

Why digital transformation will fail without the right leadership

By Amelia Ross

Dated: 5 January 2016



Successful corporate digital transformations start with leadership embracing technology. This sends a clear message to the rest of the organization that the company is serious about implementing change. Digital transformation is often pushed to the IT department, but this is a mistake; the process impacts the entire corporation.

While [an informed CIO leads the company](#) with new ideas and a streamlined process that sets a good example for the team to follow. Digital transformation will affect more than just the IT department, but the entire enterprise, so every department needs to be prepared to adjust their workflows. If digital transformation is done right, it starts at the top and moves down throughout the corporation. Below are four truths I've seen successful leaders embrace to welcome digital transformation into their organizations.

Be Prepared to Face Challenges

As CIO, CMO or other top executive, you'll face people resistant to digital transformation. Defensiveness, company bureaucracy, and the inertia of existing processes are the most common obstacles executives and entrepreneurs encounter. But a strong leader knows how to move through these challenges. I've witnessed significant movement in digital initiatives after change management workshops were utilized to educate employees on the benefits of digital transformation. Similar to any change management initiative, Digital Transformation will struggle to get buy-in if employees don't understand what it means and why it matters.

This is why businesses should not try to digitize every aspect of the company at once. Instead, start with small changes that are easier for your team to swallow. A cloud storage system connected to existing structures, for example, is a major step towards digitization that doesn't significantly affect your team's daily functions.

Digital transformation sometimes results in machines or programs replacing manpower, but this doesn't necessarily translate to job loss. You'll probably need to revise some job functions or restructure departments, though. Consider each employee's real value rather than his or her particular function. Keep employees relevant by providing additional training.

It Has to Start at the Top

For digital transformation to be successful, the initiative must come from the top—from an [executive who wields enough power to influence the entire enterprise](#). You'll be the one to initiate the project and ensure everyone is aligned. You're responsible for ensuring all C-level executives in the company are on board. Remember, digital transformation is only successful when it's cohesive across an organization.

Here are your top three priorities:

1. Understand that technology is always changing; the company will need to commit to keeping up with innovation.
2. Initiate the transformation immediately.
3. Engage employees, consumers, and external partners.

As mentioned, a company's digital initiatives may require restructuring departments or even creating new ones. Does your company have a social media department? If not, could it benefit from creating one? This is your opportunity to allocate employees where they're most needed.

Worried about causing havoc with a company-wide restructure? Manage this transition with a well-developed plan that considers the benefits vs. cost. Change models such as [Professor John Kotter's 8 steps of change management](#), are comprised with a series of steps that can lead to successful digital transformation. Kotter's plan is driven by the following:

1. Establish urgency.
2. Assemble a group to lead the change.
3. Develop the vision and strategies.
4. Communicate the vision.
5. Empower action and remove obstacles.
6. Generate short-term wins.
7. Never let up—continue to change, develop employees, and take on new projects.
8. Develop the culture.

Collaboration Is a Must

Regardless of your company's size or industry, there's one goal that fits everyone. All organizations benefit from working jointly with internal sectors, external partners, vendors, and even consumers.

Why is this so important? Being part of the change is the best way to keep everyone positive and motivated to participate. The more points of view you have on the transformation, the better the chances of covering all angles and getting the job done right. All internal sectors need to have input to ensure systems communicate smoothly cross-departmentally. You want supportive, patient external partners during times of transition.

It's important to know your vendors' processes and how they'll interact with digital initiatives. You also want to understand the needs of the consumer. And don't forget—C-level executives will expect a consult and to share input, as well.

I can scarcely think of a business that won't need to address digital transformation, but I often see companies timid to take this step into the future. Leaders who want their organizations to remain fresh and competitive, however, won't hesitate to embrace their digital potential.

This article was written by Daniel Newman from Forbes and was legally licensed through the NewsCred publisher network.

Submitted by: Ruth Edge – Cardinia Shire Council