Secrets to the Success of Organizational Transformation

Secret No. 5: Speed[1]

Dr. Prasad S. Kodukula[2]

In the first article of this series, we established **P**urpose as the foundation of successful organizational transformation. In the second, we explored **L**eadership as the force that mobilizes people toward that purpose. In the third, we examined **E**mpowerment as the mechanism for transferring ownership and driving execution. In the fourth, we discussed **A**lignment as the discipline that keeps initiatives, priorities, and people moving in the same direction.

Now we turn to the fifth element of the **P-L-E-A-S-E** model: **Speed**.

Purpose defines direction. Leadership mobilizes people. Empowerment releases ownership. Alignment creates coherence. But without speed, even the best strategies remain unrealized.

Speed in transformation has two dimensions. The first is **decision speed**: how quickly leaders recognize reality, make the call, and commit resources. The second is **implementation speed**: how quickly the organization converts that decision into visible action, market response, and operational results.

In the heart of Silicon Valley, a small tech startup named Slack faced daunting competition. Giants like Microsoft and Google had already staked claims in the fertile grounds of workplace communication. Slack's challenge was formidable: to carve out a space where it could not just grow but thrive.

By embracing speed in every facet of the organization—from product development to customer service—Slack transformed its potential into tangible success. It moved faster than its larger rivals on feature releases, customer response, and platform integrations. Within a short span, it emerged not merely as a competitor but as a standard-bearer for innovation and agility in a crowded market.

Successful organizations understand that transformation is not just about change; it is about the **velocity** of change. In today's business environment, speed is not merely a competitive advantage. It is increasingly the script for survival.

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So, how can organizations inject speed into their veins? Here are a few actionable tips:

Make Speed a Competitive Advantage

Speed is not just about moving fast. It is about moving faster than your rivals in the moments that matter. Organizations that embed speed into their culture—rewarding rapid action, tolerating fast failure, and compressing cycle times—build an advantage that is very hard to overcome.

In 2012, Facebook was growing fast — but it was watching something grow faster. Instagram, a mobile photo-sharing app with just 13 employees and no revenue, was gaining users at a pace that signaled a fundamental shift in how people would share and consume content on mobile devices. Facebook's leadership recognized the threat early and acted without hesitation. Within under two weeks of negotiation, it acquired Instagram for $1 billion. By 2014, Instagram had 300 million users. The acquisition didn't just neutralize a rival — it handed Facebook dominance over the next wave of social media before that wave had fully formed.

That is speed of recognition and speed of decision working together. Facebook didn't wait for a committee report or a six-month strategic review. It saw the shift, made the call, and moved.

MySpace tells the other side of the story. Once the dominant force in social media, MySpace was slow to recognize the shifts happening around it — in mobile, in user experience, in product design. By the time it understood the direction the market was moving, it had already lost the ground it needed to compete. Speed of recognition without speed of response is not enough. And the absence of both is fatal.

The lesson: in fast-moving markets, the window between recognizing an opportunity and acting on it is narrow — and getting narrower. Facebook saw the window and moved through it in two weeks. MySpace watched it close.

A more dramatic illustration comes from AI. In January 2025, DeepSeek—a Chinese startup founded just two years earlier—released a series of models that matched the performance of the world's most advanced AI systems at a fraction of the cost. This demonstrated that frontier AI—long assumed to require billions of dollars in resources and years of development—could be matched by a lean, fast-moving challenger, fundamentally undermining the structural advantages the largest players believed they had built.

In AI, as in social media, speed is not an ornament. It is a moat.

Prioritize Ruthlessly

The art of prioritization is not simply about choosing what to do. It is about choosing what **not** to do—and making that choice fast enough to matter.

Spreading effort across too many fronts does not just waste resources. It kills speed. When an organization tries to move quickly in ten directions at once, it goes nowhere fast. Ruthless prioritization is what concentrates speed into competitive force.

Amazon built its logistics dominance by making one relentless organizational bet: prioritize customer experience above everything else. Every resource, every decision, every investment was filtered through that lens. The result was not just better service—it was a supply chain so fast and responsive that it became a competitive weapon in its own right.

OpenAI offers a more recent example of prioritization as a speed discipline. In 2025, the company had expanded into a broad range of initiatives—Sora, shopping features, instant checkout inside ChatGPT, and more. By early 2026, it pulled back, cutting side projects and refocusing sharply on coding and enterprise users. The move was not a retreat. It was a deliberate narrowing of the agenda to concentrate on execution speed where it mattered most.

Google Glass illustrates what happens when prioritization fails. Announced in 2012, Glass tried to be too many things at once—a consumer fashion item, an enterprise tool, a developer platform, and a lifestyle statement. By trying to move fast in all directions, Google could not build real momentum in any of them. The consumer version was discontinued in 2015. By the time Google narrowed its focus to enterprise use cases — factory floors, warehouses, hands-free industrial work — the product had lost too much momentum to recover. Google discontinued Glass entirely in 2023.

Humane's AI Pin tells a similar story. Launched in April 2024 with an ambitious vision, the company could not build speed behind any single, compelling use case. Reviews were poor, orders were weak, and by February 2025, less than a year after launch, the company ultimately discontinued the product and sold its assets to HP. In fast-moving markets, broad ambition without sharp focus is not boldness. It is a brake on speed.

Zara offers the clearest cross-industry illustration. Rather than competing on cost like most fashion retailers, Zara made a singular bet: prioritize speed-to-market above all else. The company designs, produces, and delivers new garments to stores in two to three weeks—refreshing collections every two weeks on average, while most competitors do so every ten to fourteen weeks. It reserves 85 percent of factory capacity for in-season adjustments rather than locking into large production orders months before knowing what customers will buy.

That single-minded prioritization made Zara's supply chain its greatest competitive asset.

H&M competed in the same market, at similar price points, for the same customer. But it relied on longer lead times and large advance commitments. When seasonal bets were wrong, there was no mechanism to course-correct quickly. The result, in 2018, was a $4 billion inventory crisis—nine weeks of unsold stock, markdowns of up to 47 percent, and steep profit losses. Analysts described the brand bluntly as "neither fast nor fashionable."

Same industry. Same customer. Radically different outcomes—because one company built its operating model around speed, and the other did not.

Ruthless prioritization is not a defensive act. It is the discipline that gives speed its force.

Decide Faster

Every hour a decision sits unmade is an hour a competitor can use. Accelerated decision-making is not about being reckless. It is about removing the organizational friction—unnecessary approvals, over-engineered governance, fear of being wrong—that turns simple calls into slow ones.

Decentralizing decisions to the people closest to the work is one of the most powerful ways to compress cycle times. But leadership must also be primed to make strategic calls at pace, without waiting for perfect information.

When Samsung faced the Galaxy Note 7 battery crisis in 2016, the company moved decisively—recalling devices globally and communicating with customers quickly. The financial hit was painful. But the speed of the decision, and the speed of its execution, helped preserve long-term trust. Compare that to Motorola in the 1990s, whose multi-gate development structure became a textbook case of how slow decision architecture weakens competitiveness and extends cycle times.

A more recent contrast comes from semiconductors. NVIDIA recognized the AI infrastructure opportunity early and moved fast to dominate it. Intel recognized the same shift later and has spent years trying to catch up through a difficult and costly turnaround. Both companies saw the wave. Only one moved at the speed the moment required.

The most well-known—and perhaps most dramatic—example of decision speed in recent history comes from medicine. The COVID-19 vaccine story has been widely told. But what is less often recognized is that its speed was not primarily a scientific achievement. It was an organizational and decision-making one.

Before the pandemic, bringing a vaccine from discovery to regulatory approval took ten to fifteen years on average. Pfizer and BioNTech achieved emergency use authorization in just 221 days. The breakthrough was not a lucky shortcut. It came from a deliberate redesign of decision-making: governance layers were stripped back, functional leaders drove decisions in real time, development steps ran in parallel rather than sequentially, and escalation to the CEO occurred weekly rather than quarterly. The result was a 16-fold compression of a process the industry had long considered immovable—not because the science moved faster, but because the decisions did.

The contrast is equally instructive. GlaxoSmithKline, Merck, and Sanofi—three of the world's most resourced pharmaceutical companies—were slow to commit to mRNA, the platform that proved most effective. By the time they moved, Pfizer and Moderna had claimed the market. Sanofi ultimately abandoned its mRNA COVID-19 vaccine program entirely. No amount of resources can compensate for the speed at which a decisive competitor can move.

Fast decisions matter. Fast follow-through matters more.

Apply Agile Methods

Agile methodology is fundamentally a speed system. By breaking work into short cycles, empowering cross-functional teams to decide and act, and building in continuous feedback, agile compresses the time between idea and outcome. It is not just a software development approach. It is an organizational operating model for moving fast without losing control.

Spotify has long been a textbook agile organization. Its "Squad" model allows small, autonomous teams to ship improvements continuously—without waiting for large, infrequent releases that slow most organizations down. The result is a platform that evolves at a pace users can feel. In 2026, Spotify extended this agile approach beyond its core product, moving into physical-book sales through a Bookshop.org partnership—iterating from music to podcasts to audiobooks to books without losing organizational momentum.

Pandora, competing in the same streaming space, could not match that pace. As competition intensified, subscribers spent less time on the platform, and ad growth slowed. The problem was not strategy alone—the real problem was speed: Pandora failed to adapt its ad-supported streaming model fast enough as listener habits shifted and on-demand rivals redefined what streaming meant. Agility is not optional in fast-moving markets. It is the price of staying relevant.

SpaceX brings the agile lesson into an industry where speed was previously unthinkable. Aerospace has historically been defined by gate-heavy, documentation-first development processes designed to eliminate risk at the cost of time. SpaceX inverted that model entirely.

Rather than perfecting designs on paper, SpaceX builds prototypes quickly, tests them under real conditions, and uses every outcome—success or failure—as data for the next iteration. Its Raptor engine development compressed a traditionally ten-to-fifteen-year process to approximately five years. Decisions are made by the person closest to the problem, not routed upward through layers of approval. The philosophy is to act, learn, and act again—faster than any rival can keep up.

Legacy aerospace contractors operating on waterfall models have watched SpaceX capture NASA contracts and commercial launch market share at a pace their organizational structures cannot match. In aerospace, as in software, agility is not a methodology. It is a competitive position.

Agile methods matter because they convert speed from a slogan into a system.

Embrace Technological Innovation

Technology does not create speed by itself. But in the hands of an organization already committed to moving fast, it becomes a force multiplier. The companies that pull ahead are not just the ones that adopt new technology—they are the ones that operationalize it faster than rivals.

Domino's Pizza is one of the clearest examples outside the tech sector. The company transformed itself from a struggling pizza chain into a technology-enabled operator, making digital ordering, delivery tracking, and operational speed central to its model. It beat Wall Street estimates for fourth-quarter 2025 U.S. same-store sales, driven by menu innovation, customer convenience, and speed.

Pizza Hut tells the contrasting story. In late 2025, Yum Brands began a strategic review of Pizza Hut after seven consecutive quarters of declining sales. The chain had not moved fast enough to close the gap on digital ordering, delivery speed, or operational technology. One company used technology to accelerate. The other is still trying to recover relevance.

Zara offers yet another dimension of the same lesson—and it is worth revisiting this example because it illustrates how technology and speed reinforce each other in ways that go beyond prioritization alone. We saw earlier how Zara's ruthless focus on speed-to-market reshaped its supply chain. At the operational level, technology makes that possible.

The company uses RFID tags throughout its supply chain to track inventory in real time from the warehouse to the store floor. AI-driven algorithms analyze sales data and consumer preferences daily, feeding immediate production decisions. These are not bolt-on tools. They are the operational infrastructure that makes two-week design cycles physically possible.

Gap Inc. invested in the same retail category but moved far more slowly to embed technology into its supply chain. The result was chronic inventory mismanagement—too much of the wrong product, not enough of what was selling. Heavy markdowns, store closures, and years of restructuring followed. Technology investments came reactively, after the damage was done, rather than proactively as a speed enabler.

Same industry. Same core challenge of getting the right product to the right store at the right time. Completely different outcomes—because one company used technology to move faster, and the other did not move fast enough to use it.

The same dynamic is playing out in manufacturing. GM, Ford, Panasonic, Samsung SDI, and LG Energy Solution are now repurposing battery capacity toward stationary storage to meet demand from AI and cloud computing. Meanwhile, parts of the German auto industry continue to lose share in China while still adjusting. The window for technology-enabled speed does not stay open indefinitely. Those who retool and execute first capture the advantage. Those who wait inherit the cost.

Technology creates an advantage when organizations adopt and operationalize it faster than their rivals.

Conclusion

Speed is not recklessness. It is **disciplined urgency**.

Speed determines whether the transformation becomes real before the market has moved on. Organizations that transform successfully do two things well. They decide fast. And they implement fast.

That is why speed deserves its place in the **P-L-E-A-S-E** model. It is the force that breaks inertia, compresses learning cycles, and converts good intentions into measurable results.

In transformation, speed is not just about making the call. It is about making the move.

And in a world where opportunities open and close at a breathtaking pace, it is not just the strong that survive—but the swift.

Author's Note: Preliminary versions of the articles in this series were previously published as blog posts on my website (www.kodukula.com). They have been revised and expanded for publication in PMWJ. In preparing the final articles, I used ChatGPT and Claude as support tools for editing, refinement, and language clarity. All ideas, interpretations, conclusions, and final editorial decisions remain my own.

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As co-founder and CEO of Kodukula & Associates, Inc. and NeoChloris, Inc., he leads these firms in project management and renewable energy, respectively. Recognized three times by the Project Management Institute as "Best of the Best in Project Management," he has received multiple accolades, including the Illinois Tech Alumni Association Professional Achievement Award and honors from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the states of Arizona, Kansas, and Illinois for his outstanding leadership in education and training, environmental improvement, and innovation. An accomplished author, Dr. Kodukula has co-authored or contributed to 12 books and over 40 articles, and holds four U.S. patents. He can be reached at https://www.linkedin.com/in/prasadkodukula/.