

PROPHET

# Catalysts: The Cultural Levers of Growth in the Digital Age

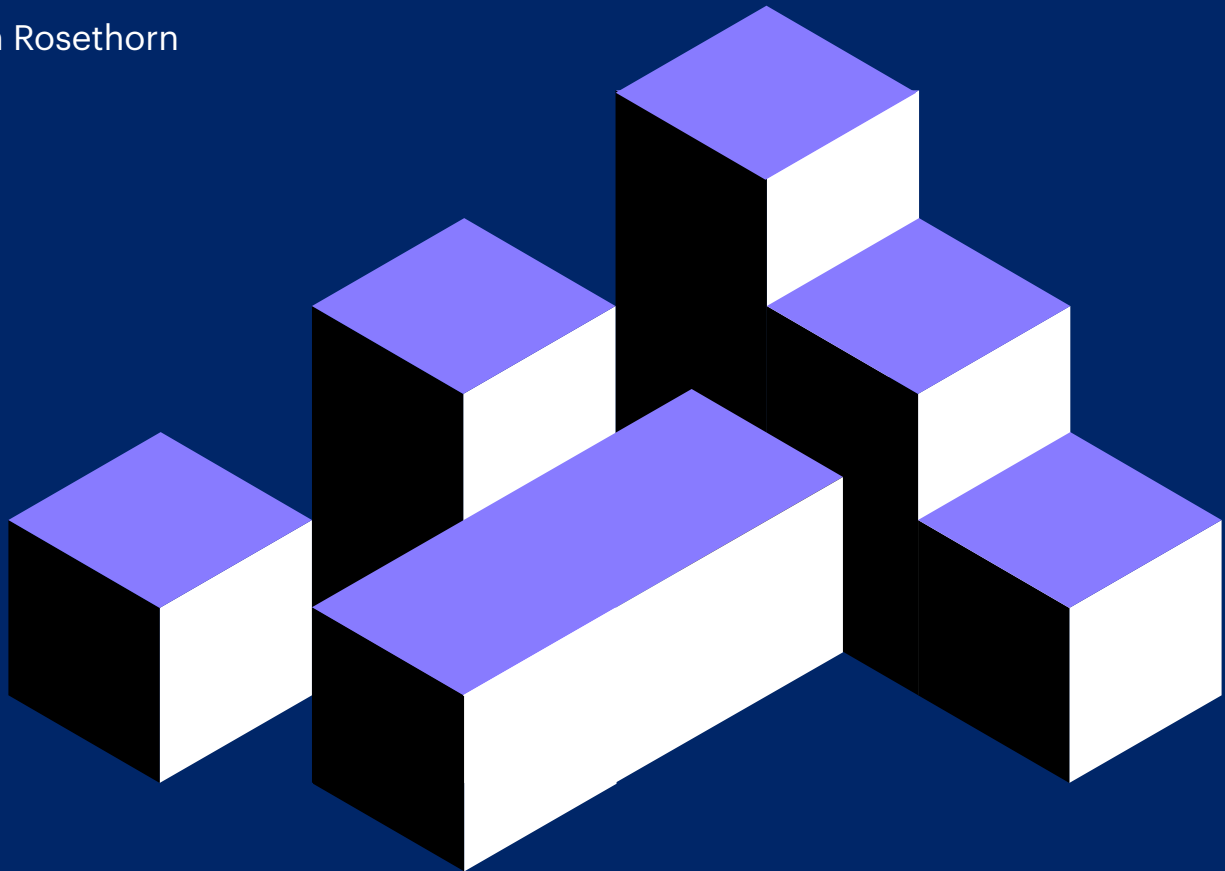
A Global Research Report

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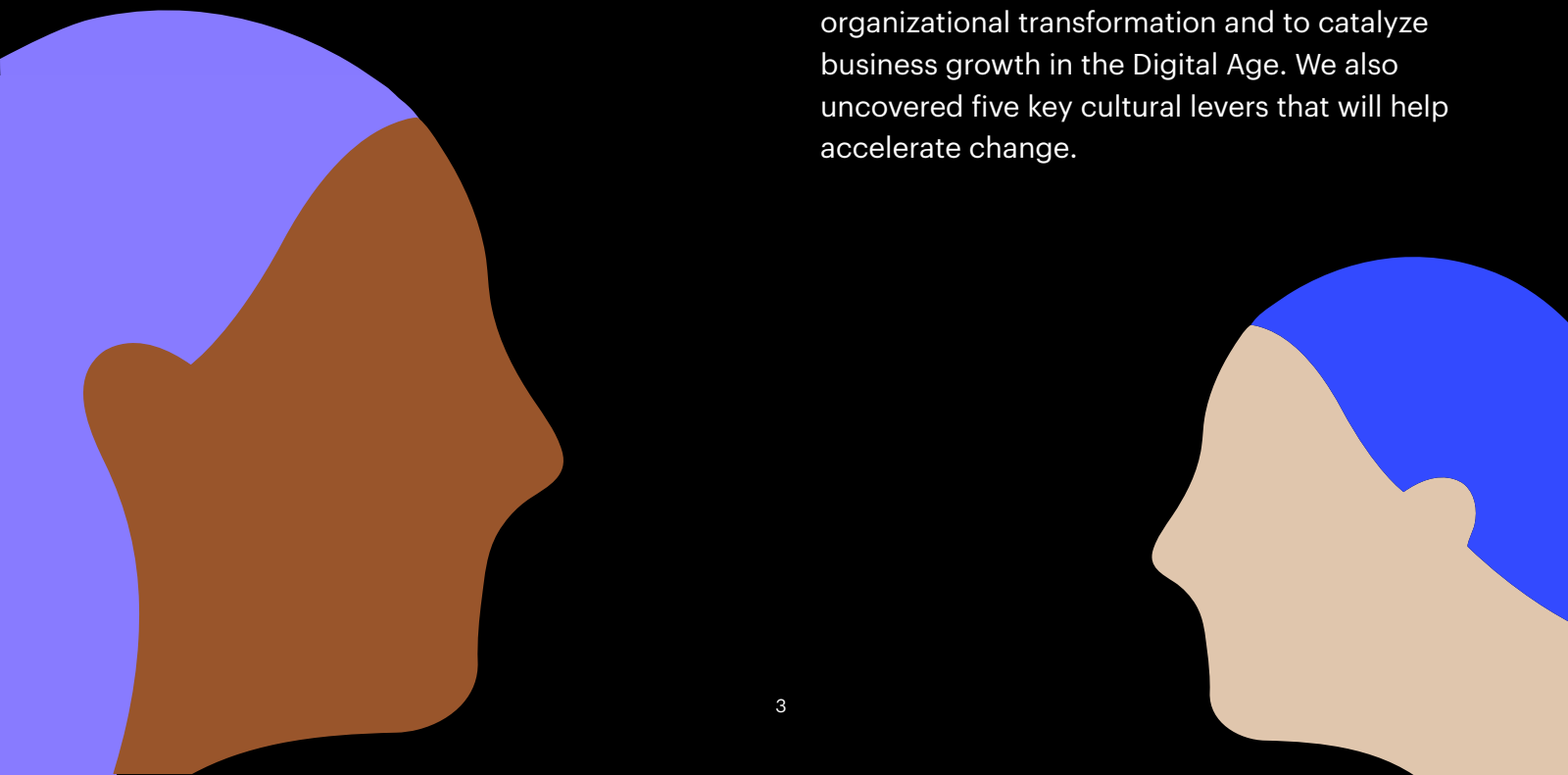
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# Executive Summary

Managing organizational culture to drive digital transformation is no easy task. It requires more of everything: more planning, more flexibility and more empowerment for employees.

Even in the new millennium, as technology drives the fastest rate of change the business world has ever seen, businesses are still run by humans. Businesses don't change. Humans change and then humans change the business.

Prophet's global research, led by our Organization & Culture practice, reveals the specific and most fundamental actions leaders must take to drive the human aspects of organizational transformation and to catalyze business growth in the Digital Age. We also uncovered five key cultural levers that will help accelerate change.



## Report Highlights

01

### **There is no silver bullet**

Organizations need to integrate all elements of our human-centered transformation model: DNA, Body, Mind & Soul.

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02

### **Some actions matter more than others**

There are fundamentals from which to start and key accelerators to help companies speed and sustain the transformation.

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03

### **Transformation in the digital age requires more effort**

Starting at the leadership level, followed by deep engagement across the entire organization.

# Introduction

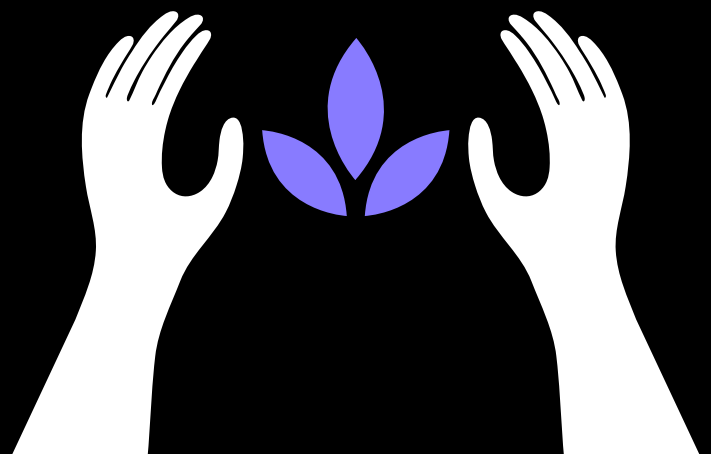
“Digital transformation is not a program or path or strategy, it’s an enabler to our overall business success and business strategy.”

**Joshua Sukenic, Vice President,  
Head of Global Digital Business Platforms**  
Dawn Foods

## **Growing from Within**

The need to power growth from the “inside out” is widely overlooked in the digital era. All too often it’s assumed that leaders and employees will rush to embrace their new future, happily abandoning their old ways of working and adopting unfamiliar new ones. Digital evolution is never that smooth because organizations so often overlook the need to take a strategic approach to cultural change; otherwise, as it has been said, “you get the culture you deserve.”

There are plenty of studies setting out how and why to create digital transformation strategies. However, there are too few actionable insights into what cultural factors really kick-start and sustain transformation and growth. Hence the decision to conduct our global research, the findings of which are the focus of this report.





We focused on culture because we know it is one of the most important intangible assets a company possesses—along with brand, intellectual property and R&D—to fuel uncommon growth. Yet, for those who take a truly strategic approach, it can be the ingredient that distinguishes companies that achieve uncommon growth from those that become irrelevant.

### **The Challenges of Transformation**

Digitally native businesses, those born in the last 20 years, have completely different assumptions about creating value than their older counterparts. Competing with them effectively often requires dramatic re-thinking of value propositions, products, services and customer experiences.

The speed of digital change compounds all the challenges. Change across sectors can be extraordinarily quick—with new business models, applications, and intelligence creating the fastest cycles of disruption in history. For businesses to evolve and keep their edge, they must transform more quickly and more radically than others on their journey. No two sectors are the same. Where the barriers to entry are lower, the stakes for companies are often higher.

In his annual update on the state of digital transformation, Brian Solis from our Altimeter team explains that digital progress has become an enterprise-wide movement that cuts to the heart of how companies work and compete. It isn't simply another change program.

“The change coming from digital is so fundamental that we have to question everything we have in the organization.”

**Julian Weber, Head of Retail**  
Shell

## The Human Factor

Our global research found that strategy and technology alone aren't enough to drive transformation. Our findings bolster the fact that organizational culture and the employee experience have a vital part to play in shaping progress. As a result, the human factors in digital transformation have grown in prominence.

It's important to state that our research isn't a playbook. There are simply too many organizations at different stages of transformation and maturity to prescribe a course of action to follow.

Indeed, our research demonstrates that digital transformation requires effort and attention across every aspect of culture to achieve success. How you run your organization, lead and reward your people will shape your progress. Simply put, a culture managed holistically and synched with strategy spurs growth.

As we dug deeper, we found three clear categories of cultural levers that leaders of change, particularly digital change, need to prioritize. None of these are a "silver bullet." But while no one lever will deliver change on its own, prioritizing and combining these features will ignite digital transformation and represents a route towards accelerated change. Importantly, our research indicated that purpose and leadership have particular power as catalysts of digital transformation.

Finally, it is worth noting that some of the labels we have set out against the various levers shouldn't be a barrier to applying our insights. We are conscious that concepts such as "KPIs" represent different things to different people. Do look beyond the language. Whatever your organization's name for a particular cultural process or feature, the insights can be personalized for your own experience and context.

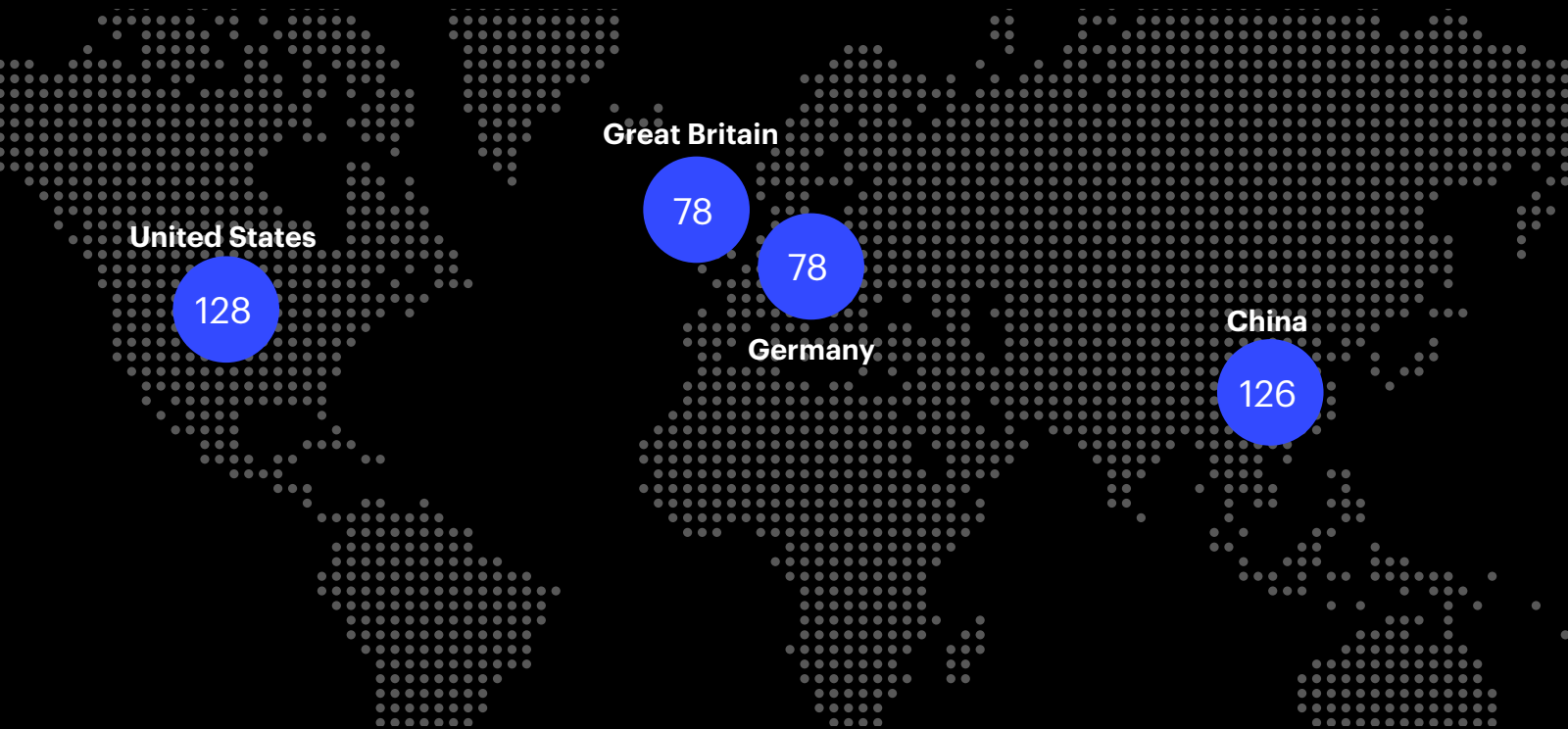
"In China, we were lucky as we set up a company and operations from scratch. So we don't have the baggage or legacy that exists in Europe. We came in with a fresh mindset and with the knowledge that we would need to setup a more digital company — our setup now is 100% digital."

**Alessandro Dassi, CEO**  
Thomas Cook China



# Methodology

In late 2018 and early 2019, we undertook two phases of research:



## Executive Interviews

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**50** Across industries, functional role, geographies and transformation 'maturity'

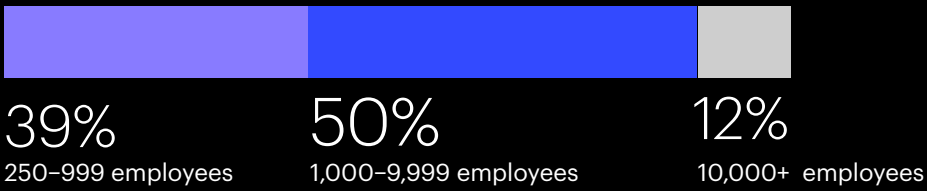
## Survey Participants

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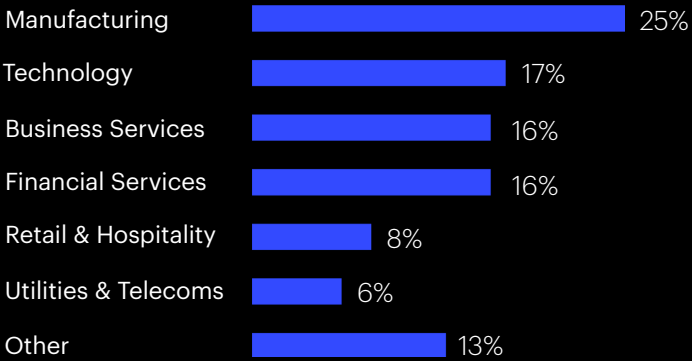
**400** Across the U.S, U.K, Germany and China



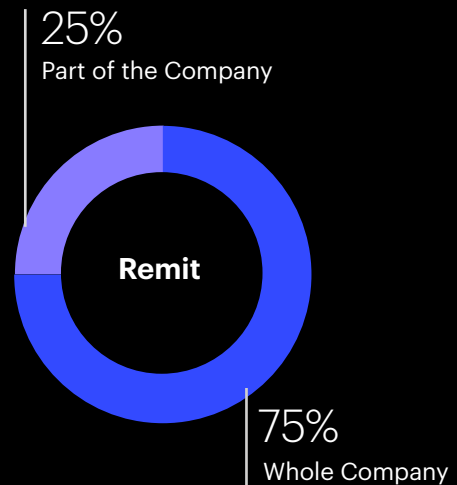
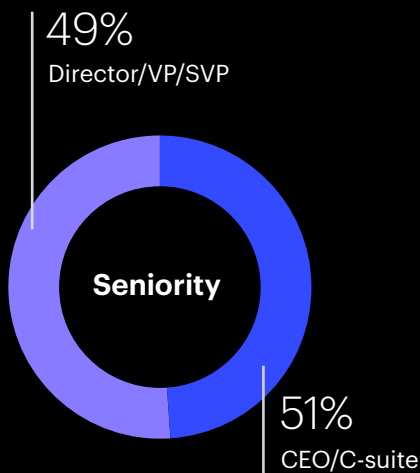
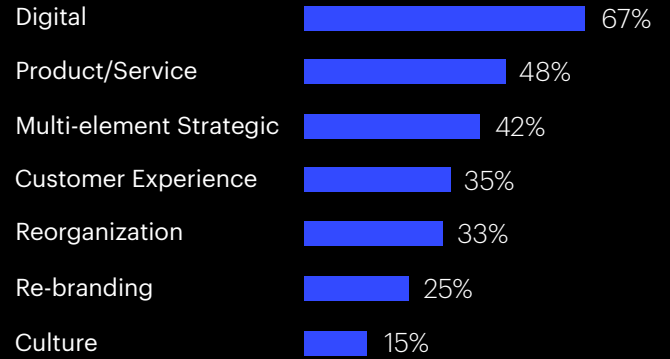
## Number of Employees



## Industry



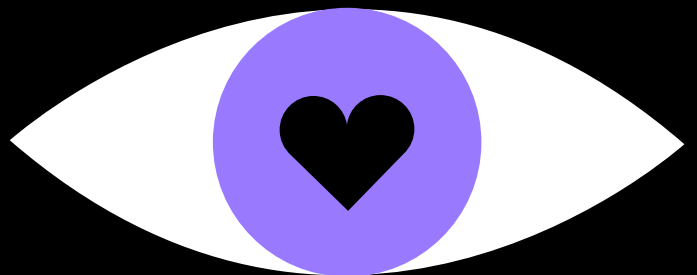
## Transformation Focus

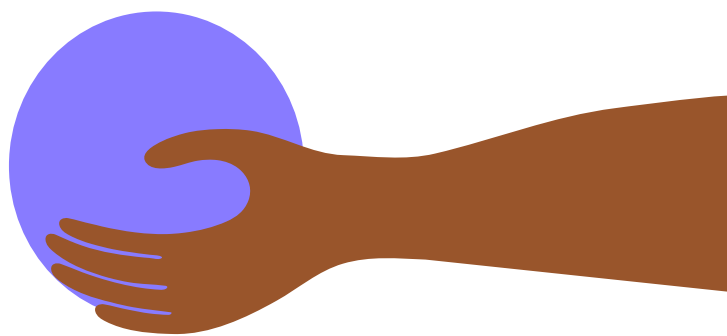
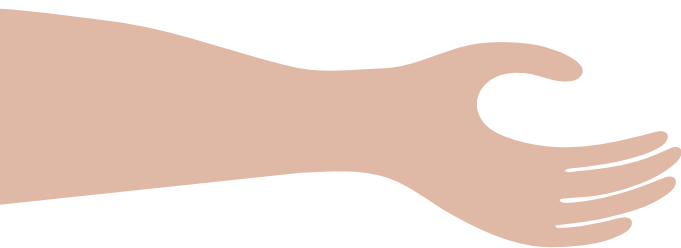


# What is Culture and Why Does it Matter?

## **Culture: enabler, inhibitor or both?**

“Culture” conjures up many definitions for business leaders. For many decades it was considered “soft” and “unmanageable.” However, since Peter Drucker, the respected management consultant and business writer, announced “culture eats strategy for breakfast,” it has attracted more attention. Today, it is a key focus for both executive leadership and boardrooms, a fact reflected in the caveat from Mark Fields, the former CEO of Ford, who added, “culture eats strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner.”





### **Culture and Change**

Possibly one of the most acute observations about culture comes from Edgar Schein, one of the world’s foremost organizational development experts. Schein noted, “You only begin to understand your culture when you start to change it.” This highlights one of the great challenges in all discussions about culture: it is for many organizations an amorphous concept—simply “the way we do things around here.” As such, all cultural change programs beg the question: where do we start?

However hard to define, culture’s importance is now beyond question. Larry Fink, the CEO of Blackrock, the world’s largest asset management firm, underlined in his 2018 letter to shareholders how critical it is to synchronize purpose, strategy and culture for sustainable performance.

Equally, the UK’s Financial Reporting Council has just begun mandating on culture. They have stipulated that boards of directors of publicly listed companies should be responsible for building healthy, purposeful cultures that align with their commercial strategies.

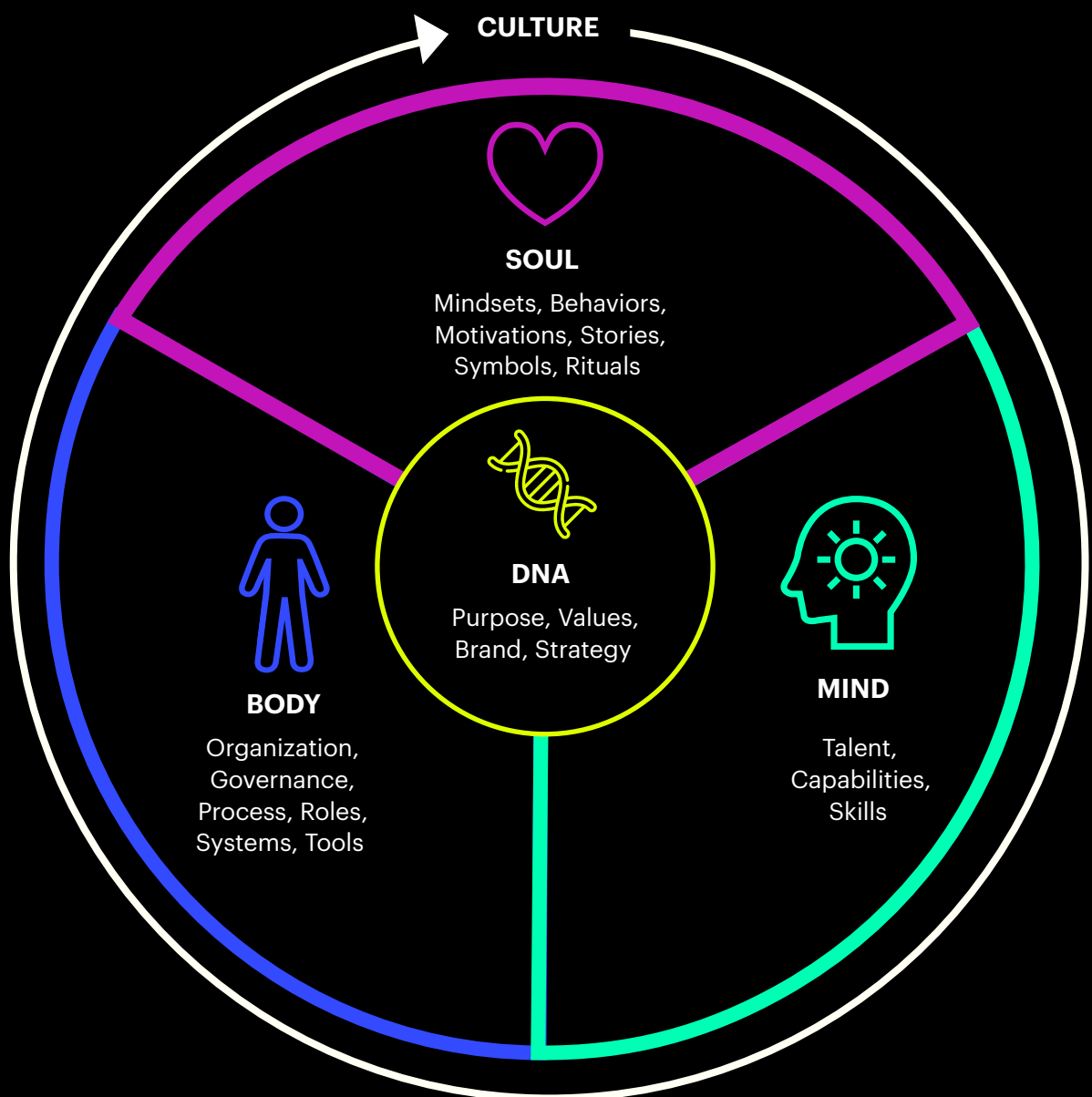
### **Culture is Human**

No matter how digital they may be, all organizations are human. All are made up of people, and those people must evolve and change what they do in a sustained and consistent way for the organization to change. Thus, we introduced the human-centered transformation model consisting of DNA, Body, Mind, and Soul. For an organization to be transformed—for it to be changed both radically and sustainably like a human—all these elements must be reimaged and realigned.

“First you rely on individuals who are interested in digitization and are intrinsically driven to see what they can do with it.”

**Julian Weber, Head of Retail**  
Shell

# A Human-Centered Transformation Model





# MIND

## Enable the Change

What new skills and capabilities might be required for employees to drive transformation?



# SOUL

## Motivate the Change

What mindsets, behaviors, beliefs and rituals might be leveraged to ensure employees adopt and evangelize new ways of working?



# BODY

## Direct the Change

What about the operating model needs to change to make transformation real?



# DNA

## Define the Change

What precisely is changing in the purpose & values, strategy or brand which requires a transformation?

From the outset we used this framing to test hypotheses through the initial qualitative phase of research, then in the way we explored themes through the quantitative research and finally in the way we analyzed and validated our findings.

We wanted to see, given the propensity in transformation—and in particular within digitally led transformation to lead with new processes and structures (Body)—if any particular part of the ecosystem emerged as dominant. The answer is it did not.

However, what has emerged *globally* are two categories of catalysts of change that are spread across all parts of the human-centered transformation model:



## Fundamentals

These are, as the name suggests, essential for change. Neglect them at your peril. You might call them “table stakes” in the U.S. and “minimum bets” in Asia—but, these are critical globally.



## Accelerators

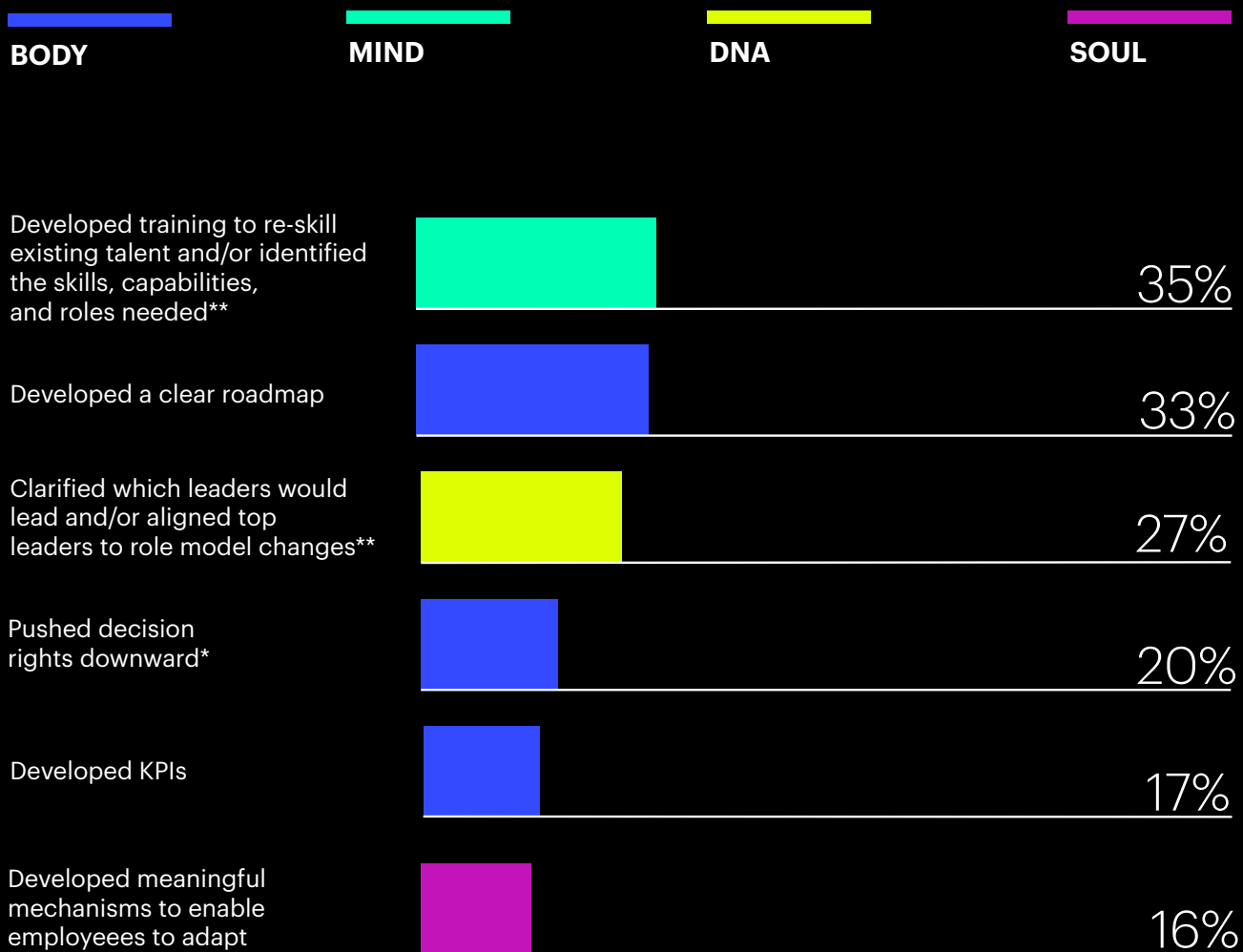
These are hidden drivers that can make a significant difference to change. They can be deployed in their own right or in combination with the fundamentals.

# The Fundamentals & Hidden Accelerators of Culture Change

## ■ Fundamentals

Six fundamentals came through in the research, with a particularly strong top three.

## Fundamentals – based on stated importance



\*should have done in hindsight

\*\* Net of two statements

Note: Percentage of respondents who listed action as critical to transformation success.

# 01

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## Re-skilling

Re-skilling emerged as the most important of our fundamental levers – putting talent strategy at the heart of effective transformation today. While it is often necessary to hire in digital skills to accelerate transformation, no one can replace the majority of their workforce and succeed. Therefore, the larger priority is actually on identifying the skills needed for transformation and investing in re-skilling existing talent.

We have seen multiple re-skilling approaches, from new skills “hubs” to “imposed transformation” from the top. In our experience, this is a classic area for organizational tension and often what results is a combined approach that uneasily blends the “new and the old” or, more worryingly, creates a sense of “future employees” and “legacy employees.”

This tension underlines how important it is to create a sense of momentum, led by the C-suite, towards new ways of working, while not creating a barrier to the injection of talent.

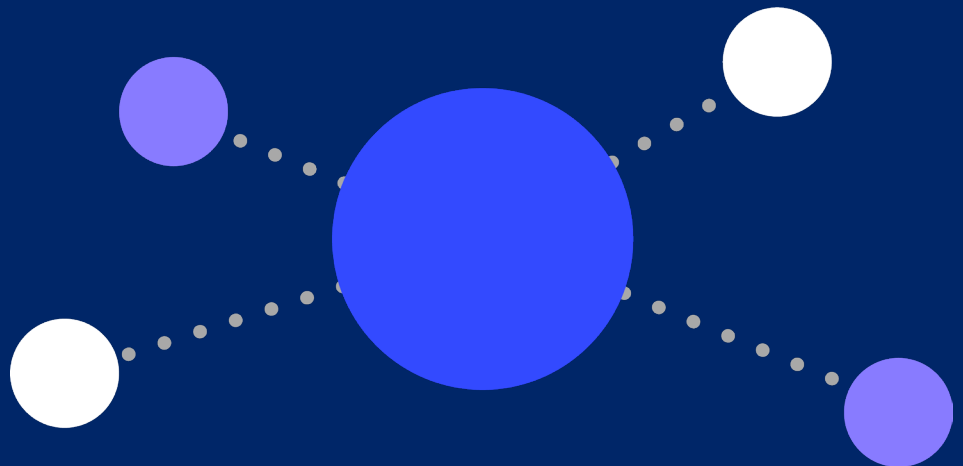
“With the speed of digital innovation, organizations and people don’t change fast enough so you have to inject digital talent that is supported by the Board and CEO.”

**Chris Hsu, CEO and Co-Founder**  
Zibo Inc (former COO of Hewlett Packard Enterprise & CEO of Micro Focus)



Any digital initiative requires a combination of business knowledge, process knowledge and tech knowledge. Because digital requires these people to work together, collaboration is happening across lines of business, not across clusters.

Peter Dew, Chief Digital Officer  
DSM



# 02

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## A Roadmap for Change

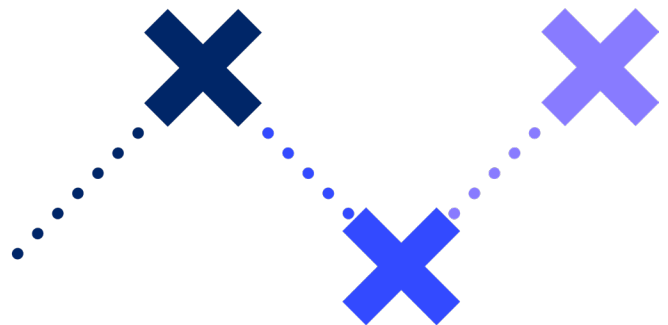
Our findings revealed that a roadmap for change was the second most important lever within our top three grouping. People at all levels need answers to the key questions: “where we are going?,” “what are the staging posts along the way?,” “who is leading what?,” and more.

On some level this feels counter-intuitive. In today’s business world there is intense pressure to be agile and respond quickly to events. The need for a considered ambition and guiding roadmap seems to sit uncomfortably with this. However, if you then link this to the importance of setting a powerful, actionable ambition under our “accelerators” (see p.24) it is clear that there is still a deeply held desire for organizing principles on every corporate journey. Visions and plans may change, but without some guardrails you have a recipe for confusion and chaos.

Building an effective roadmap for digital transformation requires laying out the key initiatives for multiple workstreams, typically covering key elements of the Body separately, e.g., data, technology, employee enablement, and customer experience.

Key aspects of the Soul and Mind, e.g., change network activities, communications and skills building are most frequently bundled into a single workstream called “culture” or “organization.”

Another hallmark of an effective digital transformation roadmap is the relatively near-term focus. The era of “Long Range Planning” (LRP) roadmaps is long over in the evolved enterprise. Digital transformation roadmaps generally focus on a two to three-year rolling timeline. Also, new to some may be the fact that instead of being created by a select team and held tightly at the top of the firm, successful digital transformation roadmaps are co-created with stakeholders at multiple levels and are visible globally.



# 03

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## Leading the Transformation

Clarifying which leaders are leading the transformation in conjunction with aligning top leadership is our next fundamental lever. Leadership and talent clearly need to be mapped to the areas where transformation will add most value. It's also important that the clarity in leadership cascades well below the C-suite so that employees know who's accountable and invested in the change. This can only happen if top leadership is aligned and clear in their roles as champions of transformation.

Given the speed it takes to transform successfully and the difficult decisions that are required to break through business-as-usual behaviors, it is no surprise that this was identified as such an important action.

“Top management can't really drive change; they can give permission and say it's okay to fail and be brave. I have learned that starting 2-3 levels below has much better impact.”

Lance Batchelor, Group CEO  
Saga

# 04

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## Pushing Decision-Making Rights Downward

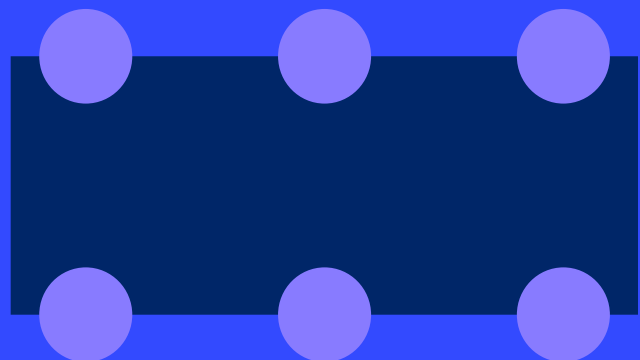
Our fourth fundamental lever is pushing decision-making rights downward into the organization. This was a key concern for business leaders when reflecting on change. Indeed, it was *the* change that business leaders most wished they had grasped in hindsight.

It would be understandable to jump to the conclusion that this is all about dismantling hierarchy. But that would be too simplistic. In our experience, the core issue is that agility in the digital age is highly contingent on deep cross-functional, self-governing teams.

Whether structures must be changed to achieve this outcome varies according to local norms. In the United States, we've seen structural change is often necessary. In a number of our large Asia-based clients, when senior executives clearly instruct teams to work cross-functionally and truly empower them to make decisions, that works, too.

“At all levels of the organization people need to be better enabled.”

John Nolan, Head of HR  
Jardines



Arriving at the company, people just stared at me blankly when I stood on stage and talked about innovation and courage. I found out that no one had ever encouraged that — in fact, they would fire you for it.

Now, some of them have really moved the needle and changed the organization — being given permission to be brave. People come to me all the time now and ask if they can set up a rapid results project and they want to be the heroes of the project. It's a great opportunity and has really shifted our culture to something more agile and fast paced.

**Lance Batchelor, Group CEO**  
Saga

# 05

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## Developing Effective KPIs

Developing effective KPIs is our fifth fundamental lever. KPIs are another label that triggers debate given the exponential growth of data and insights in today's digital age. The core point here though is that at a foundational level, transformation efforts need to be measured. Measurement is essential to demonstrate progress and drive accountabilities, as well as to increase visibility and transparency so course correction is quick and simple.

A common technique for ensuring alignment at all levels in digital transformation is to illustrate the relationship between all KPIs and revenue generation and/or cost reduction. This is commonly referred to as a value driver tree or matrix. Value driver matrices serve three important functions: they identify what specifically will be measured, the hypotheses for how those measurements relate to business performance, and they ensure executive alignment around the dashboard for measuring progress.

We will come back to KPIs under "accelerators." However, in the context of fundamental levers, the development of effective KPIs is linked to a number of vital criteria, they should:

- 1. Ladder up to one of two key business drivers in any business: top-line growth and profitability.**
- 2. Be linked to ambition and meaningful milestones on a roadmap.**
- 3. Be aligned at a business unit and/or functional level before being translated into team and individual goals.**
- 4. Be shared and transparent.**

# 06

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## Helping Employees Adapt

Helping employees adapt to working environment changes and/or creating safe spaces and ways to experiment emerged as a sixth fundamental lever for success.

Empowerment is the key term here. These activities involve giving employees the freedom to experience and ultimately adopt new ways of working. This could be through greenlighting skunkworks projects or simply creating collaborative spaces in offices.

Changing behavior is hard and during a digital transformation, it is even harder. Unfamiliar technology, new skills, flattening organizational structures, upheaval of annual objectives, and a pace that can be dizzying often create spaces that are psychologically and physically more challenging for employees.

For those with the attitude and aptitude to be part of the future, setting the right conditions for them to try, fail, learn and grow is critical.

It is worth noting the other emerging themes, albeit not as significant as our sixth fundamental, that came to light when we asked leaders what else they would have done in hindsight:

**Change and communication:** the importance of rapidly sharing success and lessons learned (See p.24 “accelerators”). Plus, the need to take a more dedicated approach to transformation management.

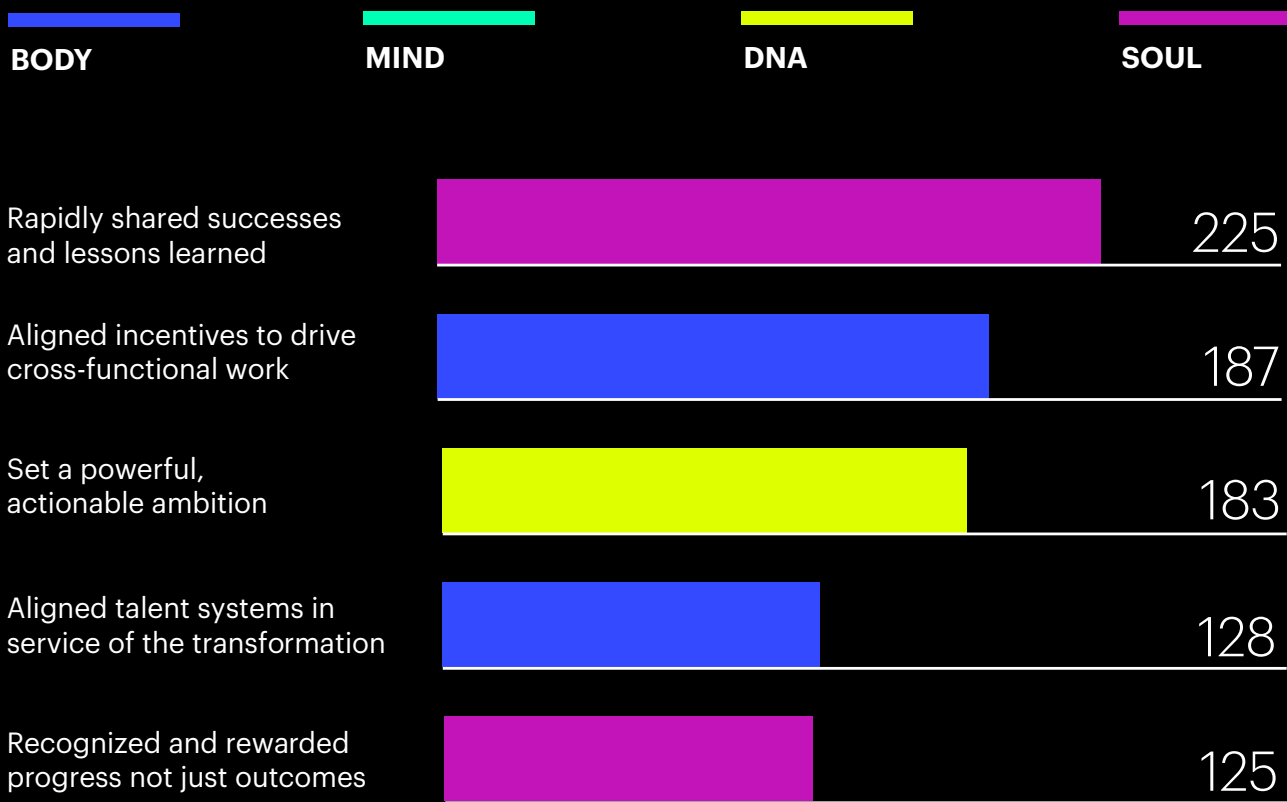
**Aligning incentives to power collaboration:** a governance lever.

**Building talent:** hiring to bring new skills is critical. But it’s vital to ensure that you are not “adding to the ballast” by continuing to hire people with legacy mindsets and skills.



We found five key change accelerators that make a real impact on cultural transformation:

## Accelerators – The Hidden Drivers (indexed)\*



\*indexed around an average of 100; Statistically significant to the .05 level

Note: Index measures derived importance based on correlation with the dependent variable: "Taking everything into account, how successful was the transformation?" or, for WIP transformations, "Taking everything into account, how successful has the transformation been to date?"



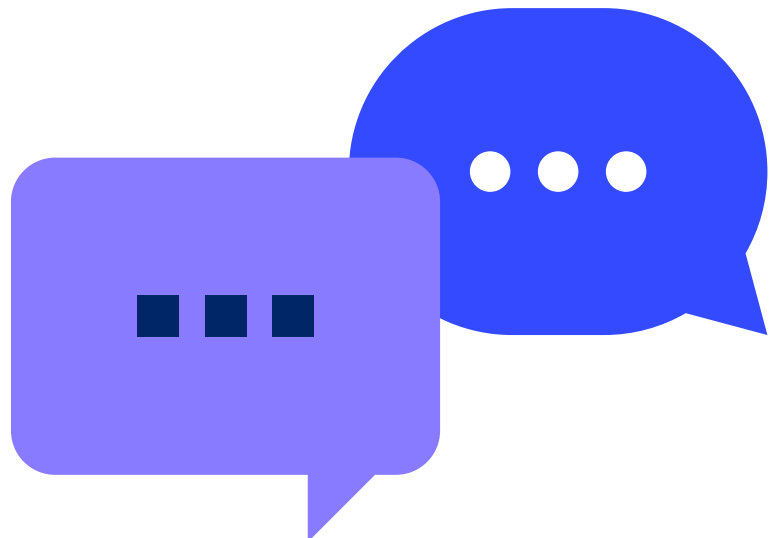
# 01

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## Real-Time Storytelling

To succeed, digital transformation calls for pioneering on every front. Organizations must find new ways of working, learn new skills, apply the latest technologies and implement more agile governance models. Every one of these pilots offers an important opportunity to communicate back to the larger organization about the new world. When it comes to championing change and energizing colleagues, sharing what is and what is not working, as well as lessons learned is hugely important. It signals that the organization can actually change and deliver new, better outcomes as a result. It also fuels propensity to try new ways and therefore to learn.

This means that, in addition to getting good at disciplined experimentation — often framed as “failing fast” — it is important to develop myriad touchpoints for sharing success stories. These will encourage the important behavioral changes required for success: focus, pace, risk taking and collaboration.



## 02

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### **Aligning Incentives to Drive Collaboration**

More and more businesses today are dismantling old performance management and reward systems and pushing to create a strong sense of “team” and “teams of teams.”

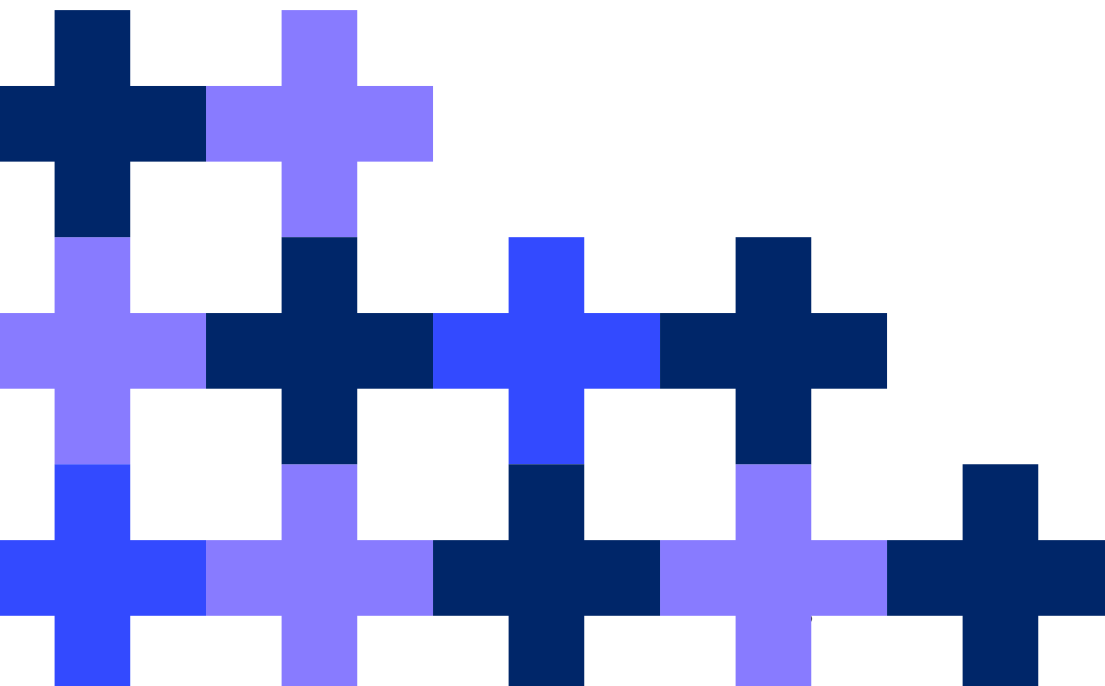
Cooperation never seriously challenged the silos that have held so many organizations back as they attempted to transform. What is needed is true collaboration—linked to pace and agility—across business units and functions. Such collaboration isn’t easy to achieve, it comes with pain and some demanding trade-offs. And that’s why incentive programs built to motivate this mission-critical behavior are so important.

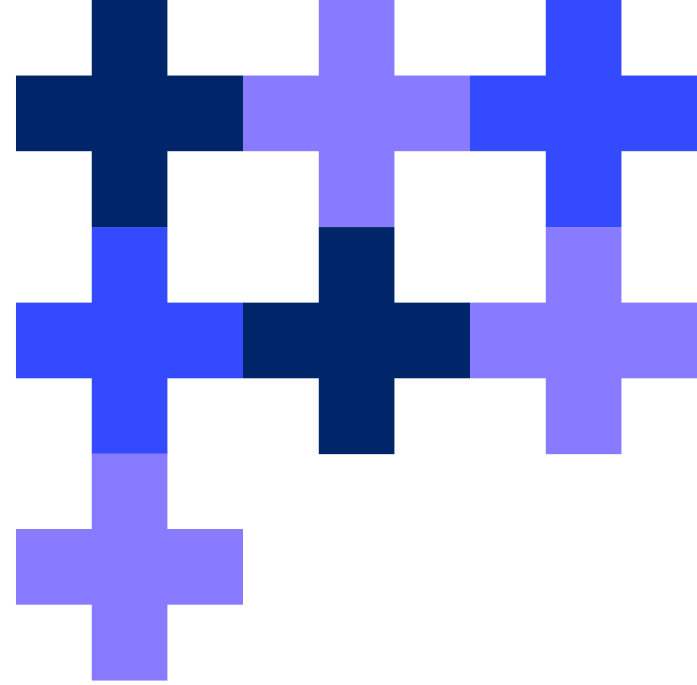
## 03

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### **Setting a Powerful Ambition**

Ambitions that are not truly transformational fail to catalyze emotions in the organization. Countless studies have demonstrated that, without an inspiring purpose, employers become extremely fungible. Accelerating growth requires an energized workforce that is clear about where the business intends to move and the benefits to customers, colleagues and even society of bringing the organization’s DNA to life in the world.





## 04

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### **Ensuring Talent Systems are Supporting Transformation**

Business leaders need to apply a more discerning lens to people processes than ever before. They need to question the validity of often long-established practices and be prepared to transform HR functions to help transform the wider business.

Where this has happened business leaders report marked success. Digital transformation accelerates when performance and pay systems pull apart, when talent planning and skills development are reimagined and when recruitment processes are sped up.

## 05

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### **Recognizing Progress Rather than Simply Measuring Outcomes**

Recognizing progress rather than simply measuring outcomes emerged as our fifth accelerator. This point links to our finding that KPIs are a fundamental lever of change. Transformation efforts need to recognize “the how” as well as “the what”—in a way that encourages the many small steps that are typically required to embed new ways of working.

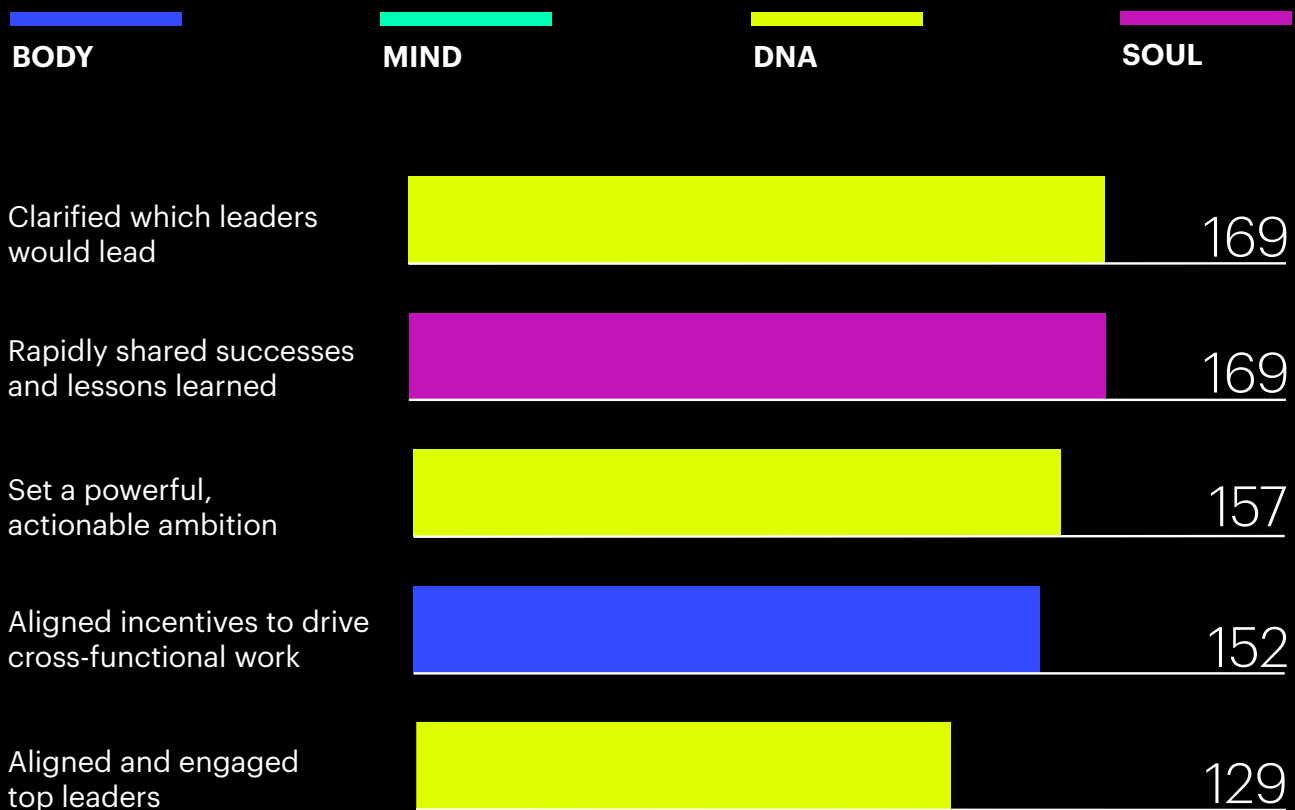
By recognizing progress, we also accelerate the adoption of rapid experimentation and collaboration. We all know of the Amazon philosophy that failing comes as a natural by-product of trying harder. But if the only measure of achievement is an outcome, then the incentive is to abandon change and stick to the tried and tested.

# What Makes Digitally-Led Transformations Different?

We decided to test whether there were differences in performance of our types of levers between digitally-led transformations and other forms of change. Sixty seven percent of our business leaders engaged through the quantitative phase of our research were driving a digitally-focused transformation. So, we compared their views of what counts to the opinions of the rest of our transformation leaders.

**Fig. A**  
**Top 5 DT\*\* drivers (derived, indexed)**

Digital transformations emphasize the DNA of an organization as the leading drivers of success



\*indexed around an average of 100; Statistically significant to the .05 level

\*\*Respondents who said digital transformation was their primary focus.

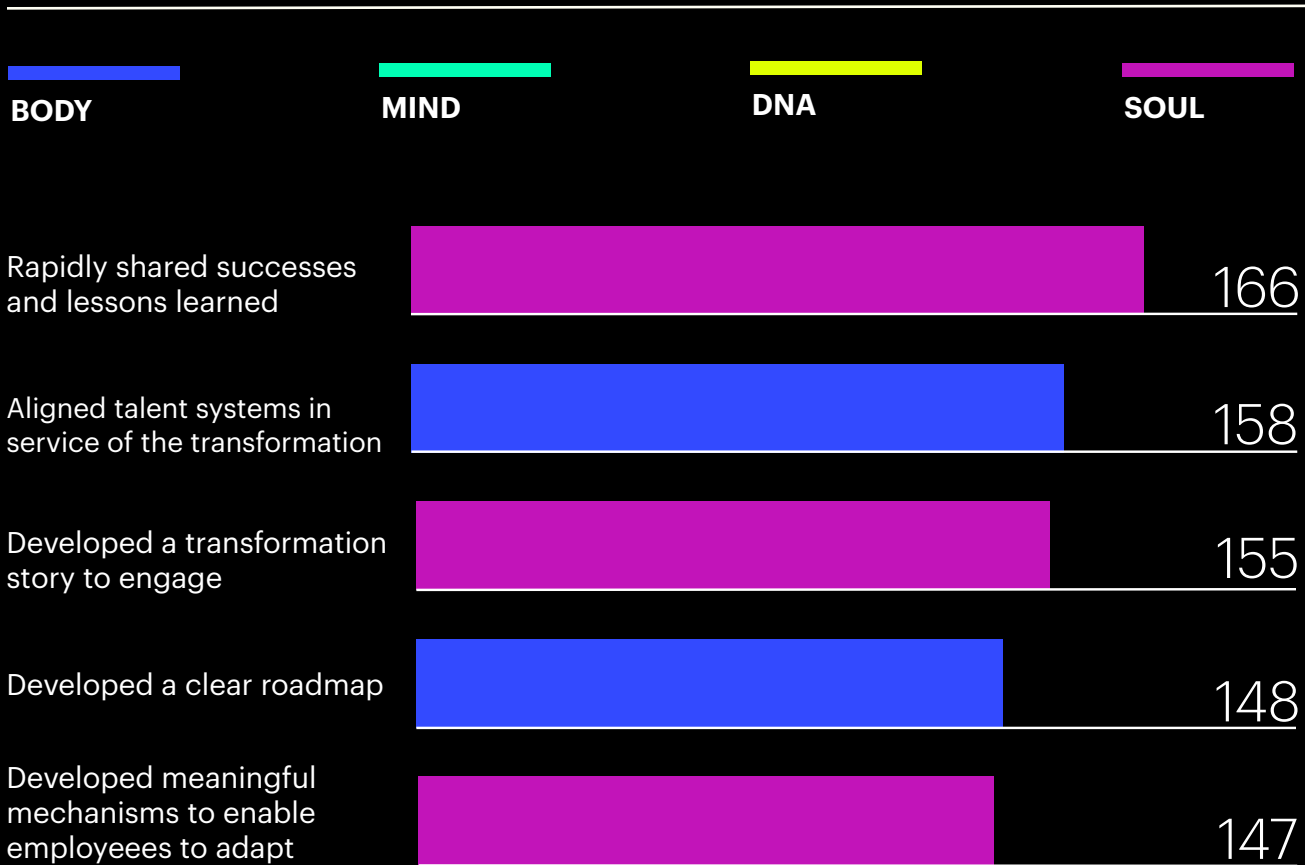
Note: Index measures derived importance based on correlation with the dependent variable: "Taking everything into account, how successful was the transformation?" or, for WIP transformations, "Taking everything into account, how successful has the transformation been to date?"

As you can see from **Figure A**, the fundamental DNA elements dominate as the top levers for those powering digital transformation versus the non-digitally led transformation drivers, where elements of Soul are more prevalent. In our fundamentals, we have already discussed clarifying which leaders should lead and the importance of a powerful and actionable ambition. However, the digitally-focused transformation results also illustrate that it's critical to align and engage top leaders in the journey.

Interestingly, DNA elements are missing as a category in the top drivers for business leaders driving less digitally-focused change (**Figure B**). Here, the dominance of Soul elements focuses more on change management, communications and the engagement of employees.

Further examination of the findings across these two groups reveal other key learnings for any leaders driving digitally-led change.

**Fig. B**  
**Top 5 non-DT drivers (derived, indexed)**



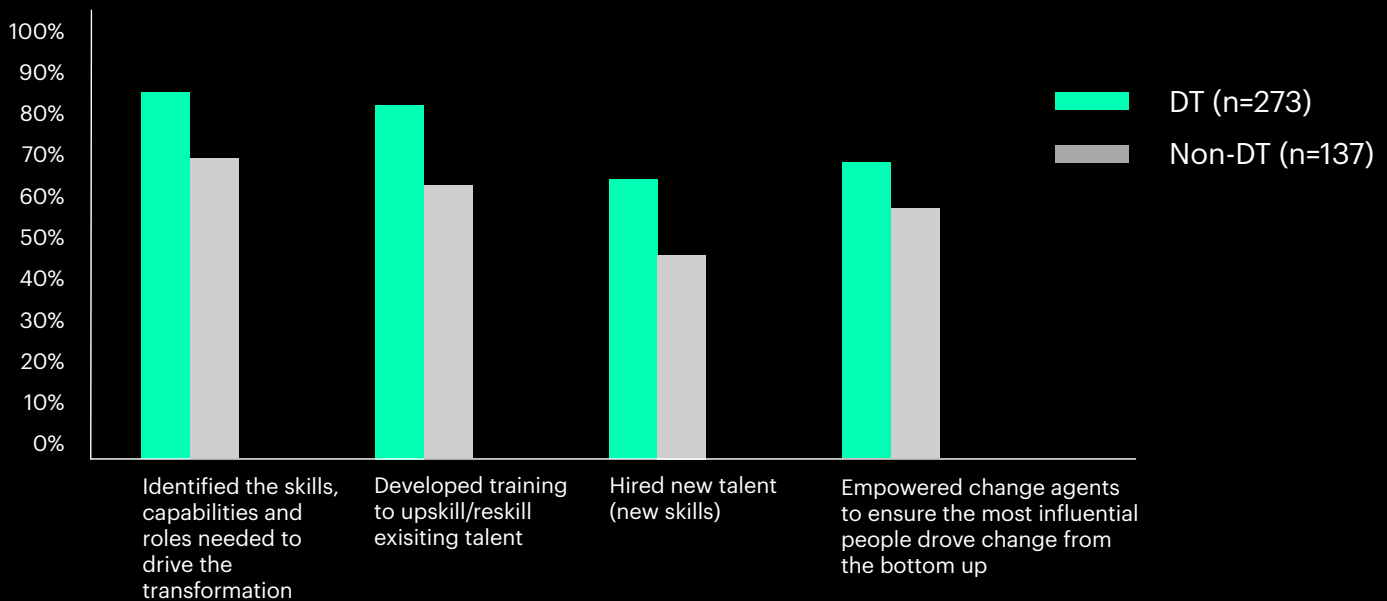
\*indexed around an average of 100; Statistically significant to the .05 level

Note: Index measures derived importance based on correlation with the dependent variable: "Taking everything into account, how successful was the transformation?" or, for WIP transformations, "Taking everything into account, how successful has the transformation been to date?"

## Q. Did your organization do any of these as part of your recent transformation process?

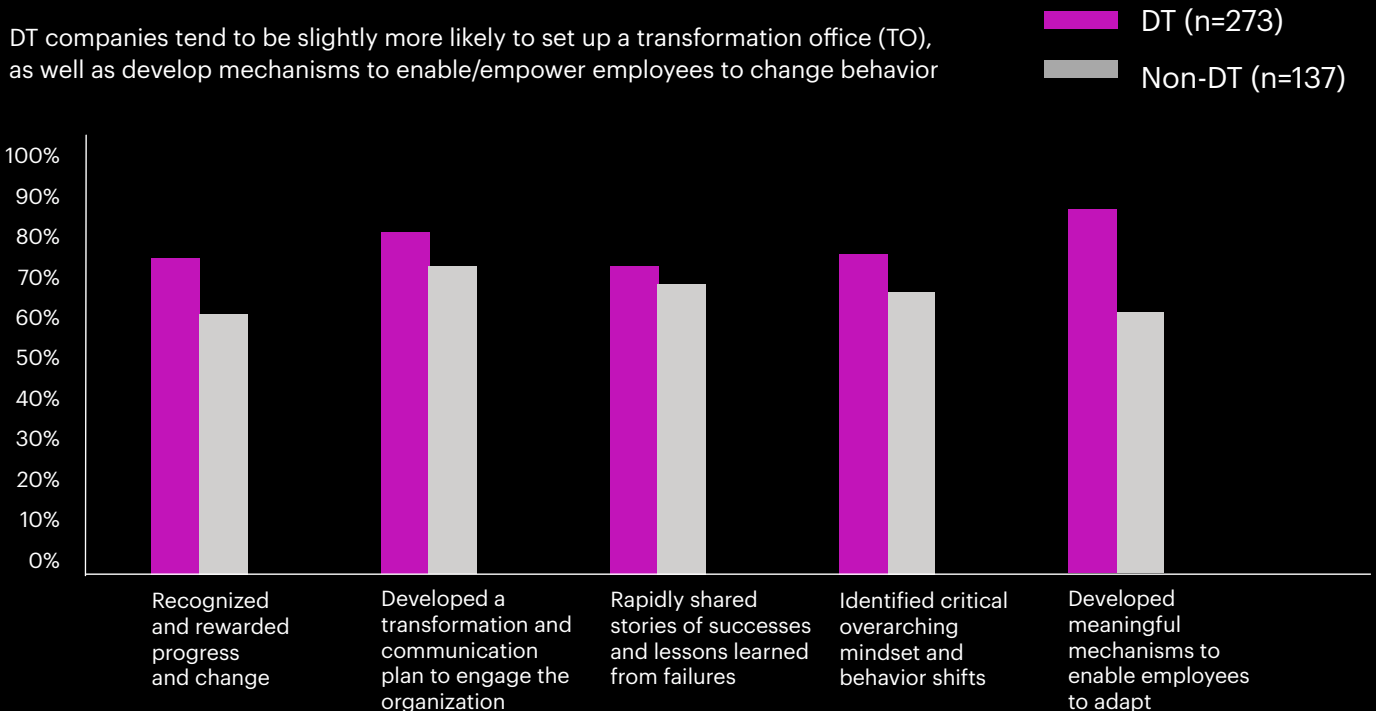
### MIND

Enabling with the Mind: A higher proportion of DT companies focus on identifying needed skills and upskilling and hiring new talent



### SOUL

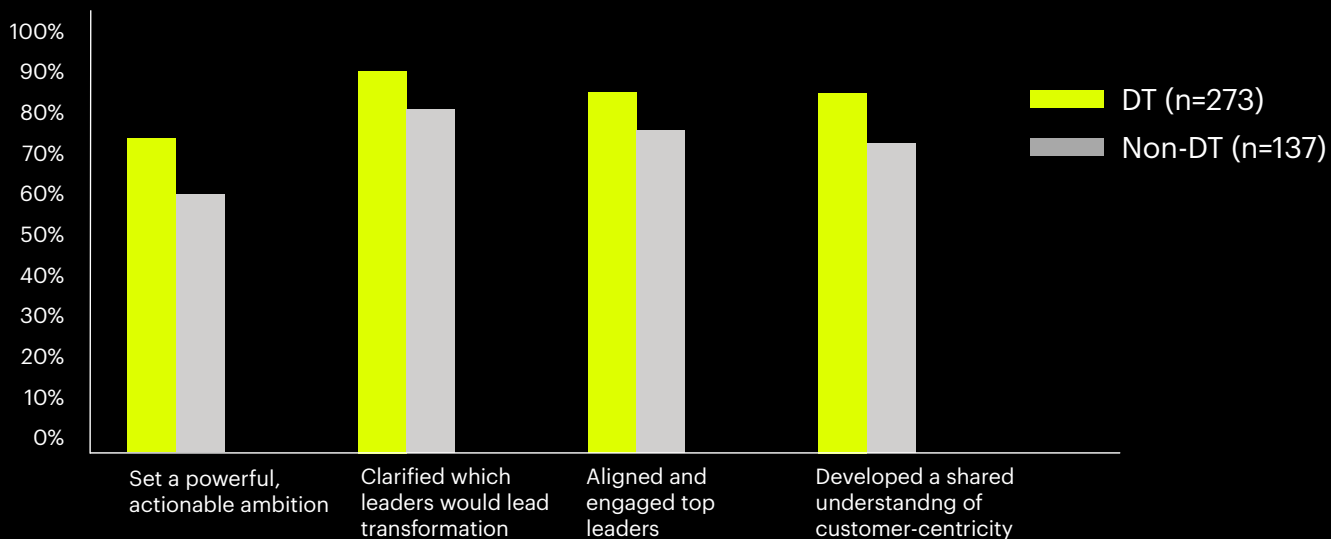
DT companies tend to be slightly more likely to set up a transformation office (TO), as well as develop mechanisms to enable/empower employees to change behavior



# Digital transformations put a higher emphasis on training and up-skilling current employees and overall involve a greater level of planning and flexibility

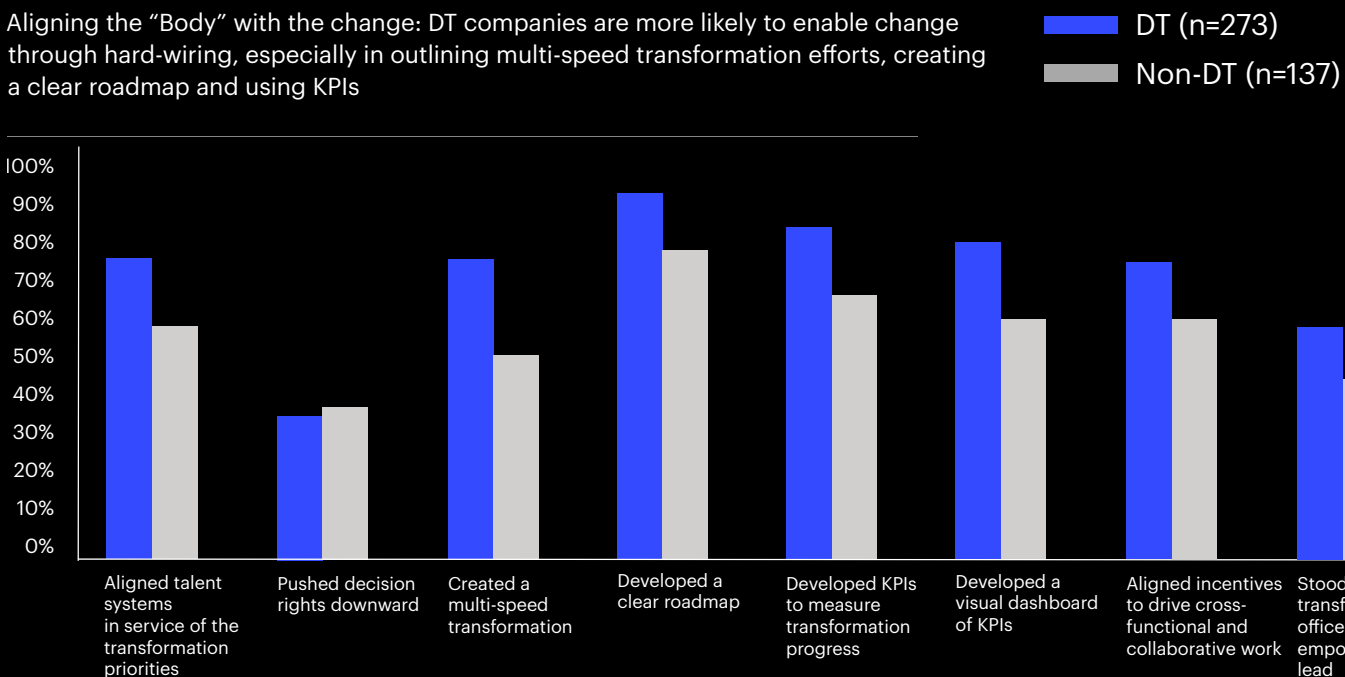
## DNA

Defining DNA with purpose and leadership: Companies with DT focus tend to more often set a powerful and actionable ambition and focus more on the fundamental definition of “customer-centricity” for themselves



## BODY

Aligning the “Body” with the change: DT companies are more likely to enable change through hard-wiring, especially in outlining multi-speed transformation efforts, creating a clear roadmap and using KPIs



“Problem is, everything looks good on paper...as you execute, there are different things you need to take on. There is a plan and measurement against the plan, but it can change over time. It’s constantly shifting as it’s hard to predict what’s going to come next.”

**Amran Khamis, Head of Digital Experience Asia**  
Sun Life

Earlier in this report, we introduced our human-centred transformation model. If we extend our human analogy, then we know that humans rarely transform dramatically and, currently, can’t replace all their DNA.

Organizational change should be thought of in the same way. Dramatic shifts do happen, but sustained transformation means continuous evolution. Organizationally, this is almost always preferable. Indeed, we respond better to evolution because it tends to bring a greater sense of control and choice.

However, when it comes to digitally-led transformation much of the transformation driving organizational change today comes down to a hunger for a shift and our research shows that it is forcing a change in the very nature of change management itself.

Change management has traditionally been all about working towards something known and potentially fixed.

But given the dynamics today, with categories disrupting and a future state that is not by any means clearly understood, comfort with continuous and fast-paced change needs to be seen as something woven through all aspects of the culture:

**In the DNA, having an ambition that acknowledges the reality of ongoing disruption.**

**In the Soul, having rituals and symbols that embrace transience.**

**In the Mind, having core skills like design thinking and agile work methods present in all functions.**


**In the Body, being bold enough to organize and govern the organization to be able to flex for customers and their needs.**



One important step in managing organizational change for digital transformation is in the replacement of a Project Management Office (PMO) by a dynamic Transformation Management Office (TMO). Our research shows that organizations going through digitally-led transformation were more likely to do this.

Let's make that clearer. A TMO isn't a multi-million dollar reporting control tower filled with people devoted solely to capturing value. A modern TMO is a cross-functional coalition to help change the tempo of transformation in the business—to allow multi-speed change to happen as it needs to. Reimagined, it doesn't just extract value and deliver initiatives on time and on budget.

Rather, it makes transformation a way of working and a state of mind. It removes roadblocks to change, models open working and a new way of doing business.



“The best ideas don't necessarily come from the most senior people in the room, but rather from those on the front lines who are working with customers all day. So it's about how do we include this person in the process... they're at the coal face and can tell you what's possible and what's not.”

**Donna Miller, European HR Director**  
Enterprise Holdings



## What does this all mean?

This research, shaped by our field experience and our Human-Centered Transformation Model, is intended to help clarify how to develop transformation strategies that will successfully drive uncommon growth in the digital age. If you're not clear where you might need to focus, reach out to us to take our Cultural Transformation Diagnostic.

We intend this research to be a fresh perspective and for the diagnostic to help you identify a clearer path to a cultural transformation that drives growth. But this is a difficult task ahead and it will benefit from great minds working on it together.

Ready to join us in shaping the future of uncommon growth and transformation? If so, contact us:

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Prophet is a digitally-powered, creatively inspired consultancy that helps our clients unlock uncommon growth in the face of disruption.

Unprecedented levels of change and disruption require new thinking and transformative approaches to growth. From purpose to product, brand to experience, customers to operations, we bring the insight, rigor and expertise needed to both uncover and realize transformative opportunities.

Our global team combines insight, creativity, data and technology to help our clients to unlock growth that is human centered, transformative and durable. We are guided by a mission and set of values that are focused on a higher-order approach to growth.

Our global footprint operates within a single P&L, enabling us to bring the right people with the right experience together to solve our clients' current business challenges from across our eleven offices.

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