TRANSFORMING OPERATIONS IN A MULTI-YEAR PROGRAM

REFLECTIONS ON TRANSFORMATION

I often say that we need to act today to lead tomorrow. Unless you are already the market leader, acting means changing how work gets done today - and people rarely welcome change at first.

Organizations transform for different reasons: to improve competitiveness, increase performance, strengthen long-term sustainability, or all of these at once. Whatever the trigger, transformation affects far more than technology. It reshapes operations, culture, customer experience, and, ultimately, future strategy.

Transformation rests on three pillars - the three Ps: Processes define the path, Platforms enable it, and People make it happen.

This article reflects on my experience leading a large-enterprise transformation: the decisions I made, the rationale behind them, and the lessons I took away.

THE BUSINESS CASE

The program was a multi-year operational transformation designed to reduce a heavy workload created by outdated and inefficient processes. The ambition was to simplify, optimize, and automate work while delivering each project within fixed timelines and capped budgets, in collaboration with internal teams and external partners.

THE FIRST P: PROCESSES

UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE SCOPE

The first challenge was scope. Sponsors initially wanted to optimize all processes. That ambition was understandable, but not realistic within the available budget and timeline. A company typically has around 150 processes but only 20 are business critical in average.

I therefore launched an exploratory phase using three years of operational data. The goal was to map the full process landscape and assess each process against objective criteria: volume, redundancy, resolution time, operational impact, and whether the issue was local, regional, or global.

CREATING THE BACKLOG AND DEFINING WAYS OF WORKING AND SUCCESS

Once the exploratory phase was complete, we created a structured backlog of all processes and worked with business stakeholders to classify it as business critical – around 40 processes - or urgent – up to 200 processes.

I then took the critical backlog to the SteerCo and secured agreement that 80% of the program KPIs would be linked to its completion. This gave the organization a clear basis for cross-team prioritization. The remaining 20% of the scope was assigned to a priority backlog, organized into delivery waves from an end-to-end business perspective.

To reinforce commitment and transparency, backlog management was centralized in one platform – MS Azure DevOps, as the single source of truth. Changes required cross-stakeholder sign-off, which improved ownership, visibility, and governance. It also enabled automated dashboards which looks obvious these days with all AI technologies around us, but was a significant step forward at the time.

THE SECOND P: PLATFORMS

Platforms - applications, tools, and digital solutions - are critical enablers of transformation. A strong platform strategy should improve operational efficiency, strengthen collaboration, unlock new opportunities, and increase business agility.

Experience has also taught me that there is no universal solution that fits every organization. For this program, the team built the platform strategy around two principles:

- Configure systems and tools to maximize execution speed, scalability, and transparency during a transformation program with a clear start and end date.
- Align technology decisions closely with business operations to ensure long-term efficiency, sustainability, and measurable business value after the program ends.

The existing operations landscape was built on outdated platforms, tools, and applications that were no longer fit for purpose. Many systems were not cloud-based, lacked scalability, and were not API-driven, which limited efficiency and innovation potential. Modernizing the ecosystem offered a clear opportunity to create business value through automation, scalability, and cost reduction.

At the same time, upgrading the full technology stack carried considerable risk, cost, and implementation complexity. To support data-driven decision-making, we developed a 3D assessment matrix covering cost, complexity, and business relevance. This helped identify the initiatives that could deliver the highest business value with the lowest implementation effort and risk.

The result was a realistic transformation roadmap. Together with business stakeholders, we focused early delivery on high-impact opportunities that combined low complexity, controlled investment, and fast operational benefits, reshaping previous prioritization over the critical backlog. This phased approach created a strong foundation for scalable change while keeping business priorities, technology modernization, and delivery feasibility aligned.

THE THIRD P: PEOPLE

People are often described as the intangible part of transformation, but they are the real drivers of sustainable change. A transformation only succeeds when people understand the vision, build the capabilities required, and are willing to work differently.

This is not easy. I witnessed in many transformations, how organizations underestimate the human side of change. This program was no exception.

The main issue was the narrative. The proposal emphasized automation and effort reduction, which was compelling for sponsors but unsettling for employees. Many interpreted the objective as headcount reduction. That created uncertainty, fear, and resistance.

This is why I believe many transformation programs fail because of people and culture, not because of technology. In this case, employees did not fully understand the purpose of the change, and that resistance affected timelines, quality, and budget.

We completed the critical backlog, including the full automation of some processes and the partial automation of others. However, the priority backlog remained untouched.

PROGRAM END: CONCLUSIONS

The organization presented the program as a success, and in many ways it was. My own assessment was more nuanced. We delivered important outcomes, but we could have achieved more if people had been placed at the center of the transformation from the beginning.

Sustainable change cannot be delivered through technology and process redesign alone. It requires a deliberate focus on people: communication, involvement, capability building, and trust.

The program achieved over the critical process backlog, the following outcomes:

- 20% of the critical processes were fully automated.
- 65% of the critical processes improved in efficiency.
- 15% of the critical processes were redefined to reflect the new operating reality.

The priority backlog remained untouched.

My main takeaway is clear: transformation initiatives fail far more often because of people and culture than because of technology itself. Processes and platforms matter, but people determine whether change becomes sustainable.