

How To Build Teams That Support Organizational Transformation

By

Mostafa Sayyadi, The Change Leader Consulting Inc.

Michael J. Provitera, Barry University

Joanna Seraphim, IESEG School of Management

In this article, we aim to blend change management consulting practices with not only practicing leaders but also scholars from leading universities such as but not limited to Harvard Business School, UC Berkeley, USF Muma, Ivey Business School, and Cornell SC Johnson College of Business. We are in the age of disruptions and uncertainty and if we do not create effective transformations, our business will be in chaos. In our recent empirical study in Australia in 2024, we asked 349 Australian senior executives to list the characteristics of an effective company. We found that about 94 percent of them listed a characteristic of high-performance transformation. The C-Suite will find our idea novel in approach and scholars will delve into our idea of high-performance transformation so that they can expand on it, criticize it, extrapolate it, and, in some cases, replicate it. Our main reasoning in this article is based on effective transforma-

tion which must be team-oriented. Teams that support organizational transformation can play a critical role in business success for organizations. First, an effective transformation should effectively involve all members of the organization and foster teamwork, and a sense of camaraderie. Second, the development of these teams requires the courage of top managers.

Then, organizations can benefit from their teamwork to achieve prosperity and effectiveness. In this novel idea article, we aim to expand Kotter's change model to address scholars and practitioners

Executives can build teams that support organizational transformation to provide more innovative solutions and more effective responses to customer

worldwide to initiate a new conversation on organizational transformation. Much of what we share in this article has been adapted from our book titled Management Consulting's Black Box which summarizes our 25 years of management consulting work experience across the globe and will be published in the Business Expert Press soon.

Keywords: Organizational Transformation, Teamworking, Leadership, Organizational Performance, Organizational Culture, Kotter's Change Model.

High-performance transformation is at the heart of teamwork. While working as senior corporate executives we realized that self-managed teams may be self-managed but may not be high-performance teams. This led us to change the name from self-managed teams to high-performance teams. John Kotter, in 2007, coined the term “Leading Change: Why Transformational Efforts Fail,” in the Harvard Business Review. Since then, many authors implemented different applications of this idea which is easily transferred to organizations and companies in a practical and virtuous way.

We guide managers toward the goal of transformation using high-performance teamwork by expanding on Kotter’s model of change. In this article, gained from our 25 years of management consulting work experience and adapted from our book titled Management Consulting’s Black Box, our effort is to help leaders improve their team performance in organizations. Many organizations are restructuring, reengineering, reorganizing strategies, merging companies, downsizing, quality planning, and new in-vogue cultural projects. Having a management mentality to create transformation, despite the presence of quality people in the process, self-managed team transformation will face inevitable failure. There are several categories of pressure for transformation. One is the difference between leadership and management, and the other is the culture of the organization. In this article, we particularly answer the following key question:

What factors build teams that support organizational transformation?

The Problem of Self-Managed Team Transformation and its Solution

Why do organizations fail? Today, changes in organizations are inevitable. For success, it is necessary to make continuous changes, and an organization that cannot implement these changes correctly and in accordance with its goals will inevitably fail. In this context, organizations commit frequent and common mistakes that accelerate the failure of change. In our 25 years of management consulting across Australia, France, and the United States and our interviews with hundreds of CEOs and executives in these three countries, we found that the following most common mistakes the organizations made:

Mistake One: Seeking too much comfort

This is a fatal mistake because when comfort levels are high, disruptive changes may fail to achieve their goals. The occurrence of disruptive change that aims to reduce people’s convenience paralyzes managers; people become defensive; or managers may confuse necessity with concern, and by showing their con-

cern to employees, they cause them to sink deeper into their known safe haven and even show more resistance to change. When you take away supervisor titles and replace them with self-transformation team leaders you might as well put up teepees because people are going to feel a tribe mentality.

Mistake Two: Failure to create powerful coalitions

In order to create successful change, it is necessary to create a coordinated team composed of senior managers, department managers, or heads of departments, in addition to a number of other people who are committed to improving team performance. Team activities that do not have a strong enough coalition will have only limited progress. From the executive corner, these powerful coalitions also give each of these teams of the organization effective communication channels to disseminate information quickly and effectively. On the other hand, teams struggle with tradition and short-term interests, preventing structural change from bringing about the needed behavioral change that comes with high-performance teams.

Mistake Three: Underestimating the importance of vision development

Vision plays an important role in bringing about beneficial changes by guiding, aligning, and inspiring people’s activities (Yamamoto & Philbeck, 2013; Tipurić, 2022). Some people, understanding the problems of creating change, try to manage their activities quietly behind the scenes and deliberately avoid any discussion in public. Without developing a blatant vision to guide decisions, every choice employees face will lead to endless debate.

Mistake Four: Insufficient transmission of the vision to the employees

High-performance teams require willing team members (Serrat, 2017; Nadeem et al., 2019; Clack, 2021). People are willing to sacrifice if they are satisfied with the current conditions. They must see the benefits and believe that change is possible. Without establishing effective communication, it is not possible to conquer the hearts and minds of employees. Transmit the vision clearly in the minds of the team without any doubt to help them fully.

Mistake Five: The presence of obstacles against the new vision

When employees feel that they are facing obstacles on the way, new poor job specifications such as team members can reduce effectiveness. New compensation systems or performance evaluation systems can even force employees to choose between divesting from a new vision and focusing on personal resources such as new employment options (Mohtsham Saeed & Arshad, 2012; Maas, 2018). Things get worse when supervisors refuse to adapt to new conditions because they feel that they are being usurped. Whenever intelligent and benevolent people avoid

facing obstacles, they weaken the employees and delay the transformation.

Mistake Six: Inability to create short-term victories

A real transformation takes about eighteen months' time. If the efforts to create transformation or reconstruction of business and work lack short-term goals that are easy to reach or admirable, employees will lose motivation. Most people do not continue with long-term efforts unless they see signs of the expected results after a short period of time. Most employees give up without short-term victories or resist change because the target is too far into the future.

Mistake Seven: Premature declaration of victory

After several years of hard work, the employees want to announce the results of the transformation as a victory. Although celebrating a victory is a good thing, it should not be considered a complete victory, and this is a mistake. The changes must be deeply embedded and institutionalized in the organizational culture, and this usually takes 3 to 10 years.

Mistake Eight: Neglecting to stabilize the changes in the culture of the organization

Change takes place and becomes stable when they are part of a new or enhanced culture (Wagoner & Power, 2021; Stephenson, 2023a; Stephenson, 2023b). Regression is real and easily accepted. Conscious efforts by leaders must show the importance of change and much work to improve the attitude of employees must be ongoing.

In summary, the negative consequences of these eight mistakes are:

- New strategies are not implemented well.
- With the merger, the expected synergy does not occur.
- Re-engineering takes a lot of time and money.
- Downsizing does not control costs.
- Quality improvement programs do not produce the expected results.

The Expansion of Kotter's Change Model

The challenge of the global economy creates opportunities and threats for everyone and puts companies under pressure. Successful organizations in the change process have learned how to adopt new strategies of integration, re-engineering, quality programs, and restructuring (Kolmos et al., 2016; Weerakkody et al., 2021). In 2007, John Kotter proposed his model of change. Scaffolding may be used as a success factor. Because, in comparison with other theories such as the Tuckman Model, multi-stage processes the appropriate authority level from senior leaders provides motivation. However, this process is effective when it is led by top management with a high-quality leadership steering committee.

In the next sections, we go further and will expand Kotter's change model (Figure 1) by presenting methods and important required features and ways to link changes to old roots and institutionalize

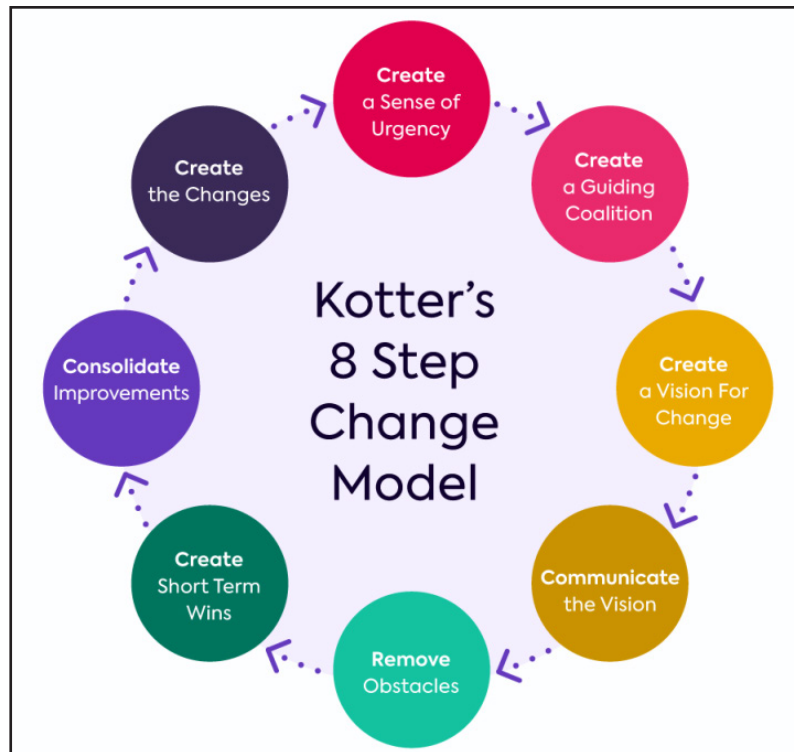


Figure 1: Kotter's Change Model

Table 1: The Success Stages of Transformation and Eight Main Mistakes

Mistakes	Success Stages
Seeking too much comfort	Necessity and urgency
Failure to create powerful coalitions	Guiding coalitions
Underestimating the importance of vision development	Vision, mission, and strategy
Insufficient transmission of the vision to the employees	Providing an engaging vision
The presence of obstacles against the new vision	Empowering employees
Inability to create short-term victories	Short-term wins
Premature declaration of victory	Celebrating victories
Neglecting to stabilize the changes in the culture of the organization	Opening lock-in cultural norms

new activities in a culture, as shown in Table 1. In doing this expansion, we deeply analyze our eight success stages of organizational transformation to correspond with the eight main mistakes of organizational change. This is the unique contribution of this article.

Stage 1: Recognizing necessity and urgency

Examining the market and the competitive realities to diagnose current and potential crises. These examinations primarily manifest themselves in analyzing the current situation to explore the possible crises for a company. For example, the emerging and complex technology of artificial intelligence or natural disasters of climate change may lead to a potential crisis for many companies now. Here, people outside the organization can be useful in customer relationship management. Additional information can also be gathered by suppliers and shareholders.

Stage 2: Creating a guiding coalition

Next, based on the examinations of the market and the competitive realities, a steering committee with enough authority must be formed to lead the transformation and guide the group in such a way that they work as a unified team. A powerful guiding coalition with the right structure, appropriate level of trust, and common goals will also steer the organization in the correct direction.

To create an effective guiding coalition, four key features should be considered:

1. The organizational capital of the situation: Are there enough key people involved in this coalition so that other people cannot create a barrier against the transformation?
2. Broad expertise: Are there different departmental experts that are both knowledgeable and some that are outsiders to offer an outside point of view so that the correct and intelligent deci-

sions can be made?

3. Credibility: Does the steering committee have a good reputation in the company so that other employees of the company take their opinions seriously?
4. Leadership: Does the steering committee have leadership knowledge, authority, and autonomy so that they can guide the transformation process well?

The key kernel for executives is that the combination of trust and a common goal between people with the appropriate characteristics can lead to the creation of a strong steering committee.

Stage 3: Creating a vision, mission, and strategy

A vision that guides change efforts is usually 5 to ten years out while a mission could be a daily continuous day-to-day operation. The strategy is much more inclusive of both vision and mission but also guiding principles, goals, and objectives (Inyang, 2013; Samans & Nelson, 2022). Thus, vision refers to a clear picture of the future that shows why an organization thrives. For example, Toyota Motor Corporation is a great example that has successfully developed a strategy that includes vision and mission and also guiding principles, goals, and objectives (Ejaz, 2024). In the transformation process, the focal point of managerial implication is that a good vision has three important goals:

- Clarify the development path,
- Motivate people, and;
- Keep people focused on the mission.

Most visions have the following characteristics:

1. Providing a picture of the future.
2. Showing the long-term interests of employees, customers, shareholders and stakeholders.
3. Including realistic and practical goals.
4. Being clear to provide the necessary decision-making.
5. Being an iterative process to create change.

6. Being easy to remember, manifest, and known and practiced by all employees.

The degree of desirability of a transformation vision can be determined by asking the following questions:

- What is the customer value proposition offered by our vision?
- What effect will the vision have on the shareholders and the communities in which the organization prospers and serves?
- What is the effect of the vision on attracting and retaining talented professionals?

Stage 4: Providing an engaging vision

Continuously convey the vision and strategy and create role models that portray the mission and vision. A great vision serves an important purpose. The real power of a vision is revealed when most of the people involved in the transformation activity have a common understanding of the organizational goals and direction (Carballo, 2023; Leso et al., 2023; Khaw et al., 2023). When the sense of urgency is high employees will be able to create a vision and transfer that vision into the future appropriately. To effectively convey the vision, some important features should be considered:

1. Use simplicity: All technical terms and jargon should be left out.
2. Use metaphors: Similes, examples, and verbal images are worth a thousand times than the written writings.
3. Use multiple platforms: Informal memos and company newsletters are all effective in spreading the vision
4. Use repetition: Ideas penetrate deeply into people's minds only when they are repeated and heard over and over again.
5. Use leadership: Present models and host monthly praising sessions.
6. Stage 5: Empowering employees

Changing systems or structures that help people thrive strengthens the vision, encourages risk-taking, and welcomes ideas. We recommend that executives use a customer-centric vision so that the organization continually adds value.

Stage 6: Creating short-term wins

Planning for visible improvements in performance or small victories, whatever they may be, is important to provide an impetus of positive momentum in the company's vision and mission. An example of this, completing a pilot program is an example of a specific short-term win. The key point for executives is that appreciating and giving rewards to the people who make progress possible is very important. Major developments take time and in some cases require great care. Loyal believers want to see clear evidence that the transformation is working. Managing a transformation effort without a major focus on short-term wins is incredibly risky.

A short-term victory has at least the following three characteristics:

- It is visible. A large number of people can see if the result is real.
- It is not ambiguous. Clarification and advertising may be necessary.
- It connects the transformation efforts, and it is a victory.

The functions that are learned in a short time can also facilitate short-term wins and help the changes in the following six ways:

- Provides evidence of good decisions and valuable sacrifices.
- Short-term wins as positive feedback improves morale and motivation.
- They help provide clear vision and strategies: Short-term victories provide objective information to the guiding coalition about the validity of their ideas.
- They reduce pessimism and conservative resistance: evidence that clearly indicates the improvement in performance makes it difficult for people to resist the required transformation.
- They keep the leaders in the scene: for the people who have a higher position in the chain of administrative ranks, they provide evidence that the transformation is on its way.
- They bring motivation to people: they turn indifferent people into supporters and reluctant supporters into active helpers.

Stage 7: Celebrating Victories

Celebrating victories is not just throwing parties for no reason, it is built on employing, and promoting. People, who have the potential to implement the organizational vision, should be trained and developed to advocate for the mission and change initiatives. As agents of change, these employees can play a critical role that needs to be celebrated.

Major changes, especially in large organizations, require spending a lot of time and money. This money spent must go to operative projects for improvement in the tangible assets of the organization such as human capital, social capital, and organizational capital.

The process of creating transformation needs to have everyone in the organization rowing in the same direction (Mancl & Fraser, 2019; García-Marzá & Calvo, 2024). Reward people for coming on board the change initiative, then halfway through using short-term victories. The work on the strategic planning process must be coordinated and each step along the way must be communicated. Things to communicate via intranet or paper distribution would cover things such as but not limited to restructuring, reengineering, or change in strategic planning, monitored or new training programs, modifying information systems, increasing or decreasing the number of em-

ployees, and new enhanced performance evaluation systems. Finally, the stage of summarizing the victories must build upon each other incrementally from an off-site gathering to a full-blown concert or trip to an exotic island.

Stage 8: Opening lock-in cultural norms

Customer-oriented leadership, customer relationship management, and customer-value proposition are derived from intangible assets of organizations such as social capital, organizational capital, and human capital. Thus, productive behavior, more effective leadership, and better management establish a connection between new behaviors and organizational success. This creates tools to guarantee and develop leadership prowess throughout the organization. How this is manifested has to do with the seven stages mentioned above but without a way of making this transformation stick all efforts are bound to revert back to inertia.

Culture refers, in this case, to the norms of behavior and shared values among the stakeholders of the organization (Fietz et al., 2021; Ylimaki & Brunderman, 2022). Norms of instilling this behavior and sustaining it are common and penetrating methods

of action that are found among successful organizations that prosper.

Shared values are important tasks and goals shared by most employees that shape group behavior and often persist over time, even if employees change. Thus, talent management and onboarding new people are very important to organizational success. Culture is important because it can have a great impact on human behavior, while changing it may be difficult.

In a transformation effort, new activities, that are not compatible with existing cultures, are often subject to going back or regressing, causing inertia. Therefore, tying the knot on positive change is just as important as setting up the transformation process.

Opening locking in the culture is powerful for three reasons:

1. People are selected based on the culture of the organization with talent management.
2. Culture, like morale, can change easily and this must be monitored, therefore, culture should be continuously nurtured.
3. Culture can also be challenged by opposing egos



Figure 2: *The Expanded Model of Kotter’s Change Model*

that unconsciously undermine the transformation for self-interests.

These key eight stages, which have also been successfully tested in an Australian multinational automotive manufacturer in our management consulting project, have been presented in Figure 2 below.

Conclusions

In many transformational efforts, the main axis of the previous culture is not in conflict with the new perspective, although there will be conflict with some of the tried-and-true previous cultural norms. In such cases, linking new activities to old roots while removing incompatible components is a fundamental challenge. This is why we suggest that leading strategic change must be the competency of senior leaders in the C-Suite. Institutionalizing a set of activities in a culture that are even compatible with its core values is also a complex challenge. The biggest obstacle to transformation is a group's culture. Thus, the first step in a big transformation is to change norms and values. Once accomplished, this has to be the organizational mantra instilled in the mission, vision, and guiding principles of the organization. Leaders need to understand the existing culture so that they can raise the level of urgency and necessity for change. The key to the survival of successful organizations in today's era of disruptions is effectively leading strategic change. Employees must also be able to handle the competitive and constantly changing environment. In achieving these goals, the model presented above touches on eight steps that can help companies continuously and more effectively lead changes using high-performance teams to provide more innovative solutions to respond to customer needs using a continuous improvement perspective in real time. Thus, executives will be able to achieve a higher degree of effectiveness and competitive advantage in a world of disruptions.

References

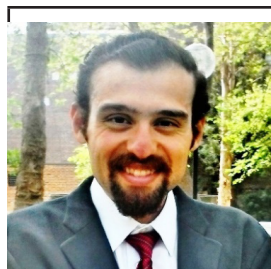
- Carballo, R.E. (2023). Purpose-driven transformation: a holistic organization design framework for integrating societal goals into companies. *Journal of Organization Design*, 12(1), pp. 195–215. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41469-023-00156-8>
- Clack, L. (2021). Employee Engagement: Keys to Organizational Success. In: Dhiman, S.K. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Workplace Well-Being*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30025-8_77
- Ejaz, M.R. (2024). Smart Manufacturing as a Management Strategy to Achieve Sustainable Competitiveness. *Journal of the Knowledge Economy*, 15(1), pp. 682–705. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-023-01097-z>
- Fietz, B., Hillmann, J., & Guenther, E. (2021). Cultural Effects on Organizational Resilience: Evidence from the NAFTA Region. *Schmalenbach Journal of Business Research*, 73(1), pp. 5–46 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41471-021-00106-8>
- García-Marzá, D., & Calvo, P. (2024). Institutional Design for the Development of Algorithmic Democracy. In: *Algorithmic Democracy. Philosophy and Politics - Critical Explorations*, vol 29. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-53015-9_12
- Inyang, B.J. (2013). Mission Statements (Credo, Way, Vision). In: Idowu, S.O., Capaldi, N., Zu, L., Gupta, A.D. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility*. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-28036-8_202
- Khaw, K.W., Alnoor, A. & AL-Abrow, H. (2023). Reactions towards organizational change: a systematic literature review. *Current Psychology* 42(22), pp. 19137–19160 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-03070-6>
- Kolmos, A., Hadgraft, R.G. & Holgaard, J.E. (2016). Response strategies for curriculum change in engineering. *International Journal of Technology and Design Education*, 26(3), pp. 391–411. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10798-015-9319-y>
- Kotter, J.P. (2007). Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/1995/03/leading-change-why-transformation-efforts-fail-2>
- Leso, B.H., Cortimiglia, M.N. & Ghezzi, A. (2023). The contribution of organizational culture, structure, and leadership factors in the digital transformation of SMEs: a mixed-methods approach. *Cognition Technology and Work*, 25(1), pp. 151–179. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10111-022-00714-2>
- Maas, K. (2018). Do Corporate Social Performance Targets in Executive Compensation Contribute to Corporate Social Performance?. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 148(3), pp. 573–585. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2975-8>
- Mancl, D., & Fraser, S.D. (2019). XP 2019 Panel: Business Agility. In: Hoda, R. (eds) *Agile Processes in Software Engineering and Extreme Programming – Workshops. XP 2019. Lecture Notes in Business Information Processing*, vol 364. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-30126-2_18
- Mohtsham Saeed, M. & Arshad, F. (2012). Corporate social responsibility as a source of competitive advantage: The mediating role of social capital and reputational capital. *Journal of Database Marketing & Customer Strategy Management*, 19(4), 219–232. <https://doi.org/10.1057/dbm.2012.19>
- Nadeem, K., Riaz, A., & Danish, R.Q. (2019). Influence of high-performance work system on employee service performance and OCB: the

- mediating role of resilience. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 9(1), pp. 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40497-018-0142-2>
- Samans, R., & Nelson, J. (2022). *Corporate Strategy and Implementation*. In: *Sustainable Enterprise Value Creation*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-93560-3_5
- Serrat, O. (2017). *Engaging Staff in the Workplace*. In: *Knowledge Solutions*. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0983-9_49
- Stephenson, J. (2023a). *Cultural Change*. In: *Culture and Sustainability*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25515-1_6
- Stephenson, J. (2023b). *Cultural Stability*. In: *Culture and Sustainability*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25515-1_5
- Tipurić, D. (2022). *Strategic Direction*. In: *The Enactment of Strategic Leadership*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-03799-3_5
- Wagoner, B., & Power, S.A. (2021). *Social Change*. In: *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of the Possible*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98390-5_143-1
- Weerakkody, V., Janssen, M., & El-Haddadeh, R. (2021). The resurgence of business process re-engineering in public sector transformation efforts: exploring the systemic challenges and unintended consequences. *Information Systems and e-Business Management*, 19(2), pp. 993–1014. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10257-021-00527-2>
- Yamamoto, N., & Philbeck, J.W. (2013). Peripheral vision benefits spatial learning by guiding eye movements. *Memory & Cognition*, 41, pp. 109–121. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13421-012-0240-2>
- Ylimaki, R.M., & Brunderman, L.A. (2022). Values, Culture and Context. In: Ylimaki, R.M., Brunderman, L.A. (eds) *Evidence-Based School Development in Changing Demographic Contexts. Studies in Educational Leadership*, vol 24. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76837-9_3

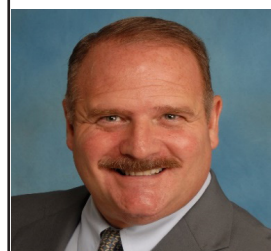
Review

This article was accepted under the **constructive peer review** option. For further details, see the descriptions at: <http://mumabusinessreview.org/peer-review-options/>

Authors



Author name is the subject of this brief biography, which could cover the entire **Mostafa Sayyadi** works with senior business leaders to effectively develop innovation in companies, and helps companies—from start-ups to the Fortune 100—succeed by improving the effectiveness of their leaders.



Michael J. Provitera is an Associate Professor of Management at Barry University. He is an author of *Level Up Leadership* published by Business Expert Press.



Joanna Seraphim is a Professor of Practice at IÉSEG School of Management in Paris, France. She holds a PhD degree in Anthropology from École des Hautes Études de Sciences Sociales, Paris.