

The importance of being human in the digital age

Businesses embarking on a digital transformation journey must ensure that they remain cognisant of the human element within this process – how people react to new technologies, for instance, and their fears of being replaced by a machine – or they will be doomed to failure.

So says Bill Hoggarth, National Sales Manager: Digital Business Solutions at Datacentrix, who was speaking at the annual OpenText Digirruption Indaba.

“How we use information as human beings is becoming ever more important,” he clarified, referencing bestselling book *Humanification. Go Digital. Stay Human* by author Christian Kromme. “The word ‘humanification’ originated in mid 19th century from the German word ‘menschwerdung’, meaning the action or process of making something human. Kromme’s writing demonstrates the way in which technology unites humanity into one big organism, giving new insights into how to look at technology and its effect.”

According to Kromme, “Humanification is more than just an idea; it’s a new wave of understanding that helps to make sense of what’s driving technology, what’s in store for a new, more collaborative society, and how we do business in the future”.

And this statement corroborates with the Datacentrix mindset, said Hoggarth; as a business’ technology journey unfolds, organisations must keep tabs on whether it is impacting on human behaviour, with the result of driving change at the human level to unlock new and different methods of executing tasks and doing business.

Hoggarth likened the successful adoption of so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) technology building blocks to the local rollout of the e-toll gantries more than five years ago. “If your technology is strides ahead of humankind’s willing acceptance, it’s just not going to work,” he stated. “These 4IR technologies have all been around for some time now, but are exponentially more powerful than ever before, making end user acceptance increasingly critical.

“If it doesn’t weave the human being into the digital age, then 4IR just isn’t worth the time we ascribe to it; you might have all the latest bells and whistles available, but no-one will be using them. The e-toll project – and resultant public backlash – is a case in point.”

Businesses need to look at what has worked within the company to radically change behaviour, and why it was successful. You need to find out what has altered company culture, and how it has had a positive effect on people’s day-to-day tasks.

“Steve Jobs once said that you have to start with the customer experience and work backwards to the technology, and this is even more critical today than ever before. Businesses must have an end goal or desired outcome in their sights, and work back to the type of solution to be implemented.



Bill Hoggarth, National Sales Manager: Digital Business Solutions at Datacentrix

Technology acceptance is essentially people-led, so it is important that end users are aware that these new solutions will remove repetitive, systematic processes and unlock more, but different, job functions. They must be empowered to embrace technology and new processes willingly.

“This is a great mindset when we’re considering desired future states, whether we’re talking about a content management deployment, or whether we’re looking at changing the way that people create, author, manage and then make available the intelligence within documents and records. It’s really important that we think that way, instead of hastily jumping onto the latest technology bandwagon because it sounds ‘exciting’.”

Hoggarth made an analogy comparing today’s use of technology to the change in our approach to food. “High profile chefs like Heston Blumenthal have made us look at food in a completely different light, turning the simple act of eating into a multi-sensory experience with access to greater flavours than ever before.

“So too in the technology world, we are no longer constrained by what is housed within a data warehouse. We now have the capacity to access structured and unstructured, formal and informal, and internal and external data like never before. This means that we’re starting with more – and different – raw data ‘ingredients’, in real time, which can be cleansed, prepared, and brought together into a more palatable format for presentation to the correct person, at the right time, and at the right ‘portion’ size for those particular needs.”

A very important first step in unlocking the barriers to a successful digitalisation programme is communication, said Hoggarth.

“We need to talk to staff as humans operating within the digital age. We need to communicate with colleagues and executive management to find out how their day-to-day activities can be positively affected. We also need to look within, identify whether we’re setting the right example, and see that we have embraced the benefits of digitalisation ourselves.”

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Start with customer experience



Have an end goal



Communicate solution benefits



Empower willing adoption

SUMMARY

Technology unites humanity. This new, more collaborative society is changing how we do business. End user acceptance of new technologies that support this change dictates the success of even the best technologies.

- Consider the desired future state.
- Drive behavioural change on a human level.
- Apply learnings from historical technology implementations.
- Unlock the barriers to successful digitalisation using communication.
- Monitor how new technologies are influencing behaviour.
- Set the right example.
- Optimise the opportunities that data management presents to gain insight.