

People-powering the digitalisation process



By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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The number of mobile phone users is expected to hit 4.8 billion in 2017 and 2,55 billion people are predicted to engage on social networks. Last year in just one [internet minute](#) there was a staggering 2.4 million Google search queries, 150 million sent emails, 20,8 million sent WhatsApp messages and 2,78 million viewed YouTube videos.



Giorgio Heiman, VP, Africa, Orange Business Services

People are becoming more mobile and more social, and these trends have created an unprecedented need for universal connectivity. But they're not merely technology trends; they're societal trends, and they require businesses to digitally transform and respond to them.

"It's not just hype," confirms Giorgio Heiman, VP of Africa, at Orange Business Services. "Digitalisation is changing the way customers and employees interact with each other in their personal and business lives."

A business model makeover

This transformation, he warns, involves digitalising one's current operational processes but it can also require a complete overall of one's business model and demand new skill-sets.

“The labour market is changing and there is a demand for different skills. Businesses need to consider which skills they want to retain, which they want to evolve, which they want to attract and how to provide people with training so that they can adapt to the new digital environment.”

“This has profound implications for government and policy makers if they want to ensure the education system continues to produce people with the right skills according to the demands of the labour market nationally and globally.”

Company structure and working methods are changing too. Unlike the industrial economy which demanded a large workforce, companies – or at the very least departments – in the new digital economy tend to be smaller in size and flatter in structure.

“In today’s business environment, it’s not important if you are a manager or not. The people that are important are the nodes in the information system... the people distributing information.”

A digitalised enterprise is more open, and remote working is accepted, if not encouraged. “More and more often you’ll find project-based work done by virtual teams, so you need to have communication and collaboration tools available,” Heiman explains.

Technology does not a digital business make

The strength of digital technology does not, however, lie in the technologies individually. Instead, it stems from how companies integrate them to transform their businesses and how they work.

Considering the storm of tech buzzwords directed at business decision makers on a daily basis, it’s little wonder some of them believe that a cocktail of these innovations – be it the Internet of Things, the cloud, or virtual reality – will fast-track their company into the Fortune 500.

Heiman feels that often too much emphasis is placed on the separate technologies. “Digitalisation will not happen through technology alone; that’s just one aspect. In my opinion, people are the fundamental element in the process, and the most important.”

These “people” are not just your customers, they’re the people working for you.

“You need to endorse digitalisation and this new way of working from the top of the company, and provide people with the tools to learn and understand the process. You need to have their buy-in and participation,” he says.

In other words, an investment in IT must be coupled with an investment in one’s staff. This investment must not only empower them to participate in the digital economy, but it must tap into the talents of the digital-native, mobile-first millennial generation.

“Millennials are our customers right now, they’re the customers of tomorrow and they are becoming our employees. As a business, you have to appeal to them and leverage their skills as much as you can.”

Digital on the inside

The Orange Group, parent company of Orange Business Services, has invested significant time, money and energy into the skills development of its workers, ensuring that the business becomes digital from the inside out.

As part of its efforts, the Group deployed digital knowledge management tools that are able to be used across multiple devices, and therefore always accessible to those working remotely. An example of this is their Piazza platform, a corporate social network that encourages communication between staff and houses knowledge about the organisation’s services, products and marketing initiatives.

According to Heiman, Orange has also had the younger employees working with some of the senior executives to familiarise them with social media and how best to make use of it.

Arguably one of the most notable investments is Orange's Digital Academy, which aims to provide a common grounding of digital know-how to all of the Group's employees, irrespective of their occupation.

The training programme raises staff awareness around the company's digital efforts and provides a structured series of online courses on topics ranging from cloud technology and 4G to the basics of digitalisation. It involves input from industry analysts and draws on the positive and negative experiences from other companies undergoing the process of transformation.

Orange intends for this skills development approach to be a unique selling point to apprentices, interns and job applicants, and eventually become an employer promise.

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