

Future-Proof Your Operations

Driving Breakthrough Performance While Retaining Critical Skills, Knowledge, and Talent

EFESO recently conducted an industry-wide survey in partnership with Chemical Week, drawing insights from top executives in the Chemical Process Industry. The objective of the survey was to better understand the current operational challenges leading chemical companies face caused by the loss of talent and critical skills, and what actions they're taking now to protect future performance.

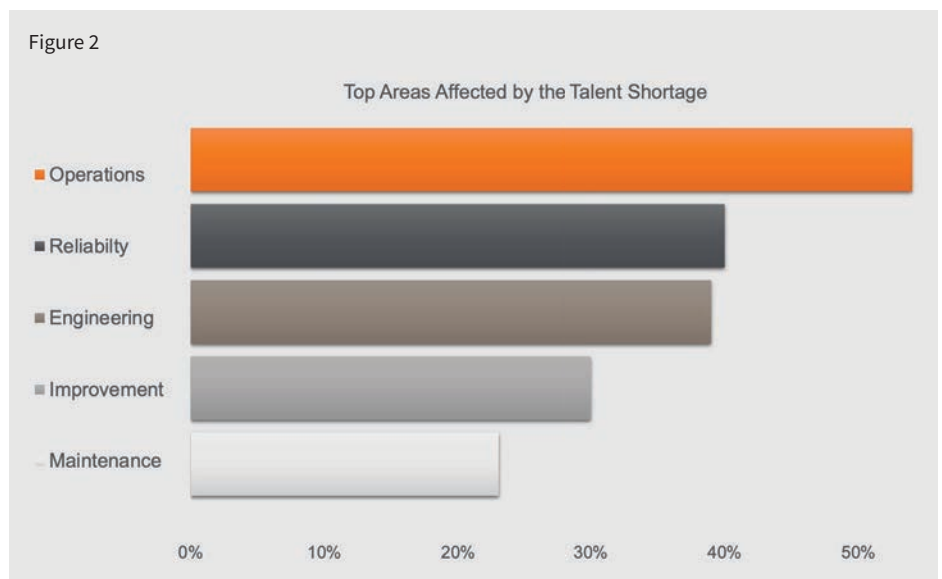
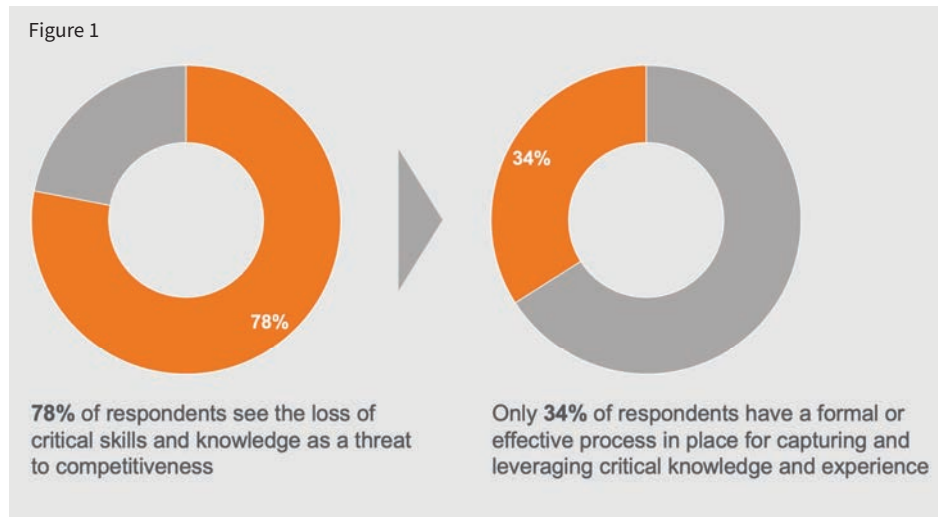
An overwhelming majority—78% of respondents—reported that the loss of critical skills, knowledge, and talent is eroding current operational performance and future improvement potential. Only 1/3 of respondents believe that their current knowledge management and work processes have been effective in retaining critical knowledge and institutional experience.

According to our survey, 57% of respondents reported Operations as a top area impacted by the talent shortage, followed closely by Reliability at 40%, Engineering at 39%, and Improvement at 30%.

These realities underscore an urgent need for organizations to rethink their operational strategies, design and implement more effective organizational models, and implement performance-driven best in class standard work processes to thrive in the future.

Leadership is Foundational for Future-Proofing Operations

The Chemical Process Industry continues to grapple with deepening talent challenges, changing market conditions, and mounting competitive pressure. Our experience indicates that it takes a strong executive mandate to drive breakthrough operational transformation. Successful leaders whom we've worked with have created a compelling vision, a well-articulated case for change, and a culture of operational discipline and accountability—enabling them to accelerate sustainable results.



So, what does it take to navigate these challenges? According to the survey results and our experience, the following three success factors are required to effectively drive operational transformation:

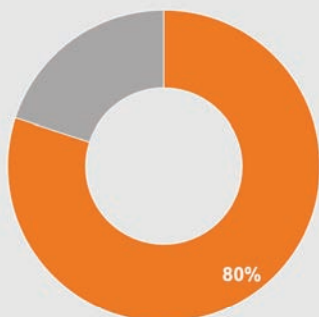
- Create performance-driven best in class standard work processes
- Build a high-performance organizational environment

- Establish a Value-Based Digitalization Strategy

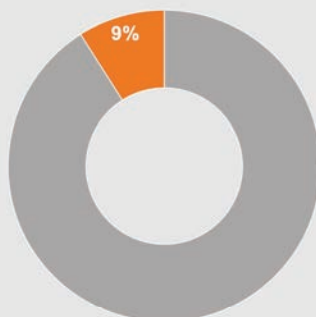
Imperative #1: Create performance-driven best in class standard work processes

Standardizing and simplifying work processes not only provides a more predictable, reliable, and efficient operational

Figure 3



80% of respondents reported that performance-driven best in class standard work processes are essential or very important



Only 9% of respondents have fully implemented performance-driven best in class standard work processes in their organizations

environment, it also greatly enhances the ability of organizations to train and onboard new hires. While 80% of respondents affirmed that implementing performance-driven best in class standard work processes and streamlining organizational models globally is essential or very important, a mere 9% reported that their organizations have fully embraced such best practices. This demonstrates a significant implementation gap, performance improvement opportunity, and urgent call to action.

But what does standardization and simplification of core work processes mean for an organization? It means creating well-defined processes and work instructions that include best practices, codifying institutional knowledge and designing and implementing consistent roles and organizational models to drive cross-functional collaboration and performance improvement.

There are many benefits to creating performance-driven best in class standard work processes and realigning organizational models including:

- Embeds and leverages best practices and learning
- Enables 80/20 reactive to 80/20 proactive transition
- Lowers cost of goods sold and reduces waste
- Provides clear expectations and ensures alignment
- Accelerates onboarding and training

- Clarifies white spaces and handoffs between roles and functions
- Enables more effective benchmarking internally and externally

Based on our experience, implementing performance-driven, best-in-class standard work processes and rethinking organizational structures reduces operational risk, drives 15–20% productivity gains, frees up 5–10% additional capacity, and significantly shortens new-employee onboarding time. These figures are hard to ignore, especially in a competitive environment where margin pressures and geopolitical uncertainties are on the horizon.

The best-in-class chemical companies know that future-proofing their operations is a top priority. That means preserving institutional knowledge, retaining critical skills, and driving sustainable growth—outcomes that stem directly from rigorous operational discipline and a renewed focus on how work gets done.

The gains in operational productivity are further magnified when operations integrate safety, environmental, and capital planning and execution into standardized workflows and organizational models.

Imperative 2: Build a High-Performance Environment

The chemical process industry has long been viewed as slow-moving and traditional, lacking the rapid innovation seen in other sectors. This can be seen as less attractive to recruiting and retaining talent. A second

crucial imperative is for companies to communicate a more purpose-driven mission and a dynamic vision for the future, creating a high-performance environment where employees are intrinsically motivated by a shared North Star of operational excellence. Leaders who paint an engaging picture of the future, supported by a consistent, enterprise-wide vision, energize their people to adopt new methods and processes willingly. For many chemical process organizations, this shift requires embedding robust knowledge management systems, leveraging best practices, and integrating continuous shared learning.

Part of a high-performance environment is not only creating performance-driven best in class standard work processes, but also revisiting the organizational structure and setup. Many chemical companies are currently revisiting their organizational structure to better respond to future potential demands and opportunities. There are some common enablers we have increasingly deployed to improve organizational performance and agility:

- Reduce organizational layers – reduce organizational complexity and bring leadership closer to the shopfloor
- Split “Run” and “Improve” roles – ensure organizational clarity and create conditions for Improve roles to focus on future and not daily priorities
- Synergize key support functions – align functions like Engineering, Reliability etc. and create centers of excellence to bring best practice capability consistently to all sites
- Strengthen leadership roles and understanding – ensure development plans are in place at all levels in the organization.
- Bring Accountability to the process – ensure to anchor accountability as close to the process & shopfloor as possible – ensuring engagement and better decisions
- Ensure KPI transparency & accountability – determine clear KPI accountability per role & anchor functions to drive the continuous improvement engine

When employees understand the value of their work and see a clear path for career development, retention naturally improves. Recognition programs, succession planning, and transparent performance management systems strengthens

ownership and accountability. Rather than working in functional silos, teams move toward cross-functional collaboration, often aided by visual management systems that provide immediate feedback on performance. This sense of “knowing when you’re winning” spurs swift and targeted action, leading to improvements in productivity and an enhanced sense of collective achievement.

Imperative 3: Establish a Value-Based Digitization Strategy

While performance-driven best in class standard work processes provides the bedrock for consistent operations, digitization and automation present vital opportunities to connect employees to workflows in real time – thus establishing a connected worker environment. By leveraging digital solutions—such as automated data capture, analytics-driven dashboards, and integrated operations and maintenance management systems—organizations can reduce variability, enhance reliability, and streamline their decision-making processes.

In our experience, the successful adoption of digital solutions depend on the maturity of the organization’s creating performance-driven best in class standard work processes. Without robust, documented workflows, well-defined roles and organizational models, digitization efforts risk being either too narrow, too broad, or misaligned with practical day-to-day needs. In our experience, successful organizations establish a value-based digital strategy and roadmap to accelerate improvements.

Once performance-driven best in class standard work processes are in place, digital solutions can be deployed to accelerate routine tasks, minimize human error, and free up skilled personnel to focus on higher-value activities. Furthermore, these solutions often offer intuitive visual dashboards that highlight real-time performance and potential deviations—an invaluable tool for decision-makers as they strive to maintain operational excellence across multiple facilities and geographies.

Looking Ahead

The path toward global performance-driven best in class standard work processes is not always easy, but it is both

achievable and highly rewarding. It begins with clear sponsorship from the top, followed by a thorough evaluation of current processes and organizational design. The creation of standardized maps, robust documentation, and detailed role descriptions form the tangible backbone of any transformation program. Meanwhile, an accompanying cultural shift is critical to ensure the new practices take hold across the enterprise. Monitoring and governance structures confirm the organization remains on track and ensure that the newly adopted ways of working are sustainable and create competitive advantages.

Ultimately, the chemical process industry has a remarkable opportunity to redefine itself—to shed outdated perceptions and leverage operational best practices as a source of innovation, growth, and employee fulfillment. With many organizations experiencing critical talent loss and skill shortages, the time for decisive action is now. By embracing performance-driven best in class standard work, building high-performance environments, and harnessing the power of digitization, chemical companies can navigate today’s challenges, solidify their operational resilience, and unlock new levels of performance for years to come.

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