

theStorytellers®

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

How storytelling can help drive and sustain change

Inspire. Accelerate. Transform.

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01.

The transformation is now

01. The transformation is now

We are living in a dynamic era of digital transformation: a thrilling new reality, ripped from the future and thrust early into our present, as the pandemic accelerates the evolution of nascent trends and forever changes the way we work.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought digital transformation forward by seven years, according to a McKinsey & Company study.¹ Fifty eight per cent of all customer interactions are now digital, and more than half of all products or services are either partially or fully digitised. In addition, the enforced pivot towards remote and collaborative working represents a seismic shift in employment patterns that will define the way organisations hire, train and retain their staff for years to come.

Digital transformation remains a crucial enabler – a means to achieving wider organisational, customer service, growth and retention goals more quickly.

This may include rapidly responding to:

- Shifting work needs, such as remote and flexible working;
- Customer behaviours and needs, now in a semi-permanent state of flux;
- The need to reach ESG targets or other CSR-specific outcomes; and
- The market demands and challenges that emerged during the pandemic, such as price volatility and product shortages.

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02.

The challenge for organisations



02. The challenge for organisations

Any digital transformation requires organisational change. At the height of the COVID-19 response, the world of work embraced a crisis-centric, pandemic-driven resilience – a communal determination to weather the storm and make use of everything at our digital disposal to get through it together.

It's easy to assume that everyone is comfortable with these changes. After all, we have broadly adopted them, seen how well they can function, and embedded new ways of working in our lives. However, digital transformation also brings change that runs deep within organisations – impacting everything from operating models and structures to company culture and recruitment. These are changes that can leave people feeling like they have lost autonomy or that their skills and expertise are no longer valued.

When people fail to connect the reasons for your digital journey with the 'bigger picture' of your organisational goals, or struggle to understand their role within the future organisation, this heightens the risk of resistance and disengagement with the process.

03.

Essential questions for leaders

03. Essential questions for leaders

1.

Is there a clear goal? What are you ultimately looking to achieve as a result of digital transformation?

2.

How will you bring people with you on your digital journey to ensure this change is sustainable for the long term?

3.

Are you listening to all voices within your organisation about their feelings towards your digital journey?

4.

How are you harnessing these voices in your company's strategic narrative to give everyone agency and ownership of their role in a shared, secure future vision?

04.

Key pillars of digital transformation

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Organisations that fail at implementing digital transformation programmes are too often poor at communicating the reasons for change, how it relates to the organisation's wider business goals, and crucially, the benefits it will bring to customers. Similarly, digital transformation programmes are regularly run as isolated projects, when instead they need to be connected to all organisational activities. Thus it's important to remember that the 'why' of change is often better explained through emotional connection than cold rationality.

A key factor in the long-term success of a digital transformation programme is ensuring employees and customers fully understand and connect with the purpose of their organisation's digital journey. The Storytellers use story to help large and complex organisations do this effectively – to unify people at every level of an organisation behind every stage. This unity creates a movement, whereby people across the organisation become the 'champions' who will advocate change, rather than its passive observers.

A compelling story will contextualise all the changes your organisation is going through, and unite everyone connected to your business – colleagues, customers, communities – behind a profound and rewarding common purpose.

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The story you tell as an organisation – driven by a shared vision of a digitally empowered future – can galvanise your people and their talents, turning uncertainty into opportunity. The following pillars will help you consider carefully how your digital transformation will achieve your vision. It can also be used as a structure on which to build a story to engage and inspire every stakeholder in your organisation's future.



04. Key pillars of digital transformation

1. Authentic and visible leadership

Your Executive Team must lead from the front. Connect your people to your shared purpose by not only openly acknowledging challenges, but also by providing the stability and hope of a compelling narrative. Your organisation is looking to you for guidance, clarity and inspiration – what kind of leader will you be? What's your story?

Speaking at 'Stories from the C-suite', a webinar series hosted by The Storytellers, Pano Christou – CEO of the UK-based sandwich shop chain Pret A Manger explained how engaging the emotional side of people is key to his leadership.² As a big believer in purpose, he wants his teams and colleagues to enjoy an emotional connection to the brand they are part of. So how does he cultivate this connection? By communicating through human stories and making people feel part of the journey Pret is on.

Alex Perry – CEO of Bupa Insurance UK, also during a 'Stories from the C-suite' webinar told us how co-creating a narrative helped to connect everyone in the business both rationally and emotionally to their transformation strategy.³ "We were looking to change some really entrenched behaviours and beliefs. The story has played a big part in that and really helped us through what I believe was an inflexion point for the business." He explained.

“The process of creating a story really helped to align the Executive team around our future and the changes we needed to make. It then created a fantastic vehicle to help us connect and enrol all of our people in our transformation journey.”

Alex Perry, CEO of Bupa Insurance UK

The authenticity of good leadership begins with you – who are you as a leader? What are your values? How are you demonstrating these values to your people, and assuring them that the organisation doesn't just talk the talk, but genuinely, day after day, walks the walk?





04. Key pillars of digital transformation

2. A culture of continuous learning and innovation

Regardless of the different roles colleagues perform in your organisation, all your people should be encouraged to realise their ideas in a culture of continuous learning, upskilling and innovation. Your business can be a place where knowledge and expertise is not only utilised, but sought after and acquired.

A 2021 LinkedIn Workplace Learning Report⁴ found that amongst L&D professionals worldwide, 'upskilling and reskilling' was the number one organisational priority for 2021 and beyond, with 'resilience' and 'digital fluency' cited as the two most important skills. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum (WEF) estimates that automation will remove 85 million jobs by 2025. Many of the 97 million new jobs projected to be created in the same period will require skills in coding, blockchain, data security and artificial intelligence.

The WEF's Future of Jobs 2020 Report discovered that "50 per cent of employers are expecting to accelerate the automation of some roles in their companies."⁵ This means that your own organisation's digital transformation journey will require employees to be digitally fluent, i.e. possessing the skills required to navigate a world increasingly dominated by digital technology.

The transformation will reconfigure aspects of every business across all sectors, in supply chains, engineering, manufacturing and the service industries. Innovation drives transformation, which results in further innovation.

A resilient organisation will have a culture of continuous learning that gives its people the digital tools they need to thrive in their roles and innovate in ways which may also have a significant impact on the company's future success. Such an organisation, where employees at every level are always learning, and are empowered to create and innovate, will be healthily equipped for its digital transformation journey.

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04. Key pillars of digital transformation

3. Storytelling

It is no coincidence that during the series of lockdowns in 2020 triggered by the pandemic, more books were sold in the UK than ever before, resulting in the highest rise in sales in the book market since 2007, according to The Bookseller magazine.⁶ In the US, the book industry saw close to a 10% growth in the same period⁷. Stories help us make sense of our lives, our world, and the changes within them both; they make us feel less alone and isolated, and remind us of the power of empathy and connection. Stories are the lifeblood of the human experience, and an essential tool in the leader's toolkit for strengthening relationships and motivating positive growth.

The successes of your organisation, as well as its failures, can be understood on both a rational and emotional level through the sharing of stories. When teams discuss their achievements and disappointments about a company's culture, policies, strategies and aspirations, a shared understanding of the organisation's values can emerge, and a roadmap for progression and improvement can be envisaged. When stories are shared, there is an organisational impact that goes beyond the fostering of greater camaraderie: new insights are revealed, which can inform strategy, shape decision-making, and help people feel recognised, valued and empowered.

Many of your people may be feeling left behind by the digital revolution – they may feel that an understanding of the technology has passed them by, or be resistant to new ways of working that appear complex and intimidating. By encouraging the sharing of stories about their working experience, you can help them to gain more confidence in embracing these new technologies, in a compassionate spirit of acceptance and camaraderie.

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04. Key pillars of digital transformation

4. Cross-team communities

Rumi, the great 13th century scholar, poet and storyteller, described a community of the spirit. “Join it”, he wrote, “and feel the delight of walking in the noisy street.” Since early 2020, we have all mourned the loss of some physical familiarity – the water cooler chats, the friendly catch-ups at the start of a meeting, the after-work socialising where many of our best ideas germinate in the relaxed back and forth of easy conversation. Some of these modes of interaction will return, but others will not, perhaps permanently replaced by the Zoom call or the WhatsApp group.

Our workplaces have changed forever. Leaders must bridge the silos that can develop when face-to-face communication is no longer possible as more and more employees embrace remote working, either by choice or by necessity. Before the pandemic, reports The Economist, “Americans spent five per cent of their working time at home. By spring 2020 the figure was 60 per cent.”⁸

Driven by the continual development of customer service, and how best to evolve in the right way to retain and grow the customer base, it's critical for leaders to encourage the creation of cross-team communities which share information, insights and support, to ensure different parts of the business are aware of each other's activities and to prevent the fragmentation of strategies and motivations.

These new digital teams present an exciting opportunity to the forward-thinking leader: in addition to maintaining the integration and 'community of spirit' of your organisation, they can foster a curiosity and spontaneity between colleagues that traverses any physical boundary. Stories can be shared instantly between co-workers, between departments, between cities, between continents. The world, and everything in it, has now become everyone's 'noisy street'.

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04. Key pillars of digital transformation

5. Clear communication channels and tools

Your organisation will have discovered, through trial and error, which digital collaboration tools are working well, and which need to be refined or replaced. Group conversations about these details can be enormously beneficial in the long-term as your organisation adapts itself for the future, and it's important to give everyone in the organisation a voice, to allow each individual story to be heard through clear channels of communication.

Your people also need to feel they are being kept in the loop: the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) warns their research has found that “many employees feel they receive limited or very little information.” They advise that effective internal communication “has a significant impact on employee engagement, organisational culture and, ultimately, productivity.”⁹

There are a range of different channels available to you as a leader, from the two-way one-to-one meeting to the multi-directional exchange of opinions and ideas facilitated by new communication technologies. Different people will respond in different ways to these channels, so an open and honest discussion about what works best, in which contexts, and for whom, will help your organisation communicate effectively, and enable your teams to collaborate with ingenuity and intent.

Internal communication has a significant impact on employee engagement, organisational culture and, ultimately, productivity.



05.

How stories can help drive your digital transformation

05. Understanding the power of story

An understanding of the power of the story can equip you with the motivation, means and momentum to facilitate change and unite your people around a common purpose. The story of your company's 'community of spirit' will become the compass for your digital transformation journey, as your authentic leadership inspires a mindset of continuous learning, clear communication between teams and individuals, and a culture of collaborative endeavour that can overcome all the challenges ahead in our rapidly evolving digital world.

We are The Storytellers - home of story-driven change.

We exist to move more people to do great things through the power and influence of storytelling. In doing so, we help leaders navigate their teams through periods of change and uncertainty with purpose and agility, to rapidly build stable, resilient, connected organisations, accelerate change and transform business performance.

Our unique approach enables leaders to motivate and bring people with them through complex journeys of change as galvanised, engaged and aligned teams, where each and every person understands the journey the business is on, and the personal contribution they can make to success.

Contact us to explore your change challenge and how we might help.

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Visit us at thestorytellers.com to read more insights on this topic and other change challenges including strategy engagement, culture change, building a brand culture, post-merger integration and business transformation.

Storytelling is your enabler to ensure digital transformation is sustainable for the long term.

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