



## From Stalled to Breakthrough Transformations

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The organization has committed the resources, and learning initiatives are being implemented across its length and breadth, but you still have little to show for all the effort. Instead of improving performance, the transformation seems to be in danger of going to the initiative “graveyard,” along with other well-intentioned efforts.

What can the CLO do to turn things around before it's too late? Lots!

First, you must recognize the situation for what it is — often, a case of too much, too soon. The more extreme the transformation, the greater the challenge, and the longer it takes to build the needed leadership alignment and commitment.

Second, step back and re-evaluate the design of the overall transformation approach. Look for telltale symptoms and treat them effectively as part of an overall results-oriented approach.

### Prescription for Four Common Symptoms of Transformational Distress

- **Symptom 1: Rushing to the finish line**

Scale back the implementation, targeting carefully selected objectives in key functional areas where improvements will generate the greatest impact in the shortest time. These “quick hits” will help build support and momentum for going forward. One option to consider here is to identify two or three key initiatives that are the collective drivers of the transformation you have envisioned for the organization. Then, instead of having everyone across the organization working part time on various related efforts and doing their best to transform the business by “fits and starts,” take a more targeted approach. Select core resources dedicated to the strategic initiative for a designated period of time to generate meaningful results quickly.

- **Symptom 2: Changing everything, no matter how trivial**

Identify the top priorities for transformation and improvement. They should be areas in which core external and/or internal customers are not satisfied, offer the potential for real cost savings, significantly improve pro-

ductivity and quality and/or greatly affect the bottom line in other ways. With fierce global competition in just about every market, it is critical to accurately identify key customer satisfaction indicators — it is not enough to rely on what you think they are. Without this knowledge, it is too easy to focus energies on the “trivial many” rather than on the “critical few” areas that make a difference.

- **Symptom 3: Overdosing on learning activities**

Many people fall into the trap of equating success with the number of courses offered and/or participants enrolled in classroom or online instruction rather than any measurable performance improvements resulting from learning activities. One way to prevent this kind of overdosing is to prescribe learning interventions on an as-needed basis. Based on the organization's transformational priorities, leaders need to help employees define individual development plans that are aligned to future skills, knowledge and performance requirements. Doing so creates a more applied learning experience, enabling participants to make decisions and improvements faster because they are an integral part of the learning process.

- **Symptom 4: Measuring and rewarding “activity,” not results**

It is a common fallacy to mistake “working harder, faster and longer” for success. These things are really just indicators of activity, not accomplishment. For the latter, you need results-oriented measures. During times of change, only very directed and focused efforts with properly developed and deployed performance measures can realize the transformation you originally envisioned. By focusing on the vital “few” initiatives and the “right” measures, you can effectively and efficiently guide and manage shifts in the business direction.

Taking the lead to avoid or remedy these all-too-common symptoms can put your organization's transformation on the road to recovery and, ultimately, success. ■

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