

Challenges for Leadership and Organization in the Context of Digital Transformation – a Corporate Consortium Action Research Project

Consortium members



The Context

Over the last few years, Digital Transformation has moved to the top of the agenda of virtually every large corporation. While we usually see a strong consensus about the strategic importance of the topic, evidence shows that the various internal stakeholders of the process, such as IT, Marketing, Strategy, Sales, Communication, HR, or Innovation tend to approach the issue with their distinctive interests and perspectives.

As a result, we often witness a lack of unified perspectives as well as political organizational dynamics that exacerbate an already difficult process. As Digital Transformation requires a **collaborative effort across functional boundaries**, it is critical to understand the mindset of the various stakeholders and engage them in an in-depth dialogue about their perspectives.

The Project

The project will explore how the most senior stakeholders from functions that are relevant in the Digital Transformation process perceive the **related leadership and organizational challenges, with special emphasis on cross-boundary collaboration**. We are particularly interested how the various players perceive their own role, how they contribute to the transformation process, and how they perceive the other stakeholders within their organization in this context.

We will gather these perspectives through **in-depth interviews with 6-7 top executives** from each company that participates in the consortium. The conversations will be unstructured to allow a maximum of flexibility, following the respondents' various narratives. They will last about 1 hour.

The conversations will be treated **strictly confidential**, and insights will be aggregated in an executive summary, reflecting patterns and commonalities.

All interviewed executives will be invited to a **highly interactive cross-functional think tank** to discuss the results and their implications. Through this format, we intend to instigate a strategic/organizational dialogue about key issues that surface in the context of a Digital Transformation journey.

In summary, the project provides an excellent opportunity to strengthen important stakeholder relationships and yield insights that will help senior leaders to navigate the complex dynamics of the process more effectively.

Questions / areas we would like to cover during the interviews

1 **General Opening**

- When it comes to the process of digital transformation, what are the three most important challenges your company faces?
- What does “Digital Transformation” mean for you in your area of responsibility?

2 **Key Strategic Initiative**

- Briefly describe the most important strategic initiative in your organization that is dedicated to driving digital transformation? Specifically, what barriers/roadblocks do you encounter in implementing this initiative?

Building on the answers to these first 2 questions, we would then look to explore in greater detail:

3 **Your contribution**

- the contribution your function provides in your organization’s process of digital transformation. What are the three most important challenges you face in this context?

4 **Perspective on other stakeholders**

- which other internal stakeholders, other than the CEO, are most critical for making your efforts a success? Think about other functions in your organization as well as the roles of businesses and corporate headquarters.
- What, if any, frictions do you perceive between those stakeholders and yourself? What are the reasons for these frictions?
- How do you perceive the overall “political” dynamic between the key players involved in your digital transformation efforts?
- What mechanisms do you have in place to mitigate these “politics”?

5 **Leadership culture**

- How do you assess the current leadership culture in your organization when it comes to dealing with the process Digital Transformation? What are the biggest challenges?
- What kind of culture do you think is required for a successful transformation? How do you envision to get to the desired culture?
- Who, if anyone, in your organization is driving the related cultural transformation processes? How do you organize the change process? What do you recommend to improve/accelerate this process?

6 **Wrap-up**

- If you look at the big picture - what is the most important thing that should be done different in your organization when it comes to the DT process, and why?
 - What do you think about this conversation?
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Project Organization

The project will be conducted by the Center for the Future of Organization at the Drucker School of Management at Claremont Graduate University (CFFO), in cooperation with the Executive Corporate Learning Forum (ECLF). CFFO director Roland Deiser will serve as the Principal Investigator, supported by a team consisting of a seasoned interviewer, business writer, and a research assistant.

About the Center for the Future of Organization

The Center for the Future of Organization is an independent Think Tank and Research Center at the Drucker School of Management at Claremont Graduate University. The Center's mission is to deepen our understanding for new capabilities that are critical to succeed in a digitally connected world, and to support leaders and organizations along their transformational journey. In the tradition of Peter Drucker, the Center works across disciplines, combining conceptual depth with practical applicability and ethical responsibility. More at www.futureorg.org.

About ECLF

The Executive Corporate Learning Forum (ECLF) is a community of senior executives from major global corporations, who have a strategic responsibility to build organizational capabilities and drive large-scale learning, change and transformation processes. The Forum provides an intellectually and socially inspiring environment that encourages in-depth discourse on key challenges large organizations are facing today. ECLF includes currently executives from more than 60 major corporations across all industries, many of them being global leaders in their space. More at www.eclf.org.

About the Principal Investigator

Roland Deiser is a Professor of Organizational Politics and has held senior teaching and research positions at numerous universities in Europe and the United States. He is a Drucker Senior Fellow and leads the Center for the Future of Organization at the Drucker School of Management at Claremont Graduate University, where his work focuses on the impact of digital technologies on leadership and organization, and on organizational capabilities required in disruptive business environments. Prior to this appointment at CGU he served for 10 years as a Senior Fellow with the Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California (USC).

He is also Founding Chairman of the Executive Corporate Learning Forum (ECLF), a consortium of more than 60 major multinational corporations from 14 countries which was created in 2005 to shape the future Corporate Learning and Development. His latest books are *“Designing the Smart Organization”* (2009) and *“Transformers”* (2014).

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