

When Culture Change Fails

Diana Barea, Managing Director for Talent and Organisation at Accenture, explains that when changing a company's culture, senior executives need to look in the mirror first





Moving to new ways of working are inherently tricky. They take more than just change but also collaboration, innovation and often cost-conscious behaviours that fuel growth.

I've seen far too many digital initiatives fail because of pushback from employees who resist changes to the corporate culture. But in many cases, the fundamental cause for that originates from the C-suite. Let me explain...

Many CEOs and other senior execs mistakenly believe that change initiatives need to be driven from the top. [Our research](#) shows otherwise. We have found that driving change too extensively from the C-suite can actually be highly counterproductive.

Inclusive Leadership

The most successful change initiatives occur when all employees are actively involved, especially the team leaders and middle managers. Remember that people will be more likely to buy into a cultural transformation if they helped shape those changes.

Simply put, cultural changes must have employees' fingerprints on them. One effective mechanism for accomplishing that is crowdsourcing.

When the online retailer Zappos was trying to define its corporate culture, its CEO Tony Hsieh asked for input from all of its employees. It then came up with a set of values and asked everyone to change one thing about Zappos' policies or processes to better align them with the values. By doing so they immediately put those values into action.

“ Many organisations fall short of implementing real culture changes ”

Top-down approaches can also be problematic for another reason. In my experience, I have found that digital transformations typically require a more flexible, purpose-driven work environment and a flat hierarchy.

Unfortunately, those kinds of culture changes often require top execs to move away from, if not completely abandon, the behaviours that made them successful in the past, for example command-and-control.

If senior execs aren't able to make those changes, they won't be able to lead by example. All their talk about values and behaviours will feel like nothing more than corporate wallpaper. So, what to do?

I've found that peer coaching and peer-to-peer learning can be very effective in helping leaders to adopt new behaviours.

The objective is to provide a safe environment in which execs can share their difficulties and best practices for overcoming those obstacles.

Reverse mentoring can also be a very effective practice, particularly because

desirable skills and behaviours are commonly found in junior employees or those with a millennial mindset.

Regrettably, many organisations fall short of implementing real culture changes, but it doesn't have to be that way.

If executives are prepared for the leadership challenges and new rules of conduct, they can lead an entire workforce to adopt new behaviours. And only then will large scale change programmes like digital transformation take root. ■

Why not join Diana and Rachael Edwards, HR Director for Passenger Cars at Mercedes-Benz UK, at our upcoming [HR Director Breakfast](#)?

This article was originally published as a blog on Accenture's website. Find out more [here](#)



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