

Enterprise Guide for Product-aligned Operating Model Transformation

Including a case study on transforming
dsm-firmenich's operations

A report by Everest Group, supported by HCLTech

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Introduction

In today's dynamic business environment, enterprises are rapidly adopting product-aligned operating models to remain competitive and relevant. This approach focuses on aligning teams, workflows, and technologies with value streams to enhance innovation, agility, and responsiveness to customer needs. Unlike traditional project-based models, a product-aligned operating model enables continuous delivery and adaptability by emphasizing cross-functional collaboration and end-to-end product ownership.

To guide enterprises through this transformation, the 4R framework –Reinvent organizational design, Redefine processes, Reshape talent, and Reimagine core technology – provides a structured methodology to address the key dimensions of change. Each pillar is essential in creating an enterprise that is not only agile but also scalable, resilient, and aligned with customer-centric goals.

This Viewpoint explores the adoption of product-aligned operating models and focuses on the four pillars. It provides actionable insights for enterprises navigating the challenges of digital transformation. Each pillar focuses on a key dimension of change, equipping organizations to drive agility, collaboration, and innovation.

The Viewpoint contains:

- An overview of essential pillars of the product-aligned operating model through the 4R framework
- A detailed enterprise case study highlighting the important aspects of its transformation process

The product-aligned operating model paradigm

The product-aligned operating model enables enterprises to build a value-driven IT organization by aligning IT and business teams along the value streams. The underlying platforms support the teams in consistently delivering value to their customers while ensuring long-term business sustainability. While the construct appears straightforward, adopting this operating model is complex, and enterprises must consider numerous factors to transition successfully.

This journey keeps evolving, as no single North Star universally applies; each organization must tailor the model to align with its unique context, priorities, and market dynamics. As enterprises progress, they must continuously refine and adapt their models to meet shifting business demands, emerging technologies, and competitive pressures.

Everest Group surveyed 200+ enterprises with more than US\$1 billion in revenue, indicating that reshaping talent and reimagining core technology has been seen as one of the most important dimensions in their transformation journey.

Exhibit 1 demonstrates some key insights and challenges enterprises adopting product-aligned operating models face.

Exhibit 1: Key challenges while adopting a product-aligned operating model

Source: Everest Group (2025), based on Everest Group's survey of 200 global enterprises with revenue more than US\$1 billion

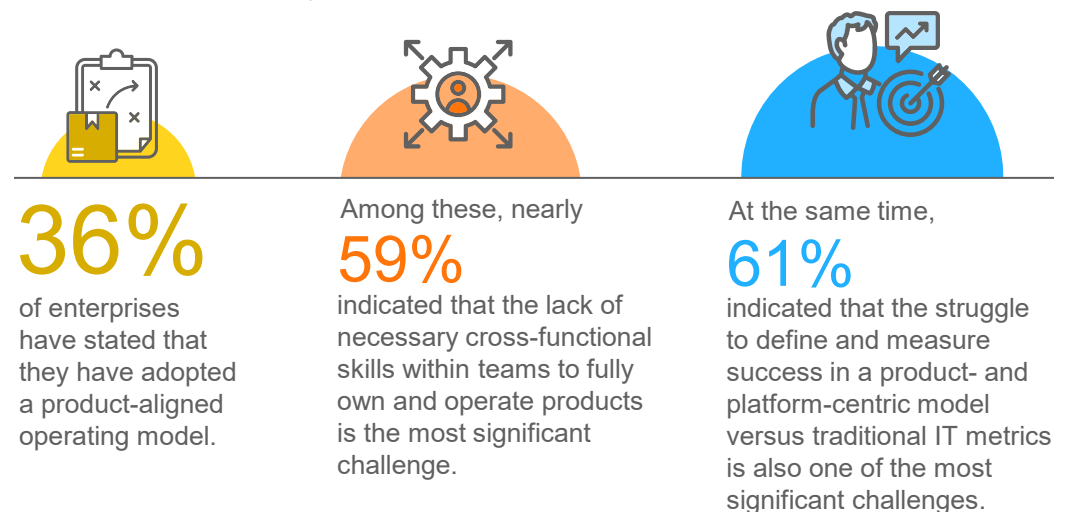
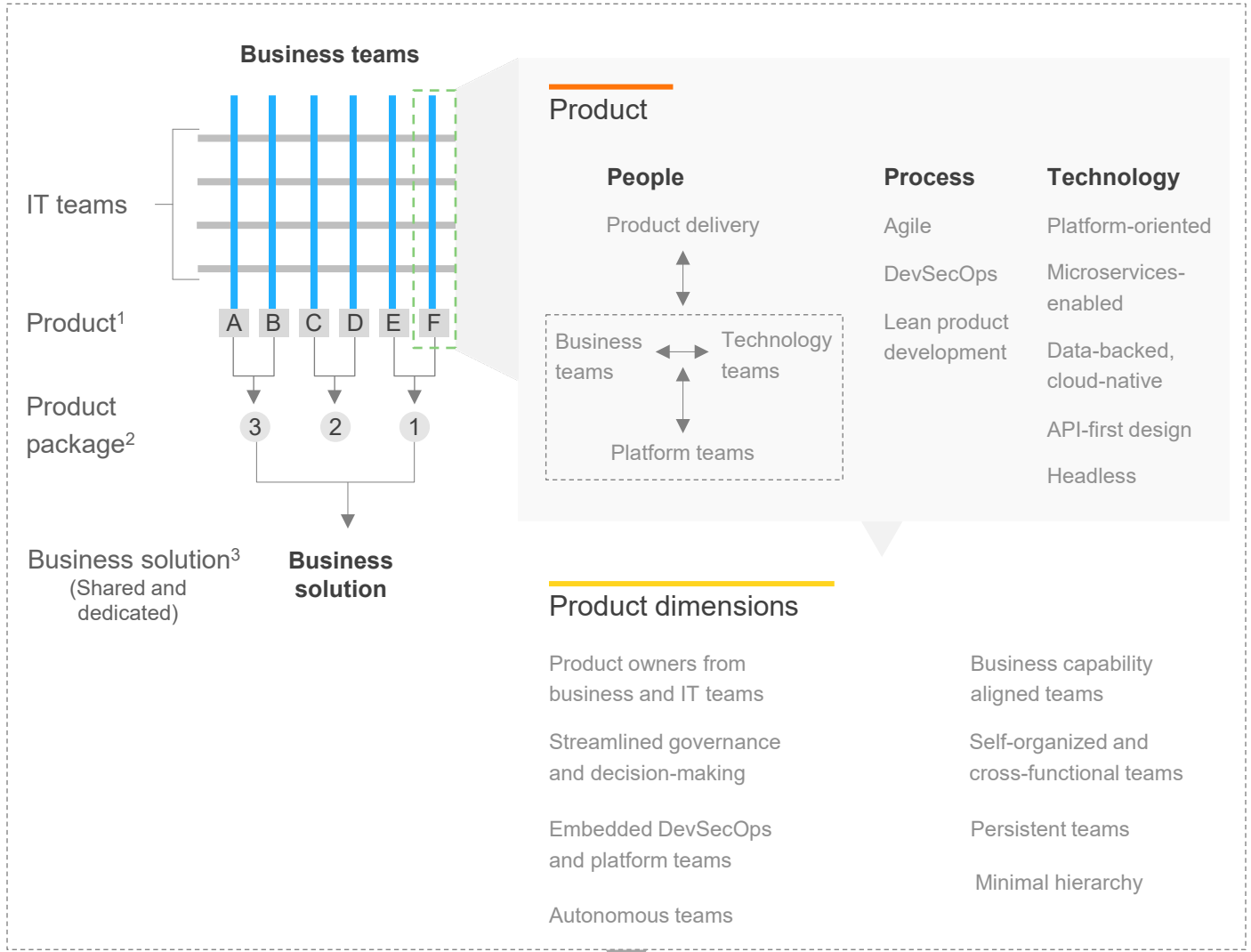


Exhibit 2 illustrates a matured product-aligned operating model. However, it should be noted that the operating model transformation varies with each organization's unique business needs, maturity level, and strategic objectives.

Exhibit 2: Organizational model of a product-aligned enterprise

Source: Everest Group (2025)

[NOT EXHAUSTIVE]



Outcomes

- Customer-centric value delivery
- Increased innovation and flexibility
- Operational efficiency and cost optimization
- Improved speed and responsiveness
- Scalability and resilience

The next section will explore the key dimensions of transforming the enterprise operating model using the 4R framework.

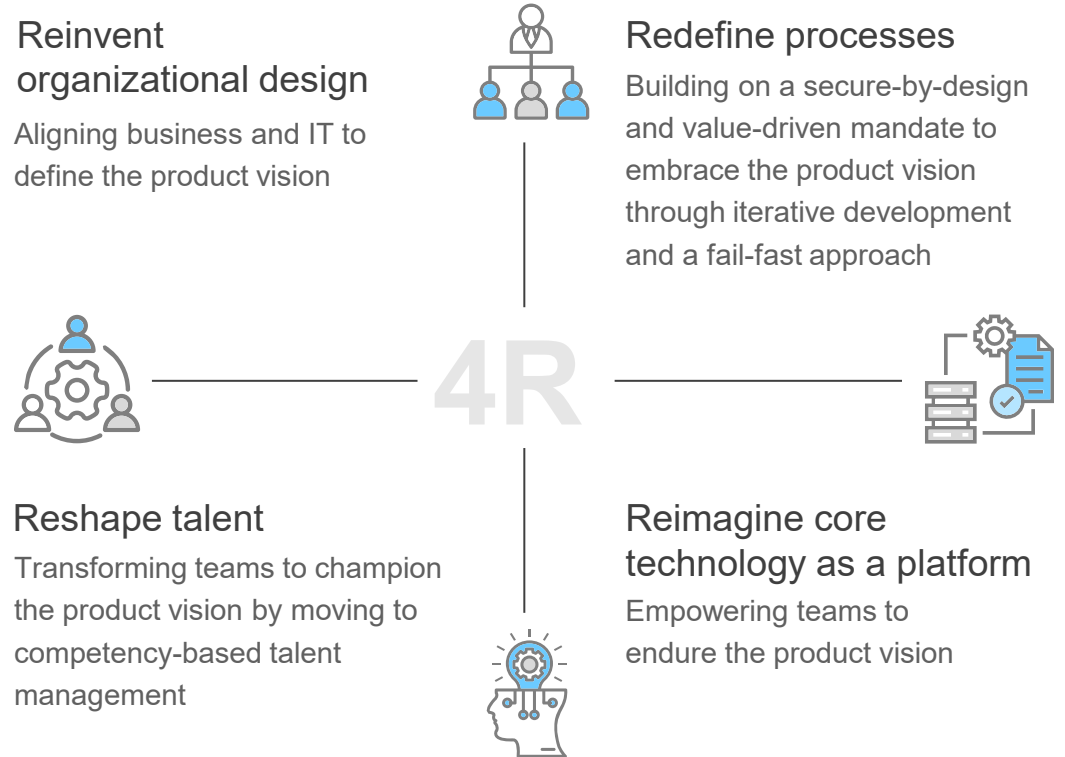
1 Product: a solution or set of features developed to meet specific customer needs, encompassing everything from design to deployment, aimed at providing continuous value to users.
 2 Product package: a bundle of related products to meet broader customer needs.
 3 Business solution: a group of products and/or product packages aligned with strategic business goals, designed to generate revenue, improve market positioning, or drive key outcomes for the enterprise

The 4R framework to successfully transition to a product-aligned operating model

The 4R framework, a strategic model for organizational transformation, focuses on four key pillars to align teams, processes, and technologies and drive a unified product vision. Exhibit 3 presents this framework, which serves as a blueprint to establish the foundation of a product-aligned operating model and assists enterprises throughout their transformation journey.

Exhibit 3: The 4R framework

Source: Everest Group (2024)



Now, let us dive deeper into **the first pillar** in this report, reinventing organizational design.

Reinventing organizational design in product-aligned transformation involves restructuring the enterprise to align with product-centric principles, fostering agility, innovation, and customer-centricity. This redesign touches every aspect of the organization, from team structures to organizational design.

Considerations for enterprises include:

- Establishing empowered and persistent product-centric teams while converging business and IT teams to define a product-centric vision
- Implementing self-organized teams with clearly defined roles, such as squads, tribes, chapters, and guilds from the Spotify model; scrum teams from the Scrum@Scale to effectively cross-collaborate
- Setting up product teams aligned to business capability - Organize teams around core business capabilities (e.g., finance, supply chain) to ensure end-to-end ownership and alignment with business outcomes
- Fostering a generative culture that empowers teams to embrace change and stay aligned with the product vision
- Institutionalizing an alignment-enabled autonomy construct to define the common goal based on the overall product vision

Next, we will discuss **the second pillar**, redefining processes.

Redefining processes in product-aligned transformation involves restructuring enterprise operational workflows to align with a secure-by-design approach and a value-driven mandate. Considerations for enterprises include:

- Embedding frameworks such as SAFe and DevSecOps to drive iterative innovation aligned with value creation and promote secure-by-design practices
- Adopting a value-creating federated governance structure for distributed decision-making and full product ownership (funding, strategy, and execution)
- Implementing value stream management to enhance cross-functional collaboration, leading to faster and more value-driven releases
- Using Objectives and Key Results (OKRs), flow metrics, and DORA metrics to evaluate overall performance and the business impact
- Establishing robust processes to gather, analyze, and act on customer feedback throughout the product life cycle
- Discovering and optimizing/automating/eliminating hand-offs in processes to enhance process efficiency
- Continuously measuring and optimizing dependency affinity between product teams to improve enterprise process agility

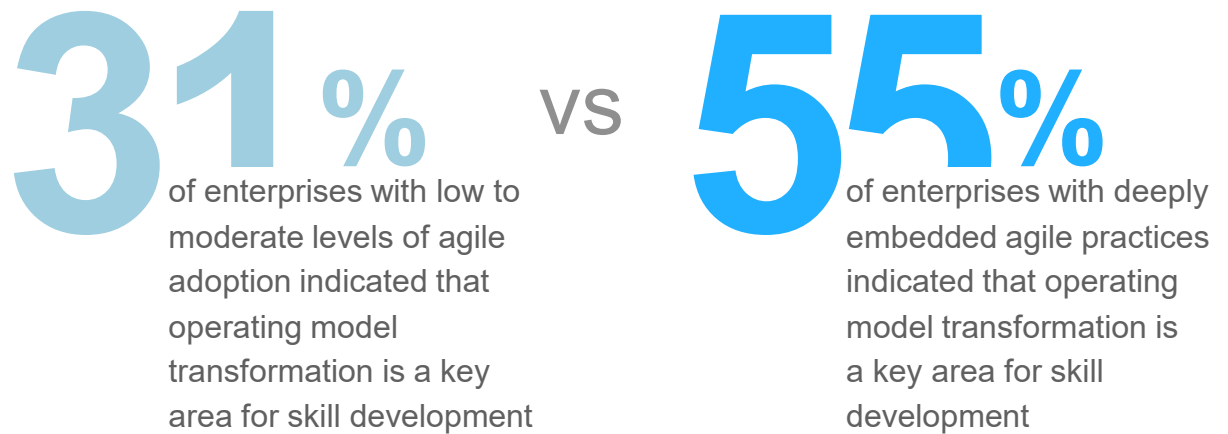
The third pillar, reshaping talent, requires a shift in how organizations attract, develop, and retain talent, fostering an adaptable and customer-centric workforce aligned with the product vision. Considerations for enterprises include:

- Prioritizing T-shaped, pi-shaped, and comb-shaped training models to efficiently drive product outcomes
- Transitioning from an experience-based to a competency-based model
- Building next-generation roles such as AI/ML engineers and cloud-native developers to bridge skill gaps and support the product vision

- Introducing roles vital for product-aligned growth, such as product managers, user experience designers, and data analysts. Exhibit 4 indicates that operating model transformation is a key investment area for enterprises to enhance integration and alignment between IT and business teams
- Emphasizing platform engineering skills with expertise in building and maintaining scalable and reusable infrastructure and tooling for development teams
- Reimagining the traditional pyramid models with talent that can effectively adapt to agile culture and work in a hybrid model
- Aligning talent to remote-first ways of working, enabling teams to be self-driven and adaptable to decentralized collaboration models

Exhibit 4: Key investment areas for skill development

Source: Everest Group (2024), based on Everest Group's survey of 200 global enterprises with revenue more than US\$1 billion



The final pillar, reimagining core technology as a platform, involves transforming the organization's technology infrastructure from disparate systems into a cohesive, flexible, and scalable platform supporting product-aligned growth. Considerations for enterprises include:

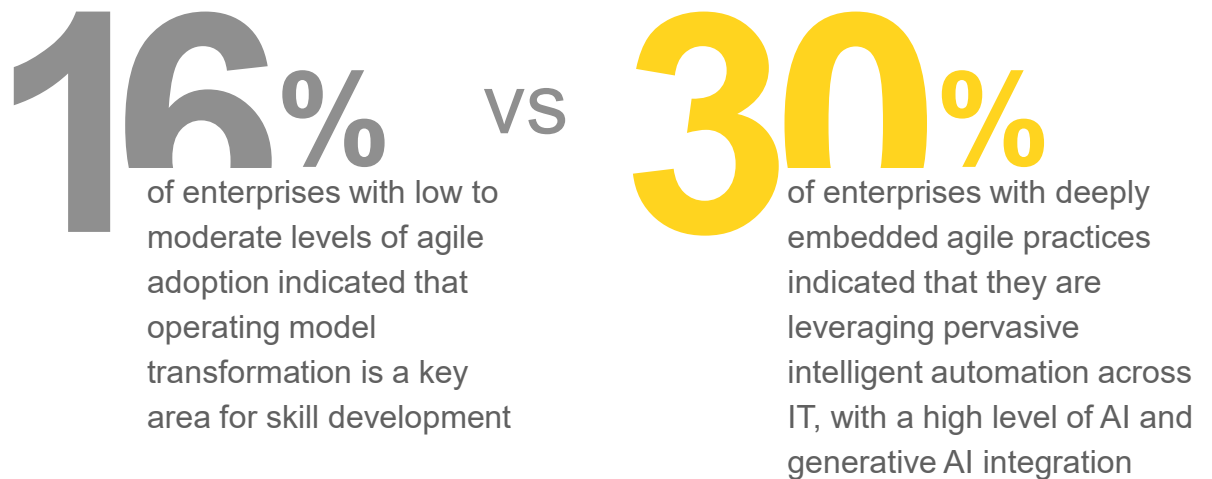
- Automating repetitive tasks and adopting AI-driven decision-making to improve efficiency, streamline workflows, and allow teams to focus on high-value activities that align with the product vision
- Adopting a platform-based approach with foundational, operational, engineering, and business capabilities built into platforms for seamless scalability, faster time-to-market, and enhanced operational agility
- Reimagining platforms-as-a-marketplace to enable seamless collaboration and on-demand access to capabilities and services

- Leveraging data-driven insights and advanced analytics for real-time decision-making, ensuring team alignment to continuously improve products
- Transitioning from monolithic systems to a modular, microservices-based architecture
- Embracing cloud-native technologies and practices to enhance scalability, reliability, and cost efficiency
- Implementing comprehensive DevOps practices and automation to streamline development, testing, and deployment

Exhibit 5 depicts that enterprises adopting a product-aligned operating model have achieved higher levels of intelligent automation across IT, with significant AI and generative AI integration.

Exhibit 5: Levels of AI, including generative AI, and automation penetration

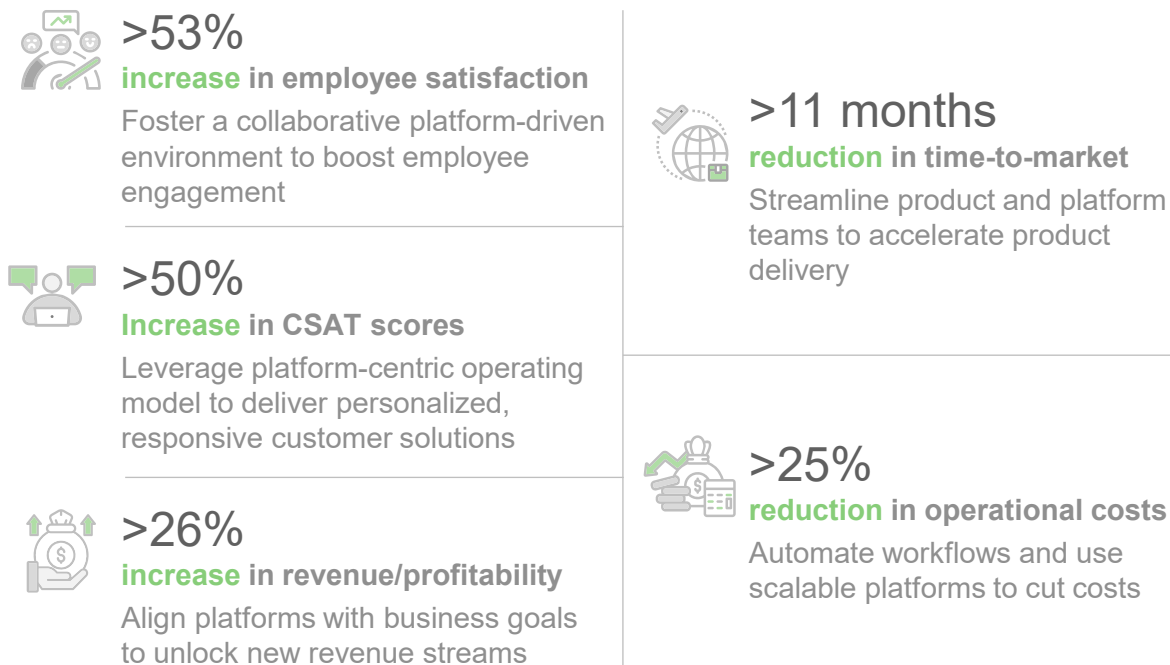
Source: Everest Group (2024), based on Everest Group's survey of 200 global enterprises with revenue more than US\$1 billion



Enterprises that effectively configure these strategic drivers to align with their unique context will be well-positioned to successfully leverage and scale their product-centric operating models. Exhibit 6 illustrates the outcomes and recommendations across key metrics for global enterprises we surveyed that adopted a product-aligned operating model.

Exhibit 6: Outcomes of adopting a product-aligned operating model

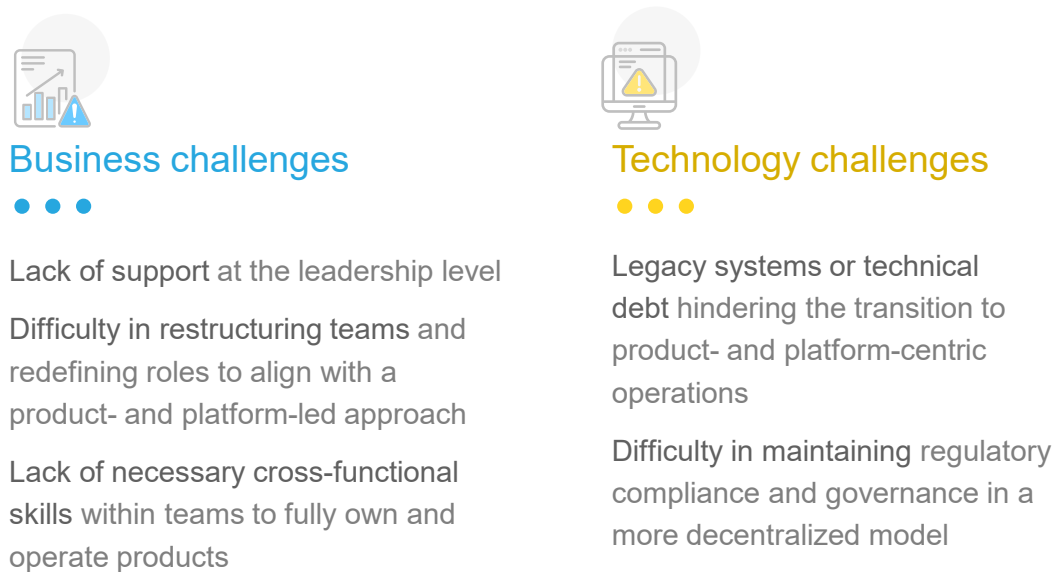
Source: Everest Group (2024)



However, enterprises face multiple roadblocks in achieving these outcomes. Exhibit 7 depicts key business and technical challenges enterprises face.

Exhibit 7: Challenges in transitioning to a product-aligned operating model

Source: Everest Group (2024)



Note: These responses are based on our pilot survey results and will change once we gather more responses.

To address these challenges, providers are vital in guiding enterprises through their transformation journey. The next section will cover their role in helping enterprises transition to a product-aligned operating model.

Role of providers in transitioning to a product-aligned operating model

Providers take on a more strategic role in helping enterprises transition. Given that the transition requires careful calibration of multiple drivers, providers act as advisory-led transformation drivers, guiding enterprises across all the dimensions, as described below.

Providers help enterprises adopt a data-driven approach to identify capability gaps and design the right-fit **organizational model**:

- **Data-backed organizational assessment:** Conduct detailed assessments using data and analytics to identify the gaps in the current operating model
- **Capability mapping and alignment:** Help enterprises map their existing capabilities against future needs, ensuring alignment between business goals and the required organizational competencies
- **Right-fit model design:** Design tailored organizational models that foster agility, innovation, and resilience, ensuring the enterprise is structured to support continuous product delivery
- **Dependency affinity measurement:** Continuously measure dependency affinity and assist capability-aligned product teams in becoming increasingly autonomous, reducing bottlenecks and improving overall process efficiency

Providers assist enterprises in **refining and enhancing their processes** for greater efficiency and alignment with a product-aligned model.

- **Maturity assessment and process improvement:** Conduct process maturity assessments and help enterprises streamline and refine their processes. Introduce best practices to optimize workflows and ensure processes are aligned with product vision
- **Industry-specific OKRs and metrics:** Assist enterprises in defining tailored OKRs, flow metrics, and performance indicators. This reduces the number of iterations by creating clear, measurable goals that align with creating value
- **Agile and scaled-agile adoption:** Help enterprises adopt Agile methodologies and scaled-agile frameworks, fostering iterative development and improved collaboration across teams to enhance responsiveness and adaptability

Let us examine how providers are crucial in **identifying and developing talent strategies** to close gaps and build a future-ready workforce.

- **Identifying talent gaps:** Assess current talent against future needs and identify skill gaps that could hinder the transition to a product-aligned model. This ensures that the right talent is in place to support the new operating model
- **Developing tailored talent strategies:** Design comprehensive talent development strategies, including upskilling and reskilling initiatives, to close competency gaps and ensure teams are equipped to work in a product-driven environment
- **Building cross-functional capabilities:** Create a workforce with cross-functional capabilities, enabling them to work effectively in agile, product-centric teams. This involves both technical and business skills training necessary for success
- **Building assessment platforms and approaches:** Help build robust assessment platforms and strategies to attract, hire, and retain the best talent, ensuring organizations can meet current and future skill requirements
- **Democratic and gamified upskilling platforms:** Provide a democratic and gamified platform for the workforce community to upskill and cross-skill themselves, fostering continuous learning and engagement

Now, let us dive into how providers also guide enterprises in consolidating and **modernizing their technology to create a platform** that supports scalability and innovation.

- **Platform engineering and scalability:** Build and engineer new platforms for scalability, flexibility, and agility. These platforms allow teams to access resources, data, and tools in real time, enhancing operational effectiveness
- **Emerging technologies integration:** Adopt emerging technologies such as AI, ML, and cloud-native solutions into enterprises' platforms to drive automation, improve decision-making, and help them gain a competitive edge in product development
- **Platforms-as-a-marketplace setup:** Assist in establishing platforms as marketplaces that enable seamless collaboration, resource sharing, and service monetization, creating a unified and scalable ecosystem
- **Partner IPs and accelerators:** Bring in partner IPs and accelerators to expedite transformation, enabling rapid deployment and enhanced platform capabilities

Hence, providers guide enterprises' journey to a product-aligned model by offering expertise in process optimization. Their strategic partnership ensures that enterprises are equipped to drive innovation, agility, and sustained growth.

We will now examine a detailed case study of an enterprise that has transformed its operating model by reconfiguring the four key dimensions to achieve such alignment.

Case study: transforming dsm-firmenich's operations

Company background

dsm-firmenich was created through the merger of DSM, a Dutch health, nutrition, and beauty company and Firmenich, a Swiss company specializing in fragrances and flavors. The combined entity, dsm-firmenich, is an innovator in nutrition, health, and beauty, with a strong emphasis on science, biotechnology, and sustainability.

Over the years, dsm-firmenich focused on biotechnology and sustainability while transitioning into a digital-first enterprise. However, its traditional structure, marked by long project cycles, rigid organizational boundaries, and fragmented IT frameworks, hindered its ability to respond quickly to market dynamics.

Recognizing the need for an integrated approach that would foster agility, unify digital strategies, and drive alignment across business functions, dsm-firmenich launched a major digital transformation toward a product- and platform-led operating model. This shift, aimed at establishing a strong foundation for future success, reimagined its operating model to be more agile, product-aligned, and responsive to market changes.

Transformation overview

dsm-firmenich embarked on this transformation to address inefficiencies in its waterfall-based project management, which had slowed response times and limited adaptability. Recognizing these challenges, the company set out to better understand what it means to build real digital products. As a result, it created and evolved product squads to enable

continuous delivery and faster market response. It also ensured that projects transitioned into enduring products, allowing for continuous improvement. This new model established agile, value-driven structures to unify IT and business under collaborative platforms, enabling the firm to integrate operations across the merged entities and introduce a coherent, adaptive approach to meeting strategic objectives.

Key challenges during this journey included harmonizing two distinct organizational cultures after the merger, overcoming resistance to change, and developing a common framework for operation. Through extensive stakeholder engagement, including workshops and alignment sessions led by dsm-firmenich's digital and business leaders, the organization successfully navigated these challenges.

The success of this initiative hinged on a coalition of key stakeholders. dsm-firmenich's senior digital and senior business leaders were central to aligning resources and championing the transition. Providers such as HCLTech supported the initiative as transformation partners, providing expertise in agile, DevSecOps, and cloud-native solutions to support dsm-firmenich's journey to a sustainable, product-aligned future.

Business objectives

The primary objective for dsm-firmenich's transformation was to create a more agile and responsive digital function that closely aligned with business outcomes and value. The company aimed to reduce the lengthy timelines associated with traditional, waterfall-based project delivery by fostering cross-functional collaboration and a product-oriented focus. Key goals included:

- **Accelerating time-to-market:** Breaking down complex projects into manageable, outcome-oriented product teams that could deliver faster
- **Aligning IT with business functions:** Aligning IT with business priorities and translating those priorities to the backlog of the product squads to drive targeted innovation
- **Enhancing customer experience:** Improving visibility and accessibility across dsm-firmenich's supply chain through digital initiatives, such as track-and-trace capabilities
- **Building a scalable technology platform:** Consolidating legacy technology to reduce complexity and operational costs, creating a more adaptable infrastructure for long-term growth

dsm-firmenich's leadership recognized that this shift required new tools, processes, structures, and talent to create a more connected, digital-driven enterprise supported by a unified technology platform. The framework is discussed in detail below.

“We started the program to break down these big waterfall projects into smaller products... The time lag between talking about requirements and implementing complex digital solutions was too long for our dynamic business environment.”

– Senior Director, Digital Supply Chain and Manufacturing, dsm-firmenich

Reinvent organizational design

Challenges faced

dsm-firmenich's previous structure was marked by silos, with independent business and IT teams that often struggled to align on priorities. This setup led to communication bottlenecks and delayed decision-making. The merger exacerbated these issues, as one side followed a traditional project-based model while the other implemented limited agile practices. These two different models presented challenges in developing a unified approach, especially as business units had varying objectives, such as cost reduction in some areas and growth in others.

The solution

dsm-firmenich adopted a platforms and products model, which consisted of:

- Differentiated platforms: Manufacturing, product, supply chain, customer, science and research
- Leveraged platforms: Transaction core, supply chain, employee, procurement, finance, enterprise services
- Data platforms
- Technology foundation platforms

This structure was inspired by the Spotify model, establishing cross-functional product squads and chapters that could tackle challenges within specific business domains. For instance, the supply chain platform was divided into squads dedicated to warehousing, distribution, and insights, each responsible for a key part of the supply chain.

dsm-firmenich made centralized decisions on shared solutions to avoid redundant technologies across business units, such as a unified supply chain planning tool. While this approach required more upfront alignment and slowed IT delivery, it reduced costs and created long-term efficiencies.

Key roles were introduced to ensure cross-functional integration, including:

- Business product owners: From the business side, providing domain expertise and aligning product goals with business needs, setting priorities, and ensuring the organization is ready to adopt the product
- IT product managers: From the digital team, managing delivery and fostering collaboration within product teams
- Platform leads, delivery leads, architects, and data leads: Ensuring technology coherence and data-driven decision-making across platforms

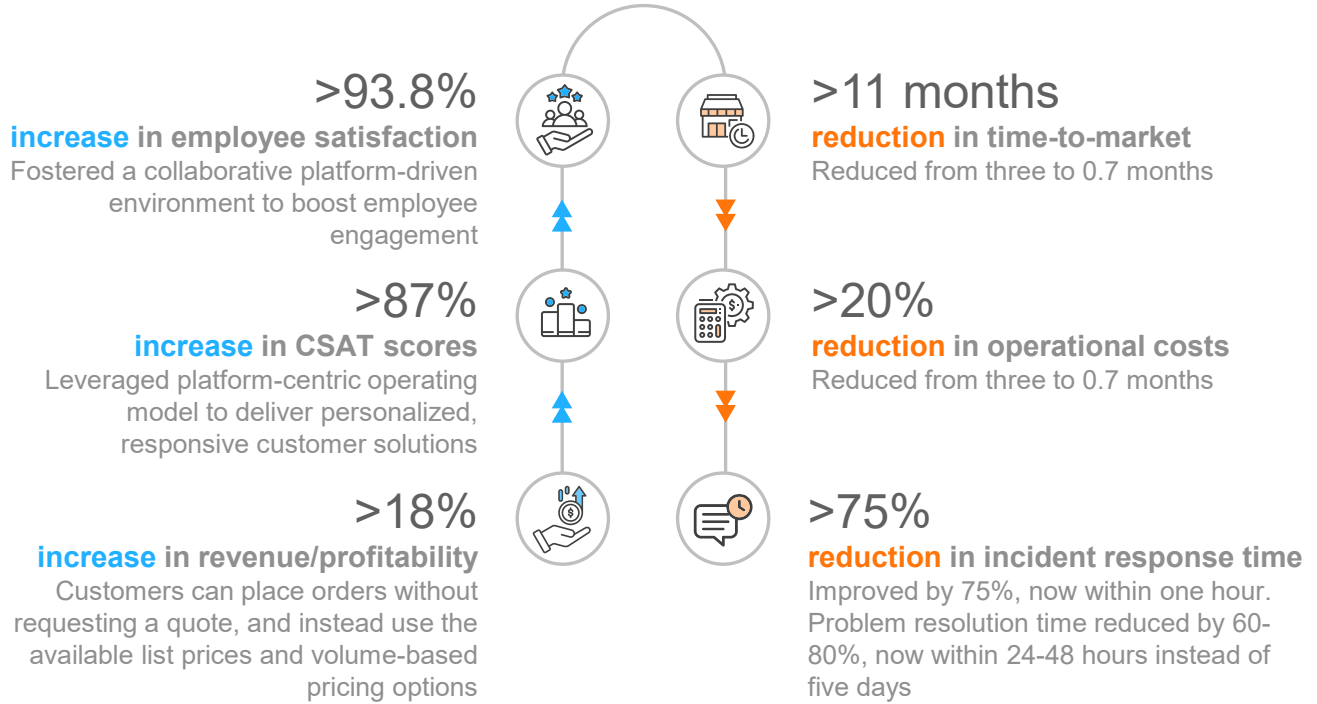
Outcomes achieved

Business value realization: Shifting focus to business metrics such as cost efficiency and time-to-hire helped ensure that IT efforts delivered measurable strategic value.

Improved customer alignment: Product teams structured around business capabilities allowed for better alignment with customer needs, enhancing responsiveness to market demands.

Exhibit 8: Outcomes achieved for one of the products across metrics

Source: Everest Group (2024)



Redefine processes

Challenges faced

dsm-firmenich's standard project-based model provided consistency for many types of work. Recognizing the pace of market changes, the company identified opportunities to introduce more flexible operating models to increase adaptability. Integrating new, more iterative workflows involved thoughtful consideration of how best to adapt processes within the organization's established consensus-driven culture.

The solution

dsm-firmenich adopted agile frameworks, shifting from waterfall-based project management to iterative product delivery. The firm maintained a dual-mode execution model: agile product teams handled shorter-term, value-focused initiatives, while large-scale, resource-intensive projects retained a refined project management structure.

Outcomes achieved

The process redesign led to enhanced alignment among dsm-firmenich's business units, enabling the company to prioritize market needs effectively. With security integrated into development workflows, the company experienced a reduction in compliance incidents, contributing to a more secure, resilient digital environment. Enhanced communication and transparency also helped foster buy-in from both business and IT teams, improving overall operational efficiency.

Reshape talent

Challenges faced

dsm-firmenich found talent gaps in its agile practices, cross-functional and domain skills, challenging its ability to execute the new model. Product management experience was limited, making it difficult for technical teams to fully align their work with business goals. Additionally, dsm-firmenich's IT staff required stronger business acumen to improve cross-functional collaboration and drive customer-centricity.

The solution

dsm-firmenich implemented a dual-track talent strategy combining specialized chapters for capability building and agile product teams for execution. Employees were grouped into chapters based on expertise and functional areas – such as manufacturing, supply chain, sales and marketing, finance, and procurement – where they could gain specialized training and advance their functional knowledge. Roughly 20% of each employee's time was dedicated to chapter-based development, while the remaining 80% was spent working in product teams that were aligned with specific business platforms. This model promoted cross-functional skill-building, allowing individuals to work effectively within agile teams and gain exposure to both business and technical requirements.

A structured development path was introduced, emphasizing T-shaped skills to foster cross-functional collaboration. dsm-firmenich promoted internal mobility, enabling employees to transition into roles within the business that better matched their skills and interests. For instance, senior IT leads who had gained business insights through their roles were encouraged to engage more directly with business functions, fostering a shared understanding.

Outcomes achieved

dsm-firmenich saw increased engagement among product-aligned teams, and IT staff gained a deeper understanding of the business context, which enhanced collaboration. The move toward cross-functional and domain roles also allowed the firm to deploy talent more flexibly across business units, improving adaptability and engagement across the board.

Reimagine core technology as a platform

Challenges faced

dsm-firmenich's legacy technology landscape was complex and fragmented due to past mergers and acquisitions, leading to high maintenance costs and inconsistent technology standards across business units. Legacy systems restricted the integration of emerging technologies and data-driven decision-making, creating operational inefficiencies. The merger further highlighted the need for standardization, as different technology approaches impeded integration efforts and complicated dsm-firmenich's transformation objectives.

The solution

The company restructured its technology infrastructure around a connected enterprise approach, consolidating its business units and adopting a cloud-first strategy. Three main technology platforms were established: the transactional core, technology foundation, and data, with other business-critical applications. This approach provided scalability while retaining necessary on-premises solutions for specific needs. To support remote collaboration, dsm-firmenich adopted tools such as Miro, Mural, and Microsoft Teams, enabling cross-functional teams to communicate effectively across geographies. Decision-making within technology architecture was centralized, with platform architects responsible to ensure alignment across platforms, reducing complexity, and enabling a scalable solution.

Outcomes achieved

Standardizing technology platforms reduced dsm-firmenich's operating costs and decreased technical debt, creating a more adaptable infrastructure. The unified platform improved security, with fewer incidents reported due to standardized security protocols. The firm also reported reduced redundancy, especially in the supply chain, where previously fragmented tools were consolidated.

“We are not moving the entire company to a product model; some initiatives still operate as projects when they have a clear start and end date. It is about using the right method for the situation while leveraging the governance of our platforms”.

– Senior Director, Digital Supply Chain and Manufacturing, dsm-firmenich

Everest Group take

Everest Group recognizes dsm-firmenich's use of differentiated platforms as a market-leading practice that fosters focused innovation and collaboration across key areas such as manufacturing and customer engagement. The combination of unified decision-making and targeted platform development places it in the best-practice category for balancing scalability and agility within a complex global organization.

The adoption of the Spotify model, that is, product squads and chapters, provided dsm-firmenich with a solid foundation for collaboration and adaptability. However, the company's consensus-driven culture highlighted the inherent challenges of transitioning to this model in a traditional organization and creating a balance between traditional and new methods. To further succeed, it must accelerate decision-making and refine agile governance practices, empowering teams with the autonomy needed to maintain momentum across diverse geographies.

As dsm-firmenich scales this model, balancing agility with operational efficiency will be essential. Its phased approach – initiating pilots within key business units – allowed it to manage resistance and collect early feedback, showcasing a best practice for gradual implementation in large-scale transformations. Continued leadership engagement, cultural alignment, and a focus on cross-functional skills will be crucial as dsm-firmenich continues to expand. Everest Group believes the firm's careful, data-driven strategy is a strong foundation, yet sustaining agility, continuous learning, and iterative improvement will be vital for it to fully realize the long-term benefits of this transformation.

Conclusion

This case study illustrates how enterprises in complex, regulated industries can navigate structural and cultural change, adopting models that drive innovation, flexibility, and sustained value delivery in a competitive environment. By focusing on organizational restructuring, process redefinition, talent reshaping, and technology modernization, dsm-firmenich was able to overcome key challenges and drive meaningful improvements in business agility, operational efficiency, and customer satisfaction.

The transformation not only enhanced the firm's ability to respond to market changes but also created a more collaborative and aligned internal culture, where business and IT work together to achieve shared goals. While the journey is ongoing, the foundational changes made through this transformation have set dsm-firmenich on a path toward long-term success in the digital age.

Looking ahead, dsm-firmenich's challenge will be to maintain the momentum of cultural change while scaling its product-aligned model across diverse geographies and market segments.



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