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SUCCEEDING IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Nine Common Digital Transformation Pitfalls and How to Steer Around Them

An Infosys Consulting Perspective

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

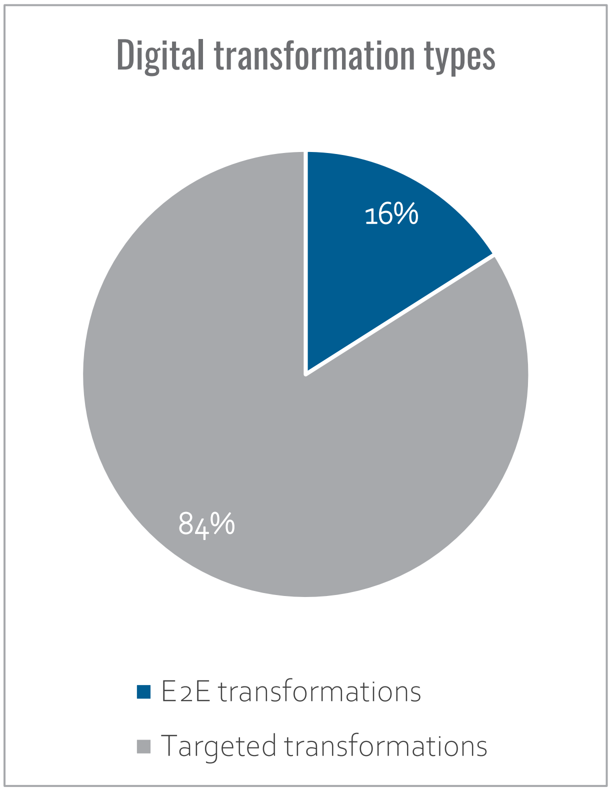
Digital transformation is used to define a wide variety of initiatives. Most executives set specific customer-centric goals for their digital transformation. Only 16 % of the digital transformations aim for a holistic end-to-end business transformation. [1]

Indeed, many digital transformations are not transformational for the business. Many digital 'transformations' have limited scope and are led from the middle of the organization, with limited and passive support from the top management. Unsurprisingly, such initiatives make little difference for the business as a whole.[2]

In this point of view, we focus on digital transformations driving an E2E business transformation, while many of the points are applicable for other transformations.

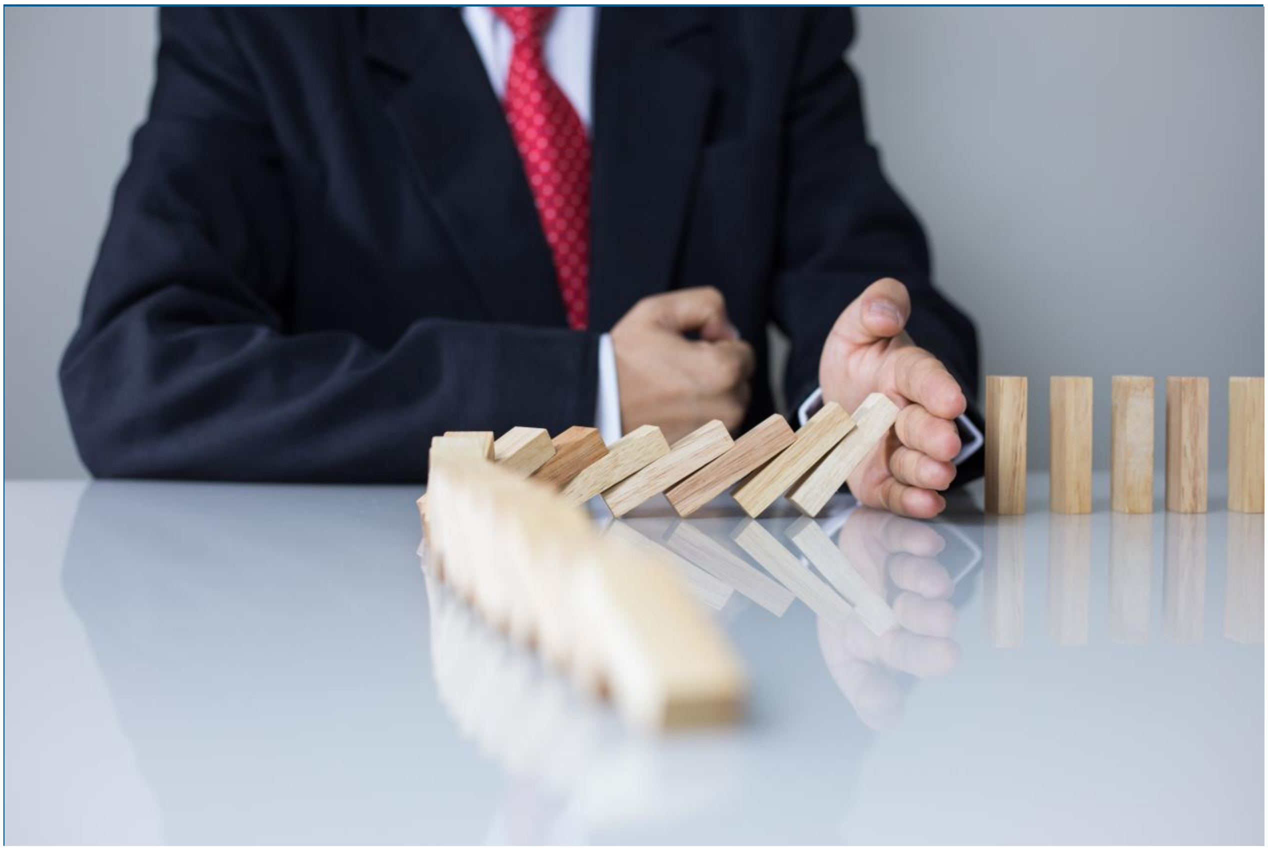
E2E transformations are the large-scale transformation of an entire end-to-end flow or flows. They encompass significant parts of the business operation, from a single business line to the entire firm. These transformations drive substantial changes to how the firm operates.

Targeted transformations are focused on changes enabled by digital technology, e.g., improving customer experience or reducing operational costs. They will change how that part of the firm operates.



INTRODUCTION

THE 9 PITFALLS



The digital strategy enables and accelerates the corporate strategy. Digital transformation is one possible step in the firm's digital strategy – not all firms need an E2E digital transformation. E2E digital transformations are typically complex, large-scale change programs enabled by new digital technologies, often spanning multiple years. Unfortunately, 70% of such transformations do not reach their stated goals.[3] Another study yields the same finding regardless of transformation size or scope.[4]

We see in Infosys Consulting that digital transformations fail in three areas: failure in planning, failure in execution and failure in tracking. Tracking is especially important due to the transformation's long duration: firms fail to have a systematic way of measuring and tracking the transformation's success. For a transformation to succeed, getting all three success areas right from the start is vital.

Our past experiences and analysis reveal nine pitfalls across the three success areas, each alone able to derail the digital transformation and lead it to not meeting its goals. From this point of view, we provide pragmatic insight into staying on course and avoiding the pitfalls.

INTRODUCTION

SUCCESS AREA		PITFALL	HOW TO AVOID
PLANNING	1	Not having a clear direction and top management alignment	Define business-driven targets and share accountability across the leadership
	2	Transformation is seen as an IT upgrade without any impact on operations	Rewire the business operations enabled by the new digital technologies
	3	Kicking off the delivery in an agile fashion with limited planning or practical view of the target state	Plan the transformation pragmatically bottom-up and sequence the activities
EXECUTION	4	Losing focus from the big picture to quick-wins and incremental opportunities	Focus on the transformation goals and business-driven targets, separate incremental uplifts
	5	Not setting up and mobilizing the transformation program properly	Clearly define the transformation engine, and ensure everyone follows the same model
	6	Overestimating internal capabilities and underestimating cultural barriers	Build the agile transformation capability within the organization
TRACKING	7	Missing clear transformation targets and overemphasizing cost savings	Define a driver-based business case and track value realization actively against it
	8	Having a limited vision of where the transformation is relative to original and revised timelines	Track transformation progress factoring in changes to scope and estimation accuracy
	9	Hands-off management of outsourced team focusing on the cost of SOWs	Run the transformation organization as its business unit with its own performance metrics

PLANNING – PITFALL 1

NO CLEAR DIRECTION AND TOP MANAGEMENT ALIGNMENT

Too often, for an end-to-end business transformation, the digital transformation appears to have no apparent business ownership and directive. Typically, this shows limited business-oriented prioritization and non-IT leadership accountability towards the transformation goals. At its extreme, the digital transformation is handed over to the CIO leadership / IT department, and its business targets are cost-saving.

This will lead the IT department to focus on replicating the business operating model, processes, and even systems. All the above will lead the IT department to push the new digital technologies and tools to businesses that are uninterested in using them. The transformation program may need to fight for management attention against all the other innovative developments run by the departments themselves.

Leadership likely was aligned in the strategy workshop that kicked off the digital transformation. Still, that alignment alone is not sufficient to result in business-driven, firm-wide alignment on the transformation scope, priorities, and direction. Lack of clear direction and top management alignment leads to cross-departmental misalignment will yield limited outcomes.

If left unattended, the CXO owning the digital transformation will be left to focus on their own scope, which will not lead to the strategic transformation outcomes discussed in the strategy workshop. The CXO and transformation leadership will feel like '*Don Quijotes*', fighting the windmills that are not aligned with changing.

For example, sales & marketing department did not want self-serviced product and price configuration but instead preferred to have the IT operations to implement the product and pricing changes like they had done in the legacy.

Self-serve was more beneficial for the firm overall in terms of cost and quality, but it was perceived to negatively impact sales & marketing department's financials and staff.

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

This pitfall emerges when the digital transformation does not have business accountability or strategy to follow. To avoid this pitfall, the firm leadership needs to align on 'why, as a business, are we doing this?', 'what are our goals and priorities across departments?' and then assign owners for the outcomes ultimately cascading them through the organization. The leaders' and departments' KPIs and metrics need to be re-evaluated to accommodate the digital transformation. Every department must own its digital transformation targets and the realization in its scope. While the CXO leading the change can steer the transformation program to yield the results efficiently and with quality.

PLANNING – PITFALL 2

TRANSFORMATION ONLY AN IT UPGRADE

"If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have said faster horses"
– Henry Ford

A holistic digital transformation will allow the firm to rethink the growth opportunities, business model, operating model, and company culture while keeping the company mission, vision, values, and purpose intact. Yet, most changes and improvements during the digital transformation focus on incremental improvement of the existing ways of working, for example, automation opportunities in existing processes or experience uplift in a specific channel. Even when the business alignment and accountability are there, the people defining the new ways of working are stuck to replicating the as-is to the to-be.

Business departments are anchored to their ways of working and their current scope of operations. It is very difficult to think of system-level innovations when one does not see or experience the whole system. In addition, the department stakeholders designing the to-be might not know what is possible through new technologies or even just with a cross-departmental process redesign. This myopia is what the other departments are thinking and doing; the perceived difficulty of trying to push radical changes and even just having limited knowledge of what is possible will result in sub-optimal results.

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

Digital transformation is a prime opportunity for the business to reinvent itself. The transformation program needs to be enabled to change the organization: design and adopt changes. This will require changing the hearts and minds of the staff to embrace the change and openly discuss across departments. Firms must lead by tackling areas that are currently causing trouble, being empathetic to concerns relating to changes in roles, responsibilities, and the organization around staff, and finally, willingness to learn and try something new.

When the mindset is there, building the to-be ways of working using an end-to-end approach will yield an organization-wide change. Recommend starting by defining the transformation targets. They help the departments work together to define the important outcomes first

Three E2E design approaches for designing the firm's to-be state

1. Customer experience / journey-driven approach for transformations focusing on customer experience and revenue uplifts especially in B2C businesses.
2. Value chain driven approach for transformations focusing on economic value generated vs. captured, especially in B2B and industrial supply chain networks.
3. E2E process driven approach for transformations focusing on operational efficiency, especially in labor-intensive businesses.

PLANNING – PITFALL 3

STARTING DELIVERY WITH LIMITED VIEW OF THE TARGET STATE

Organizations often want to kick off the transformation as soon as possible once the ambition and the big roadmaps are set. Trust in agile methodologies often leads the organization to think that a more detailed plan is not required. Digital transformation planning may be perceived as complex due to the organization's limited expertise in the to-be systems, architecture, or integrations. Sometimes organizations choose to avert the planning by expecting that the transformation partner, e.g., a consultant or a systems integrator, will do the detailed planning for them. While doing so, organizations forget that the technology dimension is just one of the operating model elements: processes, roles, culture, and metrics – and sometimes organization and governance – are also transformed. The operating model change will require planning before and alongside the technology delivery.

Kicking off the planned transformation at a sufficient level of detail will lead the organization to transform with a limited vision of the target state and milestones to reach there. It typically leads to changes in direction midway which may lead to costly rework of already developed solutions. In addition, during the transformation, the arising needs like user training, change enablement or market launch readiness are identified when they are 'stumbled upon' instead of prepared for, leaving little time to act on those needs. Typically, these result in extended duration and increased cost. Finally, not planning the sequencing in sufficient detail may lead to sub-standard customer and user experience. All these hindrances deteriorate the organization's trust towards the digital transformation and transformation partners, further increasing the stress of the transformation.

PLANNING – PITFALL 3

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

Designing the transformation target state and planning the journey upfront at a sufficient level of detail from bottom-up will set clear waypoints for the transformation to follow. The plan should cover all the transformed elements of the organization, including technology, processes, roles, culture, and metrics. The roadmap should follow sequencing dictated by business priorities and dependencies while maximizing synergies. Planning the transformation development up-front should prioritize decommissioning the legacy systems as soon as possible.

To increase agility, parts of the plan can be event-triggered, for example, when a certain technical readiness level is reached. The transformation plan needs to account for the opportunities of the new technologies. The organization should strive to have strong technical capabilities of the new systems to understand them and realize the opportunities they bring fully.

For example, a sales application for the sales staff was first estimated and planned as a simple variation of the new system's customer service interface. In detailed design, the requirement expanded into a guided interaction flow through 15 screens replicating the as-is flow.

Once realized, it was cumbersome and was ultimately fully redesigned from scratch considering the customer and employee experience. Overall, it required 10x more work than originally planned and was delivered 10 months late, all which could have been avoided if appropriately planned and designed up front.

EXECUTION – PITFALL 4

LOSING FOCUS FROM THE BIG PICTURE

While digital transformation is typically a multi-year endeavor, the first minimum viable and minimum marketable products (MVP / MMP) will be launched shortly. Those products will be 'bare bones' versions compared to existing products. However, they are new and full of opportunities, which will spark ideas for further improvements, some of which might be brand new and out of the original transformation scope.

Differences in legacy and new systems' capabilities limit customer migration, especially for subscription-based businesses like telecommunications or banking. While the new platform capabilities are built, both existing legacy and new business must operate: all impacted functions, from customer service to operations and finance, need to operate both the legacy and new systems, and the IT needs to service them both.

The excitement of the new creates a precarious situation for the digital transformation. The customer-facing departments will be keen to develop incremental revenue-generating features and iterate the look and feel based on customer feedback to increase customer satisfaction. Elsewhere, operations, customer service, and finance departments will be keen on improving automation and employee experience.

While iterations are essential, these new features will consume the same development capacity that would build the capabilities required for progressing the transformation, customer migration, and eventual decommissioning of the legacy. Running two parallel tech stacks will have double the IT operating costs as the legacy will still need to be maintained, and licenses will need to be paid. Especially in agile ways of working where the demand is iteratively prioritized, there is a high risk that the business departments lose focus on the transformation.

In the worst-case scenario, the capability building leading to eventual decommissioning of legacy is deprioritized as it is perceived to not provide significant short-term benefits to revenue or cost for business departments.

For example, a new digital supplementary service was ideated and prioritized to be implemented based on the incremental revenue it was expected to bring. The service was ultimately developed over the course of several months taking close to 10 % of the transformation's annual capacity.

The prioritization led to a delay of the customer migration, leading to millions of dollars of unrealized savings. Finally, the new service could serve only the customers of the new system, which would have greatly benefited from a customer migration in the first place.

EXECUTION – PITFALL 4

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

Transformation focus needs to be to enable migration and decommissioning of legacy as soon as possible; The original business case is planned with a certain time horizon and all the departments need to be aligned on that same goal despite the eagerness to build additional incremental services on top of the new platform.

The departments can be further incentivized through internal pricing, where the business departments need to pay for both tech platforms' costs, thus impacting their department's P&L.

Recommended capacity planning approach

Categorize all identified and arising development requirements into three categories:

1. Transformative (which build capabilities to enable decommissioning of legacy),
2. Business critical (new development on top of (1) which are necessary to operate legacy and new stacks. E.g. new legal requirements),
3. Incremental (everything else, i.e. the new and exciting business features enabling something the business could not do in the legacy).

Use transformation budget and resources for the categories 1 and 2. The departments / business units should invest themselves into category 3 features based on each feature's business case. Alternatively, part of the transformation budget, e.g. 20%, can be allocated for the category 3, increasing the transformation's overall cost.

Once the new digital platform has been set up and the foundational capabilities enabled, the category 3 developments can be initiated. The category 3 new features are best implemented based on overall customer experience and incremental business impact; this work can be facilitated with an 'innovation hub' or a similar concept where new ideas are quickly conceptualized, market-tested, iterated, validated and planned for delivery in a co-creative way together with customers (internal or external), technology providers, designers, strategists and business owners.

EXECUTION – PITFALL 5

LIMITATIONS IN SETTING UP THE TRANSFORMATION PROGRAM

The choice between waterfall, agile, and all the options in between defines at the foundational level how the program will operate and how it will interface with the rest of the firm. Digital transformation is easy to kick off very quickly 'in agile ways of working, and it will start to produce results quickly for internal and external test users to gather feedback for the next iterations. Agile is far away from the traditional waterfall. The business requirements are carefully written and iterated several times before handing the requirements for the development team to realize in a single go over an extended period of time. Both approaches and everything in between has their specific pros and cons: a single approach does not fit every situation.

When the transformation is kicked off, emphasis is given to what needs to be delivered instead of how it is delivered. Digital transformation is a multi-year endeavor and might comprise a significant portion of the firm's budget or total headcount. Going headfirst to 'delivery mode' will result in many 'leads', who will essentially be the shepherds and occasional problem solvers trying to resolve all the arising situations. Not having a transparent and well-communicated transformation operating model will cause miscommunications and mistrust: transformation organizations will appear as a black box for the business stakeholders. All the above reduces the transformation effectiveness and consumes time.

For example, a digital transformation was set up with a custom approach. The business's agile maturity and technical expertise were both low. Therefore, the 'business owners' represented the business demands and prioritization and handed the technical 'product owner' types of tasks for the system integrator.

Since multiple systems were being implemented at the same time, a component teaming was used, and the product owners ensured that their features would be appropriately developed by the several component teams working on them.

While the model included overhead, it ensured that the organization could kick-start the agile transformation quickly with the support provided.

EXECUTION – PITFALL 5

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

Establish core transformation program operations early on, implement them in business and the delivery organization and ensure all the parties involved use the same ways of working. Agile development typically needs processes to stay focused and maintain the big picture. Waterfall needs processes to adapt to change and update the plans. Establish the program operations from the start and enforce them with a strong transformation management office. Using highly prescriptive enterprise-level agile frameworks like SAFe will help set up the transformation governance and operating model.

Ensure that the program operating model is clear for everyone involved 1) from business leadership to product and process owners, 2) from IT leadership (CIO / CDO / CTO) to architects and developers, and 3) for all transformation operations, including e.g., change enablement and training. A clear transformation program's target state will make it easier for everyone to develop the organization towards that same direction at a sufficient level of detail. In addition, sequencing the transformation milestones will enable everyone to improve that alignment further – regardless of a waterfall or agile approach.

EXECUTION – PITFALL 6

OVERESTIMATING INTERNAL CAPABILITIES

Enterprise-level business agility is a hot topic, and many firms want to realize their major transformations in an agile manner as it advertises to start the transformation without delay and the first releases in a few months' time. Also, vendors push for agile approaches as it enables them to roll in resources faster, start work earlier, and enable billing earlier. Yet, most companies operate traditionally; certainly, some are more agile than others. Especially for firms with deeply rooted waterfall / traditional ways of working, the agile ways of working will need a paradigm and culture shift on top of the rest of the transformation.

Often, organizations decide to pursue the agile approach without deep consideration of what the decision entails. Agile transformation gives a lot of decision-making power to business and product owners. If they are not used to the role or the new ways of working, they might make short-sighted decisions, reducing efficiency and rework. Agility and smaller high-cadence releases also mean that not all the features are released in one go; if expectations are not managed upfront, the organization may expect too much from the first releases.

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

The transformation program needs to work at a careful balance between the ways of working ambition and the existing agile maturity level. Well-structured processes, prescribed documentation requirements, and endorsement for quality over speed will reduce costly decisions early on. There is no single way to implement agile, and there are many variations between agile and waterfall. Understanding what capabilities each variation expects from the organization will help decide what's the right fit for the transformation. The analysis will also yield the capability-building requirements leading to training plans and coaching. In a multi-party setting, the point of view of agile may be different for each organization; understanding their preferences and making an educated choice on what 'version of agile' is applied will make everyone more involved from the start.

Firm's agile maturity improvement needs more support from vendors, for example, additional coaching and other support until the firm is confident of its capabilities. In the short term, this will negatively impact the program efficiency, quality, and cost as the new firm's key resources, such as journey owners, business owners, and product owners, are learning the agile ways of working. Ultimately it will pay off, resulting in an agile way of working with proven benefits. The cost and the 'crawl' phase need to be factored in into the transformation roadmap, budget, and value realization.

TRACKING – PITFALL 7

MISSING CLEAR TRANSFORMATION TARGETS

Digital transformations' typical revenue-increasing drivers include improved pricing, improved marketing reach, targeted promotions, bundling, cross- and up-sales, and churn prevention. Typical cost reduction sources include reduced IT capex and opex, operational efficiency, manual process automation, increased self-serve share, and reduced paper. In addition to financial targets, digital transformations often target non-financial outcomes such as customer satisfaction, employee engagement, business agility, resilience, and predictability.

The business case that yielded the green light for the transformation is typically a high-level, top-down estimation focusing on financial targets. In addition, the financial targets often emphasize the cost savings as they are considered more concrete and within the organization's own control. Sometimes, the business case is defined only for the IT department. The non-financial targets are often reduced to statements like 'digital office', 'digital customer experience', and 'business agility; While they may have great meaning and bold ambitions, if they are not linked to the business transformation targets, they will easily get overlooked.

During the multi-year transformation, the business realities change. For example, the market conditions and, therefore the underlying assumptions of the business case change. Besides reprioritizing some features, these changes may readjust the baseline parameters of the business case. Unfortunately, these business and transformation changes are often not followed or adjusted for the business case - if it is even actively tracked. Often, the original business case has served its purpose once it initiated the transformation and is not to be returned again.

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

Transformation is a business priority for years – clear indicators for value targeted and value realized are needed to articulate transformation success. The business case needs to have a level of detail that captures the digital transformation's operational changes across departments, set targets for them, and enables their measurement. In addition to the financial metrics, also non-financial business key metrics should be defined, set targets for, and measured. The business case targets need be allocated for department-specific targets and further cascaded as operational targets.

Additionally, a driver-based business case will enable updating the underlying assumptions to reflect the changing business environment and the changing business priorities. It enables comparing current transformation status with 'where the firm would be if the had not initiated the transformation. Finally, it will provide a near real-time view to the value-added of the transformation.

The incremental, category three developments introduced earlier should have their own independent incremental business cases. Those should be tracked using the same approach and same rigor as the transformation business case. This ensures that they reach the business's ambitions and that their impact is not under- or over-valued compared to the transformation as a whole.

TRACKING – PITFALL 8

LIMITED VISIBILITY TO THE TRANSFORMATION PROGRESS

Transformation programs are significant investments for a long time and are typically tracked in terms of cost and delay compared to plan, often using predetermined milestones as midway targets. That approach aligns with a well-planned waterfall transformation but does not align with a transformation with movable components. During the multi-year transformation, the business realities change. This often leads to the business refocusing and reprioritizing some aspects of the ongoing transformation, impacting the remaining scope, timeline, and cost. Often, these changes are not factored into the program's progress reporting. An added layer of complexity arises from the planning error between estimated work required and realized capacity use.

Reporting an agile transformation using waterfall progress metrics or reporting on waterfall transformation but omitting the impact of change requests, 'capacity creep', or extensions will give an untrue view of the transformation's progress and status. The reporting will show delays and cost overruns compared to the original scope and timeline even though the capacity has been fully utilized based on the business's requirements.

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

The business case and program plan are derived from the earliest estimations and typically only the category 1 transformative scope. The progress and remaining work until program completion must be adjusted for estimation error and changes in scope category by category. This will provide the program leadership a transparent view to track the completion of the various scope elements and allocate true capacity usage and therefore cost to the category 1 transformative scope, explaining most of the difference between the original plan and realized progress.

Recommend to setting up program progress reporting according to capacity planning categories introduced earlier: 1. Transformative, 2. Business-critical, and 3. Incremental. For each category, the estimated effort and realized capacity use need to be tracked. The cost can be derived from the capacity used. There can be multiple rounds of estimations that are to be tracked separately, each providing increasing detail.

For example, a digital transformation had its milestone release postponed due to business-originated changes in scope what needed to be completed in the milestone. Changes to scope were tracked only on a feature level: feature 'X' to replace 'Y' and 'Z' in scope.

While the reporting provided visibility to the scope realized, it did not show the implication to program's remaining scope, added scope on top of original plan, or impact to the overall timeline or cost. By the year-end, the program leadership were explaining program delays in a reactive instead of a proactive way.

TRACKING – PITFALL 9

HANDS-OFF MANAGEMENT OF THE OUTSOURCED TEAM

Especially in the IT-led or IT-focused transformations, the business leaders often take a 'hands-off' management approach. There are hundreds of outsourced resources delivering the transformation in a multi-year program, but to whom the business has limited visibility. Especially whenever the program is facing obstacles or perceived delays/cost overruns, the business leadership may rightfully ask: "Are we getting enough?", "Could we do better?", and "why is this like this?". In addition, especially if the firm has limited capabilities to understand the transformation operating model or the new technologies as highlighted earlier, the imbalance of knowledge between the business and vendors accentuates any friction.

COVID-19 changed the ways of working further towards offsite, including offshore delivery and working from home. Offsite work reduces day-to-day face-to-face interactions that would help build trusted, personal relationships.

Besides trust, working from home and offshore has increased online meetings tremendously. However, their downsides include lack of attention, coming and going, connection-related issues, and reduced possibility of reading the room's reactions even when using video.

A common complication is that the organization has limited visibility to how the transformation is performing and whether that is to be considered good or bad. The offsite work requires additional reporting effort to provide the same level of trust as day-to-day working on site. The transformation organization is essentially its own department or a business unit in multi-year programs. Yet, many firms lack the rigor – tools, data, and reporting – to measure their performance by themselves. Instead, organizations leave performance reporting for the vendors themselves – again possibly leading to friction if the outcomes are not what was expected.

TRACKING – PITFALL 9

AVOIDING THE PITFALL

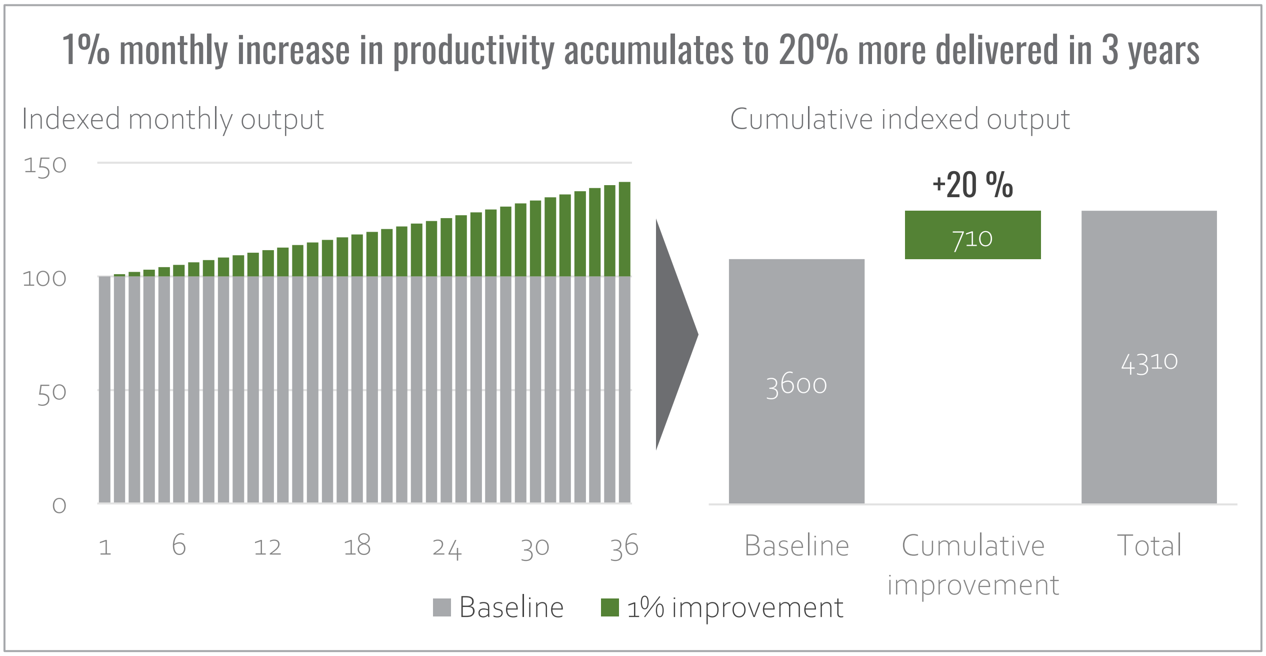
Successful transformations have key program metrics, benchmarks, and 3rd party expert insights to provide a grounded, fact-based, and insightful view on the transformation performance. In addition, having a solid program management office with a specific focus on the program's continuous improvement ensures that the program's output-to-cost ratio and other vital metrics improve over time. For example, a modest 1 % per month increase in monthly output accumulates to 20 % more delivered in 3 years than no improvements.

The transformation program, including in-house and vendor resources, needs to be considered its own department/business unit with its performance indicators. The performance indicators are in addition to value realization and program progress metrics.

The performance indicators need to be defined and reported consistently. Akin to typical business units, the performance targets need to be rolled down until the team-level. That enables calculating the program's performance metrics appropriately, e.g., output per developer would only consider those developers who are actively engaged in developing new features instead of performing other transformation functions like testing automation.

For example, a mature digital transformation organization was performing well and reported the foundational performance metrics like 'velocity, 'backlog depth', and 'defect density'. The program was focused on continuous improvement and a prescriptive quality tracking was implemented.

The quality tracking uses dozens of quantitative and qualitative indicators from the project management / work planning systems, predicts the quality of the release and prescribes actions to improve the quality. Quality tracking reduced the time to market by 20% and reduced defects by 15%.[5]



CONCLUSION

The nine pitfalls are the main culprits behind failed transformations. Therefore, success in a digital transformation requires focused action on planning, execution, and tracking to avoid the pitfalls. In addition, the definition of transformation success is clarified, so reaching it will be more easily ascertained.

BEST PRACTICES IN AVOIDING THE PITFALLS

PLANNING	EXECUTION	TRACKING
1 Define business-driven targets and share accountability across the leadership.	**4** Focus on the transformation goals and business-driven targets, separate incremental uplifts.	**7** Define a driver-based business case and track value realization actively against it.
2 Rewire the business operations enabled by the new digital technologies.	**5** Clearly define the transformation engine, ensure everyone follows the same model.	**8** Track transformation progress factoring in changes to scope and estimation accuracy.
3 Plan the transformation pragmatically bottom-up and sequence the activities.	**6** Build the agile transformation capability within the organization.	**9** Run the transformation organization as its own business unit with its own performance metrics.

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