

A futuristic, white flying car drone with a sleek, aerodynamic design. It has a central fuselage with a cockpit area, and four vertical rotors extending from the sides. The rotors are black with white tips. The vehicle is shown from a three-quarter front view, appearing to be in a ready-to-fly position.

FROM CONCEPT TO REALITY: BRINGING DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION INTO FOCUS

The incredible announcement from Uber at this year's annual Elevate conference in Los Angeles sent echoes across the globe, stirring imaginations about just what's possible with new technologies. The transportation giant unveiled its electric-powered 'flying car' – looking like a hybrid of a drone and a helicopter – designed to fly 1,000 feet above the ground, and taking us between rooftop 'skyports' when it launches to consumers in 2023.

“That's just over four short years away,” notes Nigel Hysom, business unit manager: enterprise information management (EIM): Western Cape at Datacentrix. “This type of quantum leap grabs consumers' attention, pushing us to demand more from our technology and from the companies with which we engage,” he says. “After all, if flying cars are possible, then why can't an insurance company allow me to open a new policy on a website? Why can't a retailer allow me to track the delivery of my goods through an app?”

So, in the era of aerial Ubers, just how can organisations keep up with ever more demanding consumer expectations?

“Digital transformation must be considered across all aspects of the organisation,” begins Hysom, noting the following core principles:

- **People** – human capital transformation efforts, to develop new skills within teams, change the ways-of-working, and redeploy individuals into new areas of focus.
- **Processes** – integrating robotic process automation and integration technologies (such as Restful APIs) to better connect systems within the organisation, as well as external systems from partner companies in one's ecosystem.

- **Technology** – the smart application of 'frontier' technologies like artificial intelligence, cloud platforms, intelligent devices, to transform internal operations and external products/services to consumers.

“But to truly deliver on heightened consumer expectations, firms must make the big shift from dabbling in new technology, running pilots, POCs and incubators, towards truly embracing digital transformation in an enterprise-wide, committed manner.”

Hysom adds that many organisations, both locally and globally, are now appointing Chief Digital Officers (CDOs) and investing heavily in their digital transformation programmes.

“The advent of the CDO role reflects the need to coordinate different pockets of digital innovation from across the business, and orchestrate them into an enterprise strategy,” he says. “Today's digital pilots must become tomorrow's operational solutions.”

“Though most companies are experimenting with the likes of blockchain, artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things in limited ways, we'll soon see full adoption, wrapped within entirely new business models and business strategies.”

Making it real

Putting some of these principles into practice, Datacentrix' EIM team operates with the rallying cry of “enabling your digitisation journey”, distilling the principles of digital into real-world programmes that have tangible impact.

“For instance, in financial services, we've built the tools and processes for a major bank to pilot an entirely new way of onboarding new customers. We've leveraged mobile devices that scan ID books and other documents, fingerprints and facial recognition, and integrate into third-party systems. The result is a fully-secure, fully-compliant solution that means customers don't need to visit a branch to complete the FICA process.

“This could have a tremendous benefit to banks, as they play in an increasingly-competitive space, with many new entrants entering the fray in 2019 and beyond,” explains Hysom.

“Or, another great example is that of a resources giant, where we've taken the user-friendly principles of consumer apps and extended that thinking into an enterprise ecosystem. The result is an app-based extranet tool that securely exposes a number of different services, allowing its distribution network to place orders, report faults, amend profiles and verify compliance documents – all from the convenience of an intuitive mobile app.”

Scaling out

But, across the broader South African business landscape, there is much more of this kind of work to be done. Hysom says that, at a national level, the focus should be on skills development and small business incubation.

“At the moment, the demand for high-tech transformation programmes is outstripping the supply of quality people that can design, implement and deliver an end-to-end journey.

“Then, at a business level, digital hubs like the Silicon Cape initiative should be expanded across



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the rest of the country. Already, over 1,200 small businesses in the Western Cape are driving innovative new solutions and technologies via Silicon Cape.

“It's time for local government to accelerate these kinds of programmes, and adopt a similar stance to the UK government, for instance, which has provided preferential tax incentives to IP-based companies.”

Ultimately, many of the underlying technologies needed for the digital revolution – the likes of blockchain, IoT, 5G and machine learning – are rapidly maturing. Standards and best-practices are starting to emerge; and the risks and costs of embracing these new technologies are dropping.

With all this in mind, and with consumers expecting flying cars in just a few years, the time is now to prepare one's organisation for the digital revolution.

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