



Secrets of successful change implementation

Alasdair Johnston, Frédéric Lefort, and Joseph Tesvic

What do successful implementers of change initiatives do differently from other companies? Our survey of more than 2,000 executives yields actionable answers.

Alasdair Johnston and **Joseph Tesvic** are partners in McKinsey's Sydney office, and **Frédéric Lefort** is a partner in the Gothenburg office.

Any executive who has led a major change program knows that even the most carefully planned programs can fail because of mediocre implementation. Turning plans into reality isn't easy, and certain companies seem to be better at it than others. To learn how some of the world's leading companies ensure implementation excellence, we conducted a survey of more than 2,000 executives in 900 companies across industries.¹ We asked respondents to evaluate their company's implementation performance, capabilities, and practices.

Our survey revealed that "good implementers"—defined as companies whose respondents reported top-quartile scores for their implementation capabilities—achieved superior

performance on a range of financial-performance metrics. Perhaps more important, two years after a change effort has ended, good implementers sustain twice the level of financial benefits as poor implementers do.

So what can other companies learn from successful implementers?

The factors that matter most

Every transformation leaks value at various stages of the implementation process: some prioritized initiatives are never done, others are implemented but don't achieve bottom-line impact, and still others may fail to sustain their initial good results. But at every stage of the process, good implementers retain more value than poor implementers (Exhibit 1).

¹ The online survey was conducted from January 14 to January 24, 2014, and garnered responses from 2,079 executives representing the full range of regions, industries, company sizes, functional specialties, and tenures. The results reported in this article also include responses from an additional 151 global executives surveyed at an earlier date. To adjust for differences in response rates, the data are weighted by the contribution of each respondent's nation to global GDP.