DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

INNOVATION

Destroy, then build, for true business transformation

With so many new, cheap digital tools, why aren't we seeing more disruptive innovation?

Nick Easen

The essence of market economies involves destroying the old and celebrating the new. Joseph Schumpeter, a 20th-century Austrian economist, called it "creative destruction", and described it was the only route to innovation and sustained growth. This has seen CDs scrapped for music streaming, Blockbusters for Netflix, Blackberry's demise and iPhone's rise and Uber upturning taxi services.

Right now, digital solutions are cheaper and more democratised than at any point in human history. From manufacturing to finance, retail to healthcare, tranches of the global economy are adopting them, making it easier for businesses to adapt.

It means you can take bad habits and scrappy data from old analogue firms and make them more digital- and data-led. You can reconcile old data silos and deploy AI to make sense of legacy systems. Because you have an established customer base often little or no creative destruction occurs.

"Building digital capabilities is easier than ever. But getting enterprise-wide adoption of digital remains incredibly difficult – change is difficult. Businesses find it tough to evolve old paradigms when there

isn't an existential threat forcing them to do so," explains Jet Lali, chief digital officer at State Street Global Advisors.

"A digital transformation that does not lead to business transformation is an IT

> **The challenge of business-model innovation after the adoption of digital technology can be exacerbated by a focus on profitability**

project," he observes. Michael Hamer, a renowned US engineer, echoed this in the 1990s when he said that instead of "embedding outdated processes in silicon and soft-

ware, we should obliterate them and start over, we should re-engineer our businesses." Fast forward to 2022 and many are still failing to do just that.

Disruptive innovation is a tricky business. Schumpeter's so-called "perennial gale of creative destruction" is a mere light breeze today. Rolls-Royce's power servitisation model and Domino's Pizza Tracker technology are overused examples. So why aren't we seeing more firms tout transformative offerings to the marketplace, especially with the trillion-dollar uptake of digital services going on worldwide?

"Most transformation efforts fail, digital and conventional. Some of the common reasons involve not attending to soft factors, or businesses just digitising existing processes and business models. Then there's digitising for efficiency alone, or pursuing technology for its own sake," states Martin Reeves, chairman of the BCG Henderson Institute.

"But take John Deere, Apple or Walmart and what they've done differently is to focus on transforming their business for competitive advantage," he points out.

Today, most firms are starting their digital transformation journey, adopting piecemeal solutions. They haven't yet experienced the full benefit of joining up the data dots. Full digital- and data-led visibility across a business is rare, which results in a pale imitation of digitally native firms. The ability of legacy incumbents to offer something disruptive is therefore limited.

Professor Chander Velu, professor of innovation and economics at the University of Cambridge, believes businesses aren't gauging the right metrics either. "The challenge of business-model innovation following the adoption of digital technology can be exacerbated by a primary focus on profitability. This emphasises performance activities as opposed to transformative activities," he says.

It doesn't help that progress for businesses is neither linear nor inevitable. There is no definitive blueprint or profit model for every transformed business which deploys disruptive digital tools. This means that there is a question mark over just how much firms should pay for such innovation.

"A customer cannot always tell us how new technologies can potentially change things," explains Christian Pedersen, chief product officer at IFS, an enterprise software firm. "Companies also still fundamentally want predictability around the financial year with costs. They want to know how much they're going to spend."
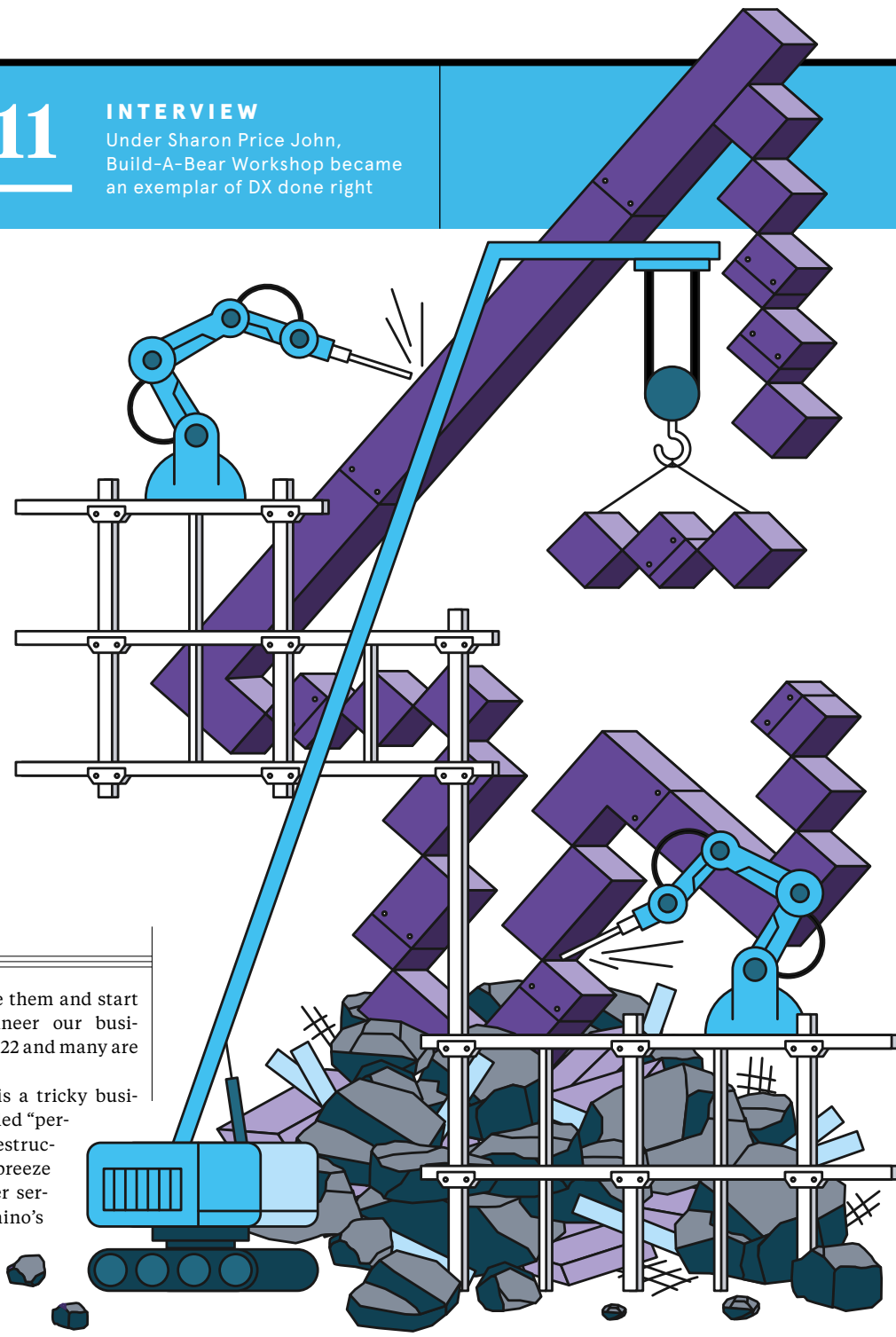
Business-model experts and the media focus on big market displacements – creative destruction makes headline news and Elon Musk's takeover of Twitter is a recent example. Yet a lot of transformation right now involves incremental change.

Dr Carl Benedikt Frey is director of the Future of Work programme at the Oxford Martin School, a research and policy unit based at the University of Oxford. He sees parallels with industrial revolutions.

"When electric motors arrived factories replaced the steam engine as the central power source. It took time for factory owners to figure out that you can equip every single machine with its own motor and get rid of all the power shafts in the factory. It then took more time to sequence these machines with the natural flow of production. This eventually paved the way for mass production, which spread from one industry to another."

Schumpeterian academics talk of creative accumulation. Firms have been quietly adding the digital building blocks during the economic good times. When a fresh global recession lands, that might be the time to unleash a new wave of disruptive innovation. This was seen in the wake of the global financial crisis.

"Think about electric cars and how long it's taking the public to find them more appealing than vehicles with an internal combustion engine. We still need more powerful batteries that are charged faster, better designed or with cheaper costs of production. All these are incremental innovations that add up to a radical technology. The same can be said about AI and its applications, or many biotech innovations," comments Diego Comín, professor of economics at Dartmouth College.

Creative destruction should also be more prevalent now since the barriers to market entry for digitally native startups appear low. Anyone can buy cheap data-driven tools off the shelf and get their business up and running. So why aren't there enough plucky 'one-person and a PowerPoint' teams upending markets? It's because there are other forces at play now.

"We used to see that excess profits in a market would attract new firms to enter and compete for them. This used to be a good predictor of entry. But that link has now broken. Why is that? I think the answer that more economists are coming to is that there are significant barriers to entry, which aren't necessarily technological," says Frey.

Several reasons are given, whether it's conforming to digital regulations such as GDPR, and other legislation for specific sectors which might be costly to adopt. Then there are incumbents which buy startups that pose a threat to them, or political lobbying by firms to push through legislation, making it difficult for creative players on a shoestring budget to disrupt incumbents.

What then, is next? "The need for more discipline, given the new cost of money. We're entering an era of 'disciplined innovation' when businesses will redouble the need to be systematic about digital innovation," says Reeves. Certainly, the future is uncharted. ●

DON'T EXPECT THE NEXT PARADIGM SHIFT

Extent to which business leaders expect business-model innovations to disrupt their organisation

44%
Little/no extent

43%
Some extent

13%
Great extent
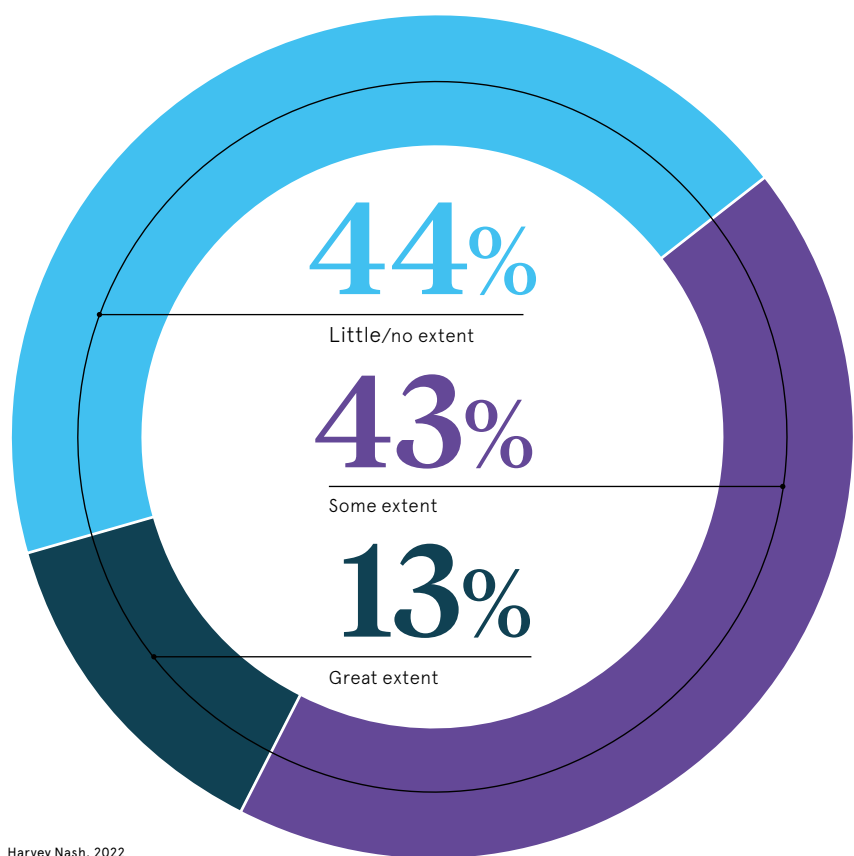
Harvey Nash, 2022

45%

of UK businesses are classed by the government as "innovation active" – they have introduced or improved products and services; they have engaged in innovation projects that are not yet complete; and they actively invest in innovation equipment, training, activities, etc.

BEIS, 2021

£48.7bn

The value of R&D performed by UK businesses in 2021

ONS, 2021

THE AGE OF INTELLIGENT AUTOMATION

2021

Intelligent automation brings together two advanced technologies: artificial intelligence and robotic process automation. When fully realised, intelligent automation can increase organisational efficiency and productivity, reduce costs and optimise back-office operations. Automation is no longer just for warehouses and manufacturing plants

83% of functional leadership is supportive or highly supportive of intelligent automation

but only

43% of the workforce expresses support for intelligent automation
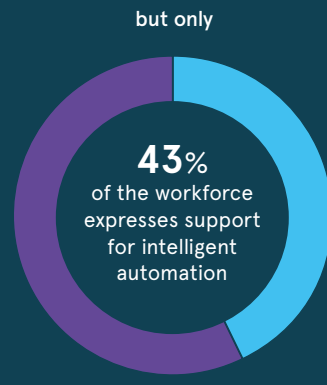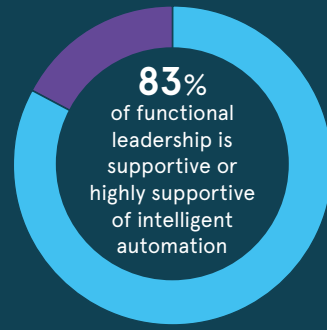
Deloitte, 2022

PROCESS FRAGMENTATION REMAINS THE BIGGEST OBSTACLE TO SCALABLE AUTOMATION

Barriers to scaling intelligent automation (rank order)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Process fragmentation	1	1	1	1
Lack of IT readiness	2	2	2	2
Lack of clear vision	3	3	3	3
Lack of skills to implement	4	4	4	4
Resistance to change	5	5	5	5
Cost to implement	6	6	6	6
Executive support and alignment	7	7	7	7
Speed to implement	8	8	8	8
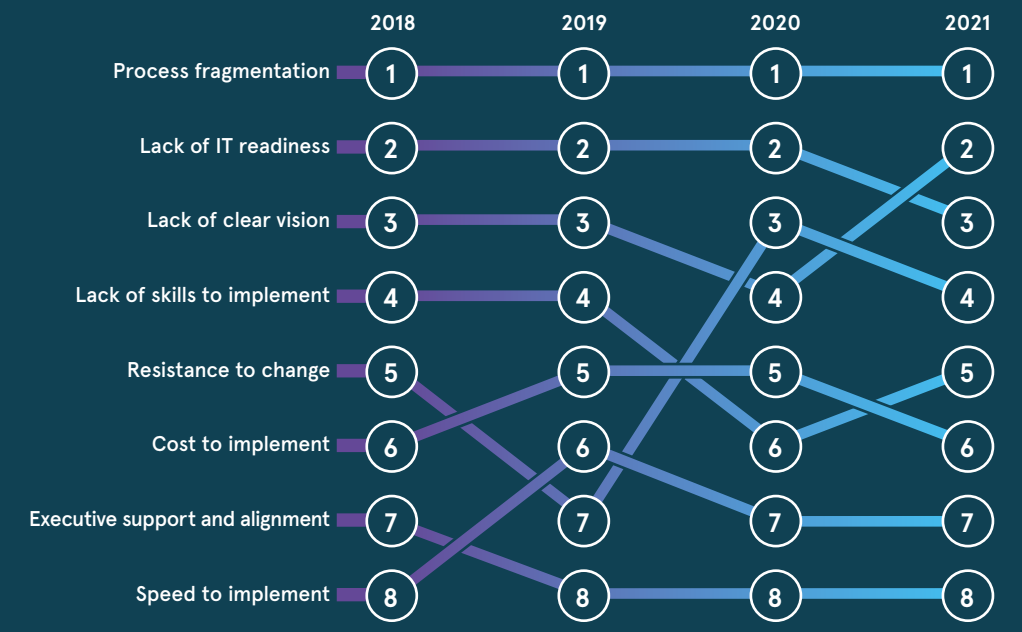
Deloitte, 2022

BUT MANY EMPLOYEES MAY FEAR BECOMING OBSOLETE

Share of employees expressing concerns about AI and automation replacing humans at work (selected countries)

Country	%
Portugal	62%
South Africa	61%
Spain	59%
France	40%
Australia	40%
New Zealand	40%
Italy	39%
US	39%
Ireland	35%
UK	33%
Switzerland	32%
Netherlands	26%
Germany	22%

$93.5bn

Total global corporate investment in AI worldwide as of 2021

Stanford University, 2021
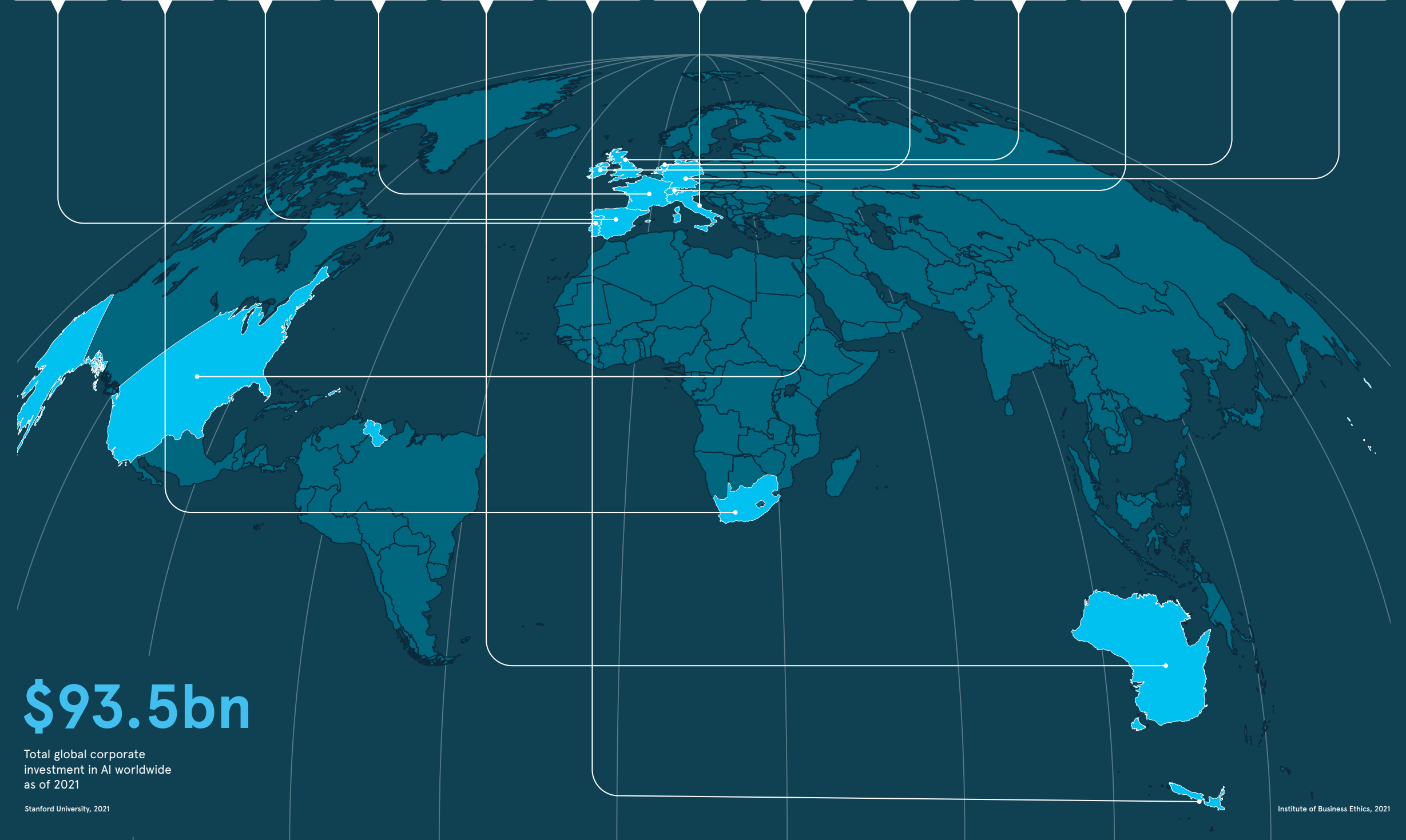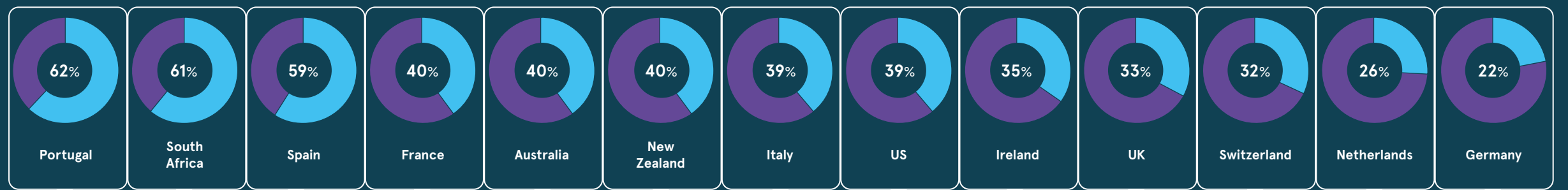
Institute of Business Ethics, 2021

OUTSOURCING AUTOMATION

Share of organisations piloting or implementing automation-as-a-service as part of an intelligent automation strategy

17% Already implementing

32% Plan to implement in the next three years

51% Currently no plans to implement
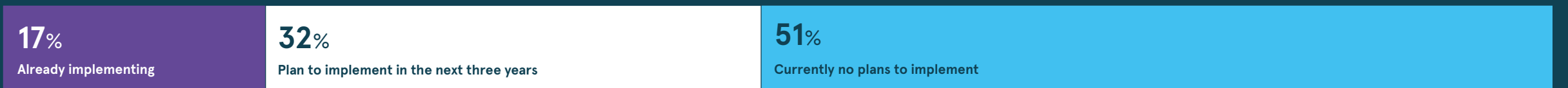
Deloitte, 2022

REALISING THE BENEFITS OF AUTOMATION

Share of companies reporting benefits of intelligent automation and average payback period – the time needed to see results

	2019	2020	2021
Cost reduction	22%	24%	31%
Increased revenue	11%	15%	24%
Payback period (in months)	13.3	13.4	17.1
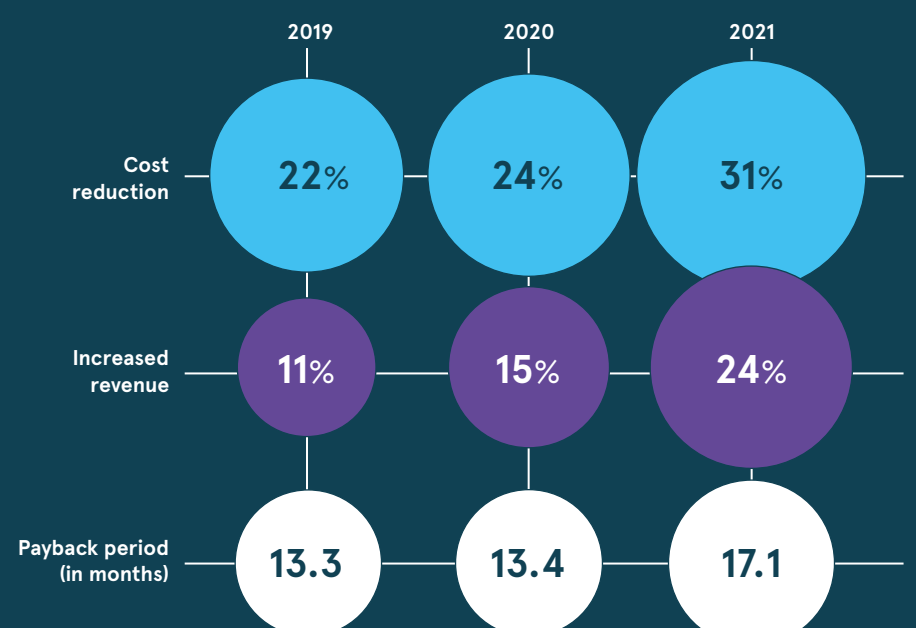
Deloitte, 2022

SPENDING ON RPA WILL INCREASE NEARLY EIGHTFOLD BY 2030

Spending on robotic process automation software worldwide

Year	Spending
2020	$2.09bn
2021	$2.65bn
2022*	$3.4bn
2023*	$4.3bn
2024*	$5.4bn
2025*	$6.9bn
2026*	$8.8bn
2027*	$11.3bn
2028*	$14.5bn
2029*	$18.6bn
2030*	$23.9bn
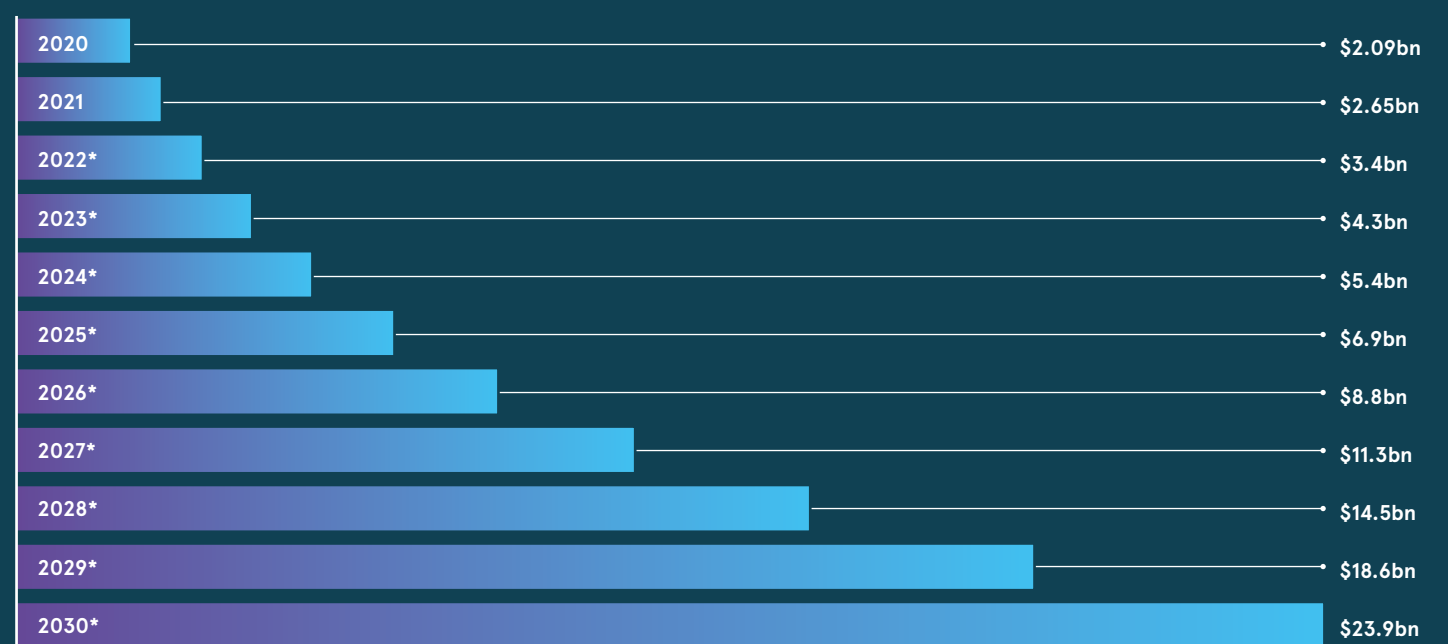
*Projected

GlobeNewswire, 2022

AGILITY

Are you switched on to plug and play?

The trend towards mix-and-match technologies to meet the needs of a fast-paced digital marketplace shows no sign of slowing

Morag Cuddeford-Jones

fhm via Getty Images

Keeping on top of technological advances is a head-scratcher for most IT departments. More likely than not, firms of any size and history are struggling with a legacy tech stack.

For many organisations, the answer to transforming that stack has been to add plug-and-play solutions; dedicated pieces of software that are comparatively easy to add to systems and allow flexibility to adapt to changing digital needs.

"Most tech today offers turnkey integrations, making it easy to add to a stack or swap in solutions. Thinking that one enterprise suite will solve every problem is, in my opinion, getting to be an outdated approach, though for many this is still debatable," suggests Odd Morten Sørensen, martech landscape contributor at MartechTribe.

Plug-and-play solutions have a variety of guises. They may be under a digital experience platform (DXP), which is a collection of systems curated by a vendor to work well together to help deliver digital experiences. Or they can be part of a self-selected set of technologies that are individually designed to integrate, even between competitors. This is part of the trend towards composable architecture – an ecosystem that can be created using independent systems that work together through APIs and can be swapped in and out at will. But the key is to understand the shortcomings of the existing systems, know where support will be most meaningful and then adapt the tech stack accordingly.

> **"Running a marathon requires a lot more than buying a pair of Nikes... in the same way, layering on a DXP won't be a silver bullet"**

The description 'plug and play' can be misleading, though. Sitecore is one of many software companies that provide a DXP as well as solutions that arguably fall under that definition, such as Sitecore Search. But the company itself states that: "The truth is there is no plug-and-play solution that will enable marketing teams to flip a switch to integrate their stack."

Sørensen warns: "There are many possible solutions to manage the digital experience today. It comes down to your current set-up. There will always be a transition phase when switching from legacy or on-premise solutions to cloud-based and connected solutions."

Gareth Chilton is the founder of tech consultancy ManMachine. He notes that one of the reasons companies clamour for plug-and-play solutions is that what they have is underperforming. And instead of addressing the underlying problem, they use new tech as a sticking plaster. "In the same way that running a marathon takes a lot more than buying a pair of Nikes – it takes the right training and nutrition too – just layering on a DXP won't be a silver bullet."

Chilton also points out the danger of thinking a company can slot in a new piece of tech and forget about it. "Vendors change their technology all the time. To take advantage of it, you must invest to stay up to date. Has a particular provider added or launched a feature that is relevant for your company?" The result is a lot of swapping in and out of component software as functionalities are needed, making it a never-ending task.

It pays to be careful about just how much plug-and-play technology a company onboards. One source estimated the average enterprise uses 288 different SaaS apps. Yet recent research suggests that nearly every IT professional (94%) says their company would benefit from reducing their overall software contracts while 89% believe they waste time every week dealing with 'bloatware' – unwanted, overly complicated SaaS add-ons and features that hinder productivity and cause frustration.

"There are some pitfalls to avoid," Sørensen says. "Buying tech first, with no strategy in place, is one. And while turnkey integrations can be easily swapped, adopting new software to a team or organisation will take time and will probably cost more than expected every time."

Marketers are looking for a solution that creates order out of this chaos, as global legal publisher Wolters Kluwer found itself. The company was managing more than 200 different websites to serve its varied customer base of tax, legal, governance and health clients. After an extensive sales and marketing survey, the company discovered it was well below parity in marketing maturity, had gaps in capabilities and skill sets, was labouring under a proliferation of poorly used marketing tools and its many websites had security, compliance and user experience issues.

"Our business case was, we had no business case. We couldn't find the numbers. We couldn't find the performance. We didn't understand how those sites were being used, what they were generating or even what they cost," explains Amy Kolzow, vice-president of global digital marketing at Wolters Kluwer.

Over two years, the company created a single, multilingual website that could reduce costs and evolve customer experience through a shared, flexible and integrated technology stack. This included a Sitecore content management system at the core, supported by their content management platform and digital asset management solutions, Google Analytics and Mouseflow analytics engines and a Conductor SEO solution.

There were clear logistical benefits to rationalising the chaotic and confusing technologies into what the company calls its OneWeb transformation – information was easier to find for customers, the brand had a consistent brand experience, and it lowered the total cost of ownership around software licensing, hosting, analytics and agency services.
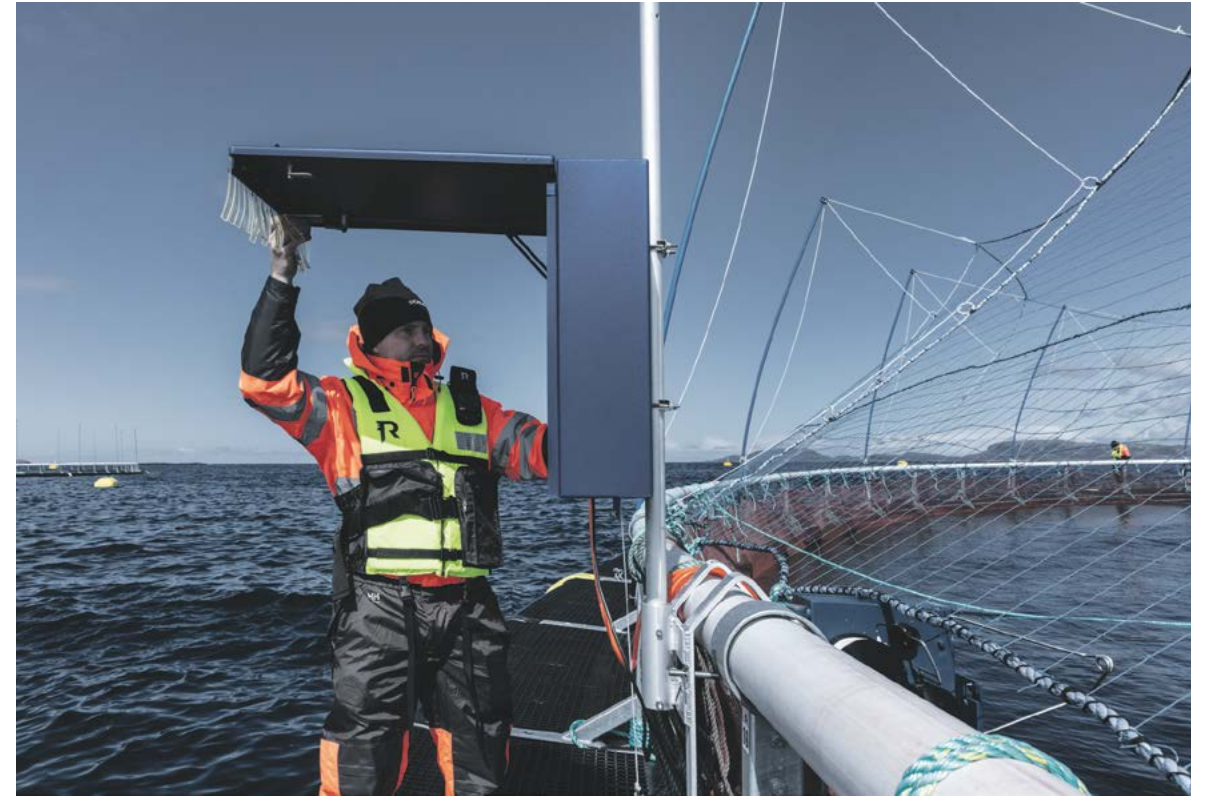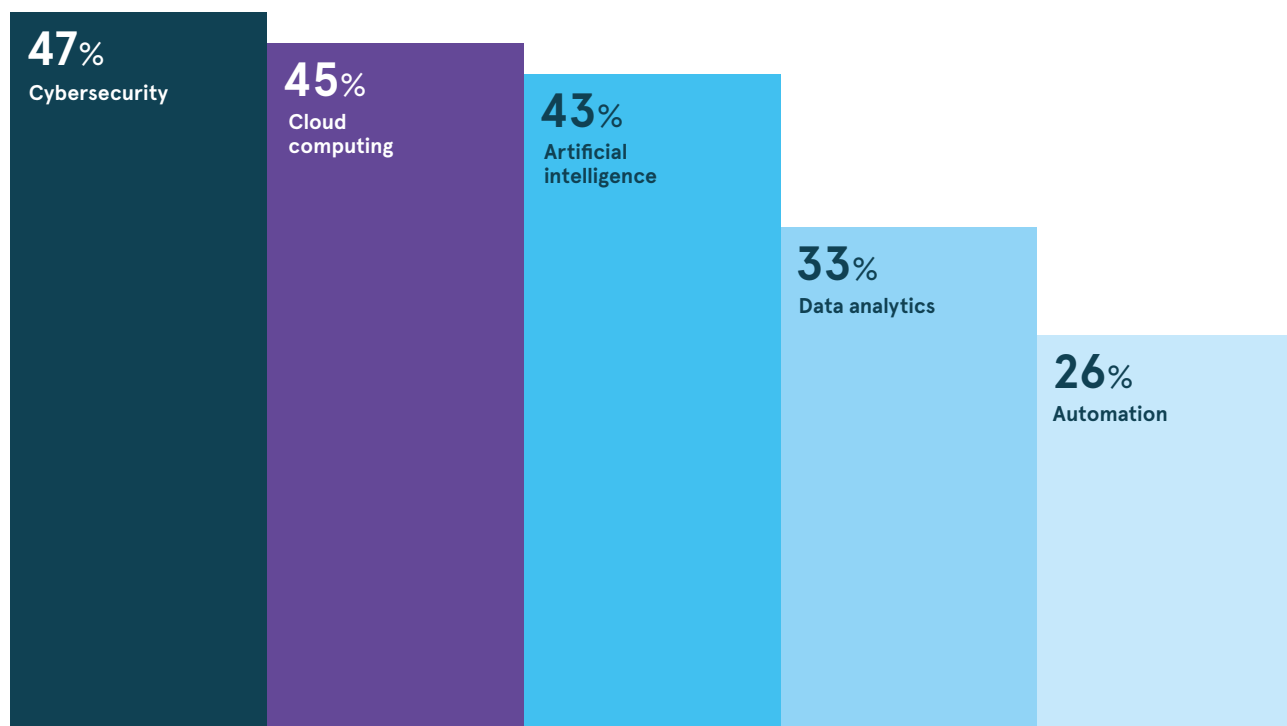
Inevitably, companies such Wolters Kluwer will have to keep an eye on how their new tech setup is performing. "Martech is developing at a rapid pace. Whatever is happening today will be different tomorrow. If you adopt an agile approach with composable technology, be sure to keep up to date with it," Chilton advises.

DXPs, plug-and-play technologies or investing in composable solutions seem to be the future. "Continuing to build bespoke solutions into 2023 is something only companies in niche areas could benefit from," says Sørensen. But proceed with caution and don't ever rest on your laurels, lest your martech stack comes tumbling down. ●

THE COMPONENTS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Baker McKenzie, 2021

Most important strategic technologies for digital transformation according to corporate purchasers of digital solutions worldwide

- **47%** Cybersecurity
- **45%** Cloud computing
- **43%** Artificial intelligence
- **33%** Data analytics
- **26%** Automation

Advanced mobility from sea to shop floor

Legacy management systems are sapping your field workforce of its productivity and concealing opportunities for cost reduction. Mobile-first digital solutions hold the key to greater efficiency

From the aquaculture technician carrying out intricate equipment inspections in extreme conditions, to the salesperson struggling with the paperwork generated by on-site surveys and questionnaires.

This is the reality of the last mile for many of the 2.7 billion deskless employees, who make up the biggest workforce in the world.

The problems faced daily by these field workers are myriad, but their efficiency and productivity are vital for the success, sustainability and, ultimately, survival of their companies.

Resco is a mobile-first platform, offering mobility for Dynamics 365 and Salesforce, which aims to digitise the last mile, empowering mobile superworkers in Microsoft, Salesforce and beyond so that they not only know what their next job is but are informed enough to know how to do that job more effectively.

"Leveraging a mobile workforce for data generation instantly makes a business more intelligent and resilient at its periphery," reveals Resco CEO, Andrew Lorraine.

"It feeds intel to the business without having to take on any major capital expenditure projects to make assets 'smarter', instead you already have your human assets in place."

And the need for a high level of usable field digitisation for these "human assets" has never been more urgent, as the nature of operations in the field continues to evolve.

It was a problem experienced by ScaleAQ, an aquaculture business with headquarters in Trondheim, Norway. ScaleAQ operates vast fish pens, so deep that they can almost hide a 737 vertically from nose to tail. There can be up to 18 of these pens in one location, all of them requiring significant levels of maintenance and inspection. Moreover, the pens are often unique and demand different inspections every time.

However, ScaleAQ was missing a mobile app for its field engineers to cover complex inspections scenarios of their assets. This was especially a problem when dealing with recurring inspections, where information needed to be passed on from the first visit to the next, and also when assets were being assembled, as inspections must be carried out with the correct template of questions.

ScaleAQ's mobile workers required sophisticated, enterprise-grade mobility that could match the increasing complexity of these field operations. That's where Resco stepped in. With its implementation partner, DXC Technology, Resco helped bridge a dangerous data gap and enabled ScaleAQ's mobile specialists to streamline both kinds of inspections.

In particular, Resco made it possible for field managers to provide technicians with the correct inspection questionnaire for any complex asset, and build dynamic inspections of pens that were under construction from the asset data stored in MS Dynamics.

Static inspections were out of the question because each new asset was unique, but using Resco Inspections, ScaleAQ was able to generate templates dynamically based on the asset's product card, so the engineer's workflow was tailored to the asset they were working on. At the same time, development costs were kept to a minimum as the solution was developed with rules definitions only, so no coding was required.

"Immersive data-driven workflows like this help ensure on-site productivity and safety for field workers. It also empowers them to respond to problems and improve customer experience or find new insights that generate business opportunities," explains Andrew Lorraine. "Getting hold of purposeful, structured data from the field unlocks tremendous business value during that critical frontline or customer-service moment and beyond."

Another company that experienced how advanced mobility can unlock value is Southern States Toyotalift (SSTlift), an authorised Toyota forklift dealer, which began working with Resco in 2018 to solve a problem it was experiencing involving huge inefficiencies in the data exchange between field sales representatives and wholesale managers.

It was a problem that resulted in reams of paperwork being generated for every order created, but an implementation of inspections into the workflow, combined with Resco Mobile Sales and Microsoft Dynamics CRM, allowed SSTlift's field salespeople to input information into digital forms directly from their contacts, via phones or tablets, in real time.

The adoption of Resco Inspections meant that sales representatives could take and make use of photos that are synced to Dynamics and made instantly available to the back-office team. After completing their survey, sales representatives were able to export two PDF documents, which were automatically sent to the wholesale manager. The report, which has no customer information, was then sent to an auction network where the company received live bids on the equipment.

It created an instant efficiency that reduced the form-filling process that had previously taken up to an hour, to about four minutes per form, resulting in a staggering 45% process efficiency increase and a $350,000 per month increase in revenue.

There were other benefits too, including optimised workflows, lower costs and improved adoption of technology across the company. It also automatically baked in eco-sustainability for the business, eliminating the need for pen and paper, and optimising processes like travel planning, asset operation and maintenance optimisation, so there were no wasted resources.

This is why Andrew Lorraine believes if you're a business leader, now is the time to look at any inefficiencies that exist in your organisation's field mobility and evolve a mobile tech strategy to counter them.

"Equipping mobile workers with the right tech allows them to better play the role of trusted adviser to the customer and boost loyalty," he says. "Investing in your mobile workforce also has a big impact on company sustainability, both in terms of eliminating paper-based processes and creating, using and improving knowledge artefacts that are a critical part of a company's differentiation and are hard to retain through times of high turnover."

By capturing data at the source, in the field, the debilitating impacts of the so-called 'silver tsunami', whereby knowledge is lost by ageing employees leaving or retiring from an organisation, can be mitigated.

> **Getting hold of purposeful, structured data from the field unlocks tremendous business value during that critical frontline moment**

It's another example of how Resco can help organisations deal with the many challenges currently facing them as inflation puts service companies under pressure to be more cost-effective.

However, one of the most important values of advanced mobility is its capability to harvest field data to gain competitive advantages and accelerate time-to-value without the need for extra investments or the involvement of developers.

With advanced mobility, field workers can also identify inefficient processes and instead rely on the most up-to-date information relevant to the task and customer, who view field service technicians as experienced advisers. That's where the value is created and experienced.

"At Resco, we believe the right technology should allow for rapid co-innovation between IT and other lines of business," says Andrew Lorraine. "And that technology must function in the unpredictable, offline mobile environment, be easily adopted by field workers themselves and not add complexity or technical debt to a company's IT organisation."

For more information please visit resco.net

TOP BENEFITS OF ADVANCED MOBILITY, BASED ON RESCO COMMUNITY

Southern States Toyotalift:

$350k
Monthly Revenue Increase

45%
Increase in process efficiency

Krones:

30%
Increase in time efficiency for back office processes

Enterprise Inns:

25%
Increase in property inspections volume

Effy Group:

5 days
Saved for delivering each report

Resco, 2022

resco.net

Why it's time to revive grass-roots leadership

With transformations so often thwarted by internal barriers, businesses would do well to heed the century-old guidance of a pioneering management theorist and try empowering change from the shopfloor up

Annette Corbett

P rolific digital transformations are a hot ticket, attracting visionary business leaders, ambitious middle managers and a host of coat-tail riders with their theories on how to secure a competitive edge with such projects. Yet, for all the insights these players may claim to offer, the secret to a successful transformation remains as elusive as Google's ever-evolving search algorithm. According to estimates by Bain & Company, Boston Consulting Group, KPMG and McKinsey, the likelihood of failure lies somewhere between 70% and 95%.

There are myriad studies explaining why these projects fall short of expectations so often. Most of them cite factors such as digital illiteracy and cultural resistance to change in the organisation – implicitly blaming grass-roots employees – but none will offer a winning formula for bucking the trend.
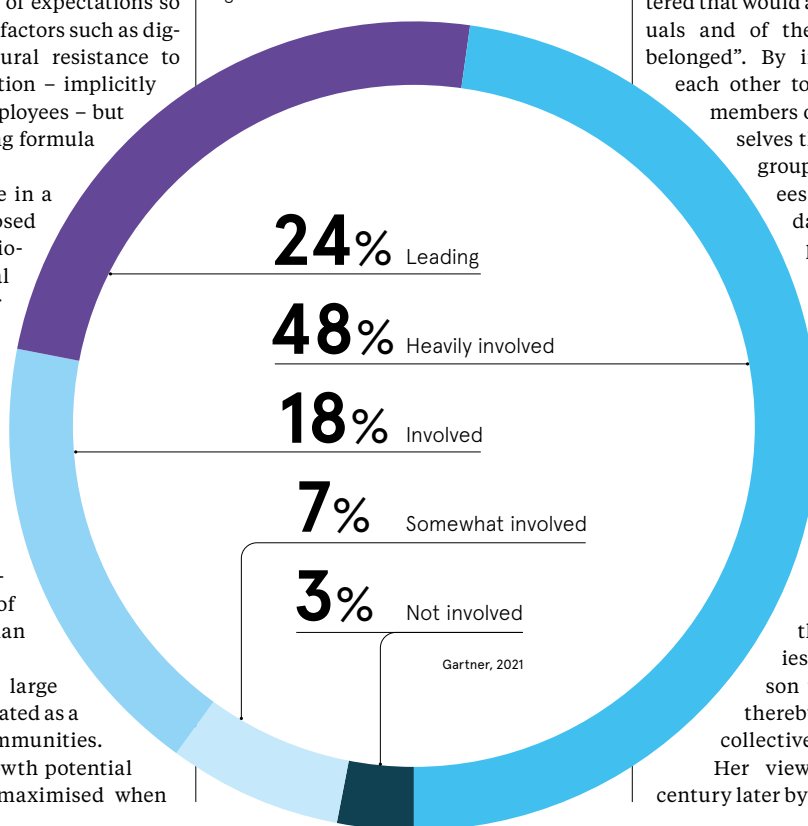
Could the solution lie in a concept that was proposed a century ago by a pioneering organisational thinker? Mary Parker Follett, one of the earliest management consultants, drew on psychology and developed a forerunner of human relations theory to revolutionise the study of organisational behaviour in the early 1900s. She advocated using the power of relational, rather than hierarchical, influence.

Follett believed that large organisations can be treated as a collection of local communities. She argued that the growth potential of a business will be maximised when

these communities are self-governing to the fullest possible extent.

Organisations should be viewed as local social systems involving networks of groups, according to Follett. In this way, a "self-governing principle" could be fostered that would aid "the growth of individuals and of the groups to which they belonged". By interacting directly with each other to achieve common goals, members of a group "fulfilled themselves through the process of the group's development". Employees would thereby feel validated, integral to a given project's success and perfectly placed to share their perspectives from the grass-roots level.

Follett noted that the more traditional hierarchical approach to leadership and management encouraged consistent damaging trends, especially acquiescence. This, she commented, is the situation that occurs when the group allows the pushiest and/or most senior person to have their way, which thereby diluting the members' collective experience.

Her view was echoed nearly a century later by Rita Zonius, social media

DATA AND ANALYTICS EXPERTS OFTEN PLAY A LARGE ROLE IN TRANSFORMATION EFFORTS

Share of data and analytics leaders involved in digital transformation initiatives worldwide

24% Leading
48% Heavily involved
18% Involved
7% Somewhat involved
3% Not involved

Gartner, 2021

> Having a diverse and fluid group of people, who can take on leadership roles when required and work together to help articulate purpose and direction, is invaluable

learning specialist at McKinsey, when she was speaking at a leadership discussion hosted by the Digital Workplace Group consultancy in 2020. She referred not to the elephant in the room but to the "Hippo" (highest-paid person's opinion) – and the belief that this is automatically more valid than any other participant's view.

After he became MD of the Royal Dutch/Shell Group in the late 1990s, Steven Miller led a diverse team drawn from all parts of the organisation with the aim of transforming the oil giant's European business. In doing so, he applied a leadership model based on Follett's theory of 'power with' rather than 'power over'.

In an interview with *Fast Company* in 1998, Miller explained: "The leader may have a vision, but the actual solutions about how best to meet the challenges of the moment have to be made by the people closest to the action... Once the folks at the grass roots find that they own the problem, they find that they also own the answer. They improve things very quickly, aggressively and creatively, with a lot more ideas than the old-style leader could ever hand down."

He could almost have been describing today's change champions'. These particularly engaged and influential employees – who can be found at any level of an organisation – are key to the success of any transformation it might attempt. Despite their pivotal cultural role, these enthusiastic evangelists are rarely asked to join project management boards and steering committees.

Wouldn't involving grass-roots employees at the ideation stage of digital transformations – when business cases are drafted and solutions to potential problems proposed – give such projects a better shot at success?

In their 2021 book *Nature of Work*, Paul Miller and Shimrit Janes discuss philosophies such as servant leadership and emergent leadership for adaptive organisational structures. They argue that "having a diverse and fluid group of people, who can take on leadership roles when required and work together to help articulate purpose and direction, is invaluable. Who takes the lead at any one time may change depending on the challenge at hand. Perhaps it will be a subject-matter expert for one project and somebody deeply embedded in the front line for the next."

They're not suggesting here that organisations should dismantle their hierarchies entirely. This approach is more about enabling a business to operate fluidly around its emergent objectives and empower those best placed to take charge of them at the time.

Any leader seeking to test this grass-roots model must expect teething troubles. So says Céline Schillinger, author of the 2022 book *Dare to Un-lead: The art of relational leadership in a fragmented world*.

In a podcast discussion with Miller and Janes in March, Schillinger explained that "un-leadership" requires courage. This approach requires you to acknowledge that no one person can possibly see the whole picture. You must therefore be brave enough to remove yourself from the centre, thereby enabling the process of collective leadership.

This would be a leap of faith for any leader, especially the founder-CEO who's long called the shots with little consultation beyond one or two trusted lieutenants. It could also be a culture shock for the relatively junior front-line employee who may suddenly find themselves entrusted to play a strategically important role. But, given that your chances of a successful digital transformation are so slim, it may well be worth at least experimenting with Follett's approach to leadership, even if you use a smaller-scale project as a test bed. What's the worst that could happen? ●

Automating security for remote workers

The genie is out of the bottle: remote working is here to stay. The question companies should be answering is not how to get people back to the office, but how to enable secure hybrid working

T he Covid-19 crisis transformed perceptions of remote working. Much of the capability already existed to enable secure access to workplace tools from home, driven by improved technology, the rise of cloud computing and high-speed broadband. But it took a global pandemic to demonstrate to more traditional companies that their workforce could remain highly productive when not in the office.

The return to a sense of normality has triggered varying degrees of retreat back to offices, with half of companies expecting staff back five days a week, recent research by Microsoft found. Empowered by the flexibility remote working provides, however, many workers are resisting, according to a Manpower study that the government observes as a key economic indicator.

Amid a talent shortage in many parts of the economy, most workers have made it clear that they value a hybrid approach to working. Crucially, companies that scaled quickly through the pandemic have shown remote working is more conducive to growing in a thoughtful, efficient way.

Tines, a no-code automation platform for security teams, is a prime example. The Dublin-based company had just five employees before Covid-19. It now has 150 and believes the remote working model, though initially forced on the company, has been vital to its success.

"I don't think we would have been able to grow that fast if we had been constrained to working in an office," says Eoin Hinchy, co-founder and CEO at Tines. "All of a sudden we were able to do interviews with people anywhere in the world. We employ people in 10 different time zones, four continents and 13 US states. We wouldn't have had access to all this talent or embraced that distribution if we'd been in an office."

Tines has relied on automation to onboard new employees globally, while maintaining a leanness that other fast-growing startups

often struggle with. Every part of the hiring process, including identifying the need and budget, posting job descriptions, managing interviews and feedback, making job offers and sending contracts, is automated and handled through the Tines platform.

This makes the hiring experience for both candidates and those involved in the recruitment process far more seamless and efficient. But then, of course, there is the security element to consider, something that has historically deterred companies from embracing remote working.

The State of Pentesting 2022 report from Cobalt found that 54% of security professionals want to quit their jobs, largely because they feel tired and overwhelmed by trying to ensure other departments are following security recommendations. The Tines platform removes a lot of this stress by automatically responding to and remediating security alerts in real time, as well as managing access to the data, systems, and hardware that employees need to do their job.

"I fundamentally believe that working in security should be the best job in the world," says Hinchy. "It has all the ingredients to be an extraordinarily satisfying career, yet so many people want to leave the profession because

a lot of the time you're heavily dependent on other teams for your success. Even though you're accountable for security, a lot of what you do is informing other teams and giving recommendations for how they can do their jobs in a more secure way.

"It's very stressful when you don't have much control over the principal thing you're responsible for. No-code automation can dramatically improve that because there's no room for manual complacency or error from teams out of your control. Meanwhile other departments aren't fretting about the security team breathing down their neck, so relationships are much better.

"Companies can't turn back the clock on remote working. It's here to stay, and that's a good thing for productivity and employee satisfaction, but no-code automation is going to be crucial to doing it in a secure, efficient way."

For more information, visit tines.com

⊜ tines

How to prepare for the future of customer contact

Engage Business Media is creating discussion around the future of customer contact. Here, editor **Svilena Keane** outlines the issues that will determine customer contact for progressive businesses

T he outbreak of Covid and the cost-of-living crisis have significantly impacted customer contact in recent times. Almost overnight, the pandemic forced companies to change how they operate as the needs and expectations of customers suddenly shifted. Today, companies are faced with deciphering what customers want as the back-to-back crises have led to lack of trust and confusion over the need for digital and human contact.

On 9 February 2023 our Future of Customer Contact Conference will address these challenges, the topics that are impacting customer contact and what companies are doing to keep up with the changes. Specifically, the conference will expand on four key areas of research: customer outcomes; strategy and leadership; colleagues and culture; and data and insight.

Customers expect choice
Research by Brainfood Consulting for Engage Business Media found that customers expect choice. So companies should ensure customers have access to support channels including email, live web chat and phone.

Contrary to what many may have thought, people have become less willing to self-serve and have returned to assisted support channels. The reason for this was found to be the desire for human contact and reassurance following the outbreak of the pandemic. Another important topic that organisations must focus on is vulnerable customers. Companies must understand the nature and scale of their vulnerabilities and set up systems to support their needs.

New operating models
The past two years have disrupted the business models of organisations world-

wide. As a result, many have now turned their attention to finding new operating models and the right metrics for customers and colleagues.

Expanding on this, Brainfood Consulting's research found the 'customer satisfaction' score and the 'quality' score were ranked as the most useful CX benchmarks. Meanwhile, the 'customer effort' score and the 'customer retention rate' received the lowest rankings.

At the Future of Customer Contact Conference, speakers will discuss how they have implemented organisational transformations to tackle the challenges of the past two years. Moreover, they will address the implications of a recession and how businesses can adapt.

Ensuring employee wellbeing
Although it is now safe to return to the office, many companies have kept remote work as an option for their workers. The analyst firm ContactBabel predicts that hybrid working will likely remain a dominant strategy for contact centres in 2023. Considering this, businesses must give employees the option to work flexibly if they wish to remain competitive.

Also, they should work on creating safe spaces where employees feel heard and seen. One of the reasons why organisations should prioritise employee wellbeing is that the younger generations are reportedly less tolerant to unsatisfying work and more likely to quiet quit.

The link between employee and customer experience is another important reason why businesses must focus on wellbeing. According to Brainfood Consulting's research, 93% of contact-centre managers say that agent stress affects customer satisfaction scores. In other words, employees who feel burnt out and stressed are more likely to be unfriendly to customers.

> Companies are faced with deciphering what customers want as back-to-back crises have resulted in a lack of trust

Using data and insight
To retain customers, companies must make use of data and insight. Put differently, they should track customer behaviour and understand the needs of their target market. In this way, they will be able to respond to the fast-changing needs of customers, take their vulnerabilities into account, and drive innovation. February's event will expand on this topic, with numerous speakers expected to reveal how they have used data and insight to improve CX.

Taking place at The Brewery in London, the 2023 Future of Customer Contact Conference will explore the aforementioned areas of research in depth. Designed to help businesses prepare for the future, the conference will feature exclusive insights from world-renowned companies such as Microsoft, John Lewis, Vodafone, Affinity Water, Covéa Insurance, The Very Group, Sky, Mercedes-Benz and more. ●

Svilena Keane
Editor
Engage Business Media

Craveiger via Getty Images

AUTOMATION

Automatic for the people

Every business leader knows that robotics and AI can reduce operating costs and free up employees for more enjoyable tasks. But how is automation fitting into common business functions?

Oliver Pickup

In the world of finance, professionals spend a chunk of their time collecting, tracking and chasing receipts and invoices – up to 2.7 working days every month, according to research by spend management specialists Moss. Yet up to 16 working hours for every 100 transaction-related tasks could be saved by adopting an automated spend management platform. So says Sarah Hamarneh, strategy and business development manager at Moss.

Waste-management company Biffa has triumphed after binning its old cash-collection system. Emily Munnoch, the firm's finance director for shared services, explains that an AI-powered order-to-cash platform has helped to secure and accelerate cashflow – by expediting invoice payments and managing disputes and credit risk. "Our dunning success rate has improved by 22.5%, which has reduced overdue debt and improved cashflow for the business," she says.
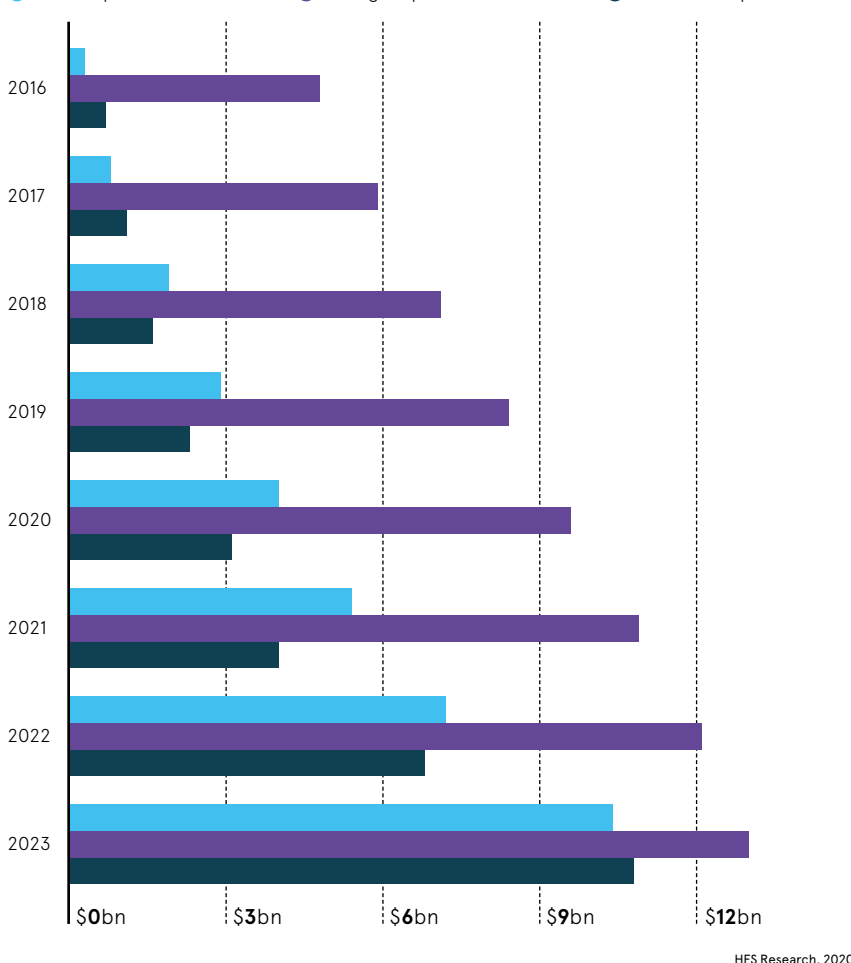
And there are further benefits. "All of our credit controllers love using the platform, and it has enhanced customer communications because we can now communicate electronically with more than 99% of our customer base," she adds.

Elsewhere, Ilija Ugrinic, commercial solutions director at Proactis, an international payments software business, offers two examples. His company saved Screwfix £100,000 year-on-year after introducing "one standardised, integrated automation solution that streamlined receipt, approval and exception handling". Additionally Wigan Council, which deals with about 90,000 invoices a year, improved invoice processing by 66% using Proactis' solution and saw an annual saving of £120,000.

Shayne Simpson is managing director of TechNET IT Recruitment. He admits he took a risk in choosing a solution that automates recruitment processes and communication with candidates. But he says the gamble has paid off.

"In the last six months we've saved 28,609 hours, sent 144,269 automatic emails with a 53% read rate and sent 45,852 texts," says Simpson. "All of this equates to the admin of 30 full-time consultants being completed by a robot, every month."

Jason Heilman is Bullhorn's senior vice-president for automation, AI and talent experience. He points out that the average recruitment firm using Bullhorn's automation solution currently automates more than 20,000 emails, texts, updates, notes and tasks each year. "Cumulatively, this represented an estimated saving of 2.5 million employee hours in 2021 alone, equal to freeing up three hours every day per recruiter," he says.

Chris Underwood, managing director for executive search consultancy Adastrum, though, is ambivalent. "It's important to question the reliability of AI in implementing the diversity and inclusion agenda during recruitment," he warns. "Take Amazon, for example. It no longer uses AI in HR since it discovered its AI-driven candidate-screening process was discriminating against women. "Removing the human element from HR will only frustrate and limit the candidate's company experience if interviews are robotic."

Compared to finance, the legal sector has been slower to take up AI and robotics. "The scope for efficiencies in legal processes is staggering," says Jonathan White, legal and compliance director at National Accident Helpline. "Law firms have been behind the curve but we're beginning to see significant advantages, particularly in automating processes to create documents with common features such as non-disclosure agreements." JPMorgan's contract analysis solution, Coin, can reportedly complete 36,000 hours of legal work in seconds, White says.

Tom Dunlop, co-founder and CEO of legal tech developer and provider Summize, claims to have developed the world's first integrated contract management solution.

"The average reported time to review one contract manually is approximately 92 minutes," he says. "With large organisations managing an average of 350 contracts each week, speeding up this process makes a huge difference." Summize's product, which uses AI and natural language processing, means a contract can be created in under two minutes and then the first-pass review in under five minutes. "Clients report time savings of 85% or more compared to manual processes," he adds.

With nearly a quarter of a million legal contracts stored in one central system, Elliott Young, chief technology officer at Dell Technologies UK, required such a solution. "The legal team was reading approximately 800 contracts per quarter, so processing the repository would have taken 212 quarters or 53 years," he says. Instead, a proof-of-concept system that combined AI and humans achieved the same results in months.

Meanwhile, automation in marketing is transforming how businesses operate. "Automation presents a huge opportunity to build on the foundations of our relationships with customers," says Carlene Jackson, CEO of Brighton-based digital transformation consultancy Cloud9 Insight. "If a customer follows you on social media, that could trigger a private message which encourages them to download a guide from your website." That message could then generate timely emails with useful content which is based on the pageviews or links they have accessed on subsequent visits.

Natalie Cramp is CEO of data science consultancy Profusion and agrees. "Automating even basic processes like email builds and sends can save marketing teams a lot of time and money. It can also, crucially, increase marketing effectiveness while removing the potential for human error."

Of course, mistakes can still creep in. In January 2020, for instance, Aviva accidentally called all the customers in its email base "Michael". Cramp continues: "If businesses can dedicate time to more complex automation, such as data management and algorithms, these can fuel highly personalised customer journeys and lead to a huge impact on customer experience with vastly increased sales."

Nick Mason is co-founder and CEO of Turtl, a content automation platform. He calculates that personalised content can generate up to 10 times more subscribers. "You can cut the time to produce sales proposals by 90% if you use pre-existing automation engines to create personalised digital documents," he observes.

> **This automation represented an estimated saving of 2.5 million employee hours in 2021 alone, equal to freeing up three hours every day per recruiter**

Customer service is seeing the benefits of using automation. For Virgin Media O2, which has around 47 million customers in the UK, automating its contact centre was a strategic imperative – not least because uncoordinated messaging to the business's 7,000 agents was leading to inconsistencies and knowledge gaps.

Last October, it overhauled its processes using Intradiem's intelligent automation solution. The platform was used to deliver training directly to agents' desktops; to send notifications to help call-handling time within preset thresholds and to facilitate their ability to take breaks on time and to use the off-phone time to stay up to date on internal communications, explains Faye Herring, Virgin Media's workforce planning manager.

"Within four months of launch, more than 3,500 hours of offline time were delivered to agents' desktops via Intradiem to make productive use of what had previously been wasted available time," she says. "And it reduced the average call-handling time by up to 60 seconds."

Greg Adams, regional vice-president for the UK and Ireland at Dynatrace, offers an equally impressive example. His company's work has enabled UK health and life insurance company Vitality to take up a proactive servicing model.

"The customer service teams are automatically notified when Vitality's members encounter tech errors in their digital experience. That means that customer service agents can proactively contact members and resolve the issue instead of waiting for the customer to get in touch to ask for help," Adams explains.

He adds that this proactive customer support capability has helped Vitality to reduce policy lapse rates by 65% among members who come up against problems during their digital journey.

Automation clearly speeds up processes and can bring huge efficiencies across various business functions. But deciding what the best use cases for robotics and AI are right now and what they could be still require human insight. For now, at least. ●

THE MARKET FOR AUTOMATION

Worldwide spending and projected spending on robotic/intelligent process automation and AI automation, by segment

- ● Robotic process automation
- ● Intelligent process automation
- ● AI business operations

	$0bn	$3bn	$6bn	$9bn	$12bn
2016					
2017					
2018					
2019					
2020					
2021					
2022					
2023					

HFS Research, 2020
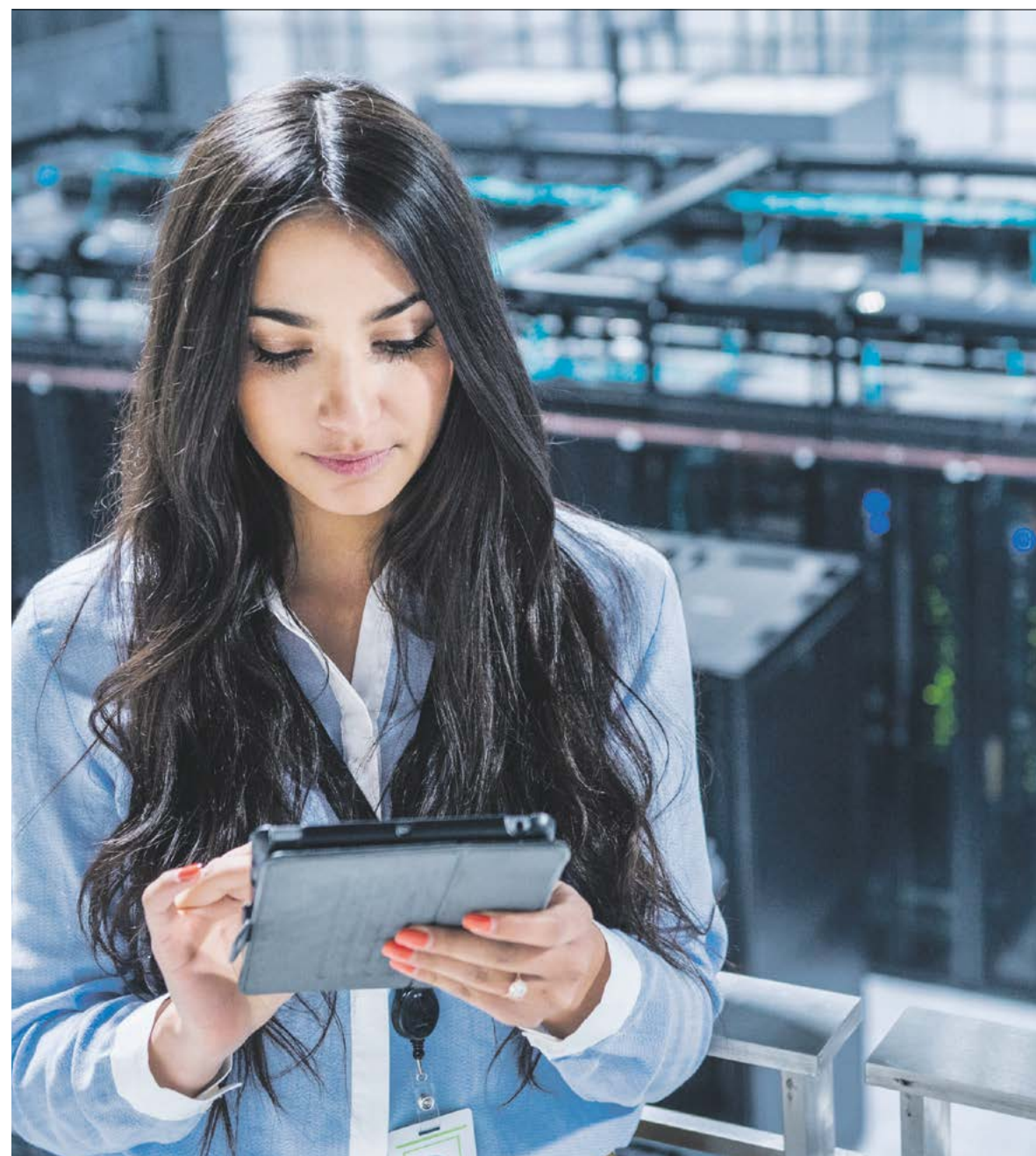
Is regulation getting in the way of digital transformation?

The sand is shifting beneath businesses. But staying on the right side of regulation mustn't put a block on innovation

It has been a tough few years for data regulation, and companies are facing scrutiny over their handling of user insights.

The 2018 European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) set the wheels in motion for ever-tightening measures. 2020's Schrems II judgement further limited the use of data by businesses, prompting many organisations to re-think their mechanisms for transferring data and prioritise compliance against harsher EU laws. Similarly, the highly publicised Facebook–Cambridge Analytica scandal, which exposed the misappropriation of users' personal information for political purposes, captured public interest in the data regulation discourse.

Alasdair Anderson, vice president and general manager for Europe, the Middle East and Africa at Protegrity, says: "While consumers are growing increasingly concerned about their privacy, their demand for highly personalised services – which by definition require the use of their personal data – is skyrocketing. Businesses must figure out how to tread this fine line."

"Anyone who's ever purchased a car will understand this," explains Anderson. "While you probably don't want your contact details sold to third-party advertisers, you definitely want a simple, seamless purchase experience, which means that everyone from the car manufacturer to the bank to the insurance company needs to collaborate and share what they know about you so you can drive off the lot that same day."

In reality, businesses that understand how to securely and responsibly utilise data will not only deliver better experiences for their customers but will also drive innovation, competitive advantage, and growth in the marketplace.

Decoding dangers
It's not just the risk of breaching the law that causes some corporate leaders to think twice before embracing data and its power to drive business change. According to Check Point Research, the average organisation worldwide fields more than 1,130 attempted cyberattacks per week. This rise in cyber attacks means that businesses are increasingly concerned about collecting large swathes of customer data that could be at risk.

The way businesses approach sensitive information is evolving, says Anderson. "It's now a nexus between digital and data," he says. "Companies are really spending a lot of time trying to get the digital experience right."

Striking a balance is hard, Anderson admits. Driving business growth while carefully toeing regulatory lines is challenging. "It's sort of the immovable object meets the unstoppable force," says Anderson. Everyday users have become more conscious of the information they surrender to big tech companies and how their data can be misused.

"People think the social media giants of the world, like the Facebooks, are a bit creepy," he says. This scepticism means companies must do substantial due diligence around the appropriate use of digital data. "Do you have the right to use this data for this purpose?"

Regulators have peered through the looking glass and have lost patience with businesses. "There's definitely a far tougher enforcement regime now," says Anderson. "We're seeing that across all industries … the tolerance for breaches or slips is almost zero. You must be a safe custodian of data, but you also must act in a trusted advisor role, where consumers expect you to understand who they are, what they need, and how to keep them safe," he says.

Finding solutions
Enterprise data protection policies that follow the data wherever it's used help businesses take advantage of sensitive data to improve advanced analytics, machine learning, and AI without putting intellectual property or the personal information of customers and employees at risk.

> **There's definitely a far tougher enforcement regime now … the tolerance for breaches or slips is almost zero**

"At first, it might sound strange to think of data as travelling, but this is a very important concept in data security and privacy and is critical to delivering a positive customer experience," explains Anderson. "Think about what's required when a person travels internationally. Their personal information is needed for airline reservation systems and loyalty programs, at immigration or when they use a credit card. Their data travels across country and legal entity borders, but also technology systems and cloud architectures."

It's not just individual businesses that can benefit from this data: trusted third parties working with businesses can, too. An analytics vendor working with an organisation could be granted access to a protected dataset in a way that doesn't allow them to view the data but does utilise it to improve algorithms, driving better business results. It's an approach that improves the third-party provider's ability to offer data solutions to the business, as well as the business and its ability to provide better service to customers.

"Zero trust principles" are more important than ever in a hybrid and remote work world. They ensure data is protected at rest, in motion, and in use and is only reidentified by an authorised viewer just in time to complete their task. Businesses that fully deployed zero trust security models lost up to 42% less in data breach costs last year. It's also a way of ensuring the business stays compliant with the spider's web of global data regulations without falling foul of cross-border issues.

Staying competitive
While compliance is essential, too much risk aversion within a business can put a brake on innovation. Corporate leaders may feel like they need to avoid pitfalls rather than enter into new areas, leading to increasingly conservative decision-making. Both real and perceived threats can have a profound influence on the way data is used and controlled. But this emphasis on playing it safe has the potential to obscure new opportunities.

Equipping data teams with the right systems to push forward while protecting data and remaining transparent is essential. As new data privacy regulations emerge, data protection solutions must extend protection wherever data travels – across IT platforms, clouds, regional borders, and beyond. Protegrity has developed data protection tools that enable businesses to make informed, real-time decisions based on insights derived from their data. It acts as the central component of an in-depth cybersecurity strategy, supporting compliance and innovation in tandem.

"The biggest factor is the competitive environment companies find themselves in," says Anderson. "Whereas in the past you'd have multiple attempts at getting it right, now you really only have one chance to make a first impression, to make people want to come back. That's all driven through how you understand your customer – and that requires a deep analysis of data."

Organisations that can unleash the potential of their data will steam ahead in the coming years. Consumers are the ones driving the change, which in turn creates great opportunities for those businesses that can innovate. Businesses must become more flexible with their data to drive transformation – not just to survive in the face of stiff competition, but to thrive.

For more information, visit
protegrity.com

PROTEGRITY

Commercial feature

How visibility can bring down business spend

With a recession looming, visibility, resilience and agility are the order of the day for finance and procurement professionals, says **Ilija Ugrinic**, commercial solutions director at Proactis. The good news is that medium-sized firms can now take a front-footed approach to bringing business spend under control

As the economic climate deteriorates, more businesses are turning to digital technology to provide vital insight into what they are spending and keep costs under control. According to Proactis' eRecovery Report, 93% of businesses have already invested in, or are currently digitising their finance and procurement departments, while 81% of major businesses have attempted to digitise supplier management in the last 12 months.

The need to automate processes was starkly highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic, which revealed a split between those who had and hadn't invested in digital capabilities. Those who had were able to adapt seamlessly to remote working and react quickly to constantly changing scenarios, while those who hadn't struggled to cope at a time when traditional ways of working were no longer possible.

For any finance function – and in any business condition – knowing what you're spending money on and with whom is vital. It's a starting point to bringing business spend under control. But the pandemic illustrated the limits to what can realistically be foreseen, and the need to be able to react quickly should the unexpected happen.

Having early visibility and control of spending through an effective source-to-pay package means finance functions can plan ahead and react to changing circumstances as required. This means they can ensure there is sufficient cash to meet outgoings, but also better manage cash flow, which will become even more important as we enter a recession.

Encouraging a culture where all business spend is conducted electronically will drive upfront requisitioning, ordering, receipting and first-time invoice matching. This process drives

efficiency for everyone, helping those working in the finance functions to do their job more efficiently, and ensuring more effective spending. A final factor here is the ability for finance functions to report on business spend, ensuring they comply with external reporting requirements, such as those faced by public sector firms and companies in regulated industries.

> **Having visibility and control over spending means procurement can reduce the risk associated with third-party suppliers**

For those working in procurement functions, digital solutions mean they can demonstrate spending against any contracts they have negotiated, and prove any cost savings or mitigation that have been achieved. Such a system is much more likely to encourage internal customers who are purchasers across the organisation to buy through approved channels and category management structures, helping to reduce maverick spending.

Having more spending under management will increase buying power when it comes to renegotiating terms in the future, offering the potential for further savings. Visibility around contracts

means businesses can keep track of any automatic renewals and act ahead of these coming into force if needed.

Having visibility and control over spending also means procurement can reduce the risk associated with third-party suppliers. Organisations today need to be keenly aware of not just what they are buying but who they are buying it from. From a reputational perspective, they cannot afford to be found using a supplier with dubious ethical or environmental credentials.

Being able to keep track of supplier credentials digitally will enable organisations to demonstrate compliance with other legal requirements. All businesses need to comply with regulations like the Modern Slavery Act 2015 and the Bribery Act 2010, and are likely to see more laws governing environmental impact. An effective digital system means procurement professionals can also free up their own time, allowing them to engage in more due diligence around such issues.

While large organisations may have already taken steps to bring spending under control, many medium-sized businesses still rely on spreadsheets or individual requests to suppliers on an ad hoc basis. But mid-market firms can benefit from greater efficiencies and visibility associated with source-to-pay software packages, and it's also possible to take advantage without committing to an enterprise-wide installation.

At Proactis, for instance, we offer a modular approach which allows those working in finance or procurement to adopt the digital element that best suits their immediate needs, and deliver quick wins by reducing bottlenecks. This might be driven by those in accounts seeking greater control and efficiency over invoices, or procurement looking to get more spending under management. In time, this can then be built upon, expanding into other areas once the system is proven and at a time when the business is ready.

With the current need to get costs under control and ensure teams are working effectively from anywhere, having an effective digital platform is more important than ever. Not only can this deliver significant operational savings, but it can also help create a more resilient supply chain that will help to ensure compliance with regulation, and provide the ability to react to any unexpected future events that may be lurking around the corner. In today's market, agility really is the name of the game.

Transforming the National Trust

Back in 2014, conservation charity the National Trust was spending around £360m a year on third-party services. But a combination of legacy IT systems and the sheer number of suppliers made for a confusing picture, and setting up a new supplier would often take weeks.

As part of a wider digital transformation project, the organisation was looking for a partner that would help it consolidate spending, develop contracts for large projects and create a more organised procurement process.

The National Trust selected Proactis' Supplier Relationship Management solution, which is easily integrated with the Trust's strategic enterprise resource planning system that was installed at the same time. The system allows the procurement

team to control the suppliers it uses for particular categories. Suppliers can access the system to ensure their own details are correct and keep them up to date, reducing the administrative burden for the Trust's finance and procurement teams.

"Our suppliers love the system as it gives them control of their records and information," says a senior member of the National Trust's procurement team. "We have gone from an average of two weeks to onboard a new supplier to, on occasion, less than an hour. Our record is six minutes!"

As a result of the new system, the number of suppliers has been reduced from 24,000 to 12,000, and the Trust has seen savings of £30m. The charity has since gone on to implement Proactis' sourcing and contract management solutions.

Proactis is a leading source-to-pay software solution provider for mid-market organisations. To find out more about how it could help your business, visit proactis.com

proactis

Destination upwards: how to get to the next level

Having the right people and the right culture is crucial if companies want a digital transformation strategy that continues to keep up with the pace of technology

Rich McEachran

Digital transformation has entered the lexicon of many companies over the past couple of years. Business leaders have been jumping feet-first into embracing technologies, excited by the prospect of a digital-first approach transforming how they operate.

While the pace of investment in digital transformation has accelerated, thanks to a combination of the pandemic and supply chain challenges, some companies may end up getting ahead of themselves. The consequence of this is that many firms may find that their digital transformation strategy hits a brick wall.

James Addlestone is chief strategy officer at performance marketing agency Journey Further. Digital transformation, he says, isn't a process that takes you "from A to B to unlock radical growth. Businesses that engage in one-time digital transformation projects invariably end up disappointed when they've spent a larger-than-expected budget over a longer-than-expected period and their business hasn't transformed."

Instead of thinking of digital transformation as a "one-off radical change", companies need to see it as "a constantly changing and evolving mission", according to Glenn Griggs, director of sales at Ricoh UK.

Approaching it in this way and not as having a fixed end point will help companies to successfully navigate the stages of digital transformation. "There will always be more to do," Griggs adds. This mindset is critical if companies want to take their digital transformation to the next level. But there are other things to consider.

Successful digital transformation projects require a defined purpose. From a strategic standpoint, this means all parts of a business need to be aligned. But the mistake that some companies will make is digitising different parts of the business without joining them up.

David Hughes is solutions consulting director at PTC, a technology specialist supporting companies in multiple industries along their digital transformation journey. He explains that optimising siloed functions has "some tactical relevance" but will likely lead to the transformation being "compromised further down the road".

Data and how it can be accessed by every part of a business should be at the heart of a strategy. A 2020 survey by MuleSoft of 800 IT leaders from around the world revealed that 89% of respondents cited data silos as an obstacle to reaching digital transformation targets.

"Getting your digital house in order is about removing the silos that different departments operate in and creating a digital thread of information that flows through the entire business," says Hughes. "This should help to identify the issues and opportunities in each area and work through how digital transformation can have a positive impact."

Once companies have improved the flow of data through their business, they need to consider how trustworthy the data is, says Shaun Connolly, head of international strategic services at software company Precisely. "Analysis is only as good as the data it's based on, and the cost of getting that data wrong is now greater than ever too."

BARRIERS TO DIGITAL INNOVATION

Barriers to digital innovation in organisations, according to senior technology decision-makers worldwide

Barrier	%
A lack of focus/too many distractions	53%
Under-resourced internally	44%
Generating and prioritising ideas	28%
Proving a return on investment	24%
Validating the business case	23%
Capturing business requirements	21%
Technology – not agile enough	18%
A lack of senior buy-in to digitalisation	18%
Driving wider adoption of new solutions	14%
Risings costs/inflation makes it too expensive	14%
Developing a proof of concept	7%

Harvey Nash, 2022

> **Digital is only part of the story. A transformation journey is not just about technology but about people and processes too**

If companies want to improve the insights they have access to and, in turn, take digital transformation to the next level, then "a strong foundation of data integrity, where the data is accurate, consistent and provides the right context" – is a must, Connolly adds.

Driving actionable insights that can help to take digital transformation projects to the next level requires more than investing in the latest technologies, though.

A common misconception is that digital transformation starts with the IT department. Companies identify a function or process that needs improving, buy the technology hoping it will be a game-changer and then get the IT department to start the systems integration work. Yet the technology might not deliver the desired results because the impact on the wider business wasn't considered from the start.

"Digital is only part of the story. A transformation journey is not just about technology, it's about people and processes too. The former is often the easiest of the three to solve," says Lee Foster, chief technology officer at Opencast, which develops end-to-end enterprise solutions. Foster previously led global IT enterprise and solution architecture functions at Sage.

A common misconception is that, much as the data dots in different areas of a business need to be joined up, employees across all functions – including facilities, finance, HR, IT and operations – need to be aligned with the vision and goals of the digital transformation strategy.

"It should not and does not rest on the shoulders of a single team. It's an organisational change that can impact every area of business, which is why digital transformation projects need to consider people, processes and systems in their thinking," says Will Smith, senior strategist at digital transformation agency Equator.

Foster adds: "Companies need to bring their people with them as their engagement and buy-in is critical. By making sure your people are onboard, you can reduce the risk of your transformation efforts stalling."

Creating buy-in requires identifying employee challenges and barriers, as well as providing the training and reskilling or upskilling employees may need. A KPMG survey this year of CEOs in Canada found that six in 10 cited a lack of the right people with the right skills as the reason their strategic roll-out is being held back.

Employees may be resistant to change, for example, but simply firing them and hiring replacements may not be the best move. Not to mention, it can be costly. Instead, companies should do their best to identify potential gaps in employee knowledge and focus on reskilling and upskilling, providing them with the right tools to succeed in their role and the right environment in which they can innovate, argues Smith. Employees should then become more comfortable with the new tools and processes.

An employee culture that embraces change is more likely to be prepared to quickly pivot business operations. "Companies will undoubtedly encounter challenges along their digital transformation project, which can change the course of projects," says Smith. "It's essential that teams have degrees of flexibility to allow projects to realise the core vision and target state."

Communication is critical. "Like any project, feedback and review act as touchpoints to ensure objectives are being achieved and that the new systems being put in place are working for all the people who will be using them and serving their intended purpose," notes Griggs.

Communication and feedback can also help companies to know when to press pause on their digital transformation. In their rush to transform their businesses, many might push too hard. Sixty-eight per cent of the CEOs in Canada in the KPMG survey said accelerating their digital transformation efforts since the pandemic had led to burnout. The figure was 65% for CEOs in the UK.

Pressing the pause button is an opportunity for companies to take stock and re-evaluate their strategy, before putting their foot down on the accelerator again and taking digital transformation to the next level.

Griggs thinks that working together instead of in silos "will probably need to have multiple department leaders at different moments of its life cycle to ensure effective collaboration". This, he says, can make the difference between success and failure.

Still, digital transformation projects should be allowed to fail to a certain degree, providing there are no costly implications. "A culture where the success or failure of a project determines individual success leads to fewer people wanting to embrace digital transformation," says Addlestone.

Does a digital transformation have a final destination?

Business leaders will begin their digital transformation journey with a destination in mind but never reach the journey's end. Digital transformation can't be delivered overnight, over a few weeks or even over a few months. By the time companies reach their initial destination, new technology will likely have come along or another part of the business will need digitalising to prevent it from standing still or, worse, falling behind.

"The final stages of digital transformation projects are often a mirage because they don't really exist," says Will Smith, senior strategist at digital transformation agency Equator. Once companies have reached their initial destination "it'll be time to review and define a new vision for tomorrow", he comments.

This is why getting the right people on board and having the right company culture in place are so important. The challenge for organisations is to be able to adapt, stay alert and keep pace with the technological change and external events that will continue to accelerate as they move along their digital transformation journey.

"As technology changes and develops, so does business," says Glenn Griggs, director of sales at Ricoh UK. "Adopting a human-centric approach and ensuring your people have the space to work collaboratively and creatively will help you adapt as those goals shift naturally with the tides of business."

The team will need to evolve to meet demands as the business changes but the impact should be significant in the long term. With the right people in place, companies can navigate the uncertainty of a changing business and technological landscape. This helps to foster agility, build resilience and an efficient ability to react quickly to challenges as they arise, says Griggs.

Creating digital threads of data that flow through every department and function can help. Access to good data, which is also reliable, makes it possible to monitor trends, spot opportunities and invest in the right technologies. Once the benefits of digital transformation to a business are ingrained into company culture, digital transformation should continue to evolve.

Adapting to the digital world takes time, says Griggs, and "ensuring you are competitive and innovative should be – and is – a never-ending pursuit" he says. And that is regardless of where a business sits with its digital maturity.

Once the culture is set, employees should be able to deliver the digital transformation strategy without the need for top-down management. Done correctly, companies shouldn't need new leadership to take their digital transformation to the next level. "Often, it's not about new leaders; it's about the current leadership embracing new ways of thinking, ways which will create the culture changes to empower their teams to make an impact," says Smith.

Griggs agrees. "It needs a clear vision of the path the company is on and its objective. Leaders should understand the steps and actions needed to achieve success at every stage of digital transformation. It doesn't necessarily require new leaders."

What is required, though, is a long-term commitment from business leaders to have in place the support systems and tools that employees will need to sufficiently drive this continuous, virtuous circle of improvement and innovation. ●

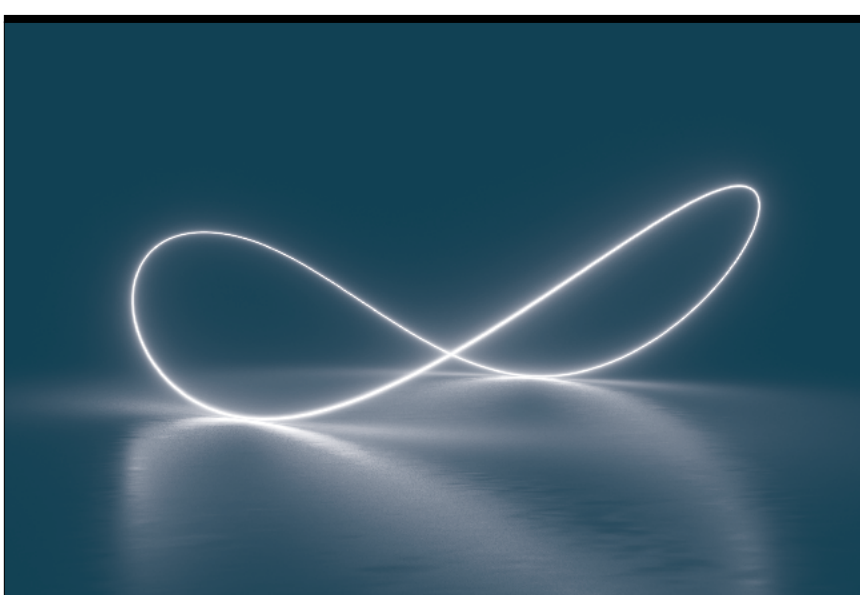> ❝ Often, it's not about new leaders, it's about the current leadership embracing new ways of thinking

WHAT'S HOLDING BACK TRANSFORMATION?

Hurdles preventing organisations from progressing with digital transformation initiatives

8% Nothing is preventing our organisations from progressing with digital transformation

35% Lack of money

39% Lack of time

54% Lack of IT skills and transformational expertise

53% Dependencies on legacy systems and technologies

51% Still focused on maintaining operations due to pandemic

43% Lack of senior management buy-in

Veeam, 2022

Empowering CMOs to accelerate digital value creation

Driving value through digital change is an ambition that ranks highly among many chief marketing officers. But to get there, businesses will need to transform processes, act on insights and establish powerful C-suite partnerships

Digital sales and customer experiences – whether online, in-app, on social media platforms or even in the metaverse – have become top priorities for chief marketing officers worldwide. And for the many businesses that have been transforming digitally for decades, the accelerated pace of change catalysed by the coronavirus pandemic significantly raised the stakes for their marketing leaders.

While organisations should remain agile to contend with uncertainty, the shifts in the habits of business clients and consumers have proven to be remarkably enduring, as have new efficiencies in ways of working. Digital transformations in customer journeys and brand experience are on track to accelerate across all platforms, according to Gonzalo Garcia Villanueva, CMO at the market intelligence firm GfK.

"Business leaders have continued to witness post-Covid the unprecedented speed in digital transformation in their industry, and they know they have to match or exceed it. This is essential to surviving, and it also opens up new opportunities to innovate and grow," says Garcia Villanueva.

Chief executives and company shareholders alike now demand high-velocity transformations across all marketing and sales channels. "CMOs need to make sure they offer outstanding customer experiences and sell on an ever-growing array of outlets," Garcia Villanueva explains. "This omnichannel reality ultimately creates additional routes and opportunities to generate revenue, but only when all these places offer seamless, consistent experiences that delight."

Analysing buyer behaviour
Delivering these experiences requires CMOs to overcome several challenges. The first is developing an understanding of each customer's entire journey. Some shoppers allow their decisions to be shaped through social media before taking the plunge and buying on a website or in-app. Others form opinions in shops before committing to a digital purchase or vice versa. And these trends vary largely by region and consumer demographics.

When attempting to deliver relevant omnichannel experiences to these buyers, marketing organisations may struggle with extracting the necessary actionable analysis from such a plethora of information. Garcia Villanueva continues: "Not being able to make sense of billions of data points across these channels is a major problem". Alarmingly, only 38% of marketers are highly confident in their analytics and insights systems, according to research by GfK and the CMO Council. Smarter technology, faster processes and higher data quality are all needed to enhance trust in insights.

In other companies, the problem is more fundamental. Often, key personnel cannot access the pertinent data directly. Some 46% of marketers warn that their ability to view customer and market information is variable or unpredictable. "Companies need to be agile, making decisions frequently and rapidly. But having tight bottlenecks around information, with data stuck in teams such as market research or e-commerce, prevents this agility," says Garcia Villanueva. "Businesses must democratise staff access to relevant information and break down silos."

Whatever the amount of data that marketers are presented with, having the right staff capabilities and culture is essential to using information optimally; he adds: "Companies should assess their skills gaps around information because many people are not used to directly accessing data in the decision-making process. CMOs need to focus on staff development and hiring people with analytical skills while connecting workflows across teams."

> ❝ It has never been more important for CMOs and CTOs to work in close partnership, as key creators of value

Executive partnerships that deliver change
Given the unprecedented change requirements around technology, workflows, cultures and skillsets, marketing leaders are wise to avoid attempting to deliver holistic transformation on their own. Ben Jones, chief technology officer at GfK, notes that marketers' partnerships with tech leaders are now essential to company success. "Transformation is a continuous journey and key to driving brand loyalty and sales. Aligning the goals of the CTO and CMO is more critical than ever to rapid and consistent value creation," he says.

Evolving the CMO-CTO partnership will be pivotal in understanding customer behaviour and acting quickly to drive relevant experiences in response. Working together, marketing and technology teams can transform the entire customer lifecycle, backed by powerful ways of working and smart, secure systems. "CMOs and CTOs have a laser focus on the business' long-term value creation, and so collaboration here can bring big results," Jones notes. "The smartest executives have recognised that this partnership means business objectives are achieved consistently and effectively."

Crucially, this partnership is also influential when breaking down projects into smaller chunks, with technology departments highly mature in agile and iterative development. "A common problem for CMOs is their digital transformation requirements start off very broad, and they can risk 'boiling the ocean', leading to an expensive failure," adds Jones. "The CMO-CTO partnership unlocks the ability to create powerful change momentum by learning early and delivering regular wins quickly." Dividing projects into small chunks on a timeline with 'sprint' or interim goals is an effective method.

New insights at the heart of success
Smart insights are at the heart of such project plans. Used well, they can reveal who a company's consumers are and how they behave and are likely to act. Furthermore, marketers can harness data to evaluate how these factors compare with competitors. This lays the groundwork for the iterative development of excellent experiences and products. Four in ten top performers in these contexts can rapidly move from gathering data to creating actionable analysis.

Companies across industries rely on deep, relevant insights from GfK to derive clear signals from the sea of data. Whether through GfK's always-on platform, research reports or consulting services, these firms are moving from descriptive analytics to predictive insights and prescriptive actions.

They include the computing company HP, which uses the cloud-based gfknewron platform to build strategic initiatives in Spain, informing market knowledge, assessing competitors and shaping retailer conversations. Meanwhile, the online electrical retailer AO applies GfK market intelligence to rapid and long-term decision-making, with ongoing analysis of emerging opportunities as well as demand forecasting. And the healthcare firm Philips relies on GfK intelligence to inform strategies, campaigns, pricing and products for its Middle East and North Africa personal care sales.

For marketing chiefs, now is the time to act on powerful digital value transformation. "The CMOs leading successful digital transformations are able to jump into opportunities much more quickly, helping drive better long-term profitability as well as retention of top talent," Garcia Villanueva concludes. "By being agile and disruptors in their sector, they're hedging risk, driving growth, and continually optimising brand and consumer experience."

To learn more about data-driven decisions that drive sustainable growth, visit gfk.com/cmo

GfK — Growth from Knowledge

Getting the measure of digital job satisfaction

Hiring freezes in the tech sector and the promise of quantifiable transformation could level the playing field for other companies to attract digital talent

Christine Horton

O ver the past decade, sky-high valuations of tech companies and rivers of VC funding have starved companies in more conventional industries of digital talent. But that might now be set to change.

The second half of 2022 has seen tech firms like Salesforce and Apple announce hiring freezes, while others made large-scale job cuts to brace against tough economic headwinds.

One result is there is more potential tech talent for 'second-choice' industries to snap up. But could traditional industries such as financial services and utilities hold a new appeal for digital talent with offers of attractive salaries and job stability? Analyst Forrester believes so. It suggests that continued tech redundancies will make traditionally 'unattractive' industries desirable again in 2023.

"In the past, hotshot techies and marketers might have scoffed at the idea of working for 'stodgy' financial services or utility companies. But those industries now offer attractive salaries and job stability that their startup counterparts cannot," notes Forrester in its *Predictions 2023: Europe* report.

"We've received scattered reports of smaller, technology-focused companies having more trouble recruiting technology and marketing talent from more established industries," says Laura Koetzle, vice-president, group director at Forrester.

"The potential candidates aren't interested in being 'last in, first out' when the funding dries up. And those two phenomena – more tech talent migrating to traditional industries, and candidates staying with a job at an established firm – would both reflect talent-seeking stability."

Chris Fernyhough is director at The Bridge, a specialist in IT and digital recruit-

ment. He reports that many candidates are choosing to move from tech companies to take up DX roles with more traditional employers. But he says the moves aren't driven by a need for more stability.

"We recently placed a candidate who moved from an ecommerce company to an airport, where he can be involved in digital
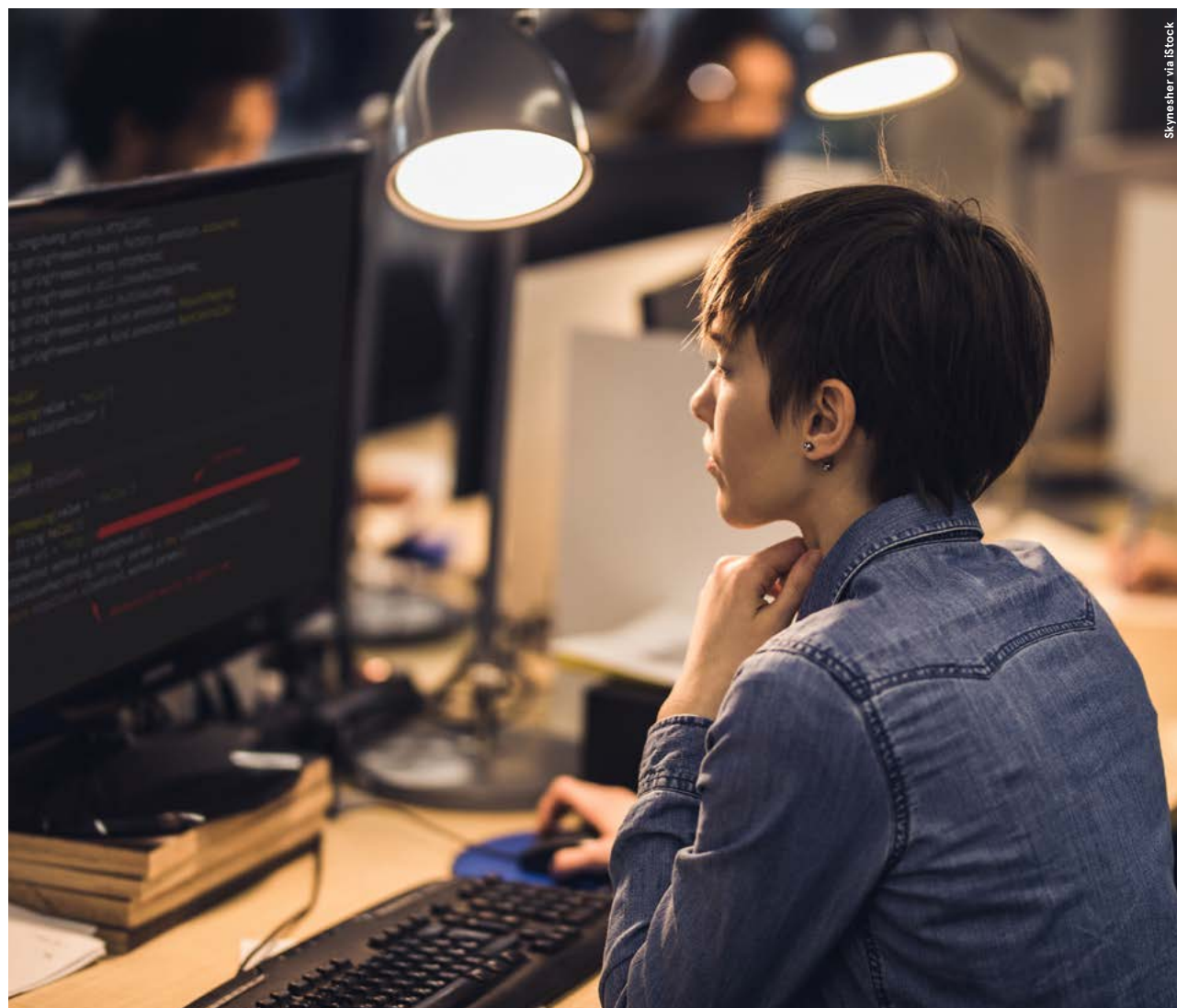
> ## "
> **Culture, progression and benefits are key to attracting and retaining digital talent**

transformation that will involve AI, machine learning and data analysis to improve the passenger experience and deliver efficiency and business improvement," he says.

"For this candidate, the key factors were using leading-edge technologies and being involved in a transformation that will make a tangible difference, so he can see the positive impact of his work, while building on his CV to enhance his future employability. The rewards go beyond financial considerations and job security. There is a clear move for some candidates to choose roles that have purpose and measurable outcomes.

"Another example of this is an engineering startup we're working with, which will play a major role in future-proofing the UK's energy supply. Candidates are attracted to working on a cutting-edge concept and having the opportunity to make a difference for the greater good."

Fernyhough observes that, notably, tech candidates are looking for environments where they not only feel valued but can see the value in the work they are doing – and DX projects in traditional sectors can often provide that.

Elsewhere, Chris Adcock, managing director of recruiter Reed Technology, says we are in a candidate-driven market. "Companies across the board are short of technology specialists in all practice areas and remuneration packages for these roles are at the strongest they have ever been," he says.

"The pandemic put digital strategy high on the agenda for many businesses. Demand for roles such as data specialists, developers and analysts was already on the increase but spiked during and post-pandemic. Finding high-quality specialists with the right skills has been a challenge for a long time in the technology sector, and

this became more challenging in a candidate-driven market.

"These companies need to look at new ways of engaging talent beyond permanent and contract roles. Using outcome-focused statements of work solutions or fractional models can help businesses through a time of digital transformation."

Adcock also points out that jobseekers are looking past the pay packet to what a business can offer them.

"Culture, progression and benefits are key to attracting and retaining talent. Benefits such as flexible or remote working could once have been a strong USP but are now seen as a given in the market."

Forrester, too, maintains that incumbent businesses will need to build diverse and dynamic cultures to retain their additions. DX may help to entice people to work for a stable company that is digitalising – and perhaps to keep them for the long term.

"Our research shows that when employees find purpose in the work they do they are more committed and the organisation will be better able to face adversity," says Koetzle. "And for many prospective employees with sought-after digital skills, being part of a digital transformation that they can see is critical to the company's strategy, and its future, reinforces that sense of purpose."

One recent report found enterprise digital transformations to be stalling because of a shortage of job-ready digital talent. But with digital talent available, more digital transformation projects should be able to get off the ground.

Without board-level support for digital initiatives, though, digital projects tend to stagnate or even fail, according to Philipp Ortlieb, partner and chief people officer at digital consultancy OMMAX.

"We recently found that, in a study of 380 board members of 55 of the UK's largest family-owned companies, 73% did not have any digital expertise. Innovation is becoming increasingly central to businesses across all industries and business leaders need to keep on top of this and start to integrate digital projects into their strategic business planning."

He maintains that while DX projects can help to attract digital talent, the "best talent will tend to go towards the most interesting and challenging projects".

So there is likely to be a more even playing field between traditional industries and tech companies and startups when it comes to hiring in 2023. Innovation and interesting work will be central to attracting and retaining talent, regardless of the industry. ●

DIGITAL SKILLS IN DEMAND

Number of additional jobs in the digital sector in the UK by 2025

216,500	London
129,500	South East
52,700	West Midlands
50,000	North West
42,200	Yorkshire and the Humber
41,400	East of England
36,600	South West
36,500	East Midlands
34,300	Scotland
13,800	North East
13,300	NI
11,300	Wales

DCMS, 2021

Skywalker via iStock
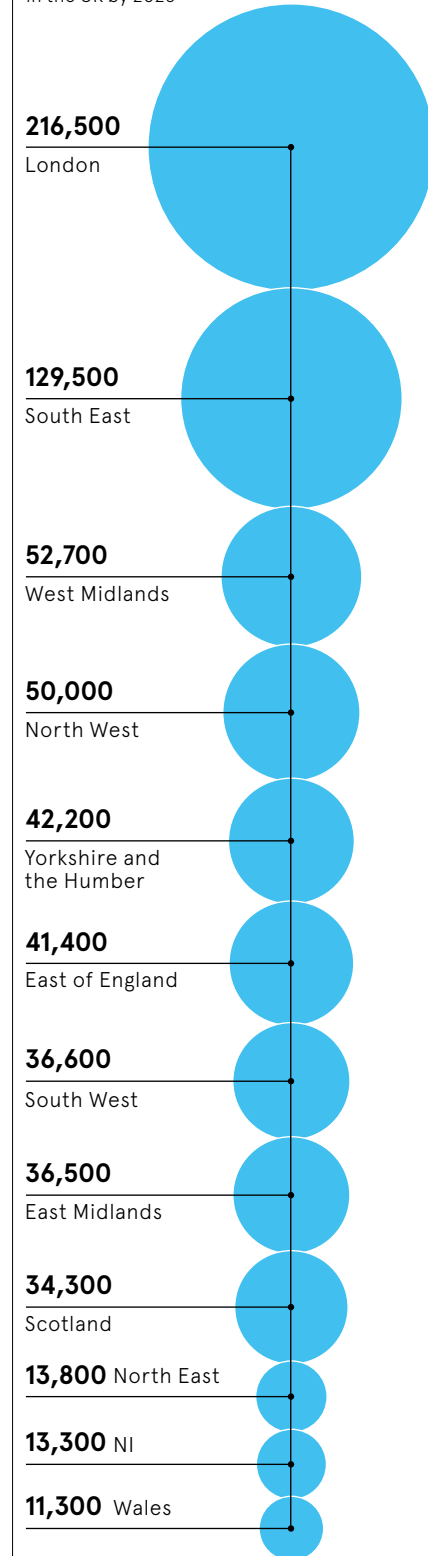
Q&A
IT-powered employee experience

Technology is transforming employee experience for the modern workplace. **Sridhar Iyengar**, managing director at Zoho and ManageEngine Europe, explains

Q How will employee experience drive the future of work?

A The way we work is undergoing fundamental changes as digitalisation and technology create new opportunities for businesses. Digital transformation is impacting every area of activity in the workplace and is driven by a workforce that's mostly distributed. Hybrid working is transforming the approach to office work and bringing new challenges and opportunities.

Businesses must strike the right balance between focusing on employees and customers. Organisations are realising that happy employees are crucial to driving a good customer experience. This is transforming the way organisations treat their workforce. Technology is an essential component of creating a positive experience for the distributed workforce, so investments, policy and workflows are all orchestrated to make life easier for the employees.

Q How are organisations using IT to deliver a consistent employee experience across every digital medium?

A Modern workplaces are mobile and digital, so IT is influencing businesses like never before as workplace experience is increasingly driven by tools or solutions that are implemented across the organisation. Our recent study shows that 82% of decision-makers believe the collaboration between IT teams and other departments has increased over the last two years.

Certain objectives can only be achieved by the efforts of IT teams as they collaborate with departments to transform the employee experience. Together, they are making some impressive achievements, such as improved service delivery and workflow automation. They're finding ways to

enhance productivity by removing barriers to work, and they're enabling mobility without compromising on security.

Q What steps can organisations take to ensure collaboration and co-working fuel innovation in the modern environment?

A This is an era where innovation has become vital to market success. A truly digital enterprise is one where technology is democratised, collaboration happens in real-time, and teams are self-organising.

To create an environment where innovation occurs successfully and at speed, organisations are implementing automation and integration of enterprise-wide IT-to-business workflows and orchestrations. They are applying artificial intelligence and machine learning to create an adaptive user experience. Organisations are also allowing employees a self-service approach across different locations, devices and channels.

Q How can IT departments optimise the employee experience while protecting the network from cyberattacks?

A While digital security is essentially the responsibility of the cybersecurity team, businesses in the UK and Ireland are realising that everyone must play their part in securing networks. Our study found that 23% of decision-makers in the UK and Ireland believe that employees are responsible for cybersecurity too, which is much higher than the global average of 7%.

The big question becomes how IT teams can reduce the attack surface without compromising the end user's comfort. Security teams must monitor anomalies in the

behaviour of users to reduce insider attacks. Securing endpoints means ensuring that when employees enter the organisation's network, they have the relevant access privileges and that their devices are not compromised. Using multi factor authentication is vital to minimising risks. At the same time, staff should only be permitted access to areas of the network that are relevant to their work.

Q How can organisations future-proof themselves against the challenges of decentralised working, digitalisation and automation?

A Organisations need to upgrade their policies, processes and technologies to ensure high levels of employee motivation in a frictionless and secure environment and staff need to be trained. The workplace should be driven by a single-touch workflow, which automates work processes. Workloads should be powered by a full-stack monitoring and correlation platform to help detect anomalous user behaviour and intrusions, prevent data loss, control network access and improve service delivery.

To respond to cyber threats without affecting the speed of business, organisations adopt best practices such as the National Cyber Security Centre's Cyber Essentials framework. This helps mitigate cyberattacks and maintain a strong security posture without affecting productivity.

In a nutshell, employee experience will drive the future of work in the coming years.

For more information please visit
www.manageengine.co.uk

ManageEngine

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5 DX strategies to navigate change in 2023

With recession looming and budgets tightening, is your digital transformation strategy ready for what lies ahead? Here are five points to consider as we move into 2023

Natasha Serafimovska

Even if you aren't actively working on digital transformation (DX), you're probably thinking about it or hearing other executives talk about it. Driven by the pandemic and emphasised by the rising economic instability, the pace of DX adoption has speeded up by three to seven years over a few months.

Shifts in consumer expectations together with a focus on ESG and sustainability have put further pressure on com-

panies to innovate, adapt and act as advocates for change.

A McKinsey study reveals that nine out of 10 businesses believe their business model needs to change in 2023 or has changed already, while 64% say they need to build new digital businesses to remain economically viable. Digital transformation has created a scenario where companies that are fast and agile stand to outlive those that aren't.

But embarking on the DX journey requires caution. Trying to do too much too fast or doing nothing at all can both cost dearly. Instead, examine the overall business model needs to see what emerging technology can help achieve it. The digital strategy, in this sense, should be a living, breathing thing that evolves alongside the business.

But with so many competing priorities, how does one decide where to begin? Experts say, start with the basics.

Dust off your data

Before you even start to bring in new technology, inform your decision-making by gathering the right data. Many companies still struggle with disjointed or incomplete data and that can lead DX efforts astray. Jon Reay is the founder and CEO of Rewrite Digital, a digital transformation consultancy based in Wiltshire. He advises leaders start by taking stock of the data they already have. "You might be collecting a lot of data from different sources

that you haven't brought together, haven't interpreted and therefore you don't know how to create value out of it."

Other than looking at internal data, he advises organisations to look at external sources. "In some cases, combining data between organisations across the sector can provide insights on consumer trends that you might not otherwise have had."

Once you have clean and sufficient data you can think about which technologies, such as machine learning and AI, will best use it to tackle specific issues.

> We often talk about reskilling top management, but you also have to think about how you can retrain your workforce more broadly

Invest in core capabilities

Inflationary spikes and a looming recession are making companies think about how to achieve more with less, both in terms of their labour and digital capabilities. Improvements in workforce scheduling, for example, can mitigate issues with labour shortages, while automating manual tasks can increase productivity. Ruben Schaubroeck is senior partner and leader of McKinsey's digital practice in the UK, Ireland and Israel. He recommends taking an incremental approach, where small changes can lead to big results. "The best organ-

isations take a domain-specific view of data, for instance customer service or digital sales, and think about how they can take an end-to-end view of that use case to show a clear impact on customers and employees."

Once you have your proof of concept, you can replicate that model across other departments and get the buy-in from key stakeholders. What you don't want to do, Schaubroeck warns, is rip out the whole tech stack and start from scratch. Those strategies rarely get top-level buy-in or work as planned.

On the other hand, companies need to exercise caution about how they build their technical capabilities. So says Barnaby Moffat, who is co-founder

and commercial director of KPS UK, an ecommerce and digital transformation consultancy. While many companies oscillate between buying a single enterprise solution or building a custom solution from standalone tools, the most agile businesses usually do both. They buy into a modern enterprise solution and then use it as the foundation for all the other bolt-on pieces.

Moffat explains: "This hybrid approach allows you to move faster and have more control while still having one or two tech vendors be answerable to you. You can then build a suite of best-of-breed at the front end of your business, which is where businesses tend to need agility the most."

Practise good digital hygiene

Sustainability, resilience, cybersecurity and risk management are often after-thoughts in the process of implementing new digital solutions. But these elements need to be included at the beginning to build a lasting digital solution.

Does your solution allow you to be more agile in times of uncertainty? Do you have a disaster recovery plan should one of your data centres fail? Do you have a good data governance policy in place which informs your employees how to collect and use data? If the answer is no to most of these questions, then you still have some ground-level work to do.

Experts also highlight the need to embrace ESG and sustainability, not only because it's a major concern for customers and employees but because it can be a great cost-cutting exercise over time.

Moffat highlights the expansion of the digital hygiene umbrella. "For years we've built in automated testing for technical debt, quality, performance and speed. Now, we can also test for energy efficiency." He notes that companies can measure the energy consumption of their source code and work to make it more efficient. They can also look at cloud solutions and opt for green data centres instead of traditional servers, which consume more energy. Schaubroeck says this can also improve your employee value proposition to a talent who is increasingly ESG-conscious. ●

Focus on customer experience

While digital innovation occurs across sectors, B2B organisations often lag behind B2C vendors in customer experience. This needs to change.

Reay emphasises the need for businesses to look outside their sector. "B2B should be looking at B2C and what they're doing – because that will come next, so it will give you a better idea of what needs to change in your industry."

Experience matters regardless of the type of business you run. Consumers, especially newer generations, can be unforgiving about engaging with brands if the experience isn't enjoyable and more likely to turn away than to stay. "Customers often move between different touchpoints, from customer services to sales or sales to in-store, and in-store to online," says Moffat. "If that isn't joined up, if the customer isn't given a holistically excellent experience, it can cause a lot of friction."

One way that you can build this single customer view is to capitalise on data. Charlotte Joyce, an independent digital
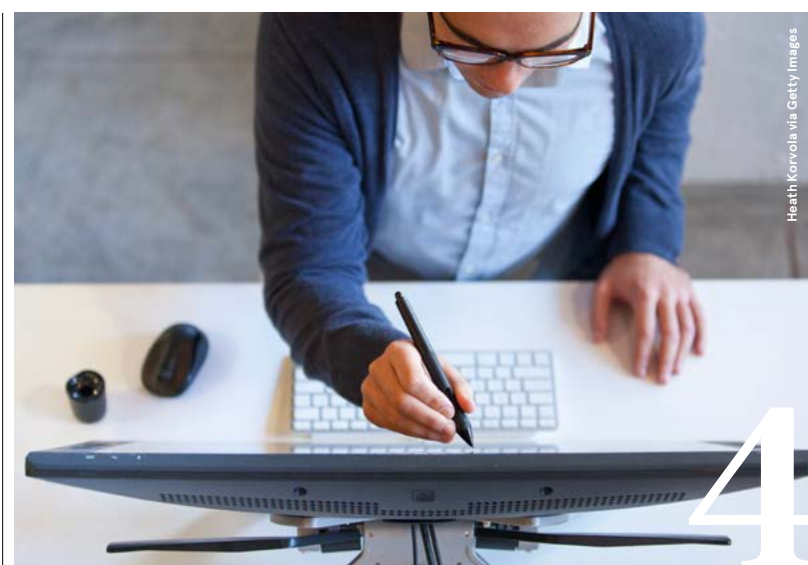
transformation consultant, thinks that loyalty programmes are still an excellent way to collect customer data while making shoppers feel appreciated.

"Customer loyalty programmes are helping to drive this digital shift – not just to improve the customer experience but also for customer retention. In this

sense, loyalty programmes aren't just about giving back to your customers. They're also about getting more back for the business."

Provided you have the necessary data, you can start thinking about how you can personalise each touchpoint to drive upsells and increase brand loyalty.

Embed digital in your corporate DNA

Digital transformation is often more about the people than the technology behind it. It's about how you think about and respond to risks and opportunities. Joyce notes that resistance to change is the most common reason she sees DX projects fail, so it's important to have the right talent in place. "Change management is such an underestimated factor in digital transformation and it needs to be a priority," she says.

One of her non-tech clients hired a chief technology officer because they realised that digital adoption is an integral part of their business transformation. Other businesses are introducing roles such as a chief experience officer to

look at the employee and customer experience, a head of remote to oversee an increasingly distributed workforce and a chief of data to manage the overall data analytics infrastructure.

Looking beyond hiring, it is vital to invest in upgrading the digital competencies of your overall workforce, at scale. Schaubroeck observes that we often talk about digital and data teams and reskilling top management. But, he notes: "It's important to think about how to retrain your workforce more broadly. There's often an assumption that we can't retrain people at scale, but we've seen companies be very successful in doing that."

Leading a digital trust movement

Cybercrime is evolving, and security leaders must be on their A-game to unite employees around winning defence strategies. One thing is becoming increasingly clear: no CISO is an island

The UK government's recent investigation into the total cost of cyber-crime put into concrete terms a concern that will come as no surprise to many IT teams. The investigation observed that malicious cyber attacks now cost the UK economy an eye-watering £27bn per year.

Although staggering, acknowledging the sheer scale of the problem may come as a relief to many put-upon security teams that feel they are under 24-hour siege.

Businesses are starting to embrace an all-hands-on-deck approach. Just as a house with a locked front door is never safe while a window is left open, a CISO can only keep an organisation safe and maintain the digital trust of consumers if all staff are involved in creating a ring of steel against cyber threats.

"Involving all staff will establish a more diverse and effective circle of protection," states Tony Hughes, director of cybersecurity consulting at ANSEC and ISACA member. "Any organisation needs lots of people who don't think like each other to identify different risks and settle them as quickly as possible."

Deploying a holistic security posture across departments requires a company-wide commitment. But despite their pivotal position, many CISOs do not feel empowered to lead collaborative defences. In a recent survey of 2,755 global business and IT professionals, ISACA found that only half felt there was sufficient collaboration at their organisation to promote digital trust.

With the accelerated pace of hyperconnected business, organisations face new considerations for establishing and sustaining digital trust and transformation – but one won't happen without the other. IT leaders acknowledge this as 76% agree that digital trust is important to digital transformation.

Working more openly can help CISOs plug substantial gaps across teams. Most business-critical problems, even technical ones, have a significant human component which can only be mitigated by making staff themselves more resilient against an attack.

Before the pandemic, security leaders largely oversaw how businesses utilised technologies to operate more than the people behind those operations. "Sweeping change has come about because people need the relevant skills and training to run technologies securely and effectively," says Ramses Gallego, CTO at CyberRes and ISACA member. "People who are empowered to do so will become cybersecurity advocates and encourage other employees to take on relevant training to avoid disruption and set the business up for success."

Historically, CISOs have relied upon their developer or engineering backgrounds, focusing extensively on the technical side of security. But strategically speaking, modern security leaders have more to bring to the table. "In today's complex economy, with digital trust making or breaking an enterprise, CISOs need to bring not only technical expertise but also strong business acumen and the ability to clearly communicate risk to the board and C-suite," says Chris Dimitriadis, chief global strategy officer at ISACA. "Today's CISOs must view themselves as a key business enabler that, by aligning security strategy with enterprise goals, helps to make security a driving force of the enterprise's ongoing pursuit of digital trust."

On top of fighting cyber apathy, reduced budgets and changing business priorities,

CISOs must seek support from other areas of the business. Bringing in risk-aware departments and engaging the entire width of the C-suite can foster cyber resilience across departments regardless of technological know-how, says Allan Boardman, founder of CyberAdvisor.London and ISACA member.

"Any department that holds employee or consumer data is at risk," says Boardman. "As a first priority, businesses need to get the fundamentals right and encourage all employees – whether they work in HR, operations, or marketing – to sign up to good security practices, so they know what to look out for, what to avoid, and how to report any unusual activity."

Getting an entire organisation rowing in the same direction is a challenge for the ages. In order to rise to the occasion, the CISO must be at the forefront of change. The hard work on mitigating cyber risk must extend beyond the IT and security teams to permeate every facet and function of the organisation at every level.

To learn more, visit isaca.org/digital-trust

ISACA

TECHNOLOGY

Knocking 5G for six

While the launch of the 6G network in 2030 may seem a long way off, the architecture is being consolidated now. It's time to start planning for the switch

Emma Perry

The numbers are striking. The sixth generation of wireless internet technology, 6G, offers a theoretical peak data transfer rate of 1,000 gigabytes per second (GB/s). That compares to 20GB/s for today's 5G networks.

That difference may well give 6G the power to enable exciting new applications, including, for instance, digital twinning – the ability to model the physical world in the digital domain and update changes by the millisecond. Similar technology would allow manufacturers to model and test their products via the cloud and then identify problems in real time.

Trials of 6G are already under way in anticipation of its launch in 2030. In February, Chinese scientists demonstrated the potential speeds of 6G by transmitting 1 terabyte of data over 1km in a second.

Colin Willcock is chairman of the governing board for the 6G Smart Networks and Services Industry Association and is optimistic about the technology. "It's likely that 6G will be the key technology driving future prosperity. Mobile communications are becoming a central part of our world and bringing more industries together as part of a digital society."

While we don't yet know exactly what the 6G rollout will look like in the UK, there are many similarities between the visions for 6G laid out by government, regulators and industry. The pillars of 6G will be the use of terahertz communications, AI, improved sensing, multiple-input multiple-output, flexibility and sustainability.

AI is likely to be the backbone of the 6G network. By processing information such as current and future bandwidth use, an AI system could allocate resources on demand, optimising network performance and user experience. This flexibility is a significant step away from traditional means of achieving quality of service, where the solution is building more infrastructure. "That's not good economics," says Dan Warren, director of advanced network research at Samsung R&D UK. "A flexible and adaptable AI network will improve resource efficiency and cut down on CapEx and OpEx."

Past experiences of 5G should inform the 6G rollout. For instance, 5G utilised many different architectures to handle overlapping 4G and 5G networks. "All these different architectures required a lot of time to standardise, develop, test and deploy. Hopefully, when we go to 6G we will instead have a single architecture that will do the job," explains Willcock.

There's scope to improve the speed of approval and the availability of sites for infrastructure too, perhaps by introducing a system for operators to deploy 6G infrastructure on street furniture such as lampposts. "If regulators, local councils and operators could work together to develop a framework like this, it would be a great opportunity," says Mischa Dohler, chief architect at Ericsson Inc. It will also be worth bearing in mind that the launch of 5G caused a lot of public concern about safety and privacy. Educating the public now about 6G will be essential to ensure confidence by 2030. "What we should do better this time is inform the public why the frequency bands we are using are safe, tell them about the decades of testing they go through before release," says Dohler.

The current 5G ecosystem is largely B2C but the next wave is expected to expand into B2B. To prepare for this, companies will need to start their research early to develop the technology and use cases for 6G. "B2B is a complicated value chain, and developing cross-industry consortia will be essential," says Tom Winstanley, CTO and head of new ventures at NTT Data UK. "We need to develop partner ecosystems to bring 6G from consumer proposition to enterprise solution."

For manufacturers, the advent of 6G means they'll need to think about how to restructure their facilities. This means ensuring that reference designs and best-practice documents are in place to inform the budgets and choices being made now. "What we really need to think about is smart procurement when it comes to upgrading manufacturing facilities for the future," says Dohler.

> **It's likely that 6G will be the key technology driving future prosperity. Mobile communications are becoming a central part of our world**

Companies will also need to consider how they plan to innovate with 6G and how that might translate into revenue. "In gaming, you would need to make new types of games. Just as with 3G, 4G and 5G, industry needs time to make technologies capable of using 6G," says Professor Rahim Tafazolli, head of the Institute for Communication Systems at the University of Surrey.

"We will also need to be data-savvy," says Warren. If AI will be key to the use of 6G, a great deal of data related to network management will need to be exposed and processed. Companies will need to get to grips with the consequences of that.

Right now, it falls to CTOs to think ahead. "As a CTO you should be identifying the key challenges you face: is it coverage or cost? As we are in the early stages of negotiation, it is essential to engage other stakeholders to ensure your voice is heard," says William Webb, CTO at tech-focused management consultancy Access Partnership.

Next year's World Radiocommunication Conference is expected to bring greater clarity on the spectrum allocation for 6G and how it may be regulated. But other issues will still need to be ironed out. As Dohler puts it: "We are building an entirely new metaverse-type world, built on blockchain. There will be questions of how regulation can be enforced, how privacy is respected and how we ensure we have the right ethical principles."

Laurence Norman, vice-president sports technology at NTT Data Impact, suggests that 6G could be an opportunity to think about how our future society might look. "We could have a low-cost, efficient, sustainable public transport network that is autonomous. We need to start thinking about the bigger picture." ●

NEXT-LEVEL SPEED

User-experience data rates of 4G, 5G and 6G mobile broadband technologies

10Mbps
4G

100 Mbps
5G

1,000 Mbps
6G
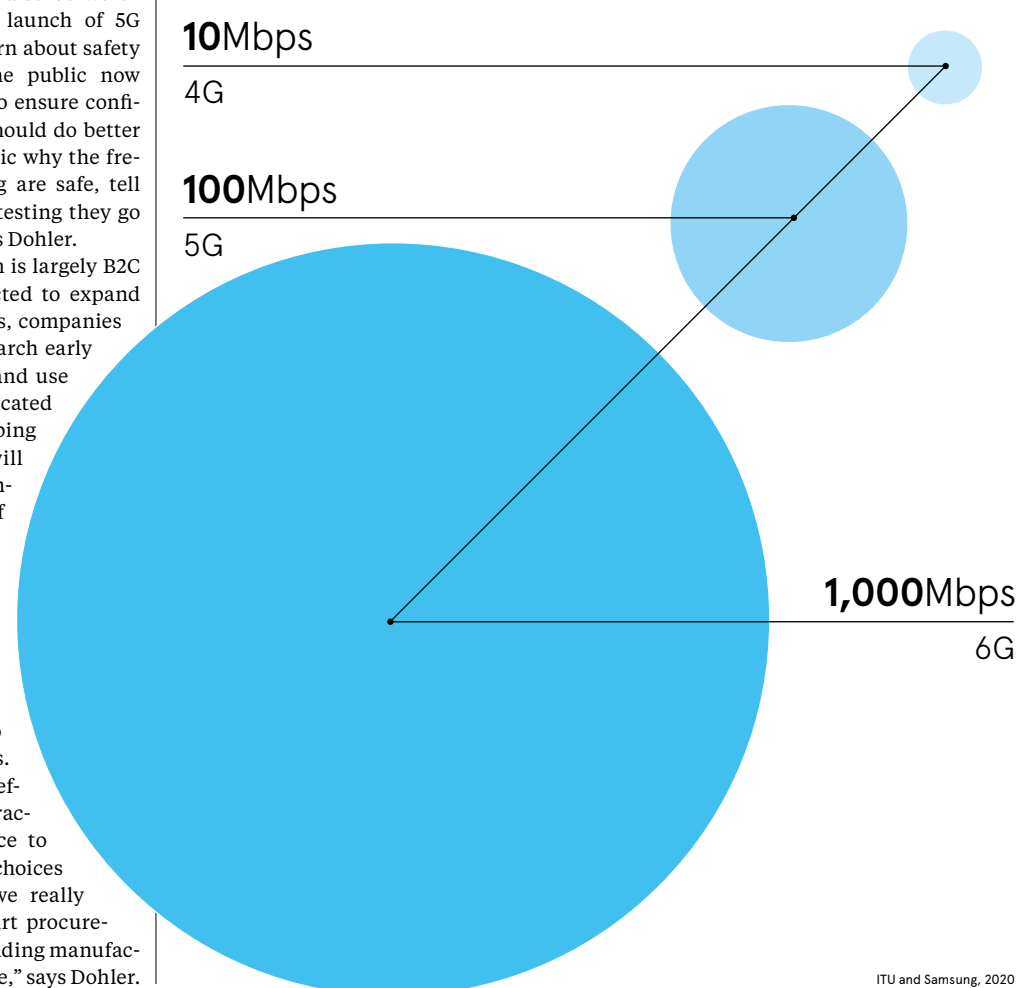
ITU and Samsung, 2020

Commercial feature

Delivering speed and quality to the UK's full-fibre broadband rollout
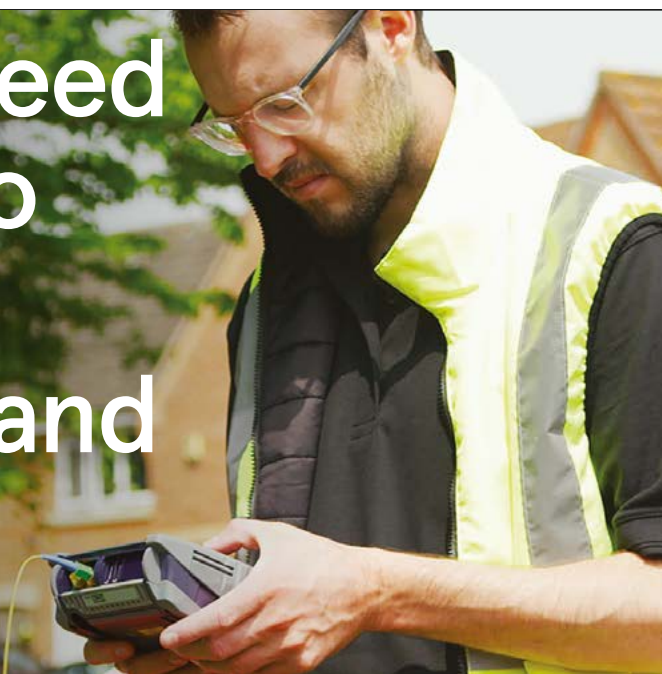
With the government setting a target of 2030 for full-fibre coverage in the UK, telecoms firms are making use of partners like VIAVI to achieve high-quality but rapid network deployment

World-class full-fibre broadband will drive a new era of growth, productivity and innovation for UK consumers and businesses. With rollouts already well underway, the technological revolution is happening at speed.

It isn't just the biggest telecom players like BT Openreach and Virgin Media driving progress. Independents, alternative networks – or 'altnets' – are also building fibre-to-the-premises (FTTP) networks across the UK.

With the UK government's target for full fibre coverage by 2030, the pressure on these companies is huge. The challenge they all face is building at speed and with quality, which is why many have partnered with VIAVI Solutions. Its centralised and automated processes and systems, tools and technologies enable network operators to achieve rapid network deployment without compromising on quality standards.

The company, which marks its 100th anniversary next year, has a test and measurement capability for validating new network construction, performing preactivation checks and monitoring ongoing service remotely. This reduces the need for costly engineering re-visits to fix a fault. During the build phase, VIAVI's test and measurement platform certifies that the network is built correctly and, after customer activation, ensures that the end-user speed is correct.

Kevin O'Donnell, head of EMEA regional and channel marketing, says: "Our equipment enables rapid progress to be made while proving the quality of the build. The last thing you want when you're building at scale is to have to go back and fix an issue, or worse, find that customers are not getting the service they are paying for."

As the fibre rollout continues a great deal of focus is, primarily from the investment community, has been on the altnets. The sector has already attracted significant sums of private funding, with investment and expenditure commitments predicted to reach £17.7bn by the end of 2025, according to figures from the Independent Networks Cooperative Association (INCA). However, with more than a 100 of these altnets now operating in the UK, the market is ripe for consolidation, with acquisition activity expected to increase in the coming months. Here, VIAVI Solutions will play a crucial role.

The main consideration for investors is whether the asset they are buying has been deployed with quality to the highest standards. This is important not just for the long-term value of the asset, but also for its integration into existing networks owned by the acquirer, which will be easier and the costs therefore lower. Equally, altnet owners looking to attract investors will want to maximise the value of a sale by being able to demonstrate the high quality of the network build and deployment.

Rick Phillips, managing partner at tech investment bank and private equity fund Axxeltrova, says: "Fibre remains an attractive investment and a long-lived asset class for institutional investors with consistent mid-teens or better percentage returns. In the UK, there are still many opportunities, especially in less urban areas."

Quality is a top priority for the altnets themselves, in terms of customer retention. "If customers aren't receiving the service they are paying for because of a substandard network build or activation, they are more likely to switch to another provider," adds O'Donnell.

In the current labour market, skill shortages present another challenge for altnets, which are under pressure to compete by being able to deploy quickly without compromising standards. By providing the systems and processes that allow these companies to complete deployment more efficiently, VIAVI's role in the UK's full-fibre broadband infrastructure project is pivotal.

O'Donnell says: "The operation of our solutions is designed to be as simple as possible, so they can be used by engineers who are not necessarily test and measurement experts. By building intelligence into our equipment we make the technician experience as simple as possible while enabling acceleration of the build."

For more information visit
viavisolutions.com

VIAVI
VIAVI Solutions

INTERVIEW

Ready, teddy, go: how Build-A-Bear went from mall store to digital brand

Company CEO **Sharon Price John** explains how she took the retailer from $48m in losses to the strongest first half of its 25-year history, through the expansion of ecommerce, licensed bears and NFTs

Sam Forsdick

The Build-A-Bear brand still holds a fond place in the hearts of many, who may remember constructing their own stuffed animals at friends' birthday parties. But a lot has changed in the retail industry since the company was founded in 1997.

As consumer spending has increasingly shifted online, bricks-and-mortar stores have often struggled to make the leap to ecommerce. And the challenges facing Build-A-Bear were even more pronounced.

Coming into the business from children's footwear retailer Stride Rite in 2013, CEO Sharon Price John took on the task of modernising the ailing company. The year prior, Build-A-Bear Workshop had pre-tax losses of over $48m (£40m) and was in a "really challenged situation", according to John.

"Build-A-Bear is not just a bricks-and-mortar retailer, it was primarily mall-based retail-tainment and was known for the physicality of the shopping experience," John says. "Those things, combined with the fact that our primary customers are children, made it that much more difficult to imagine the evolution of the business."

Property vacancy rates in malls were higher than in any other retail area in the US in the fourth quarter of 2021 (8.3%) and these shopping centres are at a greater risk of further store closures over the next five years, according to analysts at UBS. They predict that up to 50,000 American retail stores will pull down their shutters by 2026.

For John, these figures highlight the urgent need for every retailer to think of themselves as a digital company "in some way, shape or form". She adds: "Everything that holds the company together and makes the company operate has to go through this digital transformation. But for us, being a vertical retailer, we also needed to consider how best to participate in the growing digital economy. That required us to think entirely differently about the brand."

Being a product that is predominantly aimed at children – a customer base with little online purchasing power or access to credit or debit cards – presented another obstacle for Build-A-Bear, as it shifted its focus towards ecommerce.

John says: "We realised that not only did we have to rethink the channels where we were participating, but we also had to think about the expansion of our addressable market and how we could appeal to teens and adults that transact online."

According to John, working in the company's favour was the strength of the brand, which has established "deep emotional connections" with its customers. Building on this, Build-A-Bear Workshop sought to expand its range of licensed products to appeal to an older audience who has grown up with the brand.

These have included tie-ins with *The Matrix, Gremlins, Deadpool, Friends* and a Grogu soft toy based on the baby Yoda character from the *Star Wars* TV show *The Mandalorian*. The latter product generated a billion impressions across social media on its launch.

As a result of these changes in strategy, 40% of Build-A-Bear Workshops sales are now made to teens and adults, while the figure previously stood at 25% at the start of John's tenure. Similarly, ecommerce now accounts for 20% of sales, where this was once 5% in 2012.

The diversification of the business has included the development of an outbound licensing arm, which generates royalty revenue from licensed products, a content creation arm Build-A-Bear Entertainment, which has a multi-year deal with Sony and a Netflix film *The Honey Girls* and even NFTs. Build-A-Bear Entertainment has also partnered with Reese Witherspoon's production company Hello Sunshine to produce a modern retelling of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears.*

As a result, Build-A-Bear Workshop posted one of its best quarters at the start of the year, recording a gross profit of $70m and, over the trailing 12 months, has a turnover of $440m. This means the business is on track to record its highest revenues since 2008.

"We not only executed an immediate financial turnaround," John says. "We executed a multidimensional business-model shift, moving from a retailer that happened to have built a powerful brand, to a branded intellectual property company that just happens to have vertical retail as one of its revenue streams."

John describes herself as "a change agent" and drew on her prior experience in the toy industry as she transformed Build-A-Bear Workshop. "There is a process for change, but it's about human psychology more than anything else," she adds.

The concerning financial situation the business found itself in at the start of her tenure worked in John's favour in this regard. "It can be harder to get organisations to evolve and change when nothing is discernibly wrong," she says. "But when you're on a challenging path, as Build-A-Bear was, with eight years of declining profitability and a really tough year prior to me starting, it's easier to express the negative potential outcome if change doesn't happen."

There is an optimism that Build-A-Bear Workshop can continue on this growth path, despite the current economic headwinds. "Nothing's recession proof but there are some categories that tend to be more recession-resistant than others and the toy market is one of those," John says.

She believes that the business' recent profits were separate from any Covid-related bounceback. Instead, she claims that the financial results have been due to "the fundamental changes that we've made through digital transformation and the evolution of our retail footprint". Some 35% of Build-A-Bear stores are now based in tourism and hospitality locations, rather than the traditional malls.

John also points to the Birthday Treat Bear promotion as one of its methods for keeping products affordable. The birthday promotion links the price of the soft toy to the age of the child it is being bought for. If a child turns four, their parents can come into the store and buy a teddy bear for $4. "It can be a very approachable purchase for almost any socio-economic strata," John adds.

The promotion does have an additional benefit for the business. Getting the discounted rate is dependent on signing up to Build-A-Bear's loyalty programme. John describes this as a "reverse acquisition cost" – the younger they are, the less they pay, but the longer the customer is part of its database. "This means that we have an opportunity to engage with that consumer for more years, creating longer lifetime value," she adds.

Capitalising on this customer data is the next stage of the company's digital transformation. The loyalty programme has 20 million first-party data points but there is a need to add analytics to improve the customer experience.

John says she's agnostic to how people engage with the brand, whether it's watching *The Honey Girls* feature film, hosting a Build-A-Bear birthday party or downloading its app. But she notes: "It's our job to assure consumers that if you engage in one area of the business, we can use your preferences to serve up something else that you like in a different area."

Although many of these changes behind the scenes may have gone unnoticed by the wider business world, John is proud of what her team has achieved. As the company moves into the digital age, she is determined that the brand holds firm to its heritage. She says: "Build-A-Bear is iconic, multigenerational, highly trusted and, from my personal experience, it's beloved. Whenever anyone finds out I'm the CEO of Build-A-Bear Workshop, it rarely goes without a smile, a story and usually a hug." ●

> "We not only executed an immediate financial turnaround, we executed a multidimensional business-model shift"

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION PRODUCES REAL RESULTS

Pre-tax income of Build-A-Bear Workshop ($m)

Companiesmarketcap.com, 2022

£413bn the additional value digital technology could create for the UK economy by 2030 – about 19% of the entire UK economy

48% of small-business leaders have not heard of cloud computing or do not know what the term "cloud computing" means

80% of businesses on the cloud agree that cloud computing has made it easier for their business to compete with bigger enterprises

67% agree that the costs of starting a business have reduced substantially because of cloud computing

92% of cloud users feel confident that their data is secure in the cloud

45% of cloud users say they would find it difficult to store data securely without cloud services

MIGRATION AND MODERNISATION BUSINESS OUTCOMES

31% cost savings over comparable infrastructure

62% more efficient IT infrastructure

75% increase in agility in delivering new features

Breaking down cloud barriers for small businesses

SMEs are drawn to cloud computing's scalability and efficiencies, but fears of complexity often halt migration. By working with an experienced cloud partner, businesses can secure transformative success

The benefits of cloud computing, now standard at large companies, are clear. When cloud computing is used well, businesses of all sizes can count on significant cost savings, hassle-free architecture, elasticity of infrastructures, improved data sovereignty and best-in-class security.

For small- to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), moving away from using on-site servers or managed data centres can mean significant savings. The alternative is using 'right-sized' cloud infrastructure that can scale at any time, with systems even powered off when not in use. In addition to savings, this can also mean opening up cutting-edge machine learning, AI and data analytics capabilities.

"Making the move to the cloud can be a game changer for SMEs – it can enable them to compete with the big players," explains Simon Walker, managing director at the cloud services business Cloud Bridge.

Common barriers

But switching to cloud computing as an SME can be complex, and many firms are put off by their worries from the very beginning of this transformative change. Deciding where to start is one of the most difficult challenges. One-third of businesses struggle to determine what kind of cloud setup will work, according to recent Cloud Bridge research. "SME bosses don't have the time to figure out what to do first and they don't know what kind of capacities they need," explains Walker. "When company bosses start asking IT teams for guidance, it can be difficult to provide accurate answers."

Costs are also of particular concern to SMEs, given the challenges of deriving a like-for-like comparison between cloud services and in-house setups or managed data centres. "Many businesses look at the processing power and disk space they might need and use a calculator from the intended cloud provider. This is the wrong approach. It's better to run the cloud 'hot', meaning at the capacity currently needed, with the ability to auto scale for peaks in demand," Walker explains. "The complexity of licensing in the cloud, as well as the 'bill shock' when companies find engineers have added expensive functionality, can also be a deterrent.

Meanwhile, 40% of businesses are worried about security issues in the cloud, and believe that their own infrastructures are better protected. "While security is a common worry, this thinking is not based on the evidence," Walker states. "Many large cloud providers already host highly sensitive data for companies and governments, so the level of security they offer actually far exceeds what SMEs can achieve themselves."

Thirty per cent of managers are seriously worried that their IT team lacks the skills for a cloud migration. And over a fifth are either unsure how to execute the migration, or they lack the proper time to focus on it. Resistance to any planned change is often another major obstacle.

Delivering successful migration

These barriers to migration mean many SMEs are missing out on the efficiencies and powerful transformation that can be gained by moving to the cloud. Managers often feel obliged to lead cloud migrations themselves, with many not realising that service providers can overcome these challenges.

Instead, by choosing the right partner, businesses can plan and forecast the costs of their cloud migrations more precisely, establishing the right security and architecture, modernising operations, containing costs and improving governance. Crucially, service partners can help them secure funding for any migration

> "Making the move to the cloud can be a game changer for SMEs – it can enable them to compete with the big players"

or even specific service rollouts. All of this raises their use of technology to an advanced level at which they can effectively and efficiently compete with much larger businesses.

SMEs across sectors are already making the change, working with Cloud Bridge to migrate to the Amazon Web Services (AWS) cloud platform, which is used by businesses globally for their critical services and systems. "The first stage for us is helping SMEs plan their move, and establishing the total cost of ownership," Walker explains. "We provide a 360-degree view of migration costs and ongoing expenses, detailing the time and resources needed. We also look at security and backups, and build out a best practice 'landing zone'."

The funding on offer is also transforming these businesses' access to the cloud, with Cloud Bridge helping them secure this essential support for entire migrations and also for smaller-service launches.

Once companies are on the cloud, they count on Cloud Bridge to help them improve the technology's effectiveness. "We do an optimised 'lift and shift' – making systems more effective and efficient through methodical changes to licensing and the technologies in place," Walker says. "This includes our FinOps function finding important ongoing cost efficiencies and readying services to automatically scale, while introducing deeper changes such as moving to microservices for powerful efficiencies." Cloud Bridge's 24/7 managed support also helps businesses to handle ongoing cloud usage.

In practice

Among the companies working with Cloud Bridge – which recently won the AWS UK & Ireland 'Rising Star of the Year Partner Award' – are Astroscale, the market leader in satellite servicing and long-term orbital sustainability. The company wanted to move its applications and databases to the cloud to manage the vast amounts of on-demand computational power needed for planning, launching, tracking and data gathering. It turned to Cloud Bridge to provide a complete cost and time assessment. "We provided a cost-neutral business case for migration, containing clear future savings, performance benefits and other advantages around resilience and security," Walker explains.

Another example is job management software developer Oneserve, which sought to move its existing SQL database to AWS. Cloud Bridge provided a full technical discovery, exploring options such as Aurora, Postgres and Babelfish, as well as providing a full well-architected review, the output of which included ongoing cost-management suggestions.

Similarly, Smartbox.ai, which uses AI to perform advanced data detection to help businesses solve important data protection and privacy challenges, was supported by Cloud Bridge with AWS architecture billing best practice. This ensured that AWS usage would be efficiently managed on an ongoing basis, all while taking a holistic view of how best to support overall cloud goals for future growth.

Looking ahead, Walker expects SMEs across industries to focus on highly powerful ways for the cloud to drive competitiveness with larger rivals. "In the next year we're looking to build out packaged services around AI, machine learning and analytics," Walker says. "Using deep intelligence around data will really transform what small businesses can do. There is so much untapped information they could be making better use of, such as linking unconnected information on customers to automate experiences and deliver truly personalised marketing campaigns. AI in the cloud will transform what SMEs can achieve."

To make an effective, transformative move to the cloud, visit info.cloud-bridge.co.uk/ get-your-free-migration-assessment

cloud bridge

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Off-shore Energy

Distribution

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