



September 17th,
2025

Maintain The ROI of Digital Investments - Culture is the Foundation, Not Just a Barrier to Change

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INTRODUCTION

Many transformation programs fall short of expectations. Research by McKinsey shows that about 70% of large-scale transformations do not achieve sustained impact, with employee resistance and organizational misalignment repeatedly emerging as critical barriers to success (McKinsey & Company, 2018).

Organizations often place their primary focus on individual readiness: ensuring employees are aware of changes, motivated to engage, and equipped with the necessary skills. Frameworks such as ADKAR (Awareness, Desire, Knowledge, Ability, Reinforcement) are widely used to guide this process. These frameworks are important enablers, yet they cannot secure lasting outcomes or deliver the expected return on investment without the right operating model.

Even the most capable individuals cannot sustain new behaviors when the broader environment resists or sends conflicting signals. Culture is not simply a barrier to overcome. It is the foundation upon which sustainable change is built and where the true value of transformation is ultimately realized.

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HIGHLIGHTED TOPICS

- Why adoption success depends on more than individual readiness.
- How organizational setting, leadership behaviors, and cultural alignment amplify or undermine change.
- Practical enablers for sustaining adoption and realizing ROI.
- The link between cultural alignment and long-term value creation.

ADOPTION BEYOND THE INDIVIDUAL

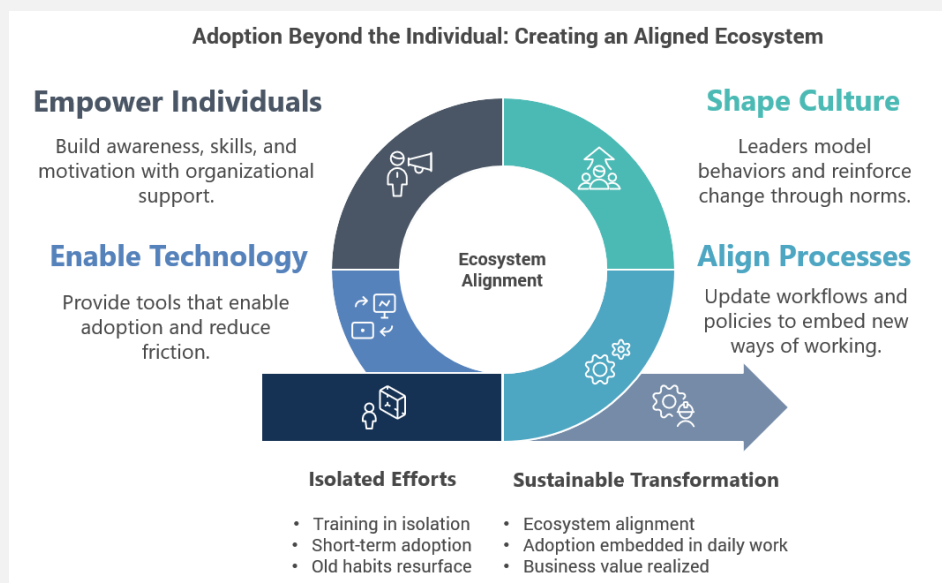
Training, communication, and change management frameworks are common tools for preparing individuals during transformation. They build awareness, motivation, and skills, but these efforts rarely translate into lasting impact when used in isolation.

The reason is simple: people operate within systems. Employees may leave a workshop motivated and capable, yet if they return to a workplace where business processes, incentives, or leadership behaviors contradict the new direction, old habits will resurface. When the operating model does not support new ways of working, individuals quickly revert to old practices, and the transformation fails to achieve its intended results.

McKinsey's research (McKinsey & Company, 2018) reinforces this point, showing that employee resistance and misaligned management behaviors are the most frequently mentioned barriers in failed transformations. Overcoming these barriers requires

addressing the environment that shapes daily decisions and priorities.

The lesson for leaders is clear. Adoption cannot be viewed as a one-dimensional effort to prepare individuals. Adoption should be seen as part of an ecosystem that combines people, processes, technology, and culture, creating the alignment needed for new ways of working to thrive and generate measurable business benefits.



ORGANIZATIONAL SETTING AS AN ADOPTION MULTIPLIER

An aligned organizational setting does more than support adoption, it accelerates it. When the environment reinforces the change, individual readiness efforts scale faster, resistance decreases, and the organization begins realizing benefits earlier. This multiplier effect shortens time-to-value and increases the likelihood that transformation outcomes will endure.

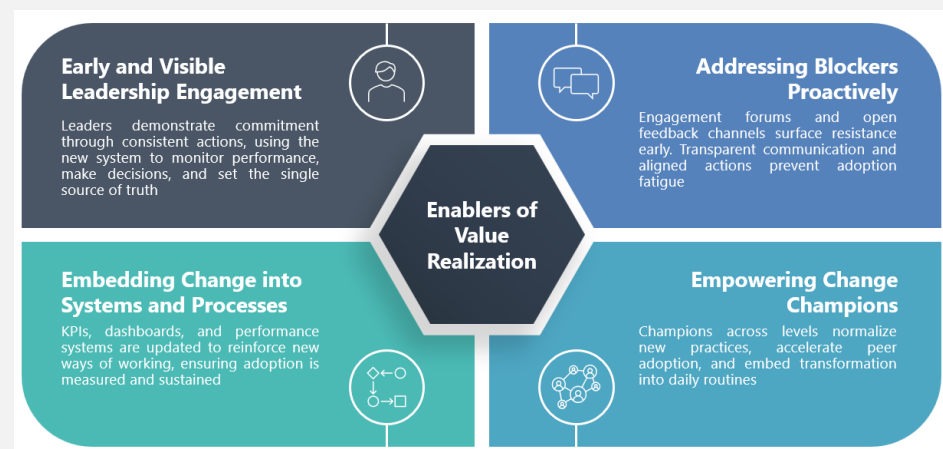
- **When misaligned**, Employees receive conflicting signals when leaders endorse change in words but fall back into old practices and continue to sustain the status quo. In such an environment, even motivated individuals find it difficult to maintain new behaviors, and adoption slows down before the benefits can be achieved.

- **When aligned,** Employees see consistency when leaders role-model the change, policies and procedures are updated to reflect the new way of working. Change becomes integrated into ‘how things are done,’ resistance fades, and benefits are sustained over the long term.

This distinction highlights why the organizational setting is more than a background factor, it is an amplifier of adoption. When leadership, incentives, and processes are aligned with the transformation agenda, organizations accelerate adoption, shorten time-to-value, reduce the cost of change, and build resilience for future transformations.

PRACTICAL ENABLERS FOR ADOPTION AND VALUE REALIZATION

Adoption succeeds when individual readiness is reinforced by organizational readiness that aligns people, processes, technology, and culture. For leaders, the challenge goes beyond initiating change, they must also ensure it is embedded into daily operations so that benefits are realized and sustained over time. To achieve this, leaders should concentrate on a set of practical enablers that ensure adoption delivers measurable business results:



- **Early and Visible Leadership Engagement**

Sponsors and managers need to show commitment through visible and consistent actions. For example, when senior leaders actively use the new system to monitor facility performance, make decisions, and treat it as the single point of truth, employees perceive the change as credible. This alignment builds trust and accelerates both the speed and depth of adoption.

- **Addressing Blockers Proactively**

Engagement forums and cultural assessments reveal hidden resistance, whether it comes from hierarchical bottlenecks, unclear communication or insufficient support. For example, when employees feel their concerns are heard through open dialogue and accessible feedback channels, resistance surfaces early and can be addressed constructively. Tackling these blockers through transparent communication and aligned actions prevents adoption fatigue and builds momentum.

- **Embedding Change into Systems and Processes**

Change becomes sustainable when it is reinforced by the systems and processes that guide daily work. Linking adoption to performance management, recognition programs, and governance dashboards ensures that new behaviors are consistently measured and reinforced across the organization. For instance, updating KPIs on dashboards to track adoption-related metrics, such as the percentage of transactions completed through the new system, makes the change part of how performance is measured. This integration drives sustained ROI and helps ensure transformation outcomes endure rather than slipping back into temporary compliance.

- **Empowering Change Champions**

Champions at multiple levels normalize new practices and accelerate peer adoption. For example, frontline supervisors who demonstrate the new safety reporting system or department coordinators who guide peers through a digital workflow act as visible role models. A distributed champion network ensures change is reinforced in daily interactions and helps embed transformation into the organization.

CONCLUSION

Sustainable transformation requires organizational readiness where leadership, business processes, technology, and culture are aligned to reinforce new ways of working. Culture is the foundation of adoption, giving change the stability to scale and endure. Embedding new practices into daily routines, aligning policies, and having leaders demonstrate the desired behaviors enables them to become established as standard practice. Such alignment speeds up adoption, reduces time-to-value, and ensures long-term business impact. For leaders, the priority is clear: build a culture that supports change and integrate it with leadership, business processes, and technology as a connected ecosystem to realize the full value of transformation investments.

Plant.Digital supports enterprises in turning adoption strategies into measurable results. Leveraging our expertise in IMOMS and digital transformation, we help clients operationalize change through tailored adoption frameworks, practical enablers, and hands-on support. Our focus is on enabling organizations to embed new ways of working into daily practice and sustain the value of their transformation investments.

REFERENCE

1. McKinsey & Company. (2018). Unlocking success in digital transformations.

AUTHOR BIO

Mohammed Almohaishi is a change management and digital transformation consultant at Plant.Digital. He has over 10 years of experience leading adoption programs across the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors, with a focus on IMOMS, integration, and enterprise-wide transformation initiatives. His expertise spans stakeholder engagement, cultural alignment, and value realization in large-scale digital programs.

ABOUT PLANT.DIGITAL

Plant.Digital, an Aramco & Honeywell joint venture, is a service company providing end-to-end digital OT Services, including consultancy, project execution, solution implementation, support, and adoption management. We specialize in business process automation, leveraging agile project management for seamless and successful digital transformation - and deliver the promised ROI of digital transformation.

Our integrated digital solution suite and services enhance automation by digitalizing workflows and processes with high-quality, tailored data. By integrating multiple software systems, we turn complex data into clear, actionable insights, driving efficiency, profitability, safety, reliability and smarter decision-making.

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