



In [The Ascendant Organisation by Peter Wickens](#), he describes **four** types of organisation characterised by different 'combinations' of people and processes:

1. Apathy

Low commitment of people and poor processes leads to 'Apathy'. Typically, there is no initiative or direction in this kind of organisation and no consequence of failure or reward for success.

2. Anarchy

High commitment of people and poor processes leads to 'Anarchy'. Here, individuals and teams are 'empowered' to make their own improvements without the guidelines and frameworks to ensure the changes they make fit into the broader needs of the business.

3. Alienation

Low commitment of people and robust processes leads to 'Alienation' in the organisation. Think about the last time you listened to a call centre employee following a script word for word and you get the picture. How engaged was the employee and how did it make you feel as the customer?

4. The ascendant organisation

High commitment of people and robust processes leads to an 'Ascendant' organisation. The way things are done makes sense to the customer and employees have the skills and motivation to make constant and managed improvements.

These four archetypes help you diagnose both when and how previous improvement 'initiatives' have failed and signpost the way to avoid the pitfalls of your current transformation plans.

Handling the Blockers

Every improvement initiative has supporters and detractors. But, the trick is to make the most of your enablers and to understand and manage your blockers.

A very effective way to do this is through Force Field Analysis, a method for listing, discussing and dealing with those forces that will help to drive change and those that will hold it back.

We've worked with a wide range of organisations from both the Public and Private sectors and we have found that the main challenges tend to revolve around people, markets and products, and are often very similar.

At the end of the analysis, people are asked:

- Which of the blockers are manageable?
- What is needed to mitigate them
- Which ones are 'deal breakers'?

It's amazing how quickly people realise that very few of them are deal breakers and how big issues such as industry regulation affecting everyone just serve to create a level playing field for all.

Conclusion

Transformation programmes are hard work but there is no substitute for working hard to get as many of your people on board. As on any journey, your perception of where you are changes as your perspective of the landscape around you inevitably changes. Hopefully by having a decent compass and a way to deal with the magnets that try to deflect your direction, the journey will be beneficial even if the destination always seems to be some way off!

Typical Enablers	Typical Blockers
Management fully support the change	Certain, important individuals or groups are against the change
Economic conditions are favourable	A silo mentality hinders enterprise-wide improvement
The programme is facilitated well	The current product range or service offering is limited
Staff understand the need for change	Industry regulation restricts change
It's human nature to want to do a good job	Staff fear change will lead to redundancies

If you have a question about something in this article, or if you're looking for support with another situation, feel free to get in touch on 01926 633333 alternatively you can email us at info@bourton.co.uk.