The BIG question:
What does effective transformation leadership look like?
Transformation requires leadership—a single dedicated and accountable executive at the top who can help shape the vision and guide strategy.
What to look for.

Here's what to look for as you seek the right talent to lead your transformation.

- **Deep knowledge of the organization.** A view across the enterprise and into the deep inner workings of the business is critical for understanding the full impact of transformation and managing the transformation strategy. Why? Because transformation is about optimizing the whole, not just individual pieces.

- **Solid relationships across the organization and strong political capital.** Your top transformation executive must understand the political landscape and be able to influence the various key players to get to answers quickly, build consensus, and get all stakeholders moving efficiently down the transformation path. Managing cross-functional conflicts and dependencies can be key to execution—which is one of the most difficult steps of a transformation.

- **A proven history of getting things done.** Transformation is about establishing a vision for the end-state operating model, developing a clear roadmap to get there, and then leveraging your team to execute with great efficiency and speed to deliver that end-state vision.
A track record of decisiveness. A leader who can make effective and integrated decisions, balancing the trade-offs inherent in any difficult decision. Great leaders make effective decisions and they make them efficiently—this will help you save time, capital, and other resources during your transformation while also positioning your organization to achieve long-term results.

Relevant experience, not necessarily prior transformation experience. The ability to lead matters most. An internal transformation center of excellence, Results Management Office or third-party support can help make up for any specific transformation experience your leader lacks.

What if no one fits the bill? First realize that you will have to pull someone entirely away from his or her primary job function to lead the transformation. That leader needs to focus exclusively on the transformation and set aside the biases of his or her previous role. The stakes are too high to have the leader split duties with a pre-existing role. With that in mind, don’t obsess over finding a leader who’s perfect on all five points above. Consider the type of transformation you’re undertaking and the mix of leadership skills you need.

What’s the point?
Transformation is a big topic—one that encompasses business processes, regulations, the workforce, technology, external stakeholders, and more. It’s also a topic that comes with big questions. The Deloitte Business Insights and Guidance (BIG) on Transformation series seeks to help leaders rapidly understand the issues at play—one big question at a time—so they can make big, bold changes that allow them to own the disruptions taking place in their markets.

The big question right now: What does effective transformation leadership look like?

Still have questions after reading this piece? We can help. We’re big on transformation. Contact us to get the conversation started.
Strong transformation leaders need to represent the business. No matter the type of transformation, your organization needs a leader who deeply understands the business issues at play and who can build accountability with key business stakeholders. It can sometimes be tempting to tap the CIO to lead a transformation. But that can create big problems. Why? Because to be effective as a transformation leader, the CIO will have to stop being the CIO. Piling transformation leadership duties onto another function is a recipe for failure. You’ll require an exclusive transformation leader, and your CIO might be too valuable a talent resource to spare. Keep in mind that anyone who might be perceived as having an inherent bias (departmental or otherwise) might not make an ideal candidate—since building consensus is key to an effective transformation. And if there’s an internal battle for resources between two departments, choosing an executive from one of the departments could be a mistake.

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One more question:
What about leadership style?

Great transformation leaders should have four “faces” or personas at their disposal. They use each face depending on business needs and project demands. As you evaluate candidates, discuss the four faces and how the candidate balances them:

- **Catalyst**
  Motivate the organization to embrace change and execute the transformation ambition.

- **Strategist**
  Bring new ideas and perspectives that transform the organization and provide competitive advantage and strategic differentiation.

- **Steward**
  Focus on the organization’s critical assets and on protecting them throughout the transformation.

- **Operator**
  Drive operational excellence in the transformation program while balancing trade-offs with business-as-usual.
If you have enabled the transformation leader to do his or her job—not piling transformation onto other roles—you’ve already taken a major step toward accountability. But even the best transformation executive could fail if there is not a critical mass of executives who are aligned on the transformation and supporting the leader. The transformation leader must drive that alignment, with help from the CEO and the blessing of the board.

The transformation leader should report to a steering committee, and the leader should also serve on that committee. Don’t double-down if you’ve selected the wrong leader or made the wrong trade-offs while trying to adjust existing leadership roles and responsibilities. It makes more sense to install a new transformation leadership who can get things right—rather than continue with a suboptimal leader. Changing the leadership midstream will be disruptive, but it can be critically necessary.

Motivating the transformation leader and the supporting executive team can be a simple matter of tying performance incentives to transformation outcomes—a move that also could help swiftly align all the key players on objectives and strategy.
What happens once the transformation is done?

Your transformation leader has a suddenly more powerful résumé—one that qualifies him or her for new position, potentially in the C-suite. In fact, your organization might have offered candidates a new C-level role as an incentive for serving as transformation leader. Recognize that your transformation possesses a dimension of know-how that can bring value to your business. Also, after a transformation, establish a system to collect feedback from executives and managers within your organization to find out what went well. Codify that feedback into your management practices and policies, to enable future transformation leaders.

And keep in mind that transformation is not a one-time thing. To keep pace with exponential change, your organization needs to build a capability around it. Each merger, each acquisition, each major business initiative or technology deployment represents an opportunity to evolve the organization.

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Picking the right talent to lead your transformation requires more than the ability to identify a strong leader. It requires an understanding of the demands and requirements of the transformation in addition to what effective transformation leaders do. It also requires being able to assess how quickly the leader can ramp up to meet the new demands the transformation requires of them. How do you select the leader that can deliver the results you need and provide the tools, resources, and support necessary for an effective transformation? We can help.

We have a strong record of helping organizations navigate effectively through the challenges of transformation to deliver new value. Our global network of business and technology professionals, as well as extensive industry-specific experience, means we can rapidly collaborate with you to develop a transformation vision and strategy that makes sense for where you want your business to go.

Want to know more?
Want more answers to big questions about transformation? Contact us to get the conversation started.

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