



Technology and Innovation

Where Digital Transformation Goes Wrong?

Jeremy Blain and Scott Gulliver



Jeremy Blain
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Biography

Jeremy Blain is an award-winning Business Leader, Futurist, New Era Learning Professional, Author and Conference Speaker. Founder and CEO of PerformanceWorks International (PWI) (<https://www.performanceworks.global/>) Jeremy has created PWI because he knows that his experience, knowledge and passion can help organizations and individuals face into the changing workplace and help them be fit and ready for the future.

Jeremy is also a newly appointed Advisory Board Member of WDHB; one of the world's foremost Industry 4.0 immersive learning experiences companies (leadership expeditions, community events and transformational learning interventions for the disruptive era). Previously, Jeremy has been a partner at Cegos Group, one of the world's leading professional skills training organizations. His last role was Regional Managing Director for Cegos Asia Pacific. Jeremy has a wealth of International experience having worked in most major and developing markets across the globe.

A Fellow of The Institute of Directors UK (FIoD), Jeremy holds a Masters of Management in International Business from the Australian Institute of Business and a BA (hons) from Sheffield University (UK). He is a frequent international conference speaker and media commentator on topics related to the global L&D market. He understands the leadership and management challenges for global organizations as they head into the next workplace shift in the 2020s. He knows how to create solutions that work.

As a result of his research, industry papers and work in the transformation of work and learning in the digital era, Jeremy has been recognized by Stanford Who's Who since 2013. In their words: "Jeremy has consistently demonstrated the dedication, vision and skills required to be considered among the best".

Author of the award-winning, International #1 best-selling book: 'The Inner CEO – Unleashing leaders at all levels' (<https://www.performanceworks.global/theinnerceo/>)

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Scott Gulliver
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Scott Gulliver is the Founder and Director of Fluff Software (<https://www.fluff.software>) based in the South West of England. Scott has been helping large companies to implement software and technology, with a particular focus on digital transformation over the past decade.

Fluff Software helps companies transform their ideas and turn them into real products. As a software agency, Fluff Software provides a range of services and solutions which help companies to evolve and scale up.

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Abstract

Digital transformation has been high on the agenda for most companies over the past few years – but there's often too much inaction. This is preparing for failure, and that will come sooner than many might think. Furthermore, getting started on



Technology and Innovation

the journey is one thing, but implementing it in the right way, for success, takes time, people, leadership, management, and focus. In this article, the authors' explore some of the common pitfalls which companies fall into, and what their success should really look like.

Introduction – The need for change

There's no such thing as being too big to fail anymore. Technology continues to evolve at pace, and that opens up new ways for companies to be able to deliver products and services to their customers. We're now seeing every industry start to have an influx of new "challenger" companies, which are created as technology-first. There's no such thing as being too big to fail anymore. Competitive advantage is speed and rapid performance. Are you as a leader in your organization ready for the steep learning and action curve?

The ways that companies are delivering value to their customers is also changing, as they create more interactive and self-serve experiences. Customers are now starting to demand more of this in every aspect of their life and are now often reaching for convenience and functionality over brand loyalty. The movement is from customer experience, to longer-term, in-depth customer journeys. Learning how to lead and manage remotely has been one of the biggest hits and misses for successful and failing leaders.

The pandemic has also introduced a lot of new problems for companies to deal with that are likely to be around for the foreseeable. This includes a more distributed workforce, a change in customer behaviours, and disruption to traditional supply-chains. Technology and change open the door to solutions that can help a company to not only overcome these issues, but also find new audiences and efficiencies.

Today, putting leaders and managers on a level footing with other employees is also important. As the landscape continues to change, it's key that everyone learns together – and learning how to lead and manage remotely has been one of the biggest hits and misses for successful and failing leaders out there.

Technology departments remain a key component – it's key to remember that it's a collaborative process

Once the need for change has been identified, the next step is often that a company will lean on the technology department to lead the programme. This usually starts with a transformation specialist (such as a Chief Technology Officer) who can start to build a roadmap.

Some companies choose to first look at new ways of reaching their customers. This could be through using social media, and more digital-first ways of marketing, or by introducing things such as interactive web experiences, or mobile apps. Others start with their internal systems and processes, looking to find ways to achieve things faster, cheaper, and with fewer faults.



While technology leaders and the teams that support them are excellent generators of practical ideas and strategies in this area, it only goes so far without proper support from the rest of the organization. It's key to remember that it's a collaborative process, and as much as digital strategy, it's also a human one. CTOs need the whole business lens, not just the technical one. Technical systems must be matched with getting people "on board" with them. Developing binding ecosystems is required to ensure that technology truly becomes embedded in the long run.

We have seen successful organizations start by introducing somewhat standalone "innovation centres". These acts almost like a start-up, with more autonomy to bring about change. But, for this to actually impact the core business in the long term, it requires a transition through to "business as usual" for everyone else.

To put in place even the most well thought out transformation plans, they need the key things that every other project does – budget, resources, and time. These are often the things that introduce hurdles to overcome, as many organizations are set up in a way that's too rigid for some of the unknown exploration required for change to be brought about.



It begins with leadership

Leadership is where digital talk and workforce transformation fails first. Budgets and resources can often be locked behind paperwork and lengthy sign-off processes. These are often designed to mitigate risk, and ensure that spending happens in the most efficient way – but they can be the main reason that projects never get off the ground. More often than not, you need to test and explore the possible by running a series of experiments.

Change in any organization is almost always a calculated risk, with a dose of educated guesses thrown in. In this case, mitigating those risks can be a sensible thing to do, but often, you need to test and explore the possible by running a series of experiments. This naturally requires a budget and approach to be more flexible than the company may be used to.

Let's imagine that an energy company is thinking about making their core services available via an app to their users, to make it more "self-serve". There's bound to be a good business case for this, including cost savings to contact-centre staff. But as with any technology project, there's a question of what users want. There may be no point developing the app if 95% of users still end up choosing to call up to give their meter reading.

The agile methodology has been the standard in technology for many years now. It's designed to break down projects into smaller chunks and "test the water" by getting feedback at each stage. This naturally requires a different approach when it comes to budgeting and roadmaps.



In conclusion

As we've explored, the issue often stems from not bringing the whole organization along for the ride, and instead, trying to implement transformation as a "side project".

Working in agile ways shouldn't just be reserved for the technical teams. Being strategically reactive and data-driven, by using tools such as analytics, data visualization, and feedback will bring a shift in the company, when it's implemented across the organization. Leaders must walk the walk across departments – and ensure that the entire organization follows the example.

Plans are less "set in stone", and often need teams to have freedom to "fail" and learn by testing. To succeed with transformation, boards must become more open to a game-plan, rather than a strict step-by-step proposal. Those who lead the company must also adapt their ways. Teams must be given relative freedom and autonomy to find the best way to achieve the business goals.

Perhaps most importantly, to get results from digital transformation, companies must be willing to truly transform with it. Leaders must nurture a more collaborative, and data-driven environment – and be willing to take calculated risks towards a new future for the organization.