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The digital era; a seismic change & an opportunity to reimagine your business

Productivity challenges are one of the biggest economic threats facing Britain. At the same time, the intense and constant pace of change caused by the digital era continues to ripple across every industry.

We are in the midst of a digital revolution; technology is shaping our personal and working lives to an unimaginable degree. As the 4th Industrial Revolution develops, it brings with it a need for change, a change that will shift towards a more innovative, connected way of working. This involves rethinking the processes and culture in a business to boost productivity, recharging business intellect based on insight from powerful analytics and reshaping the entire organisation with an ecosystem of innovation. Businesses that are digitally savvy are leading the way and growing exponentially.

Brexit has evoked further uncertainty for businesses in the UK. The pressure on all British organisations is immense. Has this level of change and associated pressure always been like this, or are we operating in unchartered waters? Clearly being able to thrive in today's competitive environment requires a new skillset and in fact, a new outlook. It is important to take a step back so you can assess where preconceptions need to be thrown out of the window and an agile mindset needs to be applied, to rethink the way things are done and be open to questioning assumptions, methods and pre-conceived beliefs.

Depending on your views, this might be daunting, exciting, or both. It certainly provides the perfect opportunity to ensure you're not operating in a 'just business as usual' sense because in this age of disruption, only the quickest to respond, the fastest to change – or even transform – will survive and thrive.

In this white paper, we explore why this state of affairs should be a catalyst for change and how businesses can turn this into an opportunity. We have identified three major areas for improvement, which we argue agile companies are best placed to exploit in the future:

> Your workforce: reimagine your employees operating at their full potential, using digital technology to adapt and enhance the way they work.

> Your leaders: reimagine your management team, or your C-suite, gaining control and recharging the organisation with connected, real-time information. This insight on the projected performance of the business will enable you to spot fluctuations and predict trends to ensure your business can stay ahead of the game.

The digital era: time to reimagine your business

> Your customer service: reimagine transforming the service you deliver to your customers, making a positive impact on the everyday life of those customers, driving satisfaction and loyalty and – importantly - re-purchase.

The white paper will provide a framework from which you can establish if you're well-placed and hence ready to see the digital era as an exciting opportunity to reimagine your business - to adapt, with confidence, to compete, grow and prosper.

Your reimagined workforce: agile, dynamic, engaged

The impact of digital technology is arguably a seismic change, where the norm is no longer relevant, effective or appropriate. Nowhere is this more visible than within the workplace, causing a significant digital dilemma for organisations. What is this exactly? Increasingly, our expectations are being set by our own personal digital experiences, primarily outside of work. Fast and reliable connection to the internet, with use of the latest technology devices and access to your digital channel of choice, is now the norm.

Given value is based on personal expectations, how do businesses react and anticipate expectations within this digital era in order to maintain an engaged and responsive workforce? Ask yourself, what will be the impact if your employees continue to receive the same digital experience you have always provided?

Historically people have often spent their entire careers doing the same job, using the same skills and competencies, however, this is simply no longer the case. And if companies aren't embracing change, the danger is that those talented, dynamic individuals will simply leave their organisations.

A study by PwC; Millennials at Work: Reshaping the Workplace, exemplified this point, revealing that technology is often a catalyst for intergenerational conflict in the workplace and many Millennials feel held back by rigid or outdated working styles. It also found that over a quarter of Millennials now expect to have six employers or more, compared with just 10 per cent in 2008.

But the challenge of retaining dynamic Millennials won't be the only consequence if you don't reshape your entire business system with innovation and technology. Without providing the latest digital tools on a day-to-day basis, the resulting execution of daily tasks are carried out in the same inefficient ways they always have been. The results are well-reported - low productivity, inefficiencies, inability to change, leaving businesses lagging behind more forward-thinking competitors.

Ultimately, the digital dilemma organisations now face is a result of the expectations we may well have set ourselves.

So how do you start considering the move to a more agile workforce underpinned by flexible working practices?

Agility for efficiencies

Analysis by the Agile Future Forum, set up with the aim of maximising the competitiveness of UK businesses in the global marketplace, states that sales rise and workplace costs can be cut by between 3%-13% by embracing flexible working. In addition, one of the Agile Future Forum's members has improved productivity by 10% by up-skilling its employees to have the agility to undertake additional roles.

Investing in the latest tools and educating employees on the latest digital technology allows employees to be efficient and encourage a culture of innovation. By ensuring any manual, often repetitive processes that can be automated are, businesses can introduce new capabilities with minimum disruption, freeing up employees to create a flexible and productive workforce.

> Are your employees empowered with the right tools to be agile?

> Have you automated any of your manual processes, freeing up employees from low value-add activities that can be time consuming, frustrating and prone to human error?

> Does your workforce have secure access to the right information from any device, from any location?

> Have you considered how the latest technologies – from Cloud, social, mobile – can save time and free up employees to more value-add operations and tasks?

> Have you ever audited processes to identify inefficiencies and rethink how tasks are carried out?

The digital era: time to reimagine your business

Agility for a collaborative digital workplace

The Millennial workforce introduces a new kind of employee, with different outlooks and aspirations. This 'born-digital' generation demands a world responsive to its needs and expectations of what work is like. In fact, Gartner defines the digital workplace as one which enables new, more effective ways of working; raises employee engagement and agility and exploits consumer-oriented styles and technologies.

Workplace agility is important for employees who are better able to communicate and collaborate, as well as work more efficiently. It helps to liberate the workforce with a culture of autonomy, accountability and empowerment; these employees, who are often on the front-line dealing with customers, receive that direct feedback about what change is required from a product or service perspective.

Today's technology can facilitate this. Using customer relationship management (CRM) systems such as Microsoft Dynamics or Salesforce, every interaction with customers can be captured and made accessible to all the right people. This helps to encourage a culture of collaborative feedback, which can then be used to identify trends and anticipate problems, ensuring employees are on the front-foot.

> Do your employees have access to integrated, centralised systems to capture customer data and service history?

> Do your employees have the right data from which to make informed decisions, spot threats and identify opportunities?

> Are your employees empowered to work seamlessly across platforms and devices to collaborate in new ways?

Agility for attracting talent

Just as evidence points to the fact that those businesses moving towards more agile working practices are becoming smarter, leaner and more profitable, they're also the most likely to attract the top talent of tomorrow. Reimagining your business now means embracing new ways that people want and expect to work, thereby adapting your business to put your workforce at the heart of it.

Businesses need to be able to identify, appeal to and inspire a diverse talent pool; the key to successfully building an agile workforce. This is becoming more evident with the impact of Millennials in the workplace. The born-digital generation expect a level of investment in digital technology that supports and ideally embraces the way they like to work, from BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) policies, through to an openness to engaging with new messaging and social channels for communications.

However, is there a digital disconnect in Britain? A study by Cisco revealed nearly one-third of staff have little faith in their boss's ability to embrace new digital ways of working, that nearly one third (29%) of UK businesses are still not bringing any sort of digital technologies into their environment, with workers clueless about any digital technology roll-outs. 40% of those surveyed said that digital technology was not explained effectively to them by their employers when introduced, with 57% saying they would have liked more information on how to use it.

To build the capabilities they need to succeed in the future, businesses leaders need to take the time and space to rethink how the organisation operates and up their digital game in order to retain and attract the most dynamic talent.

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At Advanced we have undergone a major business transformation programme designed to support our future growth plans. Recruitment is one of the strategic pillars to ensure this is successful. Alex Arundale, our Group HR Director, talks about her vision to ensure the right talent is attracted and retained. *"Our vision is to have a dynamic, motivated and engaged workforce that reaches its potential and has the right skills and experience to support our business goals.*

We are passionate about investing in our people but in also recruiting dynamic, high performing and motivated individuals. They are key to our future expansion.

We are recruiting 1,000 new staff members through our innovative talent acquisition programme. We are committed to ensuring new employees are equipped through this programme with the technology, digital and business skills the UK economy needs.

Our high performing entry-level talent acquisition programme is designed to attract Britain's best talent. We're passionate about having a recruitment programme that avoids unconscious bias and is based on skills and competency with candidates from diverse backgrounds.

We believe candidate ability should be measured by capability and potential, ensuring everyone is given a chance. CVs are thrown out the window. To date, we're proud to say that 96% of new hires in Birmingham are Millennials, and 40% are female."

> How often do you reconsider your IT policies from an employee engagement perspective?

> Do you have policies on mobile access, BYOD and how inclusive are they?

> Do you have a 360-degree feedback strategy with employees to encourage feedback on digital policies/working practices etc?

> How many employees leave because of a lack of digital ways of working?

> How many staff members do you recruit because of your innovative engagement strategies and policies on digital technology?

Your reimagined leadership: insightful, agile, ahead of the game

With every industry experiencing or bracing itself for radical disruption, business leaders need to find new ways of not only keeping up, but keeping ahead of the game. Digital technologies afford company leaders the opportunity to recharge the business, quickly gaining control and insight with real-time data. With agile reactions required by customers, employees and competitors and business productivity a threat facing the majority of organisations, is it time to stop and rethink the way business leaders can best lead their organisation to succeed?

Research from The Global Centre for Digital Business shows that despite the awareness of both the likelihood and impact of digital disruption, it is not viewed as a board-level matter in 45% of companies.

When asked about their company's attitude towards digital disruption, 43% of executives said their business did not recognise it as a priority, with a further 32% taking a "follower" approach. In other words, only 25% of companies are proactively responding to the threats and opportunities of digital.

So how do you move to become a connected, agile leadership team and why see it as a priority?

Agility for decision-making

If business leaders had a single view (against year-end targets) of real-time information across their company, with up-to-date business forecasts mapped against sales, marketing, HR and operations, think how it might transform their world.

With data held in ntegrated, centralised systems, there's no need for time-consuming data set comparisons. Imagine the potential impact, with leaders freed up to make decisions faster and with confidence in a streamlined and connected view of the business.

As information-driven decision-making comes into play, leaders can use a digital dashboard to identify unexpected fluctuations, weaknesses, trends and threats. The board would be freed up to collaborate rather than compare, spotting inefficiencies, analysing the insight from their data into actionable insights, strategies and tasks.

> How much time do you spend getting an up-to-date view of the business?

> Can you think of examples that demonstrate how digital technologies have reshaped the way your business operates?

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> Would your business leaders ever be described as 'digital pioneers'?

> Do you have a technology infrastructure that is connected across the organisation, providing one view of the business?

> How important is understanding the role and benefit of digital technologies within your future strategy?

> Do you have a data-driven analysis approach within your business?

Agility to stay ahead of the game

The level of disruption witnessed as a result of the digital era has shaken up every single industry. Whether directly, as with Uber or Airbnb, or as observers of associated industries, business leaders operate with a sense of anxiety if their business heritage has been knocked. With the rise of innovative on-demand services led by online and mobile technologies, leaders are under pressure to consider the possibilities that may affect their sector and essentially, predict and prepare for the unknown.

However, by altering your mindset, this changing playing field gives every single business a chance to reimagine their future. Every leader can rethink goals, unearth and seize new opportunities, and gain the ability to transform and rebuild.

However, digital technologies need to become the backbone of a business to ensure they have the capabilities to innovate quickly – before the competition. A connected infrastructure will ensure leaders have the insight to spot an opportunity and assess its value, then mobilise their teams with the right talent to transform a service or product.

> What processes and techniques do you have for market analysis?

> How quickly could you change your product roadmap or a service strategy; more importantly, are you in control of these processes?

> Do you see digital disruption as a threat?

> Do you see digital transformation as a priority?

> Have you ever tried to reimagine your business and what it would take to consider yourself as agile and ahead of the game?

Your reimagined customer service: responsive, excellent, innovative

Customer service was one of the first areas of business to be transformed by digital technologies with innovative online brands in dominant positions. Amazon's personalised customer experience has arguably set the bar for consumer expectations when purchasing online. With the advent of social media, the customer experience was further affected by the realisation that consumers could engage over multiple channels with – primarily retail organisations initially – and publicly, putting power into the hands of the consumer.

These massive changes have now rippled across industries and into business, where partners, stakeholders and customers in every industry have similar expectations – whether a patient, a sports fan, or a student, through to any kind of professional services client.

Once again the rules of the game have changed and businesses offering any kind of product or service have had to respond, some better than others. The winners and the losers have been well reported and there's no slow-down in the level of expectation as people want and increasingly expect informed, personalised service with immediate responses and reactions, 24/7, from any device.

Customer service has become intrinsically linked with the success of a company's brand ethos around quality, excellence and capability.

With the power remaining firmly in the hands of the customer, how can businesses reimagine the way they deliver services and products to become renowned for excellent service?

Agility to surprise and delight

Customers want to be kept updated about the delivery of a new product; when it's in stock, when it will be delivered. Providing real-time tracking of the process online or via an app gives the customer control. For staff on the front-line, this visibility empowers them with knowledge of what's going on to service customers effectively.

The reality is that there is now an expectation from customers that organisations will have certain facts and figures at their fingertips; from their purchase history, through to understanding their preferences of engagement.

Those organisations that haven't invested in the latest digital technologies are limiting the possibilities of excellence in customer service, resulting in a genuine disconnect between the digital consumer expectation and the service they actually receive.

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It's simple; businesses not in control will negatively impact the customer experience. Whether it's on the phone, online or via social media channels, by transforming your customer service to make it real-time, secure and personalised, the rewards will be in loyalty and increased revenues. It will also motivate and inspire your customer service staff.

> Have you invested in the latest technologies to ensure customer service is excellent?

> Can you keep your customers informed about their service across multiple channels of their choice?

> Can you improve the overall customer journey?

> Can you evolve to meet your customers' changing needs? Is your company in a position to offer critical 'added value'?

> Is your customer experience aligned across all customer touch points – sales, marketing, operations, customer service, finance and HR, with all departments working on keeping and developing that customer?

Agility to innovate

Today's consumers demand new ways of learning about, trying, exploring, adopting and being social about your products and services. At the same time, loyalty is under the spotlight as companies constantly push to encourage and incentivise customers to change suppliers, products, services and sometimes even business models.

For example, Amazon is investing in one-hour and half-hour delivery promises, which goes above and beyond what is available in many others businesses and sectors. As each new technology emerges, businesses need to take the time to rethink, recharge and reshape what they can offer in response to these new demands.

Those companies keeping abreast of the latest developments can look to spot gaps in the market; those that listen to feedback from customers – and their customer facing employees.

> Do you have forums in place to secure feedback from customers about your service – whether face-to-face or via online groups?

> When was the last time you acted upon customer feedback to introduce a new product or service?

> When was the last time you identified a gap in the market and/or introduced something genuinely new?

> Do you have methods to track technology innovations and analyse the resulting opportunity for your industry sector?

Are you in the right place to reimagine your business?

The digital era is resulting in businesses and their processes becoming more transparent, making it clear which companies have been agile enough to adapt and which are failing to embrace the digital opportunity and are not keeping up with new ways of working – and therefore the competition.

Consequently, the new digital culture is driving companies to assimilate the new world, in order to move forward and transform themselves to plan for future success.

Leveraging the power of a digital business is no longer simply about incorporating digital technologies into the organisation. It's about? reimaging the organisation—and the culture within it—to drive innovation, to drive change, to drive the business forward. The question for every enterprise therefore has to be: are you in the right place to reimagine your business?

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