

Change the Change

Six building blocks for high impact transformation

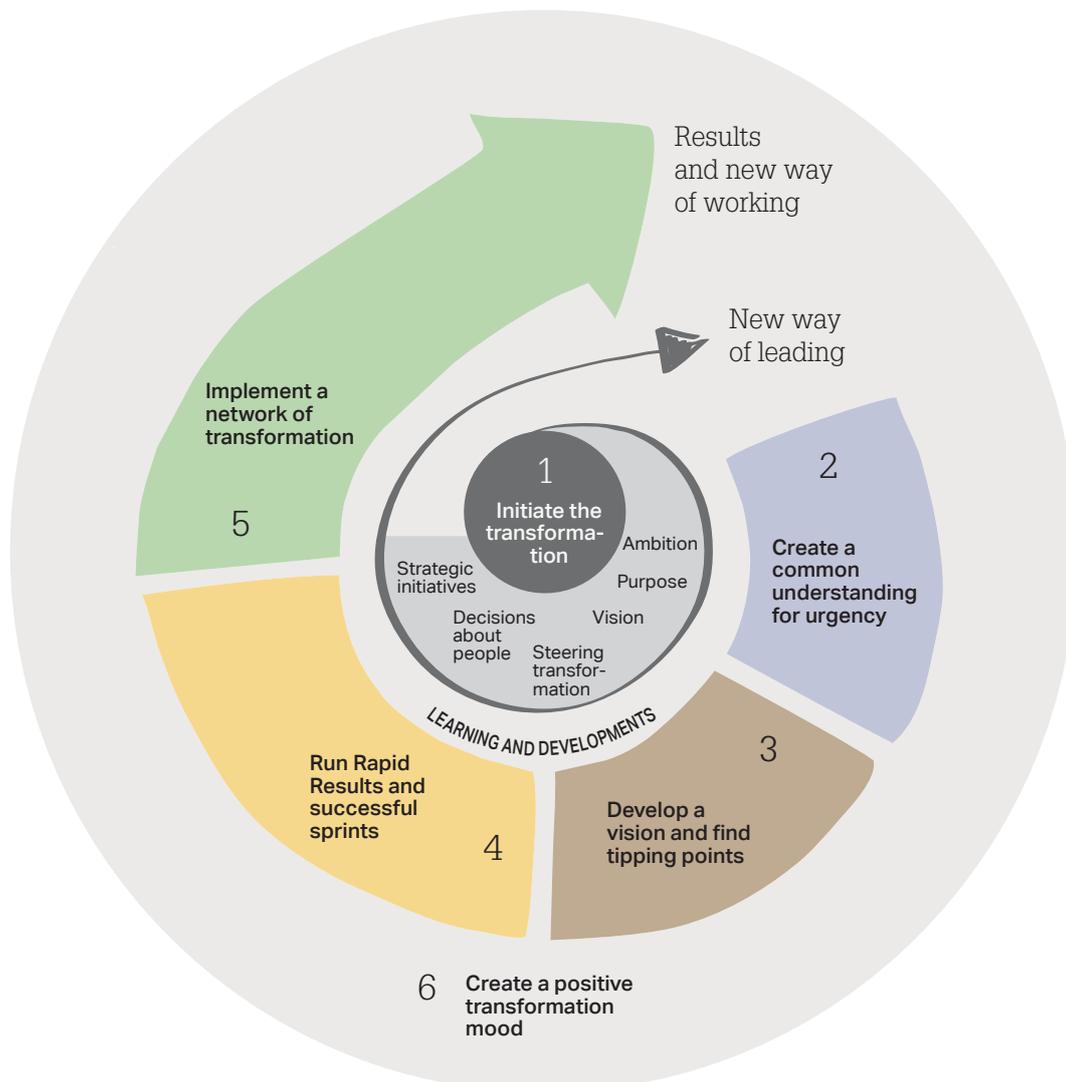
In almost every large corporation, today's messages from top management are all the same: »We need to be faster, more agile, less bureaucratic, and strengthen our innovativeness.« In order to achieve this, a dramatic change in mind-set and behavior is needed; some might call it a cultural transformation.

by Manfred Höfler

Traditional change programs don't function anymore in the VUCA environment we are all living and working in. Heavy programs with traditional project management, detailed roadmaps and complex team structures supported by big consultancy teams create many actions and often a lot of resistance. Soft style approaches where change consultants try to intervene mainly in psychodynamics or foster personal developments in trainings, workshops and coaching often don't create enough impact on business. In both approaches the results are poor and people are overwhelmed by complexity. Promises made when these kinds of change initiatives are initiated are by far not fulfilled. In contrast, most people are fed up when hearing the term »change management.« However, »change« in today's context – I would rather call it transformation – is crucial for all the big corporations to stay in the game and keep up with new agile competitors in the digital area. This all happens in a world where attributes like responsiveness, resilience and agility are the key words for success. To deal with these challenges, we want to show you a proactive, proven concept for more agile transformation processes based on a few guiding principles (see illustration). But be aware: There is no recipe for success; it's all about supporting interventions that have the highest impact.

1. Form a coalition of intrinsically motivated pioneers from different hierarchy levels for the transformation – together with them, specify the »transformational why« and the value for the business.
2. Foster a sense of urgency in the whole organization based on emotions and facts that are strongly influenced by the company's outside world.
3. Align powerful influencers and pioneers for the »new« to draw a common picture of the future and define shared tipping points for a transformation process.
4. In a short time, achieve rapid results with new ways of working by groups that consist of intrinsically motivated volunteers.
5. Use successes to convince the whole organization and create more agile transformation activities. Focus on changes of structures and systems that also remove barriers.
6. Mobilize the whole organization by authentic dialogue-based communication. Stage professional large group events, implement virtual platforms or use informal channels for it. ▶

Six building blocks for high impact transformation



1 Initiate the transformation

To initiate transformation, always start with one to three pioneers who are convinced that »something« should happen. They should be part of the management team of the organization and are the most important transformation leaders during the whole process. Together with an internal or external professional for transformation, they should gather first ideas for how to handle the challenge. In this first step, they need to clarify the purpose, define the »transformational why« and the ambition they want to achieve. A short stakeholder assessment can give them a clear picture regarding influences and interests of relevant key people – a transformation consultant could help them align awareness, ambitions and expectations. A transformation team (TT) consisting of people from different units and hierarchy levels is invited to be the transformation partner of the top management. Kick-off workshops with TT and the top management team are essential to determine the design of the transformation process and gain a common understanding of the purpose, ambition, current context and challenges. Afterwards, this new adventure can be started. Further on in the process, transformation leaders have to be active in steering, coaching and supporting respective activities.



Outcomes

- ➔ Change story V1
 - Purpose of and reason for the change
 - Business opportunity / vision
 - Process design
 - Stakeholder influence mapping
- ➔ Pioneers of commitment set-up
 - Pioneers in top management
 - Transformation team
 - Transformation consultants
- ➔ Steering principles and process for the transformation

Period of time: 2–4 weeks

2 Create a common understanding for urgency

A compact 360° »organizational assessment« helps gain a common understanding about the current state and what kind of changes are needed. Try to include these five angles:

1. **Customer perspective:** Organize a half-day customer conference with 10 to 20 important external or internal customers. Ask them about satisfaction, expectations and future needs. The customers should talk to each other and the top management listens.
2. **Employee focus groups:** Employees from all units should elaborate their view of the situation in a half-day workshop. Afterwards, invite representatives to present their findings to top management.
3. **Observations:** Send TT and management team members on personal learning journeys to competitors, companies in other industries and relevant hot spots. Have them write a journal about it.
4. **Supervisory board or upper management level:** Ask them about their expectations, views and challenges.
5. **Management team and TT:** Together with them, make an assessment about the current situation. Broach hot issues and process the feedback given. Create a common, emotionally significant »sense of urgency« for the transformation.



Outcomes

- ➔ Feedback
 - Customers feedback
 - Learning journey
 - Employees feedback
- ➔ Common understanding
 - Why we have to change
 - Hot issues of status quo
 - Key points for transformation
- ➔ Emotional unfreezing
 - Leaders are emotionally touched
 - Team spirit – we have the same challenges

Period of time: 4–6 weeks

3 Develop a vision and find tipping points

A compelling vision can be created in a one-day top management workshop. This process starts with individuals drawing and describing visionary pictures, followed by a group dialogue about how life in an attractive future should look. This exploration is necessary to build common ground for the future. The findings should be put into a future story, which is the foundation for the commitment of top management. Based on this attractive picture and in relation to hot issues of the current state, they define priorities for developments. These tasks are done in dialogic teamwork. To bring leaders into a creative working mode, a suitable working space is crucial and it needs at least a full day of management attention without any disturbances. At this stage, first agile implementations (speed boats) are ready to be started. Line managers take responsibility for fast actions and top management defines topics for Rapid Results initiatives. At the same time, TT is in charge of self-organized, cross-unit activities. This only has an impact if the top management decides on how they themselves will change their way of working to become role models for the transformation.



Outcomes

- ➔ Picture of the future
 - Common understanding of what an attractive future looks like
 - Commitment of key people
- ➔ Development priorities
 - List of agreed developments
 - Main actions for each field
- ➔ Rapid successes/sprints
 - Topics for initiatives
 - Topics for workshops
 - Topics for fast successes
 - New working principles

Period of time: 2–4 weeks

4 Run Rapid Results and successful sprints

This phase needs actions, proven outcomes and real business-related results. Cross-functional Rapid Results initiatives help achieve winning spirit. Volunteers take over »project leads,« build small teams and promise top management they will achieve challenging results within 100 days by new ways of working. These Rapid Results teams work in a self-organized manner alongside their regular jobs. The top management creates space for learning as well as reflection and helps reduce useless barriers for these teams. The TT is a partial member of these initiatives or supports further activities/sprints. After 100 days, results are assessed and lessons learned are shared with the top management. From the experience gained, future transformational measures can be derived. Parallel to these sprints, line managers work on fast successes in their own unit to prove contribution to the common ambitions. For specific challenges, three to five day-long »sprint workshops« can help generate new solutions, as well. The role of the TT is to assist the coordination of activities in this phase. Office concepts for new ways of working, new communication processes and further community building for volunteers are important enablers at this point.



Outcomes

- ➔ Business relevant success stories
- ➔ Fast success in all units
- ➔ Feedback about cultural barriers based on practical changes
- ➔ Community of volunteers who are really committed and energized
- ➔ Leaders who trust the change based on success

Period of time: 3–4 months

5 Implement a network of transformation

The picture of the future is the lighthouse for further developments. Fast, successful results are the energizers that early followers can contribute. As opposed to traditional change roadmaps, the top management and TT don't steer, but rather orchestrate the transformation. Small projects, big restructuring activities or system developments – all of these are change actions that depend on people who are truly committed to the transformation goals. In this phase, the right structural interventions, a change of systems, customized training, coaching and HR-activities – whatever is needed – are crucial to support individuals in performing and fulfilling their tasks. Sometimes further sprints or Rapid Results initiatives make sense. Quite often, the behavior of change leaders is vital to sow the seeds for transformation in the whole organization; however, the biggest boost for all activities is business successes, which is why collecting success stories, measuring developments and progress are essential. Important enabling activities are coaching of key people, reflection of learnings and honest feedback about successes and failures.



Outcomes

- ➔ Business success
- ➔ Cultural changes – new beliefs based on successful behavior
- ➔ Development of capabilities of many people
- ➔ Positive attitude towards change
- ➔ Transformation knowledge increased basis for future demands
- ➔ An organization-wide learning mindset

Period of time: 6–12 months

6 Create a positive transformation mood

To nourish the transformation and achieve a critical mass, a professional mobilization process is needed – and communication is key here. Unlike traditional change communication programs, it's all about dialogue in a contemporary transformation process. Customized mobilization activities and settings for communication are needed in each of the building blocks one to five. They range from large group events with mainly face-to-face conversations (working with 100 to 1000 people for one or two days and based on dialogic communication) to a series of smaller one-day workshops in all relevant units. These communication activities need a professional design and can be facilitated by the leaders themselves. Nowadays, you also have to run internal social networks competently with relevant content and involvement of the leaders. Use informal networks, routine meetings and learning programs, etc. to tell stories about the transformation and create a positive vibe for the »mission.« To make sure that you are on track with all of these mobilization activities, ask people if they really feel involved and trust in the authenticity of success stories.



Outcomes

- ➔ Positive mood for transformation
- ➔ Low resistance
- ➔ Getting all brains and hearts involved
- ➔ Reinforcement for the process
- ➔ Feedback about impact and misunderstanding
- ➔ »We-feeling«

Period of time: during the whole transformation process