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# The Future of Operational Excellence

Making the 'human system' the focal point of transformation efforts unleashes extraordinary, tangible results.

Gaurav Bhatnagar and Heather Gilmartin Adams  
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Management / Change Management

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## Take-Aways

- Companies implementing a change initiative should first focus on overcoming employees' reluctance to new ways of doing things and on encouraging them to sustain operational changes.
- People's mind-sets, their relationships with one another and their "untapped potential" can stand in the way of change.
- When leaders prioritize people over the technical aspects of change, they help employees commit to structural changes.
- For cultural changes to happen, individuals must feel they can affect outcomes, team members must learn to support one another and leaders must set an example for "operational excellence."
- Leaders need patience when pursuing change: They must encourage "emotional commitment" to company goals, provide training in necessary skills, build systems which support the new culture and foster strong "two-way" communication.

## Recommendation

Why do some change initiatives thrive and others fall flat? In this detailed report, corporate culture experts Gaurav Bhatnagar and Heather Gilmartin Adams of the consulting company Co-Creation Partners illustrate why prioritizing your people and preparing them for change are the crucial foundations of implementing technical changes. Bhatnagar and Adams offer practical tips to help corporate leaders implement culturally focused, performance-enhancing change. *getAbstract* recommends you read this article to remind you that change happens when people change.

## Summary

Many organizational leaders understand that performance-enhancing change initiatives must coincide with shifts in corporate culture. But too often, focus on employees comes after the fact, or is limited to surface-level “compliance.” As a result, roughly 70% of change programs don’t survive long-term: Early successes give way to doubt and disconnect between company leadership and frontline employees.

Because reluctance to embrace new ways of doing things can make or break an organization’s change efforts, leaders should first focus upon changing employee mind-sets, improving their relationships with one another and unleashing their “untapped potential.” Organizations which prioritize culture in this manner frequently see their performance exceed expectations.

*“Transforming process through a culture lens...unlocks the untapped potential of every individual in the organization, manifesting extraordinary, sustainable results.”*

By encouraging employees to see themselves as agents of change, rather than just demanding that they adjust to a re-established plan, organizations can spark genuine interest in achieving company goals. When chemical manufacturer BASF Wyandotte chose to prioritize cultural changes, for example, they not only improved in the areas they had identified, but their employees singled out many additional improvement opportunities. BASF’s change initiative enjoyed strong executive support and resulted in significant savings as well as a renewed sense of unity and purpose at all levels of the organization.

*“Make the human system the focus of the transformation. Have it be the catalyst and conduit through which technical solutions are created and put in place.”*

Help individual employees understand they can contribute and affect outcomes. Team members must learn to trust, communicate with and support one another. For these shifts to occur, managers and employee “influencers” must learn how to model desired behaviors. They need to create a new companywide identity and kindle interest in “operational excellence” by telling inspiring “change stories.” Culture change doesn’t occur quickly. Be patient and continue to motivate people to commit to change and keep up their excitement about company goals. Give your employees access to the training they need to flourish in the new system, encourage communication and be willing to listen.

## About the Authors

**Gaurav Bhatnagar** is managing partner at the consulting company Co-Creation Partners, where **Heather Gilmartin Adams** is engagement manager.



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