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What's the secret behind successful transformation?

No, it's not the latest bleeding edge technology; it's not an AI application, or a chat bot, or moving to the cloud. It's people!

People are the driving force behind the most successful organisations and successful transformations. From the leadership at the top to all the people who come to work every day — each one plays an important role which could make or break your transformation efforts.

It's not that the technology is not an important factor, it's just not the only factor. Too often organisations buy a piece of technology to solve a business problem. They buy it, configure it, and roll it out without much more than a passing mention to the people who will use it every day. And the outcomes can be devastating. Time and again we see cases where millions of dollars are spent on a new system which does not achieve its purpose. Often, it's not fit-for-purpose, because we never stopped to ask the users what their purpose was. People stick with their painful manual processes and work-arounds because, ironically, they are easier than using the new million-dollar system.

Top tips for successful people-led transformation:

1. Design for people

Technology is used by people to solve business problems. So make sure you include the people and the business problems in any transformation activities. Use human-centric design principles to understand your customers, citizens and employees and what they need. When we solve for people, we solve the real problems in an organisation.

Engage stakeholders at all stages of the project. This ensures you are building the 'right' solutions and guarantees increased user adoption, compliance, and positive word-of-mouth referrals.

2. Invest in your people

Technology is moving at such a pace that it's hard to keep up. Our people need continuous learning, training, mentoring, and opportunities to understand and apply technologies to their daily work. We can achieve this through training modules and formal learning, but equally valuable is simply exposing them to new ideas and ways of working. Encourage early adopters to share their projects across the team. Support communities of practice and informal networks dedicated to knowledge transfer and learning. Reward natural mentors within your teams and establish formal processes to support work-shadowing and mentorship programs. It is far easier (and cheaper) to keep an employee than finding a new one, so investing in your people makes good financial sense.

And to rapidly increase your capability, hire for the digital and data skills you know you need for effective transformation. Review position descriptions and ensure digital and data skills are a part of every job description. Review performance management frameworks to ensure digital and data skills are included prominently in core skill sets. And establish reward and recognition programs for people who are growing their digital capabilities, and more importantly, growing the digital capabilities of their teams.

3. Manage change at a pace your people can manage

Some transformation programs move at such a pace it's like drinking from a fire hose. People can't do their daily jobs and process the level of change and investment required. They burn out and disengage. This is bad news for a transformation project because the engagement of stakeholders is a key component for success.

A good leader can tell when their team is tired; when they've had enough; and when it's time to rest. Absolutely develop a timeline for transformation but build it with your people and be prepared to change it if necessary. Without the people on board the transformation will fail. Move at their pace. Reward and encourage them. Celebrate the small wins and listen to their feedback.

4. Recognise that people respond to change differently

Acknowledge that people have different responses to change. Some are hungry for change and will be your greatest supporters and advocates. Others will oppose you no matter what you do because you threaten the status quo – something they hold dear. While others will sit on the fence.

- **The Opposition:** Don't waste too much time on the opposition. Engage them, communicate with them, and give them every opportunity to come onboard, but at the end of the day you may have to accept their resistance and move on.

- **The Supporters:** As tempting as it may be, don't spend all your time in an echo chamber with your supporters either. They already support you and your goals so show them respect, engage them in the process, and move on.

- **The Fence-sitters:** Invest in the middle. This group could be converted to supporters or opposition depending on how they are treated. Win these people over to your side with factual information, emotional appeals, benefit statements, and honesty. Fence-sitters have the potential to become some of your strongest supporters.

One of the most important factors in successful transformation is a persistent team – a committed group of individuals who bring stability, productivity, and passion to their work every day. Persistent teams bring invaluable institutional knowledge and minimise the learning curve and lost effort which is a natural part of new team establishment. If your people are not one of the key considerations in your transformation plan then you are doomed to fail.

People are the single most important factor in any transformation program. Treat them with respect and they will deliver for you every time.

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