

Tech Transformation is Not an IT Problem - It's a Leadership One

Executive Summary

Successful transformation is not won by process alone; it is earned through a culture of partnership that makes difficult work easier and prevents unnecessary friction. At Hitachi Solutions, we see time and again that while formal governance keeps the score, informal governance wins the match. Trust, transparency and executive alignment ultimately determine whether value is created or destroyed.

This is not a technology or procurement issue to be delegated down the organisation. Tech-enabled transformation succeeds or fails based on the behaviours modelled by CEOs, CFOs and CPOs, and the partnerships they choose to build. This article explores the culture of partnership and the executive behaviours that turn plans into results and explains why, when these are absent, organisations often end up picking up the pieces mid-programme.

The Catalyst

Capital is tighter, boards are less patient, and change portfolios are increasingly crowded. In this environment, tech-enabled transformation is both a growth engine and a concentration of risk. When leadership alignment and partnership culture are strong, decisions stay fast, issues surface early and momentum is protected. When they are weak, even well-funded programmes stall.

Effective partnership is what keeps delivery grounded when pressure rises and ensures benefits actually land. Below, we outline seven behaviours that make partnership real in practice and what executives should look for when selecting a transformation partner.



The Insight: Why partnership culture is the decisive variable

What matters most is how people behave day to day. Partnership culture is the set of everyday behaviours that determine whether governance drives progress or becomes theatre. What follows are patterns we have seen repeatedly make or break transformation programmes.

1 **Formal governance is necessary. Informal governance is decisive.**

Plans, scopes, risks and steering committees matter, but work breaks down when teams hide behind templates and email chains. Picking up the phone, sharing what is being seen on the ground, and resolving issues early prevents problems turning into stage-managed escalations. This is how mechanical process is stopped from crowding out real problem solving.

2 **Set the tone at the top, every day, not just at the SteerCo.**

Projects are temporary organisations, and leaders set their culture. When senior stakeholders default to point-scoring and blame, teams retreat to cover, risk logs become weapons, and progress stalls. Executive sponsorship must model candid conversations and reinforce agreed behaviours consistently, not intermittently.

3 **Use mantras to hard-wire behaviour.**

Memorable cues that everyone can act on matter. “Leave the badges at the door.” “Attack the problem, not the person.” “Effective governance changes behaviours.” These phrases turn abstract values into practical conduct that can be coached, observed and corrected in the moment.

4 **No surprises.**

When something goes wrong, give early notice, be clear about what is not yet known, explain how you will find out, and report back when you said you would — even if only to say the issue is still being investigated. Surprises erode trust faster than the original problem. Reliability in small moments creates permission for difficult conversations later.

5 **Reset culture before debating cost.**

On a multi-million-pound programme, arguments over a £50k–£100k change request usually signal a deeper issue. Fix the ways of working and escalation posture first; cost discussions tend to become rational again. In practice, bringing C-suite conversations forward to reset culture can stop tit-for-tat dynamics from consuming the agenda.

6 **Judge governance by outcomes, not artefacts.**

Every partner has a methodology, a risk process and a change process. The question is whether those rituals lead to better decisions and improved performance. Governance decays unless leaders inspect its effectiveness rather than its existence. If reports do not drive action, they are little more than noise.

7 **Align the client’s house before scaling delivery.**

Misalignment between IT and the business, or between functions such as Finance and Operations, quietly sabotages execution. Without a single North Star and an explicit reconciliation of competing objectives, any partner will appear inconsistent because it is being pulled in opposing directions. Naming these tensions early allows sponsors to align their executives before delivery accelerates.

Choosing the Right Partner is an Executive Choice

The way a transformation partner is chosen often determines the outcome long before delivery begins. A digital transformation is not a commodity purchase. It is a working relationship you will live with for years, under pressure.

As Executive Sponsor, you set the incentives. If the brief rewards the lowest price, expect transactional behaviour when things get difficult. If it rewards no-surprises conduct, experienced delivery leadership and visible problem-solving, you are far more likely to get a partner who protects outcomes and financial performance.



1

Meet the delivery leads early and give them a small, time-boxed problem to work through with you. Pay attention to how they behave when facts are incomplete. Do they call first, surface risk early and focus on resolution? Or do they retreat into long email chains and defensiveness?

2

Tune evaluation beyond price. Weight observable behaviour, the strength and continuity of named individuals, and evidence of disciplined no-surprises working. These factors matter far more in delivery than marginal differences in day rates.

3

Test trust under pressure. Ask each bidder for one real example of an issue they caused, how they flagged it, and what they did to fix it. You are not screening for perfection, but for how trust is built and maintained when things go wrong.

What this means for results

Top line

A strong partnership culture speeds joint decision-making, limits defensive behaviour, and keeps attention on customer and commercial priorities that drive adoption and market share.

Bottom line

Fewer escalations, faster issue resolution, and disciplined governance protect margins and shorten the path to steady-state operations.

Resilience and scale

Trust, transparency and executive alignment reduce delivery risk and create a clearer, more credible narrative of scalability for stakeholders..



The Operator's Playbook: Making it actionable



Codify informal governance

Establish a daily or twice-weekly cross-leadership huddle that is off the record and solution-oriented. Require early notice of emerging risks, expect call-first then log, and set simple rules of engagement that discourage long reply-all chains. Measure effectiveness by reduced escalations, not by meeting volume.



Install behavioural mantras and rituals

Open major checkpoints by restating two or three behavioural commitments. Close with clear ownership: who will call whom, by when. Reward early issue-surfacing. Challenge keyboard-warrior behaviour. Make the desired culture visible and repetitive so it sticks.



Run a monthly governance effectiveness review

Pick three artefacts, for example the status report, risk log and change log, and ask a single question of each. What decision or behaviour changed because of this in the last four weeks? If the answer is none, redesign the artefact or kill it. Assume governance decays without inspection.



Force executive alignment on the North Star

Before scaling delivery, bring the sponsor and function heads together to resolve competing objectives. Agree the single North Star and explicit trade-offs, then socialise that alignment with delivery leaders on both sides. Revisit it when circumstances change to prevent drift.



Measure partnership health

Track escalation volume and trend, time to decision on critical issues, and the proportion of high-severity risks with a clear owner and mitigation. These measures correlate strongly with margin protection and faster stabilisation.



The value conclusion

A culture of partnership is not soft stuff. It is the operating system that turns capital and effort into financial performance and a credible growth narrative. Where leaders model transparency, reject weaponised process and practise no-surprises execution, programmes reach stable operations sooner, realise benefits more cleanly, and give stakeholders confidence in their ability to scale.



Strategic Takeaway

Partnership culture is a leadership choice you enforce, not a mood you hope for. Make informal governance explicit, anchor behaviour with clear mantras, audit governance for impact, and align executives around a single North Star. The result is fewer firefights, faster value delivery, and a materially de-risked transformation.

Get in touch with our experts

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