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Organisations that manage to think strategically about digital transformation will be best equipped to emerge from the crisis

Digital crisis?

NICK HAYNE, THE DATA MASTER

One of the few silver linings of this terrible crisis, to be filed alongside the newly expressed respects for the people who have emerged as key workers, is the emergence of a genuine form of digital transformation. Digital transformation has become imperative for organisations (large and small, across almost every sector) to undertake if they want to maintain as close to normal business operations as possible – remote or home-based working a couple of days a week is no longer a pipedream.

Already, there's talk of the shift to homeworking becoming embedded more permanently once employers take note of the fact that a saving in overheads is also accompanied by a rise in productivity.

The degree to which the changes we're currently seeing in digital provision become permanent in a post-crisis world remains to be seen – but the experience of many industries transformed by digital disrupters shows that once the digital genie is out of the bottle, it's extremely hard to put it back in.

Many employees in lockdown are getting used to the new future of work using collaboration and communication tools like Microsoft Teams. And the often repeated myth that it only takes 21 days for behaviour to change or for an individual to adopt a new habit has re-surfaced.

It originated in the 1960s when the best-selling book, *Psycho-Cybernetics* by plastic surgeon Maxwell Maltz, reported that it typically took a minimum 21 days for a patient to become accustomed to their new face or for an amputee to get used to the loss of a limb.

His theory has been misinterpreted ever since by self-help authors and used to motivate

people into making change by using the simple 21-day target, which seems achievable for almost anyone.

It might be regarded as a myth today, but there's truth in how quickly new habits can be learned, especially if, as with remote working with Teams, they deliver positive benefits. And most employees new to working with isolated colleagues are likely to be accustomed to using digital comms tools like Teams during the first phase of lockdown.

The longer the lockdown, the closer we get to the 66 days cited in a 2009 study by Philippa Lally, a health psychology researcher, who found this was the average time taken for a habit to become ingrained. However, before anyone gets too excited at the prospect of changing behaviour quickly, it's important to note that the harder work the habit was, the longer it took for it to become second nature.

The key to adopting a new behaviour, like using Teams to collaborate and communicate with colleagues as if you shared an office, is to keep at it. Yes, it's a bit odd at the beginning and the way you talk when there are more than two people takes some getting used to, but it will smooth out.

So, before we look at specific areas of our society that seem set to be digitally transformed to the greatest and most permanent degree in my next column, there's one thought to take away from this one ...

Despite all the other challenges, organisations that manage to think strategically about the digital transformation that's currently forced upon them, and how it can be integrated on a permanent basis into their operations in a useful manner, will be best equipped to emerge from the crisis and move forwards optimistically. **LPM**



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