

The background is a complex, abstract composition. It features a stylized city map or circuit board pattern in shades of blue, purple, and red, with numerous small white dots and lines. Overlaid on this is a large, dark silhouette of a person standing with arms outstretched, facing right. The person's shadow is cast onto the background, creating a sense of depth. The overall effect is one of technological complexity and human impact.

BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE IS HARD

UNVEILING TECH TRUTHS

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WHY BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE IS THE HARDEST PART OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

When we think of digital transformation, it's easy to focus on the technology, new platforms, tools, and systems that promise to revolutionise how businesses operate. But the true driving force behind any successful transformation isn't the technology itself - it's the people who use it. This is where many digital transformations falter, because while technology can be deployed relatively quickly, changing how people work, behave, and interact with that technology is far more complex.

"Technology is just a tool, and it's people who make it work". Organisations that fail to address the behavioural change required for transformation are setting themselves up for failure. In this article, we'll explore why behavioural change is so critical, how to foster it, and the role of leadership in driving this change.

THE ROLE OF TECHNOLOGY VS. PEOPLE

The assumption that deploying new technology will automatically lead to success is one of the biggest misconceptions in digital transformation. The reality is that no matter how advanced the technology, its success depends on how well people adopt it. Many digital initiatives fail because they focus too much on the technology itself and not enough on the behaviours and cultural shifts required to make the technology effective.

For example, imagine implementing a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system that promises to streamline sales processes and improve client management. The technology itself may be cutting-edge, but if the sales team is not trained to use it properly or if they are resistant to change because they prefer their old methods, the system's potential will never be fully realised. This is a classic case of behavioural inertia, people sticking with familiar practices even when they're inefficient because change feels uncomfortable.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Lead with People, Not Technology:** When planning a digital transformation, think of it as a behavioural change project, not just a technology implementation. Understand how employees work today and anticipate the resistance they might have to new tools.
- **Involve Teams Early:** Employees are more likely to embrace change when they feel included in the process. Involve key stakeholders from the beginning to understand their pain points and how new technology can solve them.
- **One Size does not fit all:** Understand how individuals want to operate and engage as differences can make a big impact across the transformation programme.

EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOURAL CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

One of the most telling examples of how behavioural change can derail a digital transformation is where large-scale technology projects are often implemented without considering how people will actually use the systems. Organisations frequently deploy technologies with great potential but fail to train staff properly, leading to underutilisation, duplication of systems and processes, try and force everything into a single model/mode, and generally design for the masses

In many cases, technology is introduced with minimal attention to training and support, resulting in employees reverting to old habits. Consider the introduction of automated systems in healthcare to manage patient records. Despite the technology's promise of reducing administrative errors and improving care, if staff aren't properly trained or if the new system disrupts their workflow, they will often find workarounds, defeating the purpose of the transformation. In healthcare the focus has to be on the patients, with technology supporting the clinical and non-clinical staff to perform their individual duties.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Invest in Comprehensive Training:** No matter how intuitive a new system might seem, users will need guidance. Offer hands-on training and continuous support to help employees transition smoothly.
- **Address the Emotional Side of Change:** Resistance to change isn't always about the technology, it can stem from fear of job insecurity, a lack of confidence in using new tools, or even skepticism about whether the change is necessary. Acknowledge these concerns and communicate the benefits clearly.
- **Time allowance:** People have day jobs so any plan must factor in how to release people to undertake training on a regular basis. In high impact front-line services like policing, EMS, and hospitals this can be difficult given the workloads individuals operate under.

STRATEGIES FOR FOSTERING BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

So how do you encourage people to change their behaviours and embrace new technologies? The answer lies in creating a culture of adaptability and making change feel less like an imposition and more like an opportunity.

- **Model Change from the Top:** Leadership plays a crucial role in driving behavioural change. When CTOs and other senior leaders openly embrace new tools and demonstrate their benefits, it sets the tone for the rest of the organisation. If leadership doesn't adopt the technology, neither will the team. Show don't Tell.
- **Make the Change Personal:** Employees are more likely to adopt new technologies if they see a direct benefit to their own work. Help teams understand how the technology will make their jobs easier or more efficient. For example, if a new data analytics tool can reduce the time spent on manual reporting, emphasise how this will allow teams to focus on higher-value tasks. Don't focus on the savings by themselves as this can lead to a feeling of job insecurity.
- **Gamify the Adoption Process:** One strategy that has proven effective in driving adoption is gamification. Turn the learning process into a challenge, reward teams for completing training or reaching certain milestones in their use of new tools. This not only creates engagement but also encourages a sense of accomplishment. For example, implementing a health and wellbeing programme for children to help manage obesity used gamification to encourage better behaviours through the introduction of competitive challenges (individual and group).

- **Create a Supportive Environment:** Provide an ongoing support system where employees can ask questions, troubleshoot issues, and learn from each other. A strong change management team can help smooth the transition by addressing concerns as they arise.
- **Voice of the People:** Listen to all the feedback from users, ask their opinions on the next round of features. Don't adopt an assumption model which implements new features the team "assume" users would want. For example, in healthcare there are examples of development teams implementing a digital suggestions capability, where clinical/non-clinical staff can ask for new features to be included in the mobile application stack.

WHY LEADERSHIP IS ESSENTIAL TO BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE

Leadership is key to driving successful behavioural change, with technology leaders guiding their teams through the cultural shifts necessary to make digital tools effective. CTOs must not only oversee the deployment of new systems but also actively participate in their adoption. If leaders are seen to be doing something different then others will follow, this applies across all aspects of an operational landscape.

Leaders must foster an environment where experimentation and learning are encouraged, where employees feel comfortable experimenting with new tools without the fear of making mistakes. This requires a shift from traditional management styles that prioritise short-term efficiency over long-term growth and adaptability. Some of the best innovations come from people actually doing the job, allow them to come up with new ways of doing something that improves their day to day activities.

WHAT CTOs SHOULD CONSIDER:

- **Lead by Example:** Demonstrate your commitment to new technology by using it yourself and showing how it adds value to the organisation.
- **Encourage a Growth Mindset:** Create a culture where learning and experimentation are valued. Reward employees who take initiative to embrace new tools and workflows.
- **Avoid the Done To Model:** People doing a job generally have views and ideas on what will make it better, so ask them and don't impose ivory tower thinking/development.

CONCLUSION: DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION IS ABOUT PEOPLE FIRST

As CTOs, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement of new technologies, but we must remember that digital transformation is ultimately about people, not tools. The success of any transformation depends on the behavioural changes that accompany it. If employees aren't willing or able to change how they work, even the most advanced technology will fail to deliver its full potential.

By focusing on fostering a culture of openness, adaptability, offering comprehensive training, and leading by example, CTOs can ensure that behavioural change becomes the foundation of a successful transformation.

Remember, technology can only take you so far. it's the people who will make the difference.

Neil Catton is an experienced strategist and recognised thought leader on the ethical and structural implications of emerging technologies. Through his *Next Evolution* series, Neil explores how legacy institutions must adapt to remain relevant in an era shaped by AI, spatial computing, quantum systems, and digital transformation.

He is a trusted voice on responsible innovation, with a distinctive narrative style that blends systems thinking, moral foresight, and practical governance insight. Neil's work spans public service redesign, cyber resilience, digital ethics, and ambient technology — always grounded in purpose, people, and long-term value.

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