

# Integrating 12E Framework with STARS Model for Improved Employee Engagement

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## Abstract:

This paper introduces the 12E Framework, developed by the author based on extensive real-world experience, insightful case studies, and interactions with industry leaders. The 12E Framework is then integrated with Michael Watkins' STARS Model to improve employee engagement and drive organizational success during critical transitions. The STARS Model outlines five organizational phases (Start-Up, Turnaround, Accelerated Growth, Realignment, and Sustaining Success), each with distinct challenges. The 12E Framework provides a structured approach to navigate these phases effectively by focusing on strategic elements like Envision, Enable, Engage, and Evolve. Case studies from Airbnb, Ford, Google, Microsoft, and Unilever demonstrate the framework's ability to enhance organizational agility, improve employee satisfaction, and drive long-term success. Future research should focus on quantifying the impact of the 12E Framework across various industries.

**Keywords — STARS model, employee experience, organizational transitions, leadership transitions, workplace culture, engagement strategies**

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Organizational transitions whether during a start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, or sustaining success phase present significant challenges for leaders and employees. Disengaged employees cost companies an estimated \$450-\$550 billion annually in lost productivity (Gallup, 2024), highlighting the critical need for effective transition management.

This paper addresses this need by introducing the 12E Framework, a practical tool developed by the author through extensive experience guiding organizations through various stages of growth and change. The 12E Framework builds on the well-established STARS Model (Watkins, 2013), which categorizes organizations into five distinct phases, each requiring tailored strategies. Unlike existing literature that often treats employee engagement and organizational transitions as separate concerns, this paper proposes a comprehensive approach by integrating the 12E Framework with the STARS Model.

This integration provides leaders with a structured roadmap to align leadership strategies with employee engagement principles, fostering a supportive and productive work environment throughout all phases of the STARS model.

## II. STARS MODEL

The STARS Model outlines five key organizational scenarios, each presenting its own unique challenges and opportunities (Watkins, 2013).

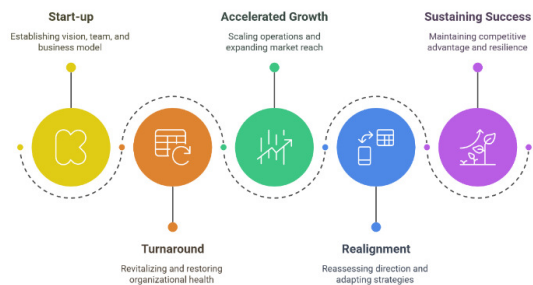


Figure 1: STARS Model Illustration

**Start-Up:** In this phase, organizations focus on establishing a viable business model and gaining market traction. The priority is building a strong foundation while fostering innovation, though ambiguity often challenges employees' experience (Salamzadeh & Kawamorita Kesim, 2015). For example, employees might feel uncertain about their roles or the company's long-term prospects. Start-ups with strong employee engagement are 2.3 times more likely to achieve rapid revenue growth compared to those with low engagement (Harvard Business Review, 2022)

**Turnaround:** Organizations facing financial instability must restructure, cut costs, and redefine their strategy. Employees may experience stress, but the renewed sense of purpose can help drive engagement (Harvard Business School, 2021). Leaders must communicate transparently and involve employees in the turnaround process to build trust and commitment.

**Accelerated Growth:** During periods of rapid expansion, leaders must scale operations, optimize processes, and manage increased workloads. This phase offers rapid career advancement but can lead to employee burnout (Bock, 2015). Companies need to invest in training and development programs to equip employees with the skills they need to handle the increased demands.

**Realignment:** Organizations must adapt their strategies due to shifts in market conditions or internal inefficiencies. Realignment often requires cultural change, which can challenge employees' alignment with organizational goals (Nadella, 2017). Leaders must foster open communication and collaboration to ensure that employees understand the need for change and are committed to the new direction.

**Sustaining Success:** Maintaining market leadership requires continuous improvement, innovation, and a focus on employee engagement to avoid stagnation (Unilever, 2022). Companies need to create a culture of learning and development to encourage employees to continuously improve their skills and knowledge.

### III. 12E FRAMEWORK

The 12E Framework was developed over 15 years through the author's experience as a director, advisor, and consultant. Observing patterns in successful organizational transitions and high-performing teams, twelve key elements emerged as critical drivers of employee engagement and overall success.

These elements, organized under the acronym '12E,' represent a holistic approach to aligning leadership strategies with employee needs, ultimately leading to improved organizational agility, employee satisfaction, and long-term sustainability.



Figure 2: 12 E Classification

1. **Envision:** A clear vision and strategic direction help guide employees, ensuring alignment with the organization's goals (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001). Leaders must articulate the vision in a compelling way and communicate it frequently to all employees.
2. **Environment:** A collaborative, psychologically safe workplace fosters higher commitment and productivity (Shenoy & Uchil, 2018). Leaders must create a culture where employees feel safe to take risks and share their ideas.
3. **Enable:** Equipping employees with the necessary resources and training ensures efficiency and confidence (Malik et al., 2021). Companies should invest in training and

development programs to equip employees with the skills they need to succeed.

4. Execute: Effective execution of strategic plans leads to tangible results, fostering organizational success (Sivathanu, 2019). Leaders must ensure that employees have the resources and support they need to execute the plans effectively.
5. Empower: Empowering employees with autonomy drive innovation and engagement (Harvard Business School, 2021). Leaders should delegate decision-making authority to employees and give them the freedom to take ownership of their work.
6. Engage: A culture of recognition and communication enhances employee retention (Plaskoff, 2017). Companies should recognize and reward employees for their contributions and provide regular feedback.
7. Encourage: Professional development initiatives motivate employees and support long-term performance (Tucker, 2020). Leaders should encourage employees to pursue professional development opportunities and provide them with the resources they need to grow.
8. Enumerate: Data-driven decision-making ensures transparency and accountability (Sivathanu, 2019). Companies should use data to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions.
9. Embed: Reinforcing organizational values through policies and leadership behaviours strengthens culture (Schein, 2010). Leaders must model the company's values and ensure that they are reflected in all policies and practices.
10. Evolve: Adapting to industry trends and technological advancements sustains a competitive advantage (Harvard Business Review, 2020). Companies should

continuously scan the environment for new trends and technologies and adapt their strategies accordingly.

11. Empathy: Leaders who prioritize employee well-being foster inclusive and supportive workplaces (Ahire & Sinha, 2022). Leaders must demonstrate empathy for their employees and create a culture where everyone feels valued and respected.
12. Experience: A positive employee experience is strongly linked to business performance and engagement (Plaskoff, 2017). Companies should focus on creating a positive employee experience by providing opportunities for growth, development, and recognition.

#### IV. 12E FRAMEWORK APPLIED TO STARS MODEL

Each phase of the STARS Model requires a tailored application of the 12E principles.

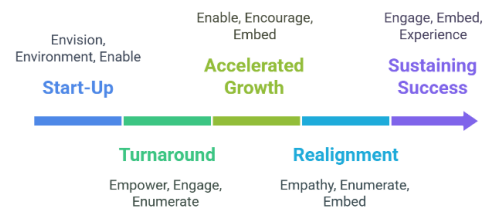


Figure 3: 12 E Framework Integration with STARS Model

**Start-Up:** In this phase, the focus is on Envision, Environment, and Enable, as organizations must establish a clear vision, create a supportive environment, and equip employees with the tools they need to succeed. For example, leaders should involve employees in the process of developing the company's mission statement and values to foster a sense of shared purpose. They should also create a culture where employees feel safe to take risks and share their ideas. To enable success, companies should invest in training and development programs to equip employees with the skills they need to perform their jobs effectively.

**Turnaround:** Leaders should focus on Empower, Engage, and Enumerate, using data-driven decision-making and employee empowerment to rebuild trust and stabilize the organization. For example, leaders can empower employees by delegating decision-making authority to them and giving them the freedom to take ownership of their work. To engage employees, companies can provide opportunities for them to participate in the turnaround process and share their ideas. To enumerate, companies can use data to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions. Companies that prioritize employee empowerment (Empower) during turnarounds are 1.7 times more likely to successfully restructure and regain profitability (SHRM, 2023).

**Accelerated Growth:** The focus shifts to Enable, Encourage, and Embed, ensuring that leadership capacity and innovation are sustained through robust systems and an adaptable culture. To enable, companies can invest in training and development programs to equip employees with the skills they need to handle the increased demands of rapid growth. To encourage, leaders can provide opportunities for employees to pursue professional development and grow their careers. To embed, companies can reinforce their core values through policies and practices that support innovation and adaptability.

**Realignment:** Empathy, Enumerate, and Embed are crucial in realignment, as organizations must understand employee needs, measure performance, and reinforce core values to maintain alignment. For example, leaders can demonstrate empathy by listening to employee concerns and addressing their needs. To enumerate, companies can use data to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions. To embed, companies can reinforce their core values through policies and practices that support the realignment process.

**Sustaining Success:** To maintain success, organizations must focus on Engage, Embed, and Experience, continuously improving employee engagement, reinforcing culture, and innovating to stay competitive. To engage, companies can provide opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making and share their ideas. To embed,

companies can reinforce their core values through policies and practices that support innovation and continuous improvement. To improve the employee experience, companies can provide opportunities for growth, development, and recognition.

## V. CASE STUDIES

Here are five real-world case studies that support the 12E Framework for the STARS Model, demonstrating how companies successfully applied different Es at various business stages.

TABLE I  
REAL TIME EXAMPLES

No	Company	Stage	Applied 12E	Impact
1	Airbnb (Chesky, 2020; Lee, 2020; O'Neill, 2020)	Start-Up	Envision, Environment Enable, Execute	Established trust with hosts and guests, scaled operations, and disrupted the hospitality industry.
2	Ford Motor (Ford Motor Company, 2006; Vella, 2010)	Turnaround	Empower, Engage, Enumerate, Execute	Achieved financial stability, improved product quality, and restored brand credibility.
3	Google (Bock, 2015; Eagle, 2019)	Accelerated Growth	Enable, Encourage, Embed, Evolve	Sustained innovation, retained top talent, and scaled operations effectively.
4	Microsoft (Nadella, 2017; Microsoft, 2022)	Realignment	Empathy, Enumerate, Embed, Experience	Revitalized company culture, regained market leadership, and improved employee engagement.
5	Unilever (Polman, 2018; Unilever, 2022)	Sustaining Success	Engage, Embed, Experience, Evolve	Strengthened ESG initiatives, enhanced employee well-being, and maintained long-term profitability.



Across these five companies, several key themes emerge:

- Empowerment and engagement drive successful turnarounds (e.g., Ford and Microsoft).
- Embedding strong values and culture enhances resilience during transitions (e.g., Airbnb and Unilever).
- Enablement and encouragement sustain innovation and competitive advantage (e.g., Google and Microsoft).
- Organizations that evolve and enumerate strategies remain industry leaders (e.g., all five case studies).

While the case studies presented offer valuable insights into the application of the 12E Framework within the STARS Model, it's important to acknowledge their limitations. The selection of Airbnb, Ford, Google, Microsoft, and Unilever, while representing diverse industries and organizational phases, may not fully capture the complexities and nuances of all business contexts.

Additionally, the data available for these case studies is primarily based on publicly available information, which may not provide a comprehensive or entirely accurate picture of the internal dynamics and decision-making processes within these organizations. Furthermore, the success of these companies may be attributed to a multitude of factors beyond the application of the 12E Framework, making it challenging to isolate the specific impact of the framework on their overall performance.

## **VI. PERSONAL INFERENCES**

Throughout my career, spanning roles as a director, advisor, and consultant, I've had the unique opportunity to implement and analyse the STARS Model and the 12E Framework across diverse organizational landscapes. These experiences have solidified my understanding of the vital role structured transitions play in a company's journey and underscored the critical need to align corporate strategies with both employee engagement and sound governance principles.

In leadership positions, the STARS Model served as an invaluable guide, enabling me to navigate organizations through various stages, from nascent startups to complex turnaround scenarios and periods of high-octane growth. I consistently observed that the ability to envision and communicate a clear strategic direction was paramount in uniting teams under a shared purpose. Embedding core company values early on proved essential for sustaining a cohesive corporate culture throughout periods of change. Moreover, empowering employees to take ownership fostered accountability and unleashed innovation, particularly during phases of accelerated expansion.

Serving in an advisory capacity, I witnessed firsthand how organizations often grapple with the challenges of realignment and sustaining long-term success. It was here that the 12E Framework revealed its true power. Embracing empathy in leadership facilitated smoother transitions within organizations undergoing cultural or structural shifts, fostering an environment where employees felt heard and valued. Diligently enumerating key performance metrics enabled businesses to not only gauge the effectiveness of engagement initiatives but also fine-tune strategies based on data-driven insights. And perhaps most crucially, encouraging a mindset of continuous learning and adaptation instilled a sense of resilience, enabling organizations to thrive even in the face of dynamic and unpredictable market forces.

As a consultant working across diverse industries, I've applied both frameworks to craft tailored solutions that drive both improved business performance and enhanced employee engagement. A key lesson has been the power of well-defined action plans in ensuring alignment between corporate goals and employee expectations, creating a shared understanding of objectives and responsibilities. By embracing data-driven strategies that promote evolution and adaptation, companies are equipped to maintain a competitive edge in their respective industries. Furthermore, proactively engaging stakeholders from the outset significantly increases the likelihood of success in complex transformation projects. In essence, my

journey has reinforced the conviction that a holistic, people-centric approach to organizational transitions is not just a "nice-to-have," but a fundamental driver of sustainable success.

## **VII. RECOMMENDATION**

I offer the following recommendations, drawn from my experiences, to guide organizations toward greater success. To organizational leaders, I emphasize the importance of embracing both the STARS Model and the 12E Framework as complementary tools to understand the specific challenges of each organizational phase and to implement targeted engagement strategies.

A clear and compelling vision, especially in the startup phase, is crucial for aligning and motivating employees, and actively empowering employees during turnaround efforts can foster a sense of ownership and drive positive change. As organizations navigate accelerated growth, prioritizing employee training and development and cultivating a positive employee experience are essential for sustaining long-term success.

For human resource professionals, I recommend developing targeted engagement programs that are specifically tailored to each STARS phase and championing a culture of psychological safety where employees feel valued and respected. Regularly measuring and tracking engagement metrics is also crucial for assessing the effectiveness of engagement initiatives.

To consultants and advisors, I advise leveraging the integrated STARS Model and 12E Framework to provide clients with a comprehensive approach to managing employee engagement during business transitions. Tailoring solutions to specific organizational contexts and utilizing data-driven insights are key to driving meaningful results.

Finally, for aspiring researchers, I encourage future studies to focus on conducting quantitative studies to measure the impact of the 12E Framework on employee engagement and organizational performance across diverse industries and to investigate the role of leadership

in driving engagement during business transitions. By embracing these recommendations, organizations can create a more engaged, productive, and resilient workforce that is well-equipped to navigate the challenges and opportunities of business transitions.

## **VIII. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Future research on the 12E Framework and its relevance to the STARS Model can explore its application across diverse industries and organizational structures. A deeper analysis of how each "E" influences business transitions ranging from startups to sustaining success can provide valuable insights for leaders and policymakers.

Empirical studies measuring the impact of 12E-driven interventions on employee engagement, organizational performance, and long-term business sustainability would further validate its effectiveness. Additionally, integrating technology, digital transformation, and ESG considerations into the framework could enhance its adaptability in evolving corporate landscapes.

Future research should conduct a longitudinal study to measure the impact of 12E-driven interventions on employee engagement, organizational performance, and long-term business sustainability.

## **IX. CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates the value of integrating the 12E Framework with the STARS Model to enhance employee engagement and organizational effectiveness during business transitions. The case studies of Airbnb, Ford, Google, Microsoft, and Unilever illustrate the practical application of the framework, highlighting improvements in agility, employee satisfaction, and long-term success. Future research should focus on developing quantitative assessments and exploring industry-specific applications to further validate the framework's impact. By adopting this integrated approach, organizations can navigate transitions more effectively, maintain high levels of employee engagement, and achieve sustainable success.

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