**HIGHER**DIGITAL®

# (SEA)Change - White Paper
## Digital Transformation Doesn't Have to Be Hard!

*How to Align Your Organization and Produce Great Results Fast*

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Higher Digital has decades of experience successfully delivering digital products and effectively managing change. It has synthesized the best features of various standards, systems, and methodologies to create a lightweight and flexible framework for tackling digital transformation and creating engaging products that deliver results—Simplified Enterprise Agile™, also known as (SEA)Change.

## What is digital transformation, anyway?

Digital transformation has been defined in many different ways. The Enterprisers Project defines it as "the integration of digital technology into all areas of a business, fundamentally changing how you operate and deliver value to customers." But it's also "a cultural change that requires organizations to continually challenge the status quo, experiment, and get comfortable with failure."

Regardless of how it's defined, there's no doubt that digital transformation is finally getting attention from leaders and innovators alike. Everyone understands that transformation is necessary to compete in today's environment, but few truly understand how to initiate the transformation process. How do you execute a transformation without starting from scratch, writing off past investments, or hiring all new staff? What does it take to transform? More importantly, how long does it take to reap the benefits? Daunting questions indeed.

Naturally, a complete process reorganization can be costly and place at risk any deliverables the organization may have already made. And cultural transformation can be particularly challenging: too much drastic change at one time can lead to confusion and discontent among stakeholders, which can put customer milestones in jeopardy.

## Greater challenges for higher education

Transformation challenges are even more pronounced in the field of higher education. Institutions of higher learning typically need to close a much wider digital relevance gap than organizations that have the full investment, urgency, and backing of their executive teams.

Despite their sizable importance to their organizations, college and university IT teams are not revenue-drivers, but rather they are expense-drivers. As such, members of those teams live in a realm of constant justification, with some executive leaders even limiting the scope of their potential influence to the confines of "the teams that keep the lights on." Mean-while, internal and external customers are demanding quicker outcomes, more data to enhance decision-making, and improved user experiences.

Adding to these challenges, it is not uncommon to see dysfunction within the ranks of higher education senior leadership. Unfortunate, but true: sometimes, internal management teams simply do not trust one another. They spend more time criticizing each other for perceived deficiencies than they do prioritizing and advancing change on behalf of their customers—the employees and students. Management distrust trickles down to technology leaders, who may then conceal difficult facts from senior leadership, or blame vendors for their problems.
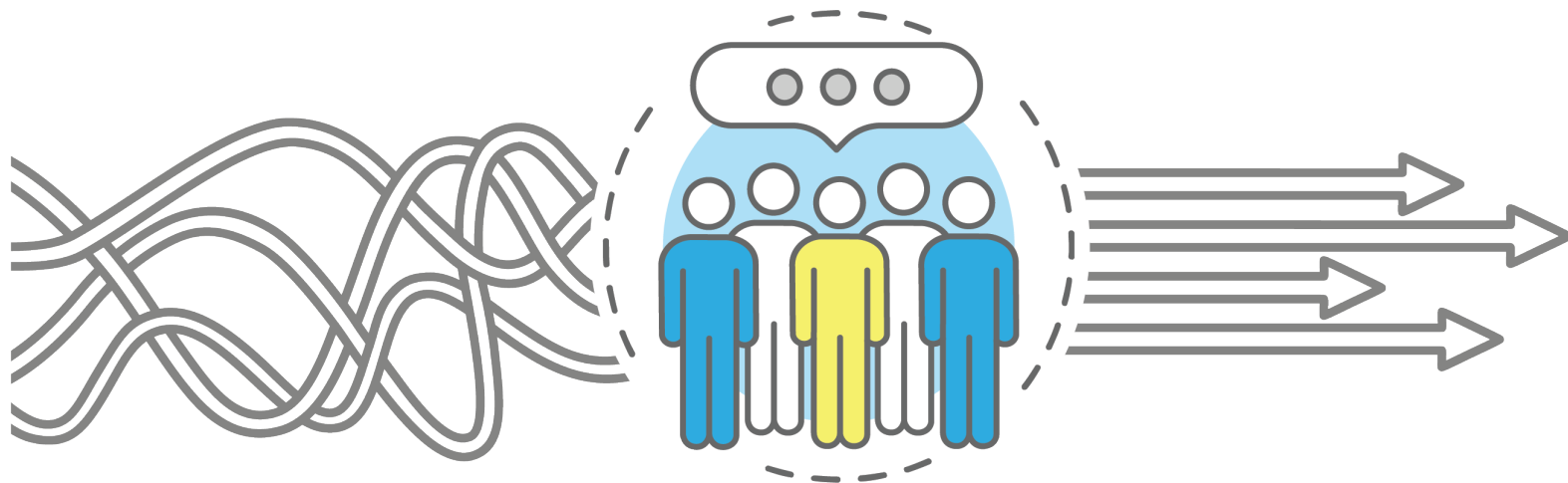
## Transparency + alignment = true digital transformation

At Higher Digital, we've seen these patterns repeated over and over, and the solution is always the same: fostering a new culture of transparency and alignment, where both executive leadership and technology managers partner, compromise, and move forward—together. They collaborate and prioritize the importance of consistently delivering the solutions that their customers need.

We believe that such alignment is a critical step toward achieving true digital transformation. And, it is why we created our own digital transformation model: Simplified Enterprise Agile Change—(SEA)Change—a highly customizable process that brings teams together, addresses the needs of the entire organization, and leads higher education institutions on their own successful digital transformation journeys.

## A flexible and agile approach to transformation

As its title suggests, (SEA)Change is an agile approach to managing change within your organization. Leveraging the spirit of Lean methods, (SEA)Change harnesses the most effective practices from the several common frameworks and dispenses with those that are less effective. (SEA)Change is highly adaptable to any environment, leverages the tools and structures you've already invested in, and requires no specialized training or certifications.

Organizations that use (SEA)Change, including forwarding-thinking schools like Southern New Hampshire University and American University, have quickly experienced positive and measurable change. Many of our clients start by im-plementing (SEA)Change within a specific division, then expand their efforts more broadly once that first division has successfully experienced actual digital transformation. Once others within an organization see rapid progress delivering value, any doubt turns into opportunistic encouragement. They realize that digital transformation isn't necessarily as hard as they thought it would be—and opt to try this approach for their stakeholders.

# A different type of framework

Traditional 'change frameworks' can provide organizations with a vision and serve as a guide; however, more often than not, they overcomplicate the process of organizational change so much that adoption inevitably stalls. In order to address every possible business scenario, many frameworks offer little flexibility for business and technical leadership to actively reimagine or customize their operations. From large universities to small colleges, we have steered leaders and teams around popular frameworks' complex and rigid structures, navigating with them through layers of prescribed roles, processes, principles, guidelines, practices and procedures in favor of a simplified, unified approach.

One of our goals in coaching organizations through such a transformation is to enable sustained positive momentum and help the organization learn fast (vs. fail fast). We purposefully steer stakeholders away from arguing which framework is "the right way," or predictions of disaster if implementations are not literally followed to the letter. It is easy to lose sight of the opportunity to reimagine how change can and should work. With leadership and teams already fully deployed and overwhelmed, Higher Digital puts people before frameworks, and helps them to learn, be creative, and become the agents of their own change.
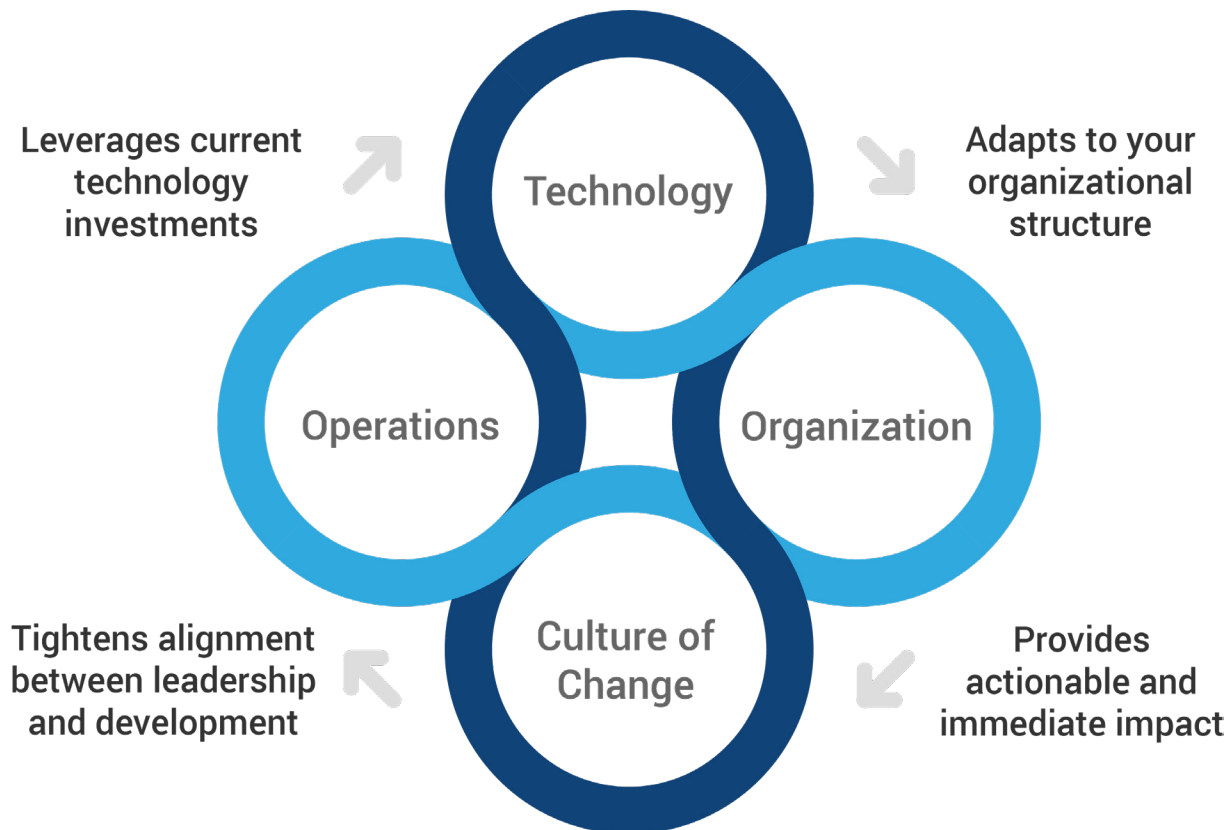


(SEA)Change is different. When talking to our clients about (SEA)Change, we first ask:

- What will have the most impact on your team's ability to change?

- Which best practices will turn your teams into highly functioning assets seemingly overnight?

- How can we make the framework flexible enough to adapt to your organization and its needs?

Then, we customize the (SEA)Change program to fit your organizational needs, rather than trying to reshape your organization onto someone else's overly prescriptive framework.

The following pages outline several of the most popular frameworks in use today—highlighting strengths and challenges, and describing how (SEA)Change stacks up.

# Agile Scrum/Kanban

Agile Scrum/Kanban is probably the most commonly understood framework and yet results in widely varied experiences. It can work effectively in those organizations that practice consistently across all teams. Kanban— a visual system for managing workflows — works effectively when organizations strictly follow all of its ceremonies.

| Strengths | Challenges |
|---|---|
| Easy to learn and follow. | Tough to define and tricky to implement.<br><br>Everyone seems to have a different opinion of "scrum" and "Kanban"—and when it makes sense to use one vs. the other. Whole operational strategies can be defined around one practice, but that practice may not be the right approach for the organization. |
| Works well for "Shared Services" or "Maintenance-Only" teams. | Requires 'world class' discipline.<br><br>Teams run the risk of easily falling back on bad habits—for example, estimating in hours, not story points, or not testing within the sprint cycle (or at all), developers serving as product owners, etc. These can unravel teams. |
| Introduces prioritization and alignment guidelines. | Team members feeling undervalued.<br><br>Functional "HR managers" can revert back to assigning work to others, leaving them confused and wondering what value they're bringing to the team. |
| Standardizes team operations through consistent estimating and time-boxed work iterations. | Easy to fall into the "hybrid" zone.<br><br>Some teams may find themselves stuck between waterfall and agile methodologies, lessening the benefits of agile and creating confusion among team members and customers regarding stakeholder responsibilities and deliverables. |
| Introduces approvals based on working code vs. signing off on written requirements. | |
| Introduces continuous improvement opportunities at the end of each iteration. | |

## The (SEA)Change Advantage over Agile Scrum/Kanban

- We stress the need for team members to hold themselves accountable for the sake of the entire team.

- We coach teams, explaining what happens if teams or people "go rogue."

- We acknowledge that most people have been exposed to some form of agile or scrum practices and encourage members to share their experiences. However, we also coach that everyone must coordinate in full and be willing to concede their individual experiences in favor of one collective understanding.

- We encourage stakeholders to think differently and try something new

# Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL)

The ITIL process has been around for years and is one of the more commonly practiced change frameworks. The most recent upgrades occurred in 2007, 2011, and 2019. The latest version introduces more of a focus on business and agile processes. A cursory understanding of ITIL can help quickly align teams and decision-makers.

| Strengths | Challenges |
|---|---|
| Practices are commonly understood among many technology leaders and operations managers. | Challenging to implement due to its complexity. ITIL's many facets—including a focus on principles, practices, and service management, along value chain and value models—can make it difficult for organizations to consistently implement and follow. |
| Focuses on alignment of services across the organization. | Contradicts agile. Although ITIL4 incorporates agile concepts, it also prescribes traditional approvals for every change. |
| Offers best practices that provide guidelines on how to operationalize traditional IT services, including service, error, and problem management; change management; SLAs; response times; and more. | Not all-inclusive. ITIL does not account for the importance of enterprise architecture within an organization. |
| | Too focused on process. Change management is too process-ridden and can impede workflow and teams' abilities to deliver results quickly. |
| | The version which most organizations still currently use today, ITIL3, was last updated in 2007. Organizations considering implementing ITIL3 in 2020 and beyond risk rendering their teams less productive. |

## The (SEA)Change Advantage over ITIL

- We believe that services are a foundational element of any technology organization. As such, we focus on how services and service teams work with other technology and business stakeholders to prioritize and deliver those services.

- We believe that every organization—regardless of size—should be able to transform. Size and variations in structure should not be seen as a barrier to digital transformation, but rather an opportunity to differentiate an organization's value. We understand that no two organizations are alike, so implementing a rigid framework can restrict the freedom and uniqueness that most executives are unwilling to give up.

# Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe)

At Higher Digital, we've worked with numerous organizations that employ SAFe. However, we've found it to be simultaneously brilliant and over-engineered.

| Strengths | Challenges |
|---|---|
| Introduces a "Program" level between portfolio and technology teams that helps facilitate bi-directional communication and prioritization across an organization. | Extraordinarily complex. The process picture alone scares executive leadership. |
| Removes "phase-gate" and "approval-gate" process that impede workflow. | Requires specific expertise. SAFe must be led by trained professionals who can guide the organization through the framework's implementation. This can be expensive. Plus, once this process is done, these professionals normally leave the organization. |
| SAFe isn't just for IT. The framework stresses the need for business stakeholders to own their digital goals and change management initiatives. | Lack of consistency in execution. SAFe expects portfolio and executive leaders to prioritize their work via Kanban boards. This process can be unrealistic and result in inconsistent execution and performance across teams. |
| Provides a method for very large or process-ridden organizations to consistently communicate and deliver value without a reduction in quality. | User experience (UX) is ignored. With SAFe, there's no mention of when or how to integrate UX or facilitate user adoption. |
| Introduces an agile multiple-sprint-increment planning process, where business and technology teams collaborate, break down, and assign work in smaller chunks. | Not optimal for smaller organizations. SAFe is a complicated framework that can cost significant money to implement. Organizations with development teams of less than 125 people and tight budgets may not be able to afford the necessary training and certifications that are required by SAFe, nor will they be able to manage the framework's inherent complexity. |
|  | Requires transitioning to new tools. SAFe employs use of a portfolio management tool that can capture the framework's layers of complexity and overall process. For most organizations, this will require investing in and transition to a new tool, possibly even losing valuable insight into when work is being delivered and how that work aligns to enterprise goals. |
|  | Extremely rigid terminology. Everyone must "speak SAFe." Business stakeholders must remember the framework's many terms and their definitions (epics, stories, retrospectives, trains, etc.). We've seen business leaders spend hours arguing over the various definitions and how to apply each concept to their technology organizations. That time could be better spent delivering results. |

## The (SEA)Change Advantage over SAFe

- (SEA)Change incorporates the best parts of this very complex framework and discards the overengineering. (SEA)Change is a simplified scaled framework that aligns product and service management to an organization's overall portfolio. With (SEA)Change, business and technology teams plan together in their own chosen increments and use clear terminology that has the same meaning to each stakeholder.

- We recognize that most organizations have previous investments and we leverage these processes and tools. Higher Digital will provide specialized training if required.

- We remain engaged with our customers to ensure that they continue to successfully implement the framework, even after the initial work is done. We work with our clients through their entire transformation, from full change management to team alignment to updating job descriptions and beyond.

## (SEA)Change yields powerful and lasting digital transformations

Change is hard for every organization. It requires commitment, collaboration, and buy-in across all stakeholders, from top to bottom.

But the experience of change isn't the same for every participant or every organization. There is no universal "one-size-fits-all" approach for all organizations. Naturally, large and small organizations will have different needs, and thus different criteria for success. Colleges and universities each have unique challenges, requiring transformation processes tailored to address their needs.

At Higher Digital, we understand those needs and the importance of implementing practices that are agile, flexible, and deliver measurable results. That's why we've created (SEA)Change—a proven framework that lives up to its name by helping our customers achieve powerful and lasting digital transformations.

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