Digital Adoption – A Change Manager's Experience

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To quote the Chinese proverb 'The best time to start was yesterday. The next best time is now'

If you have ever attended presentations or read articles about Industry 4.0 you are likely to come across terms like 'revolutionary', 'ground breaking', or 'disruption' and whilst it is challenging enough to keep the current business running, this perception of Industry 4.0 can make your preparations for the digital future feel even more daunting.

It is vitally important to get the implementation of digital technology right, to truly harness its potential. But technology on its own will not transform your business; the greatest value comes from employees and technology working together. If this engagement is not achieved it is likely the workforce will fail to adopt new ways of working. With the investment in new technology wasted and labelled as "another initiative of the month".

The critical role that people, leadership and culture play in digital transformation is less talked about than the technologies and while these aspects are perceived as harder to change, they are key to the success of a digital adoption programme.

Digital transformation cannot be driven by top-down instruction to change. All leaders, at all levels must demonstrate key leadership traits to create the best conditions for employees to start thinking and working differently. Leaders need to enable the organisation by providing vision and purpose, creating conditions to experiment, empowering people to think differently and ensuring collaboration across functions.

Digital transformation cannot be delegated to the IT department.

In terms of Digital talent there is no secret black box knowledge which can only be found in Silicon Valley, Millennials were not born with digital skills and you don't need to retrain your employees to be Data Scientists or Programmers.

Core-Periphery Model as an organisational enabler of Digital transformation

According to Melissa Valentine, Stanford University, the Core-Periphery Model (CPM) provides a useful change management structure to enable businesses to shape the Workplace of the Future.

The Core represents a small group of employees who are invested in, trained, nurtured, and empowered to assemble project teams from a peripheral group of employees.

Core employees need to adapt to constant change and require the ability to continuously learn. Businesses should create the opportunities for continuous lifelong learning, not necessarily in the traditional classroom format, but online, and at the point of use.

For instance, whilst adopting Operational Excellence doesn't require everyone to be Six Sigma Black Belts, it does require staff to have an appreciation of the scope and range of application of the techniques. In the same way, it is important to invest in your leaders and employees to become digitally savvy, gaining an awareness of digital technologies; what they are, how they can be adopted

and the expected benefit of use. For example, BASF utilise 1 hour of their weekly Senior Leadership Team meetings to learn about new digital technologies.

Rather than the alarming prospect of robots taking over, the latest research shows that humans will continue to play a central role in all business sectors, bringing uniquely human skills of creativity, complex reasoning and emotional intelligence[1]. We are fortunate, in the North West to have access to a comprehensive range of digital talent, support and funding, making the opportunity to adopt digital technologies even easier. The Innovation Centre at Sci-Tech Daresbury is acting as a hub for digital technology firms providing expertise to clients on a project basis, whilst support programmes such as LCR 4.0 START and Made Smarter and organisations such as The Virtual Engineering Centre help create the best conditions within an organisation to ensure that digital technology is fully adopted and stimulates further business growth. Everything you need to prepare your leaders and workforce is available right now, including maximising the Apprenticeship Levy for leadership and workforce development.

Whilst the Digital Revolution might seem daunting, maximising regional and UK funding opportunities to develop your digital leadership and workforce and accessing specialist impartial digital technology advice is a good place to start.

[1] 'Coming of Age Digitally. Learning, Leadership, and Legacy' MIT Sloan Management Review Research Report. Summer 2018. By Gerald C. Kane, Doug Palmer, Anh Nguyen Phillips, David Kiron, and Natasha Buckley

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