

Trend Topic: **Transformation** in the accelerated age

By



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# Building a culture for continuous reinvention

## Why your success depends on human change

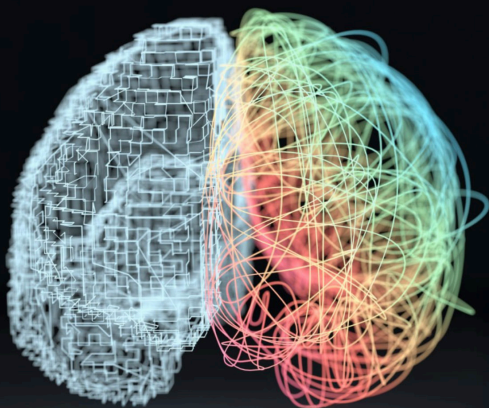
The biggest threat to your transformation isn't resistance. It's repetition.

We've normalized a broken cycle: a disruption hits, leaders announce a transformation, and the organization snaps into action. Consultants are hired. Strategy decks are built. Roles shift. Teams reorganize. Trainings roll out. It all starts to feel eerily familiar.

This approach may have worked for incremental improvements. But when the change is big — like reimagining an entire operating model, adopting enterprise-wide AI, or responding to macroeconomic shifts — it falls apart. Because real transformation isn't just about moving parts. It's about shifting mindsets.

The dominant mental model for change is still this: go from point A to point B. Define where you are. Define where you're going. Close the gap. When a company needs to transform, they think in terms of linear movement. They hire experts to diagnose the gap, then get to work changing

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org charts, reskilling talent, and crafting communication plans. Finally, anyone unwilling or unable to make the leap is let go.

That's change management. And it used to work — back when change came in occasional, manageable waves. But in today's world, there is no fixed-point B. There's just an evolving set of pressures, expectations, and innovations that never stop coming. The idea that transformation is a journey with a clear start and finish is no longer just outdated — it's dangerous. Now, the companies that thrive aren't the ones that manage change the best; they're the ones that build the capacity to change — constantly.

That capacity doesn't come from better timelines or sharper training modules. It comes from shifting how people think. Culture, at its core, is how people think and act to get results. But most leaders focus only on the act part. They obsess over what people are doing — are they using the new tool? Following the new process? Hitting the new target?

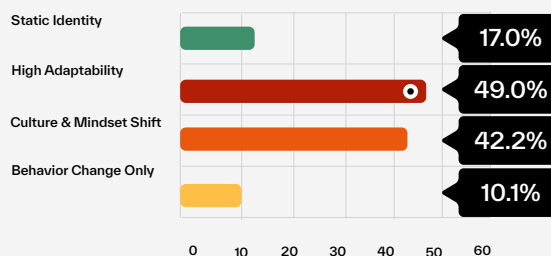
That over-focus on behavior is what Culture Partners calls the Action Trap — the illusion that

change is working just because people are acting differently. But it's a trap. You can force new behaviors for a quarter. Maybe two. But unless you shift the underlying beliefs driving those behaviors, the moment pressure hits — or priorities shift — people revert to what they know.

Traditional change management does not lead to sustained transformation. That's not a theory. It's data. In a joint study with Stanford, Culture Partners analyzed 243 companies over three years. The organizations that focused on behavior change alone — on action — grew modestly (10.1%). But the companies that focused on culture — on the thinking behind behavior — grew more than four times faster (42.2%).

And the most powerful predictor of growth wasn't what you'd expect. Not innovation. Not customer obsession. Not even accountability. It was adaptability. The organizations that built cultures capable of shifting how they think and act in response to new strategies, crises, or market conditions grew by nearly 50%. Meanwhile, companies that clung to a static identity — trying to hardwire one mindset — stalled at 17%.

#### Culture vs. Behavior-only Impact on Growth



The message was clear: In a world of constant change, the ability to reinvent your thinking is more valuable than the ability to execute a plan. That insight reframed everything. Most leaders still treat culture like a brand — something to define, publish, and promote. But culture isn't a fixed identity. It's a dynamic capability. If your culture can't evolve, your strategy won't matter.

Competitive advantage no longer comes from having the best roadmap. It comes from having a workforce that can pivot with purpose — again and again.

**T**his is what continuous reinvention actually requires: not more plans, but more adaptability. Not tighter control, but stronger capacity for change. Adaptability isn't a value you hang on the wall. It's a muscle you build — through how you lead, how you learn, and how you respond when reality shifts.

**A**dditionally, AI is accelerating the pace — and raising the stakes — of business transformation. The technology is evolving faster than most teams can adapt. But AI isn't just a disruptor. It can be a driver of adaptability — if culture allows for it. Organizations that build cultures of clarity, alignment, and accountability are the ones best positioned to integrate AI successfully. Not just to automate tasks, but to augment decision-making, enable faster pivots, and unleash new forms of creativity. AI doesn't replace the need for human adaptability — it amplifies it. And that makes culture more important, not less.

### **Why human change is the new business imperative**

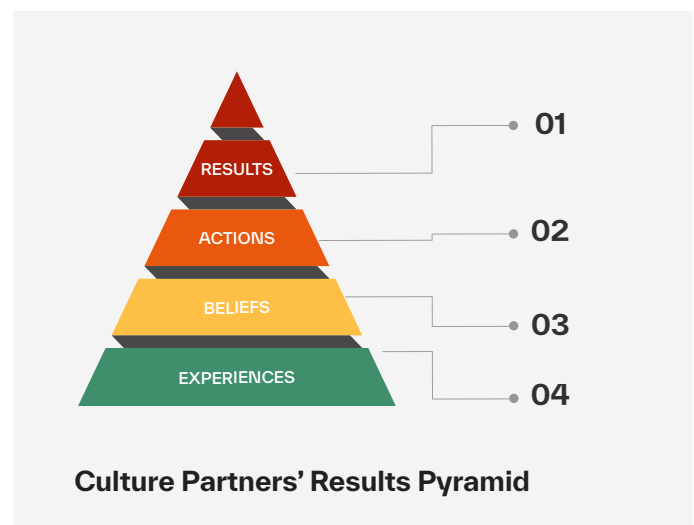
**T**he half-life of strategy — the amount of time a business plan remains relevant — is shrinking. Technology evolves faster than humans adapt, which means the strategies that worked a year ago may already be obsolete. Competitive

advantage no longer comes from having the best roadmap. It comes from having a workforce that can pivot with purpose — again and again.

**T**hat means belief systems must evolve faster than business models. Every reinvention effort is a belief battle first. If your people don't believe in the change, don't understand the change, or don't trust those leading it — execution won't matter. No amount of upskilling or communication can compensate for a belief system that hasn't caught up.

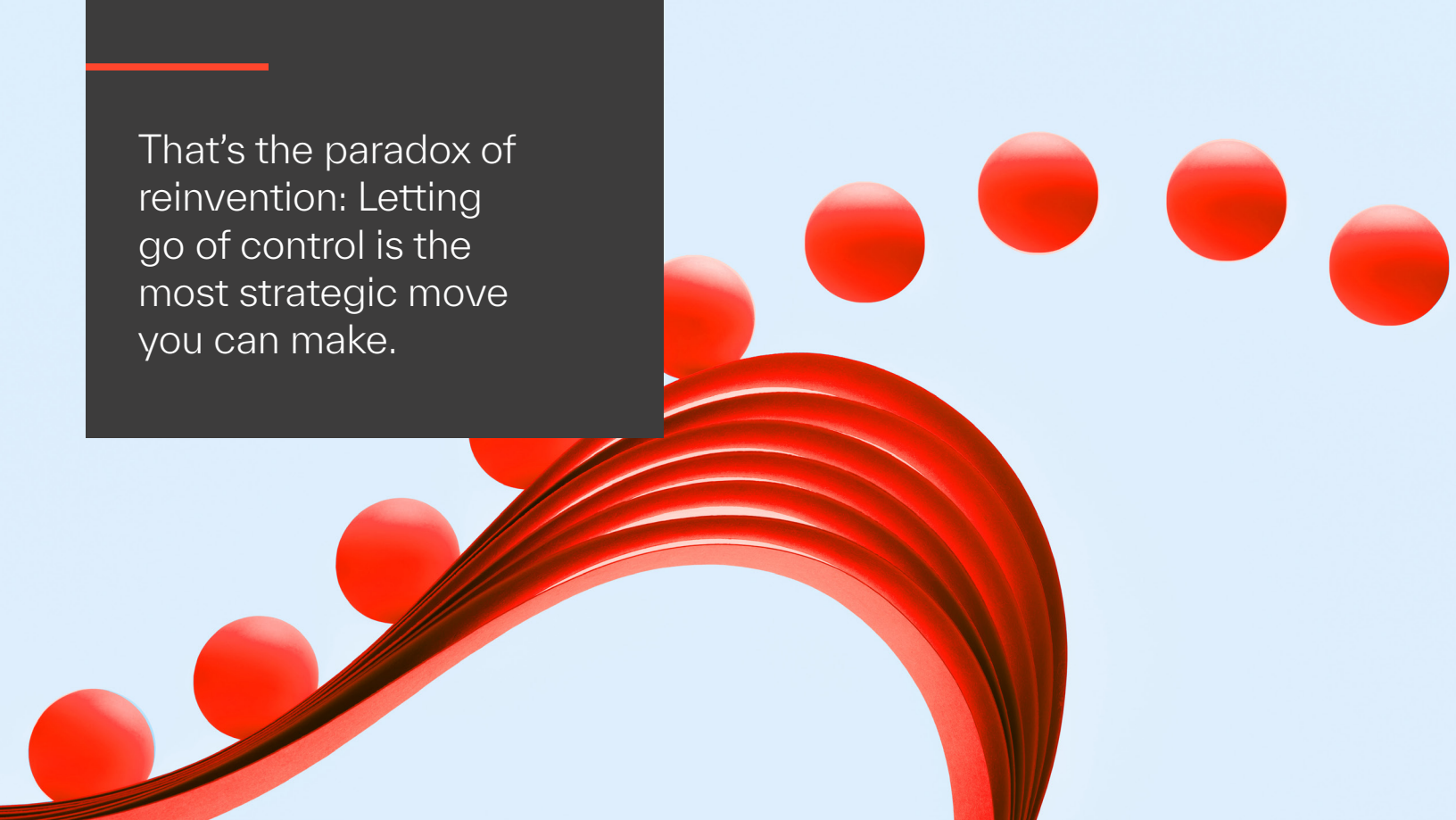
**T**his is where the real shift in leadership happens. Not from strategy to tactics—but from control to design. The most effective leaders aren't the ones who force outcomes. They're the ones who design experiences that shape belief.

**T**his is the foundation of the Culture Partners' Results Pyramid: Experiences → Beliefs → Actions → Results.



**E**xperience shapes belief. Belief drives behavior. And behavior leads to results.

**I**f you want different results, you have to reverse-engineer from belief. And if you want new beliefs to take root, you have to change the experiences your people are having at work—what they see, hear, feel, and are recognized for.



That's the paradox of reinvention: Letting go of control is the most strategic move you can make.

**W**ant more collaboration? Don't just mandate cross-functional meetings. Create experiences that lead people to believe "We win more when we work together." Want more innovation? Don't just run a hackathon. Create experiences that show "Risk is safe here. Failure won't get me fired."

**We** saw this play out with one client — a sales team puzzled by stagnant collaboration despite constant reminders from leadership. The problem wasn't intention. It was incentive. Their systems still rewarded individual wins. Dashboards tracked solo performance. President's Club was for lone wolves. But once they changed the experience — tracking shared deals, celebrating cross-sell wins, and building in team-based rewards — the belief shifted. So did the behavior. And the results followed.

**This** is what it looks like to lead culture deliberately. Not by telling people how to act, but by designing the experiences that reshape how they think. That's the work of continuous reinvention. And it starts with you.

## **The counterintuitive leadership shift**

**A**t some point, every leader reaches the limits of control. The meetings. The dashboards. The reorgs. The force of will. Eventually, the old playbook stops working. And in that moment, what separates great leaders from the rest isn't how hard they push — it's what they choose to let go of.

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**We** saw this unfold at a major U.S. utility company in the middle of a large-scale digital transformation. The technology roadmap was strong. The platforms were ready. But progress was gridlocked.

**IT** and customer service teams were misaligned — strategically, operationally, even emotionally. Trust had eroded. Escalations turned into stand-offs. Collaboration stalled. Transformation wasn't just delayed — it was derailed. The breakthrough didn't come from another integration plan. It came from surrender.



Instead of pushing harder, leaders paused to ask two deceptively simple questions:

- 1 What are the currently held shared beliefs that are getting in the way of achieving our result?
- 2 What do we want those beliefs to be instead?

What emerged were beliefs like “My team’s success is all that matters” and “We can’t rely on them.” And from that tension, a new shared belief took root: “Shared outcomes matter more than individual wins.” That belief became the tipping point.

They aligned on joint goals. Co-owned their metrics. Built systems that rewarded collaboration. What had once been siloed became seamless. And the results followed:

- 22% improvement in employee engagement
- 50% faster decision-making
- #1 JD Power ranking for customer experience in the South
- Lowest cost to serve in their market

None of that happened because of software alone. It happened because people were aligned — and bought in. That’s what surrender makes possible. Not passivity, but permission. Permission to let go of outdated beliefs, rigid roles, and zero-sum thinking. Permission to design culture — not just manage change. Permission to adapt with purpose — again and again.

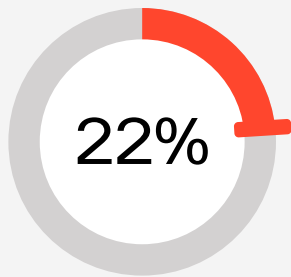
So next time the pressure to transform feels overwhelming, don’t just ask: “What should we do?”

Ask:

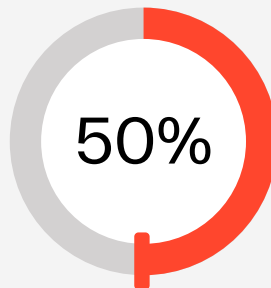
“What are the beliefs getting in our way?”

“What do we want those beliefs to be?”

Mindset can’t be mandated. A culture of continuous reinvention isn’t something leaders can force. But they can create the conditions that shape it — by designing experiences that lead to new belief. Transformation doesn’t happen when people are told what to do. It happens when they believe in why they’re doing it. That’s the difference between managing change — and leading human change. —



Improvement in  
employee engagement



Faster decision-making



JD Power ranking for customer  
experience in the South

## References

- 1 <https://culturepartners.com/insights/which-type-of-culture-yields-316-revenue-growth/>