

WHAT IS A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FRAMEWORK?



The challenges many companies faced during 2020 are possibly unlike anything their disaster recovery plans prepared them to handle. These past few months have solidified the value of automating manual processes and moving important data and systems to cloud-based services. Trying to weather the past few months of uncertainty would have been tragic to many businesses if they had not already started their digital transformations, opening the eyes of those businesses who have delayed implementing their own journeys.

Businesses of all sizes have had their resiliency tested. Now is the time to take a holistic look at an organization and really determine what technology worked well and what processes need to be improved. From these learnings, a plan can be created to focus on those areas of opportunity not only to keep the business running but to ensure employees and customers who are relying on the business survive another economic shut down if one was to happen. Even though these times are challenging, it's during times of great change when even greater change can happen. Whether a business is big or small, it's important to implement a digital transformation framework that becomes the blueprint for handling significant changes because of evolving business conditions.

Avoiding Piecemeal Solutions

For most if not all organizations, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Each area of the business should make up a fine-tuned mix of separate functions working in tandem to deliver products and services to customers. The problem for many digital transformation efforts comes when departments take an improvisational approach to solving their individual challenges by

choosing solutions that work solely for their own purposes. This strategy may have previously made sense, but it risks the potential for divided, uncoordinated operations that do not work well together in clear, integrated ways.

Now, new technology and IT capabilities are emerging with many of them capable of incorporating shared value for an organization. To obtain the most out of these solutions, successful companies will take a holistic and multi-faceted approach to their continued business evolution by using a digital transformation framework as a scaffolding to guide them through these intense changes and utilizing the strength of the entire business to potentially grow in new and even uncharted areas.

A digital transformation framework is a tool used across the organization that guides all departments and job levels through the journey. When executed correctly, it ensures no area of the business is left unattended during periods of transition and change while keeping all parties aligned to the overall vision of the business. Successful frameworks enable the business strategy while providing roadmaps that allow an organization to evolve and succeed in the rapidly changing market conditions. These frameworks do this by providing a way to create tangible benchmarks, meaningful metrics, and clear indications of progress while pinpointing areas that require more attention or can be utilized for further growth.

Choosing the Right Framework

Many experts have weighed in on how to execute a digital transformation framework by formalizing strategies for organizations to tackle their approach to the rapid pace of change faced when attempting to transform their businesses. But no single framework will work for every business and any business will need to tailor a framework to fit their specific needs. The simplest goal of a framework is to create a sense of order amid the chaos that is modern IT operations by ultimately wrangling in challenges nearly all IT teams in the middle of digital transformations must face like:

- Legacy apps and services running on dedicated servers and requiring a local network connection
- Cloud applications that IT departments often don't even know about
- A diverse array of endpoints ranging from smartphones to old laptops
- Data workflows regularly crossing organizational, geographical, and regulatory boundaries

Because additional technology often opens up new and exciting possibilities an organization may have never thought to pursue, it is crucial to utilize a framework that provides leaders with a body of knowledge and roadmaps to help them independently lead their transformation according to the business strategy.

Change Happens

A framework should first be highly adaptable and everyone involved should understand that anything and everything can and will change constantly. It needs to be able to be phased into logical, cohesive steps that will show tangible progress. Initial phases should ensure the organization knows what it is doing and why it needs to do it. The following phases are about execution and the ongoing operational environment.

This is why it is necessary for everyone from the CEO down to have the appropriate mindset, understanding that they will need to think differently and be resilient in the face of continuous

change. As this journey unfolds, adjustments will be necessary for the business to achieve its overall vision of where they want this new digital road to take them. Mutual buy-in from the CEO down is necessary to start a task as challenging as a digital transformation can be while the framework will be the guiding beacon that provides everyone a sense of progress toward the end goal – a revitalized, successful organization.

More than Technology

A practical digital transformation framework also focuses on more than just technology. Although technology seems like the obvious place to start, it is much too narrow a view that leaves significant value on the table by solving only the problems of today. Digital transformation is not about only adopting new ways to do work or making daily operations more efficient, it is also about making sure the business has explored all areas of opportunity for future growth by purposefully solving problems with solutions that can be expanded across the entire organization, potentially opening up new areas for business expansion. There are significant opportunities being created by new technologies, but corporations that don't recognize and pursue transformation in a multi-dimensional way may find themselves missing out.

For instance, the well-known case of Netflix and how it reinvented the way movies are distributed is a great example of not just digital transformation but also using technology to completely revamp the existing business model. Without a framework in place and complete commitment from leadership to the defined business strategy guiding them, who knows how we would have watched movies during the quarantine.

Not only can business models be affected during digital transformations, but having a framework in place with top-down organizational support can open up additional growth opportunities. New technologies used to complement one piece of the business can also provide very real opportunities to unlock wholly new businesses beyond currently served markets.

Amazon may provide the clearest example of how a highly adaptable digital transformation framework can guide a vision and demonstrate the ability of a business to enter a new domain. Amazon Web Services (AWS) was only able to enter this domain of cloud computing/infrastructure services once owned by giants like Microsoft and IBM because of its strong digital capabilities supporting its core retail business. Often it is this type of transformation that is overlooked but can offer the greatest opportunities to create new value.

Get Started

Leadership teams across the world have found themselves at one time or another during the past few months either thankful for finally getting their big data to the cloud or possibly regretting the priority their own digital transformation took in the overall business strategy. Lessons were surely learned, but it's sometimes the hard lessons that give the greatest insights. Now is the time to take this learning and implement it into a digital transformation framework that creates a logical and pragmatic approach to drive success in this period of radical change.