



# When Workforce Transformation Fails

Digital disruption is forcing organisations to change the skills and behaviour of their employees. **Andrew Woolf**, Global and APAC Human Capital Lead for Financial Services at Accenture, explains why transformation programmes are often stymied when leaders fail to take culture into account



Organisations are forced to radically change how they lead and manage their employees. They have to shift traditional mindsets and behaviour and encourage workers to better collaborate, innovate and solve problems. They also need to promote swift and decisive decision-making among all levels of staff.

Such bold attempts to transform the workforce, however, often fail. They hit a big stumbling block: the culture of the organisation.

Conventional tools for initiating and managing change, such as training and communication, are unable on their own to deliver the transformation that's needed. The long-established culture of the organisation is deep-rooted and tough to change.

As a result, transformation programmes flounder. Managers become frustrated and employees grow dispirited. The consequences for the organisation can be disastrous. Digital disruption will increasingly become a threat rather than an opportunity.

Key talent is likely to jump ship, productivity and efficiency will almost always slump, and the organisation will become more vulnerable to competitors.

## How to Champion Change

Culture change is the key to effective workforce transformation, but how can organisations get it right? To find out, we researched change initiatives at more than 150 organisations involving nearly a million employees.

One of the biggest findings of our [Change Tracking research](#) was the

**“Culture change is the key to effective workforce transformation”**

importance of business leaders championing change. Executives must lead by doing, not just talking. They have to model the new values and behaviour they are promoting. If they don't, their talk will carry little weight.

Leading by example is most difficult for executives when they have to adopt behaviour and practices that are foreign and challenging. They're often wary of appearing inept and uncomfortable about letting go of approaches that contributed to their past success. However, humility and a willingness to learn from others are vital.

Such attitudes equip executives to constantly adapt to new challenges. They're also infectious; they encourage employees to relinquish their fear of change and embrace new ways of performing their work.

Peer-to-peer coaching is a highly effective way to encourage business leaders to change their behaviour as well. It allows executives to share their difficulties and successes in coping with change. This encourages leaders to embrace transformation and also fosters greater collaboration among executives.

Reverse-mentoring also allows executives to learn specific skills from specialists within the organisation.

For example a major financial institution recently introduced a reverse-mentoring programme for 200 of its managers. These managers were paired with tech-savvy employees who taught them how to use the organisation's new digital collaboration platform. The programme was a great success and the managers became strong advocates of the digital platform. ■

Andrew is a speaker at the upcoming Criticaleye Asia Leadership Retreat in association with Accenture. Find out more [here](#)



**Andrew Woolf**  
Global & APAC  
Human Capital Lead  
Financial Services, Accenture

Andrew is Accenture's Global Human Capital Lead for Financial Services, with over 20 years of experience running large scale business change and HR transformation programmes.

He is responsible for change, HR, and people and culture consulting engagements with banking, insurance and capital markets clients globally.

Andrew has extensive global experience from the UK and North America, to Asia and Africa, working with a broad range of local and multinational clients, such as Suncorp, Aegon, AXA, Aon and Marsh. He is based in Melbourne, Australia.

Contact Andrew through:  
[www.criticaleye.com](http://www.criticaleye.com)