

Bridging the gap: From technology to benefits

Tom Samuel, Chief Executive

Digital transformation is an oft-touted phrase, but what does it mean in practice? In a piece first published in EME Outlook magazine in March 2021, Tom Samuel shares his thoughts.

It was back in the late 1990s that organisations first started talking about the need for 'digital transformation'. Google the phrase today, and you'll get over 500 million results! But what exactly is digital transformation? And how can you maximise its potential?

At Harmonic, we deliver digital transformation programmes for diverse organisations in the public and private sector – including defence and the Cabinet Office – in the UK and further afield. We also work closely with leading-edge technology providers and channel partners to help them bring innovation to the marketplace, giving us an unusually wide-ranging perspective on the challenges and benefits of digital transformation.

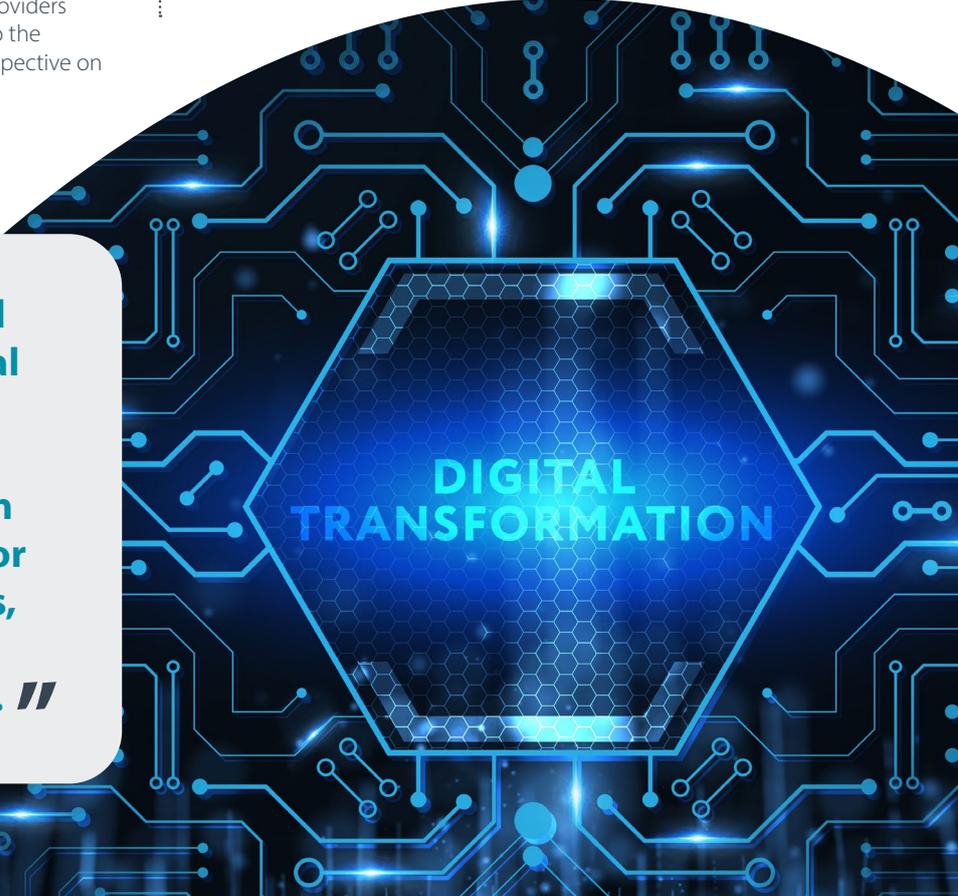
WHAT IS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?

Digital transformation is a phrase used to describe any change programme that involves integrating digital technology across a business to improve efficiency and collaboration.

If digital transformation is to succeed, it needs to be accompanied by fundamental changes in ways of working, generating a cultural shift that challenges the status quo. People – both customers and employees – are at the heart of digital transformation. Programmes rarely succeed if they originate from the IT department: digital transformation needs to be supported from the boardroom downwards and involve the whole business.



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A large graphic at the bottom of the page featuring a glowing blue hexagon with the words "DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION" inside. The hexagon is set against a background of intricate, glowing blue circuitry and network lines.

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Harmonic has developed a methodology for digital transformation that enables us to help our clients define and govern their programme, plan for change, deliver activities, realise the benefits and make sure change sticks. Whatever the context, taking a similarly systematic approach will help to ensure the long-term success of digital transformation:

- 1 Decide which business levers you want to shift, and identify your priorities.
- 2 Refine the business case and develop an agile transformation plan which starts small then scales.
- 3 Complete the activities needed to deliver the new digital capabilities.
- 4 Manage the transition from old to new ways of working.
- 5 Embed new capabilities that realise the benefits stated in the business case.

SETTING UP FOR SUCCESS

If you're planning a digital transformation programme, your first focus may be the technology itself. In order to select the right partners for the technical aspects of transformation, you obviously need a thorough understanding of the technology options available. However, more importantly, you need to consider what business benefits you want to achieve. Why are you going down this route? How are you going to achieve the transformational change? It is all too easy to choose a system without fully thinking through the implications.

Consider the impact on people of every aspect of your change programme. It is important to remember that digital transformation is about business benefits, and that these are delivered by people. As well as taking your team on the journey with you, think carefully about whether you need to communicate with customers. To retain people's trust, make sure you actively address any issues of data security and privacy.

Constant flexibility is essential. Be prepared to adjust business processes so that your teams, end users and customers can make the best possible use of the new technology. User experience and input will provide a valuable feedback loop to enhance the programme and break down barriers and siloes within the business. Agile development will help you to achieve this – if governance is fixed in old ways and is not fit for purpose, you will fail.

Make sure you consider the data you want your digital transformation programme to deliver and how you are going to use it to achieve better and faster decision-making. You can only create a strong data architecture if you have thought your goals through in advance.

As this suggests, digital transformation is an evolution; not a revolution. Think of it as a never-ending journey that will change the way your business operates and your people think.

THE BUSINESS BENEFITS

Like any change programme, digital transformation can be challenging. However, when planned and delivered well, we have seen it result in immense business benefits in four key areas:

- **Customer experience.** Customers' expectations are increasing exponentially and, as we all become more tech-savvy, maximising digital technology is enabling businesses to stay ahead of the customer service curve.
- **Data-driven insights.** By bringing together high-quality information from better sources, digital transformation is helping businesses to make better, faster, data-driven decisions.
- **Collaboration.** Digital transformation tends to go hand in hand with the introduction of more coherent business processes and common ways of working. This is increasing collaboration across organisations and helping to break down traditional barriers and siloes.
- **Innovation.** Being part of digital change encourages people to take a fresh look at other aspects of their job. As a result, businesses often find that new, more efficient ways of working are unlocked alongside digital transformation.

In summary, digital transformation is about so much more than the integration of digital technology. It involves fundamental changes to ways of working and has a profound impact on colleagues, customers and organisational culture. As this suggests, it is often a complex, challenging undertaking. However, get it right and the rewards can be far-reaching in terms of your organisation's ability to survive and thrive in our volatile, uncertain world.

HOW CAN HARMONIC HELP?

Harmonic is leading the way in helping organisations across the public and private sectors respond to the challenge of digital transformation. If you would like to find out more about our work or share your thoughts on the future impact of digital, please get in touch by dropping me an [email](#).

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