

Success factors of high performance organization transformations

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Abstract

Purpose – When an organization becomes a high performance organization (HPO), it is able to outperform comparable organizations for an extended period of time, thereby ensuring its long-term survival. It is therefore imperative for these organizations embarking on an HPO transformation to be aware of the factors that will help make this transformation successful. Unfortunately the current literature does not provide these factors; one can only find factors influencing large-scale transformations. It could be argued that becoming an HPO is a large-scale transformation, but this leaves the question open whether there are specific factors that are important for this specific type of transformation.

Design/methodology/approach – The purpose of this paper is to answer the research question “What are the main factors which theoretically and in practice best support a successful HPO transformation?” This question was answered using the results of a review of the literature on large-scale transformations and a review on the applications of de Waal’s HPO Framework in practice.

Findings – Eleven theoretical and eight practical success factors were found. These factors matched for 63.6 per cent, indicating there is a moderate overlap between what the theory predicts and what can be noticed in practice. In addition, the practical cases indicated there are two success factors that are specifically important for an HPO transformation.

Originality/value – The study results contribute to the theory, as they show what is and is not important for a specific large-scale transformation such as an organization transforming into an HPO. The practical contribution of the study lies in the fact that organizations now know which factors to pay attention to in order to increase their chances on a successful HPO transformation.

Keywords Success factors, High performance organization, Transformation

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

Organizations need to maintain their competitiveness and viability, by continuously adapting to changing circumstances through initiating and implementing fundamental large-scale changes in the way they operate and do business, otherwise they run the risk of going out of business (Bharjoo, 2005; By, 2005; Sackmann *et al.*, 2009). It is therefore no wonder that organizations are constantly seeking for ways to achieve sustainable high performance (Biedenbach and Söderholm, 2008). A concept which in this respect has gained much attention in recent years is that of the high performance organization (HPO). An HPO is defined as:

An organization that achieves financial and non-financial results that are exceedingly better than those of its peer group over a period of five years or more by focusing in a disciplined way on that what really matters to the organization (de Waal, 2012, p. 5)

If an organization obtains an HPO status, it is able to outperform comparable organizations for an extended period of time, thus ensuring its long-term survival.

So the advantages are great for an organization when it achieves the HPO status. Unfortunately, the academic literature reports high failure rates of organizational change

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initiatives, making the transformation to HPO a risky venture (Young, 2009; Whelan-Berry and Somerville, 2010; Burnes, 2011). In 1995, Kotter published his Eight-Step Change Model, based on the results of a 10-year study of more than 100 companies that attempted major organizational transformations (Kotter, 1995). Since then, Kotter dominated the change management field for a long time, although there have been many other proposed approaches which in practice turned out to be quite similar (Fernandez and Rainey (2006). However, one can question the effectiveness of these approaches when looking at the low success rate of organizational changes and transformations. In addition, a validated change approach, specifically for HPO transformations, is not available, making this major change initiative even more difficult (Bamford, 2003; Burnes, 2011). Fortunately, in recent years, work has been done on developing such a method (de Waal and Heijtel, 2017) and on identifying effective change interventions (de Waal and Heijtel, 2016). However, this recent work needs additional evaluation in real-life environments and specifically the factors that most frequently appear in successful transformations of organizations to HPO have to be identified (de Waal and Heijtel, 2016). Thus, the research question we are attempting to answer is:

RQ. What are the main factors which theoretically and in practice best support a successful HPO transformation?

We will apply the “realist review” approach in our study (Pawson *et al.*, 2005). This type of review is “an interpretive, theory-driven narrative summary that uses cross-case comparison to understand and explain how and why different outcomes have been observed in a sample of primary studies” (Best *et al.*, 2012, p. 424). The realist review of the literature should answer questions such as “What works, for whom, and under which circumstances?” (Lega *et al.*, 2017). We give shape to this approach by first conducting a review of the current literature on large-scale transformations, then collecting and summarizing findings from multiple case studies involving HPO transformations, and finally comparing these to arrive at a theoretical and practical sound overview of success factors. The relevance of our study is that, although recently an approach for an HPO transformation has become available, no specific success factors that explicitly aid this transformation have been identified. Making these factors available will help practitioners in their efforts of turning their organizations into HPOs, while at the same time advancing academic debate and research on the topic of high performance and change management.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section discusses and summarizes the factors important for a successful large-scale transformation, as found in the literature. This is followed by a brief section on the HPO Framework which we focus on for identifying the transformation success factors at companies. These success factors found in practice are described and summarized in the next section. The article ends with a conclusion, the research limitations and recommendations for future research.

Theoretical transformation success factors

For our literature review on the success factors of a successful organizational transformation to an HPO, we first checked the general HPO literature. As mentioned before, no studies on these success factors could be found. Therefore we decided to turn to literature on success factors of successful large-scale organizational transformations in general. The reason to focus on this type of literature was because we regarded a transformation of an organization to an HPO a “large-scale organizational transformation” as it constitutes a transformation that concerns the complete organization. In general HPO transformations apply to the overall organization, as it is difficult to create a high-performance *organization* when only a limited number of *units* are high-performing. Thus, we concentrated on transformations as these comprise a change in the status of the complete organization, and not, for instance, individual organizational units or processes. Flamholtz and Randle (2008) stated that transformation involves a metamorphosis from one state to another, which makes it different

from change which involves anything that is different from the norm. The authors stressed that change can lead to a transformation, while a transformation is different from change. [Fernandez and Rainey \(2006\)](#), based on an analysis of the transformation literature, found points of consensus among researchers on what organizational transformations are: initiatives involving large-scale, planned, strategic and administrative change. [Dikert et al. \(2016\)](#), [Olszewska \(née Płaska\) et al. \(2016\)](#) defined “large scale” in terms of the number of people and teams that are present in an organization. [Appelbaum et al. \(2017\)](#), p. 8) found an organizational transformation to constitute of major and fundamental changes in the organization, which is often “a multiyear endeavor with major challenges and setbacks along the way.” [Chinthala and Narla \(2017\)](#) considered an organizational transformation to be the creation and change of a whole new form, function or structure, the process of reinventing the organization, the implementation of a new or revised business model based on a vision for the future and a change in mind-set.

We focused on recent literature to include the latest thinking on successful organizational transformations. Just as [Dikert et al. \(2016\)](#) we noticed a lack of sound academic research on the topic of success factors of large-scale transformations, so we were only able to find a limited number of relevant studies. [Fernandez and Rainey \(2006\)](#), based on the aforementioned analysis of the transformation literature, found a consensus among researchers that organizations should pay special attention to eight factors in order to achieve a successful transformation:

1. Managerial leaders must verify and persuasively communicate the need for the transformation to other members of the organization and important external stakeholders.
2. Managerial leaders must develop a strategy and goals for implementing the transformation.
3. Managerial leaders must build internal support for the transformation and reduce resistance to it through widespread participation in the transformation process.
4. Top management support and commitment to the transformation are crucial for a successful transformation.
5. Managerial leaders must get support from key external stakeholders.
6. A successful transformation requires sufficient resources and a redeployment or redirection of scarce organizational resources toward new activities.
7. Managers and employees must effectively institutionalize and embed the transformation, and incorporate the new procedures and innovations into their daily routines.
8. Managerial leaders must develop an integrative, comprehensive approach to the transformation that achieves subsystem congruence.

[Saliunas \(2007\)](#), based on his experience in large-scale transformations in the US Government, identified ten success factors: establish a burning platform for the transformation; set a clear end-state vision for the transformation; address all factors that build an organization’s capabilities (people, processes, technology and physical infrastructure); develop a roadmap for the transformation using a life-cycle approach; create ownership in the organization for the transformation; communicate with stakeholders about the transformation; involve internal support organizations in the transformation; engage senior leadership in the transformation; install a competent and dedicated transformation management office; and use a data-driven approach for making decisions during the transformation. [Best et al. \(2012\)](#), in their review of large-scale transformation in the healthcare industry, found what they called five “simple rules” that were likely to enhance the success of a transformation:

1. Engage individuals at all levels in leading the transformation effort.
2. Establish feedback loops about the results of the transformation.
3. Attend to history, to take into account contextual factors that have had influence in the past on changes in the organization.
4. Engage physicians (as a subset of Rule 1).
5. Include patients and families.

[Lahrmann et al. \(2012\)](#) surveyed heads (such as program managers, heads of competency centers, regional CIOs) of enterprise transformation (ET) programs (mainly IT implementations) in large, multi-national companies, and found five factors for a successful transformation:

1. People & Technology Governance consists of highly qualified IT people with excellent business understanding, good monitoring of technology trends and development of a joint (company and implementation partner) governance model.
2. Holistic Change Management consists of identifying and managing the interdependencies of projects, and applying organizational change management.
3. Target-Driven Planning consists of joint (company and implementation partner) agreement on business objectives, using good IT architecture services, applying mid-term planning and continuous alignment and using professional program and project management.
4. Commitment to Transformation consists of applying business process optimization and innovation services, and having a highly qualified representative of the implementation partner.
5. Benefits management consists of providing transparency on progress, risks and costs of the transformation program activities, and dedicated management of the program value.

[Dikert et al. \(2016, p.100\)](#) found during their systematic review of the literature on industrial large-scale agile transformations 29 factors that made this type of transformation a success. They put these 29 factors in the following 11 categories:

1. Management support, consisting of ensuring management support, making management support visible, and educating management on agile.
2. Commitment to change, consisting of communicating that change is non-negotiable, and showing strong commitment.
3. Leadership, consisting of recognizing the importance of change leaders, and engaging change leaders without baggage of the past.
4. Choosing and customizing the agile approach, consisting of customizing the agile approach carefully, conforming to a single approach, mapping to old way of working to ease adaptation and keeping it simple.
5. Piloting, consisting of starting with a pilot to gain acceptance, and gathering insights from a pilot.
6. Training and coaching, consisting of providing training on agile methods, and coaching teams as they learn by doing.
7. Engaging people, consisting of starting with agile supporters, including persons with previous agile experience and engaging everyone in the organization.
8. Communication and transparency, consisting of communicating the change intensively, making the change transparent and creating and communicating positive experiences in the beginning.

9. Mind-set and alignment, consisting of concentrating on agile values, arranging social events, cherishing agile communities, and aligning the organization.
10. Team autonomy, consisting of allowing teams to self-organize and allowing grass roots level empowerment.
11. Requirements management, consisting of recognizing the importance of the Product Owner role, and investing in learning to refine the requirements.

[Söderlund \(2010\)](#) found that the success of large-scale transformation projects, involving a great number of specialists, departments, partners, development work and knowledge bases, was explained by the quality of the project management applied during those transformations, which in turn was determined by the quality of the knowledge integration taking place at the project. [Hawkins and Fryling \(2017, p. 47\)](#) stated that for transformations to be successful and sustainable, the focus during those transformations had to be on behaviors, i.e. “everyday practices that transcend the formal artefacts of traditional transformation efforts.” They observed the following critical capabilities that drive successful transformations: having a natural curiosity in the organization into ways to do things differently and better; being able to quickly and efficiently change direction when needed (i.e. being agile); having the discipline to get the transformation job done; and being proactive and active leaders. Using a Delphi approach, [Sullivan Sulewska et al. \(2017\)](#) identified ten elements necessary for a successful transformation effort:

1. clear and consistent goals for the transformation;
2. an organizational culture that values inclusion of people, positive thinking, learning, creativity, innovation and continuous quality;
3. focus on both transformation at the organizational level and at the individual level;
4. a strong internal and external communications plan;
5. an active and ongoing investment in realigning resources to make the transformation possible;
6. ongoing investment in staff professional development;
7. focus on customer engagement;
8. effective employment performance measurement, quality assurance, and program oversight;
9. a holistic approach; and
10. engagement of other organizations to create buy-in for the change.

As the academic literature on our research topic was scarce, we decided to include two on face value well-researched practitioner studies. [Keller et al. \(2010\)](#) surveyed organizations that had experienced successful large-scale transformations. As common success factors they identified:

- The transformation was organized into a clear structure with readily understandable sections.
- Clear, unambiguous metrics and milestones were in place to ensure that that progress and impact were rigorously tracked.
- The right information was available at the right time for managers to monitor the transformation’s progress and troubleshoot where required.
- Leaders ensured that frontline staff felt ownership for the change.
- Roles and responsibilities were clear, so people felt accountable for delivering results.

- The organization was engaged and energized through ongoing communications and involvement.
- The best talent was deployed to carry out the most critical parts of the transformation.
- Leaders role-modelled the desired transformation.

Allcock *et al.* (2015) identified, based on literature and cases, the following key factors needed for a successful implementation of new models in British National Health Service organizations: committed and respected leadership that engages staff; a culture hospitable to, and supportive of, transforming; management practices that ensure execution and implementation; capabilities and skills to identify and solve problems; data and analytics that measure and communicate impact; resources and support for change; and an enabling environment which supports and drives change.

In Table I, the twenty success factors found in the literature for a successful large-scale organizational transformation are summarized and listed according to frequency of appearance in the literature.

Table I Theoretical success factors for large-scale organizational transformations	
<i>Transformation success factor from theory</i>	<i>Source</i>
1. Ensure top management's proactive support and commitment	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Saliunas (2007), Keller <i>et al.</i> (2010), Allcock <i>et al.</i> (2015), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016), Hawkins and Fryling (2017)
2. Ensure people participate in the transformation, to increase internal support, create ownership and reduce resistance	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Saliunas (2007), Keller <i>et al.</i> (2010), Best <i>et al.</i> (2012), Allcock <i>et al.</i> (2015), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016)
3. Establish feedback loops about the transformation progress and results	Keller <i>et al.</i> (2010), Best <i>et al.</i> (2012), Lahrmann <i>et al.</i> (2012), Allcock <i>et al.</i> (2015), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
4. Develop an end-state vision, strategy, goals, plan and roles and responsibilities for the transformation	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Saliunas (2007), Keller <i>et al.</i> (2010), Lahrmann <i>et al.</i> (2012), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
5. Achieve congruence in the organization by using an integrative, comprehensive, holistic approach for the transformation and align systems, procedures and processes	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Lahrmann <i>et al.</i> (2012), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016), Söderlund (2010), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
6. Obtain support from external stakeholders and (partner) organizations	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Saliunas (2007), Best <i>et al.</i> (2012), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
7. Ensure that there are enough resources available for the transformation	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Saliunas (2007), Allcock <i>et al.</i> (2015), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
8. Use good and qualified people to take the lead in the transformation and give them autonomy	Lahrmann <i>et al.</i> (2012), Keller <i>et al.</i> (2010), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016), Söderlund (2010)
9. Communicate the need/create a burning platform for the transformation	Fernandez and Rainey (2006), Saliunas (2007), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016)
10. Have the curiosity and quality mind-set to do things differently and better	Allcock <i>et al.</i> (2015), Hawkins and Fryling (2017), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
11. Train and coach people in the new situation created by the transformation	Saliunas (2007), Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016), Sulewski <i>et al.</i> (2017)
12. Use an agile approach for the transformation	Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016), Hawkins and Fryling (2017)
13. Have the discipline to complete the transformation	Allcock <i>et al.</i> (2015), Hawkins and Fryling (2017)
14. Use a pilot during the transformation	Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016)
15. Involve internal support departments	Saliunas (2007)
16. Install a transformation management office	Saliunas (2007)
17. Take into account the context and the history of the organization during the transformation	Best <i>et al.</i> (2012)
18. Apply requirements management	Dikert <i>et al.</i> (2016)
19. Use a data-driven approach for making decisions during the transformation	Saliunas (2007)
20. Embed the transformation results into daily work life	Fernandez and Rainey (2006)

The HPO Framework

Ever since the seminal work of [Peters and Waterman \(1982\)](#) was published, many HPO Frameworks have been developed and described in the literature. Some of these frameworks have had lasting appeal (such as the work of [Collins, 2001](#)), some received fleeting attention (such as [Keller and Price, 2011](#)), while most have disappeared from the academic and managerial eye. A framework which was developed in 2007 and since then has seen constant and consistent development work is de Waal's HPO Framework ([de Waal, 2006/2010, 2012](#)). It is, to the knowledge of this author, the only HPO Framework which has been repeatedly evaluated on its workings and (positive) results in practice (see for example [de Waal and Frijns, 2011](#); [Honyenuga et al., 2014](#); [de Waal et al., 2015](#); [de Waal and Mulimbika, 2017](#); [de Waal and de Haas, 2018](#)), and for whom causality between the framework and increased organizational performance has been shown ([de Waal and Goedegebuure, 2017](#)). We will take the literature on the application of this framework in practice as a source for identifying the success factors for an HPO transformation, and therefore, we briefly describe the development and structure of this framework in this section (taken from [de Waal, 2018a](#)).

de Waal's HPO Framework is a scientific framework derived from a comprehensive literature study and subsequent empirical validation at a multitude of organizations across the globe. The study was conducted in two phases over a period of 10 years. The first phase was based on an extensive review of 290 literature sources (at a later date, extended to 505 sources) in the areas of excellence and high performance. The second phase consisted of primary data collection using a questionnaire administered to 2,601 respondents from approximately 1,300 organizations all over the world, including 623 public organizations. The collected data were statistically analyzed using an exploratory factor analysis and structural equation modelling which yielded 5 factors and 35 characteristics which show a positive correlation with competitive performance. The five factors that make up the HPO Framework are:

1. *HPO Factor 1– Continuous Improvement and Renewal*: An HPO continuously simplifies, improves and aligns all its processes to eliminate unnecessary procedures and to achieve best results. The organization measures, monitors and reports progress allowing everyone to access financial and non-financial information needed for improvement. Continuous learning, renewal and innovation are key for maintaining its competitive advantage and responding quickly and adequately to market changes. It sticks to and masters its core competencies retaining what the company is best at and outsourcing non-core competencies.
2. *HPO Factor 2 – Openness and Action Orientation*: In an HPO, management values the opinion of employees and involves them in all important business and organizational processes. Employees are encouraged to experiment, take risks and treat their mistakes as an opportunity to learn and grow. Management and employees spend a lot of time in dialogue, knowledge exchange and continuous learning. Management stimulates change by continuously striving for renewal and being personally involved in change activities to make the complete organization performance-driven.
3. *HPO Factor 3 – Management Quality*: This factor constitutes of items ranging from the personal traits of managers such as honesty, enthusiasm and decision-making capacity, to their relationship with employees. It primarily measures integrity and the extent to which managers are role models to others. Management in the HPO coaches and trains people for effective performance and at the same time holds people responsible for their results. They are result-oriented, maintaining clear accountability for performance and making tough decision about non-performers. They develop an effective, confident and strong management style by communicating the values and by making sure that these are embraced by all organizational members.

4. *HPO Factor 4 – Employee Quality*: An HPO continuously works on the development of its workforce by training them to be flexible, resilient and creative. It maintains a diverse and complementary workforce and inspires people to improve their skills for extraordinary accomplishment, making them responsible for their performance at the same time.
5. *HPO Factor 5 – Long-Term Orientation*: In an HPO, long-term sustainability is prioritized over short-term profit. An HPO emphasizes an extended relationship with all stakeholders such as shareholders, employees, suppliers, clients and society at large. The organization strives to enhance customer value creation by understanding and incorporating their needs and values. An HPO does this by involving customers directly in the organization's affairs, being responsive to their expectations and continuously enhancing customer value. An HPO extends its network with all the stakeholders and develops win-win relationships.

An organization can evaluate its high performance level by conducting an HPO Diagnosis. In this diagnosis, all managers and employees complete the HPO Questionnaire, which consists of statements based on the 35 HPO characteristics. Respondents rate their organization on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 10 (very much so) on these statements. Based on the individual scores, an average score on the HPO factors for the complete organization is calculated. The low scores indicate the organization then needs to initiate improvements in order to become an HPO.

Transformation success factors in practice

In the literature several studies on the application of de Waal's HPO Framework can be found. These studies are summarized in this section. [de Waal and Chachage \(2011\)](#) evaluated the effect of the HPO Framework application at Iringa University College (IUCo) in Tanzania and found that in two years, IUCo had not only improved its HPO status but also its financial and non-financial results. The authors found that the quality of management and the quality of the dialogue process had been of paramount importance for the successful transition at IUCo. [de Waal and Frijns \(2011\)](#) looked at the effects of applying the HPO Framework at Nabil Bank in Nepal after one year, and noticed an improvement in its financial performance, although less than hoped for. The authors in their analysis, based on interviews, noted that the factors which would make the HPO transformation speed up at the organization were:

- Management paying dedicated attention to strengthening the HPO factors and showing the discipline to execute specific improvement actions targeted at these factors.
- Management developing better dialogue skills in order to convey the importance of working on HPO factors to the employees.

The Dutch unit of Europe's largest and the world's leading single-brand manufacturer and supplier of sanitary fittings for bathroom, toilets and kitchens, Grohe, decided to conduct two subsequent HPO Diagnoses. As a result of working on the HPO attention points, management stated that through applying the HPO Framework the organization had gained a renewed spirit, the winner's mentality had returned, and financial results had improved compared to competitors. As main factors for this, they designated the following: only undertaking improvements in cross-departmental teams, which also increased knowledge sharing between units, on both regular and HPO-related issues; conducting quarterly information and dialoguing session on company results and activities which increased transparency in the company; and organizing training sessions and master classes with a focus on creating a "we can so" mentality ([de Waal, 2012](#)).

ATLAS, a British consortium of IT companies, working for the British Ministry of Defense, used the HPO Diagnosis to increase the quality of its cooperation and to achieve the results that were agreed upon with the Ministry. To this end the consortium conducted several HPO Diagnoses over a period of four years and in between worked on the HPO attention points. Results did increase, more specifically the consortium noticed: better relations, more trust and more communication between the consortium partners; increased engagement of employees; significantly more applications delivered to many more users worldwide; and external recognition from British governmental committees as being an example of successful cooperation on a grand scale. The factors leading to these results were: distinguishing between hygiene factors (i.e. those factors that have to be before an organization can even begin working on an HPO transformation) and taking target actions on getting these on order; management discussing the importance of HPO with employees; removal of the “clay layer” of middle management, so communication and dialoguing processes could be improved; using the HPO Framework to create a common language in the organization and an idea behind which people could rally; and top management actively and visibly working on HPO (de Waal, 2012).

A Dutch cable company, after conducting a first HPO Diagnosis, worked diligently on its HPO attention points and achieved after six years an increased HPO score in the second HPO diagnosis. The company noticed also non-financial benefits of working with the HPO Framework, specifically a renewed sense of employee pride in themselves, a widespread feeling of trust and a sense of belonging to a worthwhile organization. This in turn translated in financial benefits, i.e. more than 70 per cent of the goals listed in the company's improvement plans had been realized, employee satisfaction scores increased by 13 per cent, and the company's profits almost doubled. Key success factors for this transformation were: undertaking effective interventions, especially those aimed at creating platforms for dialogue; increasing communication and dialogue throughout the company; installing an HPO Champion and HPO Coaches in all key parts of the organization; providing HPO training to create high-performing managers and employees; and creating high performance partnerships with key suppliers (de Waal et al., 2015).

In an era of increasingly saturated markets and ever tightening competition, multinational firms in general aim at enhancing the quality of their organization. A European multinational embarked on an initiative to transform itself into an HPO, and within six months of using the HPO Framework, the organization realized significant behavioral improvements, including enhanced communications and employee engagement. As factors that helped achieve these results, the organization indicated: visible support of top management and management guidance leading the HPO Transition; establishment of an HPO Change Agents Group, which improved the line of communication between the work floor and management, and which made sure that the HPO transformation stayed alive because the group regularly reminded both managers and employees about the need for the company to become an HPO; and priority given to addressing openness, by creating genuine dialogue in the company about the HPO transformation thus ensuring that employees were motivated to participate in it (de Waal and Hanna, 2016).

The HPO Framework was applied at LIMOR, a social care and rehabilitation organization in The Netherlands, by conducting the HPO diagnosis twice at the organization. In the second diagnosis, the effectiveness of the interventions the organization undertook to address the recommendations originating from the first HPO diagnosis was also measured. The second diagnosis showed that the HPO Framework was mainly used to ward off and contain the negative effects of external turbulent developments, and thereby helped LIMOR to perform better than comparable organizations. As the main success factors that helped LIMOR in this, the following were identified: undertaking interventions that made better communication, discussion and dialogue possible among the staff at LIMOR, thus helping them to quickly deal with

issues and obtain information on how to improve processes; and undertaking interventions that unburdened people in their daily activities and provided them with information they could apply in their daily work environment (de Waal, 2017a).

The HPO Framework was applied in 2013 at seven sales and service locations in the USA and Canada of Swagelok, a manufacturer of services fluid systems components for critical gas and liquid applications. From the questionnaire, improvement opportunities were identified on which the locations subsequently worked. In 2015, the diagnosis was repeated to evaluate the effects of these improvements on the locations' performance and to identify the most effective interventions. This showed that the application of the HPO Framework had different outcomes depending on local circumstances. Some locations experienced growth, while other locations used the framework to battle the consequences of adverse economic circumstances. All locations agreed that the HPO Framework had been instrumental, in a positive way, to the development of their organization and its people. The locations that managed to transform into an HPO agreed upon the following success factors: undertake effective interventions, especially those aimed at creating platforms for dialogue; realize that becoming HPO takes time; convey that HPO is "here to stay"; involve everybody in the organization in the HPO effort; be aware that dialogue is imperative; hire and train the right people that fit the HPO culture from the start; be a role model as management; take a strategic and system's view on HPO; and guard the quality of the HPO implementation (de Waal, 2017b).

The Dutch location of Red Bull, world market leader in sports and energy drinks, used the HPO Framework to channel its impetuous growth in the right direction and to achieve a quality impetus in its internal organization. The company managed this by applying the following success factors: management really wanting an HPO transformation and fully supporting it; a strong focus on the progress and quality of the HPO transformation without being distracted by all kind of things going on; having a strategic plan with the HPO attention points embedded in it; and aligning the individual with the company's HPO objectives and goals (de Waal and Schreurs, 2017).

de Waal (2018b) described the application of the HPO Framework at three governmental institutions in Zambia (see also de Waal and Mulimbika, 2017). Of these three, one institution – the Competition & Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC) – managed to become an HPO. As the factors that helped achieve a successful transformation these authors identified:

- Conducting effective interventions, especially when these increased dialogue and influenced the culture. During the transformation, CCPC undertook many interventions to support the organization in its efforts to become high performing. These interventions in general were executed with both discipline, creativity and enthusiasm by both the HPO Coaches and CCPC's staff, making them highly effective.
- Supporting role of management. There was a distinct commitment to be found in CCPC's management towards the implementation of the HPO Framework and HPO improvements. The management created the space and budget to form a team of HPO Coaches led by an HPO Champion – charged with initiating and facilitating the interventions – and constantly coached and made themselves available to this dynamic group of people. Also, the management made sure that basically every employee was actively involved in the implementation of one of the HPO attention points.
- Active roles of HPO Champion and HPO Coaches. The HPO Champion and HPO Coaches were very active during the transformation process toward HPO. They were available 24/7 for employees to talk about HPO, to support them during HPO interventions and bring certain problems and issues from employees to the attention of management.

- Positive behavior of employees. Common among the attitude of employees at governmental organizations is a certain resistance to change, and CCPC's staff was no exception to this. To combat this, the HPO Coaches planned many interventions to ensure that there were enough activities to stimulate employees for and increase their understanding of the need for creating a high-performance work environment at their place of work. Eventually CCPC's employees started to show appreciation for the HPO Framework because they found it offered them a mechanism for overcoming the traditional bureaucratic communication with management, help the communication with management and employees and between the institution and its clients (the civilians and companies of Zambia). A strong sense started to emerge among the staff that the HPO status would make it possible for them to better serve Zambian citizens, something which motivated them a lot.

ARK Data Centres (ARK) was a small but rapidly growing company with high business ambitions and challenging goals for the future. It wanted to transform itself – together with its key suppliers – from a relatively new, low-profile player in the data center industry, to the UK's leading provider of high-integrity data centers. For this purpose, ARK decided to undertake the journey to the HPO status and to that end it applied the HPO Framework. After five years ARK became an HPO, and saw the following factors as key in this successful transformation: establishing a group of dedicated and motivated HPO Coaches; becoming a connected company through meetings with dialogue between all levels and units; work on becoming a mature organization by making sure processes run smoothly; undertaking many effective interventions, especially those aimed at creating platforms for dialogue; creating a can-do mentality, based on collaboration/teamwork; and working together with key suppliers to create a high performance partnership (de Waal, 2018c).

de Waal and de Haas (2018) studied the application of the HPO Framework at NEH, a Philippine banana producer and exporter, and showed that both NEH's HPO scores and organizational results had gone up considerably. Factors which helped achieve these results were identified as: conducting effective interventions, especially when these increased dialogue and influenced the culture; strengthening the process of dialoguing and giving feedback; involving people in HPO activities and thus increasing the number of people taking ownership of proposed changes and improvements; and creating high performance partnerships with suppliers and customers.

In Table II, the 15 success factors found in practice for a successful HPO transformation are summarized and listed according to frequency of appearance over all cases.

Matching theory with practice

To answer the research question “*What are the main factors which theoretically and in practice best support a successful HPO transformation?*” we will now match the transformation success factors for a large-scale transformation found in the literature with the success factors for an HPO transformation as found at the case companies (Table III). We will do this for the factors that have been found in at least three literature sources (11 sources) for three case companies (8 cases) so we know there is a certain generic validity about these factors.

Table III shows that for seven success factors, there is conformity between theory and practice. In this respect it has to be noticed that one practical success factor (no. B) according to us matches with two theoretical factors (nos. 3 and 5). As the matching percentage is 63.6 (calculated as: 7 overlapping success factors divided by 11 theoretical success factors), we can state there is a reasonable overlap between what the theory predicts as success factors for a large-scale transformation such as becoming an HPO and what can be noticed to be important in practice. In 36.4 of the theoretical factors there is no overlap while there are two practical factors that from now on to be added to the literature

Table II Success factors found in practice during HPO transformations

<i>Transformation success factors from practice</i>	<i>Source</i>
A. Ensure top management's visible and dedicated support and role-model in strengthening the HPO factors	De Waal and Chachage (2011), de Waal and Frijns (2011), de Waal (2012, Atlas), de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal and Hanna (2016), de Waal (2017b), de Waal and Schreurs (2017), de Waal (2018b)
B. Strengthen the dialogue in the organization and thereby create a "connected company"	de Waal (2012, Atlas), de Waal (2012, Grohe), de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal and Hanna (2016), de Waal (2017b), de Waal (2018b), de Waal (2018c), de Waal and de Haas (2018)
C. Conduct effective interventions, especially those aimed at creating platforms for dialogue	de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal (2017a), de Waal (2017b), de Waal (2018b), de Waal (2018c), de Waal and de Haas (2018)
D. Install an active HPO Champion and HPO Coaches	de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal and Hanna (2016), de Waal (2018b), de Waal (2018c)
E. Involve all people in HPO transformation activities	de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal and Hanna (2016), de Waal (2017b), de Waal and de Haas (2018)
F. Create high performance partnerships with suppliers and customers	de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal (2018b), de Waal (2018c), de Waal and de Haas (2018)
G. Educate people on the HPO Framework and transformation	de Waal (2012, Atlas), de Waal (2012, Grohe), de Waal <i>et al.</i> (2015), de Waal (2017b)
H. Distinguish between hygiene and HPO factors and work on these in cross-departmental teams	de Waal (2012, Atlas), de Waal (2012, Grohe), de Waal (2017b)
I. Take a strategic and system's view on HPO	de Waal (2017b), de Waal and Schreurs (2017)
J. Guard the quality of the HPO transformation	de Waal (2017b), de Waal and Schreurs (2017)
K. Use HPO to create a common language and an idea for people to rally behind	de Waal (2012, Atlas)
L. Realize that becoming an HPO takes time	de Waal (2017b)
M. Convey that HPO is "here to stay"	de Waal (2017b)
N. Hire the right people that fit the HPO culture	de Waal (2017b)
O. Align the individual with the company's HPO objectives and goals	de Waal and Schreurs (2017)

on large-scale transformations (nos. C and H). When looking at the eight practical success factors, it can be noticed that these can be categorized into three groups: success factors that indicate what action an organization has to take during the HPO transformation (nos. C and H); success factors that stipulate the behavior needed during the HPO transformation (nos. A, D, E and G); and success factors that connect internal and external entities with each other (nos. B and F). Putting these together in one figure gives "the success wheel of HPO transformations" (Figure 1).

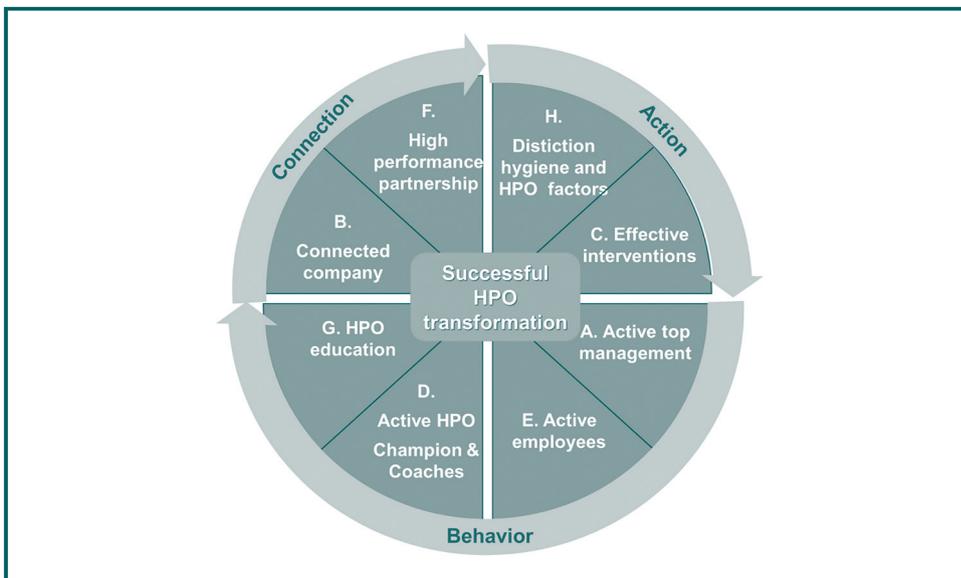
Conclusions, limitations and future research

The research question we attempted to answer with our research was: *What are the main factors which theoretically and in practice best support a successful HPO transformation?* Based on a review of the literature on large-scale transformations and studying literature on the application of a specific HPO Framework in practice, we found 11 theoretical and 8 practical success factors that were supported by multiple sources. These factors matched for 63.6 per cent, indicating there is a moderate overlap between what the theory predicts as success factors for a large-scale transformation such as becoming an HPO, and what can be noticed to be important in practice. In addition, the review of the practical literature indicated that there are two success factors that are specifically important for an HPO transformation and which have to be taken into account during such a transformation. Therefore, the answer on our research question is that there are eight main factors which theoretically and in practice best support a successful HPO transformation: active top management, active employees, active HPO Champion and Coaches, HPO education, distinction between hygiene and HPO factors, effective interventions, connected company and high performance partnerships.

Table III Matching of the theoretical with the practical transformation success factors

<i>Transformation success factor from theory</i>	<i>Transformation success factors from practice</i>
1. Ensure top management’s proactive support and commitment	A. Ensure top management’s visible and dedicated support and role-model in strengthening the HPO factors
2. Ensure people participate in the transformation, in order to increase internal support, create ownership, and reduce resistance	E. Involve all people in HPO transformation activities
3. Establish feedback loops about the transformation progress and results	B. Strengthen the dialogue in the organization and thereby create a “connected company”
5. Achieve congruence in the organization by using an integrative, comprehensive, holistic approach for the transformation and align systems, procedures and processes	B. Strengthen the dialogue in the organization and thereby create a ‘connected company’
6. Obtain support from external stakeholders and (partner) organizations	F. Create high performance partnerships with suppliers and customers
8. Use good and qualified people to take the lead in the transformation and give them autonomy	D. Install an active HPO Champion and HPO Coaches
11. Train and coach people in the new situation created by the transformation	G. Educate people on the HPO Framework and transformation
4. Develop an end-state vision, strategy, goals, plan and roles and responsibilities for the transformation	<i>No match</i>
7. Ensure that there are enough resources available for the transformation	<i>No match</i>
9. Communicate the need/create a burning platform for the transformation	<i>No match</i>
10. Have the curiosity and quality mindset to do things differently and better	<i>No match</i>
<i>No match</i>	C. Conduct effective interventions, especially those aimed at creating platforms for dialogue
<i>No match</i>	H. Distinguish between hygiene and HPO factors and work on these in cross-departmental teams

Figure 1 The success wheel of HPO transformations



Our study results thus contribute to the theory as they show what is and is not that important for a specific large-scale transformation as an organization transforming itself into an HPO. The relatively low matching percentage between theoretical and practical success factors might indicate the cause why so many interventions fail, and thus point to the need of reviewing other specific large-scale interventions to evaluate whether there are other success factors missing in the current literature. The practical contribution of our study lays in “the success wheel of HPO transformations” (Figure 1) which organizations can use to increase their chances on a successful transformation to an HPO.

There are several limitations to our study. Although we executed an extensive literature review, we might have missed theoretical success factors which potentially could have, when included, increased the matching percentage with the practical success factors. On the practical side of the study, although we used 12 studies on the application of the HPO Framework, more of these studies would be welcome to strengthen the robustness of our analysis (and maybe in the process increase the matching percentage). Also we did not include the application of other HPO Frameworks than that of de Waal, which means we might have missed other practical success factors. A final limitation is that we did not make a distinction in types of organizations (size, industry sector, life cycle) where the HPO transformation took place. Making such a distinction might have given specific “success wheels” for specific types of organizations. All these limitations lead to possibilities for more extensive research into the success factors that are important in specific types of large-scale transformations.

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