How to prepare for a digitally transformed workforce in 2022

By Danielle Barber   19 Jan 2022

Seismic changes like the pandemic, have accelerated the digital transformation of the workforce and organisations have needed to shift to being people-led and technology run. We need to have the systems, people and processes in place, ready for this change. As a key part of this change, organisations need to look at how they enable, equip and empower their workforce, to overcome challenges and make the most of opportunities, both now and in the future.

Image source: Sean Prior – 123RF.com

Defining the digital transformation of the workforce

We see digital as a state of being, but when we talk to transformation and its goal, we see it as the shift towards organisations being both adaptive and autonomous as a means of differentiation.

The digital aspect incorporates the technologies and solutions necessary for an organisation to fully realise the potential of the workforce and enhance their experience in all of this. Digital transformation also extends beyond digitisation and strong emphasis needs to be made on the transformation required.

Organisational culture can be a determining factor in the success or failure of driving change and embarking on- and embedding digital transformation in the workplace. This requires a new mindset from employees and leadership alike. It calls for a change in culture and the way things are done, to continually learn, challenge the status quo, rethink the old, experiment with the new and dedicate ongoing efforts to best respond to customer needs and industry change.

In essence, the whole organisation needs to embrace and embody agility. It will also be integral to consider the human aspect in all of this and understand where employees are at from a skill and sentiment perspective and work towards shifting the needle in a positive direction. There is no one-size-fits-all solution and business leaders will need to drive the change by taking a holistic approach to their digital transformation.

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Remote work and employee experience

Following the novel Covid-19 outbreak, most organisations had to radically change how they run their day-to-day operations.

However, the effect of remote work is not limited to digital tools, working from home has also invited a cultural shift in most organisations. It has showed us that the workforce can be effective working remotely as with working from the office, advancing efforts in decentralising authority and fostering autonomy, transparency and trust within organisations. Moving forward, organisations will have to pay special attention to developing a comprehensive, holistic employee experience strategy, incorporating things like employee well-being and integrated learning.

To further emphasise the importance of digital transformation, with remote work becoming the new norm, prospective and talented job seekers will look for flexibility when applying for career opportunities. Remote work policies are no longer a luxury but a necessity. This also means that organisations that are not digitally transformed to enable remote work from a tooling and cultural perspective, are most likely going to lose out on the talent pool's cream of the crop.

Best practice steps that organisations should look to adopt in 2022

Digital transformations need a vision which allows your organisation to compete in both the present and the future. Having a digital vision that concurrently speaks to the present and the future is the priority and key to the success of your transformation.

A vision that is practical, all-encompassing and responds to clear signals and linear changes in your industry, allows the organisation to compete in the 'now'.

If vision is the first imperative, understanding the needs of employees and customers is the second step in your organisation's digital transformation. Empathising with your employees' and customers' needs is the best route to truly grasping the context and complexities of their lives. But most importantly, it keeps the people you're designing for squarely grounded in the centre of your vision. Getting to the truth of what your employees' and customers' desire will keep your organisation close to the market and the talent pool, thus creating value for your organisation.

Understanding human needs, behaviours, motivations and experiences helps your organisation frame the market opportunities and refine and improve the vision both of which need constant focus as the path forward emerges on your digital transformation journey.

Tech + tools = people efficient processes

The digital workplace is the natural evolution of the workplace of today; comprised of employees and their technology working environment. Knowing what tools and technologies to embed within your workforce will be crucial for success in the age of digital transformation.

Any workforce transformation should invariably start with a question of "why?". Every company is unique in some way, and in order to know the "why?" of your own workplace, you should first intimately understand the unique needs and challenges within your organisation at all levels.

Usually when organisations think Digital Transformation, the focus is on customer experience. However, for a sustainable transformation journey, emphasis should be equally placed on the experience of the employees, organisation and customers.

This goes beyond acquiring and implementing the trendiest tools and processes, but also involves building an environment that prioritises employee engagement and fosters team collaboration and innovation.

The relationship between digitally transformed organisations and their workforce is symbiotic. We have tried to best describe how leadership can leverage technology to transform and maximise the potential of their workforce, enable their employees to embrace the change, as well as how they can position their organisations to compete and thrive now and in the future. There is equally a lot to be said about what the digitally transformed organisation can do to empower its employees and enhance their experience.

Organisations should focus on the people who are responsible for their success and provide them with the tools and technology to enable meaningful, productive, and personal employee experiences that drive business results.

It is to place the human at the heart of the transformation. It is to first enable individuals to do their best work in the way that works for them. When experience has taken the individual and their needs into account first, it will more likely incorporate the psychological needs that must be met for someone to perform their work well.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Danielle Barber - Senior Manager: Digital Advisory Dimension Data

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