

Corporate transformation

Colin Coulson-Thomas investigates what separates the winners from the losers.



Some companies succeed. They adapt to changing circumstances and remain relevant and vital. Their people manage change, compete and win.

Other companies struggle and stagnate. They adopt fashionable approaches, buy the latest technologies, introduce generic or re-engineered processes and are advised by leading professional firms. Yet they still fail.

Have you ever wondered why some companies are less successful than others in similar circumstances? What are the laggards overlooking or doing wrong? What do the

winners do differently?

To answer these questions an investigation led by the author has examined the corporate experience of over 2000 companies for more than a decade. Research teams have examined key processes such as

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those for winning business, building relationships and creating and exploiting knowledge.

Outcomes achieved are ranked from the most to the least successful, and the approaches of the 'winners' (most successful) are compared with the 'losers' (least successful) to isolate the factors that make a difference. The results, summarised in *Transforming the company, manage change, compete and win*, suggest most of the critical success factors are attitudinal and behavioural.

Encouragingly, there is enormous scope for improvement. Typically,

even the most successful companies are only very effective at less than half of the critical success factors. This suggests enormous scope for improving the performance of key processes.

Let's look at some overall differences between the behaviour of people in key positions who fail and succeed respectively at bringing about a fundamental transformation of their organisations.

Losers are great talkers

First, we will examine the losers. They are indecisive and oblivious to the needs of others. They are wary of commitments and fail to inspire and motivate. They are also reactive. They respond to events and often fail to anticipate the need to change.

Losers are indifferently led. Boards confuse operational and strategic issues. They offer rhetoric and spin rather than a compelling vision and clear direction. When they do act it is often in peripheral areas. They overlook what is important and ignore the biggest opportunities for performance improvement.

Losers hoard information. They are reluctant to delegate and trust. Although driven by their own agendas they often end up playing other people's games. They adopt standard approaches and are inflexible. They imitate and copy others rather than think for themselves.

Losers are great talkers. They mouth generalisations and confuse activity with progress. They are complacent, secretive and defensive. They try to do everything themselves and resist new and external ideas.

Losers train by sheep dipping. Individual needs are not addressed. Immediate priorities take precedence over longer-term aims. The attitudes, approaches and priorities of losers lock them into a negative spiral of decline towards commodity product supplier status.

And the winners are...

Winners in the change, transformation and re-invention stakes are very different. They recognise that change can be stressful and may disrupt valued relationships. They only alter what they need to change, and tell those affected why change is necessary.

Winners have a longer-term perspective. They become trusted

business partners by enhancing their capabilities, deepening relationships, developing additional options and remaining relevant.

Winners are confident, positive and pro-active. They articulate compelling and distinctive visions, and build and release talent. They equip their people to make whatever changes need to be brought about.

Winners explore, pioneer and discover. They encourage enterprise

Winners cut through blather and hype to get down to the fundamentals of what needs to be done

and innovation. They trust other people, and share information and opportunities with them where this is mutually beneficial.

Winners address the specific realities and practicalities of what they need to do to manage change. They inspire and motivate. They avoid wasted effort and concentrate upon the areas of greatest opportunity. They understand their customers and put themselves out to develop tailored responses to their requirements and bespoke offerings.

While open to ideas, winners select people, business partners and opportunities with care. They are persistent but pragmatic, and determined but adaptable in pursuit of their aims. They take calculated risks, experiment with new ways of working and learning, and create new knowledge, options and choices.

Winners value relationships. They empathise and invite feedback. They question and challenge, and listen and learn. They collaborate with complementary spirits who share their vision and values. They enter into partnering arrangements based upon openness and transparency.

The boards of change winners are competent and confident. They avoid the distractions of trappings. Their game is to inspire, enable and support growth, development and transformation. They cut through blather and hype to get down to the fundamentals of what needs to be done.

Winners prefer simple solutions

and direct action. They think before they act, push back the boundaries of what is possible and become sought after business partners. Effective change managers avoid diversions, panaceas and single solutions. They focus on activities that deliver the results they seek.

Being successful – and maintaining the success

Change, renewal and transformation should be regarded as normal activities. Work with colleagues to foster winning attitudes and behaviours, and ensure a balance between change strategy and capability. All the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle required for successful transformation and sustained competitiveness should be in place.

Check that colleagues are clear about what they are trying to achieve and are visibly committed to agreed objectives. Make sure that people understand what they need to do and are enabled to act. Ensure barriers to change are identified and tackled. Problems will arise. Their absence could indicate a lack of ambition. Learning from them and celebrating success help to sustain momentum.



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