Ten tips for achieving digital innovation in the workplace
As employees demand workplace flexibility, agility and an environment that encourages collaboration, demands on all areas of the business are reaching tipping point. In many ways, we have reached the age of the employee.

IT leaders have the ability to attract the best talent and create employee happiness, just by providing the right tools and services.

This means businesses can be more innovative, creative, and even grow faster – in a secure framework - as digital becomes a ‘must-have’ rather than a ‘nice-to-have’.

However - if you stand still, the world passes you by. But move too fast and risk it spinning out of control.
We caught up with some highly-respected business leaders to find out how CIO’s, CTO’s, and IT decision makers have embraced the age of the employee: creating innovation and implementing IT strategies that improve internal collaboration.

Share their journey, explore the challenges they’ve faced, and find out their advice for overcoming yours; whether it’s convincing the board to back you financially, getting buy-in for your next IT investment, or encouraging user adoption for new tools.
Prove it supports the wider business strategy

“Digital is not just about a set of technologies, it’s about a mind-set, agility, speed, and collaboration – all four things are critical.”

Rob Holtom, Head of Digital Innovation, BT
“I think you need to demonstrate how digital supports your corporate strategy, rather than trying to create new objectives or an additional strategy around digital transformation. You need to look at what the business is trying to achieve and the role technologies like cloud can play in enabling this – whether it’s speeding up deployment or enabling access to the latest software tools. Next you need to bring the company with you when it comes to your digital vision. Think about what the technology means for people in their role – how it will improve their day-to-day life and speed up workflows. The key is to consider how the digital transformation process will benefit the entire organisation – both internally and externally.

You also need to think about the outcomes of what you want to achieve – for us it was agility and greater collaboration. Becoming more agile must be a priority. In terms of collaboration - enabling your employees to link up in ways they haven’t been able to in the past, especially geographically, is essential to providing a good customer experience.

Internally, the success of the entire project comes down to adoption of your digital innovation. You can’t just make the tools available and hope people will use them – the key here is to invest in technology your employees are familiar with and engage them in the transformation process.”
Get the CFO on board from the beginning

“I couldn’t see a reason why we needed on-premise servers, and still can’t – they take up a lot of real estate and don’t cover the rents on that space.”

Mark Evans, Head of IT, RLB
“We have already seen a number of benefits for employees, clients and for the business, through moving to the cloud. Employees have greater flexibility: as long as they’re connected to the internet, they have access to all core services – plus, the simple user interface means the training requirement is minimal across the business. This is not always the case when investing in new tools!

From an IT (and board level) point of view we have also been given peace of mind – the back-up side of migrating to cloud is an additional bonus that is perhaps underestimated. Shortly after we migrated to the cloud for example, we had an office flood: not only did all our employees work from home with no trouble, but we didn’t lose any data.

Technology is a wonderful thing but it doesn’t mean anything if the board don’t buy in – luckily our board have an appetite to deliver value to both the business and the client.

It all comes down to making IT a business decision. My advice is not to get too involved with technology – within IT, people get wowed by technology but this obsession doesn’t transfer well outside of the department and into the wider business. IT is not a technological challenge – it’s a business proposition when done right!

As such you should involve the CFO or budget holder right from the off-set. In our case, I shared two emails with our CFO right at the beginning of the project: the new invoice for the cloud model, and an old invoice from the on-premise model. Once we’d demonstrated the cost saving in black and white, he was on board and the implementation was much smoother as a result.”
The key challenge when investing in technology is to stay focused on your goal. If companies took a critical look at their IT projects and stopped those which don’t either help employees do their jobs, or contribute to better customer experience, my guess is that there would be a lot fewer projects to work on.”

Kim MacGillavry, VP of Customer Experience, DHL Freight
“In the run up to making the larger investments, and – crucially – before making any organisational changes, we tested the basic processes in the field. Under the banner “Making the first move”, an initiative was started which replicated the target processes using legacy systems. This was a great way to learn and refine the programme before going full scale and making bigger commitments. We measured both customer and employee perceptions before and after, and ran the initiative for two consecutive years.

The results were hugely encouraging.

To get everyone on board, you need a committed leadership team, a customer centric culture throughout the company, and collaboration across departments. Without each of these three things, technology will have no effect.

Technology cannot make managers better leaders, but it can encourage better collaboration which can result in employees being more engaged. My suggestion to any company embarking on a CX journey is to test the maturity of your organisation along these lines before even considering any investment. At the end of the day, your people create the experience, not your technology.”
“We realised how difficult the situation was here when customer satisfaction surveys showed that despite increasing the time we spent maintaining our core services, staff and students still weren’t happy.”

Rene Storgaard, CIO, University of Northern Denmark
“The knock on effect of failing to provide a good standard of core services is reputation. In Denmark, education is free so there’s no financial competition between institutions. As a result, service levels become a differentiating factor and, at the time, we weren’t fairing well.

When we moved to the cloud we saw an immediate reduction in costs. Before the move, we had two people running our datacentre and in order to do this competently, they needed highly specialised skills. It became very costly to continue to provide the development and learning opportunities they needed to keep up with the demands of the job and ironically, the better skilled they became, the greater risk they’d be headhunted.

In the end it became clear that so few people running a failing critical platform was a major operational risk so this made a rapid case for change. If you don’t have such an impetus, it can be easy to be conservative and stick with what you know, but in my opinion, it’s a major risk to remain static.

And whilst security is often quoted as a barrier to cloud based services, I think the opposite. We’ve moved everything out, and migrated to vendor service which have security levels completely beyond our own means. The security we were capable of in-house is old news to cloud vendors, and their offering is only getting better and better.

So those two facts were key to getting buy-in from the business, and using an external consultant to help us create the strategy was hugely helpful in the sense that it ensured our situation was considered objectively, that internal comms were smoother and that we knew we had expert help on our side.”
“People can generally be swept along with a social movement – employees either embrace it, or leave. The key here is for IT to win the hearts and minds of employees with a cultural change in the organisation.”

Dr Chris Brauer, Director of Innovation at Goldsmiths, University of London
“The job of the CISO is to research and present the facts. Make sure your business understands the risk and ensure the data owners sign off on them. We face risks in life all the time – it’s about whether we take the time to truly understand what might go wrong and sensibly make decisions about how to mitigate it. If your business will benefit from that product, security shouldn’t be a worry – it’s about objective risk assessment. It’s up to you as a CISO to describe the threat, the impact and put it up to the rest of the organisation to accept it. It can be hard to get people to accept risks, but it’s not nearly as difficult as it used to be!

In my experience, these threats very rarely happen. It doesn’t mean they don’t happen but it’s very rare. Having a good plan in place in case of disaster helps a lot, but the key thing is right at the start: don’t scaremonger, present the facts, and get your stakeholders on board.

A lot of CISOs have resisted change because they see risks that just don’t exist. It’s a confirmation bias: people hear something, and hear it again and before you know it, they’re looking for the problem everywhere. That’s happening a lot in cyber security at the moment, and I don’t know where it will end. My advice to CISOs is to think clearly: which risks are actually pertinent to my business – and how likely is it to really happen?

As part of this it’s important to identify your priorities – they’re not the same in retail, as for government, for example. Unless you understand who and what might do your business harm, you can’t protect it. If you understand exactly who might break into your systems and why, you can clearly identify whether or not a technology represents an avenue of attack or an opportunity for your business. For a retailer, the benefit of the cloud on its own far, far outweighs the risk.”
“In the past you only had to worry about sharing your data with other members of staff within the same company – now we’re sharing it throughout the world.”

Brian Brackenborough, CISO, Channel 4
“C4 being the company that it is, we have to collaborate with a large number of companies throughout the world, and they vary in size. What we need to be able to do is share information safely and securely in a way that’s transparent to the end user, because they just want to be able to do their job. So the biggest challenges that we have within information security at C4, is finding solutions that enable that ability for the end user to be able to just come in, share the information that they need to share, giving us the confidence that that data is going to the right people at the right time.

As we start to see the cloud growing, with such force at the moment, we’ve got to find better ways in which we can manage our data safely and securely, and make it available to other companies. In the past you only had to worry about sharing your data with other members of staff within the same company – now we’re sharing it throughout the world. We’re doing it as interviews are coming in and we need to be able to convert that, edit it, then push it out on television channels – and we’ve got to find better ways of doing it, and that’s what we’re constantly looking for.

People are wanting to do things quickly, you can process things faster in the cloud, it’s easier to update things when they’re in the cloud, and so I think your focus changes slightly – you’re not actually trying to hold on to everything like Gollum in Lord of the Rings with his precious ring, what you’re actually trying to do is ensure that everybody you want to have access can get access, but also be able to revoke it at a moments notice, to be able to control it, and actually demonstrate to your management that you have the ability to do that.”
When people have the confidence to make change and progress, speed increases tenfold.

Clifton Cunningham, CTO at TES Global
“The biggest challenge was that TES was very much a traditional enterprise tech group. Things were very bureaucratic, it was risk averse, slow to change. So the first thing was to transform those teams, moving away from the traditional and into the modern digital age. The one thing I focussed on was the transformation of culture. It’s now all about empowering small teams to own products, deliver change quickly and independently and to effectively test and measure success.

I did this by immediately bringing in a small handful of like-minded people who were already in my network. I think you need to find the right people and build teams around them – that way you are demonstrating success right from the start, building confidence and creating mentors for other teams. You generally find that very different people will thrive in a new, agile practice. The team you have in place which worked well in your traditional IT structure, may not be the right team to make change. This new team is about dispelling fear, demonstrating to people that this does work, the wheels don’t fall off, and paving the way, making it smoother for the rest of the business.

When it comes to investing in new technology, first and foremost, don’t do it all at once. There’s definitely a place for a bimodal approach – the practice of managing two separate, coherent modes of IT delivery - so make an investment in a cloud platform and start operating some systems there; keeping the security of your legacy systems alongside, particularly for your core business. At TES we had a lot of old school processes that just can’t be forced out too fast, so despite the fact we push hard and develop quickly on the digital side, we still keep a traditional approach to some core services.”
“Following the success of Dropbox Business we’re also now looking to place our entire membership database on the cloud, a huge leap for a company that wasn’t using the cloud two years ago.”

Jane Pendlebury, CEO, HOSPA
“Because we’ve been able to transform our business model bit by bit, at our own pace and at a reasonable cost, we’ve actually moved from on-premise computing and into the cloud almost without realising! And certainly without the huge financial outlay and change in culture we were facing with some of the other solutions.

Today the HOSPA team are using a centralised database of documents which can be updated in real time, by assigned contributors to that document, regardless of their location – and we don’t plan to stop there. Following the success of Dropbox Business we’re also now looking to place our entire membership database on the cloud, a huge leap for a company that wasn’t using the cloud two years ago.

We’d certainly recommend a move towards this sort of system to all our members. In truth, when you look at the retail industry, most companies in the sector have been quick to adopt new technology solutions which allow for easier collaboration and communication. I feel this has been a bit of a missed opportunity by the hospitality industry.”
“If organisations aren’t willing to take risks, there will be plenty of others who are, and ultimately your business is going to be behind your competitors if you do not too.”

Lee Barney, Head of Information Security at Marks and Spencer
“Create a technology culture - Your expectations around individual adoption of technology and business objectives should be a clear and upfront part of the value system of your organisation. Ensure you’re employing people who understand the benefit of technology and work with staff who are skilled at harnessing the power of software within their roles to coach others.

Involve staff right from the start - By being clear about the business objectives, by including senior users in the assessment stage, allowing them to help test and choose technologies gives you a crucial conduit into the workforce. These superusers will represent the user community, can become champions of the technology within the organisation and help change habits from the inside. Equally, by allowing staff hands on experience and testing, you’re reducing costly mistakes, learning as you develop and ultimately creating the right tool for the business in a much more agile and cost-effective way.

Make it about productivity - The key is to relate to employees and their priorities. It’s not a tool, it’s a strategy. It’s the key to making people more productive, helping them to better achieve their own objectives. We all understand that there is only so much time in the day, and we’re all stretched within those hours, so focussing on how technology can improve the working day for each employee - and improve productivity for the business as a whole - is a great way to relate to your staff.

Ensure the teaching comes from co-workers, not IT - Finally, to make the transition easier and more natural for the majority of the user community, allow their peers, your superusers, to do the training. People generally feel much more comfortable looking towards their peers for support, but above anything, it’s about business users being able to demonstrate to their colleagues the practical application of the technology in their everyday life.”
“We really see digital as a different way of thinking – it’s a mind-set as opposed to a channel – so the challenge for other organisations is where digital is still considered a channel. That’s such an outdated view. Businesses need to embrace digital if they want to speak to customers in a different way.”

Rhona Bradshaw, Virgin Media
“When I started there was no such thing as digital as we know it now, but the concept of digital has come into its own as the company has grown.

Primarily now, it’s about integration. Despite all the change, the core platforms have remained the same. What we need to do now, is to use digital to be a bridge to the legacy systems which are required, but to also be a gateway to the use of new platforms like cloud, which allow us to do things faster.

Having a dedicated team for digital puts us in a unique position where we can set digital objectives and build digital platforms from end to end – unlike in other organisations, there’s never a point where we have to hand over control to another department. We have the marketing skills to understand our audience and the technological skills to implement the best systems.

What other companies often do is to make digital decisions based on marketing or technology priorities – neither is right or wrong but we are able to make digital transformation strategies based on a more holistic view of the business, taking into account employee and end user needs.”
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