



# Driving Transformation through Self-assessment

*Transformation through target-driven self-assessment, action planning, and collaborative learning*

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Driving behavioral change to transform an organization's quality and performance is always a challenge. For large decentralized organizations, split into diverse autonomous units, the challenge is even bigger. However, this is a typical situation facing many large public sector organizations today. A new application of a digitally enabled self-assessment methodology has proved to be effective in driving transformation across such an organization.

## The challenges of transforming an organization with many autonomous units

Public service organizations ranging from schools to elderly care usually consist of a multitude of autonomous units that have similar functions, and nearly all are under constant pressure to improve their effectiveness, efficiency and quality. Achieving the necessary transformation across such organizations may require changing the behavior of thousands of employees across hundreds of units, and so top-down "command-and-control" approaches are usually not feasible, both practically and in terms of their cultural acceptability to those involved.

So what alternative approaches can be considered? One useful avenue to pursue is to build on the diversity of the organization itself and turn it from a barrier into a lever for change. Autonomy in organizations gives employees the freedom to employ diverse means towards achieving the same end, which is often necessary to ensure responsiveness to local needs. When similar tasks and challenges are being tackled differently, efficiency and effectiveness will vary and there will be a wide range of practices and experiences. If properly managed, this diverse experience base can be a great asset. For example, in the field of education, a teacher can draw upon experience of how recorded lectures or digital

Transforming large decentralized organizations is always a difficult challenge for any business. The challenge is even bigger in public service organizations in areas such as education or care provision, where there may be large numbers of autonomously run operational units. How can behavioral change be effectively driven in this type of organization? In this article the authors describe a new application of self-assessment methodology, digitally enabled, that has proven to be very effective.

examinations were used in one class, and implement the same practice in another. Effective knowledge sharing and collaborative learning is thus critical for improving overall quality, efficiency and effectiveness across the entire organization. In recent years digitalization has provided new opportunities to systematize and widen collaborative learning within and between units, both as a trigger for change and as a key part of the transformation solution.

This article outlines a method for transforming public organizations towards improved quality and performance, by using a revamped application of traditional self-assessment performance evaluation techniques, enabled by digital tools. This hands-on, future-oriented, self-assessment approach has proved to be very effective for the City of Stockholm's education program, but the method has much broader applicability across many large decentralized, organizations. The case study below describes what has been done.

*“Execution of the action plans and capitalizing on one another’s digital skills and resources among the approximately 12,000 teachers and school heads in Stockholm is decisive in improving the learning of the 110,000 pupils that are affected.”*

Ann Hellenius, CIO of the City of Stockholm

**Case study: Target-driven transformation through digitally-enabled collaborative learning in the Stockholm education program**

Few would disagree that digitalization is changing how we live and how organizations operate. In the field of education, it is enabling organizations to make step changes in both efficiency and service quality. For example, in schools, teachers can use digital response systems to get immediate feedback on how well students understand a lecture, and subsequently adapt content and ways of teaching to benefit pupils.

In 2007, the City of Stockholm established a long-term vision to guide its endeavors over the coming two decades. “Vision 2030” states, among other things, that Stockholm

shall be a world-leading knowledge region, with a modern IT environment and usage. This vision formed the basis for Stockholm’s IT strategy – for better learning, formulated in 2011. In Sweden it had become evident that children used the internet naturally and frequently in the home, yet the use of digital tools in education was lagging behind. This prompted the educational department of Stockholm to ask a question: How can all of the city’s 12,000 or so teachers be encouraged to systematically use digital tools to improve learning?

The chosen approach was to develop a target-driven digital transformation program based on individual self-assessment, group action planning and collaborative learning. Under the process, all 12,000 teachers in the 180 public elementary and upper secondary schools in Stockholm conduct yearly individual self-assessments of their own levels of proficiency in each of the 12 dimensions of the city’s IT strategy. The self-assessment offers each individual a structure for substantive reflection upon his or her own situation, including strengths and areas of potential development.

The process is supported by a tailored web-based tool (see Table 1) which details and illustrates the IT strategy, its 12 dimensions and their corresponding key performance indicators (KPIs). Examples of KPIs concerning digital competence are: own digital competence, use of digital competence in education, and sharing and development of digital competence. For each of the 12 KPIs, criteria for evaluation were detailed on five levels, describing progression towards a “world-class” target. The target picture and KPIs were created in several workshops with teachers, combined with intelligence from interviews with some 60 national and international experts within the field. Fundamental to the

**Self-assessment**

Start			Self-assessment				Result		Actions		
1.1	1.2	1.3	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	4.1	4.2	4.3	5.1
1. Digital competence			2. Digital content			3. Collaboration and communication		4. IT infrastructure		5. Followup	

Digital competence development

**Does the school have a well-established and organized system for continuous competence development for teachers and headmaster?**

Leading

Digital competence development for teachers, e.g. through conferences, physical and digital networks and journals, is based on research and proven experience, and is also deeply anchored and integrated in the organization.

The school’s digital competence development is well thought out and anchored in “IT strategy for better learning”, and is complying with national steering documents.

Digital competence development is planned and integrated with regard to other competence development activities in the short and long terms.

In addition to planned activities, digital competence is developed through continuous, natural and hands-on peer learning. Teachers develop their digital competence continuously, proactively and curiously.

Elementary	Initiated	Established	Driving	Leading
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Table 1 **Tool for self-assessment and group action planning (illustrative)**

Source: City of Stockholm

target picture was also an analysis and synthesis of aims and guidelines regarding use of digital tools in the national steering policies for Swedish schools.

Based on the self-assessment result, the tool suggests individual actions on how to improve the use of digital techniques in education. The actions are discussed in a collaborative session during which the teachers gather in their work teams. Simultaneously, the school head and leaders conduct a corresponding exercise, focusing on more strategic actions based on the aggregated results for their school. The tool helps to systematize knowledge sharing and aggregate agreed-upon actions into team-specific action plans.

Half-way through the annual cycle, an interim follow-up is made at each school, with school heads and team leaders for each work team. During this follow-up, the implementation and impact of planned actions are reviewed, as well as any potential needs for additional support at different levels. The process creates a broad momentum for change in the schools, involving all teachers. So far, schools performing their second self-assessments have shown improvements of more than 30% in their use of digital content, knowledge sharing and collaborative learning.

### Key success factors for implementing a self-assessment transformation approach

The essence of the approach is a process of repeated self-assessment which is used as a basis for future-oriented action-planning, with subsequent follow-up assessment compared to a defined common target picture. As new experiences and locally acquired knowledge can be continuously integrated into the target picture, dynamic change is also incorporated into the organization. The process comprises five straightforward main steps, as shown in Table 2:

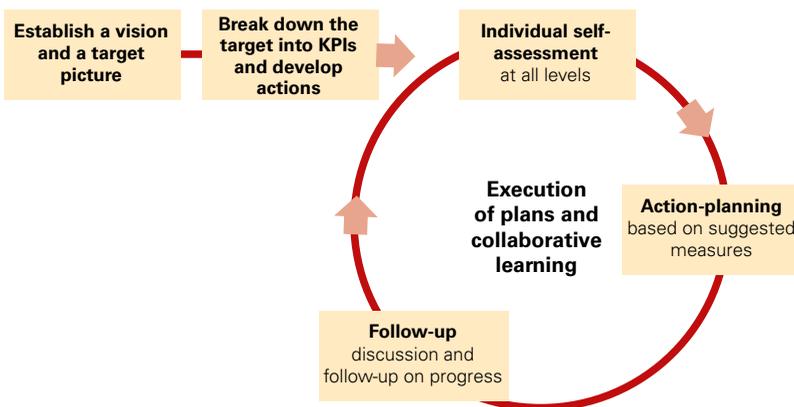


Table 2 Self-assessment transformation process steps

Source: Arthur D. Little analysis

**Establish a vision and a target picture.** Setting a clear overall direction is important. Key success factors for this include:

- Ensuring that leaders actively demonstrate their support for the process and trust in its usefulness.
- Setting a positive, stretch target, reflecting both current best practices and forward-looking critical abilities that will be needed.
- Inclusion of perspectives from all organizational levels and functions, paired with external scanning, intelligence and analysis. Interviews with experts in the field and leading organizations are useful.
- Developing a clear target picture which details required abilities, concrete scenarios and guidance. For example, a target picture for pre-school operations could include how the teaching environment is set up, how children are engaged in creative activities, how language and mathematical skills are developed and how understanding and interest in science are created.

**Break down the target into KPIs and develop actions.** The target picture needs to be broken down into logical and mutually exclusive areas with corresponding KPIs, preferably 5-10. Key success factors here are to:

- Establish detailed criteria for different competence levels for each KPI to enable self-assessment as above.
- Provide guidance on how to progress between levels.

For example, in the Stockholm case, five levels of progression were defined in each area, and for each level, concrete and tailored actions were developed to help the teacher to reach the next one. A teacher on level 2 would therefore receive action suggestions on how to engage in active collaborative learning both in and outside their working group.

**Individual self-assessment at all levels.** A web-based tool should be used to ensure time-efficient assessments and enable easy management of generated data. Key success factors include:

- User-friendly, interactive tool design to encourage engagement, while also allowing easy data analysis and extraction of both results and action plans.
- Making use of nuanced analyses of performance versus targets to identify strengths and weaknesses for individuals. This can be compared across individuals and units to allow identification of internal best-practice performance and identify bottlenecks for improvement – this includes cross-organizational issues such as digital infrastructure, which may require central action.
- Encouraging knowledge sharing around good examples. This helps improve performance and averts unrealistically positive biases in the self-assessment, as high-performers are expected to share their knowledge with colleagues.

*“Our school has improved tremendously since our self-assessment. We have invested in one iPad for each pupil, and the teachers are sharing digital competence in regular workshops. We’ve also initiated a multi-year research program on digitalization of science subjects.”*

Head of an elementary school, Stockholm

**Action planning based on suggested measures.** The process of transformation is facilitated by conducting team-based action planning, collaborative learning and execution. Actions are based on suggestions which come from the self-assessment and are thus calibrated to team performance. Key success factors here include:

- Allowing work teams to create their own action plans. This helps anchor local ownership and leverages internal competence.

- Using good examples of high-performing individuals as starting points for knowledge sharing, which can also be intrinsically rewarding for the employees concerned. Internal benchmarks can also reinforce organizational culture.
- Rigorous prioritization of actions with clear responsibilities and timing – too many actions normally hampers overall execution.

*“The concrete actions suggested are a great starting point for discussion. We used several in our action plan, but we made sure to tailor them to our situation and to detail a responsible person and timing for each of the actions. This has helped us a lot during the execution.”*

Team leader at a school, Stockholm

**Follow-up discussions on progress:** Scheduled follow-up discussions and status reviews help encourage commitment and a sense of responsibility across the organization. They also help to uncover centrally located bottlenecks understand cause-effect chains between events and actions taken, provide an opportunity for making revisions and measuring progress. Key success factors include:

- Performing these follow-ups within the line organization as part of systematic quality work.
- Choosing follow-up and self-assessment cycle timings so that periods are long enough for actions to be implemented and their effects realized.
- Ensuring that appropriate forums are available and adequate time is allocated for collaborative learning and sharing.

## **Wider applicability of the self-assessment transformation approach**

Based on the evidence so far, target-driven transformation based on self-assessment and collaborative learning is an effective approach to help transform a city's education program – at least in terms of developing the skills and capabilities to leverage digital technologies. The characteristics that make the Stockholm education program especially suitable include:

- Many separate functional units, all with differing local issues but with homogenous basic tasks, similar drivers and constraints and common goals and vision.
- A set of improvements for which progression in sophistication can be readily defined.
- An operating environment in which centralist corporate management styles would be inappropriate and ineffective.

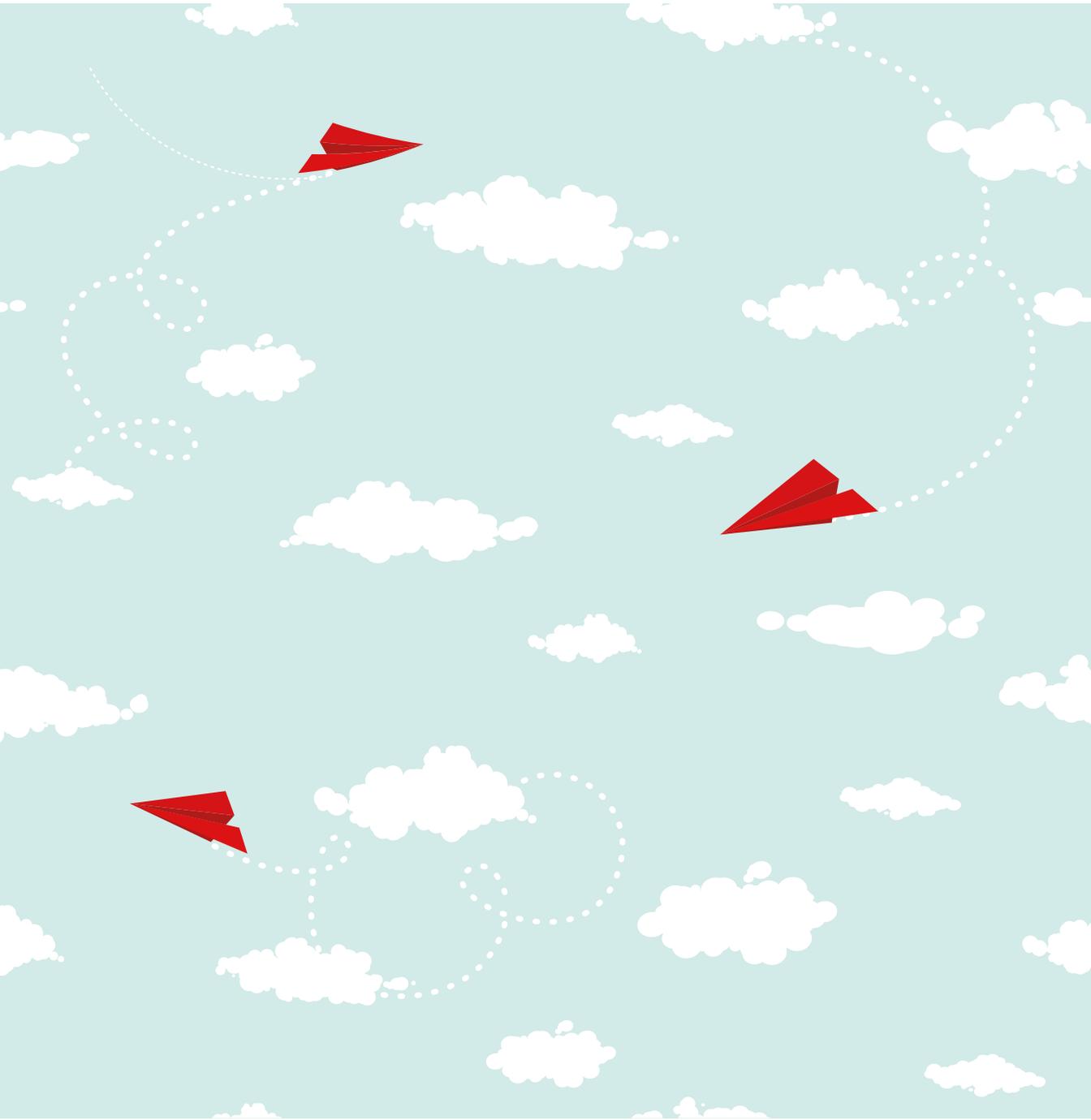
These characteristics are shared by many other public administration programs beyond education, including, for example, medical, social services, local government, and infrastructure services.

However, these characteristics can also be found among large commercial corporations, and the approach could also be applied, perhaps in a different context, here as well. Promising examples include:

- Large franchised manufacturing operations, in which there is no direct supervisory control over franchisees' businesses (such as branded consumer goods companies with co-manufacturers, packagers, bottlers, etc.).
- Global corporations with decentralized structure and geographically dispersed operational units, which include replicated functions such as sales, R&D and human resources.
- Global corporations wishing to improve collaboration, quality and performance within their supply chains or contractor communities.
- Networked businesses comprising a number of partners performing similar functions in different locations.

What's more, the self-assessment approach is also applicable as an integral part of a broader change management program. Referring to "The Change Side of Transformation" article in this issue (pp. 12-29), for example, self-assessment could be a promising tool to use in companies with non-hierarchical organizational cultures.

Of course, there are also many applications in which the approach would not be suitable – such as companies with more centralized structures, fewer operational units, or less homogenous basic tasks.



## Insights for the executive

Of course, there is nothing fundamentally novel about using self-assessment as a management approach. However, the availability of relatively cheap, user-friendly digital tools, and the increasing familiarity of users with digital approaches in everyday life, have raised their potential to a new level. Provided that the key success factors outlined above are incorporated, we believe that target-driven self-assessment can effectively help organizations transform themselves. It can help organizations capture, circulate, and capitalize upon organization-wide competence and experience. It can engage and empower autonomous units to create and execute their own plans in alignment with a common vision. And it can help to build a culture of continuous improvement. Sometimes the most powerful innovations are not ideas that are “new to the world” – but are instead the result of a simple twist on something that has been around for decades.

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