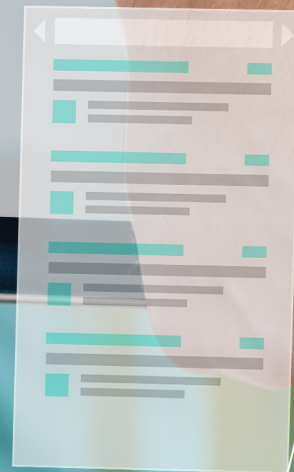


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Frontline Workers in the Digital Age: A Manager's Guide

2021 edition

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Introduction

Digital transformation (DX) has created a buzz in the enterprise area. More and more companies evolve their digital transformation strategy despite the COVID-19 pandemic. IDC estimates that \$1.3 trillion should have been spent on DX across industries in 2020^[1]. That is an estimated year-over-year growth of over 10%.

The investments are staggering. However, an estimated 80% of employees don't receive sufficient support in implementing digital solutions. And we're talking about essential frontline workers.

For long, employers focused mainly on office workers. But a majority of the workforce in traditional industries like manufacturing, construction, real estate, or utilities don't sit behind a desk during the day. They are in the field, on the shop floor, or in contact with clients.

According to the research conducted by the enterprise-focused firm Emerge, deskless workers represent more than 2.7 billion employees^[2]. And while companies provide

them with digital technology increasingly, 70% of workers feel they would benefit from additional solutions, including communications, operations & logistics, onboarding, and training.

Most employees also believe that the lack of better technology is due to budget constraints and their managers' lack of awareness. Without a proper digital solution in their hands, deskless workers are often left with sub-standard technology or even manual, paper-based processes to do their jobs.

If you are an executive or manager in a company with a frontline workforce, the time has come.

The time to make the deskless workers finally ready for the digital era.



If you are not familiar with implementing digital solutions to your frontline workers, don't worry.

In this e-book, we've outlined what digitalization is, when you should consider it, what the benefits are, and how to start the process. In the end, you'll have all the tools you need to make your business and frontline workforce ready for the 21st century.

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Digitization, digitalization, or digital transformation?

Let's make the terminology clear. When talking about implementation of digital solutions, three very similar terms are used across industries:

- **Digitization**
- **Digitalization**
- **Digital transformation**

While not the same, all three terms are associated together. Let's say you want to switch from a paper-based process to a digital one. First, you need to transform the paper into a digital form. You can scan it or create a digital form with the same content. This is called digitization – a transformation of physical things into their digital version.

Now, your frontline worker will start to use the digitalized form during a task. Let's say it is a checklist helping employees during an inspection process. You've just implemented

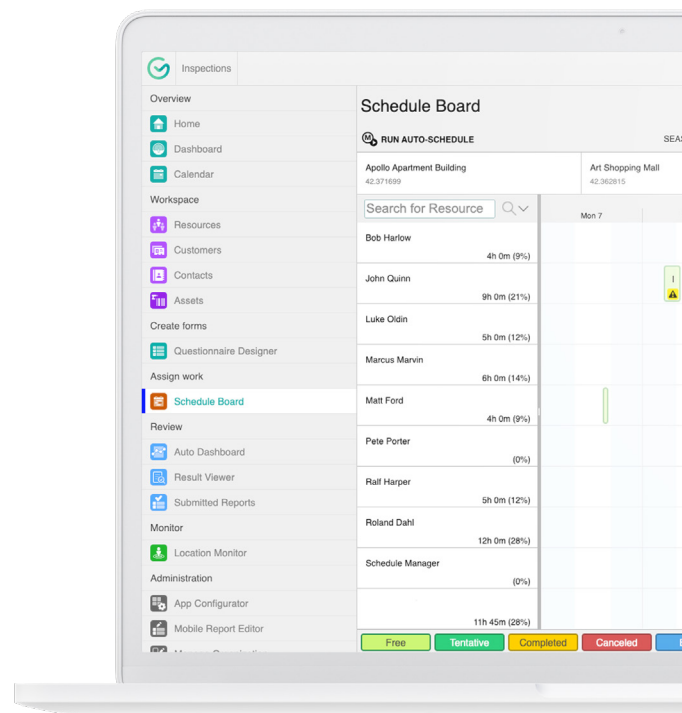
digital technology into your processes. That is what we call digitalization - employing digital technologies in business operations.

Then you send the data collected in the checklist to the cloud. The manager sitting in the office will look at the information in real-time, act on it and send a new work order to another employee who receives in a mobile app. This is starting to resemble what we call digital transformation – a fully integrated digital technology into business processes.



There is a common misunderstanding of the terms digitization and digitalization. People often use them interchangeably, but there are differences. Digitization is a simple transformation of physical things into their digital versions. With digitalization, the integration of digital devices (e.g. smartphones and tablets) and solutions into operations is the focus. Both of them are stages leading to full digital transformation.

While complete digital transformation might seem like too big of a goal initially, you don't need to worry. It has become easy to replace paper documents with digital versions and gradually implement them in your business. You can use mobile forms software, as it is simpler to manage and more affordable than more complex solutions like CRM or ERP systems.



Where can you implement digital technology?

There are several processes that digitalization typically transforms across industries – embracing digital solutions' ability to collect data, provide insights, and make better business decisions.

It all starts with the digitization of paper documents, eventually leading to more advanced use of technology. Such as deeper integration of artificial intelligence, IoT sensors, or augmented reality. But now, let's take a closer look at the essentials:



Paperwork

Transformation of analog materials into digital copies is the first step for many companies. By doing so, you enable the inclusion digitized assets into the workflow of an organization. These assets can be easily shared between coworkers and even with customers. It opens an opportunity for better collaboration and faster customer service.



Training

Onboarding of new employees can be tedious and ineffective. But with the help of digitalization, it can get smoother. Companies can prepare digital guides and materials for employees, which people can use whenever they need them. Also, studying materials with interactive elements rapidly increases the learning curve.



Data collection

Leveraging mobile technology in the field allows collecting and sharing data in real-time. Technicians can insert the information into the system via mobile phones, tablets, or other devices. If connected to the Internet, this data can be shared with the back office immediately. Furthermore, when managers use analytics tools on top of it, they can immediately see insights about the location and progress.



Quality assurance

Companies that embrace digital systems for inspections are more successful finishing the job on the first go – faster and more effectively, gaining extra time for other tasks. No mistakes go unnoticed, as workers get immediate alerts if something is incorrect or missing. This is another improvement over the traditional way of paper checklists and questionnaires.

5 ways maintaining status quo harms companies

Many companies already noticed the trend and going digital has become a priority. But many still maintain the status quo, which will harm their business in the long run. Below are the 5 common examples when doing things the old-fashioned way ultimately results in lower operations efficiency:

1. Workers waste a lot of time on paper-based processes

According to Xerox' study^[2], 46% of companies waste significant time on daily paper-intensive processes. Alaris points out that information management professionals spend 50% of their time looking for information^[3]. It is the time that workers could otherwise invest in more productive core operations.

2. Costs of human errors rise Using paper

documents brings a lot of added costs on the table. Lost, damaged, or misplaced documents have to be reproduced, or they lead to data loss, privacy violations, or even lost customers. That's why companies are switching to digital forms and invoices, which are easier to store and manage.

3. Lack of centralized data analytics & insight

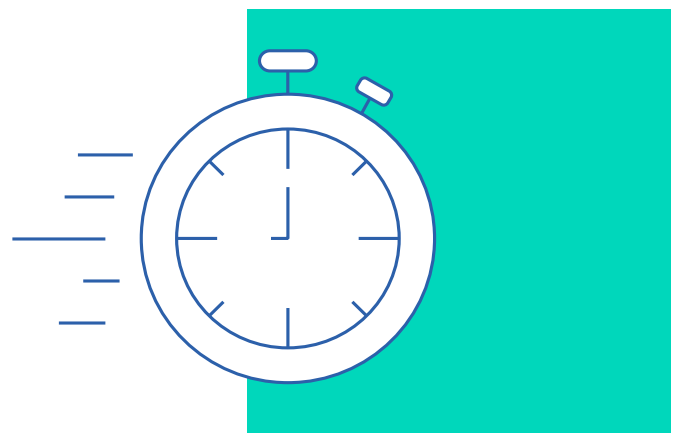
Prolonged data collection and analysis prevent decision-makers from seeing business performance and taking action. Companies with real-time data insights get a critical advantage when making business decisions.

4. Companies unable to attract a younger workforce

Deloitte Insights reports that in the coming years, between 2.5 million and 3.5 million manufacturing jobs will go unfilled^[5]. 84% of manufacturing executives agree that a talent shortage already exists in the U.S. Digitalization is an opportunity for traditional sectors to invest in the millennial generation, who expect the latest technologic advancements to help them do their jobs.

5. Competitors grow faster

Digitalization allows businesses to secure a competitive advantage by improving productivity and efficiency. Harvard Business Review's research shows that around 60% of companies are able to transcend their previous achievements by using digital solutions and apps^[6].



You should consider digitalization of your work processes if you struggle with any of these problems:

- You are managing paperwork that slows you down
- You are dealing with numerous human errors
- You do not have access to real-time data you can base decisions on
- You are struggling to attract new workforce
- You want to provide better services to customers



Success stories

The reason companies take on digital transformation even in industries where manual work is irreplaceable, is to make operations comfortable and efficient. There are several examples across traditional sectors and industries:

Productivity increase

Thanks to report digitization, the visit times have been reduced by 30 to 60 minutes per day. The workers can use this extra time to get other important work done or take even more visits.

Aljosa Nikolic,
Analyst from NAI Significa –
Real estate
[Read more](#)

NAI Significa

Revenue increase and costs saving

We're able to meet the market with information in a speed that just wasn't real for us before. That's where it accelerated our sales velocity rapidly. It resulted in a revenue increase of \$350,000 a month.

Jason Johnson,
Toyota Material Handling –
Manufacturing
[Read more](#)

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Improve customer experience and data insights

Digitalization brings many productivity enhancements to everyone: the partner has less paperwork to fill out, and we save time on retyping and controlling processes and make fewer mistakes. On every project, we save about 5 days of work. Also, the back office now has less administrative work.

Jean Manuel Baron,
IT director at Effy -
Construction
[Read more](#)

Effy

The implementation of digital solutions can rapidly improve the efficiency of work processes. This single improvement further leads to an increase in revenue or reduced costs. The amount can rise even to hundreds of thousands of dollars. Digitalization also enables companies to improve customer experience and data analysis.

Undergoing digital transformation

Digitalization is a continuous process. And it's challenging. Research shows that the success rate is still relatively low: less than 30% succeed^[7]. To start, make sure you control the areas where others fail:

Make the leaders committed to digitalization

If a CEO is not sure about the change, you are never going to succeed. Communicate the benefits digitalization will have on the business. You should convince all stakeholders that the change is possible and beneficial. When these people become advocates of digitalization, you are on the right path. Don't forget - building commitment takes time at the beginning.

Communicate and engage with frontline workers

This is where companies fail most often. The real digitalization has to always happen in the field, with the help of frontline workers. Clear explanation of what you're doing to your staff is one of the key steps to success. Identify the metrics, measure them, and make data-driven decisions that will help to see workers how digitalization will make their lives easier. Empower them to work in new ways.

Close the skill gap

When you start with digitalization from scratch, you are going to deal with a lack of required skills. But that's part of the change. Train, reskill, and upskill your current and future workforce.

Make continuous learning part of your talent development program. Explain to the workers that digital tools aren't there to replace them. Instead it is also their chance to upgrade their skillset to suit the marketplace of the future.

Start small

Don't go all-in at first. Many times, companies change too many things at once. And that often leads to failure, with high costs that generates scepticism about digital technology. Identify the main processes and communications you want to digitize. Launch a pilot project. Evaluate its results and adjust. Involve one business unit at a time. And then keep expanding.

Don't get constrained by technology

Choosing the right technology, software, or device for the transformation is going to be the hardest decision. Don't get constrained at the beginning by choosing a too narrow solution that you won't be able to scale or fit to your use case. Look for flexibility and customizability. Digital technologies favor evolution and change. Make experimenting easy for employees and encourage them to suggest optimal ways of working in the field.

Undergoing a digital transformation is a continuous process. However, focusing on step-by-step progress, clear communication, and support of frontline workers, opens doors to extensive growth and efficiency gains.



Conclusion

While billions are invested in digital transformation, a gap in support provided to frontline and desk workers still pertains. For traditional industries like manufacturing, construction, or utilities this might pose a risk. However, companies ignoring digital technology will find themselves lacking flexibility and increasingly ineffective. The work environment will continue to change in the coming years.

And digital technology will enable to sustainably innovate business operations. Providing higher efficiency and making the lives of frontline workers easier.

Ultimately, successful integration of digital solutions outside of the office will, for many organizations, become the difference between success and failure

So, are you ready to adapt?

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- Work order and **workflow management**
- Form and **report digitalization**
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