Failure to transform

How business transformation can go wrong
Organisations spend £4bn on strategy consultancy in Europe each year. Despite this investment, 95% of employees do not understand their organisation’s strategy. How then can they implement the transformation needed to bring their company’s strategy to life? Perhaps unsurprisingly, 90% of strategies fail to deliver their intended results.

Research tells us that organisations attempting to change face an uphill struggle. From poor project scoping and design to fear of the unknown; from lack of leadership to fixed employee mindsets, transformation projects are often hampered from the start. Is it any wonder then that organisational change projects have a high failure rate?

We all know that change is a constant occurrence for today’s organisations, and the pace of change is increasing. Why do so many organisations struggle to manage and implement change?

How do successful organisations deliver the benefits that transform their businesses and keep them ahead of the competition?

Change management has developed as a profession in its own right, but does it really address the mindsets and behaviours that impact change?

We wanted to find out. Following a survey of 100 C-level and senior professionals involved in transformation we have our answers.

Organisations set out with good intentions, plans and governance but, along the delivery road, something goes awry. Enthusiasm wanes, timetables slip, people carry on as before, and projects that could have delivered real benefit to the organisation end up side-lined.

Read our report to find out more.

Andy Dawson

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3 ‘Change management needs to change’, Ron Ashkenas, Harvard Business Review

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INTRODUCTION

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Strategic priorities – what are you focusing on?

Transformation doesn’t take place in a vacuum. For it to be worth the investment and likely upheaval, change has to deliver a business benefit aligned to the company’s strategic direction and priorities.

For our survey respondents, the top three strategic priorities for their organisations are ‘Revenue growth’, ‘Operational efficiencies’, with ‘Reducing cost’ and ‘Improving customer service’ in joint third place.

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<tr>
<td>Revenue growth</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural change</td>
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<td>M&amp;A</td>
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Given its ubiquity in the media, ‘digital developments’ might have scored more highly. It did appear among the top five strategic priorities, equal fifth with ‘Improving profitability’.

Again, considering the amount of focus on motivating and managing millennials, as well as the much-vaunted skills gap, it is surprising to see ‘Developing people’ feature lower down the list.

Bucking this trend are legal and other professional services organisations, for whom ‘Developing people’ is the joint number one strategic priority, alongside ‘Revenue growth’ and ‘Improving profitability’.

This result is in stark contrast to our retail respondents, none of whom identified developing people among their top three strategic priorities.

Threats – what is going to prevent you?

We asked respondents to identify the top three threats to delivering strategic priorities.

‘Insufficient skills’ is considered the single biggest threat to the ability to deliver strategic priorities.

Ranked fourth and fifth are ‘Lack of change delivery capability’ and ‘Cultural issues / Employee engagement’.

Our sector results showed areas of common ground around investment and skills.

One stark difference is the lack of apparent concern about Brexit, competition and new market entrants within the retail sector.

None of our respondents identified these issues as threats.

Given the challenge to established players by the likes of Aldi, Lidl and online-only retailers, plus the slowdown in consumer spending, this apparent indifference is intriguing.
From strategy to reality

Change is the vehicle through which organisations deliver their strategy. Achieving success in competitive and rapidly changing markets is dependent on the ability to take an ‘on-paper’ strategy and turn it into reality through successful execution of transformation projects.

Whether this means M&A, venturing into new markets and products, opening up new customer channels, operational efficiencies, or dealing with cultural issues or poor performance, how can organisations avoid the pitfalls and become successful at executing change?

Andy Dawson adds, “In my experience, those organisations where the executive team understand their role in delivering change are much more likely to implement their strategy and realise benefits.”

“They take time to understand what the change means to them and to their people, they explore what mindset shifts are needed and they actively model the desired behaviours.”

“People often make the mistake of thinking that change is a new system or process, but that is not the case. Change doesn’t happen without people doing something different to what they were doing before,” says Curium Founding Director James Farrow.

“Of course, that sounds obvious but most projects stop at the point of implementing the new system, not the point at which people are behaving in the required way.”

According to Andy Dawson, “Strong direction and leadership is about establishing a compelling vision and then setting the direction for how this vision will be achieved, including the cultural changes required to embed and sustain change.”

Achieving lasting and effective change requires a complex combination of variables to come together. Are project benefits and risks defined and articulated? Does your organisation suffer from change fatigue?

Are transformation projects aligned to strategic goals? Leadership, project management skills, communication: what factors are most important to achieving change?

We asked respondents to say which three factors they consider most important to achieving lasting and effective change.

The most important factor in achieving lasting and effective change is ‘strong direction and leadership’. Setting the tone from the top is critical, with ‘organisational culture’ and ‘buy-in from the senior team and managers’ making up the top three.

According to Andy Dawson, “Strong direction and leadership is about establishing a compelling vision and then setting the direction for how this vision will be achieved, including the cultural changes required to embed and sustain change.”

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Factors considered most important to achieving lasting and effective change

- Defined ROI and ability to measure impact and benefits of change
- Organisational culture
- Clear understanding of the likely risks and issues
- Project management professionals and tools
- Training, L&D
- Buy-in from senior team and managers
- Communication
- Strong direction and leadership

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Survey total


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Top 3 strategic priorities

1. Revenue growth
2. Operational efficiencies
3. Reducing cost

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CASE STUDY – strategy to reality

Curium is working with the Strategy Director and executive team of a household-name service provider. We are helping to define how the company’s strategy translates into changes to its business model and are mobilising projects to deliver these changes.

Alongside these practical steps to strategy execution, members of the executive team recognise that they need to shift their own mindsets and behaviours to make strategy execution a reality.

Andy Dawson says, “It is both powerful and refreshing to have an executive team who truly understand that their role in strategy execution has to be multi-dimensional: visionary; senior oversight and guidance; and establishing a new set of organisational values and behaviours.

Having the right mentality instilled from the outset in all groups affected by change is vital:

- CEO backing and belief in the importance of change
- Continued support from the senior team and functional leaders
- Employees ready for and accepting of change to the way they do things

Andy Dawson adds, “In my experience, those organisations where the executive team understand their role in delivering change are much more likely to implement their strategy and realise benefits.”

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Liz Mellon & Simon Carter, ‘Strategy of Execution’
Change capability

The five biggest threats organisations face when meeting their strategic goals coalesce around resources and skills. Or, in other words: people. Organisations cannot change unless the people in them change.

So, how are organisations mitigating the threats posed by insufficient skills or an inability to deliver sustainable change? Do employers give their employees the opportunity to do a really good job?

James Farrow says, “In my experience, most organisations don’t. People are skilled at what they do now.”

“I believe that for organisations to excel with the level and rate of transformation in the world today, ‘change’ needs to be viewed as an area of competence equal to traditional functions of operations, marketing and finance,” adds James Farrow.

The lack of investment in personal and professional development revealed by our survey is worrying, particularly in relation to other findings. According to our results, leadership, project management and communication are in short supply in many of the organisations we surveyed.

In my organisation, there is an understanding of the role of the project manager in leading change

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<td>Neither agree nor disagree</td>
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Nick Brown, Curium’s Head of Change Delivery, comments, “How and where do organisations go to help their people to deliver change?”

“Traditional project management training is focused on the professional who needs a recognised qualification. But with thousands of people trained in Prince2, and change projects only succeeding 30% of the time, that isn’t helping.”

“What about those who define strategy – how do they learn how to lead through to execution?”

“What about those “top 100” leaders in an organisation – what support is there for them to learn how their people will react to change, and how to embed change alongside achieving BAU targets?”

Almost 70% do not believe their organisation can communicate change effectively

“Senior executives continually and mistakenly try to lead an emotive topic like change without too much thinking.”

“Rational analysis and objective feedback don’t help someone who is scared of a different future to pick up their courage and move forward.”

Liz Mellon & Simon Carter, ‘Strategy of Execution’
Lead change

With ‘strong direction and leadership’ considered the main factor in achieving change, just how well do organisations lead change?

Survey respondents have a reasonably high level of confidence in their ability to lead change.

Reassuringly, the majority are also of the view that they are focusing on the right types of change.

Nearly three quarters strongly agree or agree with the statement that change initiatives are aligned with organisational strategy.

More than half strongly agree or agree that change initiatives have appropriate sponsors with active involvement in their performance.

That, however, leaves a sizeable minority (34%) who don’t have sufficient senior support.

While the CEO and executive team have an accountability to set the vision and cultural direction for change, the day-to-day leadership of change delivery most often falls to the senior team who report into them.

The challenge is to have these leaders operating inter-dependently, out of their typical silos, and committed to achieving the overall goals of the organisation.

Their role now embraces sponsorship of transformation projects, embedding the change as it is implemented; all while maintaining focus on BAU performance.

“Then, perhaps because other issues come to the fore, or because they have moved on to the next exciting idea, their attention wanes,” says James Farrow.

Emma Taylor, Curium’s Head of Operational Excellence, adds, “Leaders may not be completely in touch with the reality of the shop floor experience, which can lead to a disconnect between the project as envisaged and how it is realised.”

“Of all the things I have done, the most vital is identifying and directing the talents of those who work for us and pointing them towards a specific goal.”

Walt Disney

CASE STUDY – leadership behaviour as culture blueprint

“Leadership and culture are two sides of the same coin. A leader’s role is to define and create the culture that will help to take the organisation where it needs to go,” explains James Farrow.

For example, when working with a financial institution looking to create a cohesive and action-oriented culture following a substantial merger, Curium helped channel a leader’s assertive and competitive nature into a culture that helped to drive action and results.

“In another situation or organisation, some of these behaviours would have been counter-cultural. But, in context, they worked. Good leaders know how to demonstrate appropriate behaviours to help create organisational culture.”

“The Curium team shaped a major cultural change programme across our 6,000-strong customer operations division.

The programme included a superb leadership intervention which has had a positive and significant impact on our 600-strong leadership population.”

E.ON
Deliver change

Without a clear road map, it is all too easy to respond to short-term tactical issues at the expense of concentrating on delivering against strategic goals.

In some organisations, dedicated programme or project managers take the lead. Others have business transformation or change teams.

Some businesses simply go it alone, asking people to manage BAU activity alongside their involvement in change projects.

Given how much emphasis is paid to ‘delivery’ in change projects, we expected respondents to be favourable in their opinions on their organisation’s ability to deliver change.

The results suggest something else. They highlight the difference between seeing a project through to completion and actual change.

While the former can be achieved by a series of planned actions completed on time and within budget, the latter requires a change in behaviour or attitude.

More than half the people surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that projects have effective, timely and appropriate governance structures in place.

The plan is robust. The challenge comes in carrying out that plan.

Majority views on internal capability were negative, with half of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with both of these statements:

- My organisation has an effective change management office, business transformation team or equivalent
- Projects are mobilised quickly and effectively, with project teams moving rapidly to a level of high performance

That is a high degree of dissatisfaction with in-house delivery performance.

### Change projects in my organisation have effective, timely and appropriate structures in place

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### My organisation has an effective change management office, business transformation team or equivalent, which supports the delivery of projects and programmes

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<td>Strongly disagree / disagree</td>
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### CASE STUDY – building the change department at E.ON

Energy provider E.ON had five separate functions running change projects and programmes, but no consistent methodology. As a result, it couldn’t strategically align change, prioritise it or deliver it in a structured way. This made it hard to define the benefits of change or to effectively embed it.

Our team helped E.ON create a single department responsible for company-wide change, merging the five functions into a single department, supported by a simple, useable end-to-end methodology.

We also designed and delivered sponsorship training to all senior team members responsible for sponsoring change. This included a series of ‘how to’ guides to drive consistency in the way the change department was governed.

Within three months:

- Projects with active benefit management plans increased from 25% to 90%
- Projects with clear strategic alignment increased from 50% to 100%
- A single framework with consistent templates and toolkits was used across all change initiatives
- A consistent sponsorship approach was implemented
**CASE STUDY – investing in individuals**

Curium’s work with one client has seen it use a targeted communications effort to identify the individuals at all levels whose buy-in and involvement is critical. Team members are working one-on-one to understand the personal aspirations and motivations that will keep these internal stakeholders engaged and visibly supporting the change.

Emma Taylor says, “It is a big investment of time, which is often skipped and can lead to projects failing to deliver as originally intended.”

**CASE STUDY – a culture to sustain change at Sainsbury’s Argos**

Home Retail Group, former owner of Homebase, Argos and Habitat, wanted to improve customer satisfaction and drive £400,000 of efficiency savings across its contact centre, plus additional savings in its back office. We ended up saving more than £2m and customer satisfaction scores nearly doubled.

Curium went ‘back to basics’, showing managers the simple dynamics and metrics needed to run a successful contact centre and back office operation. Often, these are over-complicated. Next, we instilled daily disciplines to ensure teams focused on the right KPIs to give managers better insight and control of performance. We also ran TetraMap workshops for c.1000 employees to build greater self-awareness, collaboration between teams and drive cultural improvements.

To ensure the change could be sustained once we had finished our work, we introduced an accreditation process to maintain skills and capabilities within the team, and shared it with new employees.

“We embarked upon a large-scale customer service transformation programme and wanted to benefit from change specialist support. We turned to Curium to create an effective change strategy and plan, to develop and support the overall programme team, and to facilitate the delivery of multiple projects and outputs. This turned out to be the tip of the iceberg!”

“Curium not only helped us shape our strategy, plans and governance, we have also started to change the way we lead, our language, the way we think and engage with each other, and how we develop as a leadership team.”

Sainsbury’s Argos

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**Sustain change**

Effective and sustainable change is about more than delivering a project on time. Many organisations focus on the ‘doing’ part of a project, the bit controlled by timelines and plans. The result is a lot of activity with many projects and products delivered, but little in the way of real and lasting change in “the way things are done around here”.

Change will only last or ‘stick’ if people know about it, understand why it is needed, take appropriate action and derive the intended benefit.

Organisations can put themselves in the strongest position to create sustainable change by having engaging communications aligned to the change project – anything from meetings with influential individuals to presentations and updates.

Sustaining change requires a shift in employee behaviour. Employees are the people who make the product, who provide the service, whose efforts generate revenue.

If they are minded and mobilised to support an organisation’s strategic priorities, then these priorities are much more likely to be achieved.

“My organisation’s ability to absorb and change is understood and managed”

Survey total

- Strongly agree /agree: 16%
- Neither agree nor disagree: 32%
- Strongly disagree /disagree: 52%

Almost 70% do not believe their organisation can communicate change effectively

Just one-third of respondents thought that their organisation’s communications ensured that the right messages reached the right audience through appropriate channels. In legal and professional services, this figure dropped to 12%.

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Sainsbury’s Argos
CASE STUDY – people power change

At one local authority, members of the Curium team are helping to implement a new finance system. The move will achieve a significant cost saving from the previous system. More importantly, it will improve the user experience. The current system is not used consistently, and some users are doing aspects of work outside of the system, creating confusion and inefficiency.

Nick Brown says, “We are doing a lot of work with users to demonstrate the ease and benefits of using the new system. Understanding how it will help them to improve their performance helps to make them more welcoming of the change.”

Manage payback

If a change project or programme is set out correctly, then measuring its impact should be as simple as gathering the required management information.

With 50% either agreeing or strongly agreeing with the premise, legal and professional services respondents have the greatest assurance that their organisations understand risks and opportunities. That figure drops to a third for financial and insurance services, and retail businesses.

In my organisation, benefit risks and opportunities are articulated and managed

- 43% Strongly agree / agree
- 35% Strongly disagree / disagree
- 22% Neither agree nor disagree

However, for most of the respondents to our survey, this is not the case. Just one-fifth are confident in the metrics their organisation uses to assess the effectiveness and performance of change programmes. That’s a pretty poor return on investment.

What’s more, few believe that the people leading their organisation truly understand the whole change portfolio such that they can take a view of the impact of issues on the achievement of overall strategic outcomes.

In my organisation, senior leaders understand the entire change portfolio and can model the impact of project cost and time overruns on the achievement of overall strategic outcomes

- 30% Strongly agree / agree
- 55% Strongly disagree / disagree
- 15% Neither agree nor disagree

As we said earlier in this report, change is necessary if an organisation is to make progress against its strategic priorities. If a CEO or senior leader can’t see how projects fit together, then there is a problem.

In my organisation, benefit risks and opportunities are articulated and managed

“Organisational culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

Peter Drucker

CASE STUDY – people power change

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Nick Brown says, “We are doing a lot of work with users to demonstrate the ease and benefits of using the new system. Understanding how it will help them to improve their performance helps to make them more welcoming of the change.”
Our survey exists in a context where:

- Organisations spend £4bn on strategy consultancy in Europe each year
- 90% of strategies fail to deliver their intended results
- 95% of employees do not understand the strategy
- 70% of projects fail at execution

Successful organisations don’t just have a great strategy – they execute that strategy through their ability to successfully lead, manage, deliver, embed and sustain the necessary changes to their organisation.

All levels of the organisation, from the CEO down, need to be inspired by the vision and purpose, and understand their role in achieving them.

Acknowledging that there is no easy journey, that there will be obstacles to overcome, and understanding how to shift mindset and behaviours, are crucial leadership skills. They should not be underestimated.

Andy Dawson says, “Organisations who succeed at executing strategy through transformation are those where the executive and senior team lead from the front, and stay focussed and involved right through to achieving their business goals.”

“The skills required to execute change are often different from those required to run a normal BAU operation. Too often people are expected to know what to do.”

“Most organisations have a dedicated change capability, including project managers and change managers. The more enlightened know that they need to develop the skills of the entire organisation such that they can deliver change while sustaining customer service and operational focus.”

The results of our survey offer a revealing insight into where change projects go wrong, from the way they start out, through to the ability of project teams to influence behaviour change and galvanise support, to evidence of success.

According to Curium’s Nick Brown, this can often be explained by silo thinking. He says, “Organisations may well think about leading, delivering and sustaining change, but they often do this in isolation. So, leadership focuses on rallying the troops without necessarily being clear on the destination.”

“Project managers keep the project on track in terms of time and budget. Then, once ‘delivered’, attention turns to what happens next.”

“What they could do is consider four elements – lead change, deliver change, sustain change and manage payback – throughout, dialling up and down as required.”

“A project may need an injection of leadership periodically to help maintain momentum. How to sustain that momentum and embed change shouldn’t be left to the end, but factored in from the start.”

“Metrics established at the outset can be tested as the project progresses to ensure they are the right indicators of success.”

What is striking in our results, is the gap between what organisations should be doing (and know they should be doing) and what actually happens.

James Farrow adds, “My experience says that projects will always go wrong at some point.”

Our study certainly reinforces this view, with respondents identifying failings at every stage of a change project’s lifecycle: accountability; capability; communication; culture; and metrics.”

Projects may start out well, but other priorities come first. The internal change function may not have sufficient authority to drive through change.

An organisation’s employees might be resistant to or tired of change. Many factors have their part to play in achieving successful and sustainable change, which supports strategic goals.

“The real skill is not preventing problems but in knowing how to recover. Success comes from being able to correct your course as you go along,” he concludes.

At Curium, our starting point is that an organisation has developed its strategy and knows where it wants to go, but needs help with execution. This is where transformation needs to happen and where we can help.

About Curium Solutions

Curium simplifies change and empowers individuals and organisations to achieve their personal and business potential. It delivers its solutions through two consultancy practices: Delivery and Capability.

Delivery focuses on helping organisations to deliver key business initiatives like organisational design, digital strategy or transforming front and back office operations.

The Capability practice supports cultural change and helps leaders and teams to perform better.

Curium helps organisations facing change: including:

- Improving business performance – increase productivity and innovation, enhance employee engagement, improve customer service, introduce more efficient processes and reduce cost
- Supporting growth – develop skills, leadership and infrastructure to support and sustain rapid growth
- Digital developments – enable organisations to thrive in the digital world by helping them define what digital means to them and how to use digital technologies to get the outcomes they are after, while developing the right skills, mindset and business models to succeed in their market
- M&A implementation – cultural and operational change to support the new organisation

In a sector heavy with jargon and complexity, Curium simplifies change, taking best practice processes, tools, models and frameworks, and boiling them down to their essential and most useful elements.

Curium works with individuals, empowering them to make change sustainable long after the team has left.

Every member of the Curium team has experienced change from the client side and understands the emotional journeys individuals experience when leading or adapting to change.

Contacts

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