

Change Masters: Using the Transformation Gene to Empower Hyper-Performance at Work

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Brief

Achieving hyper-performance is an essential aim not only for organizations and societies but also for individuals. Digital transformation is reshaping the workplace so fast that people start falling behind, with their poor attitudes remaining the ultimate obstacle. The alignment of human-machine co-evolution is the only sustainable strategy for the future of work. Thus, this article intertwines technology design with behavioral science to empower the next generation workforce.

Keywords

performance, behavior design, human change, social mirroring, transforming technology

Reality

How often do you see two equally capable people producing significantly different results? Why can it be so hard to select a future employee from a pile of similar resumes? Actual human performance only marginally depends on slight educational or experiential differences compared to overall attitudinal flexibility. Most of the performance-related challenges are fundamentally rooted in poor ability to change the human mind.¹

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Organizations increasingly invest a large number of resources to advance their workplace with modern technologies and automated tools. **Does this sound like a good strategy?** Of course, that is one side of the coin. Remember, extremely capable innovations are already arriving on our desktops at an unprecedented pace. Such a trend will only accelerate in the near future with the development of artificial intelligence and algorithmic mastery.²

Vision

The remaining challenge is that far too often we tend to forget the other side of the same coin; That is, the role that human nature plays in this race towards *hyper-performance at work*. Old-fashioned motivation tools, such as rewards and punishments, are not yielding satisfactory outcomes anymore.³ **Guess why.** Because they have huge limitations. Somebody needs to maintain these tools. Their effects usually vanish over time, and sometimes even backfire when they are removed completely.

The reliance on external factors as the game changers in human performance is evidently fading away.⁴ More often, organization leaders are emphasizing other essential sources of encouragement, such as value alignment, growth potential, social fitness, personal fulfillment, and more. This strategy is a great step closer to igniting internal drivers of change. However, such journeys are usually falling short in arriving at the essential depth

of where the actual transformations take place in human nature.

Transformation Gene

Deep inside of every human being resides the wisdom of change, the knowledge about all global shifts, and the evolutionary advancements that mankind has been experiencing over thousands of years.⁵ All that knowledge is firmly wired into our biochemical super-machine, the body-mind. Just like our biological information is encompassed into two strings of genetic code, we have inherited an innate ability to know what change means and how transformation works. That notion is conceptually called the *transformation gene*.

The good news is that everyone has this *transformation gene*. The essential steps forward are **(1)** to bring this notion into our awareness, **(2)** to activate the transformation gene, and then **(3)** to explore its infinite power by applying it to real-life behavioral challenges. **Why is this activation important?** The science on epigenetics explains how our biological genes get silenced or expressed under certain external influences and our own choices.⁶ Similarly, the transformation gene can be heavily veiled under social conditional and habitual routines, thus silenced. Therefore, it has to be uncovered and activated for proper functioning.

Hyper-Performance

Once the gene is activated, people naturally become the drivers of change instead of desperate followers, which might have been happening to many for far too long. People at work will become the agents of self-development and drivers of the necessary organizational changes. So what? After that, every

digital transformation⁷ will be accompanied by a profound awareness of how to align human attitudes with the envisioned technology advancements. Such an approach will empower a long-term sustainable acceleration of collective growth.

Essentially, the transformation gene empowers people to make much wiser decisions for themselves and others. Previously, whenever a person had a poor attitude towards a certain task or work, it produced lower quality results.⁸ After activation, the transformation gene allows employees to become better at spotting their mistakes or habitual deviations at work. They would naturally start recalibrating their own decisions to reach their most efficient performance. Not only for themselves, but also for others through social mirroring, as described later in this article.

At the core of *human transformation* is a process of gradually but permanently swapping attitudes, also referred to as beliefs, opinions, perceptions, or biases. For example, if an employee thinks that working remotely is bad, then the outcome will not be as great if the person thinks remote work is also good. Right? This means that a mere exchange between an old attitude and a new one can profoundly change the way individuals behave and organizations perform. Remember, it is not enough to only create a new attitude. There has to be a real and permanent substitution.

Vectoral Transformation

The next question involves sustaining an attitudinal change. **How can such irreversible perceptual shifts be assured?** Behavioral science provides a list of tools and strategies to support human change.⁹ However, a large part of previous work in behavioral science

has shown quite limiting results in sustaining the desired improvements. Often, it was due to the selected intervention designs using rewards and punishments as the main motivators. In contrast, more recent research has revealed insights on sustaining change with the method of *vectoral transformation*.

A vector is a geometrical object in the form of a straight line with a dot on one end, an arrow on the other end, and has both a magnitude and a direction. Thus, a vectoral transformation is a method that uses vectors for explaining, mapping, and maintaining progress towards any long-term sustainable and transformational change.⁴ Relying on basic geometry, it easily demonstrates how any decision away from the main transformation vector cannot keep a person or organization moving towards the previously chosen direction (Figure 1).

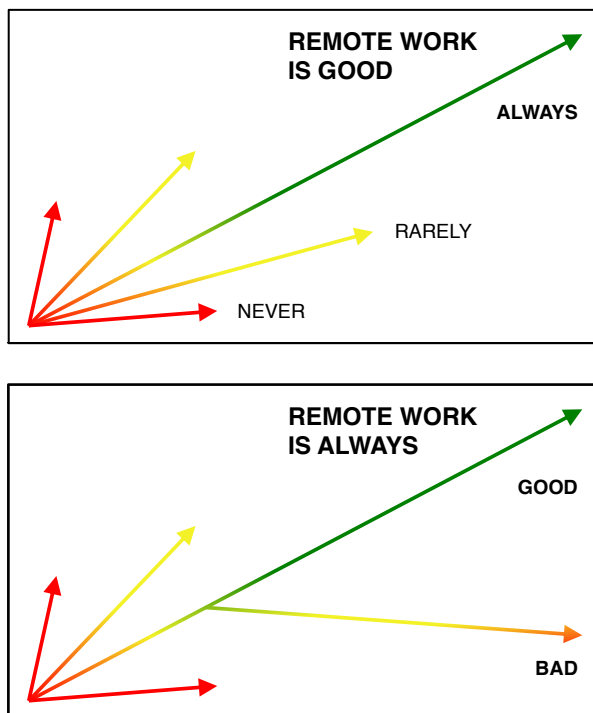


Figure 1. Vectoral Transformation.

In line with the previously described example of working remotely, the green transformation vector is working as long as the person always thinks that remote work is a good option (Figure 1, on top). The yellow vector emerges for those that rarely consider working anywhere outside an office. The red arrow exemplifies a behavioral pattern for a complete dedication to work in the designated workplace.

There can also be situations when everything goes well in the beginning, but a divergent decision is made on the way (Figure 1, on bottom). That is the most common behavioral trap.⁴ People oftentimes think that a one-time inconsistency will not produce any undesired long-term outcomes. Now, the vectoral transformation method explicitly demonstrates how the smallest deviation ruins any desired long-term changes in lives and organizations. **What helps to keep the desired outcome and movement on the transformation vector?** There are two major amplifiers of sustainable change: *social mirroring* and *technology design*.

Social Mirroring

Individuals are continuously changing what they think and do based on people surrounding them, real or imagined others. In behavioral science, this phenomenon is called *social influence*. Prior research reveals seven major forms of social influence: learning, comparison, norms, facilitation, cooperation, competition, and recognition.¹⁰ Through such social dynamics, people can acquire new behaviors and reshape their attitudes.¹¹ Moreover, they can express their transformation gene or discern when others activate it.

Social mirroring is an interactive experience that encompasses the science of social

influence with the notion of transformation genes. **How does it happen?** Imagine you have a colleague who has always been interested in trying to work remotely, but never did, just like yourself. You both agree that remote work most likely is of a lesser quality because of the distractions at home or in other locations. Next, the emergence of COVID-19 pandemic¹² requires social distancing and your organization implements a policy to work from home. After three weeks, you hop on a call with your colleague and you notice that the person is acting differently with regards to the previous home office concerns. You cannot consciously tell what has happened, but you feel the difference. That means that the genes on both sides (that is, between your colleague and yourself) are using their own channel of communication, where they speak in their own language.

Apparently, your colleague has accomplished a successful transformative experience by replacing the old attitude about remote work being inferior to a new one in which working from home is as good or better. **Why is remote work attractive?** Because you were also willing to try that. Of course, you had the same three weeks at home. However, in your case, your attitude remained unchanged. Due to this difference, the activated transformation gene in your colleague is subconsciously signaling to your transformation gene to wake up and get working. That is how social mirroring empowers a natural spread of attitudinal changes through human interaction over physical and virtual channels.¹³

Technology Design

Over the last decades, we have been creating impressively better life experiences through novel technological innovations. It turns out that these achievements are usually designed

to mainly support the evolution of things and places. By walking this path, we tend to forget about leveraging such power to also help achieve our inner transformations. **So, how can technology help?** We can always accelerate our personal performance by wisely intertwining technology design with social mirroring. Specifically, we can use a deeper understanding of human change to retrofit our existing spaces¹⁴ or design disruptive innovations to reshape organizations at scale.³

Here is a practical example that expands the previous story of remote work. An online platform that your organization uses for remote work and communication among employees can be enhanced with the following features. On an instant basis, the platform can provide how employees use the platform across the departments and contexts. For example, it can show how many people are actively using the platform now or within recent hours. It can also visually demonstrate a statistical increase in use over the last days. Displaying raw numbers is only one of the simplest options. Alternatively, a user interface can change a shade of a color or even shift across a spectrum of colors and their intensities to exemplify the dynamics of employees working from home.

What is the real application? The *transforming technology design* methodology described here can help the disruptive capacity of innovations. Empowering technologies can be specifically designed to target and facilitate the activation of the transformation gene. There are already many real-life examples of how this methodology has helped organizations to significantly improve their key performance indicators across the globe.^{3, 4}

Takeaways

Achieving hyper-performance at work is an essential, often unspoken, aim, not only for organizations and societies but also everyone individually.¹³ This article reveals the deeper essence underpinning human change, explaining how the transformation gene helps ignite profound transformations, providing insights in how vectoral transformation can help sustain desired behavioral improvement,

describing how social mirroring accelerates the gene activation, and outlining novel ways for leveraging technology design to amplify transformation at scale.⁴ With the further development of artificial intelligence and greater autonomy,¹⁵ we will soon see how our perceptions about change being difficult are gradually, but permanently, shifting toward it being absolutely manageable. At that moment, we become the masters of transformation.

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