World Association of News Publishers

FACEBOOK JOURNALISM PROJECT

BURN THE SHIPS

A GUIDE TO IGNITING CULTURAL CHANGE FOR NEWS MEDIA COMPANIES

Lessons from the **Cultural Change Ignition Program for Latin American News Publishers** organized by the World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) and the Facebook Journalism Project (October 2020-January 2021)

PREFACE

"Change is your friend, disguised as your enemy", someone smart once said to me and it really resonated.

Working as an independent digital consultant, and before in leadership roles at the BBC and Culture Trip, I am used to dealing with change in media on a daily basis. Regardless of circumstances and irrespective of whether you drive change or are on a the receiving end of it, above all, we do learn to deal with resistance, uncertainty and anxiety. As humans, we are fantastic at both adapting to change and collaborating with others while doing it - the two key ingredients for future successes and optimism. We all just need a bit of help and support.

"Organization is like the human body. It needs viruses, so the body can learn how to survive and remain strong" - this unattributed Japanese quote describes the main component of culture change perfectly - we know of many real-life examples when companies failed to adapt because they were structurally unable to accept and incorporate visible changes around them. Disrupt yourself, they say.

"I'd rather be green and growing instead of ripe, ready to rot", John Maeda, a distinguished US designer, technologist and teacher, wrote famously in his seminal "Redesigning Leadership" book, arguably one of the best works on the subject ever created. It sends a message to leaders of the day, that they should really know their 'under the hood' stuff, more so now than, perhaps, ever before. Change starts with you.

Culture change means different things to different people, though.

It's about people: achieving internal staff buy-in, empowering changemakers, saying no with empathy.

It's also about processes: being audience-centric, failing quickly and learning from it, applying user needs to everything you do, aligning content and product disciplines, agreeing on your North Star, letting others get you there ("Future leaders must be stubborn on vision but flexible on details" - Jeff Bezos, Amazon founder) through joint OKRs.

It's about organisational self-improvement: bridge roles, that we grew to love and rely on so much, making themselves redundant in the process, while C-suite gets reverse-mentored by junior team members.

It's about overcommunication: only when you are tired from your own voice repeating the same thing over and over, chances are that your message is starting to land.

This actionable, helpful report is going to be equally useful to those in senior leadership positions or those preparing for a bigger role, but also, especially to those who are only starting to think about leading others one day. Digital transformation has no end, and everyone must play their role in it, firstly by changing their own mindset, and then by changing others.

"Complete digital transformation is neither possible nor, even, desirable. Everyone wanting to lead must share the role of CMO – Chief Mindset Officer" (Minter Dial, Caleb Storkey, Futureproof).

Let's all add that great title to our CVs, friends! Happy reading!

Dmitry Shishkin,
Independent digital consultant
World Editors Forum board member
Leader in Residence, UCLAN

ABS TRACT

In the last two decades, the news media industry has undergone profound changes brought by the internet. However, digital transformation demands much more than mere wagers and simple intentions; it requires a new mindset, understanding that change is not the exception but the rule in the world where we now live. Cultural change, told by those who are leading the charge in digital, cannot be done in dribs and drabs or driven like rudderless cargo barge. Cultural change is as radical as burning the ships to guarantee that the only path leads forward.

This guide summarizes the lessons shared by leaders of several industries during the **Cultural Change Ignition Program for Latin American News Publishers** organized by **WAN-IFRA** and the **Facebook Journalism Project** from October 2020 to January 2021. With all the challenges raised his new publishing environment, the program's speakers shared tips and experiences for participants to ignite cultural change in their own companies.

About WAN-IFRA

The World Association of News Publishers (WAN-IFRA) is the global organization of the world´s press. Its mission is to protect the rights of journalists and publishers around the world to operate independent media. It provides members with expertise and services to innovate and prosper in a digital world and perform their crucial role in society.

www.wan-ifra.org

About the FACEBOOK JOURNALISM PROJECT

The Facebook Journalism Project works with publishers around the world to strengthen the connection between journalists and the communities they serve. It also helps address the news industry´s core business challenges. It develops trainings, programs, and partnerships.

www.facebook.com/journalismproject

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About the CULTURAL CHANGE IGNITION PROGRAM

From October 2020 to January 2021, the **Cultural Change Ignition Program for Latin American News Publishers**, organized by WAN-IFRA and the Facebook Journalism Project, brought together 30 Latin American executives from 15 media companies, to hear from nine experts in digital change from inside and outside the news industry. During eight sessions, the participants covered various topics to reflect on and ignite cultural change in today's media:

- **DATA** AS DRIVERS OF THE STRATEGY.
- RELATIONSHIP WITH **AUDIENCES**.
- **ORGANIZATIONAL** CHANGE.
- **TALENT** MANAGEMENT.

The program's academic coordination was led by Diego Carvajal, Digital Director of US Hispanics and LATAM in Discovery, Inc. The speakers in the ***Cultural Change Ignition Program*** were:

JOAO ADAO

Regional Director of Facebook for Latin America, Argentina

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For the speakers´ complete resumés, see:
https://events.wan-ifra.org/events/latam-cultural-change-ignition-program-2020/speakers

THIRTY MEDIA EXECUTIVES FROM THE FOLLOWING COMPANIES PARTICIPATED TO THE PROGRAM:

A Gazeta
#GrupoBandeirantes
GAZETA DO POVO
O GLOBO
RECORD TV
sbt
NOTICIAS CARACOL
Semana
am
debate
EL FINANCIERO
MILENIO
tv azteca
PERFIL

INTRO DUCTION

Some historians have attributed the order to **"burn the ships"** to Hernán Cortés during the Conquest of Mexico. Others quote Alexander the Great more than 1,000 years earlier on the Phoenician Coast. Whoever conceived the idea decided to set fire to his fleet **to prevent his crew from fleeing** a virtually impossible endeavor.

Before the arrival of the internet, traditional media leaders were not forced to make drastic decisions. At first, most of them failed to realize the importance the internet deserved, so the media's digital newsrooms, or digital silos, were receiving little attention twenty years ago. The positive side to this indifference was that digital teams could experiment freely. This fostered a wide range of innovative and quality news products.

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the change was already a certainty: digital natives had been born, grown up, and spread throughout the world. The media's traditional business model based on circulation and advertising suffered an important disruption; news consumption was increasingly digital and mobile. The media were forced to cut staff, rethink consolidate and in some cases abandon their traditional print platforms, concentrate their ownership schemes, or simply close their operations.

Yet journalism is still a crucial activity for democratic societies, and many news companies around the world have taken appropriate measures to adapt to this new age.

But a few measures is not enough. To adapt to the complexity and speed of the digital age, to stay relevant and indispensable, **it is necessary to stop, think, and fully transform the way the news product is made. In other words, it is necessary to "burn the ships."**

The sessions in the *Cultural Change Ignition Program* guided participants to reflect on ways to make profound changes in their day-to-day media operations. Changes in the news companies' culture, in the way they perceive themselves, in the conception of their role in society, and in the way they operate, compete, and monetize.

This guide features four key lessons that we hope will be useful for publishers that seek to start igniting profound changes in their companies. Each chapter provides details — practical and visual — on each lesson, with advice and examples from the program's experts:

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IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP CHAPTER 24

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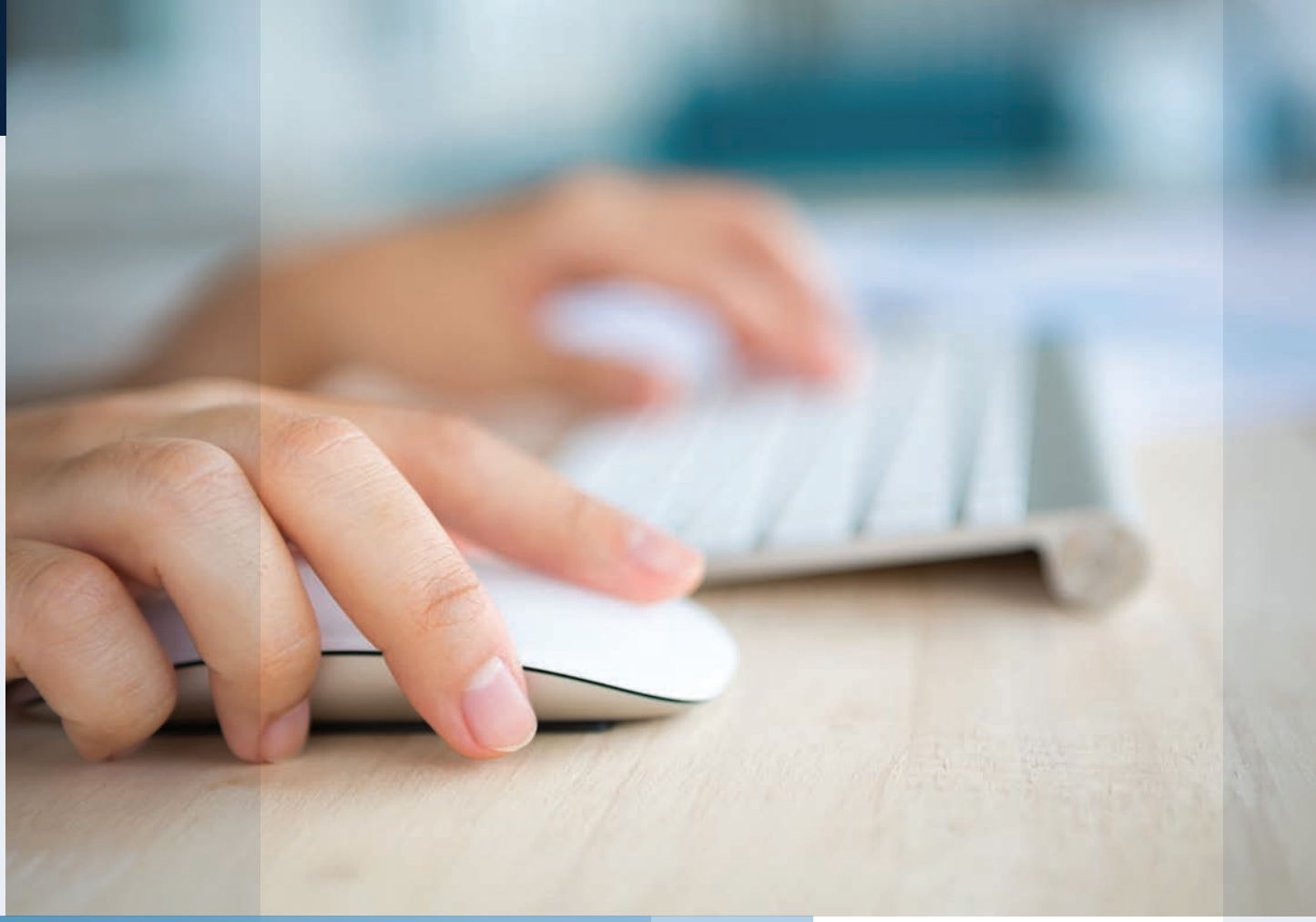
ASSEMBLE A DATA-BASED STRATEGY 32



PUT THE USER AT THE CENTER

In a market saturated with news, the audience can find whatever they want and need with a simple click. Our mission is to create products that meet our users' needs, to discover our edge. First, we need to identify and understand what these needs are.

Cultural change begins by putting users at the center of the company's strategy.

The newsroom's mystique was built around editors that pretended to know what their readers wanted. They organized the journalists' work and determined the next day's front page based on what they assumed readers wanted to read. Nobody asked readers what they wanted (nor was there a simple way to do so). The same was true for radio and television.

With scarce competition, readers remained loyal to the same daily newspaper. But the internet arrived and provided free and accessible information. Smartphones and digital platforms (search engines and social networks) put the news at everyone's fingertips around the world. This inverted the logic of news consumption: we shifted from readers, radio listeners, and TV viewers who searched for information through their media outlet of reference, to media outlets that set out in search of the attention of their users, in a highly competitive scenario saturated with free news.

SAME NEWS, DIFFERENT NEEDS

As Digital Editor of BBC World Service, Dmitry Shishkin followed the research and implementation of the **user needs model**. From **2016 to 2018**, **BBC asked users of the British network what they wanted from the news, why they consumed news, and how they defined news**. Based on the results, this British public media company introduced changes in product development and proved that the amount and **engagement** of users increases when the **agenda is covered differently,** when newsrooms deliver products based on audience needs.

WHAT DO NEWS USERS WANT?

BBC FOUND THAT NEWS CONSUMERS' NEEDS CAN BE GROUPED INTO SIX CATEGORIES:

Update me

Users of news want to know what is happening in their community, their country, and the world. This need is widely met by the media. Users find information easily and abundantly.

Give me perspective

In the face of controversial subjects, opinion pieces, analyses, and even counterpoints to the topic, allow users to form their own points of view.

Divert me

People get tired of hearing bad news all the time. So, a balanced approach is essential, adding humor and entertainment

Keep me on trend

Another audience need is to know the trends, what other people are discussing in the media.

Inspire me

Stories that speak to the heart, stories of people doing incredible things, stories of people persevering despite all odds. These are the stories that touch our audiences, that move them.

Educate me

Media organizations take knowledge for granted, and this distances them from their audiences. Readers are reluctant to relate to the media because they do not understand some stories or their context. That is why pieces that explain a topic generate highly loyal audiences.

REMEMBER

HIGHLIGHTS BY DMITRY SHISHKIN

Audiences spend all day on their cellphones, but **they devote only 5% of their cellphone time to news**.

The hard news is not sufficient to attract people regularly or with enough engagement.

General news is everywhere: relevance and engagement are what make the difference.

There is a **mismatch between what audiences want in digital** (information, yes, but also understanding, inspiration, usefulness, diversion) and **what the media delivers**.

Growth comes when users' different needs are met constantly, creatively, and strategically.

It is not about covering the newsworthy facts but covering them differently.

HIGHLIGHTS BY ANITA ZIELINA

"If audiences feel seen and heard and **if they feel that the product meets their needs, they are more willing to pay**".

DATA FOR ANALYZING USER NEEDS

Dmitry Shishkin recommends labeling each type of content with one of the six user needs categories:

INFORMATION | UPDATE | PERSPECTIVE | EDUCATION | DIVERSION | INSPIRATION

By compiling this data for several weeks, it is possible to better understand how users respond to your content.

In his experience with content categorized according to user needs, Shishkin found valuable data:

In a case study, 70% of the articles produced by an organization corresponded to the **Update** category but resulted in only 7% of the page views.

The category **Education** is not used very frequently, but it has the **highest loyalty rate**.

"At BBC, we discovered that **Inspiration** articles were three times more popular than **Information** articles."

Some sections could stop producing **Update** contents because the value is found in other user needs.

THE USER NEEDS MODEL IN PRACTICE

DMITRY SHISHKIN RECOMMENDS:

DISCOVER WHICH USER NEEDS MEETS MY CONTENT.

"Take the content that you've published in the last three months and assign the corresponding user need to it. Then your analytics team processes the information obtained after an in-depth analysis. That gives you the answer about which user needs are met by your contents."

PUBLISH DAILY CONTENT THAT ANSWERS EACH OF THE NEEDS.

"Begin by publishing a story for each kind of need and see how it works."

"The most important thing is to give your audience signals that you're starting to produce something that you didn't do before: 'Let's start publishing more educational content', and in the title, you state, 'This is an educational piece'."

TESTING WHICH FORMAT IS THE BEST FIT FOR WHICH NEED.

"Then you can begin to play with the format. The inspirational contents is always longer. The diversion content is video. The educational content is questions and answers."

"I recall a member of the audience who said he didn't read stories about Israel and Palestine because he didn't understand them: he didn't understand that Palestine is not a country according to the United Nations. He didn't understand that it consists of occupied territories and how they connect to each other. In such cases, taking these concepts and deconstructing them in little blocks can be extremely useful."

"How do you combine the different needs with the different media you have available to explore each one's potentialities to the maximum? I do this in video, I tweet, and then I do a follow-up with podcasts."

ALWAYS COVER THE NEWS AGENDA WITH USERS AT THE CENTER.

"At the BBC, the audience is global. When French President Emmanuel Macron took office, the news was not initially relevant for Indonesia or Chile. But then we discovered that Macron was the youngest French leader since Napoleon Bonaparte. We did an educational piece in which the news was still that Macron had won the election, but we focused on the fact that he was the youngest leader, and we did profiles on the five youngest world leaders in power at the time," Shishkin says.

MORE ABOUT USER NEEDS

"Be essential"
https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/12/be-essential/

"The user needs for news, explained"
https://smartocto.com/blog/explaining-user-needs/

"What Do News Readers Really Want to Read About? How Relevance Works for News Audiences"
https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/publications/2019/news-readers-really-want-read-relevance-works-news-audiences//

"From understanding to feeling"
https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/12/from-understanding-to-feeling/

"The year we ask the audience what it needs"
https://www.niemanlab.org/2020/12/the-year-we-ask-the-audience-what-it-needs/

"NEWSROOMS ARE OFTEN BLIND TO THE TREMENDOUS MISMATCH BETWEEN WHAT AUDIENCES NEED AND WHAT THE MEDIA GIVE THEM ('WE ONLY DO NEWS'). THE PROBLEM IS THAT AUDIENCES VIEW THE NEWS DIFFERENTLY. FAILURE TO MEET USER NEEDS MAY BE ONE OF THE REASONS WHY THE MEDIA HAVE PROBLEMS WITH *ENGAGEMENT*."

DMITRY SHISHKIN

TO CLOSE THIS CHAPTER, WE PROPOSE A QUESTIONNAIRE TO ASSESS THE SITUATION:

Do I know my audiences?
Do I cross-analyze the data I have on my users with the needs we meet in our organization?

ARE USERS AT THE CENTER OF MY MEDIA STRATEGY?

	IN WHICH CATEGORY CAN I GROUP MOST OF MY CONTENT?	WHICH CATEGORY GENERATES THE MOST *ENGAGEMENT* AMONG MY USERS?	WHICH CATEGORY ATTRACTS YOUNG AUDIENCES?
INFORMATION			
EDUCATION			
UPDATE			
DIVERSION			
PERSPECTIVE			
INSPIRATION			

ADOPT A PRODUCT MINDSET

Media organizations that have made progress in cultural change do not develop content— they develop products. Products centered on user needs, created by interdisciplinary teams and aligned with the company's strategy and objectives.

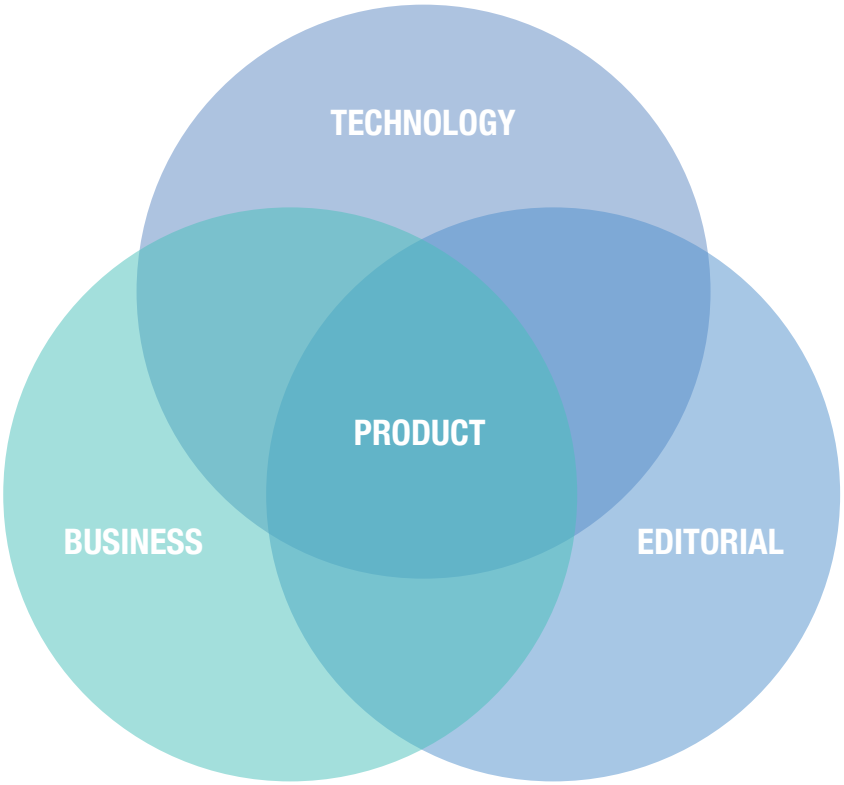
Product is at the intersection between editorial, tech, and business.

Anita Zielina shared with the program participants what Amazon owner Jeff Bezos asked when he entered The Washington Post's newsroom for the first time: "Who's in charge of the product?" Nobody answered because they weren't even sure what the product was.

WHAT'S PRODUCT?

Anita Zielina has her own definition of "product":

"Product is a function in the intersection of editorial, tech, and business that actively ensures all products and services a media organization creates address user needs, provide an excellent user experience and advance the overarching business strategy."



And as Dmitry Shishkin says:

"Content is product, and product is content."

“In traditional media, the typical process of doing something is: ‘We make a roadmap, today is 2020, and by December 2021 or March 2022 we have to launch…’. It’s not an iterative process,” Zielina says. Meanwhile, to make a “product”, the path is less linear: “In a design thinking process, you start by listening to your audience, you try to understand what it needs and particularly what it needs from your organization, and you look at the data. In the digital space, we have ways of understanding whether users are consuming a given product, why they subscribe to our products, what they feel is missing in our product,” says the CUNY professor.

Some media organizations already have product teams, but there is one organization that puts product at the operation’s center: **The Wall Street Journal**. Louise Story has been Chief Product and Technology Officer since 2019. Her positions illustrate how crosscutting her area is: CPO (Chief Product Officer), CTO (Chief Technology Officer), and CNE (Chief News Strategist).

The unit headed by Story at The Wall Street Journal is “basically in charge of everything they build, write, and sell in the digital space. They did this intentionally, because they understood that they could not have these high walls between the editorial, business, and tech areas if they wanted to be faster and more powerful in innovation. Product is an essential part of the experience,” Zielina says.

TOWARDS A PRODUCT CULTURE

OLD NEWSROOM CULTURE	NEW PRODUCT CULTURE
LONE WOLVES	COLLABORATION IN TEAMS
NO INTERDISCIPLINARY WORK	DIVERSE TEAMS FROM VARIOUS DEPARTMENTS
COMMAND-AND-CONTROL LEADERSHIP STYLE	COACHING AND DELEGATING LEADERSHIP STYLE
PERFECTIONISM	CULTURE OF FAILURE
WATERFALL DEVELOPMENT	ITERATIVE DEVELOPMENT
EGO CENTRIC VIEW	USER CENTRIC VIEW
DRIVEN BY GUT FEELING	INFORMED BY DATA

Source: Anita Zielina

THE VALUE OF A NEWS ORGANIZATION'S PRODUCT IS JOURNALISM

Importantly, the key to a successful product in news companies is still journalism. Beth Diaz, Vice-President of Audience Development and Metrics at The Washington Post confirms it: "What I can say in all these years is that what brings more subscriptions is the journalism that makes us proud. **Investing in good journalists leads you to more subscribers."**

Meanwhile, Zielina urges the media to adopt a product culture, but without letting go of the inherent knowledge of how news works: "**I don't defend the idea of abandoning the gut feeling, this kind of journalist belief or intuition,** 'There's a story to tell here,' but we can add information that the data gives us; **to do a mix** and thus increase the odds of being successful in our experiments with transformation."

Ken Doctor, creator of *Newsonomics* and founder and CEO of Look Out Local, adds along the same line: "The art is journalism, but science has to empower the art. Take the art and use everything that Netflix or Apple would use to deliver this content to the right people and to find enough people to pay for it," Doctor explains, and adds: "Having people work together (people sitting together) with a reader-centric product orientation is working."

THE TEAM THAT WILL CREATE THE PRODUCT

To adopt a product mindset, it is important to rely on a team that turns the mindset into practice. "We need people that understand innovation in the business, people from the editorial side that can talk to people on the business side, building these bridges, connecting the walls, because we know we can't build successful products if we don't have all the perspectives: the user, the product, the business," says Zielina.

In many cases, the problem for the media company is to attract professionals from other fields, essential in product teams (See Chapter 3). In a competitive scenario, they find what they want for their careers in other industries. Zielina proposes a way to attract talent: "I know of many people who come from other industries to journalism because of the impact they can have on societies. The problem is that if they don't connect to the journalism, they aren't going to feel the impact. If you make more interdisciplinary teams, if you connect them more to the newsroom, they're going to have a stronger sense of the impact of journalism."

If the product area needs professionals from different disciplines (content, business, tech, design), the question is, **who is best prepared to lead this team?** Zielina would choose her colleagues: "Many journalists can be successful in product roles because journalists prefer to listen to journalists. It's hard to give credibility to someone from the business side."

Borja Echevarría, currently Deputy Managing Editor of El País in Spain, states: "I've seen few journalists who truly understand what is happening in our industry, journalism's dynamics, the dynamics of how journalism relates to the business, the product, the technology." According to Echevarría, a comprehensive view of the news industry must exist throughout the newsroom (not only in the management positions).

Zielina explains, "If you take the knowledge of how a newsroom works, of how a news organization works, and you add product management skills, it's a winning formula." And she adds a proviso: "It may be people from tech or business, but the hard part is to understand the newsroom and how journalism works."

"A PRODUCT MANAGER TRANSLATES WORLDS, AND YOU WANT PEOPLE THAT ARE GOOD AT NEGOTIATING, THAT ARE GOOD AT WORKING WITH PEOPLE."

ANITA ZIELINA

MORE ABOUT THE PRODUCT

"El contenido es producto y el producto es contenido"
https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/content-product-why-deeper-alignment-only-way-forward-dmitry-shishkin/

"The rise of bridge roles in news organizations"
https://www.niemanlab.org/2017/12/the-rise-of-bridge-roles-in-news-organizations

News Product Alliance
https://newsproduct.org/

"WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO THINK OF THE PRODUCT FROM A BUSINESS PERSPECTIVE? IF YOU WANT PEOPLE TO PAY FOR YOUR PRODUCT, YOU HAVE TO FIND A WAY TO TRULY MEET USER NEEDS AND BECOME 'AUDIENCE-CENTERED'".

ANITA ZIELINA

IS THERE A PRODUCT TEAM IN MY ORGANIZATION?

TO CONCLUDE THIS CHAPTER, WE PROPOSE A QUESTIONNAIRE TO ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION OF YOUR COMPANY:

IS THERE AN OFFICIAL POSITION WITH SOMEONE IN CHARGE OF PRODUCT?

IF NOT, IS THERE SOMEONE WHO PERFORMS THIS ROLE IN PRACTICE?

IF THERE IS, HOW IS IT STRUCTURED? HOW MANY PEOPLE WORK IN IT, AND WHAT ARE THEIR FIELDS OF EXPERTISE?

IMPLEMENT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Leaders totally embrace the decision and the execution of the cultural change that digital transformation demands, and work to include all of the company's members together in this direction.

Cultural change should cover the entire organization from top to bottom. Positive and empathetic leaders focus on the people who want to implement change: guide them, train them, and add the talent the organization needs.

Cultural change is a painstaking process for the entire organization. Basically, because the organization is a team composed of people. And people, even in adverse scenarios, prefer the status quo. "By nature, **we humans are the ideal machines to avoid change,**" says Joao Adao, Facebook Regional Director for Latin America.

Leading cultural change means leading people. Who will lead the organization's members on paths that they have never walked before and with no guarantee of success? After all, cultural change is a bet on innovation, on trial-and-error. Leaders play a fundamental role: if they are not up to the challenge, nobody will follow them.

"I believe it is important to take a step back and see what fear you're facing in your organization," says Ryan Thomas, current CEO of Eyam Vaccines and Immunotherapeutics, and former head of the Catholic news agency EWTN News and Advisor to the Vatican for Digital Transformation. Thomas explains the cultural change experience he led at the Holy See: "Influential people within the organization were fearful of the arrival of this new continent (digital), were afraid of becoming irrelevant because they were not digital natives."

Prior to his role at Facebook, Joao Adao was CEO of the Hibu company in Latin America, owner of *Páginas Amarillas* (Yellow Pages). At the time, he led the cultural change and faced the challenges of heading a company that had dominated its market for 50 years: "Everyone owned a Yellowbook, it was the only way for a small business to be known. When Google emerged and digital emerged, this book began to decrease in value." **"I realized that the technical challenge was relatively easy to solve, and that the cultural challenge was the big issue,"** Adao explains.

Borja Echevarría has been involved in the digital transformation in newsrooms since the beginning. He knows that cultural change is no longer an abstract idea when everyone in the organization understands what it's about and takes action as a result: "Cultural change sounds very ethereal, an expression that few people understand. But how does it translate in reality?" For Echevarría, cultural change translates in practice along three lines:

LEADERSHIP	The responsibility for moving towards the future and explaining to everyone why a given direction is necessary.
A CLEAR AND SHARED VISION	Communicate the strategic plan to everyone. Not knowing or not understanding the direction can generate great frustration.
BREAKING SILOS	It's necessary to work with diverse areas that need to be involved in the process since the beginning. It's not about announcing summaries at the end.

LEADERS OF CULTURAL CHANGE

ARE PROTAGONISTS

"You can only move out of the current situation if you take a leadership role and the new responsibility".
Joao Adao

ARE HUMBLE

"Not false modesty, but humbleness that acknowledges truth, that listens, admitting that we don't own the truth".
Ryan Thomas

LISTEN

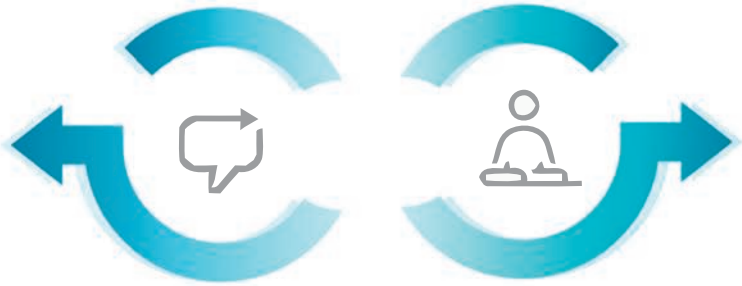
"We have to listen to voices that used to have no place at the table".
Joao Adao

WANT TO LEARN

"How do we navigate this world? What new skills do we need?"
Joao Adao

COMMUNICATE

"Communication is never too much. I don't know of anyone who 'overcommunicates".
Borja Echevarría



ORGANIZE AND CALM THE TEAMS

"The only thing that paralyzes more than fear is chaos. Sharing a clear plan reduces chaos, gives a feeling of greater control".
Joao Adao

ANALYZE, PLAN, THEN EXECUTE.

"We have to devote more time to analysis, to planning. If we do these two pieces well, the execution flows naturally".
Ryan Thomas

PERSEVERE

"If you really believe in your organization's mission, you have to persevere for the good of your audience, your team, humankind".
Ryan Thomas

DO WHAT THEY SAY NEEDS TO BE DONE

"If you're trying to change the culture, you have to be the culture that you want for the organization. It's people that create the culture, not policies". **Joao Adao**

HOW TO LEAD AND MANAGE THE TEAM THAT WILL IMPLEMENT THE CULTURAL CHANGE?

In digital transformation, teams are made of people that support the change and people that oppose it. With legacy employees and with new additions. With people that count on the abilities and skills that the company needs and with others who still need to incorporate them. Leaders reach as far as their team does. That's why human resources management is essential.

BASED ON HIS EXPERIENCE, JOAO ADAO PRODUCED A CLASSIFICATION OF HOW MEMBERS OF A TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION RESPOND TO CULTURAL CHANGE:

READY FOR THE CHANGE

They are the ones who, "when they see the opportunity to be learners, to change, to pursue new opportunities, they go for it. They migrate naturally because it's in their DNA," says Adao.

HESITANT TO CHANGE

"They're going to need help, but they'll get there eventually because they realize there's a different way, that the path they were following is no longer effective" (Adao).

CHANGE DENIERS

They're simply not going to change.

ADAO DESIGNED A DIFFERENT APPROACH FOR EACH SEGMENT:

PROMOTE THOSE READY FOR THE CHANGE TO EVANGELISTER POSITIONS

"Have them lead projects, teams, let them flourish. Promote them. Give them positions with more influence and impact. And this becomes a virtuous circle" (Adao).

ONE CONVERSATION AT A TIME WITH THE CHANGE-HESITANT TEAM MEMBERS

"Change the vocabulary, teach them to consider other points of view that they haven't considered. It takes time. When they see it work, there's a virtuous circle: they begin to see their own evolution" (Adao).

QUICKLY FIND ANOTHER ROLE FOR THE CHANGE DENIERS

Adao recalls that he went through this scenario in the sales team at the Yellow Pages: "they had no empathy with customers, they had no focus on customers, but they did have a lot of technical skills. They knew the industry, the company. We moved them to other roles, and there were people that we encouraged to leave, which is good not only for the company, but for them. They weren't happy with the new challenge."

Echevarría agrees with Adao's angle: "**I believe you have to convince people, lead people where you want to go**. I don't believe in changing everyone. But I'm a great believer **that if you've made enough effort, you have to remove people that aren't going to change."**
Zielina agrees with this position: **"Focus on the people that are interested in the change. Don´t waste time on people that refuse the change."**

At the Vatican, Ryan Thomas tested combining the ready-for-change with the change-hesitant members: "To overcome the older generations' fear, we did mentorship, workshops where the younger groups interacted with the older members, and then the older group had to hold workshops in their specialties. The idea was to build bridges."

Sometimes organizations —driven by the urgency of cultural change— decide to bring in outsiders to form the entire team that will lead the transformation. Zielina warns that this decision can drastically affect the organization's culture: "If you bring all the people from outside to do the 'cool digital thing', the inhouse people who have been there for years will feel that they are not the future, that the company is not betting on them. And nobody wants that." She thus recommends, "a combination of internal and external talent is super-effective, because **the risk of only bringing people from outside is that the people who have been there will feel left out of the innovation and the transformation.**"

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION FOR TEAM MANAGEMENT

JOAO ADAO

"There is no impossible conversation. Whether the conversations are personal, on performance, or on feedback. Once you've identified the elephant in the room, don't let things get more toxic and turn into something worse."

BORJA ECHEVARRÍA

"In companies dedicated to communication, we are actually bad at communicating, especially internal communication. But at Univision, the company's communications director, José Zamora, was always in the newsroom with the journalists. He was totally involved. Having a communication person in the newsroom was a fascinating experience."

"You need to have a communication strategy. You can't improvise all the time."

ANITA ZIELINA

"In successful organizations, communication goes on and on like a scratched record, that's the path. I've never seen an organization where communication is too much, but I have seen ones where it's not enough."

HOW TO ATTRACT NEW TALENT?

To lead change, you need to rely on a talented team and guide it towards the change. How do you attract and keep this talent that will be instrumental to the change? “The younger generations are inclined to leave a company if they don’t feel that the company’s values are connected to their own. I believe that each organization has to find this connection, what the purpose is,” Joao Adao explains. “At Facebook, we’re lucky, because the company was born to connect people. This mission has evolved, but the company has remained very faithful to this mission,” he adds.

“What most attracts talent is connecting to the organization’s mission and purpose.”

Joao Adao

“We’re competing with other industries that have done a better job of being attractive to their employees, creating space for them to develop and grow,” explains Anita Zielina.

“People in their twenties and thirties, the young digital talents, want different things for their lives and their jobs. The traditional media do not coincide with what they believe a job needs to be. And this is an issue because they’re going to choose someplace else to work.”

Anita Zielina

HOW DO YOU UPDATE EMPLOYEES' SKILLS?

Anita Zielina developed a system to organize the training processes in a media company that wants to implement cultural change:

EXPERTS

You can bring them from outside when there isn't time to train them internally, but it's always good to see if there is some *power user* that has already received a little training and that can do the job.

At this level, having a combination of internal and external talent is very effective.

POWER USERS

Power users will be the ambassadors of change in the organization.

At this level, nobody is pressured. It's about identifying the people that express interest in some of the new skills that are needed.

BASE

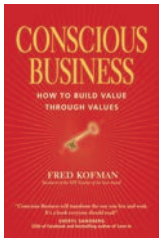
At this level, you need to define which digital and innovation skills are indispensable for everyone.

You need to identify who, with a little training, can be *power users* of a given skill. At this level, it is recommended that members of the team share knowledge.

"Invest in people that want to be part of the change process but need help. Nobody gets up one morning knowing that they want to do digital. Everybody needs to learn it. Our responsibility as managers is to help people learn what they need to be successful at their jobs."

Anita Zielina

MORE ABOUT LEADERSHIP



"AN ORGANIZATION'S REAL SUCCESS COMES WHEN EACH MEMBERS KNOWS WHERE THEY HAVE TO GO."

DMITRY SHISHKIN

MY MEDIA ORGANIZATION AND MY TEAM

TO CONCLUDE THIS CHAPTER, WE PROPOSE A QUESTIONNAIRE TO ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION:

FOR THE ORGANIZATION'S LEADERS

ARE THEY DETERMINED TO CHANGE?

HAVE THEY ADOPTED A LEADERSHIP MINDSET?

DO THEY WANT TO LEARN TO MAKE THE CHANGE?

IS THE COMPANY'S MISSION AND VISION CLEAR?

FOR ALL THE ORGANIZATION'S MEMBERS

Dmitry Shishkin proposes to ask these questions to all the company's member to know if they are all moving in the same direction:

WHY DO WE EXIST AS AN ORGANIZATION?

WHAT IS THE COMPANY'S MISSION AND VISION?

WHAT BUSINESS IS Y OUR COMPANY IN?

SET UP A DATA-BASED STRATEGY

Cultural change is a process. Organizing and following the stages allows aligning the entire company in the same direction and achieving its strategic objectives.

The organization moves forward through a strategic transformation plan based on data. Everyone knows the objectives, the milestones, the achievements.

To activate cultural change within a media company, it is necessary to know where we are headed and to manage the resources in this direction. A strategic plan guides everyone to move forward in the successive stages.

7 STEPS TO SETTING UP AND IMPLEMENTING A STRATEGY

1. ANALYZE THE CURRENT SCENARIO
2. WRITE UP THE STRATEGY
3. COMMUNICATE THE STRATEGY
4. EXECUTE THE STRATEGY
5. MEASURE THE EXECUTION
6. COMMUNICATE THE RESULTS
7. UPDATE THE STRATEGY

"The key question in any digital transformation strategy is:
How do we use data and digital skills to create new value for our customers?"

Rita McGrath, professor,
Columbia Business School, USA

1 ANALYZE THE CURRENT SCENARIO

You need to step out of the day-to-day, the urgency of the daily routine, to have time for the analysis. And gather all the necessary data to allow setting up the strategy.

2 WRITE UP THE STRATEGY

The strategy should be:

- **Clear**: so that the entire organization understands it.
- **Selective**: choosing what will be done, but also what will not be done.

The strategy should define:

- **Specific objectives.**
- **Metrics for measuring each objective.**

"When analyzing and planning the execution, it's important to have milestones in place and know that it always takes longer."

Ryan Thomas

"Schibsted, a large and very innovative company in the Nordic countries, implemented OKR (Objectives and Key Results) for the entire organization. It's a way of uniting everyone around a shared mission. You avoid 'We need 8% growth in advertising'. That's not a vision, that's a number. The OKR could be, for example: 'We want to become the number 1 brand for young people and third in our region, and we measure success through people's engagement on our digital platforms.' Something more meaningful than just numbers, and more related to the mission."

"OKR helped create the connection between design, business, tech, and editorial. Because they understood that they were all in it together."

"You can also link the senior management's bonus system to reaching these OKR. The percentage of bonus you receive depends on the percentage of OKR you reach."

Anita Zielina

"Setting the targets, and setting the metrics to measure the achievement of those targets, guarantees that you have the information you need."

Beth Diaz

3

COMMUNICATE THE STRATEGY

Everyone should know what the plan is and what their role is in that plan.

"What we did first was to define a strategic plan, with four strategic pillars, which was very clear, it was posted on every wall, in every office. Everyone knew what we needed to do, and what we didn't, because there were a lot of other things that weren't a priority. 'This is what we need you to prioritize during your time. If what you are doing is aligned with these four pillars, then you're on the right path,' and this lowered their level of anxiety. People felt part of something bigger."

"Something I found incredibly effective, was that I painted a future picture with three scenarios:

- Everything is working right, we have the strategic plan, the four strategic pillars. And everything is working right, the curve is going to trend upward and accelerate. We're going to be in a good place.
- An intermediate scenario.
- A more conservative scenario.

"All three scenarios were better than where we are today. When we share a visual of a possible future it's incredibly motivating. If someone shows you this picture, a piece of you believes in it, wants to believe in it. And that's enough."

Joao Adao on his experience at the Yellow Pages

4 EXECUTE THE STRATEGY

The best plan is useless if it's not put into practice. On this point, tensions may likely emerge, or part of the team may revert to the old routine and not move towards what was set out in the strategic plan. It is the leaders' responsibility to define the scale and scope of each stage for the transition to be as seamless as possible.

"Digital transformation is complex and requires new ways of approaching strategy. Starting big, spending a lot, and assuming you have all the information is likely to produce a full-on attack from corporate antibodies – everything from risk aversion and resentment of your project to simple resistance to change.

A discovery-driven approach gets leaders past the common barriers to digital transformation. By starting small, spending a little on an ongoing portfolio of experiments, and learning a lot, you can win early supporters and early adopters. By moving quickly and demonstrating clear impact on financial performance indicators, you can build a case for and learn your way into a digital strategy. You can also use your digitization projects to begin an organizational transformation. As people become more comfortable with the horizontal communications and activities that digital technologies enable, they will also embrace new ways of working."

Rita McGrath y Ryan McManus
"Discovery-Driven Digital Transformation", *Harvard Business Review*, May-June 2020

DATA SUSTAIN THE STRATEGY

Take-home messages from Beth Diaz, Vice President of Audience Development and Metrics, The Washington Post.

DATA IS FUNDAMENTAL IN THE ENTIRE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN:

• TO SET UP THE STRATEGY:
"Before, data was used to look at the company's past performance: 'How did we do yesterday? And the week before?' Now, data can predict future behavior and drive the company's actions."

"First, you have to set strategic goals. If you don't set goals, you have nothing to measure. At The Washington Post, there are three objectives with the same weight: brand, audience, and revenue."

• TO DEFINE THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES:
"It's tempting to say that we're concerned about everything, but you can't be strategic and tactical without making choices. You have to choose what you plan to do and what you don't."

• TO KNOW THE AUDIENCES:
"We talk about doing research and deepening our knowledge of users' behavior."

MEASURE THE EXECUTION

5

Whenever you perform an action, it's important to record and measure it. There cannot be objectives with no achievement measurement.

"We would review the plan on a monthly basis: whether we reached the milestones. But this meeting was with all the teams at the table, including the teams with no direct relationship to the specific pillar."

"Everyone had to be at the table, on the same page, and solving everything together. As an additional benefit, there are human beings in all these teams, and as they spend time together, they discover connections and learn to trust each other a little more."

"This is the tool for macro alignment: once a month we would all meet and review the same strategic topics, whether we were on track or not. And if we weren't, we would correct the course to be back on track again together."

"For the most urgent topics, we would have more frequent meetings. With the sales team, we would sit down every Monday. There were different sessions, not everybody had to be there."

Joao Adao on his experience at the Yellow Pages

"Since we have a subscriber dashboard [database], we can know our users' attitudes and behaviors. It allows us to discover opportunities. We can also do focused studies. For example, on advertisements that users don't want to see during the COVID crisis,"

• TO UNDERSTAND THE BUSINESS:
"Our focus now is on digital subscribers, and we did a lot of research: Why do they cancel the subscription? How can we get them to return?"

"We have a lot of subscribers, but we want more, and we started to think more strategically: what potential subscribers are there, and how can we get them to subscribe?"

"We have an engagement dashboard: When was the last time the subscribers came? What was the last day they came on average?"

• TO INFORM THE ORGANIZATION:
"We gather loads of data from numerous sources. What's important is to have the data centralized, accessible, and ready to evolve."

• FOR PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO DO BETTER AT THEIR JOB:
"We have a dashboard for the newsroom. For each content they make, the journalists can consult the title, author, publication date, users, subscribers, and subscribers' pageviews."

"The newsletter dashboard is a good example of how to take something that's important for the organization and measure it."

6 ANNOUNCE THE RESULTS

The issue is to share the quick wins with all members of the organization, communicate them visibly and create a positive impact. The follow-up on the targets and communication of the achievements at each stage are crucial for all the team to know that what was defined and presented still stands.

"We 'over-communicated' every metric that was aligned with the strategic priorities. And the 'over-communication' had to do with creating impact."

Joao Adao on his experience at the Yellow Pages

"We need to have data ready and accessible. And prepare different reports for different people. We have to avoid information overload."

Beth Diaz

"We had a successful case: a story by the science team and infographics: A salon, a bar, and a class: how you catch coronavirus in the air. The story had 10,000,000 unique users in five days.

- I spoke with my editor-in-chief and said, 'Before the first meeting of the day, you have to talk about this high-impact story and send messages:
- This is so important because it was conceived for digital, but later we moved it to the print pages.
- It's important because it was a collaboration between two teams.

And it's important because of how widely it was distributed.'"

Borja Echevarría

"It's important to celebrate the wins, so you celebrate where you're coming from and project the next milestone."

Ryan Thomas

7 UPDATE THE STRATEGY

During execution of the strategic plan, you will identify the hits and misses, whether in the initial definition of objectives or in the implementation. It's important to be able to permanently recalibrate the strategy based on these teachings.

> "We are in such a dynamic scenario that even the best analysis needs updating. A military general plans a battle, but as soon as he executes it, he should take the inputs. For example, we can discover that the person that we've given a new responsibility to, is not adapting."
>
> **Ryan Thomas**

> "You can have targets, metrics, and beautiful reports, but that won't matter if you don't take action based on these results."
>
> **Beth Diaz**

MORE ON STRATEGY

"Transient advantage"
https://hbr.org/2013/06/transient-advantage

"Discovery driven digital transformation"
https://hbr.org/2020/05/discovery-driven-digital-transformation

MY MEDIA ORGANIZATION AND THE STRATEGY

TO CONCLUDE THIS CHAPTER, WE PROPOSE A QUESTIONNAIRE TO ASSESS THE CURRENT SITUATION OF YOUR COMPANY:

IS THERE A PERSON, APART FROM DAY-TO-DAY, WHO IS THINKING ABOUT THE STRATEGY?

DOES THIS PERSON HAVE THE NECESSARY DATA TO ANALYZE THE ORGANIZATION'S PRESENT STRATEGY AND DEFINE IT?

DOES THE STRATEGY HAVE SPECIFIC GOALS?

WHICH METRIC WILL BE USED TO MEASURE HOW EACH GOAL IS MET?

IS THE ENTIRE ORGANIZATION INFORMED OF THE STRATEGY? DOES EVERYBODY UNDERSTAND IT? DOES EVERYBODY KNOW WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM?

ARE THERE REPORTS ON INTERIM RESULTS? ARE THEY SHARED WITH EVERYONE?

ARE THE ACTIONS EXECUTED, MODIFIED, AND ANALYZED ACCORDING TO DATA?

HOW MANY STRATEGIC DECISIONS ARE BASED ON DATA?

IS THE IMPACT OF ACTIONS MEASURED? IS THE STRATEGY MODIFIED ACCORDING TO THE DATA ON IMPACT?

DO ALL AREAS HAVE THE NECESSARY DATA TO DO THEIR WORK?

IS DATA WE HAVE ON OUR USERS SUFFICIENT? DO THEY ALLOW IMPROVING THE PRODUCTS? DO THEY ALLOW IMPROVING THE ORGANIZATION'S CONNECTION TO ITS USERS?

CONCLUSIONS

User centric data-based analysis allows establishing a clear and solid strategy with measurable objectives. Transparent and evangelizing leadership and a company that knows how to identify, attract, and maintain the necessary talent are keys to breaking down walls, igniting changes, and keeping the entire team aligned. Finally, adopting a product mindset enables innovatiion while adapting more quickly and better to the permanent changes in the digital age, yet not losing sight of the business objectives.

When asked whether there is an end to a company's digital transformation, Anita Zielina replies, "Never," but adds, "it will be less stressful. At one point, we are going to feel more comfortable with our skills for change. **Being capable of changing, of transforming, is a mindset, not a six-month project**. We're in an industry that will continue to evolve. The skills and technology are going to change, but for the organization not to have problems in the future, what we have to do is teach *how* to change."

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