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ACCELERATE

**JOHN P. KOTTER**

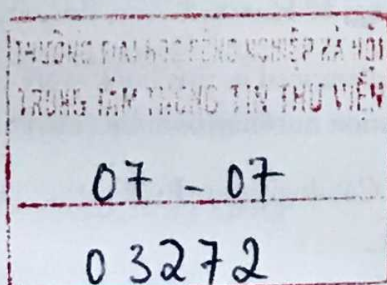
*Author of **Leading Change** and **A Sense of Urgency***

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JOHN P. KOTTER

# ACCELERATE

BUILDING STRATEGIC AGILITY FOR  
A FASTER-MOVING WORLD



GIFT OF THE ASIA FOUNDATION  
NOT FOR RE-SALE

QUÀ TẶNG CỦA QUỸ CHÂU Á  
KHÔNG ĐƯỢC BÁN LẠI

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## PREFACE

We are crossing a line into a territory with unpredictable turmoil and exponentially growing change—change for which we are not prepared. Here I describe what some pioneers have successfully done to win, and win big, in this emerging environment.

*Accelerate* is about how to handle strategic challenges fast enough, with agility and creativity, to take advantage of windows of opportunity which open and shut more quickly today. It shows how people in some leading, innovative organizations move ahead of fierce competition, deal with unprecedented turmoil, and cope with the constant threat of technological discontinuities—all without sacrificing short-term results or wearing out their workforces.

My conclusions as presented here are fundamental. The world is now changing at a rate at which the basic systems, structures, and cultures built over the past century cannot keep up with the demands being placed on them. Incremental adjustments to how you manage and strategize, no matter how clever, are not up to the job. You need something very new to stay ahead in an age of tumultuous change and growing uncertainties.



The solution is not to trash what we know and start over but instead to reintroduce, in an organic way, a second system—one which would be familiar to most successful entrepreneurs. The new system adds needed agility and speed while the old one, which keeps running, provides reliability and efficiency. The two together—a dual system—are actually very similar to what all mature organizations had at one point in their life cycles, yet did not sustain (and have long since forgotten). There is a practical way to create this dual operating system, and it can be done very inexpensively. Results come quickly. I have seen people do it. It works.

The origins of this project build on previous research I have done on large-scale change: work funded by the Harvard Business School, where I have been teaching for many decades. A report on that research was first published in my book *Leading Change* (1996) and extended with follow-up reports in *The Heart of Change* (2002), *Our Iceberg Is Melting* (2006), *A Sense of Urgency* (2008), and *Buy-in* (2010). That work, in turn, was built on my early examinations of leadership, which go all the way back to 1974, with perhaps the most important report on that subject published in 1990 as *A Force for Change: How Leadership Is Different from Management*. I am sometimes amazed at how robust the conclusions from these studies remain today—how they still speak



to us even though the world facing business leaders (and those in government, the nonprofit sector, and education) has changed so much. What I present in this book adds to my prior work. This is not a case in which new realities mean that old ideas are no longer valid. It is more a case of adding to previous conclusions in a way that takes us to some very big new ideas.

Up until this project, all of my past work, research now spanning many decades, has used the same formula. Find cases representing the highest 10% or 20% of performers. Observe what they do. Talk to people who have lived in those situations. Then do the same for the average performers and for the laggards. Look for patterns that show the differences. Report those patterns with an emphasis on factors that you can change—to take average performance to high or lagging results at least up to the norm.

With this project, for the first time in my career, I have tried a formula that is different in two fundamental ways. Here I begin by looking at people truly pushing the envelope. I mean only the top 1% or so—those who have achieved extraordinary successes through very new ways of operating. Then I watch as others (usually with the assistance of the Kotter International consulting group) try to replicate the very best, in their own way, in their own industries or organizations. This shift feels sort of like going from basic research



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in a pharmaceutical firm to basic research plus product development plus clinical trials.

*Accelerate* is for leaders willing and able to see the stark realities of today's business environment, to know that bold change is necessary, and to take the journey, to blaze the trail. I hope the stories here of early, successful pioneers will affirm your own decisions in this direction, give you the confidence to go further, and inspire much-needed additional action. There is no question in my mind that much more is required in order to build organizations that win today and will win again in the future. Much more is needed to build thriving economies that can help pull billions of people on this small planet up to a better, more prosperous place.

This effort has been formally funded by Kotter International, where I serve as the director of research and which helps pioneers do what I write about in this book. Informally, Harvard continues to be of great assistance, no longer through funding but most certainly through comments on drafts of books from executive students and faculty colleagues.

As always, many specific people share some credit for this work. They include, particularly, Dennis Goin and Randy Ottinger from Kotter International, and Amy Bernstein and Jeff Kehoe from Harvard Business Publishing.