Making the case for transformation

Everything you need to know to overcome business barriers and unlock tech's full potential

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Introduction

By Dominic Elliot, CTO EMEAR Partners, Northern Europe, Cisco

There's been a lot of talk about the pandemic accelerating business' digital plans. While many rolled out remote working at speed, this was only a quick fix. This is not the same as investing in transformation. These organisations won't feel the full benefits of the tech they've bought or be better prepared for the future. And this is a recurring problem for UK plc.

In The Future Is Now 2021 survey, BT found that less than a third of UK businesses have a transformation strategy in place.[1] While 22% don't intend to adopt any emerging technologies at all in the next five years.[2] This is a missed opportunity.

In an increasingly online world, innovation is key to meeting your business goals. And it doesn't matter what size your organisation is. Tech can help small businesses get ahead and grow, while multinationals can develop more efficient ways of working. While doing nothing means you're more likely to fall behind the competition, fail to meet rising customer expectations and leave your organisation open to cyber-attacks.

Chances are, if you've picked up this guide, you already know this and are eager to champion change in your workplace. But perhaps you don't know where to start? What a transformation strategy should look like and how to stick to it? Or how to get senior stakeholders and the wider team to buy in? Drawing on our 30 years of experience helping many types of businesses navigate their digital journeys, here you'll find practical advice on how to overcome barriers and embrace a better way of working.

Who is Cisco?

We've been working with Cisco for 30 years. Together we have a long history of innovating to meet the needs of our customers. We offer a complete range of services we've co-created with Cisco, including SD-WAN, video conferencing, contact centres and more.

Our partnership means we also have the scale and expertise to meet the needs of any organisation. So we can tailor-make a transformation strategy for you, underpinned by our trusted networks and security.
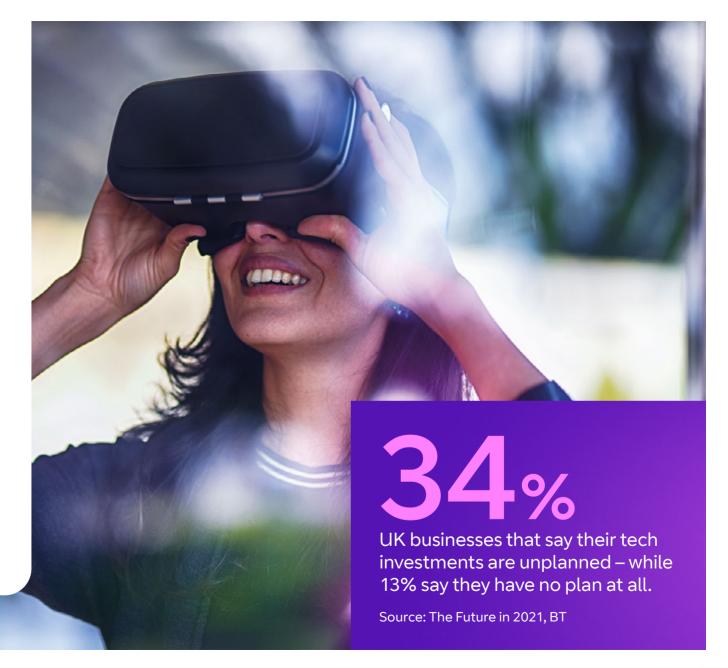
Know your starting position

1

Start from a position of **strength**

Understand the current state of your organisation, so you can know how best to improve it.

A staggering 70% of digital transformations fail.[3] The most common problem is not the technology, it's a lack of planning. Why? Unlike other business purchases, new and emerging technologies don't fit into a typical tendering process. After all, you can't tell how well they work when their capabilities aren't fully understood and are evolving all the time. For instance, you might know that you're being let down by your connectivity but are unsure how specific 5G-enabled tech can help.

The solution is to put a well-defined strategy in place. This starts with assessing your current situation, so you understand what works in your organisation, what doesn't and why. You can then set clear objectives, such as what problems you want to solve, which will help keep your transformation on track. Building a solid business case will also help you overcome objections you may face from key decision-makers.

34%

UK businesses that say their tech investments are unplanned – while 13% say they have no plan at all.

Source: The Future in 2021, BT

What to consider when planning your transformation

1.

Set your goals

Work out what your organisation wants to achieve by transforming. You might find it easier to start with your long-term ambitions, then work backwards to more immediate priorities and how you can gauge success.

Questions to ask…

- What are your organisation's main aims?
- Are these likely to change in the future and if so how?
- What are the biggest challenges your organisation faces?
- Who are the stakeholders in your organisation that can help you see the full picture?

2.

Understand your existing IT estate

While digital transformation tends to focus on the shiny new tech, in practice you're unlikely to upgrade or replace everything. So you need to understand what your IT estate looks like and what you can and can't integrate with it.

Questions to ask…

- What legacy systems do you need to work with?
- Who is responsible for your IT and are any services outsourced?
- How many suppliers do you deal with and what do they provide?
- In what ways could technology help or hinder your business goals?

3.

Spot previous pitfalls

Review any other technology investments your organisation has made in recent years. Some of it may be reusable or repurposed with the introduction of new integrations. If user adoption was slow or the costs spiralled, try and work out what went wrong so you can avoid making the same mistakes.

Questions to ask…

- How was the success of your company's last project measured?
- How was the rollout managed and who was responsible for it?
- What efforts were made to integrate the solution into the wider business?

4.

Think about your budget

Transformation can be costly. Not just in terms of investing in hardware and software, but the time and effort your team has to put into it. So work out exactly how much you can afford to invest in a project and think about how you spread the cost over time.

Questions to ask…

- Does your organisation have a centralised IT budget or does your department have its own allowance?
- Who will use your tech solution the most and do they have a budget you could draw on?
- Does the person responsible for your budget have all the information they need?
- When is the right time for you to try and influence decision-making?
- Could you reduce your costs by working with a partner?

Build a pipeline of ideas

2

Find the right technology for your transformation

Rethink how technology can benefit your business and which one is right for your transformation plans

Once you've set yourself a clear transformation goal, you need to work out how you can achieve it. This is easier said than done when 71% of UK businesses think any emerging technologies – from software-defined networking (SD-WAN) to virtual reality – 'aren't right for them'.[4]

To help you narrow your search for the right solution, consider how different technologies could be applied to your business. As a starting point, consider these three areas:

Processes in need of digitisation

Think about which areas of your business could be improved with tech. Are there any processes that would be more efficient if your people could carry them out anywhere? Or would it be better to automate a task entirely? Perhaps there are files that you'd rather secure with an added layer of encryption?

Employee frustrations

Is there a part of your people's work that hinders them, taking a lot of time and effort? If so, identify what the underlying issues are and how they could be fixed. The solution doesn't have to be technological. Examine how you could change the way your business works for the better, such as shifting to hybrid working. Then think about what tools you'd need to make that possible.

Enhance customer experience

Consider whether you're meeting all the needs of your customers. Perhaps there's a part of your product or service that is regularly complained about or takes a lot of time and effort to provide. If you have a competitor that's known for offering an excellent experience, think about what you'd need to do to outshine them.

To make sure you can answer these questions as fully as possible and get the best results, assemble a team that's made up of all the different roles that'll be affected by your proposed plan. For instance, if you want to improve customer experience, pick the brains of someone in the sales team. They can give you a deeper insight into what areas need improving and how they could work better. Another consideration is to engage with your customers to see what their needs are and how you can address them.

Group exercises to help generate ideas

Eyes of the experts

Think about how other companies or people would view your challenge and solve it.

'What would _____ do?'

Apple
Disney
Ikea
Amazon
Elon Musk
UK Government
Richard Branson

Picture prompts

- Rather than struggle to put an idea into words, create a collage of images to express your thoughts and spark new ones.

- Use pictures from a variety of sources – such as books, magazines, newspapers, photos or screenshots – to encourage participants to consider their ideas from different perspectives.

Exaggeration and deprivation

- To come up with new use cases, focus on a single benefit of a technology, exaggerate it for effect and take this to its logical conclusion.

- To rethink the value of a technology, imagine if users were deprived of it completely and what knock-on effects this would have.
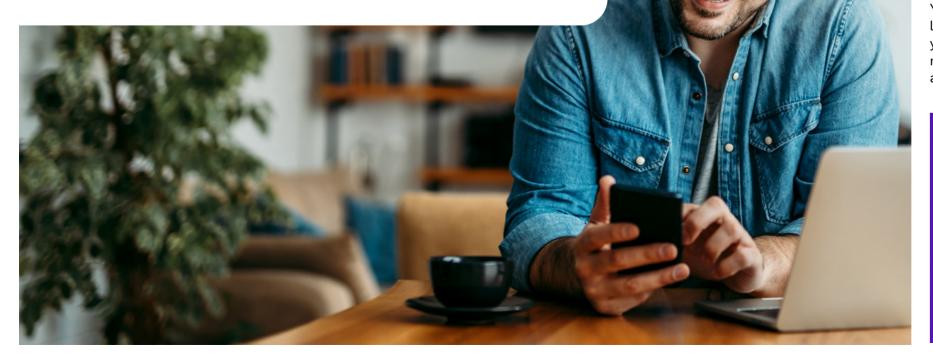
Crazy eights

- Give participants eight minutes to come up with eight different ideas.

- Set a timer to help focus their mind but also know when it's time to move on.

- To save time, participants can either write or sketch their ideas, but they'll need to be able to explain them when the clock runs out.

Build
confidence

3

Build confidence with a proof of concept

Reduce risk and strengthen your business case by trialling your transformation plans before rolling them out fully

Business leaders are often blind to how tech can benefit them. So to win support for your transformation plans, you'll need to show them what a difference it can make.

The easiest way to do this is to provide a proof of concept. Rather than rolling out your plans business-wide, trial your transformation with a single team or department first. It doesn't cost much to do, while tangible results showing your plans can reassure uncertain stakeholders. Tests like this can also help iron out any difficulties in your planned processes and help you narrow down what the right technology for your organisation is.

Proofs of concepts don't have to be complex. You could lease equipment or get a flexible licencing contract on software. That way you can achieve a proof of concept and make sure your plans work before making a significant investment.

Rules for testing your transformation plans

• Clearly define what your trial will test and how you'll measure the results.

• Run several tests to make sure your results weren't a fluke and build a stronger business case.

• Don't blow the budget. Only pay for what you need and run tests at speed.

• Always choose a test that'll produce the most valid results.

Tackling barriers to change

Here's how to overcome common objections to digital transformation

"We can't afford it"

If your organisation is under pressure to do more with less, highlight how your transformation plans will cut costs. You may have obvious expenses like running and maintaining your existing systems. But also think about possible hidden costs, such as travelling for a face-to-face meeting because you're not making the most of your voice conferencing system. Also, consider how your transformation will make your business more efficient, such as speeding up production.

"We need to focus on profits"

Identify new opportunities associated with your transformation plan. Think about the customer experience enhancements you covered in step two and what these will mean for winning new business and keeping existing clients happy. Alternatively, think about how your plan could help scale up production or offer a premium level of service that you could charge more for.

"Projects like this take too long"

Many companies resist transformation because of the time it takes to roll out, while the gradual process means it's harder to notice the benefits it brings. So make sure you demonstrate where your quick wins are possible and maintain enthusiasm for further improvements once the project is up and running by holding regular meetings with stakeholders, and the wider business, on how you're progressing.

"If it's not broken, why fix it?"

People can be reluctant to change for fear of creating new problems or upsetting the historic ways of working. Make a clear case for the benefits of the changes you are proposing and demonstrate the benefits to your organisation both internally and externally. Encourage people's opinion on the current ways of working and involve them in the conversations of proposed improvements. It may not always be a revolution but an evolution that can benefit everybody.

Think business resilience

4

Secure your digital future

Make sure your transformation plans are ready for future threats and embed security into your business

Security is a top concern for every transformation project. In fact, with home and hybrid working on the rise, 65% of UK businesses consider cyber-security to be more of a threat than it was a year ago.[5] And when it comes to purchasing technology, security is the top consideration for major corporates.[6] It's no surprise then that board members have become more involved in cyber-defence strategies over the last five years.[7] So to champion change in your organisation, you're going to have to be prepared to alleviate fears and make sure your transformation strategy has security built-in.

What's the current state of your security?

To make sure your transformation plans are secure, start by understanding what protections you already have in place and whether they're still fit for purpose. For instance, are your people increasingly working across several clouds? Then your traditional firewall – designed for fixed infrastructure – may not be keeping your data safe as it should and will need replacing.

Also, think about how secure your wider business is. Emerging technologies might seem like a risk, but so are outdated ones. Their vulnerabilities are well-known to hackers and manufacturer's no longer support them with system updates. While any processes that frustrate how your people work – for instance, a network that imposes size limits on email attachments – make it more likely they'll find a workaround, such as using their unprotected personal email account or a third-party app, opening you up to unknown threats.

If your organisation has suffered a data breach in the past, work out what your weak link was and how you can prevent a similar attack from succeeding in the future.

Make sure your business is secure

Carry out an audit
Keen an inventory of all the digital platforms and tech your organisation uses. Then regularly check whether these systems are all up to date with the latest security patches. Be sure to audit your suppliers to make sure they've got a security strategy in place too.

Test your defences
You can't be sure your defences are up to the job until someone tries to breach them. Rather than waiting for a cyber-criminal to try their luck, employ an ethical hacker to simulate an attack.

Train your team
While people are often regarded as the weakest link in any security strategy, you can turn them into a human firewall by teaching them to spot scams and best practices for working, such as an IT-approved method for sharing files.

Stay ahead of future threats
New ways of working always present new challenges. So think about how you can reduce the risks that come with your transformation plans. Such as how you can encrypt your files or segment your network as you move to paperless processes to better protect your data.

Many new and emerging technologies are built with security in mind. For instance, 5G connectivity has much higher encryption standards than previous generations. And unlike fixed infrastructure, cloud services are automatically updated with the latest security patches. Many are also actively monitored 24/7 by security experts. So you can be sure your data is safe and compliant with regulations while taking the burden off your IT team. In this way, your security strategy can dovetail with wider transformation goals to boost productivity.

Build and maintain a cyber-security maturity matrix

As the threat landscape evolves, it's easy for your security strategy to fall behind. Keep on track by updating a matrix every quarter. This should include:

- how advanced, up-to-date and secure your tech stack is
- how robust your password processes are
- where your employees sit on the cyber-security knowledge scale
- any emerging risks – for example, has there been a big churn in staff leaving and starting?

Plan for
success

5

Keeping your deployment on track

How to keep stakeholders invested during deployment and encourage your people to embrace new ways of working
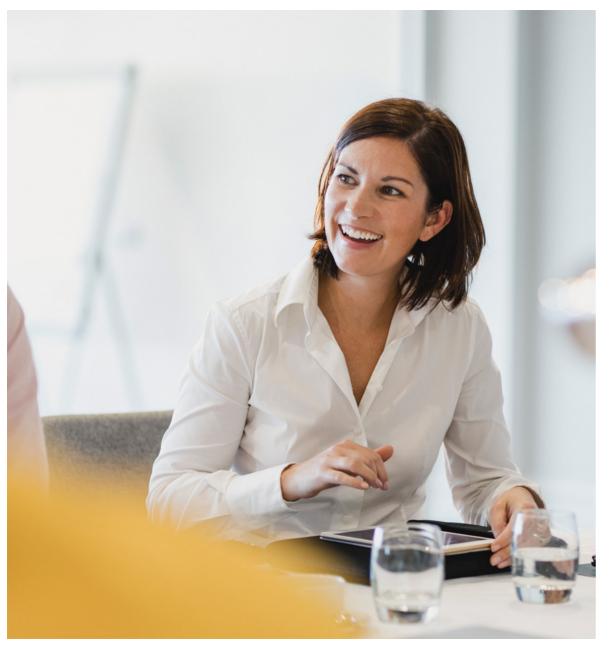
Just under a third of UK businesses who use transformative technologies say they're not being used to their full potential.[8] This goes to show how you roll out your transformation is as important as choosing the right tech.

The key is to make sure everyone involved remains committed to the project. This isn't an easy thing to do as, by their very nature, transformation plans are very complex and often take years to complete. In this time, teams can change and priorities can shift. So it can be difficult to keep tabs on how the project is progressing and sustain support.

To get around this, mark your large projects with measurable checkpoints, – sometimes called use-cases or key performance indicators (KPIs). This allows you to better define and manage expectations along the way, as well as show regular gains. Working use-case by use-case can also help you resolve operational issues and technical bottlenecks. While tracking their rollout helps stakeholders to see the 'big picture' of how the project is progressing.

If you've followed steps one and three correctly, you should have a clear idea of what success looks like for your transformation plan. So you can use this to define your use-case.

Winning over your workforce

Convincing the board to stick with a project is only half the battle. You also need to get everyone else to embrace your new way of working. The bigger your organisation, the more difficult this can be. More than 40% of major corporates say resistance to change is their number one problem, compared to only a quarter of small businesses.[9] Major corporates also say they lack tech skills more than any type of UK business.[10]

If you considered employee frustrations as part of step two, it should be easier to convince your people of the benefits of your new technologies. If you need to convince lots of different teams to adopt your new way of working, give each one tailored examples of how it will help them.

To get the word out, it's best to take a multi-pronged approach. Announce the changes in team meetings, on internal social channels and with posters in break areas. And repeat it over and over again to reach as many people as possible. Providing training classes will also help encourage adoption.

How to make sure your skills training is a success

1. Do your research
Conduct a skills gaps analysis to gauge your workforce's strengths and weaknesses. This can help you tailor training to individuals' abilities.

2. Mix up your training methods
It's likely your marketing team learn in a different way to your finance department, so offer a variety of training methods.

3. A question of time
Don't offer training before your people have had a chance to get hands-on with the tech, as it may feel too abstract. But don't wait too long for them to have struggled to use it and dismiss it as not for them.

Conclusion

By Mauro Mortali, Senior Manager, Strategy & Innovation, BT

We started this guide with a distinction. Rolling out remote working due to coronavirus is not the same as digital transformation. Having worked through our five steps for success, you should now understand why. Transformation is strategic, it makes the most of technology to meet your business goals. And it affects your whole organisation, so it only works if everyone buys into it.

But that doesn't mean the pandemic hasn't made a difference. Having been able to move thousands of employees to work from home practically overnight has shown many major corporations what's possible if they take a risk. While small businesses that were forced to close shops and restaurants have discovered new opportunities online.

Investing in digital transformation reaps rewards for all organisations whether big or small. The results often see a boost in staff morale, better sustainability, efficiency and financial gain, coupled with reinforcing security in an ever changing world.

This greater reliance on digital services over the last year has also proven that IT is truly out of the back room and in the boardroom. So there's never been a better time for you to encourage your organisation to open up to more innovation.

About the authors

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Dominic has more than 25 years of experience in the telecom market. So has a long history of delivering solutions that help Cisco's customers develop and expand their service portfolio.

He's been responsible for developing technology strategies for many of Cisco's key franchises. This includes helping develop IP Next Generation and software-defined services for use worldwide.

As Chief Technology Officer for Cisco's EMEAR Partners organisation, he focuses on providing the best possible software-defined networking, SaaS and managed services.

Mauro Mortali, Senior Manager, Strategy & Innovation, BT

With more than 20 years of experience in the IT and telecoms industry, Mauro currently runs our Innovation Programme. This aims to identify new digital capabilities, work out how we can best use them and if they'd work as products.

The programme has successfully launched more than 40 early market trials in the last three years. Mauro has helped reduce the time it takes to onboard a new third-party capability and get an experimental trial up and running from months to weeks.

Sources

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