

8 ways HR can drive digital transformation

By [Jeff Ryan](#)

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Over the past 18 months, South African businesses have accelerated their adoption of digital technologies. While they have shown remarkable grit and adaptability in reinventing their businesses for an era of lockdown and social distancing, some gaps are becoming apparent in the change programmes they have implemented.



Image: Supplied

One of the major challenges lies in humans coping with the speed of technology change.

A recent international survey from Headspring found that 36% of HR and learning and development decision-makers see resistance from team members as the number one obstacle to change. However, 62% also agreed that technological trends are likely to impact their operations and workforce this year.

Given that the human factor is key in driving successful technology transformations, it thus stands to reason that the HR function has a critical role to play in catalysing change — especially at the layer of skills development and culture. This entails both supporting digital change across the business and embracing digitalisation of the HR function.

Here are 8 ways HR and people advocates can help to enable and drive digital transformation across the business:

1. Check the digital pulse of the business

If HR leaders want to play a bigger role in supporting digital change, a good place to start is to take stock of the current business strategy, employee readiness to embrace technology, and current pain points in technology adoption. From here, HR teams can craft strategies to support digital enablement in the wider business.

It's also important for HR to focus on digitalisation of its own processes if it wants to become a digital partner to the business. A survey of 1,400 companies around the world shows that there is much work to be done — only 20% of

respondents have adopted modern, digital HR capabilities in key areas such as reskilling and coaching, mentoring and training, and real-time analytics.

2. The automated HR function

According to global Gartner research, even with one-third of HR leaders planning for budget cuts this year, 90% still plan to either maintain or increase their investment in technology. This is not surprising, given how the pandemic has highlighted the gaps in their capabilities as well as how tech can help to improve efficiency in their processes.

With everything else they have on their plates, HR departments should minimise time spent on administrative functions like leave approvals and updating records. They should look for opportunities to streamline and automate routine business processes, so they can focus on the employee experience and strategic partnership with the business.

3. Get a seat at the tech table

HR is traditionally seen as a policy or admin hub, and is often excluded from the table where decisions about technology strategy get made – to the detriment of the business. One international survey found that one third of respondents agreed that involving the HR department from the beginning was key to digital transformation success, yet one quarter admitted that they had not done so in the past.

HR can play an invaluable role in bringing a human perspective to discussions about digital transformation — from insight into employee readiness and skills availability to supporting cultural change. HR leaders should ask to be included, and be prepared to offer data that will help drive the right technology decisions.

4. Transform the employee experience with tech

If employees still need to phone the payroll manager to get a copy of their payslip or email HR and their team leader to file expense claims or apply for leave, they're not working in a digital business. Modern employee self-service platforms can transform their interactions with the company, helping to integrate them into a digital business — all while saving large amounts of time for employees, HR and managers. Focus on using intuitive mobile apps and cloud solutions to streamline routine transactions.

5. Join forces with the finance team

CFOs and HR leaders can help drive organisational success by collaborating to understand workforce costs, the potential impact of HR digitalisation and automation, and how technology decisions will drive metrics like productivity and revenue generation.

By collaborating, they can make smart decisions about future hiring and training investments to ensure a smooth and sustainable growth path. Seamless integration and sharing of data across finance and HR systems can enable business intelligence to align people and financial decisions and optimise the performance of the business.

6. Data = track and measure impact

A major part of digital transformation is using data to make better decisions across the board, including in talent recruitment and talent management. HR teams should be prepared to use analytics to delve into performance metrics, in order to support digital investment decisions in the wider business and to track and optimise performance within HR. This is especially important in a work from anywhere environment, when traditional monitoring tools and metrics can be poorly suited.

7. Where do you find your talent?

The work-from-home pivot has challenged organisations to think about how work is done and who does it in new ways. One implication is that they needn't necessarily think of talent as only the people who come in and out of the office each day. If a job can be fulfilled remotely, does it need to be done by a full-time employee? Or by a person living in the same city as the business?

With today's talent marketplaces and collaboration tools, HR should think about different ways of accessing rare talent — from contractors and freelancers to outsourcing firms and the gig economy. This can help the organisation secure the skills and capabilities it needs to drive digital transformation, from cloud architects to data scientists.

8. Focus on the human

When focusing on digital transformation, HR functions should focus on the human experience in the workplace. In addition to upskilling and reskilling programmes for employees that may be affected by new technologies, HR should also consider how tech change may affect health and mental wellness and workplace relationships.

The strain of change can be overwhelming; HR needs to stand ready to help employees navigate challenges such as working from home for the first time or adjusting to how their job description has changed following the introduction of new technology. Change management is now a full time responsibility of HR.

HR – think of it as human relationships

HR has a key role to play in facilitating change as a company transforms and automates processes with digital technology. As the voice of the employee, it can articulate the fears and aspirations of the company's people in a digital age. It can also help drive adoption, partner with people in using technology to meet their potential, and create a culture where technology serves humans in building a more successful business.

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