

# The Gridiron Metamorphosis

The Changing Role of the CEO and Top Team in Driving Transformational Change

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## The Changing Role of the CEO and Top Team in Driving Transformational Change

Transformational change presents many challenges. One of the most significant challenges the top team will face is to mobilize the team around a common goal. Through this journey the team will need to overcome internal and external resistance. In many regards the role of the top team across the three phases of transformation mirrors that which the coaching staff of a professional football team experiences on a weekly basis. Phase 1, the “CEO/Coach” is responsible for developing a vision and plan for how the team will impose its will on the competition. Phase 2, the leadership cascades the vision/strategy to generate buy-in and understanding by the managers/coordinators. The senior team then ensures the managers/coordinators are empowered to transform the vision/strategy into processes/plays that leverage the organization’s strengths and protect their weaknesses. Finally Phase 3, “Game Time” and the senior team’s role is focused on keeping score, making adjustments and substitutions to the “playbook and roster,” and ensuring that knowledge transfer and learning takes place both on the field and on Monday morning.

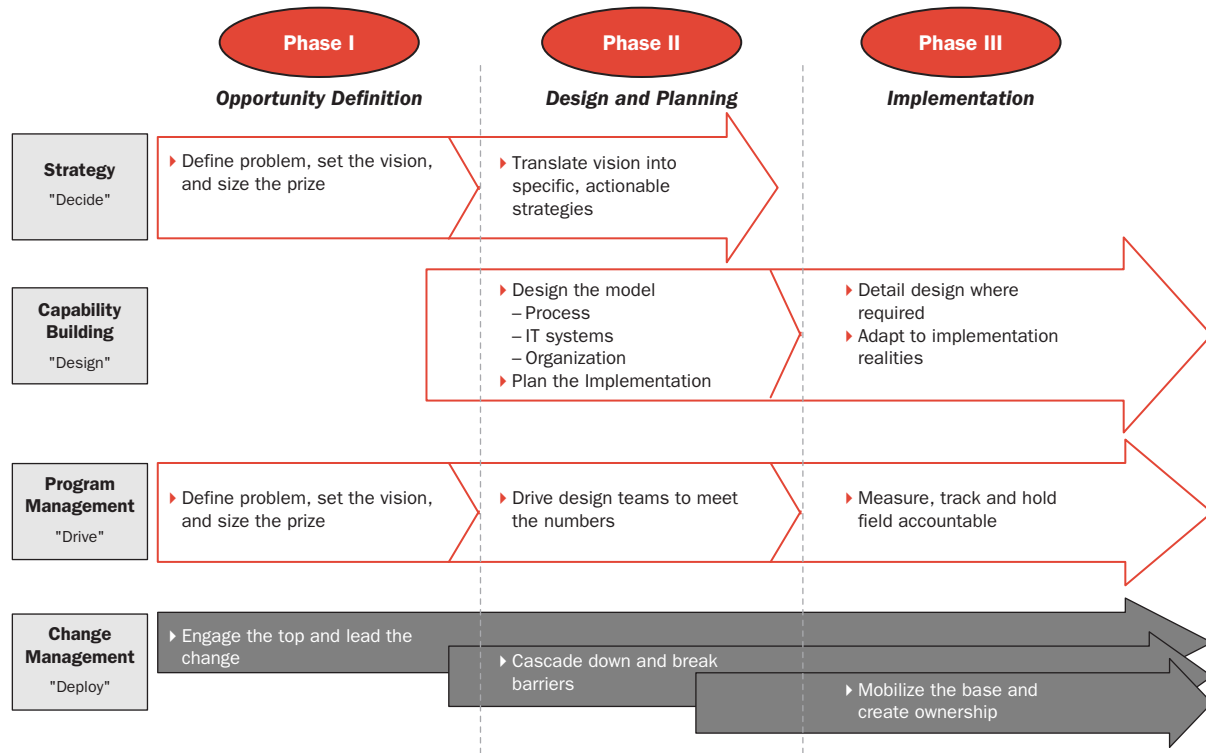
At Booz Allen we have found that most successful strategy-based transformations follow a similar three-phased approach (see Exhibit 1, page 2) that integrates the development and implementation of the strategy/operating model with the process for driving the human and emotional elements of change.

As is the case with the coaching staff on the gridiron, the roles of the CEO and top team will change across the three phases of the transformation.

### **Phase 1: Engaging the Top and Leading the Change**

In Phase 1, as with the coaching staff of a football team, the senior team’s initial focus is on diagnosing the problem. Critical to this effort is the identification of major strategic and/or organizational issues that are inhibiting corporate performance. This work provides the basis upon which to engage the top team and begin the process of driving change into the organization. The focus of the top team in this phase is centered on three critical activities: 1) Setting the Platform on Fire, 2) Defining the long-term vision, and 3) Leading the Charge.

*Setting the Platform on Fire* To effectively mobilize an organization to change, the top team needs to define, agree upon, and articulate a clear and compelling need for the change. Organizations effectively set the platform on fire for a variety of reasons. Many organizations have used crises or “external shocks” such as mergers, leadership changes, marketplace shifts, or technological disruptions to serve as a catalyst for this process. While other organizations, like Corning, have successfully set the platform on fire in the absence of crisis. Although each situation is unique there are a couple of common elements that cut across each successful transformation. First, the top team developed a shared understanding of their situation and developed a resolve to overcome their challenge. Second, in each situation the top team utilized effective commu-

**Exhibit 1****3 Phases of a Strategy-Based Transformation**

Source: Booz Allen Hamilton

nication to align of all levels of the organization and enlist its support for overcoming the challenge.

*Defining the Long-Term Vision* is critical to ensure the organization remains challenged, focused, and energized while dealing with the brutal realities of their situation. In many ways the vision will become the "rallying cry" or the "faith" that will propel the organization beyond its current situation. History tells us that visions are arrived at through many different venues. In some organizations (Ford Motor Company, Carnegie Steel) a single individual (generally the CEO) develops a unifying vision around which the organization focuses. In other companies, like Nucor, executives engage in sessions using the concept "argue-debate" to define their vision. No matter what the process an organization uses to develop its vision, all successful visions have a set of common requirements and elements.

Some particularly powerful and simple visions that have driven the creation of successful corporate organizations are those of the Ford Motor Company and the Carnegie Steel Company. Henry Ford's vision was,

"I will build a car for the great multitude." Andrew Carnegie's vision, which also proved to be clear and direct, was, "Cut the prices, scoop the market, and run the mills full ... watch the costs and the profits will take care of themselves."

*Leading the Change* requires the CEO and the top team to catalyze the process of transforming their thoughts, ideas, and beliefs into action. Successful transfor-

**Exhibit 2****Requirements and Elements of Successful Visions**

Requirements	Typical Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Guides long-term decision</li> <li>▶ Company-wide applicable</li> <li>▶ Addresses all major stakeholders (customers, employees, shareholders, public)</li> <li>▶ Comprehensible for all employees</li> <li>▶ Challenging, motivating, but plausible</li> <li>▶ Offers specifics not just phrases</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Corporate goals               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Where do we want to be in five years?</li> <li>– Where do we want to be in five years?</li> <li>– Where do we want to be in five years?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ A short version of the vision, called "Mission," is often used for communication purposes</li> </ul>

Source: Booz Allen Hamilton

mation leadership consistently demonstrates three qualities: ownership, commitment, and consistency. Ownership — successful leaders are highly visible and ensure the organization understands who is driving and owning the change by “walking the talk and talking a lot.” Commitment – successful leadership is always an early adopter of the new behaviors required for the transformation to succeed. This further demonstrates to the workforce the level of commitment management has to its new direction. Consistency – success demands that the leadership is consistent in its actions and those actions are aligned with the organization’s vision. Many great organizations have used repetition of a simple consistent message or mission statement to continuously and consistently communicate what the organization stands for and to guide the actions of all stakeholders. For example Wal-Mart’s “Always the low price – always” and Revlon’s “In the factory we make chemicals. In the beauty parlor we make hope.”

### Phase 2: Cascading Down and Breaking Barriers

In Phase 2 the top team’s role morphs from that of “head coach” to combined role of “cheerleader” and “offensive coordinator.” The senior team’s focus is on formalizing the change processes and creating high-performing project teams and zealots of change. These teams and individuals are ultimately responsible for translating the strategy into a detailed operating model, blueprint, and implementation plans. The energy of the top team is focused on three critical activities: 1) Talent Identification and Team Formulation, 2) Organizational Communication, and 3) Implementation Plan Validation.

*Talent Identification and Team Formulation* In order for the senior team to begin translating its vision into reality it must first begin to assemble the teams that will translate its vision into action. Core to this effort are the work teams that will be responsible for designing the processes, policies, and procedures that help to drive the implementation of the new operating model. Since the output of these teams will ultimately define the success of the new organization, the identification and formulation of these teams take on great impor-

tance. Successful efforts follow two principles. First, the teams are staffed with top talent and are 100% dedicated. Often, the top team does not want to make the commitment of pulling their best talent, the A players, from the responsibilities of running the business and dedicate them to changing the business. They either staff the teams with their B players or ask their A players to split their time. Either approach leads to less than optimum results. The top team needs to view these work teams as the “quarterbacks” of the transformation. When it comes to quarterbacks most professional football teams spare no expense and put great efforts at ensuring they get the best people to guide the team. In addition to selecting top talent to lead the teams it is equally as important to staff the team with individuals who are viewed as being key “influencers” within the organization. At a recent client we involved some highly respected “rainmakers” or top dogs from the sales force to support the go-to-market portion of the transformation. While these individuals are often skeptics, they prove to bring valuable insights and serve as valuable catalysts for implementing changes within the organization.

*Organizational Communications* Critical to building and sustaining organizational momentum are the communications. The top team is responsible for ensuring that the communications has clarity of purpose, effective interfaces, effective information sharing and is supported by consistent

#### Communications Principles

- ▶ Link message to strategic purpose/direction
  - Employees will understand need
  - Build credibility
- ▶ Be honest and open
  - Critical to maintaining credibility
  - “Open” doesn’t have to mean all information available every step of the way
- ▶ Set realistic expectations
  - Begin early to outline potential implications
  - Don’t gloss over potentially negative messages
  - Share parameters and limits to prevent the anticipation of worst-case outcomes
- ▶ Provide for two-way communications
  - Opportunities for employees to submit the questions they really have
  - Opportunities for employees to provide their ideas to the effort
- ▶ Put greater emphasis on being proactive versus reactive
  - Send out messages in advance, before the hue and cry becomes too great
  - Avoid the defensive posture
- ▶ Send the same message repeatedly through alternative channels
  - Frequently, individuals need to hear a message multiple times before it is internalized
  - Multiple channels increase the chance of the message being internalized

Source: Booz Allen Hamilton

behaviors from all leaders within the organization. Through our experience we have found that a cascading approach which embodies a set of principles is an effective guide for developing communications.

*Implementation Plan Validation* The final responsibility of the top team during Phase 2 is to validate and sanction the implementation plans from the change teams. The senior team's responsibility is to ensure the plans that have been developed are complementary and support the attainment of the overall corporate vision. We have found this process to work best as a series of rolling reviews by an executive throughout Phase 2 that can provide continual course corrections and effectively manage trade-offs across the change teams. This process facilitates the sharing of knowledge and insights across the teams. Most importantly, this ensures the top team remains deeply involved in the process and can react quickly to remove barriers that may impede the change team progress. Finally, as the transformation begins to transition to implementation it is essential for the top team to ensure performance measures are in place to drive the progress forward. In the final phase of this transformation the top team is going to primarily focus on results and accomplishments and this will be possible only to the extent that it has been incorporated into the pre-implementation planning during Phase 2.

### **Phase 3: Mobilizing the Base and Creating Ownership**

In Phase 3 the top team's role morphs from that of "cheerleader" and "offensive coordinator" to that of "referee and umpire." Just as the referee must ensure the game proceeds in a timely fashion and keep tally of the score so that a winner can be determined, so must the top team. The senior team's focus now shifts toward 1) fostering accountability to ensure full realization of the previously identified benefits and 2) managing the change momentum.

*Fostering Accountability* As described above, a set of expected benefits were detailed and approved by the top team during Phase 2. In Phase 3 the challenge is to ensure that the teams deliver on their commitments. Since the ultimate responsibility for delivering these benefits resides with the top team, tracking of

results during the transformation becomes critical. Detailed tracking must be augmented with transparency of results and accomplishments to foster accountability. Many of our clients have found it useful to create a war-room for tracking progress and ensuring visibility of team accomplishments to all leaders in the organization. The concept guiding the development of the war-room is to use visual cues (e.g., color coding) to immediately focus attention on areas that were not delivering to expectation. An added benefit to the war-room being a public location is that the team leaders are motivated to deliver to expectations to ensure they stay off the skyline. While the emphasis of Phase 3 is keeping the spotlight on the teams to ensure they deliver to plan, it is equally as important to balance the oversight role of the top team by celebrating publicly the successes of the change teams.

*Managing the Change Momentum* Teams have a natural tendency to either prematurely declare victory or burn out and lose momentum during implementation. In football the referee manages the game around milestone (e.g., quarters)—the senior team must do the same. Regular and routine monitoring of the plan and its expected results allows the senior team to keep a hand on the pulse of the transformation, thereby ensuring that victory is not declared until the change has been institutionalized or that the pace of change remains controllable and stable. The senior team needs to ensure the transformation is broken into manageable and measurable tasks so the implementation proceeds with precision and certainty. The senior team must also ensure that the plans combine long-term deliberate changes with quick hits. Quick hits are beneficial because they allow for an acceleration of benefits while simultaneously providing the team with an opportunity to celebrate success. These intermediate celebrations are often essential to fight burnout and to retain motivation within the change team.

### **Conclusion**

As each phase of a strategy-based transformation is markedly different from the others, so must be the role of the top team. Their role begins as a visionary; one might liken them to a Tom Landry or Vince Lombardi.

They define what the organization will be and inspire it to get there the first metamorphosis occurs and the stately head coach transforms into cheerleader/offensive coordinator. Now the top team is focused on communicating the new vision, staffing the roster, and building out the playbook for delivering victory. The final

metamorphosis occurs and the top team becomes the referee/umpire. The focus of the team now turns to keeping score and controlling the tempo of play. Through these two metamorphoses the top team fulfills its stewardship responsibility for guiding the organization toward attaining its vision.

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### Change Management Contact Information:

#### NEW YORK

**Reggie Van Lee**

Senior Vice President  
212-551-6421  
[van\\_lee\\_reggie@bah.com](mailto:van_lee_reggie@bah.com)

**John Jones**

Vice President  
212-551-6713  
[jones\\_john@bah.com](mailto:jones_john@bah.com)

**Paul Hyde**

Vice President  
212-551-6069  
[hyde\\_paul@bah.com](mailto:hyde_paul@bah.com)

#### CHICAGO

**Gary Neilson**

Senior Vice President  
312-578-4727  
[neilson\\_gary@bah.com](mailto:neilson_gary@bah.com)

**Andrew Tipping**

Vice President  
312-578-4633  
[tipping\\_andrew@bah.com](mailto:tipping_andrew@bah.com)

#### SAN FRANCISCO

**DeAnne Aguirre**

Vice President  
415-627-3330  
[aguirre\\_deanne@bah.com](mailto:aguirre_deanne@bah.com)

#### DÜSSELDORF

**Wolfgang Schirra**

Senior Vice President  
49-211-3890-130  
[schirra\\_wolfgang@bah.com](mailto:schirra_wolfgang@bah.com)

#### MUNICH

**Joerg Krings**

Vice President  
49-89-45425-574  
[krings\\_joerg@bah.com](mailto:krings_joerg@bah.com)

#### ZURICH

**Claudia Staub**

Vice President  
41-1-206-40-52  
[staub\\_claudia@bah.com](mailto:staub_claudia@bah.com)

## Worldwide Offices

**Abu Dhabi**  
Charles El-Hage  
971-2-6-270882

**Buenos Aires**  
Alejandro Stengel  
54-1-14-131-0400

**Göteborg**  
Anders Sewerin  
46-31-725-93-00

**McLean**  
Martin J. Bollinger  
703-902-3800

**Philadelphia**  
Molly Finn  
267-330-7900

**Sydney**  
Tim Jackson  
61-2-9321-1900

**Amsterdam**  
Peter Mensing  
31-20-504-1900

**Caracas**  
José Gregorio Baquero  
58-212-285-3522

**Helsinki**  
Kari Iloranta  
358-9-61-54-600

**Melbourne**  
Tim Jackson  
61-3-9221-1900

**Rio de Janeiro**  
Paolo Pigorini  
55-21-2237-8400

**Tampa**  
Joe Garner  
813-281-4900

**Atlanta**  
Joe Garner  
404-659-3600

**Chicago**  
Chris Disher  
312-346-1900

**Hong Kong**  
Salamah Ghassan  
852-2634-1878

**Mexico City**  
Alonso Martinez  
52-55-9178-4200

**Rome**  
Fernando Napolitano  
39-06-69-20-73-1

**Tokyo**  
Eric Spiegel  
81-3-3436-8600

**Bangkok**  
Tim Jackson  
66-2-653-2255

**Cleveland**  
Mark Moran  
216-696-1900

**Houston**  
Matt McKenna  
713-650-4100

**Miami**  
Alonso Martinez  
305-670-8050

**San Diego**  
Foster Rich  
619-725-6500

**Vienna**  
Helmut Meier  
43-1-518-22-900

**Beirut**  
Charles El-Hage  
961-1-336433

**Colorado Springs**  
Glen Bruels  
719-597-8005

**Jakarta**  
Tim Jackson  
6221-577-0077

**Milan**  
Enrico Strada  
390-2-72-50-91

**San Francisco**  
Bruce Pasternack  
415-391-1900

**Warsaw**  
Reg Boudinot  
48-22-630-6301

**Berlin**  
Rene Perillieux  
49-30-88705-0

**Copenhagen**  
Torsten Moe  
45-3393-36-73

**Lexington Park**  
Neil Gillespie  
301-862-3110

**Munich**  
Richard Hauser  
49-89-54525-0

**Santiago**  
Alejandro Stengel  
562-445-5100

**Wellington**  
Tim Jackson  
64-4-915-7777

**Bogotá**  
Jaime Maldonado  
57-1-628-5050

**Dallas**  
Tim Blansett  
214-746-6500

**London**  
Peter Bertone  
44-20-7393-3333

**New York**  
David Knott  
212-697-1900

**São Paulo**  
Leticia Costa  
55-11-5501-6200

**Zurich**  
Jens Schädler  
41-1-20-64-05-0

**Boston**  
John Harris  
617-428-4400

**Düsseldorf**  
Thomas Kuenstner  
49-211-38900

**Los Angeles**  
Tom Hansson  
310-297-2100

**Oslo**  
Karl Høie  
47-23-11-39-00

**Seoul**  
Jong Chang  
82-2-2170-7500

**Brisbane**  
Tim Jackson  
61-7-3230-6400

**Frankfurt**  
Rainer Bernnat  
49-69-97167-0

**Madrid**  
Mercedes Mostajo  
34-91-411-8450

**Paris**  
Bertrand Kleinmann  
33-1-44-34-3131

**Stockholm**  
Torbjörn Kihlstedt  
46-8-506-190-00