

How organisations can stay future fit

Even before Covid-19, businesses faced increasing pressure to focus on transformation, but after the disruptions of the last year, the pandemic has presented organisations with new challenges to adapt to. Today, businesses need to focus on traditional concerns like market and product development while managing a shift to digital in a pandemic too.



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Some South African leaders are turning these obstacles into opportunities, ensuring business continuity and taking steps to future proof their businesses in an increasingly digital age.

A few of them shared insights into what they've done, and are doing, to stay future fit.

An integrated digital journey for us and our customers

In an almost Darwinian way, being future-fit means that an organisation needs to be suited to its environment or it will die out. Businesses exist in different environments and finding out what makes your business fit for its environment is key to securing its future, notes Prof Josef Langerman, head of Engineering Capability and Ways of Working at Standard Bank Group.

“ Covid-19 has presented organisations and individuals with significant challenges, but if any good has come of it, it has been real digital transformation. Many businesses have tried to change digitally, but traditional cultures have slowed the process. As a catalyst for digital transformation, the pandemic has allowed us to change the way we work and to

improve experiences for our customers. ”

"At Standard Bank, customer experience is critical to our ability to be future-fit. Digital interactions now need to be more integrated, seamless, customer-centric and simple. Combined with this, businesses like ours require operational efficiency. You need to take the systems and silos that exist in a legacy business and consolidate them into an operational backbone that is fit for purpose and without duplication. Creating systems that integrate your customer journeys across different stages will foster business continuity and longevity," says Prof Josef Langerman.



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Migrating to a digital future with cloud and connectivity

Steve Briggs, chief commercial officer at Seacom, notes that in the tech space, future fitness is an approach that requires introspection as you try and anticipate what's coming next.

“ Because technology evolves so rapidly, leaders need to constantly reflect and adapt to remain at the forefront of innovation. ”

The pandemic has caused a surge in data traffic and cloud adoption, but it has also highlighted the inequality between those who have access to connectivity and those who do not. "We are just starting the journey towards realising widespread connectivity in Africa, and the economy can't be digitalised if everyone doesn't have an equal chance to participate. Ensuring access to connectivity so that more people can benefit from fourth industrial revolution (4IR) opportunities is an important part of Seacom's plan to stay future fit."

"To secure their futures, businesses need to focus on strategy, and they need to know what digital transformation means for them. Cloud models will certainly underpin the 4IR, but migration will take time and there will always be challenges. Rather than rush into things, first get your plan right, instil a digital culture and then proceed pragmatically," advises Briggs.



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An open approach to organisational change

"For Red Hat, being future fit is about organisations taking time to rediscover their purpose, giving leaders an opportunity to introspect and consider how to put customers and employees back in the centre of who they are and why they exist," says Dion Harvey, regional general manager at Red Hat Sub-Saharan Africa.

“ With more people working from home, being future fit has challenged organisations to consider how to get the best out of their workforce. Red Hat believes that workforce management should be less about command and control, and more about trust and meritocracy. As an open-source software company, we believe in fostering a work environment where decision-making is open and transparent – an open organisation. ”

"Embracing openness to become future fit means changing from a rigid organisational hierarchy to an organisation where the best ideas win, and employees are free to do their best work. Today, the most forward-thinking organisations are

embracing openness as a necessary orientation toward success," adds Harvey. This is part of Red Hat's competitive edge, leading to:

- Greater agility, as members are more capable of working toward goals together and with shared vision.
- Faster innovation, as internal and external ideas are considered, leading to rapid experimentation.
- Increased engagement, as members see connections between their activities and an organisation's overarching values, mission, and spirit.

The importance of building skilled communities

Arthur Wade Anderson, co-founder and CEO of Forge Academy, notes: "The pandemic has certainly exposed real vulnerabilities in our communities, encouraging businesses to consider whether they are future fit, and to reflect on how they can contribute to society. With technology set to underpin almost every aspect of business in the future, the real opportunity for growth lies in bridging the digital divide and creating shared wealth in the wider technological ecosystem. And to do this, we need the right skills."

“ If the youth are our future customers and employees, we need to take them on the digital journey with us. ”

Forge Academy uses a hands-on lab-based approach to give learners practical skills to become the makers and builders of tomorrow. By allowing them access to innovative technologies such as augmented reality biology lessons, robotics, app development and 3D printing, we are positioning them for future opportunities that will be relevant to consumers.

"Investing in education and social enterprise keeps a business future fit because it keeps the community future fit. The 4IR will create opportunities to harness convergent technologies for an all-inclusive future, but if we want to have a digitally empowered and tech-savvy work environment tomorrow, we need to invest in it today," says Anderson.

Moving forward together

These insights show that there is much to be gained from sharing ideas and expertise in a rapidly evolving business environment. In times of uncertainty, discussing challenges and success stories can illuminate the way forward. For Clockwork, part of being future fit means bringing our clients together and learning from their experiences too.

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