



“When digital transformation is done right, it’s like a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, but when done wrong, all you have is a really fast caterpillar.”

George Westerman, Principal Research Scientist with the MIT Sloan Initiative on the Digital Economy

It seems as though everywhere you turn, digital transformation is happening. Going digital is not an option any more, it’s an inevitability. It helps us adapt to the changing environment, encourage more open collaboration and smart thinking inside the organisation and open up more opportunities with our customers.

However we are laying this new demand on already complex organisations as something else we need to think about rather than refocusing effort and helping people translate this into their practical day to day work. And this is leaving organisations wanting in key skills. A recent survey for LinkedIn found that 57% of business leaders say soft skills are more important than hard skills yet technical skills are often the ones focused on – they are more tangible to see and measure. This is especially key for organisations undergoing a digital transformation as we are asking people to operate in a more fluid, complex culture one that demands greater thinking skills and the ability to be more flexible to get the right things done.

Dan Schulman, CEO of Paypal says “The biggest impedient to a company’s future success is its past success” So to help you navigate the challenge of digital transformation here are 6 key skills you need to be looking out for when you recruit and seeking to develop in your existing staff.

1. Critical thinking

This is about helping people define and solve new problems. It is about being able to conceptualise, synthesise and analyse data and then to be able to reason and draw conclusions from their analysis.

2. Communication

Right at a time when our ability to communicate well is coming into question we now need the ability to communicate complex data and ideas simply and with pinpoint precision to direct people’s work and thinking. New words are entering into our vocabulary at an alarming rate and we need to be able to define these in terms that make sense in our everyday working world and for many people to be able to translate complex ideas and thought processes to others so they can take action. You need people in your organisation who don’t just download information but use information to inspire and ignite action around the goals of the business. People who can relate and really understand what others need rather than downloading information on auto-pilot.

3. Creativity

So many people say ‘I’m not creative’ but they are thinking about the standard definition and thinking about the ability to paint or write. In business you need creative people who can see a problem and think ‘How can this be improved?’ They aren’t afraid to pop their heads up and challenge the way things are traditionally done and to take risks.

4. Collaboration

In today's busy world we may not be working directly with anyone else but the needs to share thinking and ideas has never been more important. Project teams pop up from nowhere, teams despite often working on individual tasks explore together and seek ways of supporting each other in different projects or activities and the ability to seek and share ideas, can short circuit roadblocks, ignite new ideas and transform staid thinking into something new and exciting. People are needed who can listen, communicate, take and give feedback and be willing to share the spotlight. You need cohorts of people who are different (not the same) and are willing to explore together.

5. Flexibility

In today's busy world we may not be working directly with anyone else but the needs to share thinking and ideas has never been more important. Project teams pop up from nowhere, teams despite often working on individual tasks explore together and seek ways of supporting each other in different projects or activities and the ability to seek and share ideas, can short circuit roadblocks, ignite new ideas and transform staid thinking into something new and exciting. People are needed who can listen, communicate, take and give feedback and be willing to share the spotlight. You need cohorts of people who are different (not the same) and are willing to explore together.

6. Productiity and accountability

The world is moving fast so you need people who can get things done with minimum fuss and those people need to accept accountability for their actions – be adult about it and not pass the buck.

Final word

As for your leaders then it goes without saying that they must be digitally literate.

They need to understand and appreciate the role technology plays in our daily and professional lives. Team collaboration, innovation, knowledge sharing and other characteristics of a digital workplace, should all become an intrinsic and natural part of the digital leader and the organisation. And with that they also need to be visionary to bring the fog of future uncertainty to life for others in a way that excites and builds a drive towards achieving that future. They also need to be prepared to be experimental and facilitate collaboration to help others express their ideas positively.

So how well do you think your organisation is doing with these skills?