The culture of enterprise and people

By Evan-Lee Courie   18 Sep 2018

During the opening keynote address by Gartner analysts at this weeks Gartner Symposium/IT Expo, taking place in Cape Town, South Africa, it was evident that in order to drive innovation at scale in the next phase of digital transformation, businesses must "shape, shift and share".

This is the strategy Gartner is calling the ContinousNext.

What is ContinuousNext?

ContinuousNext is the strategy, Gartner is saying, will help businesses achieve success in the world that is constantly changing, and also the next phase of digital transformation.

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ContinuousNext is based on five imperatives:

1. Culture

2. Privacy
3. Augmented intelligence, where humans and learning machines work together
4. Project management, as a discipline brought to life by a whole new type of
5. Digital Twin

"Why ContinuousNext? And why now?" asks Mike Harris, executive VP, Research at Gartner.

" *"Because the transition to digital is undeniable and it's only accelerating, disrupting government and business models. Those newmodels redefine the way organisations create, deliver and capture value, challenging the way you operate and bringing newmindsets and practices to IT. Nearly two-thirds of CEOs and CFOs anticipate business models to change frequently due to digital transformation."* "

Investors are encouraging change by rewarding organisations with digital capabilities. They are not just interested in big data, says Harris, but they are interested in what you do with that data through advanced analytics, and how technology created a unique competitive advantage. Because of the creative use of technology, governments are realising that digital infrastructure is as important as physical infrastructures when it comes to enticing corporate investors.

Become adaptive and ready for change

ContinuousNext will empower you to bring and create new practices, abilities and ways to use IT. If you look at a flock of birds, they can teach us a lot about a long and continuous journey.

If you think about it, says Harris, "Birds fly in a specific formation, an aerodynamic shape, shifting from leader to leader as needed, and that alone is an amazing feat of co-operation and energy conservation. But what about all the squawking? The flock is constantly communicating, sharing information..."

"But how do they do it? They shape, they shift and they share. People use the same principle."

Harris uses an example of a Peloton, in a road bicycle race, the peloton is the main group or pack of riders. Riders in a group save energy by riding close near other riders. There is a reduction in drag by riding near the leader. They shift leaders and share tactics in order to overcome other teams.

Shape, shift and share - Enterprise culture

But how can you do it? As business and IT leaders, there's no denying that there are obstacles.

Harris says that by focussing on the culture and skills issue in small winds, the rest will follow. We've learned that digital investment pays off - in growth, profits, customer satisfaction and inefficiency. The secret to getting through the transformation is culture. The culture of the enterprise and the effect that change has on the workplace has been identified as one of the most significant challenges to this transformation.

IT departments have created a bit of their own turbulence by being a constant source of change and have been stressing out employees. So the question is, are you part of the solution, or are you part of the problem?

IT department of business units are constantly introducing new systems and they have the best intentions of helping

individuals or processes to do better. New systems have the best intentions, but there are thousands of applications in the field. This has a real impact on productivity.

What's often the problem is that there are often static systems, says Harris.

All of this has a real effect on productivity. Employees who are stressed by too much change perform poorly. "In fact, the cost of stressed employees and reduced productivity is greater than many IT budgets," says Harris.

He asks, "We know that differentiated technology adoption in the enterprise correlates to success, so if technology adoption is a factor to create competitive advantage, what types of organisations are most likely to succeed?"

Gartner asked their research teams to gain insight into over 13,000 organisations. Looking at three key factors to determine the enterprise technology adoption (ETA) profile.

These factors include:

1. Does IT drive technology or is it more through executive leadership and business units?
2. Is your governance model controlled and strict or flexible? or,
3. Is your organisation cautious, measured or dynamic?

Embrace change and adopt technology

Research shows that these factors determine the ETA and are the most predictive indicator of your success. It found that the most successful organisations are overwhelmingly dynamic.

"Measured organisations can achieve top performance, but success is less likely. The strongest determinant of success is dynamism – the ability to embrace change and adopt technology in a new way."

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Harris advises that it's okay if you are not there yet, there is still hope and that businesses' approaches can change and become increasingly dynamic.

Top performers differentiate by unique applications of technology. They shape their organisations' stance on technology adoption, they shift to innovative uses of technology and then they share that success. That is the technology side of the ContinuousNext formula.

Culture and people

But how do we get our people to change when many employees are negatively affected by change?

Harris states that we can't change the need to change, but we can help people adapt by helping employees feel more comfortable with technology but also getting workers to work in larger, more dynamic and diverse teams – with constant collaboration, therefore, social skills will be in high demand.

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The demand for collaborative social skills shows in the data. In 2013, the typical jobs required a mix of skills: technology development; digital dexterity and social creative skills.

In 2018, employees have shifted the mix of skills. Social creative skills are now only half of the skills needed. That trend is even more so in IT, where they will need 50% more social skills now, compared to what was needed in 2013.

The challenge is for managers, with the best social skills, to look at working in the most collaborative environments, working with other people in that dynamic diversity that attracts collaborative leaders.

Although this is a virtuous cycle for some, it may be a cultural challenge for many.

So the focus first is on people, not by using technology in itself, but by getting people to work together, while also changing the team dynamic through technology.

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