FLEKS
EBOOKS SERIES

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Transforming while Performing in the Digital Era

Harris Apostolopoulos, PhD
Contact via https://www.linkedin.com/in/apostolopoulos/

PUBLISHED BY FLEKS HYBRID MODEL
AVAILABLE FOR FREE DOWNLOAD AT
WWW.FLEKSMODEL.COM

September 2021

PREFACE

This ebook is destined for those willing to extend their comprehension on the essentials of Digital Transformations in a plain non-technical language and irrespective of professional background and knowledge.

Sharing my two decades of experience in the field of Business and Digital Transformations including Project Management and PMOs in every possible dimension and flavor, I have come to the conclusion that Digital Transformation is not only poorly perceived, but also, there are a number of associated myths and misconceptions that stand in the way of anticipated value delivery and required processes integration.

Digital Transformations are rather notoriously difficult and complex, more so when linked to terms such as 'digital disruption'. The fundamental change brought to operations to deliver value faster, better, safer to customers coupled by digital and technological advances at an organizational level is a challenge in itself. An approach to realize the benefits of a transformation requires commitment by both; the organization and individuals since the notion of one-sized-transformation-does-not-fit-all materializes rapidly.

It is of great importance to realize that Digital Transformations are not purely technological ones rather part of the wider Business Transformation ecosystem; with culture forming one of the most important pillars of success. In other words, technology acts as the tooling bandwagon to deliver on promised value.

Enabling Digital Transformation through the New Normal Prism is far more than a technology related issue. Technology can offer global businesses diversified potential to engage seamlessly and inclusively with others on the worldwide scene. The pandemic helped to accelerate Digital Transformations and create a unique landscape for continuous innovation, enabling the technological adoption advancement in a much faster pace.

I hope this book's journey is widely read and insights are appreciated through my sole guidance. I will be more than pleased to hear about your thoughts, ideas and remarks.

We can live our digital present at its fullest but our future looks more Digital than ever before.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

During these turbulent and unprecedented, for this generation, times, humanity faced another global health crisis, with organizations and individuals increasingly discovering that dealing with great uncertainty finds them facing vastly challenging situations coupled with grave dilemmas. The multi-faceted risks associated by the complex synthesis of adaptivity, and the need for rapid and effective response has resulted to phenomenal pressure on organizational structures and business models.

Nevertheless, a plethora of changes (remote work enablement, digital services provisioning, securing individual and team wellbeing) towards the 'new normal' became more highly regarded as the world embraced them in an abruptly accelerated fashion.

Human wellbeing, mental health and mental fitness are becoming part of how the workforce will adapt to the balance of remote and physical presence of the corporate environment. Organizations are assuming self-awareness on the shift of investment and focus on the human side of conducting business.

However, this shift is associated to high volatility and identified risks on how change may result to unwanted behavioural patterns and habits. Therefore, the orchestration of a mechanism to address cultural aspects of the shift, has become paramount to its overall success.

The mitigation of systemic risks and the synthesis of sustainable solutions that had to be developed, yielded rapid adjustments to the new way business is conducted. While becoming resilient is coupled with demarcation of a great challenge: the shift of mindset, skillset, technology and processes is inevitable.

What we are experiencing now will have an enduring impact on how work is conducted in the future. Transformational momentum can be the vehicle to address the aforementioned issues. In fact, committing to transformational initiatives has never been riskier and more stressful.

In some cases, the transition is not as smooth as initially expected purely because many organizations lack the necessary competencies not only in terms of diversity of individual, team and community skillset, cross-functional collaboration and high responsiveness but also in the context of inexistent collaborative culture.

In brief, transformations are strategic and structured processes for transitioning individuals, teams or organizations from a current state to a desired future sustainable state. However, scaled change is a requirement for transformation, and transformations involve scaled change often resulting in enterprise-wide adoption.

1. OUR FUTURE IS DIGITAL

The contemporary advances of creating new products and services, as well as transforming business operations, by enabling organizations to generate higher revenues, gain greater competitive advantages, and achieve overall higher efficiency have a consequence for Digital Transformation (often abbreviated as DX or DT) to become a top initiative for today's business and IT leaders. Our future is Digital and it evolving faster than ever...

What seems to be a mission critical necessity today for an organization, is to adapt to specific customer requirements and concepts such as: strategic business planning, customer satisfaction, market adaptation, flexibility, and subsequently efficient and effective change management and risk management (Apostolopoulos et. al., 2009).

In principle, Digital Transformation is the integration of digital technological advances into business areas, by changing the fundamental way of operations and delivering value to customers. One key issue, is the mandatory cultural change(s) which keep things on track and embrace sustainable results. Transformations do affect each organizational function and bring together data across areas to work together more effectively.

Digital Transformations are rather notoriously difficult and complex. A common pitfall is that companies focus excessively on a portfolio of initiatives without considering crucial dependencies that must be in place to enable the imminent and unavoidable changes in the context of shift of mindset, skillset, practices and technology.

Focusing on digital capabilities and selective practice adoption (Cybersecurity strategy, agile and lean, DevOps, Internet of Things, Artificial Intelligence, Machine learning, cloud-based and cloud-native services) will limit success, if leadership capabilities (vision, collaboration, motivation, accountability, creativity, empathy and innovation) remain unbalanced.

Leaning organizational strategic and tactical focus in just one area can result to sequential consequences in another area that can prove to be increasingly detrimental, often leading to failure. Therefore, potential benefits (e.g., Return-on-Investment, Return-on-Value) cannot be captured in the long run.

Additionally, Digital Transformations are not purely technology ones, but part of the Business Transformation ecosystem. Therefore, trying to apply a 'one-size-fits-all' approach will not add to the probability of satisfying success criteria.

1.1 HOW TO INITIATE THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION JOURNEY

As a starting point, a fundamental focus can be on trying to change the stakeholders' mindset as well as, the organizational culture and adopted practices and principles, prior to taking the decision on other important aspects like digital tools, traditional, agile or even hybrid practices. For instance, the shift of mindset can create a purpose to unlearn "know-it-all" behaviors and reskill under the lens of "learn-it-all" cultural behavior. But again, a fundamental question is not the knowledge of the tools and processes but how to use them effectively?

For an effective Digital Transformation journey, a Digital Transformation strategy is a prerequisite. It is actually a detailed plan of actions, describing how an organization and its associated business verticals can strategically reposition itself in the new challenging digital economy.

So, there is an attempt for organizations to be reinvented and discover a new or revised business model based on a vision for the future. The systemic risks anticipated are higher (e.g., interdependence of transformation initiatives) and stronger collaboration across boundaries; transparent communication in the midst of uncertainty is required.

Business environments are complex and more specifically, associated decisions are also complex, in a way that the more change occurs the more complicated project management becomes. This can be justified by the fact that there is a lot of interaction among multitude factors (attributes) affecting complex decisions concerning change. In effect, it is important to determine the degree (impact) that each attribute has, address complex situations, identify criteria and measure overall change management risk in an organization based on these criteria, hierarchically (Apostolopoulos et. al., 2016).

A transformation is more successful when corporate ethos aligns with the beliefs and values portrayed by the transformation itself. Organizational culture among stakeholders can foster trust, teamwork, cross-functional collaboration and open communication in ways that overall operational excellence can be promoted. An opposing rhetoric can only lead to a lethargic outcome of committing to less transformational initiatives shifting investments towards operational, rather than strategic-natured initiatives.

In order for the benefits of a transformation to be realized, commitment by both the organization and individuals is required as there is no, one size fits all.

Some examples in terms of the most common set of practices, principles and technologies businesses use to enable digital transformations are:

- Artificial intelligence/machine learning
- Cloud computing
- Blockchain
- Internet of Things (IoT)
- Mobile phones and apps
- Cybersecurity
- DevOps and Lean IT
- Internet of Behavior (IoB)
- Cryptocurrencies

For instance, Blockchain was introduced initially as a disruptive technological revolution for digital currencies (cryptocurrencies). This technology (distributed ledger technology in the form of a distributed transactional database) is gradually evolving in time, and many different applications are being developed.

However, serious considerations should be taken into account in the field of corporate governance, potential legislation deficiencies, scalability, environmental protection (cryptocurrency mining emissions) including stock exchange fluctuations that can lead to significant gains or losses almost overnight in some cases.

This form of volatility can only be faced by introducing momentary reflexes in an organization's competence to deal with rapid and inconsistent market changes that lead to the perception that there can be no time to regulate or wait for a normalization sequence since every month and every week brings new developments in the digital transformation field.

Maybe you have noticed that AI is gradually complementing, supporting and even replacing what were, in recent industrial history, human-owned industry job roles in e.g., customer services with intelligent bots, and it is happening fast. Apple's Siri, Google's Alexa among similar other applications, are transforming the customer experience digitally. Did you know that Siri was actually created from a human voice and then into a synthesized voice by saying all these different words, and Alexa was completely synthesized?

In effect, one of the best ways to initiate the Digital Transformation journey is to get engaged with technology and its applications.

2. FACTS AND FIGURES

Digital Transformation is synonymous to modernization of business processes and business models supported traditionally by IT, and to support its significance certain industrial facts and figures are shared below.

Gartner (2020a) reported that 91% of businesses are engaged in some form of digital initiative and by 2024, 25% of CIOs at large enterprises will become accountable for digital business operational results, or "COO by proxy" Gartner (2020b). In a related Digital Transformation & Cloud Survey by Baker McKenzie (2020) it was reported that 58% of businesses that had not yet begun a digital transformation program said that COVID-19 has accelerated their digital plans.

The world economic forum (2021) made an estimation that 70% of new value created in the economy over the next decade will be based on digitally enabled platform business models, see Figure 1. Nevertheless, it should be noted that circa 47% of the world's population remains unconnected to the internet.

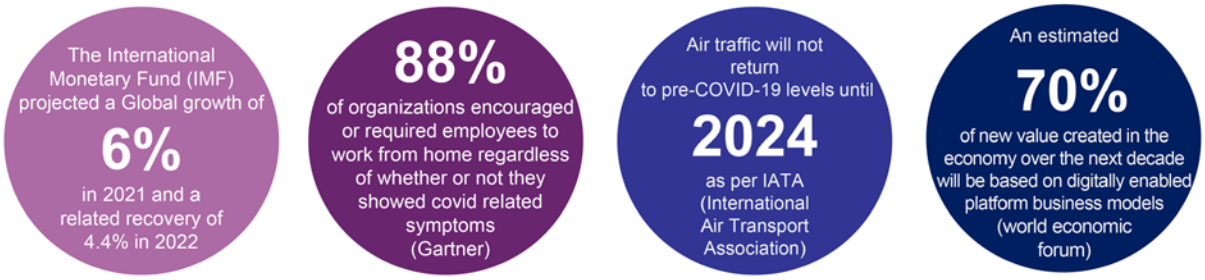

Figure 1: COVID-19 Crisis Facts & Figures

In regard to integration of applications and Digital Transformation, PwC (2017) following a research, reported that the potential contribution to the global economy by 2030 from Artificial Intelligence is estimated to $15.7tr, and more specifically, China (26% boost to GDP in 2030) and North America (14.5% boost), equivalent to a total of $10.7 trillion and accounting for almost 70% of the global economic impact.

As a consequence, industry sectors have been increasingly promoting and pursuing more Digital Transformation initiatives especially in the financial services, technology, transport and logistics sectors, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and accelerated their digitalization strategies.

3. KEY DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PILLARS

Even though Digital Transformations are rather challenging and complex, associated results are affected by a plethora of factors; the focus of this publication is on four major pillars: Culture, Strategy, Skills and Structure. Each one will be described separately, see Figure 2 below:

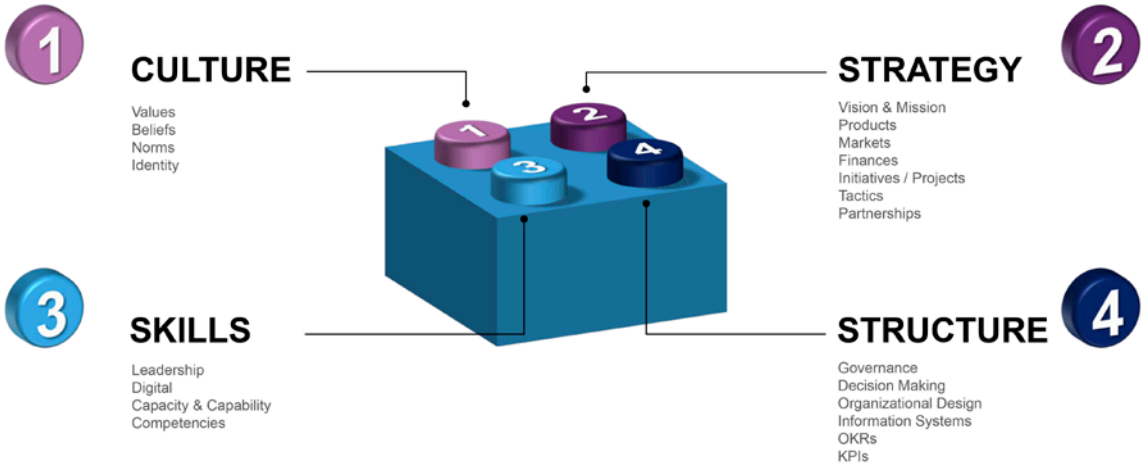

Figure 2: Four pillars of Digital Transformations

3.1 CULTURE

A very simple definition of corporate culture but with a deep meaning is the “the way we do things here”. It is related to individual or organizational values, beliefs, knowledge, experiences, norms and identity, assumptions, among other key definition factors.

A healthy and transparent digital culture can act as an enabler where stakeholders are motivated to deliver results at a faster pace, more concise and collaborate more effectively to develop new solutions (products or services). Figure 3 indicates the prominent areas of the cultural pillar. It is rather a misconception to believe that by initiating a digital transformation journey or even upgrading the current technology, organizations will be able to reach a higher maturity in the digital field.

Actually, it was never about hardware, software or technological upgrades, but about technological adaptability. By default, a digital transformation will drive a series of changes

almost in all verticals of an organization. However, organizations who wish to be digital ready must be highly responsive to the adoption of new practices and principles related to agility.

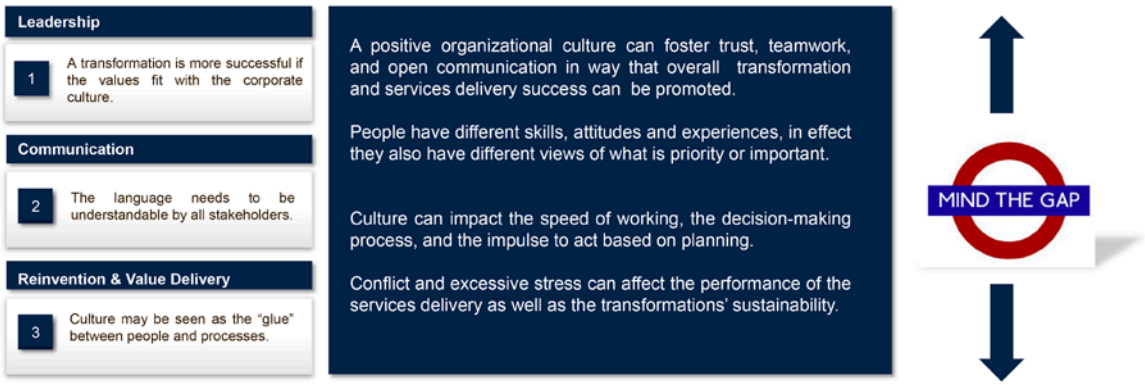

Figure 3: The significance the cultural pillar

Therefore, cultural change is not irrelevant with technology adoption but a necessity which should not be overlooked. Digital Transformation is not only about the shift of the technology toolset but the human factor plays an essential role in the proper usage of technology following its adoption. In other words, the key enablers to succeed in a Digital Transformation journey are cultural as well as technological ones.

3.2 STRATEGY

The Digital Transformation strategy has a primal focus the utilization of specific technological advancement to improve for example the business performance, the branding of a company, to create new products or services. Typically, a digital transformation strategy can start by answering the four traditional questions: the what, why, how and who?

It shows the direction an organization wishes to take by creating new competitive advantages with the integration of technology and the engagement of specific tactics and people who will embed the technology to achieve a series of forthcoming changes.

A quick walkthrough to build a digital transformation strategy can be the following:

- Ensure that you have a compelling Digital Transformation vision and mission
- Identify your goals and desired outcomes (tangible / non-tangible)
- Ensure top-down buy-in
- Secure the necessary funding

- Assess your current digital state
- Align the corporate strategy with Digital Transformation initiatives
- Create a Digital Transformation roadmap coupled with a workforce readiness plan and DT communication plan.

The digital vision should entail a clear compelling picture for the transformation, fostering understanding at all levels of the organization. Something highly motivational as a message which will increase buy-in and will make stakeholders active participants.

Assessing the current digital state answers the question, "'Where are we now?"' but at the same time there should be an association with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Objective Key Results (OKRs) so as to be able to monitor the progress made.

Maintaining a close alignment between the corporate strategy and Digital Transformation initiatives will always be a work in progress. The journey will be long and perhaps some initiatives will add no more or less value than anticipated and will have to be revised or even terminated. Therefore, continuous transformation should be at the heart of such new initiatives, which are closer to the required transformational mindset and skillset.

An established PMO can lead the strategic process alignment and institutionalize the organization's vision, mission, strategic goals and digital objectives with the project portfolio or Digital Transformation program. A strong Transformation PMO, blended with portfolio management is key to the creation of value and furthering of strategic goals, building performance and sustaining capabilities that empower the organization.

Consequently, to create a Digital Transformation strategy, technology is utilized as the platform on which the creation of the transformed business 'runs', which purposefully instills sustainability into digital corporate excellence.

3.3 STRUCTURE

Digital Transformation governance is the "'system"; set of practices and principles by which an organization is directed and controlled and affects they ways decision are being made in the digital landscape.

One of the aims of the Digital Governance, is to ensure that digital initiatives are integrated within an organization's existing IT systems, rules and capabilities. Indeed, Data integration can be proven as one of the biggest challenges in setting up your digital services.

One of the key challenges of the digital governance is related to ensuring that there is a good strategic fit of technology (tools, processes, authority, decision) within the organization and the existing IT architectural fit and the future plans in the field.

The digital governance framework should ensure that all business decisions are made ethically and as required by regulations and laws. In other words, there should not be incentivization of business decision making processes resulting to for example, diversity issues. Interactions between various management layers should therefore be truthful and transparent.

Organizations able to align their digital strategy and information technology successfully, can create very significant business returns and make quality improvements by adding value to the effectiveness of their organization, achieving effectiveness and efficiency, costs reduction, improved customer and buyer/supplier relationships, and creating new products and services.

It is rather essential that corporate objectives are well communicated transparently across an organization, so as stakeholders to know for which results are accountable (own their KPIs) as a measured value that demonstrates how effectively the organization achieves the key business objectives (in quantifiable fashion).

There is a lot of debate in the industry about the right use and suitability of OKRs. However, one of the key differences between OKRs and KPIs is the intention behind the goals set. KPI goals represent the output of a process or project, whereas OKR goals are somewhat more structured and rather ambitious. Many support the idea that OKRs is a strategic framework, whereas KPIs are metrics which are part of an existing framework. Therefore, if a KPI shows the need for improvement, it may constitute the “key result” of an OKR.

However, both can enable you to have a better understanding of the performance of the transformation journey and take informed decisions making the necessary adjustments achieving the strategic goals set.

3.4 SKILLS

For a successful Digital Transformation journey, a balance between the leadership and digital skillset of the stakeholders is required. Both are needed, and none of them in standalone mode can guarantee a silk result. Successful leaders have the capacity and capability to align stakeholders’ common vision, mission, objectives and goals, but most importantly empower and motivate them.

Part of proper planning for the unlearning and relearning process should be the identification of strong influencer decision makers who are also strong dissenters i.e., change inhibitors. If the leaders are unable to sense the benefits of adopting contemporary digital technologies and how these can act as a key enabler to adoption success, then minimum or no success for sustained impact from the transformation efforts is anticipated.

One of the core skills required is the possession of agile and lean perceptions, in terms of the ability to rapidly pivot as the digital environment changes, adapting and continuously discovering knowledge about new technologies and ways of working for the future.

However, many organizations lacked the necessary infrastructure or policies in place. In some instances, where operations previously relied heavily on colocation, remote solutions were not yet defined as the shift came a surprise. So, some organizations were forced to accelerate their digital journey, implement the right infrastructure and tools to allow a seamless remote working service for their employees.

Therefore, knowing what skills are needed and why they are critical to rapidly adjust to new digital requirements and build a sustainable digital advantage, is of outmost importance to securing, to an extent, a long-term success.

Communication is the key ingredient in driving leadership. It helps management to connect with employees, empowers them and stay focused. On the other hand, it's a great tool to resolve conflicts and celebrate success.

In a research from Harvard Business Review and MIT (2016); in a study with 1,000 CEOs, it was reported that 90% believe their businesses are being disrupted or reinvented by digital business models. What is also impressive to be noted in the aforementioned research results, is that when participants were asked about their capabilities, 70% believe they do not possess the right skills, leader, or operating structure to adapt. So, an organization may have the capacity to digitally change, but lack certain key capabilities.

In this context, PMOGA (2021) the world's largest community for PMOs and PMO professionals conducted a short research survey regarding latest key trends and advancements during these turbulent times we are all passing through and reported the top skills for a PMO professional, results are summarized in Figure 4:

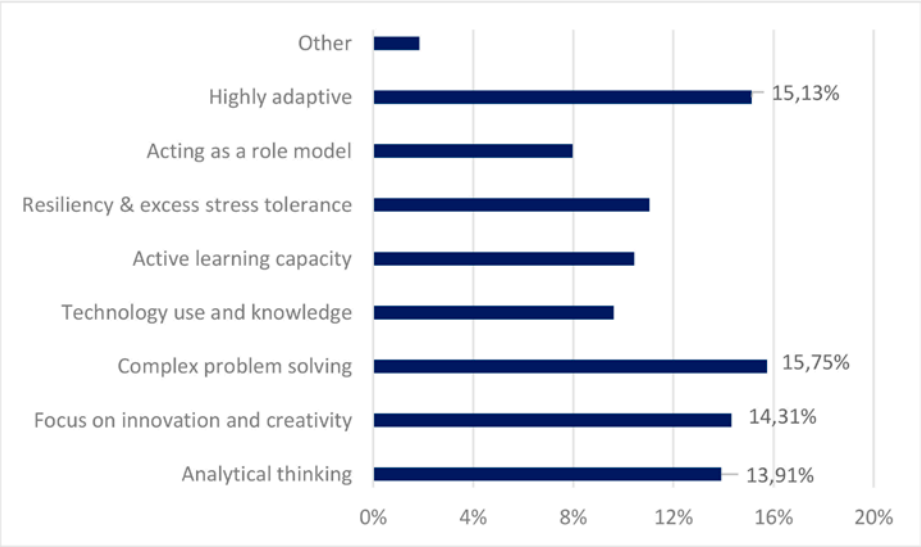

Figure 4: PMO Professionals' Top Skills & Competencies

The top 3 skills and competences are as follows:

1. Complex problem solving
2. Highly adaptive
3. Focus on innovation and creativity

The majority of respondents[1] chose "Complex problem solving"' as the top required PMO skill (15.75%). In principle, problem solving is related to searching for specific steps or processes that will lead to a successful solution or outcome.

In order to manage complex issues, large sets of information, are used to define the process in search of the right solutions. Systems' complexity is related to the number of elements; the more complex a system is, the more the interdependencies of associated elements. Resolving complex problems requires lot of different skills and one of the best ways to try and solve it, is to divide it into smaller pieces. In turn, expand on a step-by-step approach (gradually adding complexity) and finally be able to understand the overall problem and try to solve it.

Quite close to the topmost PMO skill, "Highly Adaptive" was the second highest one with 15.13%. A high level of adaptability means that you have the capacity to handle change successfully and with less stress compared to other people.

Adaptable people see opportunities where others see failure, focusing on improvement. In this modern era, the era of the "New Normal' adaptability has become a core skill in order to survive

1 Data collection and analysis is based on responses of 168 Project Managers / PMO professionals and Executives.

turbulence and bounce back out of difficult situations. While it is a great challenge to stay resilient: changes to the corporate strategy, culture, technology and organizational processes are inevitable. Therefore, the second preference was an expected outcome of the survey.

Adaptability can expand a thinking horizon to new ideas, questions the established status quo, and gives the willingness to make the necessary plans and handle change(s).

The third top PMO skill based on respondents' choice was "focus on innovation and creativity" (14.31%). One of the purposes of innovation is to create sustainable value by thinking or doing something differently or even creating something new compared to others.

Effectively, adapting an innovative mindset can help you achieve your business growth goals faster; provides the ground for autonomy to be instilled within teams; gives room to experimentation with new ideas; improves individual and team wellbeing, mental health and mental fitness; increases productivity and consequently the profitability.

More specifically, technological innovation can bring a plethora of benefits to the society, with goods and services which in turn improve the overall living standard and wellbeing. New technologies are emerging every day and irrespective if it is Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain, Cloud, Robotics, they radically transform our business world...the "new normal".

4. DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION MODELING

Every Digital Transformation must include elements that pursue business opportunities which are relevant today as well as, those that put the organization on the path towards a sustainable future. Below is a choice of one of the most interesting models (Fig. 5) regarding Digital Transformations related to the section's 3, Key Digital Transformation pillars.

The model was initially developed by Åshild Hanne Larsen, Ouriel Lancry, and Mehran Gul (WEF, 2018) and consisted of four building blocks: the digital strategy (where the business should be going); the business model (fit with the purpose); the enablers (what is needed to get there) and orchestration (how change will be managed to reach a sustainable output).

This model was further enhanced by the author by the addition of four new components designated in the dark blue boxes. The "X-Factor" in the Digital Strategy block, "Innovation" and "Agility" as enablers as well as, "Reinvention" positioned in the Orchestration block.

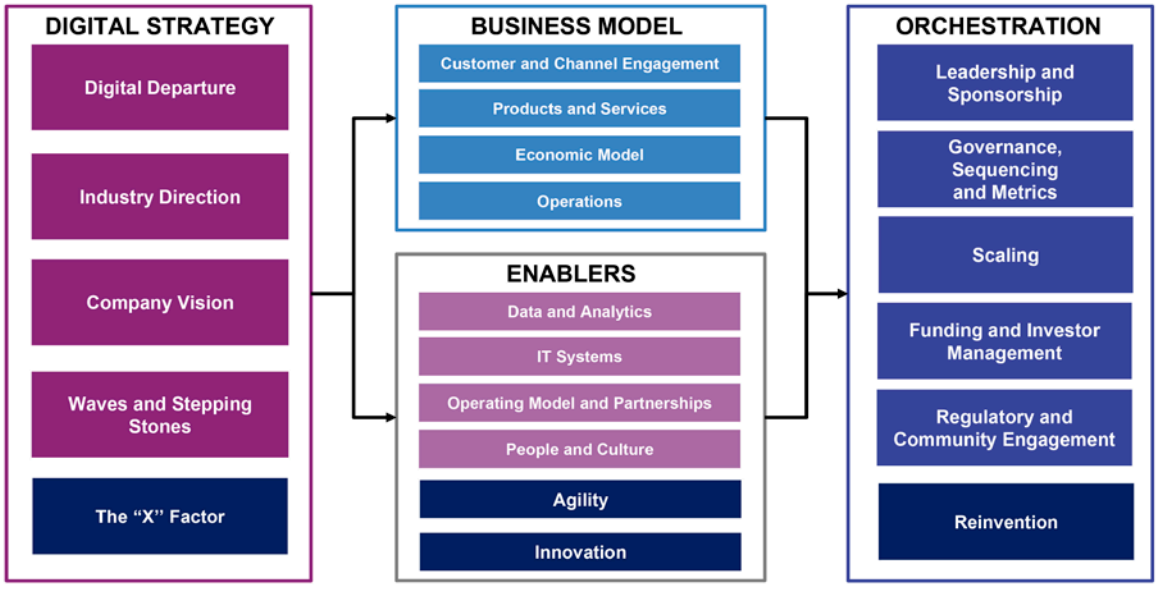

Figure 5: Enhanced Digital Transformation Model

4.1 DIGITAL STRATEGY

The recent and ongoing crisis has brought with it an abundance of unpredictable circumstances that are tied to short-term abrupt changes, and this is what the "X" factor is. Actually, what has happened in the digital field is that Digital Transformation journeys were accelerated, creating great opportunities for growth.

However, the future is depended on a plethora of integrated or conflicting factors, in effect, it is quite likely that other unstable or unpredicted factors will influence in either direction our digital future.

Industry trends in the digital sector do change rapidly. Such trends may relate to price, cost, consumer behaviors, marketing, manufacturing, sales, or services provisioning. Who could have ever predicted the rise of Artificial Intelligence, the extensive use of chatbots and a new lifestyle governed by Internet of Behaviors (IoB)? Digital Strategy is about 'who talks the talk and who walks the walk'.

It is impressive that in just a few months duration, the COVID-19 crisis has brought about years of changes in the way we see the world and operate in individual or collective levels. A proper and concrete digital strategy in place can guide more businesses to modernize digital capabilities, gaining a significant competitive advantage, and foster a business culture which focuses on the use of digital technologies leading to tangible and sustainable results.

4.2 BUSINESS MODEL

The focus of a business model is in the description and planning of how organizations can create, deliver, and gain greater value, in various business context like: economic, social, cultural. On the contrary, the focus on Digital Business Models is primarily on the digital context.

Such models drive real value both for the businesses and the stakeholders (e.g., customers). The digital transformations as specific process, results in shifts with new products or services, great and more valuable customer experience and digitization.

In effect, there is a leverage on digital technologies and potential improvements on several verticals of an organization. A digital business model is unique for every organization and there is no one size-fits-all since the needs and anticipated value proposition is different.

4.3 ENABLERS

There is no doubt that the management of data and their analysis is a key enabler in driving business' processes and improving outcomes through facilitated decision making. Analytics is more complex as the discovery of patterns and trends from data is time consuming on a per case basis and can have an excessive cost if properly managed the benefits are great.

More mature organizations deploy sophisticated qualitative and quantitative data analysis which is beneficial in examining, transforming and arranging the given data set in specific ways and extract useful information. Big Data Analytics have emerged as the game-changer for organizations. Digital transformation has set a clear path of growth for organizations, by embracing an overall positive change and stayed updated in the global competitive environment; and this is where Big Data stepped in as a catalyst.

Another great challenge in Digital Transformations is related to people and actually in hiring the right people with the necessary skillset mix. In effect, the role of human resources is vital in this issue and a multi-faceted one. There are exceptionally talented people with high caliber technical skill but lack the ones in the leadership field or vice versa.

As the project skills, the number of stakeholders and their needs in the project may change. The project manager and the project team will need to be aware of the influx of stakeholders and how this change may affect the dynamics of the project team and the project work. An approach to project human resources may work well in one phase of the project but not in another due to the stakeholders excessive or limited involvement.

Staffing requirements are the identified roles needed on a project to complete the assigned work, but in the case of Digital Transformation the digital part needs to be enhanced. Any skills gaps (digital or leadership) would need to be addressed through staff acquisition, additional training, or even via the procurement department. When it comes to human resource constraints, key project stakeholders may deal with constraining factors which will limit the options for project completion.

The is a lot of confusion in the industry as far as the terms Agile and Agility is concerned. Agility means undergoing repetitive timeboxed cycles to invent or reinvent something new, discovering how well it worked and assessing it further whether it achieves the desired results. So, digital agility may refer to ease by which an organization can rapidly and effectively enable, update, change, and adapt their processes to a new digital environment.

The concept of digital agility is not new for business, since doing things faster, with higher time-to-market velocity, more efficiently at a significant lower is something that most organizations try to achieve. Key to achieving such goals is the competence level and ability to be agile and

flexible and there is a big gap between “Being Agile” and “Doing Agile”. The first refers to actively applying the practices but there is always the danger to apply without understanding the key principles behind the practices and principles, and the latter is adopting and applying the right principles via a view to survive in on-going change.

Digital Transformations using agile principles, frameworks or tools is not a panacea. For sure it requires trained stakeholders and extensive leadership skills. Moving to an agile operating model might be a hard exercise. However, the pandemic was proven to be an enabler for the birth for many innovative digital services and products.

What is the first word that comes to mind when you hear or say the word “Innovation”? How many of you had an idea and followed through the practical steps to transform it into a reality?

During the crisis most of the companies which made billions of USD as profit, originated from the technology sector. Digital Transformation changed the way these organizations operated; their systems, workflow, processes and culture were re-evaluated. They needed the right tools and framework to manage digital innovation and they made it because they envisioned a digital-first era and became Digital ready faster than any of their competitors. Such a topic is endless, but keep in mind to be successful, the innovation must primarily support and satisfy the customer needs.

4.4 ORCHESTRATION

The role of a maestro is mainly to set the tempo. However, it is a lot more like listening critically and shaping the sound of the orchestra by unifying a large group of musicians into a core sound, serving as the messenger of the composer. Similarly, the person in charge for the success of the Digital Transformation journey plays a critical role for the success for example: by setting the priorities, ensuring the necessary finances are in place and walking the talk.

Governance keeps an eye on the bigger picture and can exist both in an orchestra and in organizations. Even though it was discussed in section 3.3 (Structure Pillar) the purposes of a governance model may include the following:

- To exercise control, e.g., approval of milestones, monitoring the budget, the achievement of objectives.
- Facilitates timely and effective decision making through a clear structure and escalation pathway e.g., resources prioritization and potential conflicting priorities.

- To ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities for the delivery of projects including the influence and authority levels.
- To ensure that effective reporting and communication mechanisms are in place
- To ensure consistency through the establishment of policies, standards and practices in collaboration with the PMO.

The sound an orchestra makes is dynamic as it should be pure and clear. Especially in the start of the composition new musical instruments may be added, others taken out., Digital Transformations are as well, dynamic and many changes will be required. Some projects may not add more value, some others might do and for some other ones the people, scope and other constraints will change.

However, what is of great importance is to have in mind reinvention and value creation. Digital Transformation can be regarded as the epitome of change in how an organization delivers value to its customers. Technology changes fast so the overall digital direction might change and the whole process needs to adapt to a new business landscape.

The implication of value creation is rather profound but customer needs and expectations move along an end-to-end cross-functional continuum within the organization.

5. TEN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION BENEFITS

Digital Transformations can be considered as foundational change in regard to the ways an organization delivers value to its customers. Typically, customers base their buying decisions on two criteria: the benefits of a particular product or service and its price. What if the real disruptive digital innovation was based on simplicity? - High quality services available for all… innovation is not about less, but to the point – high quality experiences.

In effect, high quality digital services can act as a key differentiator that enable organizations to attract new customers in a highly competitive business landscape.

To this frame a summary of potential Digital Transformation benefits is summarized below:

- Improved efficiency
- Informed decision making
- Greater customer satisfaction
- Improved profitability and higher ROI and ROV
- Better employee engagement and culture
- Improving competitive advantage(s)
- Increased agility
- Enhanced data collection
- Improved employees' skillset
- Enables digitisation of products/services

6. KEYS FOR SUCCESSFUL DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS

In regard to successful Digital Transformations' outcome, it is of great importance to balance the digital and leadership capabilities of the key stakeholders, especially to those who have high decision power or are engaged in deliverables even as team members. It's not a secret that Digital Transformations are even more difficult than traditional change efforts to pull off.

Further to the objective of digitizing an organization's operating model, results should be visible and sustainable. The sooner organizations realise that Digital Transformation must do more with people than technology, the sooner the transformation can be initiated with higher probability of success. Several keys which can act as enablers for successful Digital Transformations are seen below:

- Define goals and establish clear governance
- Train stakeholders to deliver results (focus both on digital and leadership capabilities).
- Focus as a start on quick wins, something that everyone can participate
- Select the right champions for the DT journey (think vs. do)
- Don't put all your eggs in one basket (ROI results do take time)
- Proper environment creation; take into account corporate culture and insights.
- Investment in training is a MUST
- Don't stop if things don't work out at first attempt
- Prioritise and remove obstacles. Conflict is not always bad. Apathy is worse
- Have faith in a team spirit approach. Nobody knows everything.
- Select the proper tools and tailor the PMO processes; simple and as needed
- Be patient, transformations bring results in a time range of 2 - 5 years
- Minimise and try to avoid complaints
- Allow time for people who take longer to digest the key messages
- Communicate, communicate, communicate!
- Keep it simple and to the point

The importance of selecting the right skilful team members as well as, the team development itself has already been pointed out. Nevertheless, this is of great importance and a key motivational driver to reward your team. A reward and recognition system encourages, emphasizes, and promotes good performance and behaviour among team members.

7. PMO AS A CATALYTIC ROLE

In short, a PMO underpins the project delivery mechanisms by ensuring that all business change in an organization is managed in a controlled way and if you cannot control it, you cannot manage it and vice versa. It starts with the main purpose to facilitate or even lead project success by establishing best practices, tools, processes, mitigating risks and ensuring on-time project delivery within a specified budget.

Higher level and more mature PMOs have a more specific oriented corporate structure. For example: Strategic PMOs enable strategic change in organizations. Their scope touches the organization's direction; aims to achieve tangible advantages through various initiatives e.g., planning, meeting the market needs, stakeholders' expectations fulfilment, financial sustainability, active role in mergers and acquisitions and many others. The following pinpointers indicate what PMOs are aiming to achieve in the Digital Transformation context:

- Act as an enabler and spread the corporate vision that affects the overall business strategy and come up with a new and specific strategic change(s).
- Introduce innovative ideas, or a process which can significantly affects the current way of doing or thinking in an organization; form the corporate culture.
- Have the capacity and capability to see something others stakeholders don't. Therefore, putting the pieces together towards corporate excellence!
- Have the power to transform the accepted rules, practices and principles, strategy and associated corporate governance.
- Lead the stakeholders towards a common vision / mission in the same direction
- Act as a role model and motivate stakeholders

In this context, Project Portfolio management can be the bridge between organizational strategy, program / project management and operations under an established Transformation PMO shell. In effect, the Digital Transformation strategy and objectives are translated into a set of initiatives which can establish the Digital Transformation project portfolio. Briefly, its role can be even more extended, but not limited to the following areas:

- Develop and maintain processes and procedures for gathering and reporting consolidated charters and digital program data and schedules.

- Manage the integrated strategic / digital portfolio plan and associated inter-dependencies.
- Assume an active role in risk management including assessing inter- related risks from multiple charters and programs across an organization.
- Manage the mechanism for early issue raising, issue clarification / communication and issue resolution.
- Manage change requests and take actions to fulfil the requirements
- Establish clear visibility on the status of the Digital Transformation journey and ensure transparent periodic reporting.
- Identify and implement best practices, focusing on adding value and innovation
- Define Project/Program/Portfolio management standards, processes, tools, templates and procedures.
- Create clear accountability, roles and decision making for the stakeholders
- Enhance centralized support provision for managing changes and tracking issues and risks.
- Monitor and control the journey's deliverables, removing obstacles the soonest possible and keep an eye on potential conflicts of interest.

EPILOGUE

A big part of Digital Transformation has to do with the comprehension of how the digital technologies (significant component of an organization's operating model) actually facilitate the organization's business model. This has an impact on overall enhanced customer experience which impacts the organization's profitability sustainability and digital future.

Committing to sustainable transformations in the "new normal" can be achieved by investing in people and culture from the offset of such an initiative. The development of a mutual expectation in regard to the holistic transformation efforts does take time.

Culture and deep core beliefs held by stakeholders play a vital role in executing Digital Transformations. These beliefs affect their acceptance of revolutionary technologies for fear of failure that stemmed from their unfamiliarity with the new technologies. This further highlights the significance of the role of senior management in an organization's alignment drive. Therefore, it is recommended that businesses ensure they have a good understanding of the value of strategic alignment of business and IT systems integration.

A clear path and focus on continuous improvement and innovation is not a panacea but can shed more light on the sort of adoption roadmap required and the path leading to success. Technology is not only capable in improving people's lives, but is also makes work easier and more production in many sectors.

Walking the talk in a digital transformation is not easy. To lead the stakeholders forward, leaders must communicate a compelling vision that inspires and motivates them. They must be in a position to foster a digital culture and provide clarity of benefits to their teams that are highly adaptable to change and embrace new technology and innovation.

However, in order for projects to be successful even though, vocabulary misalignment can lead to miscommunication, all stakeholders have to formulate a solution to model the customers' requirements and conform to what is being expected.

On the other hand, there cannot be a unique way to conform to project changes and assess the relative risks predefining the results of a project. Project difficulties and outcomes cannot be predicted easily. This is because what may seem to be applicable on an individual basis

or at a business level might be inappropriate or insufficient for specific project conditions (Apostolopoulos et. al., 2016).

Technology can offer to global businesses an incredible potential to engage seamlessly with people on the worldwide scene. The pandemic helped to accelerate digital transformations and create a unique landscape for continuous innovation enabling the technological adoption advancement in a faster pace. Such opportunities, are anticipated to exist even after the pandemic is over.

People are just as the same important as technology. It is impossible to run technology advancements without people. Strong, clear and transparent communication is an imperishable asset within an organization and the human element must not be put in the corner, but put in the forefront.

Digital leaders must create harmony between the technology and people, creating a balance in order to drive their business to a successful future. Growth is not anticipated to be linear, as it is almost certain that there will be no direct line from A to B, but a path full of twists and turns.

Get prepared, the future is digital!

REFERENCES

Apostolopoulos, C., Halikias, G., Maroukian, K., Tsaramirsis, G. (2016). Facilitating Organisational Decision Making: A Change Risk Assessment Model Case Study, Journal of Modelling in Management; Emerald; Vol.11, Iss. 2, pp. 694-721

Apostolopoulos, C., Simpson, B. (2009). Requirements Analysis is just the Peak of the Iceberg,1st International Workshop on Requirements Analysis, pp. 1-12, Pearsons Education, London, UK, ISBN: 9781847766632.

BakerMcKenzie (2020). 2020 Digital Transformation & Cloud Survey, The Future of Enterprise Data, https://www.bakermckenzie.com/en/insight/publications/2020/10/digital-transformation-cloud-survey-2020.

Gartner (2020a). Digitalization strategy for Business Transformation, Accelerate your digital transformation journey, https://www.gartner.com/en/information-technology/insights/digitalization

Gartner (2020b). Gartner Top 10 Strategic Predictions for 2021 and Beyond, https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/gartner-top-10-strategic-predictions-for-2021-and-beyond/

International Monetary Fund (IMF) 2021. Word Economic Outlook, April 2021, https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2021/03/23/world-economic-outlook-april-2021

International Air Transport Association (IATA) (2020). Pressroom, https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/pr/2020-07-28-02/

McKinsey (2019). Growing opportunities in the Internet of Things. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/private-equity-and-principal-investors/our-insights/growing-opportunities-in-the-internet-of-things

MIT Sloan in collaboration with Delloite University Press (2016) Aligning the Organization for Its Digital Future, https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/insights/us/articles/mit-smr-deloitte-digital-transformation-strategy/2016_MIT_DeloitteAligningDigitalFuture.pdf

PwC (2017). Sizing the prize. PwC's Global Artificial Intelligence Study: Exploiting the AI Revolution, https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/data-and-analytics/publications/artificial-intelligence-study.html

PMOGA (2021). Global Research Survey, Q6) Which are the top skills and competencies of a modern PMO professional? https://forms.office.com/r/LWhU8mc0wW

World Economic Forum (2021). Shaping the Future of Digital Economy and New Value Creation, https://www.weforum.org/platforms/shaping-the-future-of-digital-economy-and-new-value-creation

World Economic Forum (2018). How-to-transform-a-company-into-a-digital-enterprise, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/how-to-transform-a-company-into-a-digital-enterprise/

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For this publication I wish to express my gratitude to my friends Helio Costa, FLEKS Hybrid Model Developer who invited me to write this ebook and Americo Pinto, Founder and Chair of the PMO Global Alliance (PMOGA) for exchanging valuable insights and for providing the opportunity to share key learnings, being part as a C-suite level executive in the world's biggest community for PMOs and PMO professionals.

Last but not least, I'm thankful to Krikor Maroukian, Principal Modern Service Management Consultant at Microsoft, for working together several nights in numerous publications and projects, as well as, for his invaluable suggestions and final review of this publication.

Many thanks to all of you for your genuine support, friendship and trust, getting engaged in a plethora of significant initiatives giving back to the community and the profession all those many years. It is always more than a pleasure collaborating together.

Greater challenges are coming in the future, but the determination for excellence is even stronger...stay safe and tuned.

Anything is possible!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Harris is a visionary strategy executive, author and speaker with two decades of diverse industry exposure, highly skilled and experienced in international and multicultural business environments. Led and directed a plethora of large scale, complex project portfolios and programs (20 countries, up to $1.65 billion value and benefits of $178 million). Harris possesses a results-oriented mindset, being capable to lead Business & Digital transformations, PMOs and sustainable strategy implementation, putting the pieces together towards corporate excellence.

Harris's professional skills such as strong leadership, negotiation, communication, problem-solving, and empathetic reasoning have contributed to several successful initiatives to date, showing in practice creative thinking. His rich international experience spans in various sectors such as Government, Airlines/Aviation, Defence, Renewable Energy, IT & Telecoms, Smart Cities, Banking and Education.

Through hard work, perseverance, and tangible results, he is one of less than ten professionals, globally, to attain PfMP/PgMP/PMP and PhD accolades.

Personal mantra: Being motivated by what others believe as complex and impossible to achieve.

https://www.linkedin.com/in/apostolopoulos/

harris.apostolopoulos@gmail.com