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5 Digital Transformation Mistakes You Didn't Even Know You Were Making

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation is a major topic for many businesses right now, at the top of C-suite and IT department agenda. It provides a strategy to modernise old processes, to link up data silos and provide business leaders with a joined-up view of the company, helping highlight ways to boost business performance, and enabling it to take advantage of future digital initiatives.

However, digital transformation is not a single package or cloud solution that can suddenly turn a slow-moving company into a nimble and dynamic entity. Transformation takes time, planning and collaboration, resources and self-awareness, which many businesses lack.

Where transformation can help is allowing the business to improve how it interacts with customers, to make data security easier to manage and reduce risk. And, on the bottom line, it can reduce costs, improve efficiency and save time.

Done properly, it can be applied to any type of company, with a custom recipe based on a range of technologies and services that help the business understand what it is, how it competes and what it needs to do to compete better using IT and data for a positive future.

Companies can transform when they accept that IT services and data-based analytics will dominate every business. Or, they can leave it too long and try to react in a knee jerk fashion as their rivals accelerate ahead of them.

There are plenty of mistakes a business can make when embarking on a transformation journey. These are five of the worst examples - and how to avoid them.



Mistake #1

A LACK OF CLEAR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Digital transformation is a top-to-bottom strategy that must be adopted by the company leadership, explained all the way down to the bottom of the organisation, and requires strong levels of collaboration across all departments. Fail to explain it and people won't get on board. Do it piece-by-piece and the transformation will fail to come together.

At the start is the plan, a cross-team, cross-department view of how the business currently operates. From that basis, you need to look at how IT can help digitise manual processes, how data can be made accessible to all, what to do with that information and how new technologies can make your future plans more efficient and economical.

The plan requires everyone's input and support and should only be approved when it's been checked and confirmed the outcomes meet the business needs, directions and all the process changes have been rationalised. Without a soundly-costed plan, few leaders in any business would agree to the effort, and costs will certainly spiral without it.



Solution

Create a plan that addresses the business needs. Either build your own plan from scratch, or use a template provided by a possible vendor, or a successful model from a whitepaper or that someone in the business has worked with elsewhere.

Your transformation goals could be to be 20% cheaper, work 15% faster or be able to launch four new products a year instead of two. Set those goals as the aim, and then create a set of business and process steps to reach the objective. While digital transformation sounds complex, every process and task can be broken down into steps.

Consider how complex a space mission and rocket launch is; that too is simply a series of events broken down into processes and steps. From building a satellite to installing it on the rocket, the second-by-second activity of the launch to reaching orbit (and what happens if things go wrong), are all explained step-by-step.

Your business or enterprise processes might seem complex, but by breaking it down into elements that remove the complexity, it becomes more understandable. It's also easier to build the technology to meet a series of simple business needs than one nebulous or complex set of goals.

Mistake #2



THINKING IT'S ALL ABOUT THE TECHNOLOGY

As Apple has proven in the consumer space, a good strategy doesn't depend upon the latest technology. Other devices in the smartphone, tablet and smartwatch markets have more powerful hardware, better cameras, more memory and more open app stores, but Apple outsells them in most markets by focusing on proven technology and the best end-user experience.

Keep that in mind when solutions vendors and service providers try to throw the latest features, cutting edge buzzwords and complex products at your business. Digital transformation needs to be an ongoing process that can work at all levels of the business, it's not a lift-and-shift operation or a quick fix.

The key to success is using the right services that can break down data silos in the business, helping departments understand the business direction better and driving everyone forward. While the IT department will oversee much of the building, testing and operations of digital transformation, it is not their toy to play with; the technology must be used to enable and empower workers, aided by consistent leadership and company-wide involvement.

Solution

Don't let the IT department dominate the agenda, instead ensure that cross-department teams remain focused on the overall objectives and the steps to get there. Encourage everyone to get involved and to call out if the technology is starting to obscure the solution or is becoming too complex for the business to understand it; be prepared to pause or roll back on steps where serious issues occur.

Create a feature list that your business needs and compare vendor offerings to find which offers the most value. Also, look to see where their solutions can be customised to fit your business needs, or are successful in your vertical or market. Be wary of firms that only offer a general solution or lack the capabilities to offer follow up advice and support.

Mistake #3

SEEING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AS THE REQUIREMENT TO BUILD SOMETHING NEW

Most businesses are already performing their basic functions at some level of success, otherwise they would already be failing. The idea of digital transformation is to make those functions and processes more effective and efficient, and to move the pace of business to a modern tempo.

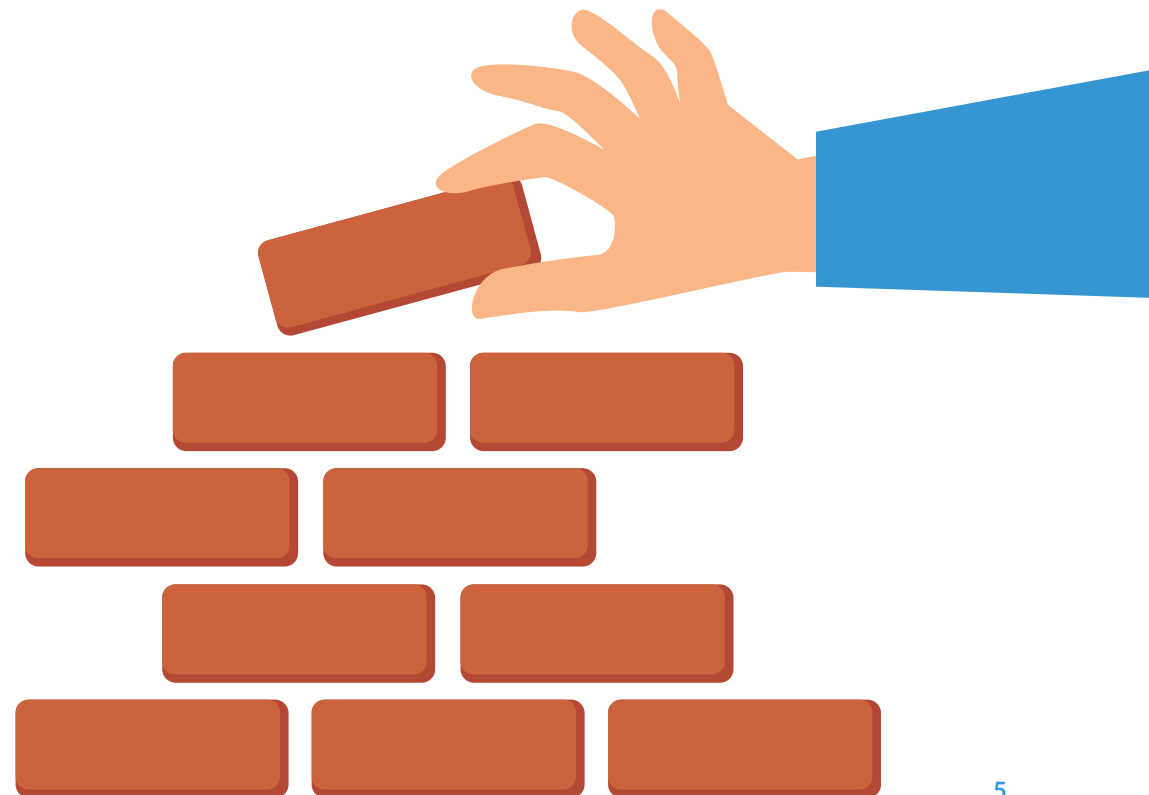
As an example, few companies still pay Microsoft £600 for a copy of Office per user every few years. Instead, a monthly low-cost subscription to Office 365 or rivals like Google Docs, provides regular updates and more features. This change to how millions of companies do one office-based task provides choice, it reduces the up-front cost and brings more benefits like analytics and collaboration.

Consider taking on the challenge of digital transformation in a similar way. Instead of rebuilding or building a whole new company, digital transformation enables the business to improve current systems, it adds new features over time and changes the business step-by-step. Yes, it is disruptive, but the business can adopt at a pace of change that most feel comfortable with.

Solution

The key to any successful digital transformation is to explain the process of evolution and business change in terms that the majority of the workforce understand. The company should also find the solutions that suit the business, that match the tactical and strategic scenarios it faces and delivers understandable, clear, results.

Digital transformation can help a company change physical processes, how data is handled and managed, and how it works with partners or suppliers. Depending on the vertical or market, there can be a host of ways to bring about the change, but encouraging innovation and smarter ways of thinking across the business is key to making the process a success, and driving it into the future for long term rewards.



Mistake #4

YOUR TEAM DOESN'T HAVE THE RIGHT KNOWLEDGE

Digital transformation will fail if your company lacks the skills to enable it. Just because a director has read a few articles in Forbes, and your IT or network manager uses a selection of cloud services, it does not qualify them to lead a transformation project.

Few business teams will be perfectly aligned to possess all the knowledge and skills or the experience to deliver on a digital transformation project. At a high level, the team could lack the broader picture or they could lack the interpersonal skills to explain it up and down the ranks, perhaps missing the fear that some people think it will wipe out their jobs.

When your teams are building their digital transformation strategy, identify up front what their weaknesses are and ensure they're solved before progressing to avoid speed bumps along the way or the whole process failing if one chorus leader is misdirecting the whole process. This applies both to the board and to partnerships across the business; instilling digital acumen and understanding is one key to a successful project.

Another aspect of knowledge is having the data to succeed. Creating metrics that will measure success, scorecards or dashboards that indicate progress are all part of building a project that will succeed or help you identify problem areas.



Solution

Before starting, the company needs to identify missing skills and address them, through training, hiring or partnering. Look beyond the hard skills that your business has and find people with useful knowledge or soft skills that can help focus the effort to build a strategy.

Many midsize and smaller companies lack the resources to dedicate a full time team to such a project. Outsourcing some of the skills or services can help provide additional knowledge and insights or free-up existing team members' time. Expert consultants will have been through the digitalisation process with many businesses, and while each will have unique points, they can speedily move the process across similar areas they have covered before.

NOT HAVING THE RIGHT INFRASTRUCTURE IN PLACE

Having stated that digital transformation is not about the technology, the right IT and infrastructure needs to be in place for the transformation to be successful. At the start of the process, the business needs to audit its existing cloud services, networks, data services and application, to establish what needs upgrading or changing during the process. Realising that a critical service which exists on a 15-year old Windows XP box running a custom application written by a developer who retired years ago and didn't leave the source code (yes, this has happened - in some very big name businesses!) can badly delay or collapse a whole project.

Here, IT or your IT partners can come into their own, finding ways to align networks and data, updating applications and using services like robotic process automation to make data accessible to the rest of the business. Modernising IT not only benefits the business by speeding up processes, but those new features like analytics tools and AI services are key parts of business transformation tools that help any company better understand what their data could be telling them.

Solution

As part of the investigation into a digital transformation project, identify what infrastructure needs to be upgraded, replaced or reconstructed, and where it is within the business. Do any or all of those actions before you begin the process and look to see if the new infrastructure or services could cause a change in plan.

The plan should also make complex systems simple, removing multiple redundant or duplicative services, reducing management workload and upgrade/deployment times, simplifying storage across the business, and where applicable moving services to cloud or hybrid cloud to reduce capital expenditure.

Cloud and multi-cloud solutions provide access to a huge number of services that can help build and drive a transformation project. While some data may need to be kept on premises, the benefits of using hosted or private cloud maintains security. Analytics, operational intelligence gathering and analysis, extracting value from data and access to the latest solutions add further value.

SUMMARY

Digital transformation is not a journey that should be taken alone. In the digital business era, a range of partners including managed service providers can help make the process easier and provide valuable data to overcome internal resistance or pain points. The use of proven hardware, cloud and infrastructure solutions from leading IT brands can help build the future-proof services that will complete and drive any transformation.



About EBC Group

EBC group has over 30 years' experience helping businesses operate better by providing the services and solutions that are suitable for them. From private cloud solutions to print and IT services, they work with best-in-class IT vendors to provide secure, high availability and accessible technology that helps a business not just use IT but gain a competitive advantage from it.



About Dell EMC

Since 1984, Dell has been a key brand in providing PC and IT services, acquiring many business over the decades to provide comprehensive business solutions. The merger with EMC in 2016 created an infrastructure solutions group capable of meeting the IT needs of companies large and small, and providing them with the skills and knowledge to deliver digital transformation.

