TREKKING THE PATH TO DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION WITH DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS AND PAPERLESS WORKFLOWS

BY ELIZABETH BRAMWELL

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS NOT ABOUT GOING FROM PHYSICAL TO DIGITAL; IT'S ABOUT BECOMING EFFICIENT, IT'S ABOUT BEING ABLE TO USE THE INFORMATION, REGARDLESS OF WHAT FORM IS HAS.

— ANKE CONZELMANN, DIRECTOR OF PRODUCT MANAGEMENT AT IRON MOUNTAIN

Digital transformation is hard, and few organisations are doing it as well or as quickly as they would like. In fact, a recent study by McKinsey found that as many as **70% of transformation initiatives fail to achieve their goals.** The truth is that change is hard, and it's less about technology and more about people. Businesses and their employees are under constant pressure to adapt to an ever-changing technology landscape, while emerging technologies bring both disruption and new opportunities.

Transformative technologies like the **internet of things, cloud apps and mobile devices** have presided over an exponential increase in the amount of digital data. The sheer volume of data now being generated daily has had a profound effect on business processes to the extent it necessitates the speedy adoption of **emerging technologies** like machine learning, artificial intelligence and blockchain. The challenge lies in classifying, managing and simply making sense of data sets that, in printed form, would comprise many billions of pages even for a small company.

Above all, digital transformation requires a culture change within the organisation. It's about establishing use cases that illustrate the tangible benefits new technologies can bring to the business. These benefits might include **delivering better value** to customers, **improving staff productivity** and so forth. It's not about implementing the latest technology for the sake of being at the cutting-edge – it's about making people's lives better and driving success. In fact, digital transformation is perhaps something of a misnomer. Rather, it's about managing change in the business environment by introducing new and more efficient ways of working, growing and communicating. The digital element is simply an enabler.

HARNESSING DATA-DRIVEN INSIGHTS THROUGH EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

> ONE TERABYTE OF DATA IS THE EQUIVALENT OF 3.3 BILLION PRINTED PAGES. THERE'S SO MUCH CONTENT OUT THERE, BUT HOW DO WE ENRICH IT? HOW DO WE USE IT? HOW DO WE MANAGE IT? HOW DO WE GOVERN IT?
>
> – SUE TROMBLEY, THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AT IRON MOUNTAIN

Whether it's a browsing session, a customer support ticket, a product review or something else entirely, every digital activity generates data. As technology continues to transform daily life all over the world, the amount of data being created increases exponentially. On average, the amount of data generated by businesses is increasing by 50% per year, and the trend isn't showing any signs of slowing down. The path to a successful digital transformation is largely about transforming data into **actionable insights** and implementing a culture change, whereby people recognise its value and know how to use it.

One of the most common reasons for digital transformation initiatives to fail is that there often isn't a **clearly defined goal.** If businesses don't know what they're aiming for, they're not going to hit their targets, and the journey will constantly shift direction, leaving everyone involved in the lurch. All too often do business leaders see digital transformation as moving from physical to digital and implementing new technologies simply because they feel that's what they have to do to keep up. However, driven by a mindset of change-management, digital transformation becomes a matter of **improving operational efficiencies** and being able to use information (i.e., data) to its fullest potential.

The business technology sector has long been a popular venue for hype. Early adopters and other enthusiasts are sometimes driven by the latest shiny new objects rather than real-world use cases. In the enterprise environment, this approach will only lead to contention among employees and, in many situations, organisations end up worse off than when they started. It should instead **start with a use case**– a clearly defined **business reason** for making the journey. For example, blockchain technology might help companies meet their compliance and security goals, while machine learning might allow them to more efficiently manage and make sense of constantly growing data sets.

Today, business intelligence is almost entirely about data-driven insights. Even organisations which aren't especially technology-heavy are facing rapidly expanding data sets. They all need to bridge the gap between data and insights, a journey that requires not just new technologies, but also a culture change. For example, artificial intelligence and machine learning offer ways to parse **enormous volumes** of data that would be practically impossible to evaluate manually. Some real-world examples include revealing likely future outcomes, learning more about the target audience or determining which marketing platforms are delivering the highest return on investment. However, due to the disconnect between business processes and technology, more than 80% of data remains underutilised[1].

1 https://www.enterpriseinnovation.net/article/data-centers-turning-unexplored-data-insight-1151649239

BOOSTING PRODUCTIVITY WITH PAPERLESS WORKFLOWS

DIGITAL IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF. IT'S ABOUT EXPLAINING THE BENEFITS IN TERMS OF EFFICIENCY, QUALITY, THROUGHPUT, INCREASED SATISFACTION AND IF THERE AN INTEREST.

– PATRICK ZAKRZEWSKI, MANAGER OF INBOUND INFORMATION FLOWS AND ARCHIVES FOR GENERALI INSURANCE

While the term itself is relatively new, organisations have been on a digital transformation path ever since the dawn of the computer age. Today, in the era of Industry 4.0, we've reached a time when the sheer amount of information being generated every day by digital activities has rendered print obsolete in many situations. After all, filing cabinets containing many millions of documents are hardly practical (or environmentally friendly).

Migrating to paperless workflows is a core tenet of digital transformation as well as a critical first step in harnessing data-driven insights. Many organisations still retain printed records, but the problem with relying on physical documents is that they're not easily **searchable**. When an employee has to rifle through thousands of records in dozens of filing cabinets, that's hardly a productive use of their time. By digitising the process, in this case by scanning said documents and using optical character recognition (OCR) technology, it's possible to make these records searchable. By attaching metadata, such as filenames, customer names, transaction numbers and dates, it's possible to search through them in an instant. Therefore, employees can spend more time acting on the information available to them rather than just searching for it.
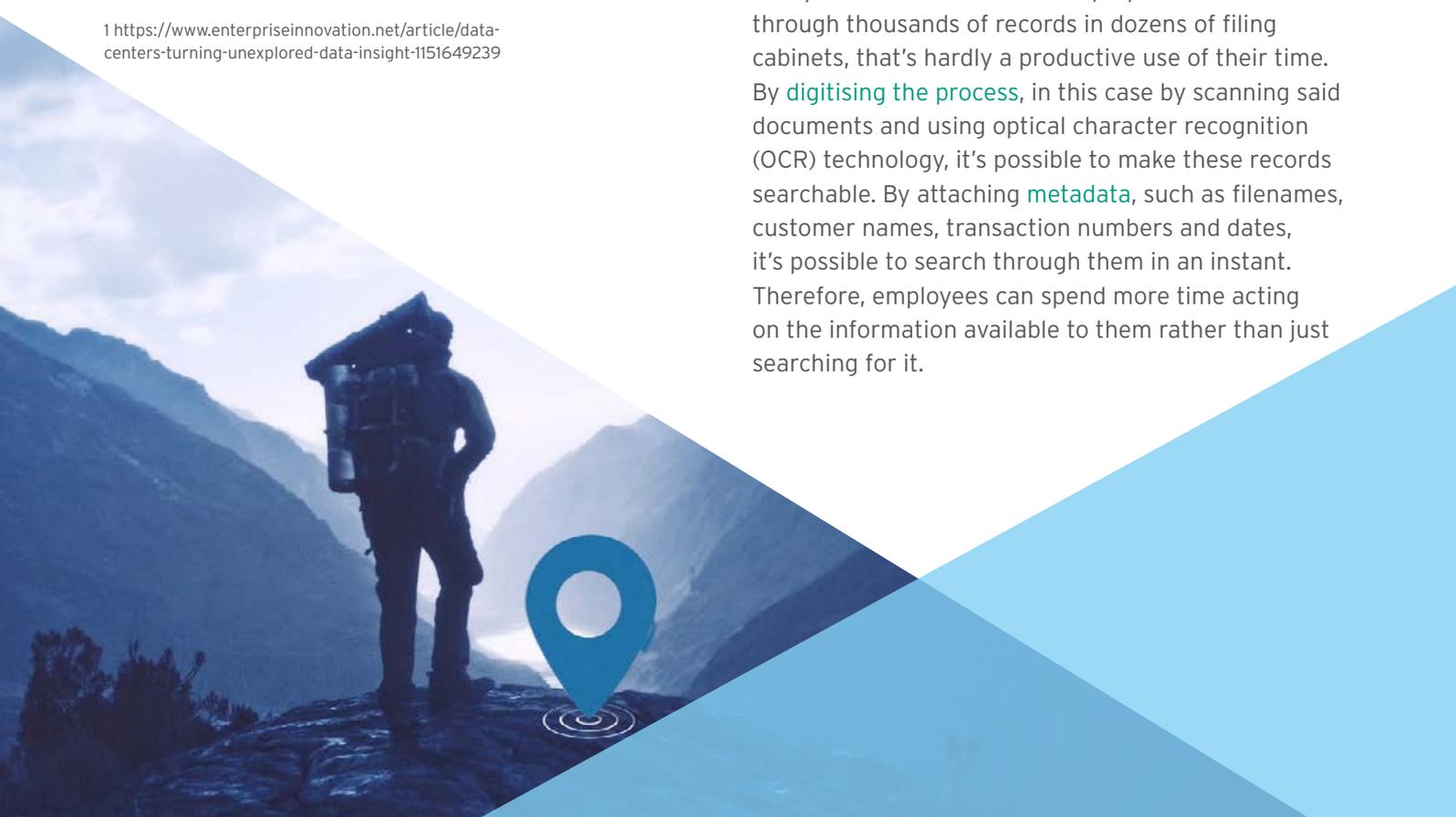
Paper documents remain one of the single biggest causes of bottlenecks in the workplace. A letter, for example, can take several days to arrive by post. Printed documents are also more susceptible to getting lost or mislaid. Yet, **paper slowdown** still touches almost every business process, particularly in established organisations that find themselves having to leave behind decades of familiar procedures. By eliminating paper from the workflow, those bottlenecks are no more, and administrators will have more control over mission-critical factors like **business continuity, compliance, security, information governance and data-driven insights**. By adding emerging technologies like AI and machine leaning into the mix, they can further **enrich their data** and, in doing so, take productivity and efficiency to new levels.

FINAL WORDS

There's no better way to **improve efficiency, productivity** and, ultimately, **customer satisfaction**, than through a clearly defined digital transformation strategy. What's most important, however, is the human element. Establishing real-world use cases will make the journey towards digital technologies much clearer. For example, business decision-makers can spend more time **acting on insights** rather than searching through data, employees will become more motivated and productive when they don't have to spend many hours on tedious manual tasks, while customers will be happier to receive a more efficient service. Being able to communicate these advantages is where **every digital transformation initiative must begin**.

With almost seven decades of experience, Iron Mountain is a global authority in data and records management. On April 9th, 2019, we were awarded the Google Cloud Technology Partner of the Year for AI and Machine Learning.

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