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Digital transformation is not just about technology - it's about people

By Anton Cabral

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Can you remember thirty-or-so years ago, to a time before mobile technology and the internet? If so, you'll also probably remember when your parents bought their first answering machine, and then fax machine, and everyone marvelled at making a call on a big, fat Nokia phone?



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The interesting thing about looking back on those days is how the technology we brought into our households was inspired by what we (or our parents) experienced in the office. It was a mark of sophistication to own workplace technology in the home.

But now, times have changed and the scenarios have reversed significantly.

The ubiquity of the internet and smartphones now means that the technology we use in our personal lives is directing the technology decisions being made in the workplace. We're taking our personal (and often recreational) gadgets and cell phones, tablets and apps, and social media into our jobs. We're taking everyday technology we use at home and making it essential for a business to adopt if it wants to engage with customers and employees successfully.

> *"It's been a 180-degree shift in the approach to the end-user…and this is fundamental to what digital transformation is really about."*

It's not just about technology

Let's be clear, digital transformation is not just about technology - it's about people. It reframes how organisations apply current and future technologies effectively to make processes more efficient, and make individuals more productive both personally and professionally. Digital transformation is about human beings, and in the workplace, this means supporting them with technology to perform better.

Many organisations are struggling with this shift in power, where IT departments are no longer driving the technology agenda on their own but are expected to engage the entire business ecosystem including operations, sales and support as the de facto. This disruption of traditional silo's to encourage a collaborative approach is an early step in initiating digital transformation.

The digital transformation of organisations is typically concerned with three areas:

- operational processes
- business models
- the end-user experience

The latter translates to the customer experience (Cx) and winning them (and especially their hard-earned rands) over in that 'last mile'. But it similarly holds true to the employee experience (Ex), where talent feels valued and supported to perform at its peak - which is what every business wants.

The digital transformation of the Ex requires a focus on developing a strong employee understanding, making the most of employee touch-points, and fostering a collaborative culture that allows employees to provide direct feedback to benefit business decisions. When these inputs are given a voice in refining the digital strategy, digital projects can be delivered in the right context with relevance and optimal functionality, ultimately elevating organisational performance.

Digital transformation has no finite point

Digital transformation is, however, a process that has no finite end-point, and in itself will never be complete. One, therefore, has to ask,

> *What is the end-goal for the collaborative business, if digital transformation is not the full picture?*

Ideally, organisations should be setting themselves up to become digitally mature. Digital maturity is a cultural mindset within an organisation, driven by leadership that is committed to an un-siloed approach to the evaluation and timely implementation of technology that allows a business and its people to evolve and thrive.

Digital maturity is a state of business ready-ness and agility, and naturally, there are some organisations that are more mature, and therefore able to outperform those who are not. Those that engage their employees from the outset definitely have a head-start.

Will businesses be digitally mature?

Increasingly, the SMAC Stack technologies of social, mobile, analytics, and cloud are poised to make great advances to business performance as they evolve. The question is, will businesses be digitally mature to take advantage of the benefits they can offer? Will they be paying close enough attention to their employees and their HR departments to anticipate and

apply these technologies effectively?

In essence, digital transformation is a subset of what it takes for an organisation to reach digital maturity. Digital maturity is not only about technology, but about being ready to use it efficiently where it's is really needed. Digital maturity requires communication between people, setting up collaborative team structures, listening to employees…giving strong leadership.

That being said, with technology doing so well in a supporting role, it would be tempting to cast it as the lead in digital transformation. But then we'd just be back to where we started in the 80's...

ABOUT ANTON CABRAL

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