



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

How Culture Drives Digital Adoption

Effective digital adoption is an all-hands-on-deck endeavor. That's why company culture is so important when it comes to implementing new technology.

Luke O'Neill May 2, 2022 | 4 min

Digital transformation remains one of the toughest organizational changes to deliver well. A recent McKinsey survey showed only 18% of respondents felt their digital transformation efforts had improved performance.

Digital transformation gets harder when you're a bigger enterprise, too. Businesses that have fewer than 100 employees are more than two and half times more likely to get it right than those with more than 50,000.

Despite the challenges, many chief technology officers (CTOs), chief information officers, and innovation-driven executives are making big plans for digital adoption. The 2021 CTO study from IBM showed 66% of CTOs see cloud computing as the technology most likely to help deliver results over the next two to three years, followed by the Internet of Things (54%), and advanced analytics (50%).

Whether you're a chief technology officer or VP at a start-up or a blue chip, effective digital adoption is an all-hands-on-deck endeavor. Here are the best practices several executives have gleaned from their digital adoption plans.

Get executive buy-in

There are a hundred levers to pull for digital adoption, suggests Claravine CEO Veri Allen. He has helped major companies such as Adobe to drive digital adoption.

"The most important, most crucial part of the process is for the CEO, and senior leadership team, to ingrain data and digital strategy into the business strategy and executive culture," he said.

To do this, Allen suggests giving data-driven people senior roles with the authority to drive big change.

"Companies need to build teams of data-driven people that don't accept the status quo but lean on data and digital insights to take risks, disrupt, and enact change," Allen said.

Check your culture

While the right hires are part of the picture, it's your core existing teams that you will really need to convince. And that's all about culture.

"Empathy and sensitivity are foremost when building any culture. Next comes

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the technology's ease of use and the value it provides in making everyday life effortless and seamless. The more intuitive a technology for both synchronous and asynchronous communication and collaboration, the higher the adoption rate will be," said Lalit Mangal, CEO of Airmeeet.

Each individual brings their own mindset and work experiences, according to Saman Pourkermani, practice lead, legal at Inspirant Group.

"And then the team and the department have their own dynamic. So, the way you change the culture is to make shifts at every level of the organization," he said.

CTOs will be key in helping their executive colleagues understand the impacts of getting this wrong.

"Firms that do not match digital transformation goals with employee values risk slow adoption of digital technology, loss of market competitiveness, the initiative's eventual collapse, and a loss of productivity and income," said Andrew Dale, technical director at managed IT support provider at CloudTech24.

Identify the barriers

Everblue Chief Innovation Officer Jon Boggiano agrees employees are the key to success. That starts with getting to know why your teams are still working the way they are. What might be holding them back from modernizing tired processes with digitization?

"People interact with processes — whether old and new, or paper or digital — with wide interests and motivations. It's critical those are understood, acknowledged, and designed for in any digital transformation," said Boggiano.

"Think of office staff designing an app for fieldworkers but not understanding there may be glare, dirty fingers, and reading glasses involved," Boggiano said. "Or the worker who's done a job for 30 years that is about to be automated. That's scary. Those concerns must be understood and met."

Explain the benefits

Companies need to be transparent as they attempt to sell these changes to their employees. They need to help teams and departments understand how digital adoption benefits both the organization and employees. This task falls to managers.

"For this to happen, the managers will have to step up and start motivating employees. There shouldn't be any doubt or fear among anyone," said Andreas Grant, a network security engineer and founder of Networks Hardware. "Once everyone realizes how this transformation is actually speeding up and decreasing their workload, it's only a matter of time for the employees to go with the 'digital-first' approach."

Talk can be cheap, though. This won't work if teams can't test and critique new tools and processes before the company fully adopts them.

"If an innovation can provide value on day one of its implementation, that will close the deal for you," said Daniel Soliman, a former AARP executive, who led a team that created a FinTech product to help low-income homeowners get property relief.

Open feedback loops

It's important to get everyone talking about the changes, too. It's key to do this early in the process of getting used to a new tool, process, or software.

"We use Slack to ask team members to share their first impressions of a new tool. If employees see their teammates are loving a new platform or tool and sharing about it, that can build enthusiasm and reinforce adoption," said Cassandra Wilcox, CTO at Statusphere.

"We like to reassure our team that they can openly share their thoughts on any new tool, positive or negative, and without judgment. It not only helps people feel comfortable trying things out, but our leaders can see what's working and what's not," she said.

Create 'change champions'

No transformation project can get all things right on the first try, according to Boggiano.

"Motivated individuals, we call them champions, really drive adoption. They need support and pathways to be able to drive change," he said.

Again, managers are key here, but executives need to give them agency to push for digital transformation, however small or audacious that might be.

"Get people managers involved right at the initiation of a new project," said Steffaney Zohrabyan, a digital adoption and sales enablement executive at Cisco. "Keep your finger on the pulse of how your employees are feeling about the current state, and the future state. This constant championing of change through these frontline managers will increase employees' awareness and clarity around new technology."

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