



LEVEL UP STRATEGIES

Field Guide for Organizational Transformation

[This 8 step guide](#) is a practical tool for you and your organization. Each step has a specific goal and outcome to guide you through a meaningful transformation successfully.

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Introduction

Goal: We are writing this Level Up Field Guide to help deliver to you a concise and effective means to achieving cultural transformation.

Transformation is a human art and will require flexibility and creativity as you navigate forward. We are convinced that the best solutions are elegant in their simplicity and easy for everyone in the organization to understand and apply, regardless of their position on the company roster. Notwithstanding, any measure of true transformation will require intentionality on the part of all stakeholders involved. “Simple” does not imply “no work” is involved. It means that the real work is done up front to ensure successful communication and implementation of the new systems and processes that are being considered.

Level Up Strategies has created this free guide because we are committed to deliver as much value as possible to you and your organization. Changing the culture of an organization is a sizable task, especially if you are responsible for reviewing and appraising the options available through various consultants. Rather than try to funnel you into a marketing campaign, this is simply a no-strings-attached guide to some of the principles that have served us and others very well over the years.

As a leader within your organization, it is important to remember that throughout the entire transformation process you have **two primary responsibilities** that will take many forms:

1. Building hope without breaking trust.
2. Supply the resources—time, encouragement, space, finances, equipment, training, guidance—the people in your organization require to facilitate meaningful and lasting success.

Perhaps one day we may work together, however, we are also happy to empower you to act independently, because we believe that you—like us—possess the required ingredients for success within yourself. We ask only that you respect the guidance and information we freely provide you; please do not sell this information or represent it as your own work to people inside or outside of your organization.



Creating a Guiding Vision

Goal: Foster Organizational Hope

Hope is a powerful force within an organization. Fostering this transformative power is the primary objective in the initial phases of a cultural transformation. The “**work**” of the transformation process will come later and must be synchronized with the guiding vision.

Note: Anything less than full participation and buy-in from the people at the head of the organization will be seen as sabotage by the rest of the people being asked to trust the process.

In writing this, we also respectfully suggest that for better or worse it is often people at the head of the organization who have the most enduring influence over the current and future states of the organizational culture. While having the most authority, these leaders often also have the most transformational work to undertake. The saying “attitude reflects leadership” comes into sharp focus when we are in these initial stages. Step 5 further outlines potential internal conflicts of interest that will need to be addressed courageously and transparently for sustainable success to be achieved.

The way organizations are typically structured can produce a situation where the people who have the most influence over a transformation (upper management) are also the ones least affected by the change process and final results. The people who are most impacted deserve to have a guiding voice throughout the process, and the process should be oriented in ways that integrate their experience.

Respecting the people at the center of a cultural transformation starts with consideration of how this transformation is postured, presented, and implemented.

Step 1 Define Success Criteria

Clearly outline what “success” looks like in simple, relatable language. This will be a specific, beneficial, and measurable set of outcomes that if achieved will produce the desired results.

Note: Misalignment of the success criteria is a key reason why, after all the “work that was done,” cultural transformations can fail to produce their intended outcome. This will also help with Step 7 Quality Control.

Deliverable #1 *Bring success down to earth in a way that is tangible and tactile for stakeholders.*

Step 2 Answer the Main Question

Answer the question “**What are we doing?**” in one “**beautiful**” sentence. Clarify the essence of success so it can be easily understood and connected with. The significance of crafting this statement cannot be understated because the buy-in of the people required to make changes will center around whether there is a guiding vision they can join with.

Deliverable #2 *Guiding Vision that outlines the path forward with clearly defined markers of what defines success.*



Evaluation of the Current Situation

Goal: See the unwashed truth & apologize where appropriate

Note: The best and worst parts of any culture are a joint by-product of the people and organizational structures that surround the work environment.

Step 3 Identify the Influencers

Identify the key people and systems that reinforce the current culture's best and worst parts. A thorough understanding of what manifests the best as well as the worst parts of the culture will be a significant step in curating a contextually appropriate alternate path forward.

Note: Careful consideration of the people and traditions is essential to ensure that the process of "removing the bad" doesn't simultaneously unwind the best of the good.

Deliverable #3 Honest and thorough appraisal of the current situation.

Step 4 Identify the Resistance

Identify the people and systems that will be the most reluctant to change and the hardest to transform. To this point, it's important to acknowledge that no one has been asked to change, and the bulk of the work undertaken so far will be expressly to cultivate trust within the organization for the consultants/change agents/guides and the emerging process.

Step 4 Continued...

Note: Rushing any of the steps will have a cascading impact on the effective outcomes of the initiative. Trust will be the currency exchanged in this process going forward, nothing less. Without due consideration, there is ample reason for the distrust and reluctance that will inevitably surface in typical cultural transformations.

Three key considerations

1. Cultural transformation is an essentially human-to-human process. Fancy charts, forms, programs, or workshops will most likely foster reluctance rather than cultivate curiosity and willingness within the people being invited to consider changing.
2. The first and most notable test of trustworthiness will come in step 5 (addressing the most reluctant people and systems first).
3. To gain a thorough understanding of the situation from multiple perspectives within the organization, there needs to be active support from upper management that empowers the transformation facilitators to access people for the appropriate time required.

Note: Oftentimes, this step can be complicated because key people are keen to avoid honest and intentional dialogues, and/or strategic support isn't extended to people whose voices matter.

An example is if an overworked manager isn't provided permission + realistic support/space while the transformation facilitators are interacting with the team, asking them to "find an hour" to have a discovery conversation about the challenges they face is not fair or realistic.

Deliverable #4 *Gap Analysis and Risk Analysis of the change efforts based on the current conditions, people, and systems within the organization.*

 **The Deep-End**

Goal: Honest appraisal to avoid hitting “the wall” and risking failure of the whole project along with the resources invested.

Step 5 Honestly Assess Your Willingness

The most significant changes need to come first. This is where you need to decide as an organization if you are **WILLING** to face them.

Note: This is truly the make-or-break step. This step is perhaps the most definitive in the whole transformation process, and our experience has revealed that neglecting the discovered challenges will inevitably mean the transformation will stall and likely fail. Therefore, we look to address those challenges early as a gesture of respect for everyone involved. To be transparent, there will need to be significant organizational resolve and leadership courage required in Step 5. If you can do this, odds are you can do anything else that is required.

- a) Leadership needs to take an honest inventory of whether they have the will and resources to address the **people** who are most reluctant to change in a respectful but resolved manner. (Extra complication arises if the identified people are those who are in authority over the cultural change initiative, or if they are at the top of the employee hierarchy).
- b) Leadership must take an honest inventory of whether they have the will and resources to address the **systems** that are most reluctant to change in a respectful but resolved manner.

Step 5 Continued...

Deliverable #5 *The organization will have an honest appraisal of their resolve to truly be different.*

Example 1 (People) A command and control style executive that believes they have worked hard to achieve their position and that any sort of critical feedback is perceived as subordination worthy of consequences.

Example 2 (People) A manager receives feedback but doesn't act on it, because there is no direct incentive or consequences for not acting on it.

Example 3 (Systems) If an organization promotes based on seniority, and thus has promoted the longest-standing person (who may not possess the attributes of great leadership) to a position of power, that is not the person's fault.

If that person's wage, influence within the organization, or retirement strategies reward them staying in their station, asking them to succeed to someone who is more fit for the idealized culture of the organization may:

1. Not be possible in the current system (union, traditions, etc.)
2. Be met with great reluctance by that person because the system is reinforcing their whole paradigm of position and belonging within the organization.
3. The system can make it hard to deal with poor leadership "above you" if the system is a "top-down" leadership construct. Therefore, a toxic leader in a position of power can have terrible and longstanding consequences with little systemic support to challenge their tenure or address subordinates' real concerns.

Example 4 (Systems) If the goal is collaboration within teams and across business units, and the design of the physical space has everyone working in cubicles and offices, or there is poor lighting and spaces that don't promote gathering and creativity, it would be hard to promote collaboration even within a team that is intrinsically motivated to do so.

 **Contextual Solutions**

Goal: Find a generative path forward that is appropriate for your organization and inclusive of the people and systems that power the organization.

Step 6 Formulate the Transition Plan

There is an art to facilitating the awakening of an organization to its dormant potential, but that awareness can only be cultivated by tapping into the immersive experience of the real people and systems from within your specific organization.

Speaking from our own mistakes:

Any consultant that comes in and tells you or your people that they “know what to do” is deceived by their ego. “Great Culture” isn’t a trademarked or patented thing—it’s universally available and follows innate human guidelines.

We experientially understand that the most sustainable and beneficial solutions are ones that are contextually derived from the people within the organization. We believe in the creative potential of your people to thrive and deliver extraordinary results that cultivate great culture and cause the business to prosper. We don’t have “the answer” but we are very good at discovering dormant solutions within your team that work for your organization.

Deliverable #6 A Plan for transformation, consensus on what needs to happen, and buy-in from the people involved in the process.

Note: Achieving consensus and buy-in is perhaps the greatest milestone of the whole transformation process. This achievement is a human art more than it is a science. At this phase, there is tangible momentum and capacity generated within the team.



Quality Control

Goal: Stay on the path towards success and ensure quality results the whole way through.

Step 7 Intentionally Look in the Direction of Opposition

Because transitions require a considerable amount of time, energy, focus, and resources, it is very important to have a quality control strategy in place to ensure the best use of the invested resources of the organization.

Following Step 6, it may be tempting to feel like the path is clear and inevitably some potential solutions will materialize quickly (low hanging fruit). An essential quality control question to ask the people at all levels of the organization **before** implementing the solutions is: “Why won’t this [proposed action] work?”

Deliverable #7 *An honest appraisal of the viability of the plan forward, and the major obstacles that you may face along the way.*

Step 8 Listen Carefully and Adapt

Listen to the critical feedback, then adapt and begin to apply the revised strategy.

Guidelines:

1. Work must be an open-handed and accountable process that has a measurable set of outcomes, along with clear reporting on progress and failures.
2. Key milestones need to be celebrated, and discovered challenges need to be recorded and actively addressed by the people who have the jurisdiction to do so— not off the side of their desk, but via active prioritization.
3. Intentionality and resolve will be the critical ingredients from upper management as the transformation process is walked out.

Deliverable #8 *Maintain buy-in from the team and collective focus of the goal through to successful completion.*

For a detailed review of change model frameworks that may be of value for you and your organization please additionally review the following document.

[Cyber Security Change Management Models](#)

**For additional inquiries or assistance with your organization's transformation,
Please reach out to spark@LevelUpStrategies.com**