

Surviving digital business change amid any crisis

While much uncertainty surrounds the COVID-19 crisis, it's clear the best way forward is to accelerate digital business change.

Digital business change can be vexing to C-level executives, even in ordinary times. Amid a worldwide crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, what was once considered somewhat complex is exponentially more challenging as unforeseen issues surface.

For starters, there are semantic issues. Many senior leaders dislike the word "digital" because it's often misused (i.e., all technology is digital) and rarely defined in business terms. This makes it difficult to get the buy-in required from stakeholders to get a digital initiative started. But despite the added challenges posed by the pandemic, the very presence of digital can be a saving grace for some organizations.

The Starting Point

Throughout my client interactions, I've seen common factors at an array of enterprises that have helped them jumpstart a successful endeavor. Among these is a well-defined strategy. Even during the COVID-19 crisis, this foundational pillar still applies.

Any successful digital business program starts by establishing and answering the "why" - what is needed in the market, and which of our offerings needs to be digitally enhanced? Are we slow to market? Has our growth stalled? Answering these questions can be vital to understanding why the digital initiative is important. Once a company establishes the "why," it can begin to strategize on the how, what and when parts of the program.

One thing I've learned in my experience is that there's no single defined path to being a digitally enhanced business. Be flexible with the twists and turns (in the vein of iteration and collaboration), while adhering to your well-defined strategy.

A Survival Guide

The following tried-and-true tips apply to any digital initiative - current crisis notwithstanding:

• Focus:

Consider how medical professionals, offices, hospitals, scientists and companies across industries have focused their undivided attention into a COVID-19 vaccine, a cure and treatment options over the last few months. The progress made, and the outlook, would look much

different if they were only working part-time or on their own. Focus fully on creating a solid transformation strategy, and the outcome will be just as solid.

• Digital talent

Successful digital initiatives require an underlying digital talent management framework. Building a reputable and trustworthy digital workforce requires considerable investment. Even if you aren't planning on going fully remote (or switching to a remote work standard post COVID-19), a capable digital workforce will be well worth the necessary spend. Elevating the importance of digital talent to executive leadership should be a priority so they are fully aware of the investment commitment.

• Routine check-ins

In the age of Agile, success is about moving quickly while not compromising on delivery, business fit and execution quality. The only way to accomplish this is through tight organizational efficiency and collaboration - not just through meetings but also by establishing well-defined checkpoints at each and every step of the evolving process. By incorporating routine check-ins, developing metrics to track goals and laying out and communicating the strategy to sharpen the expected business outcomes, organizations can set the stage for success.

• Buy-in

It's critical to get buy-in from stakeholders and executive leadership at each and every important milestone. Doing so not only ensures the vision remains aligned with the execution; it also reinforces the outlined strategy, getting organizations that much closer to achieving their goals without straying.

Organizations worldwide are feeling the rippling effects of COVID-19 on the health of people and businesses. While much uncertainty surrounds how companies respond, evolve and grow, one thing is clear: The best way forward is to accelerate digital change. The thinking, tactics and strategies needed to weather today's COVID-19 calamity will pay off by enabling organizations to be better positioned for whatever emerges once the crisis subsides.



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