



White paper

6 tips for reinvigorating your digital transformation



Are you tired of digital transformation?

For more than a decade, pundits, researchers, analysts, vendors, speakers, and experts of all kinds have been extolling the virtues of digital transformation (which is sometimes abbreviated as DT or DX). And business leaders, understanding the opportunities and the potential risks of failing to keep up with the competition, have eagerly embarked on DT initiatives. In fact, the researchers at [McKinsey](#) found, “Nine in ten C-level and senior leaders say their organisations have pursued at least one large-scale digital transformation in the past two years.” And if you search for “digital transformation” on Google, you’ll get back more than 616 billion results.

That’s billion. With a b.

For the operational leaders on the front lines of transformation efforts, it can be a bit much. Some people feel digital transformation fatigue. They don’t believe they can handle more change. After the pandemic, wars, political and social unrest, and so much rapid technological change, people are just worn out.

Making matters worse, transformation efforts are taking a long time. According to some, the journey is taking large companies twice as long and costing twice as much as anticipated.

For many people, the prospect of transformation just doesn’t seem as exciting anymore. The analysts at [McKinsey](#) concur, writing, “Many organisations embark on large-scale transformations, only to end with frustrated leaders and worse-than-expected long-term results. These efforts typically start with high aspirations and significant energy, then lose an average of 42

percent of their expected value in the later phases of the transformation program, where the focus shifts to executing and sustaining change.”

So how did we get here?

A brief history of digital transformation

From a certain point of view, digital transformation began at the dawn of the computing era. As far back as the 1950s, computer scientists were hypothesising about how digital technology might transform daily life.

But the phrase “digital transformation,” didn’t really come into popular use until 2011. That year, Capgemini and The MIT Center for Digital Business published a study titled [Digital Transformation: A Roadmap for Billion-Dollar Organisations](#). Its findings set off a surge in interest.

At that time, the study authors found that large enterprises were just beginning their transformation journeys, often spurred on by disgruntled employees who wanted to be able to use the same technology they were using at home. For example, one participant told researchers, “Come on. I know the company’s more than 100 years old, but our IT capabilities don’t have to match the age of the company.” And another respondent said, “Officially iPads are prohibited by our policies. Yet 50% of our employees are using them at work.”

Executives got the message. Over the next nine years, they embarked on digital transformation initiatives at a measured, sustainable pace.

But that all changed when COVID-19 struck.

The pandemic spurred companies to dramatically increase their speed of transformation. Researchers from [Baker McKenzie](#) found, "In 2020, 58% of digital leaders said that COVID-19 had accelerated their plans for DT and cloud."

Those efforts have reshaped organisations. And now, eager to sustain the results that they have seen, organisations are embracing new aspects of technology, such as artificial intelligence and machine learning. The same [Baker McKenzie report](#) notes, "The latest data shows DT has evolved from an urgent effort to a permanent part of the enterprise—with organisations launching and scaling DT activities and tackling cybersecurity as a priority. Cybersecurity (46%), cloud computing (44%) and AI (artificial intelligence) (40%) are the top three strategically important technologies to organisations' DT strategies."

Unfortunately, sustaining those efforts has proven incredibly difficult. According to [McKinsey](#), "While 56 percent of respondents say their organisations have achieved most or all of their transformation goals, only 12 percent report that they have sustained these goals for more than three years."

The majority who haven't been able to sustain their digital transformation efforts are missing out on substantial financial rewards. McKinsey also finds, "Respondents who say their companies have achieved their implementation performance goals and also sustained the transformation gains for more than three years report twice the rate of financial growth as their peers."

Tips for reinvigorating your digital transformation

If your organisation is like the nearly 90% of others that are finding it difficult to sustain your digital transformation initiatives, it isn't too late. You can reinvigorate your efforts and still achieve many, if not all, of the goals you had in mind when you began your DT journey.

Digital transformation

As you continue on your digital transformation journey, it's a good idea to pause and make sure everyone in your organisation defines digital transformation in the same way. As your team discusses what digital transformation means for your company, you might want to consider incorporating elements from other popular definitions:

- "Digital transformation [is] the use of technology to radically improve performance or reach of enterprises." – [Capgemini](#)
- "Digital transformation is the rewiring of an organisation, with the goal of creating value by continuously deploying tech at scale." – [McKinsey & Company](#)
- "Digital transformation is the process by which companies embed technologies across their businesses to drive fundamental change." – [Accenture](#)
- "Digital transformation is when an organisation takes advantage of new technologies to redesign and redefine relationships with their customers, employees, and partners. Digital transformation for business covers everything from modernising applications and creating new business models to building new products and services for customers." – [Google](#)
- "Digital transformation can refer to anything from IT modernisation (for example, cloud computing), to digital optimisation, to the invention of new digital business models. The term is widely used in public-sector organisations to refer to modest initiatives such as putting services online or legacy modernisation. Thus, the term is more like "digitisation" than "digital business transformation." – [Gartner IT Glossary, "Digital Transformation", as of 18 July, 2023](#)
- "Digital transformation means applying the right technologies to create or update internal processes or customer experiences that rise to the changing business demands and new customer requirements. It is also the journey of moving to a digital-first business model with the speed and nimbleness to change rapidly, exploit technology to create lean operations and differentiation, and free up internal resources across the enterprise to do more complex tasks." – [Forrester](#)

But it's going to require a long-term commitment to managing the process of digital transformation.

[Cliff Madru, Vice President of Global Solutions for Iron Mountain](#), says, "Now more than ever, organisations need to embrace disruption as a springboard for competitive advantage and adopt new ways of working that invigorate organisational performance. But making the transition isn't just about the technology involved; success requires the ability to effectively manage the transition itself."

McKinsey expands on Madru's advice, stating, "When it comes to implementing large-scale organisational change, the most successful organisations commit themselves fully to the effort from start to finish."

How can you make that long-term commitment and keep the DT projects going? Here are six tips:

1. (Re)define your vision

From the beginning, DT proponents have encouraged business leaders to start the transformation process with a clear picture of where they want to go. That early [Capgemini and MIT paper](#) says, "A compelling transformative vision, with related engagement, governance and KPIs will allow people throughout the enterprise to identify new 'whats' to meet or extend the vision."

Along the way, however, people often lose sight of the original vision.

This is such a common problem that consultants often begin by asking clients, "What are your digital transformation goals? What is your organisation transforming into? In less than two minutes? Using no buzzwords or jargon? In a way that anyone can understand and be motivated by? Would other companies say the same thing?"

If you can't answer "yes" to all those questions, it's probably time to revisit your vision. It's important to articulate and share your digital business goals and strategy, getting stakeholder buy-in along the way.

That articulation is an important part of the process. Leaders also need to be able to create and implement a communication plan to sell the transformation story to the organisation.

If you have already begun a DT project that later began to languish, you might be tempted to choose less ambitious goals for your project the second time around. But [McKinsey warns](#) that this is usually a mistake. "Companies with higher aspirations for digital tech tend to see better outcomes than other companies do," it says. "Digital strategies that involve incremental changes or lack ambition don't deliver the success that bolder digital strategies do."

To reinvigorate your digital transformation efforts, you need an aggressive, inspirational, broad vision that you clearly communicate to the rest of the organisation.

2. Break your project into smaller pieces

While your vision should be broad, it should not be monolithic. In order to accomplish a long-term goal successfully, you'll need to break it into manageable tasks that you can accomplish in a month or a quarter.

This is where strong project management makes an impact.

Project managers (PMs) excel at taking large goals—like your vision for digital transformation – and creating and executing a plan for seeing those goals to fruition. They know how to create Gantt charts, set up schedules, assign resources, and monitor progress towards milestones.

But the [Project Management Institute \(PMI\)](#) notes that to successfully manage digital transformation, PMs need more than just technical proficiency. They need the right soft skills as well, specifically the ability to imagine a new way of doing business, the ability to create cultural change, and the ability to work cross-functionally.

PMs with these skills can help make accomplishing your ambitious DT vision more manageable by keeping projects on track from day to day.

3. Apply the principles of continuous improvement

For most organisations, digital transformation isn't a one-time thing – it's an ongoing process. [Iron Mountain explains](#), "Digital transformation is a continuous process that evolves and improves as new technologies emerge." Organisations need to find ways to incorporate these emerging technologies into their businesses—or risk getting left behind by the competition.

Fortunately, organisations can borrow an idea from the realm of quality engineering to help with this task. **Continuous improvement** is a familiar concept to many people who work in product development and manufacturing. It involves making incremental changes over time while constantly monitoring to make sure that each change results in the desired outcome.

Engineers use a host of different frameworks and methodologies to implement continuous improvement: plan-do-check-act, Kaizen, Lean, Agile, Kanban, Six Sigma, and others. Your organisation almost certainly already has some processes in place to support at least one of these approaches. By applying an approach you already use to your digital transformation project, you can help ensure the success of your DT project. Your team is already familiar with the principles of your chosen approach, so you'll be building on existing knowledge, which is always easier than starting from scratch.

Continuous improvement brings with it the idea that you don't ever stop. It helps prevent your DT initiative from stalling over time.

In addition, approaching DT from a continuous improvement perspective helps your team get used to the idea that digital transformation is simply a part of the way you do business. In the same way that you are continuously improving your products and services, you will also be continuously improving the way your business uses technology, which is the heart of digital transformation.

4. Embed digital transformation in your organisation

If you want your digital transformation project to fail, make it a side project.

Forrester refers to this mistake as making digital transformation a "side hustle." It says, "The most common challenge mentioned by digital transformation practitioners was 'employee availability of time devoted

to digital transformation execution around their other job responsibilities.' Employees are tasked with transformational projects on top of their day job. When unforeseen events or fire drills happen in the daily business, the transformation grinds to a halt."

If, on the other hand, you want your DT project to succeed, you need to infuse your organisation with the idea that digital transformation isn't a nice-to-have, it's at the core of what your organisation does.

Forrester adds, "Successful organisations understand that a digital transformation needs cross-department commitment. It is not an IT deliverable but an objective of the entire enterprise. Leaders articulate their vision and make it a companywide priority by assigning clear responsibilities across key roles and sanctioning intra-organisational finger-pointing."

This need for cross-functional cooperation is mentioned in other research from **Gartner**. The firm found that "the most successful companies establish cross-functional teams for their digital business transformation initiatives."

Capgemini adds that this approach requires strong leadership. "Successful DT does not happen bottom up. It must be driven from the top," it says.

To reinvigorate your digital transformation initiative, your executives need to let everyone know that your company is in the digital transformation business. And they need to assign people digital transformation tasks as a core component of their jobs – not a side hustle. Digital transformation needs to be embedded at the very heart of your organisation.

5. Recruit new talent

When a professional sports team begins to flounder, they often bring in new players who can infuse excitement and enthusiasm in the team. The same principle can work when you are trying to reinvigorate a digital transformation team.

In fact, some analysts say that a lack of talent is one of the key reasons why DT projects stall out. [Baker McKenzie research](#) finds, “A fundamental resource gap is slowing the progress of digital transformation as organisations struggle to access what they need to make digital transformation a reality. Lack of expertise and skills, as well as lack of equipment and software are critical barriers holding organisations back from accelerating their programs.”

And while new tech talent is definitely part of the solution to this problem, organisations also need to consider the capabilities of their management team. According to [McKinsey](#), companies that are the most successful with digital transformation have “a focus on attracting and developing tech-savvy executives and on better overall integration of tech talent into the organisation, rather than just getting new tech talent in the door.”

A combination of new leaders and new technologists who have experience with and passion for new technologies can jump-start a digital transformation initiative that has begun to lose steam.

6. Bring in a partner

Of course, full-time hires aren't the only way to add fresh people to your team. You can also choose to partner with a consultant or vendor who has extensive experience with digital transformation projects.

While no two digital transformation efforts are exactly alike, the advantage of an experienced vendor is that they have seen issues like yours before.

They know what is likely to work and what doesn't. They can help you avoid common pitfalls and implement best practices.

For example, Iron Mountain frequently has helped thousands of organisations implement digital transformation projects that involve workflow automation, digitising paper documents, improving security, and managing documents and records. In just one instance, it helped [a global 500 bank transform its workflows](#) to accommodate a new hybrid work style. As a result of the engagement, the bank reduced its real estate space by 45% overall and eliminated 95% of the space that had been previously devoted to storing paper documents.

It digitised more than 375,00 pieces of paper, and helped the firm implement new all-digital workflows. It enabled the bank to take the next step on its digital transformation journey, putting it in position to take advantage of future opportunities to use technology to grow the business.

Never-ending can be good

What comes to mind when you hear the word “never-ending”? The last staff meeting you attended? The piles of laundry waiting for you at home? The bills that show up in your mailbox?

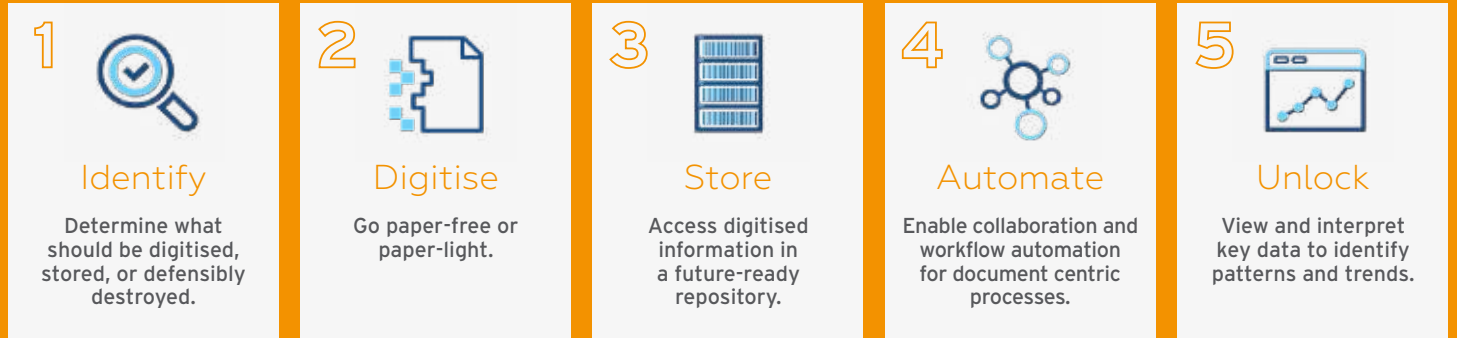
Something that is never-ending doesn't have to be boring or tedious. Never-ending can also be the free pasta, or chips and salsa refills at your favorite restaurant. It can be the opportunities you have to improve your golf game or places you can surf. It can be your favorite video game or time you have to enjoy your family.

Digital transformation is also never-ending. As a leader in your organisation, it's up to you to determine whether that never-ending process feels more like household chores or your favorite hobby. By following the tips outlined in this paper, you can bring new life to your current digital transformation projects and help your team experience the satisfaction—and success—that comes from a well-implemented digital transformation strategy.

5 steps to digital transformation

Iron Mountain takes a very pragmatic approach to digital transformation. It helps other companies use technology to automate their administrative processes, enhance the end-user experience, and obtain deep analytic insights. Along the way, these companies optimise their workflows, eliminate data silos, improve security, and reduce costs.

Having helped thousands of customers take the next step on their digital transformation journey, Iron Mountain has developed a five-step process that streamlines digital transformation:



For more information on the 5 steps of digital transformation [visit our website](#).



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