

Digital Transformation Q&A: How Enterprises Can Up Their Games by Going Back to Basics

How important is the role of the CIO to digital transformation?

The role of the CIO has really grown in prominence over the past decade, driven by the opportunities presented by digital transformation. Whereas traditionally it revolved around maintaining infrastructure and digital services, today the role has transformed to encompass more strategic and complex areas such as digital operating models or how processes will influence operations in the next five to ten years.

IT now sits at the heart of business growth and customer engagement, with many businesses seeing digital transformation as a vehicle to catapult them to success and increased efficiency over the coming years. Yet, despite this critical importance, the CIO still spends a significant proportion of their time in reactive mode rather than driving through business transformation projects. This in turn reduces their perceived value and leadership credentials – while taking their eye of the transformation ball.

For digital transformation to be a success, organizations need their CIOs to be firmly focused on the task at hand, provided with a clear, holistic view of system operations, so this intelligence can be shared across the business and IT's value visible for all in the business to see. This means providing them with the necessary budget and resources to make the project a success.



Considering the high failure rate, what are businesses doing wrong?

The biggest issue undermining CIOs and the success of digital transformation projects is IT performance. This is because modern-day enterprise systems are a patchwork of systems – legacy technology combining with newer mainframes which sit alongside mobile applications, cloud-based platforms and even Internet of Things (IoT) projects. Combine this with years of under investment (patching instead of replacing), and many organizations' digital operations are a breeding ground of inefficient, underperforming technology.

This has led to many IT departments operating in siloes, with gaps in communication and knowledge leading to tool sprawl and IT outages, as no one has a complete view of operations – including the CIO. This of course has an impact when businesses want to become connected enterprises – which requires digital excellence. One of the biggest issues organizations need to overcome is the problem of legacy technology. Legacy systems can struggle to successfully integrate with modern systems, making it impossible to ascertain system health and functionality (which is vital when moving towards becoming a digitally driven business). However, they often retain critical information – it's not simply a case of ripping and replacing – it's about reaping value from systems which really belong in a bygone era.

CIOs therefore need more effective ways to manage IT complexity, mitigate these risks posed by legacy platforms, reduce outages and enable more strategic use of their teams when undergoing transformation projects. Without this visibility CIOs can't keep the business updated and share vital information showing its value, let alone prove that transformation projects are on track.

What do companies need to do then? What practical take-aways can you provide?

The key to success is visibility – know what's going on and you can prepare for it. When it comes to IT operations, this means monitoring via a single pane of glass. IT monitoring is the unsung hero of digital operations, yet it is often overlooked as a trivial piece of maintenance – much like a virus scan. However, this should not be the case, and should be the bedrock for any IT infrastructure, as it provides so much value.

Monitoring via a single pane of glass (with everything displayed in one, clear to read dashboard) can address many of the pain-points which are exacerbated during digital transformation projects – driving insight and value concurrently. By utilizing a unified IT operations management platform, CIOs can address the issues addressed above, such as siloes and IT's reputation.

For example, monitoring means a proactive, unified approach to IT operations, breaking down siloes and being proactive – thereby tackling problems before they've had the chance to evolve into bigger problems which lead to outages. This enables them to demonstrate to the board the value of IT – alongside providing metrics which add value to other areas of the business – like Sales or Marketing – thanks to information on mutual areas of interest like uptime.

Monitoring can also enable automation, and therefore the remediation of operational issues which previously took manual oversight. This frees up skilled team members – preventing a firefighting mentality and encouraging more strategic, high value tasks. This in turn provides more engaging opportunities for employees, improving productivity and encouraging retention at a time of critical industry-wide skill shortages.

Simply by shining a light on system health and performance, CIOs and the wider business benefit from greater insights, which can feed into business strategy and influence the pace of digital transformation. Without this acumen, however, firms will find it impossible to implement widespread digital efficiencies, as they won't be able to see how it all knits together – much like planning a journey with part of the route missing.

What is the future for digital transformation, e.g the role of AIOPS?

Ultimately, digital transformation is about changing how a company engages and operates with customers by leveraging technology and data. To keep providing value and engaging customers in the right way, businesses therefore can't afford to stop innovating – they must keep harvesting operational insights to best serve the end user. With needs changing on a constant basis, the future for digital transformation will likely evolve with changing market conditions.

I believe as such CIOs will need to start acting with more urgency and purpose, as digital transformation will be seen as a must, in order not only to stay relevant, but also disrupt marketplaces and drive customer loyalty. This will be driven by technology which tracks, measures and predicts behavior, with AI and machine learning key in unearthing trends before they become them. In the meantime, investing in technology which augments the user experience will be vital for firms. In retail, this means memorable customer experience, website uptime and frictionless checkout to keep customers coming back, with AI and ML implemented to make personalized recommendations – adding value to the customer and driving ROI for the business. For logistics companies, it may be using AIOPS to drive insights into customer behaviour, helping to predict where demand lies, thereby influencing consultancy on stock distribution. Finally, for a financial services firm, it may be understanding products or services which could be cross-sold to customers, thereby growing portfolios and value, or preventing an outage and consequent customer exodus – showing the power it can provide across every industry and vertical.

Of course, to enable this digitally-driven panacea, CIOs know that they need the right foundations to build upon. IT monitoring must be this bedrock, as this provides the insights that future decisions can be based upon. For example, a single pane of glass displays system health and performance in one clear viewpoint, enabling CIOs to pinpoint potential dangers (such as outages) alongside providing real-time data like uptime. For successful transformation, this information needs analysing to ensure a connected infrastructure is able to handle the pressures of digital transformation, as without these insights, a successful overhaul will simply not be possible.

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