

EPISODE 25

The Rise of the Transformation Professional

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Hi, it's Rob Llewellyn here and welcome to episode twenty-five of transformation management. Thank you so much for joining me today. As always, I'm going to do my best to help you get better equipped to manage and lead transformation.

So how did we wind up here? How has the transformation of business using digital technologies become such a common topic inside so many organisations so quickly?

Well actually it took a while, for transformation to go mainstream - as an aspiration at least.

For decades we saw thousands of companies attempt to implement new technology with little if any consideration for the business, and the outcomes were very messy, with failed ERP projects and programmes being high on the list of culprits.

Thankfully a lot of lessons learned have been shared since then and although there are still a lot of struggling technology initiatives out there, at least now there are plenty of people who know what it takes to be more successful - even if some companies still try their luck without them.

Over the last decade we've seen mobile, social, and cloud technologies breeze through the consumer sector and we now live in a very different world as a result.

Most companies have invested in these technologies, but to a large extent, many have simply implemented new technology but continued to run their business in the same old way.

To use ERP as an example that will resonate with a lot of people, many organisations spent tens and even hundreds of millions buying ERP solutions from the likes of SAP and Oracle, but instead of seizing the opportunity to use the technology to adopt new ways of working, managers and leaders insisted that those systems accommodated existing business processes.

To a large extent, this happened because these efforts weren't led by the business. They were IT system-led and there was a complete breakdown in both communication and collaboration. Well a similar pattern is unfolding with the implementation of cloud, analytics and IoT, etc.

But the economic situation is different to how it was a decade ago. Because significantly more companies are being started, and new business and operating models are threatening to make traditional operating and business models look as appealing as a Nokia 5110 against the latest iPhone.

Those old enough to remember will know that many things that were important to us in the past are now irrelevant because we don't need them. And that made the offerings of many companies irrelevant - along with the supply chains that those companies relied upon.

So, most companies at least now accept that they need to use digital to transform their business. And while some - like Ocado and Netflix have enjoyed huge success from doing so, most companies have repeated the old ERP mistake. Meaning, they've implemented new technology, created some KPIs, thrown in some change management for good measure, but changed nothing fundamental about their operating or business models.

And of course, they label this as digital transformation because there's now a naive assumption that the words digital and transformation should be joined at the hip when anything is being done with modern-day technology.

So, while five years ago the challenge was to get companies to accept that disruption is something real and that transformation is a prerequisite for survival, now the challenge is to get companies to understand the difference between transformation and change. Because while transformation creates a new future, change only creates a better version of the past.

Fortunately, there's a growing number of professionals available to help companies understand all of this. To guide and advise leaders who know about their business and technology, but who aren't transformation experts.

These people are transformation management professionals, and as with any other profession, they've chosen to take the practice of transformation seriously.

Think about this ...

While most of us know a little about finance, organisations want certified finance professionals with experience managing that part of the business.

While most of us know a little about technology, the CIO wants certified subject matter experts with experience taking care of their infrastructure.

While most of us know a little about social media, the Chief Marketing Officer wants certified subject matter experts with experience managing their social media channels.

Because while we all know a little about a lot of things, most of us are only a professional expert at a few. And often we don't know what we don't know about areas in which we don't practice on a day to day basis.

And the same applies to transformation management. Because while many people talk about digital and transformation, an increasing number of companies are beginning to realise that they need authentic transformation managers with experience to help them transform both legitimately and successfully.

If you happen to be a transformation professional, it's likely that you want to work with companies that have a CEO who has the desire and resources to undertake legitimate transformation. And you probably don't want to be somewhere with a leadership team that is firmly stuck in the past.

Let's consider the scenario where you're already in a transformation management role with a forward-thinking innovative company, and of course you'll need to perform at your best - as a transformation professional - in that role.

You know you're going to face your fair share of transformation challenges, because they come with the territory. Because no one charged with managing or leading transformation will escape the hurdles that transformation puts in front of them. But how we clear those hurdles in the way an athlete does on a track, is what separates the skilled transformation practitioner from the one that keeps falling at every hurdle. Not because of lack of passion, effort or a desire to succeed - but because of lack of experience and knowledge.

Let's face it, most large firms are bursting with operational expertise, but this is made up from an entirely different set of skills found in a transformational management professional. And in the way that firms are diligent when it comes to hiring for key finance, IT or HR roles, leaders shouldn't make the false assumption that anyone can become an overnight transformation master.

Transformation management responsibilities need a safe pair of hands, and so it's vital that people charged with leading transformation are equipped with the expertise they need to perform at their best and deliver what leaders expect.

If you're someone with the desire, knowledge and experience to play a key role in transformation, you also need the right company for that aspiration to become a reality. The truth is, some older companies are being led by antiquated leaders who aren't equipped to lead their company towards digital economy success. And while some of them eventually get removed by the Chairman of the board, others will steer their companies into bankruptcy.

If you're working at that kind of company, but you have ambitions to undertake a meaningful transformation role, it's best you take things into your own hands and move on. This is where you need to think and act like a leader, creating a vision for where you want your career to be, then building and executing a plan to get yourself to where you want to be. You owe that to yourself and your family.

Because if you don't, and you allow yourself to get stuck with an antiquated organisation, you'll gradually lose touch with the outside world, get held back by old mindsets and ways of working, and you'll never get to practice transformation management.

Your field of vision will narrow, and your focus will be on internal priorities, and less on the world outside your firm's walls. You'll read about transformation, but you won't get involved in it because you're constrained by an antiquated organisation.

As in many of the best professions, three things you need to succeed as a transformation manager are knowledge, experience and certification. Let me say a little about each of them - starting with knowledge.

New knowledge is vital to orchestrate successful transformation, and no one, regardless of their role in an organisation, can afford to rely entirely on what they learned from the frameworks, best practices and operational models of the past.

Technology and business now need to be tightly integrated, digital needs to be at the very core of new business models, and technology, and innovation is vital to achieve transformation. Competitive intelligence, business value creation and so much more, is all part of the transformation challenge. So new knowledge is vital for anyone with ambitions of leading transformation which creates new competitive advantage.

The challenge for transformation professionals is to be selective about what they learn and to know how to put new knowledge to practical use in the real world. Reading the latest book or blog post is one thing but putting its content to work is where many struggle.

So, by selecting a framework such as THRIVE, transformation management practitioners can acquire a solid 360 degree view of transformation so they're equipped to help envisage, enable and orchestrate legitimate transformation.

The next thing you need as a transformation professional is experience.

While new ways of working and thinking are core to successful transformation, the ability to operate in complex and political environments can only be acquired through experience. So blending real-world experience with new knowledge is essential for anyone wanting to be successful in transformation management.

If you've never worked inside a large corporation or undertaken a real transformation management role, the chances of suddenly being asked to advise a multi-national CEO on transformation are slim. But in the way that all organisations need to begin their transformation journey somewhere, transformation management professionals need to do the same.

With a bit of initiative, there are ways you can accelerate your progress, if you're prepared to do more than just turn up for work each day and do what's expected of you.

Start helping people without them asking for your help, and start creating your own rich content about transformation online.

In a world where everyone from McKinsey and Harvard to teenage YouTubers and Instagram stars know the power of online content, it's important you understand how your own content will determine how others think of you as a transformation expert.

Online content is one of the most fundamental digital advantages any professional or company should be investing their time in these days.

You need to be a content creator and a giver of value to stand out from the crowd these days. Because even a 10-year-old can be a content clicker and commentator, which isn't enough to stand out.

Similarly, sending out hundreds of CVs is now as ineffective and old-fashion as the antiquated business models that will take many companies to any early grave.

So if you're looking for new opportunities as a transformation professional, think like a digital economy leader and let go of what worked well in the past. You need to leverage the power of digital yourself and demonstrate your expertise online.

And the third success factor in the transformation management profession is certification.

A growing number of career fields require professional certification, from finance and HR through to IT and Project Management. If you don't have the appropriate certification, chances are you'll be left to fill the less-well paid roles with companies that either don't have the budgets to pay for the best people, or that operate with low standards.

While transformation management certification isn't obligatory, a professional certificate that validates your knowledge of transformation and assures hiring managers in exactly the same way they seek assurance from other types of certification.

Professional certifications remain one of the most effective mechanisms to assess the knowledge and skills needed to perform a specific role. And as even more people now exaggerate their knowledge and experience online, hiring managers turn to certification as a means to better decision making. While certification offers no guarantee of a great hire, it certainly increases the odds.

After all, would you want a certified surgeon to operate on your nearest and dearest? Or one that claims to know what to do but who doesn't have the right certification?

Certification can also improve your earning potential and a number of studies show that those with relevant credentials earn higher salaries than those who don't. Oracle University, for example, compared the average salary of individuals who held Oracle certifications versus those who didn't and found that certified professionals earn 13.7% more than their non-certified colleagues.

The most successful transformation professionals don't wait for their managers to help them. The high performers take the initiative and take things into their own hands.

They take steps to acquire new knowledge about a transformation framework such as **THRIVE**.

They take an online course to get certified in that body of knowledge.

And they take advantage of basic digital tools and techniques to become known as a transformation practitioner worth paying for.

They own their personal career transformation in the way a CEO owns their company's transformation.

I appreciate you listening, and here's a quote to finish off the day from Henry Ford - founder of the Ford Motor Company.

“You can't build a reputation on what you're going to do.”

How will you show leaders that you have the knowledge, experience and certification that justifies them trusting you as a transformation professional?

I hope you enjoyed this episode. Thanks for listening - Take care and I'll catch you in the next episode of transformation management. Bye.