

The 9th Annual Operational Excellence & Business Improvement Conference 2026
9th September 2026 | One America Square, London, EC3N 2LB

Embed Culture & Tech
OPERATIONAL
EXCELLENCE 09.09.26
& Business Improvement
www.opexcultureconference.com

**Welcome To The Operational
Excellence & Business
Improvement Conference**

Official Event Programme

Please note that the following timings are flexible. Due to the nature of a live event, the conference chairs and organisers will be updating the timings throughout the day to adapt to speakers running over time, late arrivals, last minute changes and extending popular sessions. Please rest assured we will do our utmost to adapt and to accommodate all live changes.

Organised By:



08.30 Registration & Informal Networking

09.00 GIC Welcome & Morning Chair's Opening Remarks

Saima Satti, Head Global of Implementation and Adoption, **British Council**



Change & Transformation Without Disruption

09.10 Embedding Operational Excellence Into Large-Scale Change While Maintaining Trust, Pace & Resilience

- Understand why people resist change even when current processes are clearly broken by exploring the psychological, behavioural, and cultural barriers that slow adoption
- Deliver cost transformation without damaging morale or reputation by examining how leaders communicate difficult decisions, justify structural change, and maintain trust with teams affected by reorganisation, automation, or offshoring
- Keep teams engaged during prolonged periods of uncertainty by sharing practical approaches to workforce communication, engagement, and reassurance during offshoring, restructuring, and ongoing transformation
- Learn why successful operational excellence is driven more by effective change management than technical analysis and explore what has genuinely worked, and what has failed

Baljit Dhillon, Programme Delivery Director, **Centrica**



09.30 Turning Frontline Ideas into Operational Excellence: Lessons From Curry's

The people closest to the work often spot the opportunities for improvement first, long before they reach those planning from above. Sean Breza explores how Currys put that into practice, turning everyday employee ideas into action and delivering real operational gains.

He'll share what makes an employee ideas programme work, where most lose momentum and how AI can help teams act on great ideas faster without losing the human insight behind them. Expect a practical look at how Currys is turning ideas into reality and what others can learn from their approach.

Phil Knowles, Head of Continuous Improvement and Skills Development,
Curry's



Sean Breza, VP of Sales, **Sideways 6**



Sustaining Long Term Process Excellence – Double Perspective

09.45 Lock In Continuous Improvement As A Core Business Capability That Delivers Year After Year

- Anchor process excellence into everyday ways of working so improvements survive leadership changes, restructures and shifting priorities
- Expose why many initiatives fade after early wins and how leading organisations prevent regression to old habits
- Design governance, incentives and feedback loops that keep teams focused on flow, quality and value over the long term
- Equip operational leaders with practical techniques to refresh, renew and scale improvement without creating fatigue

David Anderson, Quality & Business Improvement Director, **Network Rail**



Culture & Wellbeing – Panel & Q/A

10.05 Building The Behaviours, Structures & Engagement Needed To Sustain Operational Excellence & Continuous Improvement

- Move beyond vague commitments to culture and continuous improvement by understanding how organisations translate executive intent into real investment, capability, and behaviours that stick in complex environments
- Learn how operational leaders influence senior stakeholders by framing operational excellence as a strategic enabler rather than a cost centre and connecting improvement activity directly to the problems CEOs, CFOs, and boards care about
- Explore how organisational design, decision-making structures, and ways of working either enable or block collaboration, wellbeing, and performance, and how to diagnose these issues without oversimplifying complex systems
- Create cultures where people feel heard, engaged, and secure during ongoing change by closing feedback loops, involving teams in solution design, and supporting wellbeing across hybrid, distributed, and high-pressure operating models

Geoff Weaver, CFO, **Harrods Ltd**



Gary McCready, Commercial & Strategy Director – iD, **Currys PLC**



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Daniel Smale, Head Of Continuous Improvement, **Gousto**



Catrin Archer, Head of LCS, **The Lean Competency System**



Emma Smith, Head of Culture, **Q5**



From GPO to EVO: Orchestrating Human-AI Value In Finance

10.35 Exclusive Session With IHG Hotels & Resorts

- Process ownership is no longer enough; corporate functions must own outcomes and enterprise value.
- Human and AI workforces require orchestration, visibility, accountability and coherent architectural design.
- Enterprise Value Owners optimise complete value systems, delivering measurable control, performance and ROI.

David Seacombe, Vice President, Process Excellence, **IHG Hotels**



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10.55 Morning Refreshment Break With Informal Networking

Operational Excellence Frameworks, Methodologies & Tools

11.25 Translating Strategy Into Scalable, Repeatable Operational Practices That Drive Consistent Performance

- Cut through abstract models to explore how organisations are using strategy deployment, frameworks, and methodologies to genuinely align purpose with execution – including where approaches have failed and what was learned along the way
- Understand how different industries are adapting operational excellence playbooks in practice, from large and complex organisations to sectors earlier in their OPEX journey, and what can realistically be transferred across contexts
- Assess the tools, technologies, and measurement systems that support operational excellence today, including how to design meaningful KPIs and metrics that work at every level of the organisation and drive the right behaviours
- Examine practical ways to improve efficiency behind the scenes by rethinking processes, leveraging automation and AI where it adds value, and balancing high-cost tooling with open-source or in-house solutions to deliver impact without unnecessary complexity

Matthew Shore, Head Of Operational Excellence Europe, **gategourmet**



gate**gourmet**

Justifying Investment & Proving ROI Across The Business

11.45 Win Enterprise-Wide Buy-In By Clearly Linking Operational Excellence To Commercial, Customer & Performance Outcomes

- Examine why operational excellence is so often misunderstood or deprioritised outside operations teams, and what it takes to gain traction in complex, matrix organisations
- Explore how high-performing organisations align OPEX with HR, IT, product and customer teams to position it as a shared driver of business performance
- See how leaders are translating efficiency, automation and AI initiatives into outcomes that resonate with executives, from customer experience to resilience and cost control
- Take away practical approaches for joining fragmented data, insight and metrics into compelling narratives that justify sustained investment in operational excellence

Daniel Smale, Head Of Continuous Improvement, **Gousto**

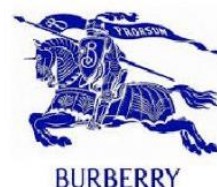


Results-Focused Leadership – Panel & Q/A

12.05 Converting Intent Into Measurable Outcomes Through Clear Accountability & Delivery Discipline

- Clarify how effective leaders translate strategic goals into concrete actions that teams can execute with confidence
- Reveal the leadership habits that remove ambiguity, reduce decision drag and keep improvement efforts moving at pace
- Illustrate how senior leaders maintain focus on outcomes while empowering teams to solve problems at the front line
- Surface practical approaches for embedding performance ownership into day-to-day management, not just reviews and reports

Roisin Hurley, Global Director Of Retail Excellence, **Burberry**



John Bell, Head Of Culture Change & Organisational Effectiveness, **Centrica**



centrica

Samantha Cox, Planning & Performance Manager, **National Express Bus**



**national
express Bus**

Ian Hammond MBE, Executive Director Of Strategic Change, **University College London (UCL)**



UCL 

Paul Robinson-Davis, Business Change Lead, **Flutter Entertainment**



FlutterTM

Jenny Baynes, Director Of Transformation, **University Of Leeds**



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Michaela Mueller, Operational Excellence Leader, **Vattenfall**

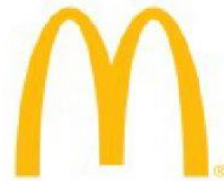


12.35 Lunch & Informal Networking For Speakers, Delegates & Partners

13.10 Interactive Hot Topic Peer-To-Peer Discussions

A) Implementing & Maintaining Continuous Improvement Cultures

Alco Jensema, Global Continuous Improvement Lead, Global Business Services, **McDonald's**



13.35 Afternoon Chair's Opening Remarks

Saima Satti, Head Global of Implementation and Adoption, **British Council**



Practical AI Adoption For Operational Excellence - Delegate Discussion

13.45 Using AI, Automation & Data Intelligently To Drive Efficiency Without Losing People, Control Or Customer Experience

We would encourage you all to enter into the spirit of the day and to share ideas with fellow delegates. We understand there might be commercial sensitivities behind discussing strategies, however, there is a lot to be gained from sharing theories, mindsets and abstract situations – the person sat next to you might just have that fresh outlook which unlocks new potential!

AI, Data & Digitalisation Use Cases Driving Operational Gains – Panel

14.05 Turn Digital Investment Into Measurable Productivity, Cost & Customer Impact

- Stabilise core processes before scaling digital tools to avoid automating inefficiency and unlock faster ROI from transformation programmes
- Connect fragmented systems, data and workflows to reduce manual effort, eliminate errors and give leaders a real-time view of operational performance
- Apply AI to forecasting, automation and decision support to improve demand planning, resource allocation and end-to-end service levels
- Deploy human-centred AI use cases at scale that lift productivity, enhance customer journeys and release teams to focus on higher-value work

Nataly Quinn, Global Head Of Change & Tech Adoption, **Holland & Barrett**



Holland & Barrett

Mark Burns, Senior Programme Director, **NatWest**



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Valentina Smirnova, Former Head Of Finance Transformation, **AXA Partners**



Cheryl MacDonald, Head Of Engineering – Intelligent Process Automation,
Lloyds Banking Group



Monika Gupta, Global Performance Excellence Specialist, Deploy & Integrate,
Mobile Infrastructure-Services, **Nokia**



Sustaining Long Term Process Excellence – Double Perspective

14.35 Lock In Continuous Improvement As A Core Business Capability That Delivers Year After Year

- Anchor process excellence into everyday ways of working so improvements survive leadership changes, restructures and shifting priorities
- Expose why many initiatives fade after early wins and how leading organisations prevent regression to old habits
- Design governance, incentives and feedback loops that keep teams focused on flow, quality and value over the long term
- Equip operational leaders with practical techniques to refresh, renew and scale improvement without creating fatigue

Ruairidh Fraser, Operational Excellence Lead: UK & Ireland, **Suntory Global Spirits**



SUNTORY
GLOBAL SPIRITS

14.55 Why Great Transformation Teams Still Fail: The Four Pillars Of Improvement Capability Resilience

- Why many Centres of Excellence unintentionally become islands of expertise, limiting long-term organisational impact.
- The concept of Improvement Capability Resilience and why it may be the missing ingredient in sustainable transformation.
- The four pillars of resilience Cognitive, Structural, Relational and Adaptive, and how they create organisations that continue improving through change.
- What current research tells us about why transformation programmes succeed or fail, and why capability matters more than ever.
- Why professional communities and cross-sector learning are becoming strategic advantages rather than “nice-to-haves”.
- Practical questions every transformation leader can take back to assess the resilience of their own improvement capability.
- How globally recognised standards, shared language and professional networks can help organisations build capability that endures.

Catrin Archer, Head of LCS, **The Lean Competency System**



15.10 Evaluation Form & Feedback

We would love to hear your thoughts from the conference today, please do submit your feedback via the QR code on the screen. Many thanks in advance!

15.15 Afternoon Refreshment Break With Informal Networking

The Human Aspect Of OPEX – Double Perspective

15.45 Keeping People, Culture & Capability At The Centre Of Operational Excellence & Continuous Improvement

- Reinforce why operational excellence succeeds through people, not tools, by embedding improvement into day-to-day roles rather than treating it as a technical or data-only discipline
- Build lasting buy-in to change initiatives by strengthening trust, engagement and ownership across teams, ensuring transformation sticks beyond the initial rollout
- Rebalance digital progress with human connection by developing core skills such as communication, stakeholder management and conflict resolution that sustain collaboration in hybrid workplaces
- Align operational excellence with organisational culture and HR priorities to create an environment where continuous improvement, accountability and performance can thrive long term

15.45 Perspective 1

Oyinda Oduntan, Head Of Operational Excellence, **1st Central**



1stCentral.

16.05 Perspective 2

Luke Sambridge, Head Of Business Design & Optimisation, **AXA Health**



The Future of Operational Excellence – Fireside Chat

16.25 How Operational Excellence Is Evolving To Meet Tomorrow's Customer & Business Demands

- Anticipate emerging operational excellence trends by learning how different industries are trialling new approaches to drive productivity, resilience and competitive edge
- Reframe operational success around customer retention by shifting from one-off transactions to long-term, value-adding relationships that increase lifetime value
- Extend product and service lifecycles through smarter operational design that supports customers beyond the point of sale and reduces churn and waste
- Position operational excellence as a growth enabler by aligning future-focused processes with customer experience, loyalty and sustainable revenue models

Azeeza Sunmonu, Head of Commercial Execution (EMEA), **Abbott**



16.45 Afternoon Chair's Closing Remarks & Official Close Of Conference

Saima Satti, Head Global of Implementation and Adoption, **British Council**

