

WHY OPERATING MODEL TRANSFORMATIONS FAIL TO DELIVER SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE

A silhouette of a person in mid-air, jumping over a gap in a cliff. The person is positioned behind the main title text. The background is a dark, moody landscape with a sea or ocean visible at the bottom.

Applying The Optimal
Performance Formula to
Transformation

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Executive Summary

Many operating model transformations are positioned as strategic initiatives, yet in practice become heavily weighted toward technology implementation, process standardisation and organisational restructuring.

While these initiatives can improve operational consistency and control, they often fail to generate sustained performance improvement because they optimise the visible elements of transformation whilst underinvesting in the human and capability systems that ultimately drive elite performance.

Transformation therefore needs to be approached differently. Rather than treating transformation as an enabler-led programme, organisations should approach it as the deliberate design of an integrated performance system.

Sustainable high performance emerges when three dimensions are aligned:

- 1 MINDSET – IDENTITY, BELIEF SYSTEMS, SHARED “MEANINGS”, STANDARDS, CULTURE AND BEHAVIOURAL FOUNDATIONS**
- 2 MAPS – THE OPERATING MODEL, CAPABILITY ARCHITECTURE, SEQUENCING AND DEVELOPMENT PATHWAYS**
- 3 MOJO – EXECUTION DISCIPLINE, ROUTINES, COACHING, COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK SYSTEMS**

Most transformations focus heavily on “Maps” whilst neglecting “Mindset” and the operational dimensions of “Mojo”. The result is often compliance without commitment, systems without adoption, and structural change without sustained performance improvement.

The Problem with Traditional Transformation

Traditional transformations tend to focus on systems implementation, governance and controls, organisational redesign, process standardisation, reporting frameworks and compliance.

These elements all matter. However, when they become the defining story of the transformation, organisations can unintentionally create a narrow focus on control, efficiency and implementation delivery. These activities create visible momentum because they are tangible, measurable and comparatively easy to organise around, but over time, this often results in change fatigue, poor adoption, shadow processes and disengaged stakeholders who increasingly experience capability stagnation and weakening organisational influence.

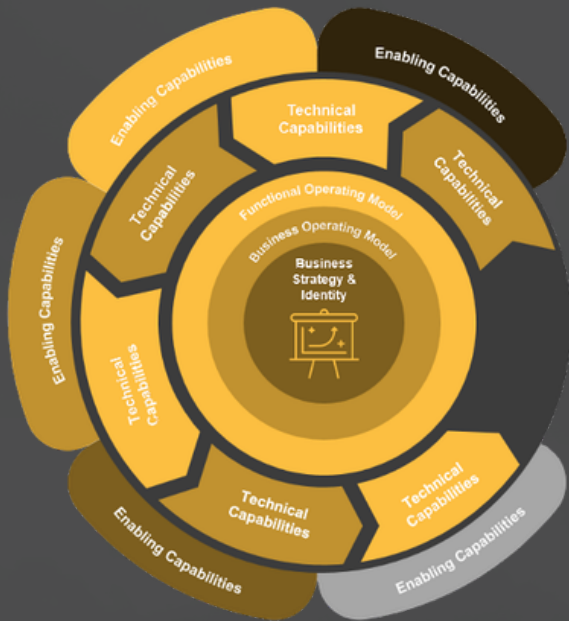
Elite performance is rarely created by optimising isolated components independently. Instead, it emerges when identity, capability development, execution discipline, learning and operational structures work together as part of a coherent system.

**Traditional Transformations:
Risk of Narrow Focus and Change Fatigue**

Control and Efficiency: Dangers of Poor Adoption and Stagnation

Elite Performance: Integrating Identity and Capability for Success

Reframing Transformation



Whilst transformation's initial focus gravitates toward the enablers of performance rather than performance itself, a deeper question often gets bypassed in favour of the momentum that focusing on enablers brings:

WHAT DOES HIGH PERFORMANCE ACTUALLY MEAN FOR THIS ORGANISATION?

What would separate a genuinely high-performing organisation or function from an average one? What would stakeholders experience differently? How would decisions improve? How would teams collaborate differently? What capabilities would become instinctive? What behaviours would define the culture? What standards would become non-negotiable?

Too often, these questions are addressed late in the transformation journey, or assumed to emerge naturally once the technology, processes and organisational structure are in place.

But elite performance does not emerge from structure and systems alone. It emerges through the alignment of identity, capability development, execution discipline and continuous learning. In practice, this means transformation should not begin with systems, processes and organisation charts. It should begin with defining the future identity of the function.

Elite sport offers useful parallels because the most successful coaches rarely begin with tactics or structures alone; they begin by defining a philosophy of play. Pep Guardiola's tenure at Manchester City is a strong example of identity-led transformation. Guardiola introduced a possession-based philosophy that fundamentally reshaped training methods, tactical expectations and the type of players required to execute his vision. Over time, that identity reshaped not only the club itself, but influenced how football is now played more broadly across the Premier League.

Once expectations are clear, operating model capabilities can then be designed intentionally around them. Rather than starting with systems, process and reporting lines, the focus shifts toward understanding which capabilities create the greatest enterprise value, how teams must collaborate to unlock them, and what leadership behaviours reinforce confidence, accountability and adaptability.

Only then do the enabling layers — systems, governance, process, data, reporting and organisational structures — become truly meaningful.

This shift is subtle but important. In many transformations, the enablers become the centre of gravity and success becomes defined primarily through implementation milestones such as go-live dates, operating model deployment, organisational stand-up and adoption statistics.

High-performing organisations rarely experience transformation this way. They experience it through behavioural evolution that manifests itself through improved decision-making, stronger collaboration, increased confidence and capabilities that compound over time.

Teams must be able to see and believe in the future state before new behaviours fully emerge, much like elite athletes visualise success long before it materialises in competition.

Transformation as Deliberate Practice

Traditional transformation programmes often interpret failure as evidence that the programme is off track. Adoption gaps are escalated negatively, mistakes become reputational risks, teams avoid experimentation and people protect the plan rather than improve the system.

Elite performance systems, particularly in sport, treat failure very differently.

Athletes do not interpret setbacks, missed shots or technical flaws as evidence of weakness. They interpret them as feedback. As data. As essential inputs into mastery. Elite performers obsess over feedback loops, deliberate practice and continuous refinement because progress is rarely linear. Improvement requires experimentation, adjustment and periods of discomfort.

Applied organisationally, this means transformation should create an environment where teams are encouraged to challenge existing ways of working, capability gaps are surfaced openly, leaders reward improvement rather than perfection, and experimentation becomes part of the learning process.

In this model, failure is not evidence that the transformation is broken. It is evidence that the organisation is learning.

That shift fundamentally changes how transformation is designed and experienced.

Instead of implementing a new structure supported by systems and governance, the organisation begins building a high-performance capability system where people development becomes central and leadership behaviours visibly reinforce the desired culture and standards.

Underpinning this, capabilities continue to evolve whilst the enablers genuinely enable:

ONE

Technology amplifies behaviours rather than replacing them

TWO

Governance reinforces trust, clarity and judgment

THREE

Process supports performance flow rather than simply enforcing standardisation

The result is a transformation that feels less like a deployment programme measured by milestone dates and more like a long-term roadmap for organisational mastery and improvement.

Final

THOUGHTS

THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON

Elite performance is fundamentally behavioural and systemic.

Technology, governance, process and structure all matter, but they are enablers rather than the primary drivers of high performance.

Sustained transformation occurs when organisations deliberately align identity, leadership behaviours and capability development with these enabling mechanisms.

Without that alignment, organisations risk creating transformations that are structurally complete but behaviourally weak.

CONCLUSION

The core difference between a traditional transformation and a performance-led approach can be summarised simply:

Traditional transformation asks:

“How do we implement a better process and operating structure?”

A performance-led transformation asks:

“How do we design an integrated system that changes how the organisation thinks, behaves, learns, collaborates and performs?”

The organisations that sustain transformation are rarely those with the best systems or the cleanest implementation plans. They are the ones that deliberately build environments where identity, capability, learning, leadership and execution continuously reinforce one another over time.

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