Digital delivery: overcoming barriers to implementation

Organisations are becoming increasingly digital first, employing digital solutions to improve their business. But it's important they avoid key pitfalls for real success.

by Nathan Beaver
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We believe the way technology is deployed can help this. Here are some of our ideas in how organisations can help to overcome these hurdles and accelerate the time it takes for digital projects to come to fruition.

Start with a blank slate

It's important to think with a 'digital first' mindset. This will help your whole organisation live and breathe the experience you are trying to create for your customers. Starting with customer feedback, lessons learned and the customer's view of the world will help you build a digital transformation strategy versus simply adding digital bells and whistles to existing customer processes.

Go agile

Agile (software) development – as term first outlined in the Manifesto for Agile Software Development fifteen years ago - breaks digital projects down into bite-sized initiatives that can be delivered at speed. One of the key philosophies of agile development is that the business leads sign off on components in the solution as soon as they are ready. The advantage of this approach is that it can be faster, more cost efficient and more flexible than the traditional approach to developing IT solutions.

The process is led by a product owner, who is the person with vision and authority. Owners define the solution and communicate the vision and priorities for the development team. As the solution enters development, everything moves very fast. Time is divided into short work modules. At the end of each module, stakeholders and team members meet to review a demonstration of the solution and either plan next steps or release the product. Whereas big IT projects can take years to deliver, agile development can create a proof-of-concept and deliver to market in days rather than months. The costs can be lower so businesses can afford to experiment with a wider range of initiatives.

Tap into your digital talent

The growing number of digital natives in the workforce can provide an advantageous, broad perspective. Millenials can play a crucial role in shaping the right digital solution. Not because they have specific technical skills, but because they have a more natural understanding of digital and digital customer experience than previous generations. They have grown up in the era of the customer, after all. We believe that tapping into this generation's perspectives can raise your "digital IQ" and smooth implementation of technology delivery.

Reduce costs in the cloud

Cloud solutions can help to reduce the costs and time involved in developing digital tools and processes. Cloud-based solutions, such as software-as-a-service (SaaS) and platform-as-a-service (PaaS), can make project delivery times faster and easier. A survey conducted by Harvard Business Review, Business Agility in the Cloud, found that nearly three-quarters of their respondents felt Cloud provides their business with a competitive advantage and has reduced complexity in their technology solutions[1].

Committed leadership

Advancing the digital agenda requires senior management's time and attention. Some organisations choose to appoint Chief Digital Officers (CDOs) to help ensure that digital issues are fully represented at board level. This has its merits, but it is equally important that the senior management team is also fully engaged with the digital agenda.

Boards need to set out a compelling digital vision at the highest level. This is by far the strongest signal that the company is genuinely committed to ongoing transformation – digital is a journey not a destination.

At the same time, the finance director's role is vital to ensure that digital projects are appropriately supported and resourced. Marketing and commercial directors will also need to shape the company's offerings. Carefully orchestrated cross-functional collaboration is essential an the tone should be set from the top.

Once these provisions are in place, your organisation can quickly start to reap the benefits of an agile, collaborative approach to digital delivery. Your customers will too.

What's your biggest implementation challenge for digital projects?

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[1] Source: Business Agility in the Cloud, Harvard Business Review analytics services, 3 July 2014

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What's your biggest implementation challenge for digital projects?