

Chapter 36

People and the Digital Enterprise: Challenges and Approaches

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of a conventional enterprise from a people-centric model to a technology-centric one has important implications for its human workforce. In this chapter, the authors look at three representative people-related focus areas for the digital enterprise, enhancing workplace wellbeing, enabling continuous learning and compliance to information security. They discuss each of these problems and then look at the technological infrastructure a digital enterprise would require to manage these areas.

INTRODUCTION

A digital enterprise's core functions are technology driven (Araujo, 2016). Technology lies at the heart of things not at the periphery. While the movement towards this paradigm shift has been going on for a long time with early adopters like Dow Corning beginning this journey as early as 2002 (Rosencrance, 2002), this has been accelerated by recent technological advances such as the Internet of Things, mobile technology and AI. We can collect information continuously from a variety of environments, be informed about a situation wherever we may be and have continuous learning and evolution built into the very fabric of a system. Due to this, earlier boundaries between the organization's external functions such as marketing & sales and the internal such as production have blurred and sometimes disappeared (Cemex, 2019).

Now while a newly hatched startup may begin life from day 1 as a digital enterprise, most existent organizations have to go through a disruptive transformation process as they remake themselves from a people centric to a technology centric enterprise. At the extreme end of the transformation journey organizations may even be trying to go from a model where automation existed to assist people at work to one where the people help create and assist the automation at work (Wired Inc, 2018), (Meister, AI plus human intelligence is the future of work, 2018). That is not all. Part of the digital journey involves connecting the parts of the enterprise separated normally either by function or geography. Curiously this has also led to a phenomenon which Bailey (Bailey & A, 2017) calls workforce fragmentation where conventional models of what forms a 'team' (co-located, functionally similar, all team members are employees of the organization) are challenged and reinvented. Given all this, it is natural that the most profound impact of an organization's transformation into a digital enterprise is on its people, its workforce.

This chapter's focus is on the people, the workforce of the digital enterprise.

If this topic is already vast in scope, its scope could be further broadened by the realisation that while organizations are making the digital journey, people too have been making their own digital journeys. Thus, not only do we have a digital enterprise, we have a digital workforce. A study by Nokia referenced in (Colbert, Yee, & George, 2016) showed that the normal American smartphone user checked their phone upto a 150 times a day. The authors also note in the same paper how increased usage of technology has reduced the ability of people to understand another's points of view, something to be concerned about given that most people in an enterprise work in teams and have to factor in each other's views. All these signal that not only must the workforce adjust to the digital enterprise, the enterprise too must adjust to the digital workforce.

But while this two way adjustment of enterprise to people and vice versa is a fascinating topic, we decided that rather than cover every people aspect of a digital enterprise, leading to a shallow treatment of an important subject, we would restrict our focus to three topics that we expect will be important representative focus areas in a digital enterprise. These topics are not new and are prevalent too in non-digital enterprises. However, each of these acquires an increased gravitas in a digital enterprise and furthermore, the digital enterprise paradigm facilitates the creation of technological systems to address these problems in new and powerful ways. The three topics are, enhancing workforce well-being, creating a continually learning workforce and ensuring workforce compliance to organizational norms. Underlying all three is how enterprises manage change though we do not discuss separately but cover it in the context of each of the three sub-areas. We also touch upon a topic of increased importance, both within the organization and without, that of data privacy.

The rest of this chapter is divided into two sections.

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