

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE IN AFRICAN COMPANIES

**AN UNTAPPED
DRIVER OF
DISRUPTION**

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FOREWORD

At a time when the business landscape around the world is undergoing considerable upheaval with the arrival in force of major players from countries that, until recently, were considered « *under-developed* » or « *developing* » **(including India and China)**, at a time when companies that have successfully implemented transformations to achieve unprecedented levels of efficiency and performance are being recognized as benchmarks from North America **(ex : the GAFAM)**, from Asia **(ex : BYD, Samsung)** or from Europe **(ex : Total Energies, CMA CGM)**, at a time when the world is experiencing an unprecedented acceleration in technology, accompanied by a democratization of technology that is making it more accessible than ever before **(ex : So-called generative artificial intelligence)**, African companies can, and should, legitimately ask themselves this fundamental question: And us in all this?

For African companies, the question is therefore whether they, too, are able to participate in and contribute to these major advances **(or even define new ones)**, and whether they are able to fully capture the benefits of these multiple developments. and how to do it, if necessary.

In this study, FinAfrique Partners and Dyese explore these questions through the particular prism of operational excellence, which appears as one of the essential levers to achieve such transformations.

For the authors, this involves:

1. Propose a practical, actionable analytical framework tailored to African realities,
2. To assess the state of operational excellence in African companies, based on a large-scale survey conducted in several Sub-Saharan African countries,
3. Formulate practical recommendations to improve this assessment.



NATION

GOAL

PART



SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION: THE SILENT REVOLUTION OF BUSINESS PROCESSES

The African economy is going through a period of profound transformation, marked by the emergence of new players, the intensification of international competition and the acceleration of technological changes.

Between 2020 and 2025, despite the global crises and upheavals related to the COVID-19 pandemic, continental GDP growth remained positive, driven by the emergence of an urban middle class, the digital boom, and gradual integration into the global economy.

The health crisis has paradoxically accelerated the continent's digitalization: development of remote work, boom in e-commerce, massive acceleration of mobile money and online services. This sometimes-forced digital revolution has revealed both the shortcomings of existing infrastructure and the extraordinary adaptability of African businesses.

But one thing is clear: the race for geographical expansion, which has long been the engine of growth for African companies, has reached its limits. It is accompanied by rising costs, increasing complexity and high operational risk.

In this new context of opportunities and challenges, African companies face an imperative: rethink their organizations and how they operate to remain competitive.

Operational excellence is no longer a luxury reserved for Western multinationals; today, it is a major driver of competitiveness and resilience for African companies seeking to break into new markets, improve their profitability, and attract talent and investors. However, this transformation cannot be achieved simply by copying Western models. It must be adapted to African realities: developing infrastructure, cultural diversity, the coexistence of the formal and informal sectors, evolving regulations, and more. To unlock its full potential!

HOW SHOULD AFRICAN COMPANIES APPROACH OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE? THE NEED FOR A WELL-DEFINED FRAMEWORK

Like any human organization, companies can experience operating dynamics as varied as regression, stagnation, progression, or even excellence for some. These dynamics are not the result of chance, but rather the consequences **(or benefits)** of decisions, organizations, and practices that are disseminated throughout companies to produce these results.

Operational excellence refers to a company's operating method that ensures the sustainable maximization of performance in terms of multiple criteria such as effectiveness, efficiency, productivity, quality, and innovation.

It is, so to speak, a stage of organization and operation in which the company is able to unlock higher levels of performance, sometimes unsuspected or even perceived as inaccessible.

For a company with ambitions, for a company evolving in an environment of high stakes or in an environment of strong competition, operational excellence is a positive way to respond, much better than its peers, to customer expectations, shareholders, employees, and even society in general.

The challenge for African companies is therefore to be able to assert themselves, in Africa and elsewhere, as leaders in their fields, to be able to develop new fruitful paradigms capitalizing on the African context and its many riches.

Let's say this right from the start: operational excellence is possible only if it is defined within a specific, clearly articulated framework and only if it is part of a proactive approach.

In order to make this framework operational and ensure its chances of success, its definition must inevitably take into account the specific characteristics of the contexts in which it will be implemented. In this regard, the African context is characterized by numerous specific features and constraints, whether cultural—such as the importance of the written word—relationships with hierarchy or the established order; in terms of infrastructure, such as the general level of equipment or access to energy; in terms of demographics, with a very broad-based age pyramid; or in terms of capacity, including the issue of skills **(particularly skill development)** and expertise—to name just a few of these dimensions.

In this African context, we have identified five core pillars **(see Figure 1)** upon which African companies can reasonably assess and base their strategy for operational excellence.

Illustrative & not exhaustive

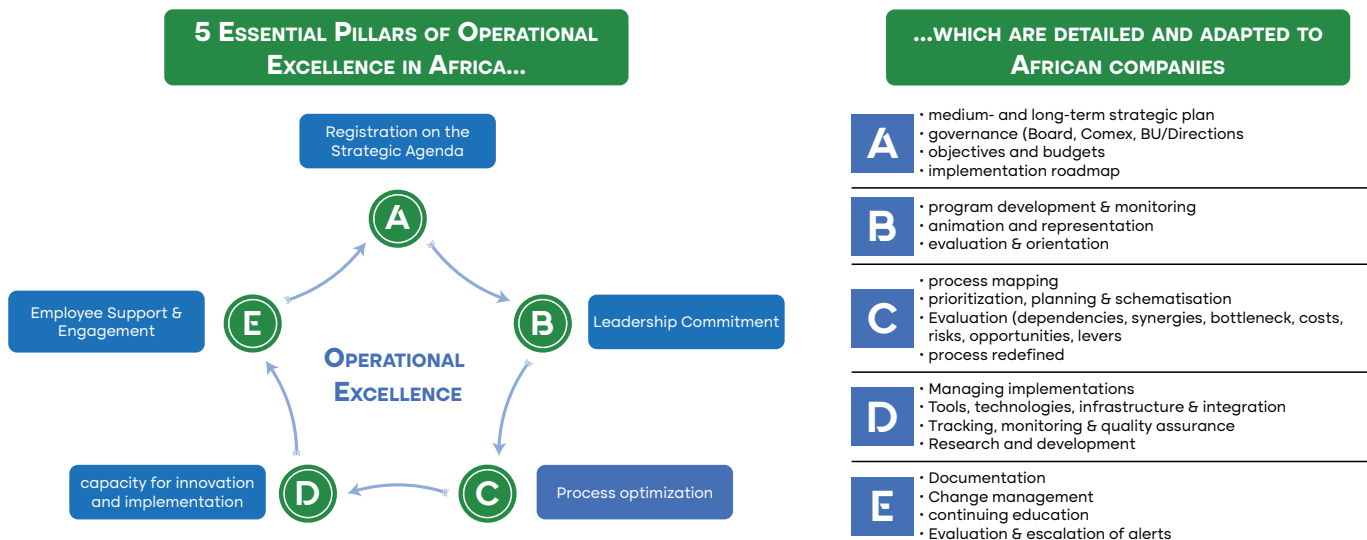


Figure 1 : Pillars of operational excellence in Africa

These 5 pillars that can structure an operational excellence approach tailored to the continent's companies are structured as follows.

Illustrative & not exhaustive

DES QUESTIONS PRÉCISES À ADRESSER POUR CHAQUE PILIER	
A	• Is operational excellence included in the strategic plan? If so, in what form? If not, why? • What governance is defined to drive its implementation (authority, reporting manager, escalation process) • What are the objectives and budgets allocated to operational excellence? Were they defined in rigorous ways? • What is the implementation roadmap?
B	• Is there a program dedicated to implementing operational excellence? Who is responsible for it, if applicable? What is the status of the program? • What actions are being taken to ensure progress in implementation? • What is the performance of the programs? Do they receive guidance to carry out their mission?
C	• Does the company have a formalized and updated catalog of its processes with clear classifications and hierarchies? • Are the processes subject to a detailed review to identify opportunities for optimization? Which stakeholders are involved? • Is the potential for process optimization objectively assessed, and is it formally planned and validated by the appropriate authorities in preparation for its implementation? • Are processes being redefined to enable them to reach their full potential for optimization?
D	• Which operational units are responsible for implementing the optimized processes? How does the implementation of these processes fit into their overall workload plan? • What tools, data, methods, technologies, and infrastructure are involved in implementing optimized processes? • What impacts does the implementation of process optimization have on standard operational conduct? Are these impacts under control? • What internal and external mechanisms are in place to produce innovations that could improve the conduct of operations, the resilience of operations, their performance, efficiency or impact
E	• Is process management (definition, evaluation, optimization) the subject of documentation accessible to employees? • What is the degree of employee participation in process management? • Does the implementation of optimized processes integrate the level of maturity of the various stakeholders concerned with respect to what about your process? If yes, in what way? • What specific employee support programs are implemented regarding optimized processes

Figure 2 : Questions to Address for Each Pillar

These questions are just a glimpse of a more comprehensive assessment framework that can help companies evaluate their level of maturity with regard to operational excellence.

But this diagnosis is often only the first step: to capture the expected benefits, this step must be followed by a holistic action plan that allows for the harmonious integration of these 5 pillars in the transformation process towards operational excellence.

I A FIELD STUDY AT THE HEART OF ENTREPRENEURIAL REALITIES

Our study is the result of a thorough investigation, conducted with business leaders in seven countries of French-speaking Africa: Cameroon, Gabon, Côte d'Ivoire, Congo, Senegal, Togo and Mauritania. For several months, we met with various executive leaders – *CEO, COO, HR Director, and CFO* – representing a variety of sectors (**banking, distribution, agri-food, energy, services, industry...**) and companies of different sizes. In total, about fifty African decision-makers contributed to this initiative.

Our objective was twofold: to understand the specific challenges African companies face in achieving operational excellence, and to identify the most relevant and feasible drivers of transformation within the local context. Rather than relying on theoretical approaches, we adopted a pragmatic approach grounded in the realities on the ground.

The testimonials collected reveal a mixed picture. On the one hand, there are companies that are aware of the challenges of modernization and have considerable growth potential. On the other hand, there are organizations facing specific constraints—power outages, unreliable connectivity, and a shortage of technical skills—that complicate their transformation.

However, far from being an obstacle, these unique characteristics can become factors that set them apart.

African companies that successfully navigate their transformation will develop a unique agility and resilience—valuable assets in an increasingly volatile economic world

The Key Objectives and Strategic Challenges of Operational Excellence for African Companies

For African companies, operational excellence is part of a comprehensive organizational transformation process that addresses three key imperatives :

- ◆ **Economic Competitiveness:** Faced with market liberalization and the arrival of new competitors, African companies must improve their operational efficiency to maintain or enhance their competitive position.
- ◆ **Regulatory Compliance:** Rapidly evolving legislative frameworks, particularly in the financial and industrial sectors, require robust and traceable processes.
- ◆ **Sustainability and Responsibility:** The integration of ESG (**Environmental, Social, and Governance**) criteria is becoming a key differentiator and a growing requirement from stakeholders.

An assessment that highlights the scale of the challenge and the urgency with which leaders must address it

Inclusion in the Strategic Agenda

89% of African executives surveyed identify operational excellence as a strategic priority for the next three years. However, this priority is not always explicitly formalized in medium- to long-term strategic plans. More often than not, this priority is not linked to quantified objectives or specific roadmaps. Thus, 67% of African executives express a need for support in translating this vision of priorities into concrete actions tailored to local realities.

This focus on operational excellence is a response to multifaceted pressures facing African companies—pressures to which a lack of an adequate response is perceived as a barrier to business growth and which center primarily on the following points:

- ◆ Pressure from customers, which is exerted in particular on:
 - ◆ **Time reduction:** In the banking sector, the manufacturing infrastructure sector, and the service sector, a 40-90% reduction in critical lead times is needed to meet customer expectations.
 - ◆ **Improving service quality:** Despite average waiting times of 2 to 6 days before a response from customer services, the majority of companies complain about a lack of effective systems for customer segmentation and feedback;
- ◆ Internal pressure that results in particular in:
 - ◆ A hyper-centralization on the leader who, in fact, are sometimes led to exhaust themselves in operational tasks at the expense of their strategic role
 - ◆ A multiplication of validation steps that unnecessarily lengthen operations
 - ◆ An overabundance of redundant manual operations that consumes 30 to 40% of working time, leading to high error rates in the absence of a viable automation solution
 - ◆ A never-ending hunt for costs and additional costs, which can reach 5% of revenue;
- ◆ A pressure from the normative environment that is visible in particular through:
 - ◆ The inflation of standards and regulatory requirements: In some sectors, up to ten new regulatory provisions are required each year.
 - ◆ The continued need to strengthen internal control: cases of internal fraud are not uncommon for companies. With less than 3% of the IT budget dedicated to cybersecurity (**vs 8-12% recommended**), African companies present major levels of vulnerability in the context of accelerated digitalization.
 - ◆ The need to take ESG criteria into account: Less than a third of African companies surveyed have formalized their ESG approach.

Leadership Commitment

Although the issue of operational excellence is a strategic concern for business leaders in Africa, these leaders often find themselves at a loss as to the approach they should take to successfully carry out this type of transformation within their organizations:

- ◆ The vast majority of the companies surveyed do not have specific roadmaps for operational excellence or associated transformation programs
- ◆ For most of the organizations surveyed, the assessment of their operational excellence status is not rigorously and quantifiably formalized.

This gap between strategic intent and the ability to execute highlights a major methodological challenge: leaders know what to do but struggle to define how to do it.

Process Optimization

The lack of a clear strategic articulation of the operational excellence trajectory is a considerable obstacle in carrying out this transformation, particularly with regard to the first building block of optimization: Between 60% and 70% of the organizations surveyed do not have a formalized mapping of their processes (**including the most critical ones**). In other words, this means that the majority of African companies are not able to have an end-to-end, comprehensive and objectifiable view of the costs, risks, and also opportunities that are present in their existing operational model. In the absence of such a fundamental building block, any optimization effort is structurally limited.

This structuring deficit is concretely reflected in 30 to 40% of working time devoted to redundant manual tasks, an operational error rate that can reach 10 to 12%, and additional costs estimated at 5 to 8% of revenue.

In other words, the challenge is not the absence of ideas, but the lack of a structure to bring them to life. Where African companies excel in responsiveness and agility, they are still struggling to build the sustainable

foundations of a controlled transformation.

Innovation & Implementation Capabilities

Access to technology has become widely available in recent years. This trend continues to strengthen, especially in the digital field, so that African companies now have, at least in theory, African companies can implement the most recent advances, like their Western or Asian counterparts.

The reality, however, is that many African companies are unaware of existing opportunities that could be applied to their own operations. Indeed, most companies do not have an internal structure that ensures technology monitoring applicable to the operation of the company.

The 2023 State of Tech in Africa report highlights that major African groups still use very little «*open innovation*» approaches. Collaborations between African companies and African technology start-ups remain weak or non-existent, even though these start-ups are often well versed in modern methods of innovation or operation. **(Intelligent Automation, Artificial Intelligence, Agile Method, etc.)** and are looking for application scopes in their close environment.

Research and development activities are very limited within African companies, even though American, European, or Asian companies invest heavily in them **(more than 500 billion USD for American companies in 2022, more than 220 billion USD for Chinese companies over the same period¹)**

Employee support and engagement

Nearly 80% of African executives surveyed readily acknowledge that their companies have significant shortcomings in supporting employees, both in terms of change management and training. Several factors may explain these situations, including.

The lack of a multi-year training plan for various staff members:

- ◆ The lack of adequate infrastructure to conduct training **(including distance learning)**,
- ◆ Unfavorable resource allocation decisions,
- ◆ The cost of external training programs leading to certification, with few high-quality local alternatives,
- ◆ The difficulty of freeing up employees for companies facing staff shortages,
- ◆ High turnover among qualified staff, which discourages investment in training,
- ◆ The perception of training as a "cost" rather than a strategic investment.

This situation creates a vicious circle: The lack of skills hinders transformation, while the absence of transformation prevents skills from rising. Only a proactive human capital investment strategy can break this cycle and anchor operational excellence.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS IN SUMMARY

For a successful transformation towards operational excellence, African companies must act on 3 levers:

1. **Adopt a structured, holistic, and sequential approach:** Moving from diagnosis to transformation, then to sustainability, is the structuring path to ensure long-term performance. This «*Decrypt - Transform - Sustain*» approach helps minimize risks and maximize adoption by teams.
2. **Prioritize hybrid solutions:** In the African context, purely digital solutions, which are often imported, are not always suitable because they are not sufficiently calibrated to take into account African realities. The hybrid approach, combining digital and optimized traditional methods, offers better resilience and wider adoption.
3. **Investing in human capital:** The simple consumption of imported technologies is not enough, African genius must also be able to express itself through the design and generation of technologies adapted to the needs of the continent's companies. For this, it is crucial that African companies foster research and development environments by building on local and internal strengths.

¹ <https://www.wipo.int/fr/web/global-innovation-index/w/blogs/2024/r-and-d-spenders>

CONCLUSION

Operational excellence represents a major strategic opportunity for African companies, going far beyond a simple quest to reduce costs. It is a fundamental driver of competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience in a rapidly changing economic environment.

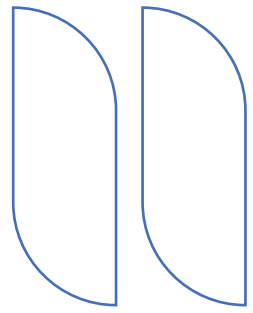
To achieve this, the key success factors identified are:

- ◆ Adopting a gradual and pragmatic approach to transformation for organizations that must maintain their operations while undergoing change.
- ◆ Strong involvement from senior management and operational teams to ensure buy-in and the sustainability of the changes.
- ◆ Adapting solutions to the specific characteristics of the African context, which is an essential prerequisite. This adaptation does not mean lowering standards but rather understanding local constraints and turning them into competitive advantages.
- ◆ Investing in training and skills development to address the shortage of qualified human capital.
- ◆ Integrating sustainability considerations from the very outset of process design to transform environmental and social constraints into drivers of economic performance.

Operational excellence is no longer an option but a necessity for African companies that wish to thrive in tomorrow's economy. The economic landscape, while varying from country to country, offers real opportunities: according to projections by the African Development Bank and the IMF, Africa is expected to maintain a growth rate of 4.2% in 2025, which is higher than the global average. Technologies are accessible, skills are developing, and several national markets are showing encouraging signs.

Today, business leaders have the opportunity to position their companies as key players in Africa's economic transformation. Those who seize this opportunity will actively help shape the future of the continent's economic development.

PART



DETAILED STUDY



SUMMARY

CONTEXTE

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PERFORMANCE ART IN AFRICA	17
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CURRENT SITUATION

A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES	19
Current Processes and Points of Friction	19
Malfunctions identified	20
Key performance factors to be strengthened	21
Specific Characteristics of the African Context: Constraints as Drivers	24

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

DECRYPTING - TRANSFORMING - SUSTAINING	27
Phase 1 : Decrypting - Diagnosis and in-depth analysis	27
Phase 2 : Transform - From Ambition to Achievement	30
Phase 3 : Sustainability - Embedding and Continuous Improvement	37

CONCLUSION

Summary of lessons	41
Recommendations for a successful transformation	41
Career prospects and opportunities	41
Call to action	42

ANNEX

SELECTIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY	43
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The purpose of this section is to present in detail the data and analyses that support the conclusions made in the synthesis.

We describe our methodology, the specific dysfunctions observed in the field, and the contextual specificities that shape the operational reality of African companies.

GLOSSAIRE

As-Is : Current status of the process as it actually operates

Should-Be : Target state of the process after optimization

Benchmark : Comparison of Practices and Performance with Industry Benchmarks

BCEAO : Central Bank of West African States (**financial regulator for the WAEMU region**)

CEMAC : Central African Economic and Monetary Community

ESG : Environment, Social, Governance (**sustainability criteria**)

ERP : Enterprise Resource Planning (**integrated management system**)

KPI : Key Performance Indicator (**key performance indicator**)

Lean Management : A work organization method aimed at eliminating waste and improving efficiency

NPS : Net Promoter Score (**Customer Satisfaction/Loyalty Indicator**)

OHADA : Organization, Harmonization, Business Law, Africa

PAPSS : Pan-African Payment and Settlement System

PCA : Business Continuity Plan

PDCA : Plan-Do-Check-Act (**4-Step Continuous Improvement Cycle**)

Process Owner : End-to-end process manager

Quick wins : Actions improvement quick impact, limited effort

RACI : Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed (**responsibilities matrix**)

ROI : Return On Investment

RPA : Robotic Process Automation

RSE : Responsabilité Sociétale Entreprise

SLA : Service Level Agreement (**Commitment to Service, Timelines, and Quality**)

Six Sigma : Methodology for Defect Reduction and Quality Improvement

Time to Yes : Processing/approval time for requests (**particularly bank loans**)

WAEMU : West African Economic and Monetary Union

ZLECAF : African Continental Free Trade Area

STUDY DESIGN AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study is organized around four complementary areas:

- ◆ *"The Context"* outlines the contemporary challenges facing African companies and defines the goals for modernization in a changing competitive environment.
- ◆ *The Current Status* provides a detailed analysis of current practices, identified shortcomings, and the specific characteristics of the African context, supplemented by testimonials and data collected during interviews.
- ◆ *The Strategic Recommendations* propose a three-phase methodology: Analyze, Transform, Sustain—with practical tools and approaches tailored to local realities.
- ◆ *The Conclusion summarizes* the key takeaways and outlines future prospects for businesses and the African economy as a whole.

Our goal is to provide African leaders with a practical and actionable guide, drawing on the experiences of their peers, to help them successfully carry out organizational transformation and contribute to the continent's sustainable economic development.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is based on a deliberately diverse sample, prioritizing the qualitative richness of the feedback. While its size does not allow for strict statistical representativeness, it nevertheless sheds significant light on the practices observed.

The figures are based on information provided by the respondents and have not all been subject to external verification.

CONTEXTE



CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN PERFORMANCE ART IN AFRICA

In a context of open and liberalized markets, increased competition, rapid digitalization, and mounting cost pressures, operational excellence is no longer a luxury but has become a strategic imperative for African companies as they face competitors from the Americas, Asia, or Europe—regions where the concept is well-known and often already integrated into the strategies of these companies as they set out to conquer the world.

Companies on the continent face a range of challenges: infrastructure modernization, regulatory harmonization, skills development, and integration into global value chains, to name just a few.

African companies' pursuit of operational excellence is part of a comprehensive organizational transformation strategy that addresses three key imperatives:

- ◆ **Economic Competitiveness:** Faced with the opening of markets and the arrival of new competitors (**digital banks such as Orange Money and MTN Mobile Money in financial services, e-commerce platforms such as Jumia in retail, and local fintech companies that are revolutionizing payments**), African companies must improve their operational efficiency to maintain or enhance their competitive position.
- ◆ **Regulatory Compliance:** The rapid evolution of legislative frameworks, particularly in the financial and industrial sectors, requires robust and traceable processes.
- ◆ **Sustainability and Responsibility:** The integration of ESG (**Environmental, Social, and Governance**) criteria is becoming a key differentiator and a growing requirement among stakeholders.

Banking and industrial companies are particularly affected, as they operate in complex, highly regulated, and rapidly changing environments.

CURRENT SITUATION



A DETAILED ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

In order to understand which elements they consider to be the most significant and limiting in their various current operational models, we surveyed African decision-makers. These elements revolve around three main themes :

1. Analysis of current processes and understanding of bottlenecks,
2. Identification of performance factors to be strengthened,
3. The influence of the African context.

CURRENT PROCESSES AND POINTS OF FRICTION

Analysis of the interviews reveals that the key issues primarily revolve around six major categories of critical processes. The tables below summarize our observations, which support the overall figures mentioned in Part I (e.g., 30–40% of time spent on manual, low-value-added activities; 5–8% in additional costs due to inefficiencies).

Critical Process Mapping

Table 1: Mapping of critical processes according to leaders

Family of processes	% Respondants	Key Subprocesses	Criticality
Financial Processes	100%	- Treasury & Banking Relations. - Investment & Financing Management - Budgeting & Management Control. - Accounting Cycle & Financial Closings.	☒☒☒
Governance & management	90%	- Corporate governance & decisions. - Risk management & compliance. - Internal audit. - Stakeholder reporting. - Management committees.	☒☒☒
Customer Process	78%	- Sales Prospecting & Business Development. - Order & Delivery Management. - Customer Service. - Customer Loyalt.	☒☒
Human Resources	77%	- Recruitment & Onboarding. - Training & Development. - Performance Evaluation. - Human Resources & Payroll.	☒☒
Production & operations	75%	- Planning & Scheduling. - Procurement & Logistics. - Quality Control. - Preventive Maintenance.	☒☒
Supply chain & achats	52%	- Sourcing & Supplier Selection. - Negotiation & Contract Formation. - Supplier Performance Tracking. - Inventory Management.	☒

Criticality Legend : ☒☒☒ = Critical | ☒☒ = Important | ☒ = Moderate

I MALFUNCTIONS IDENTIFIED

The assessment reveals recurring inefficiencies that cut across the sectors and countries studied. These inefficiencies, often considered "normal" by the teams, actually represent significant opportunities for improvement.

Table 2: Major Malfunctions Observed

Key Malfunctions	concrete illustrations	estimated impact
Excessive validation times	4 to 7 signatures are needed for a basic purchase	Extended cycle time, loss of 15-20% in managerial productivity
Multiple and manual input	3 to 4 re-entries for the same transaction	Error rate up to 12%, additional cost 5-8% of revenue
Insufficient communication between departments	Silo logic, vertical flow only, cross-departmental responses in 4-7 days	Slowed decisions, low customer responsiveness, lost opportunities
Deficiencies in governance and management	Poorly formalized decision-making processes, lack of risk mapping (75% of companies), late reporting	Unanticipated strategic risks, loss of investor and regulatory confidence
Undocumented processes	60-70% of organizations without a clear mapping of critical processes	Low traceability, difficulty in achieving regulatory compliance
Shortages and overstock	Dormant stocks poorly monitored	Logistics surcharge of 3-5% of revenue
Technical skills gap	Low digital training and Lean	Recurring errors, low adoption of tools
Unstable connectivity	Strong dependence on "online" without an offline solution	Service outages and direct revenue losses

THE MULTIPLICATION OF VALIDATIONS: WHEN HIERARCHY BECOMES A HINDRANCE

«Everything goes through me, even the purchase of an ink cartridge for 5,000 MRU. I spend 40% of my time validating requests that could be processed at the operational level»

Says the CEO of an industrial company in Mauritania

This situation, far from being isolated, illustrates a generalized phenomenon: between 60% and 70% of organizations lack clear mapping of their processes, leading to validation circuits that have on average 4 to 7 steps for a simple purchase.

This excessive centralization of decisions results from a combination of cultural (**traditional hierarchical culture**) and organizational factors (**lack of formalized delegation**). It generates bottlenecks that paralyze the organization and exhaust leaders in operational tasks at the expense of their strategic role

THE NIGHTMARE OF MULTIPLE MANUAL ENTRIES

« Our sales reps enter their orders on paper, then our assistant re-enters them into Excel, and then accounting re-enters them into the invoicing software. Three entries for an order! »
Relates a Director of Cameroonian Operations.

This increase in manual entries, observed in the majority of companies visited, consumes between 30% and 40% of working time and generates an error rate that can reach 12% on manual processes.

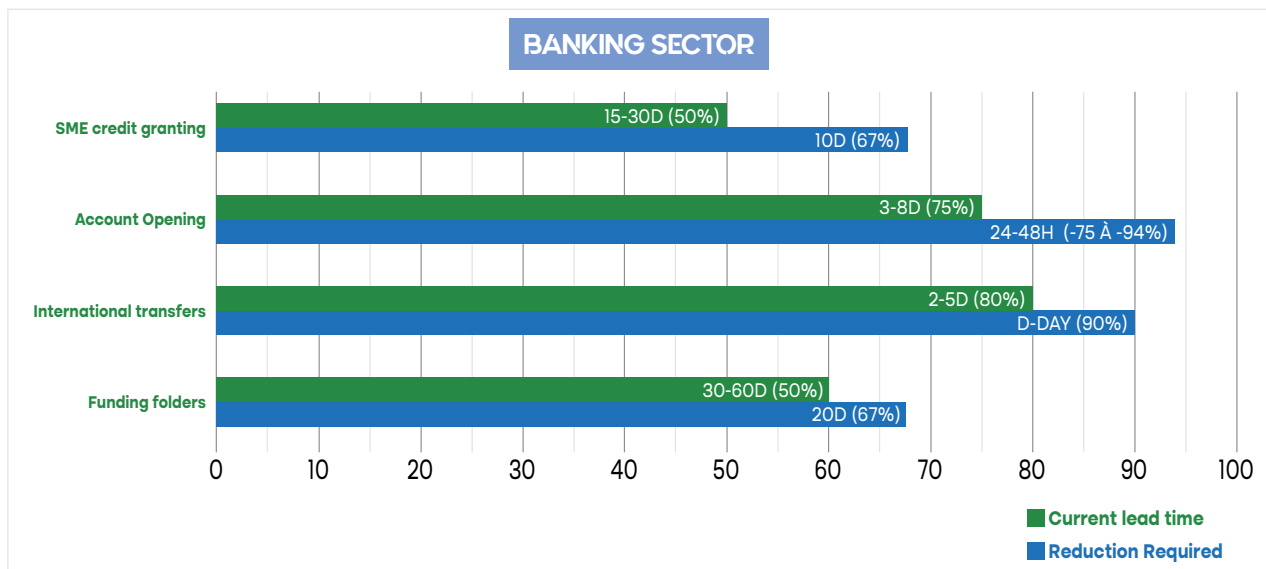
The lack of interfaces between IT applications forces companies to maintain armies of staff in charge of seizures, diverting qualified human resources from their value-added tasks.

KEY PERFORMANCE FACTORS TO BE STRENGTHENED

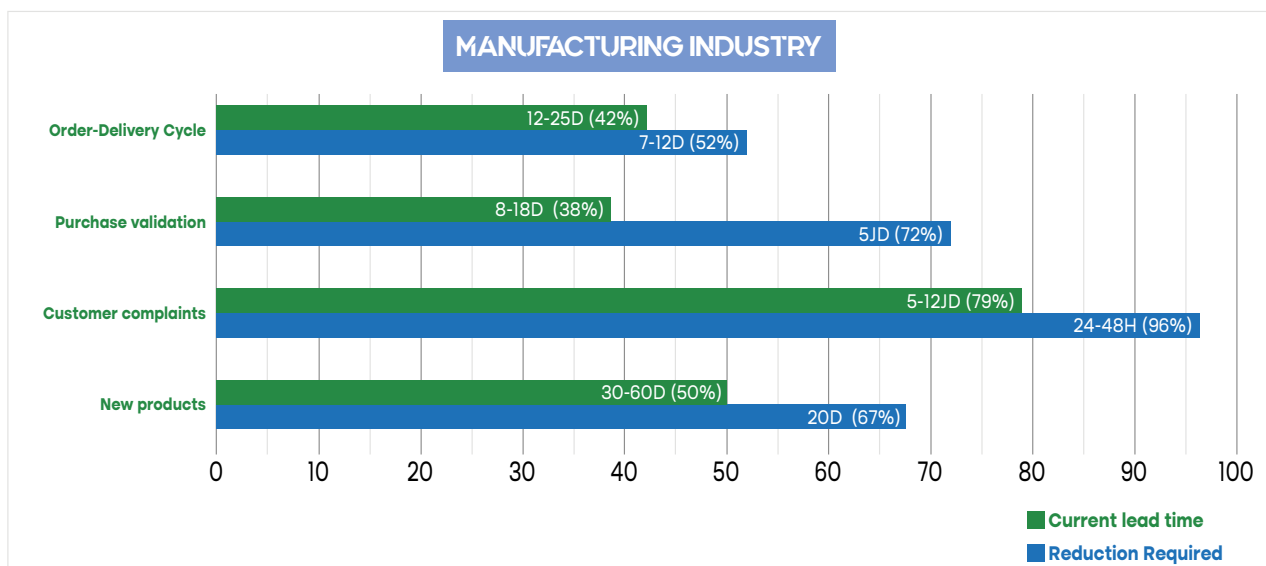
Operational efficiency: The race against time

Reduction of delays: The managers interviewed identified the slowness of internal processes as their main obstacle to growth. Processing times are a major bottleneck that directly impacts customer satisfaction and competitiveness.

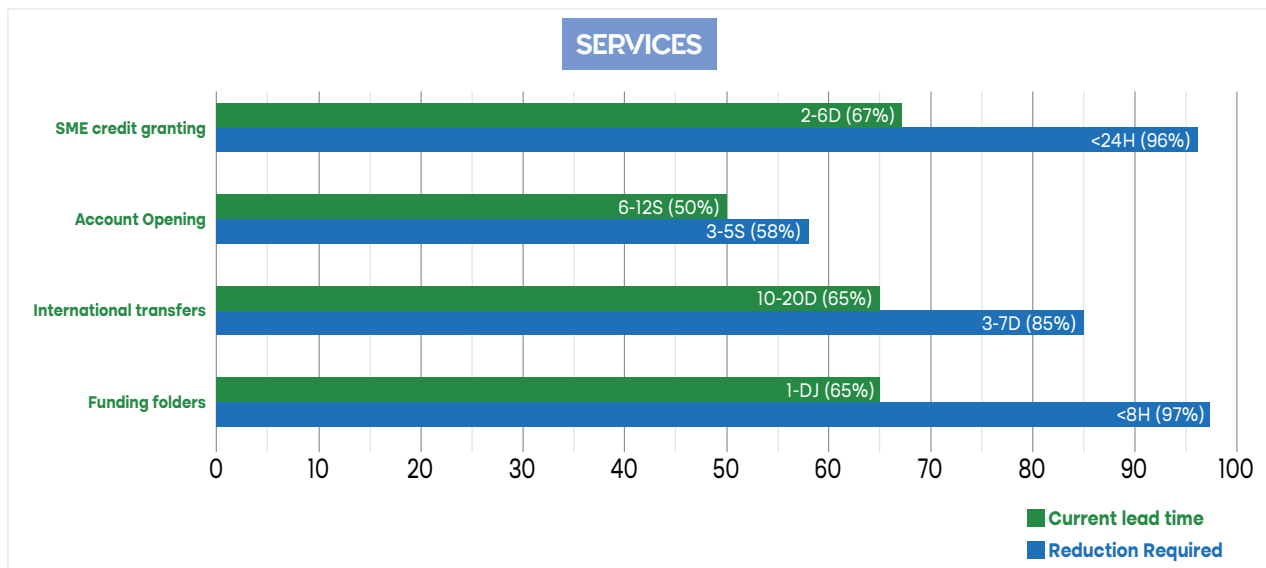
SECTOR BENCHMARK OF CRITICAL LEAD TIMES



Graphic 1



Graphic 2



Graphic 3

This obsession with speed is not a whim: it is a response to a pressing economic reality. African customers, accustomed to the responsiveness of the informal sector, are demanding ever-shorter turnaround times. At the same time, international competition imposes service standards that tolerate no delays.

«Our customers compare our processing times to those of Orange Money or Wave. If it takes us 5 days when they get a response in 2 minutes, we lose the customer,»
Explains a bank executive in Côte d'Ivoire..

ACCELERATION CHALLENGES BY SECTOR

In the banking sector, deadlines are a survival factor compared to fintechs. When an SME loan takes 15 to 30 days compared to 48 hours with some neobanks, the battle is lost in advance. Opening an account in several days pushes prospects towards 100% instant digital solutions.

The manufacturing industry is particularly suffering from the cumbersome nature of purchase approvals, which slows down the entire production chain. Processing customer complaints in 5 to 12 days severely damages the brand image in an environment where speed becomes synonymous with quality.

In services, the resolution of technical incidents is a critical issue: every day of downtime costs money in lost business and reputation. The recruitment process is too long, causing the best talent to be lost to more responsive competitors.

The automation of repetitive processes represents a considerable potential: only 23% of companies have automated their repetitive tasks, while managers estimate that 45% of administrative activities could

be. This automation would free up teams for higher value-added tasks, which are particularly crucial in a context where qualified human capital is scarce and precious.

Improving internal collaboration is also a major performance lever. Organizational silos slow down operations: invoices flowing between four departments, customer information lost between sales and delivery, decisions blocked by multiple validations. These disruptions generate systemic delays that undermine both customer satisfaction and strategic responsiveness.

Cost optimization: Doing more with less

Cost control is a strategic lever for competitiveness for African companies. In several sectors, optimization initiatives aim to reduce operational costs by around 15% to 25%, with a particular emphasis on hidden costs: time wasted in multiple re-entries, recoveries related to errors and misallocation and use of resources. Added to this are over-stocks and stock shortages, which generate an estimated additional cost of between 3% and 5% of revenue.

Beyond the financial aspects, cost control also requires better valuation of human capital. The versatility of teams allows for a more efficient distribution of tasks, limits critical dependencies and increases overall productivity. Finally, energy consumption remains a major source of improvement: the margins for improvement are between 20% and 30%, thanks to optimized facility management and the adoption of appropriate technological solutions that combine economic gains and sustainability.

Customer satisfaction and quality of service: the ultimate indicator

IMPROVED RESPONSE TIMES

Responsiveness remains a major challenge for many African companies. In the sectors studied, the average customer wait time is still between 2 and 6 days, even though the executives surveyed now set a target of less than 24 hours for the majority of standard requests. However, the formalization of service level agreements (**SLAs**) remains limited: fewer than half of the companies surveyed have defined clear and enforceable turnaround times, which undermines customer trust and loyalty.

PERSONALIZATION AND QUALITY OF SERVICE

«We talk a lot about customer proximity, but without real segmentation, we're still responding in a generic way. It's better to get to know our customers so we can provide them with a truly differentiated service.»

Explains the HR director of a Cameroonian bank.

Beyond speed, perceived quality also depends on the ability to tailor the offering to each customer's profile. However, customer segmentation remains insufficient, which prevents the fine-tuning of services.

The lack of systematic feedback systems further undermines the continuous improvement cycle.

Finally, complaint rates range from 3% to 12% depending on the industry, while the stated goal of most of the executives surveyed is to keep the rate below 5%.

Compliance and Risk Management: Regulatory Requirements

COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS

- ◆ **Regulatory changes:** Some of the executives interviewed mentioned as many as ten new regulations per year in their sector, which complicates compliance and burdens internal processes.
- ◆ **Cost of non-compliance:** Non-compliance incidents represent a significant cost for African companies, which can directly impact revenue through fines, delays, or lost contracts.
- ◆ Nearly all executives surveyed expressed a need for enhanced traceability in their processes, particularly to comply with regulatory requirements and mitigate operational risks..

INTERNAL CONTROLS AND SECURITY

- ◆ Feedback from our interviews indicates that nearly one in three companies has detected a case of internal fraud in recent years. As highlighted in the ACFE's international "Report to the Nation" study, this trend is evident across companies in selected sectors (**primarily banking, but also retail, services, etc.**).
- ◆ Finance and audit departments still spend 15 to 20% of their time on manual checks and repetitive tasks due to low levels of automation.
- ◆ According to Gartner and Deloitte, the portion of the IT budget allocated to cybersecurity should be between 8% and 12%. However, in many African organizations, this figure remains below 3%, creating major vulnerabilities amid accelerating digitalization.

Sustainability and Social Responsibility: Between Constraints and Opportunities

INTEGRATION OF ESG CRITERIA

The integration of ESG criteria reveals significant disparities across sectors and company sizes. In the financial services sector, pioneers such as Equity Group in Kenya demonstrate that responsible digitalization can significantly reduce operating costs while improving the environmental footprint. However, fewer than one-third of companies have formalized their ESG approach.

REDUCING THE ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

Paradoxically, Africa's energy constraints are driving some companies toward sustainable solutions out of economic necessity rather than environmental conviction. On-site energy production using solar power or biomass primarily addresses the need for operational continuity in the face of recurring power outages.

The circular economy often develops informally, driven by the need to optimize resources in a context of high costs. The executives interviewed frequently cite examples of waste reuse or material recovery, without always identifying these practices as part of formal CSR.

SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AFRICAN CONTEXT: CONSTRAINTS AS DRIVERS

To understand the root causes of the problems described, it is essential to analyze the unique context in which companies operate. These specific characteristics, far from being mere obstacles, can become differentiating advantages.

Demographics and Resources: The Paradox of Abundance

With a population of 1.7 billion, Africa currently accounts for about 17% of the world's population and is projected to account for nearly 40% by 2050².

The continent has considerable potential, driven by a dynamic youth population (**more than 250 million young people aged 15–24**) and exceptional natural

resources.

Africa is home to one of the richest biodiversity hotspots on the planet, some of whose ecosystems are essential to the global climate balance but are being undermined by rapid degradation. Added to this is 60% of the world's uncultivated arable land, which are fueling a growing international desire for their exploitation. Finally, the continent remains a major supplier of raw materials (**metals, minerals, hydrocarbons, agricultural products or wood ...**) largely fueling foreign economies.

Yet, behind this abundance lies a structural fragility: a persistent dependence on exports of raw materials, which limits the creation of local value and delays the rise of a fully integrated and self-sufficient African economy.

In theory, this demographic and territorial dynamic could make Africa one of the major economic poles of the twenty-first century, provided that economic actors manage to accompany these transformations with appropriate solutions. able to meet the growing needs in energy, infrastructure, connectivity and logistics.

For companies, this translates into a major challenge: how to move from the extraction of value to its local creation in order to capture a larger share of the rapidly expanding domestic market?

Infrastructure and technical constraints: Innovation through necessity

Infrastructural constraints (**unstable connectivity, regular power outages representing 10-20% of loads**) are no longer perceived as obstacles but as true catalysts for innovation. They are pushing companies to develop hybrid and resilient solutions, combining offline and cloud synchronization features.

In the payments sector, this creativity is particularly illustrated through the use of the USSD protocol, which allows transactions to be carried out without an internet connection. Services like Orange Money, MTN Mobile Money, Wave... in the WAEMU and CEMAC areas, this ensures business continuity and operational resilience, which have become real competitive advantages in unstable environments.

² <https://population.un.org/wpp/graphs?loc=903&type=Demographic%20Profiles&category=Line%20Charts>

Regulatory and cultural environment: Navigating between complexity and opportunities

A CHANGING REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The African regulatory framework remains marked by strong heterogeneity between countries, notably regarding accounting standards, tax rules, and reporting requirements.

Despite the harmonization efforts made by OHADA, the process remains incomplete: discrepancies in the interpretation and application of texts require companies to conduct continuous legal and regulatory monitoring, mobilizing significant resources to remain in compliance.

Furthermore, relations with the public administration, which are often time-consuming and marked by long processing times, weigh on the fluidity of internal processes and increase compliance costs.

BANKING AND FINANCIAL SYSTEM

The financial environment is both a constraint and an opportunity. For SMEs, access to credit remains limited, in a context where banking penetration rates vary between 15% and 30%. Banking procedures, which are considered cumbersome and slow, hinder growth and productive investment.

However, the rise of mobile banking is upsetting this equation. Solutions such as Orange Money or MTN Mobile Money promote rapid financial inclusion and better circulation of economic flows, especially in rural areas. This movement opens up new perspectives, but it also calls for appropriate regulation and smoother integration with traditional financial systems.

CULTURAL AND ENTREPRENEURIAL DYNAMICS IN TRANSFORMATION

The African economy is characterized by the coexistence of formal and informal practices, where personal networks often play a decisive role. These channels, far from being marginal, contribute to the continent's economic resilience and invite companies to adopt more inclusive models adapted to local uses.

At the same time, a dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystem is developing, driven by start-ups, incubators, and public-private partnerships, particularly in digital technology, energy, and infrastructure. Regional integration (**ECOWAS, CEMAC, AfCFTA, PAPSS**) also opens up new market opportunities for companies ready to structure and internationalize.

Finally, corporate governance in Africa remains marked by the centralization of decisions and a strong hierarchical culture inherited from traditional structures.

The challenge is to reconcile this cultural dimension with the requirements of transparency, collegiality and accountability inherent in modern standards. The future undoubtedly lies in a hybrid governance model, combining operational efficiency and cultural legitimacy, to build organizations that are both successful and rooted in their values.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS



Figure 1: Specific trade concerns raised in the TBT Committee



Figure 2: SPS trade concerns by subject, 1995 to and 2010

DECRYPTING - TRANSFORMING - SUSTAINING

PHASE 1 : DECRYPTING - DIAGNOSIS AND IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

Overall and structured internal diagnosis

IMPLEMENTATION OF DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS

Having a good diagnosis allows you to identify the right treatment and then successfully apply it. It is therefore a preliminary step, all the more important because it will make it possible to define the starting point picture on which the various stakeholders can align themselves and then monitor progress throughout the transformation process. In addition, the diagnosis will also serve to identify the priorities and action plan to be implemented to drive the transformation.

This evaluation grid, which characterizes the diagnosis, must be adapted to African specificities while being sufficiently holistic to truly enable the company's transformation towards operational excellence by objectifying the company's degree of maturity in this area.

We propose 5 pillars (see Figure 3) for the measurement and analysis of the level of operational excellence of African companies:

1. Putting operational excellence on the company's strategic agenda.
2. The commitment of company leadership to this priority.
3. Process optimization.
4. Innovation and implementation capabilities of operational excellence.
5. Supporting and engaging Employees.

Illustrative & not exhaustive

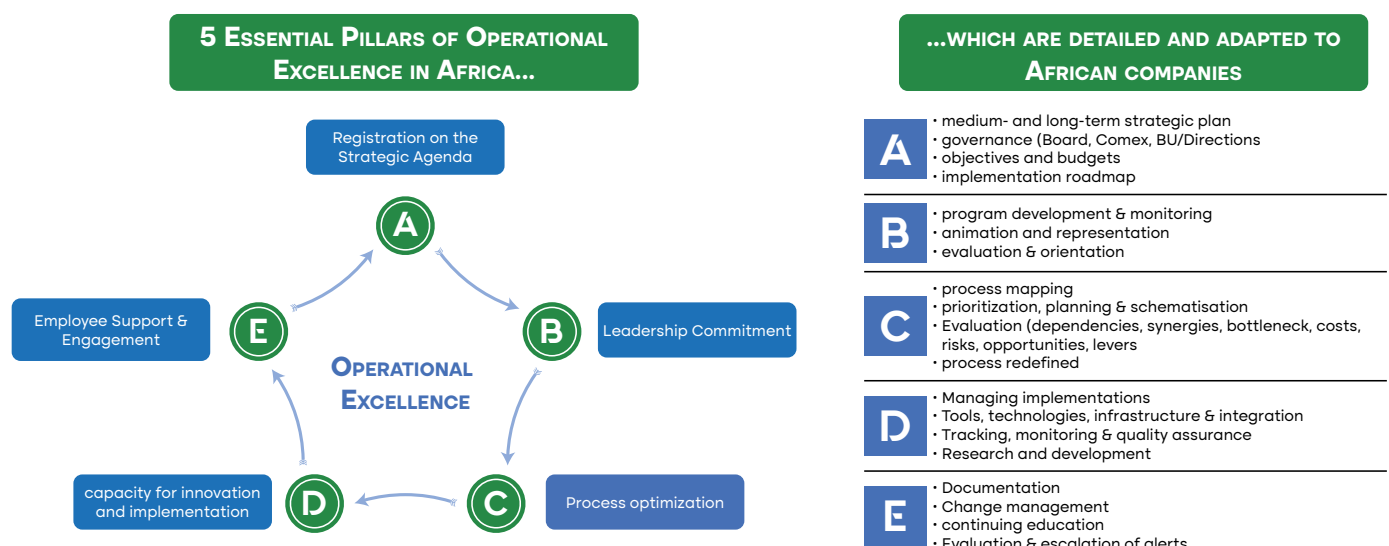


Figure 4 : 5 pillars of operational excellence in Africa

By conducting precise and recurring analyses of a set of criteria linked to the various pillars (see Figure 4), African companies will gain a comprehensive view of their status in terms of operational excellence; they will also be able to assess their progress in this area, evaluating both the ground they have already covered and the ground that remains to be covered.

Indeed, based on an objective measurement of the company's level of maturity in operational excellence, such a

diagnostic tool can be applied in a practical manner—both at the overall company level and for each pillar—to develop a detailed roadmap and a precise action plan to guide the company, in a phased and gradual manner, toward operational excellence.

Illustrative & not exhaustive

DES QUESTIONS PRÉCISES À ADRESSER POUR CHAQUE PILIER

- | | |
|----------|--|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is operational excellence included in the strategic plan? If so, in what form? If not, why? • What governance is defined to drive its implementation (authority, reporting manager, escalation process) • What are the objectives and budgets allocated to operational excellence? Were they defined in rigorous ways? • What is the implementation roadmap? |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a program dedicated to implementing operational excellence? Who is responsible for it, if applicable? What is the status of the program? • What actions are being taken to ensure progress in implementation? • What is the performance of the programs? Do they receive guidance to carry out their mission? |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the company have a formalized and updated catalog of its processes with clear classifications and hierarchies? • Are the processes subject to a detailed review to identify opportunities for optimization? Which stakeholders are involved? • Is the potential for process optimization objectively assessed, and is it formally planned and validated by the appropriate authorities in preparation for its implementation? • Are processes being redefined to enable them to reach their full potential for optimization? |
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which operational units are responsible for implementing the optimized processes? How does the implementation of these processes fit into their overall workload plan? • What tools, data, methods, technologies, and infrastructure are involved in implementing optimized processes? • What tools, data, methods, technologies and infrastructures are involved in the implementation of optimized processes? How are these elements positioned in relation to the best international standards? • What impacts does the implementation of process optimization have on standard operational conduct? Are these impacts under control? • What internal and external mechanisms are in place to produce innovations that could improve the conduct of operations, the resilience of operations, their performance, efficiency or impact |
| E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is process management (definition, evaluation, optimization) the subject of documentation accessible to employees? • What is the degree of employee participation in process management? • Does the implementation of optimized processes integrate the level of maturity of the various stakeholders concerned with respect to • what about your process? If yes, in what way? • What specific employee support programs are implemented regarding optimized processes |

Figure 5 : Possible criteria for evaluating the pillars of operational excellence of African companies

Analyzing a Pillar: The Case for Process Optimization

Process optimization is one of the key elements of an operational excellence initiative, and its essential starting point is detailed process mapping.

This step requires the company to maintain a regularly updated catalog of its processes, specifically including all of its most critical processes, the majority of its most important processes, and a minimum number of its most common processes. Inclusion in the catalog must meet criteria defined by the company, and the documentation and management of the catalog must be entrusted to clearly identified stakeholders.

Creating an effective process map relies on a solid understanding of how the company operates and, in particular, on a detailed understanding of the following three elements:

- ◆ Operational model,
- ◆ Revenue model or business model,
- ◆ Decision-making model.

This mapping exercise cannot be limited to a theoretical exercise: it must involve the operational teams who experience these processes on a daily basis and understand their nuances.

The participatory approach helps reveal the gaps between theoretical processes (**as they are supposed to work**) and operational reality (**as they actually work**). Far from being dysfunctions, these gaps often reveal pragmatic adaptations to local constraints that sometimes need to be preserved and often optimized.

YOUR PERCEPTION OF YOUR PROCESS

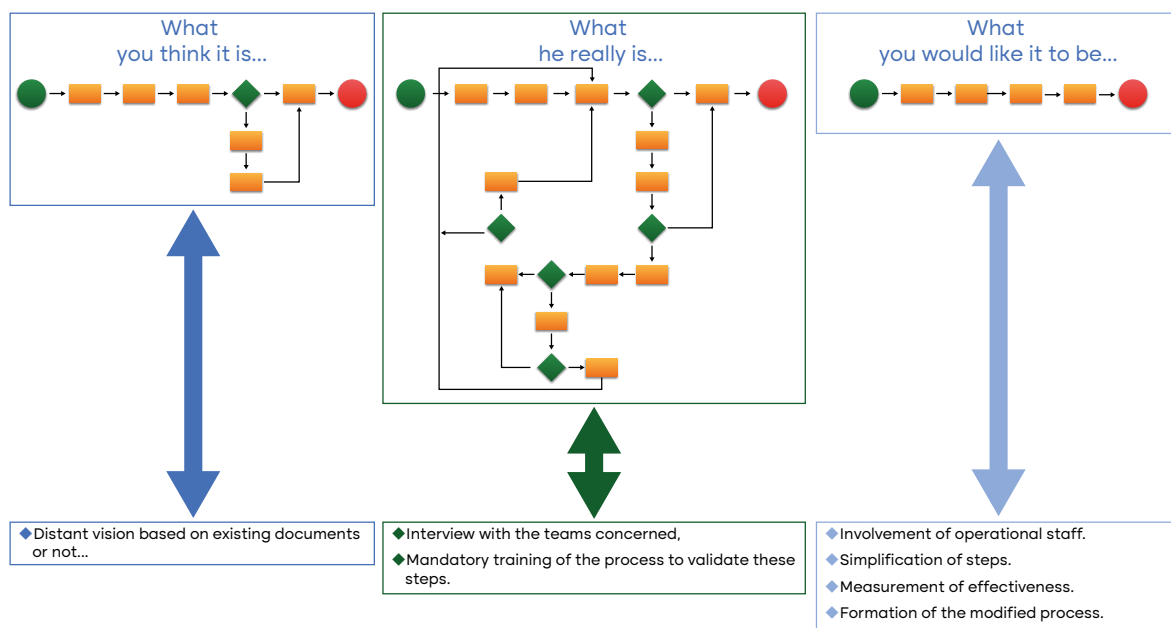


Figure 6 : Process perception gaps

Cartography must favor simplicity and accessibility: visual diagrams understandable by all, clear organizational charts, documentation of local variants and exceptions that are the richness of African adaptation.

EXAMPLES OF EXPECTED DELIVERABLES

- ◆ Visual mapping of As-Is processes (**current status**), including validation circuits and actual lead times.
- ◆ Visual mapping of Should Be processes (**optimized future state**), integrating the levers of digitalization and simplification.
- ◆ Identification of actors, systems, and information flows, highlighting areas of redundancy.
- ◆ Measurement of cycle times and associated costs, to quantify productivity and value losses.
- ◆ Documentation of local variants and exceptions (**e.g., different practices between branches within the same banking network**).

Some general principles of analysis

To successfully complete this diagnostic phase, several principles can guide the approach:

- ◆ Being part of a global roadmap

The assessment of the company's operational excellence must be iterative,

phased and gradual in order to become part of an excellence approach. This approach ensures that the lessons learned from past iterations enrich future iteration practice while gradually increasing the level of completeness of the exercise at the firm-wide level. It is therefore imperative that the diagnostic approach be framed by a validated roadmap and monitored at the highest level.

- ◆ From the general to the particular

A diagnostic process that aims to be holistic must adopt a top-down approach—moving from the general to the specific, rather than the other way around. Indeed, the goal of this type of exercise is to keep the overarching issues in mind and to verify how these overarching issues are reflected in the various lower levels.

- ◆ Leverage the teams' experience and expertise

The diagnostic process should rely as much as possible on quantitative data, but also on qualitative data derived, in particular, from interviews with teams and, when possible, even from customer panels. This process can be supplemented by on-site observations to fully understand the specific characteristics of the context.

◆ Identify points of friction and breakdowns

One of the most noticeable indicators of operational excellence is the resolution of friction points and breakdowns. It is therefore crucial to identify them based on the information gathered (**quantitative and qualitative data, or observations**) in order to consider appropriate approaches to resolving them.

◆ Analyse the root causes

This analysis helps identify the most critical levers on which improvements can be based to achieve the best impact, depending on their feasibility. Simply asking the question of the «why» as one investigates a situation helps to go beyond observations and understand the true origins of situations. This method of systematic questioning is particularly suited to African cultures where dialogue and exchange are valued.

◆ Disposer d'un benchmark pour se comparer

Comparing with other companies in the same sector, whether at local or regional level, provides a valuable external perspective for identifying performance gaps and opportunities for improvement.

◆ Prioritize actions

The use of action analysis grids facilitates the identification of priorities to be implemented. The most common grids that can be combined are, for example, impact/effort matrices to prioritize projects, cost/benefit analysis to prioritize potential improvements, and evaluation of transformation risks to anticipate corrective measures to be taken. All this step will lead to an appropriate implementation planning.

Practical case – Processing claims: A loyalty lever in the bank

Dans une banque de la zone UEMOA, les réclamations clients s'étiraient sur plusieurs semaines alors que le régulateur par la Circulaire 02 imposait un délai maxi de 30 jours. Les dossiers passaient d'un service à l'autre sans suivi clair, ce qui alimentait frustration et risques de non-conformité.

Findings: non-standardized process, multiple reception channels, lack of end-to-end monitoring, round trips between departments, lack of clarity regarding roles.

Management has decided to review the process: centralization in a single window, clarification of roles and monitoring by indicators.

Solutions implemented:

- ◆ Routing 100% of workflows to a dedicated claims management center,
- ◆ Implementing a RACI matrix to clarify roles and responsibilities,
- ◆ Eliminating steps that do not add value,
- ◆ Monitoring using internal KPIs and SLAs.

Result: processing times cut in half, regulatory compliance with the BCEAO (Circular 02), and, above all, a renewed sense of confidence among customers.

PHASE 2 : TRANSFORM - FROM AMBITION TO ACHIEVEMENT

Vision and Outlook for Operational Excellence

A transformation must be guided by a shared ambition within the company, which is embodied in the formulation of a clear vision and a timeline for achieving that vision.

Building on the lessons learned from the first phase (**assessment**) regarding the company's current situation and its potential for improvement, decision-makers must set a course toward which future transformation efforts will be directed in a coordinated manner..

The vision associated with this strategic direction must be formulated in a manner that is sufficiently general, concise, cross-functional, and even overarching for the company. This vision can then be adapted to local contexts within the domains and scopes affected by the transformation.

Furthermore, it is essential for decision-makers to link a timeframe to the defined vision in order to set the company on the path toward its desired course. This timeframe must be defined in a way that is both realistic and ambitious.

Transformation plan

A transformation plan cannot be improvised, nor can it be a collection of local efforts or uncoordinated individual initiatives. To be successfully implemented, the transformation plan must be well-designed, following a rigorous, methodical approach that ensures its clarity, consistency, feasibility, and impact.

A Revisable Trajectory

Based on the vision and timeline that have been established, the company must define the key milestones that the transformation efforts must achieve in order to realize the vision. This involves identifying the various stages necessary for the transformation and, in essence, mapping out a high-level critical path for the company's transformation journey.

In practical terms, for the company, this step involves defining intermediate time horizons (**e.g., short-term, medium-term, long-term**) for the transformation journey and the key expected achievements for these intermediate time horizons

This effort involves:

- ◆ Breaking down the overall vision into intermediate visions and objectives,
- ◆ Identifying the areas and scope of the company affected by the various intermediate time horizons,
- ◆ Defining the associated operational priorities,
- ◆ Establishing a cycle for reviewing the trajectory (**and making adjustments as necessary**) with evaluation criteria.

A detailed roadmap

The next step is to define a detailed roadmap for each pillar, including each intermediate timeframe and milestone, specifying in particular :

- ◆ Key Objectives,
- ◆ Timelines,
- ◆ Areas and Scopes,
- ◆ Programs and Projects,
- ◆ Action Plans,
- ◆ People in Charge.

The teams' experience and expertise are essential at this stage to define a roadmap that is truly actionable and for which the various stakeholders feel accountable.

The roadmap can be presented at different levels of detail depending on the target audience. In a transformation initiative, the roadmap must be visible and understandable at all levels of the organization, from top management to frontline staff. It is therefore essential to be able to present it at different levels of aggregation—from the most general to the most specific—while ensuring consistency in the presentation and maintaining a manageable level of complexity to keep it accessible to all stakeholders.

As an illustration, the two figures below propose two possible levels of representation of a transformation plan: the first figure is the summary representation of the overall roadmap of the transformation plan and the second figure is an aggregated representation of this roadmap.

By field of application or by program, these representations must be broken down into action plans detailing the sequence of main actions, constituents with associated dependencies, timelines, and persons in charge.

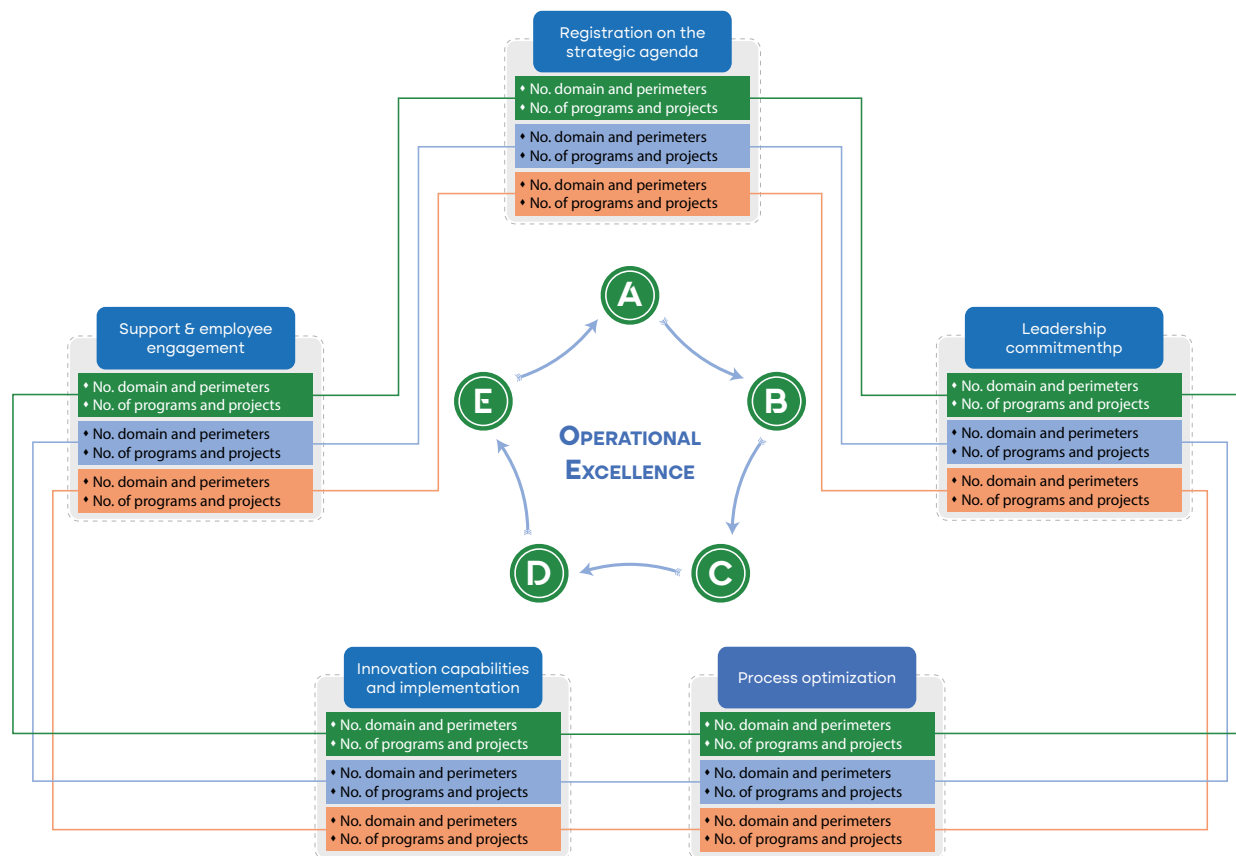


Figure 7 : Example of a synthetic representation of the global roadmap

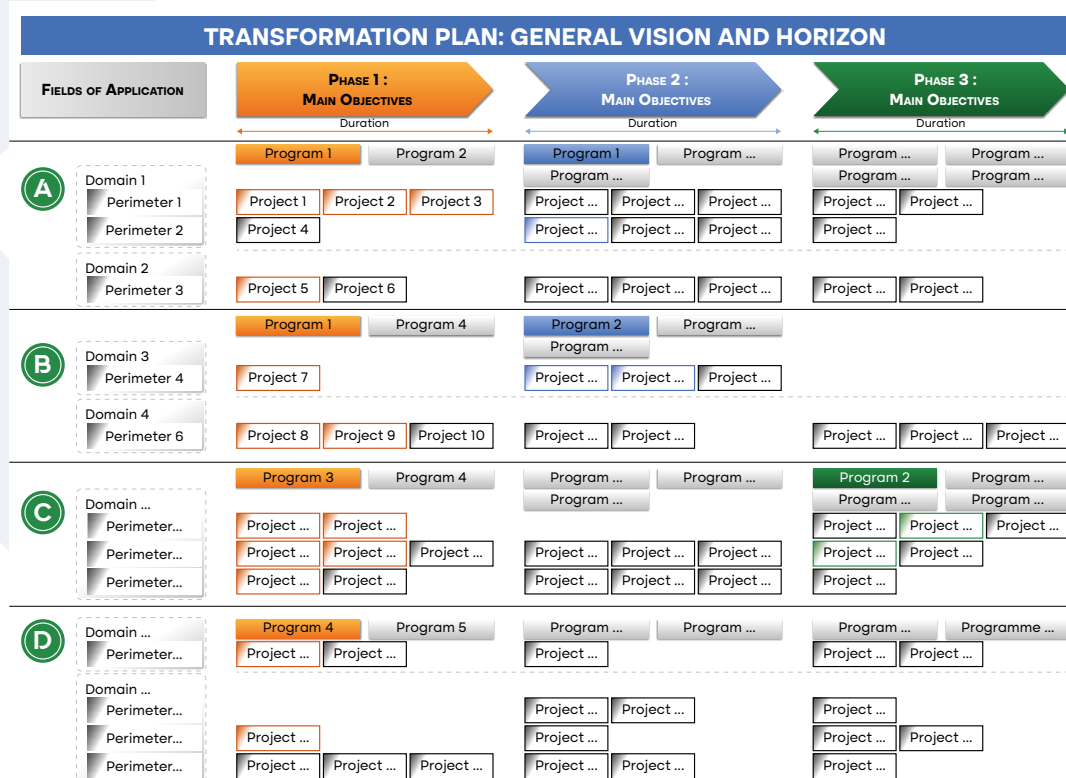


Figure 8 : Example of general representation of a roadmap of a transformation plan

At the end of this exercise, the company will have a clear vision of the various projects necessary to achieve the vision. On this basis, the company will be able to define the appropriate KPIs (**performance indicators**) and KRIs (**risk indicators**) for managing the transformation.

Necessary resources that are well assessed and allocated

A sine qua non condition for the realization of a transformation is to secure upstream the resources needed for each phase and make them available to the various operational authorities. This securing ensures the project has the necessary means to cover the various charges that will apply. The necessary budget must be approved and made available before each phase by the appropriate bodies. The staff involved must also see the load plan adapted to integrate their participation in the transformation. The recruitment of external resources must be planned in advance and implemented on time during the transformation.

To assess resources (**human, material and financial**), it is convenient to combine 2 approaches:

- ◆ At first, a top-down approach based on simplifying assumptions that are sometimes conservative, on the basis of the experience of decision-makers and on the basis of indications from top management about possible resource ceilings considered for transformation. This step allows for a global hypothesis of the necessary resources that can be allocated to the transformation; this assumption can be integrated into budget forecasts for the coming years.
- ◆ In a second phase, a bottom-up approach, once the iterations of the roadmap are stabilized. This approach makes it possible to adjust the overall assessment based on the detailed transformation plan.

Well-defined governance

The success of a transformation also depends on establishing governance adapted to all the different strata of the plan in order to ensure the contribution of the various stakeholders :

- ◆ The Board of Directors / Executive Committee, which ensures the overall monitoring of the transformation plan.

- ◆ The departments in charge of the programs.
- ◆ Teams in charge of projects.

Good governance presupposes the definition of the types of monitoring of the program, the frequency of these monitoring, the bodies in charge of these monitoring (**composition, roles, etc.**), the hierarchy between the bodies, the escalation processes between the different bodies, the documentation associated with these various follow-ups.

Potential levers for the transformation of African companies

Gradual and adapted digitalization

DIGITALIZATION STRATEGY

The digitalization of African companies cannot follow the same path as that of their Western counterparts. It must deal with specific realities: irregular connectivity, frequent power cuts and often constrained budgets. This is why a progressive and pragmatic approach is essential, favoring robust and economic solutions.

PRIORITY TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS

ERP and integrated systems

The implementation of an integrated management system (**ERP**) is often the first step in this transformation. Rather than deploying a comprehensive and costly solution from the outset, African companies benefit from adopting a modular strategy. They can start by digitizing accounting and financial management, then gradually extend the system to human resources and sales management. This approach allows the investment to be spread over several exercises while gradually training teams in these new tools.

The choice of solutions must favor those that operate in disconnected mode, a key feature in Africa. When the internet connection is unstable, employees must be able to continue working on their local data, with automatic synchronization as soon as connectivity is restored. This technical constraint actually becomes an advantage because it forces companies to adopt more resilient hybrid solutions.

Intelligent Automation (RPA)³

Automating repetitive tasks offers significant potential for African companies that still spend a great deal of time on manual data entry and administrative verification. Rather than investing in complex robotic process automation solutions, they can start by automating accounting data entry, invoice generation, and the sending of customer reminders. These time savings free up teams to focus on higher-value-added activities, a crucial consideration in a context where skilled human capital is scarce.

Artificial Intelligence and Analytics

Artificial intelligence and data analytics are being implemented in a targeted manner within African companies. Automated detection of accounting anomalies significantly reduces the risk of fraud, a major challenge identified by our interviewees.

Similarly, predictive inventory analysis helps optimize procurement in an environment where delivery times are often unpredictable.

Cloud and Mobility Solutions

The migration to the cloud should be approached from a hybrid perspective, combining local storage with remote backup. This approach allows organizations to benefit from the flexibility of the cloud while maintaining access to critical data even in the event of a prolonged internet outage. Online collaboration solutions, such as videoconferencing and document-sharing tools, are gradually transforming the way we work, particularly in a post-COVID context where partial remote work is becoming the norm.

Organizational Restructuring and Governance

NEW PROGRAM/PROJECT-BASED GOVERNANCE

The transformation toward operational excellence cannot be limited to technological tools. It requires a profound organizational transformation, which is particularly challenging in Africa, where traditional hierarchical structures are deeply rooted in corporate cultures.

TARGET ORGANIZATION

The shift from a departmental silo structure to a cross-functional, process-based approach represents a major change for most African companies. Rather than abruptly disrupting the existing organizational structure, the goal is to identify “process owners” who are responsible for end-to-end performance, from the beginning to the end of the value chain. These new roles should be entrusted to employees who are respected and have established credibility within the organization, and who are capable of bridging the gap between different departments without disrupting established hierarchical balances.

The creation of cross-functional steering committees helps coordinate this transformation while respecting cultural sensitivities. These committees bring together leaders from finance, human resources, operations, and IT around shared improvement goals. Their role is not to bypass existing reporting lines, but to create spaces for dialogue and collective decision-making on performance issues.

The emergence of shared service centers represents a natural evolution for support functions in large African companies. Rather than having accounting, HR, or IT teams scattered across each subsidiary or department, centralizing certain activities makes it possible to professionalize these functions while achieving economies of scale. This approach is particularly relevant in a context where specialized skills are scarce and valuable.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Change management is of crucial importance in Africa, where organizational transformations can face strong cultural resistance. Transparent communication about the goals and benefits of the transformation must be adapted to local norms, prioritizing direct dialogue and practical guidance over sophisticated PowerPoint presentations. Leaders must personally embody the change and demonstrate the new behaviors expected of them by example.

Providing personalized support to teams during this transition requires time and patience. Employees, who often place great value on interpersonal relationships at work, need to understand not only the “what” and “how” of the change, but above all the “why.” This educational approach, rooted in dialogue and explanation, helps transform resistance into gradual buy-in.

Celebrating early successes and learning from experience—including from failure—creates a positive cycle of continuous improvement. In African cultures where social and professional recognition is important, publicly recognizing teams that are committed to transformation strengthens everyone's

3 _ Robotic Process Automation (automatisation robotisée des processus)

commitment.

Case Study – When Automation Changes the Game

At another bank, this time in the CEMAC zone, the problem stemmed from consumer loans. Applications were arriving incomplete, approvals were taking forever, and the famous "*Time to Yes*" – *the time it took to respond to the customer* – dragged on for several weeks.

Observation : incomplete files, non-homogeneous processes between agencies, lack of traceability, unformalized customer journey.

The automation of document collection, the standardization of guarantees, and targeted training for account managers have changed the situation. The response time was reduced to just a few days, propelling the bank into the top 5 in the local market. At the same time, the cost of risk has decreased and overhead costs have been better controlled.

Solutions put in place:

- ◆ Standardization of guarantees according to the type of credit,
- ◆ Digitalization of parts collection to reduce non-compliant files,
- ◆ Strengthening of internal controls,

- ◆ Training of customer service agents and adjustment of delegations.

Results achieved: drastic improvement in Time to Yes (customer response time), positioning in the top 5 local banks, lower cost of risk and overhead costs.

Integration of advanced technologies

A SELECTIVE AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH

The adoption of advanced technologies by African companies should not be a matter of fashion, but rather a response to concrete operational needs. In an environment where resources are precious and technical constraints are real, each technology investment must demonstrate its immediate added value and ability to operate under local conditions.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning find their relevance when they tackle specific problems. Rather than replicating sometimes unsuitable Western applications, companies on the continent can take advantage of these technologies to solve their specific challenges: optimizing supply despite unpredictable delays, detect fraud in environments where manual controls are insufficient, or predict equipment failures in contexts where preventive maintenance is crucial.

Tableau 3 : Sectoral applications

Sector	Technological applications	Strategic objectives
Banking	◆ Automated credit scoring using machine learning. ◆ Real-time fraud detection. ◆ Chatbots for customer service. ◆ Blockchain for cross-border payments.	◆ Speed up decision-making and improve the "Time to Yes". ◆ Reduce operational risk and fraud. ◆ Improve the customer experience and reduce support costs. ◆ Secure and streamline international transactions.
Manufacturing Industry	◆ IoT for Equipment Monitoring. ◆ Predictive maintenance through vibration analysis. ◆ Supply chain optimization using AI.	◆ Anticipate breakdowns and reduce production downtime. ◆ Reduce maintenance costs. ◆ Improve supply chain visibility and responsiveness.
Services & Distribution	◆ Personalizing the Offer Through Behavioral Analysis. ◆ Delivery Route Optimization. ◆ Dynamic Pricing. ◆ Predictive Demand Analysis.	◆ Increase customer loyalty and revenue. ◆ Reduce logistics costs and improve on-time delivery. ◆ Adjust prices in real time based on market conditions. ◆ Forecast demand to adjust inventory levels and avoid stockouts.

Corporate Social Responsibility and Sustainability

In Africa, sustainability and corporate social responsibility (CSR) are no longer merely philanthropic initiatives but are becoming essential strategic drivers of competitiveness. Faced with the continent's unique energy, social, and environmental challenges, companies that integrate these dimensions into their business models are discovering opportunities for substantial cost savings and operational optimization.

ENERGY ECO-EFFICIENCY AS A TOP PRIORITY

In a context where electricity costs often account for 10% to 20% of operating expenses and where power outages regularly disrupt operations, adopting sustainable energy solutions has become a matter of economic survival. The example of a brewery in Burkina Faso illustrates this reality: the installation of solar panels and biomass boilers has led to energy cost reductions of approximately 30% to 35%.

THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY: TURNING WASTE INTO OPPORTUNITIES

The circular approach makes it possible to turn hidden costs into sources of revenue. In Nigeria, a soap manufacturing company has developed a closed-loop water recycling system, saving up to 40% of its potable water consumption. These practices demonstrate that the circular economy is a driver of innovation particularly well-suited to African realities, where resource optimization is crucial.

HUMAN CAPITAL AS A DIFFERENTIATING FACTOR

CSR policies focused on employee well-being generate measurable returns on investment. Telecommunications companies in Kenya and Senegal have demonstrated that investing in ongoing training and employee well-being leads to a significant reduction in absenteeism and turnover, thereby improving operational stability.

PHASE 3 : SUSTAINABILITY - EMBEDDING AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Indicator-Based Control System

MEASURE TO BETTER DECIDE

In an economic environment where every decision counts, African companies can no longer afford to operate «on instinct.» The implementation of relevant and reliable indicators is becoming a survival challenge in the face of growing competition. However, these measurement tools must remain simple and accessible, adapted to the resources and skills available locally.

The goal is not to create a reporting gas plant, but to have some key indicators that allow leaders to make the right decisions quickly. A good management system in Africa is characterized by its ability to operate even with limited resources and to provide early warnings about performance deviations.

DEPLOYMENT OF A TRACKING SYSTEM BY KPIs

Implement an integrated dashboard measuring unit costs, average lead times, non-compliance rates and other critical indicators.

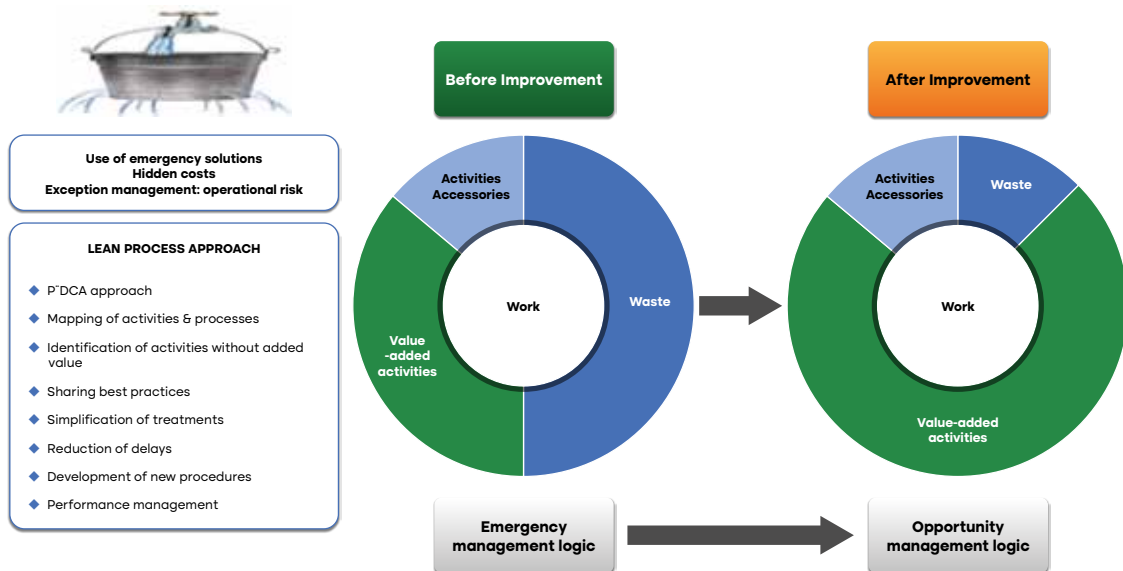
Tableau 4 : Indicator families

Indicator families	Examples of indicators	strategic objectives
Effectiveness	◆ Cycle times for critical processes. ◆ On-time delivery rate (SLA). ◆ Productivity by function/process. ◆ Task automation rate.	Accelerate value delivery, improve responsiveness, and reduce customer wait times
Efficiency	◆ Unit Cost per Transaction. ◆ ROI on Technology Investments. ◆ Resource Utilization Rate. ◆ Changes in Operating Expenses.	Optimize costs, maximize resource utilization, and justify investments
Quality	◆ Error rate by process. ◆ Customer satisfaction (NPS, CSAT). ◆ Complaint rate. ◆ Regulatory compliance.	Improve the customer experience, reduce errors, and ensure compliance
Innovation	◆ Number of proposed/implemented improvements. ◆ Time required to roll out new solutions. ◆ Adoption of digital tools. ◆ Training and skill development.	Create a culture of continuous improvement, accelerate innovation, and strengthen internal capabilities

Culture of continuous improvement

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AS A CULTURE, NOT AS A PROJECT

The most effective leaders know that continuous improvement is not a one-time project but an organizational culture. At a Cameroonian investment firm, the CEO has instituted a brief weekly performance review in which each team proposes an improvement, no matter how small. This simple practice is gradually changing mindsets: improvement is becoming a collective responsibility rather than a managerial directive.



Graphic 4

The experience of an Ivorian industrial company illustrates the power of participatory innovation. The director of operations set up a digital suggestion box accessible to everyone. As a result, 60% of the accepted suggestions came from front-line workers, who are often best positioned to identify waste that goes unnoticed by management. This democratization of innovation not only generates substantial savings but also strengthens team engagement.

TRAIN TO TRANSFORM

Training is the foundation of continuous improvement. Several industrial groups in North Africa have introduced their managers to Lean Management and the PDCA cycle, accustoming them to continuous testing and correction. Mauritian service companies certify their managers in Green Belt Six Sigma, giving them concrete tools to reduce errors and improve quality.

This increase in skills should not be limited to management. A Togolese distribution company systematically trains its sales teams in digital inventory tracking tools, drastically reducing stock-outs. In the energy sector, workshops bringing together engineers, technicians, and sales representatives have made it possible to optimize the consumption of backup generators, a crucial issue in Africa.

INNOVATING COLLECTIVELY

Successful companies are multiplying the collection and promotion of ideas (**suggestion platforms, digital or not..., internal innovation competitions, etc.**).

Quality circles by service allow operational teams to analyze their recurring errors themselves and propose immediate solutions. In the service sector, the systematic organization of feedback after each project avoids the reproduction of the same errors and capitalizes on lessons learned.

RECOGNIZE TO MOTIVATE

Recognition is the third pillar of continuous improvement. In some companies, a symbolic bonus is given to employees whose idea is implemented. Others include the contribution to innovation in the annual evaluation, turning continuous improvement into a criterion for individual performance.

Internal communication plays an essential role: a Cameroonian distribution company publishes a monthly bulletin highlighting successful initiatives, creating positive emulation. In several CEMAC banks, employees who have led a Lean or digital project receive a career boost, sending a strong signal about the strategic importance of continuous improvement.

Continuous improvement works when it is embodied on a daily basis by management, visible and valued by all employees. It does not require colossal budgets, but a constant managerial commitment and an organization that frees up speech and initiative at all levels.

Resilience and business continuity

ENSURING ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY

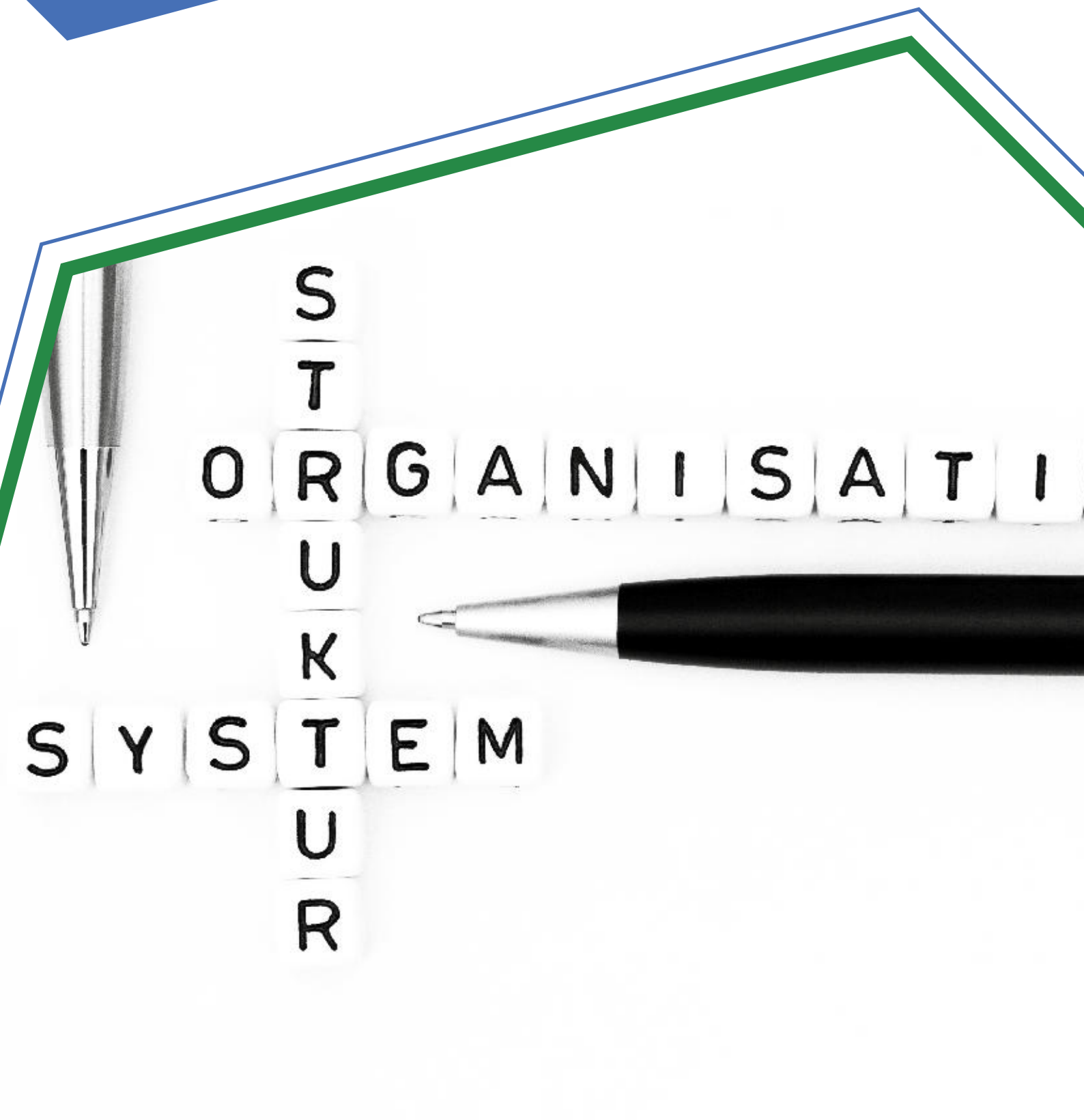
Business continuity management is of particular importance in Africa, where there are multiple potential downtime risks: power outages, connectivity issues, and geopolitical instability. Business continuity plans should identify critical processes, provide backup solutions and be tested regularly.

Cybersecurity and data protection require an approach adapted to local issues, with pragmatic security policies and robust backup solutions. Compliance with data protection regulations is becoming a major issue as the African legislative framework evolves.

Tableau 5 : Resilience framework and business continuity

Volet	Key Best Practices	Expected Strategic Impact
Business Continuity Plan (PCA)	- Identification of Critical Processes and Criticality Thresholds. - Contingency plans for power outages and connectivity failures. - Backup sites and crisis response teams. - Regular testing and updates.	- Maintaining Operations During a Crisis. - Minimizing Financial and Operational Losses.
Cybersecurity & Data Protection	- A security policy tailored to local challenges. - Training and awareness programs for all employees. - Automated and encrypted backups. - Regulatory compliance (GDPR, local laws).	- Protecting Critical Data. - Maintaining the Trust of Customers and Investors.
Proactive Risk Management	- Mapping of operational, financial, and regulatory risks. - Early warning and monitoring system. - Insurance tailored to business activities and geographic regions. - Diversification of suppliers and strategic partners.	- Anticipate threats. - Reduce vulnerability, and strengthen organizational resilience.

CONCLUSION



I SUMMARY OF LESSONS

Operational excellence represents a major strategic opportunity for African companies, well beyond the quest to reduce costs. It constitutes a fundamental lever for competitiveness, sustainability, and resilience in a rapidly changing economic environment.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM INTERVIEWS

The managers surveyed are fully aware of the challenges of performance and modernization. 89% identify operational excellence as a strategic priority for the next three years. However, 67% express a need for support to translate this vision into concrete actions adapted to local realities.

SUCCESS FACTORS IDENTIFIED

- ◆ A progressive and pragmatic approach to transformation is essential when dealing with organizations that must maintain their activity while transforming themselves.
- ◆ Strong involvement from management and operational teams ensures that changes are adhered to and made sustainable.
- ◆ The adaptation of solutions to the specificities of the African context is an essential prerequisite. This adaptation does not mean levelling down but understanding local constraints in order to turn them into competitive advantages.
- ◆ Investment in training and skills development addresses the scarcity of qualified human capital.
- ◆ The integration of sustainability issues into process design transforms environmental and social constraints into levers for economic performance.

I RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORMATION

Adopt a structured, holistic and sequential approach: Moving from diagnosis to transformation, then to sustainability is the structuring path to ensure long-term performance. This «Decrypt - Transform - Sustain» approach helps minimize risks and maximize adoption by teams.

Prioritize hybrid solutions: In the African context, purely digital solutions, which are often imported, are not always suitable because they are not sufficiently calibrated to take into account African realities. The hybrid approach, combining digital and optimized traditional methods, offers better resilience and wider adoption.

Investing in human capital: The simple consumption

of imported technologies is not enough, African genius must also be able to express itself through the design and generation of technologies adapted to the needs of the continent's companies. For this, it is crucial that African companies foster research and development environments by building on local and internal strengths. Moreover, according to the feedback analyzed, a large majority of transformation failures are related to human factors: resistance to change, lack of training, mismatch of skills. Investment in training and support for teams is a critical success factor.

I CAREER PROSPECTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Emergence of an African digital ecosystem: The rapid development of digital infrastructure, the democratization of mobile and the emergence of local solutions are creating new opportunities. Companies that anticipate these changes will be ahead of the competition.

Enhanced regional integration: The regulatory harmonization (**OHADA, ZLECAf**) and economic integration initiatives are creating new challenges but also opportunities for scale for well-prepared companies.

Driving societal transformation: African companies that succeed in this transformation will not only improve their profitability, but also play a leading role in the economic and social transformation of the continent. They will become references for their peers and privileged partners of international investors.

Impact on continental competitiveness: The operational excellence of companies contributes to the overall competitiveness of the African economy. It is an issue that goes beyond the company itself to be part of a sustainable economic development dynamic.

I CALL TO ACTION

Operational excellence is no longer an option but a necessity for African companies that wish to thrive in tomorrow's economy. The economic landscape, while varying from country to country, offers real opportunities: according to projections by the African Development Bank and the IMF, Africa is expected to maintain 4.2% growth in 2025, exceeding the global average. Technology is accessible, skills are developing, and several national markets are showing encouraging signs.

Leaders today have the opportunity to position their companies as key players in Africa's economic transformation. Those who seize this opportunity will actively help shape the future of the continent's economic development.

ANNEX

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