
Digitally Mature? Ready for the Digital Transformation?

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Abstract

Above all, in this article we would like to raise questions, which need to be addressed if we want to become mature citizens of a digital society – and to be successful in mastering this digital transformation, in Germany. The article also shows potential solutions to the deciding questions we have to answer in order to avoid becoming powerless marionettes attached to the strings of the digital revolution. It is also a question of bridging the gap between our private app behavior and the resulting implications for successful digital strategies in enterprises, society and politics. Oftentimes we are well aware of the successful digital solutions available, but are simply not able to identify the deciding success factors and to adapt them to entrepreneurial areas. In the consumer market place, major and minor global players are demonstrating how digital interactions can, and need to function in order to meet customer needs (see amazon, google, Facebook, Alibaba, airbnb, ebay, etc . . .). Why is it then that it is so difficult for IT departments of large corporations to offer equally successful functional digital applications for their employees? What is the significance of UI and UX designs in the consumer market on the one hand, and the influence of company culture on the success of digital strategies on the other? Is there a correlation or can the two worlds – private and professional, consumer and enterprise markets – be viewed independent of each other? How can digital corporate strategies profit from our digital commonplace? In order to answer these questions we need to recognize our ways of dealing with digital media, and analyze which conscious or subconscious mechanisms we use to navigate through in an ever increasingly digital world.

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8.1 What Does the Digital Transformation Do to Us? What Do We Gain from the Digital Transformation?

Are we mature in handling digital media, and able to form our own opinion? What decides our action and our decisions in working with smart phones, tablets, apps and IoT? Accordingly, with which criteria do we click our way through an ever more digital world? Are we self-determining, and, if so, to what degree, or do we allow ourselves to be led by cleverly programmed algorithms through a world which we don't understand ourselves anymore? Can we really actively structure the digital change, or are we being overwhelmed by the digital revolution? And if we, the inhabitants of this digital modern time, do not want to accept this disruptive transformation as a force of nature, how can we have an influence on it?

8.1.1 Our Conscious and Unconscious Motives Accepting Digital Achievements

In order to answer these questions I believe a differentiated view is necessary – a close look at our conscious and unconscious actions within the spreading digital development around us. It is a view at our true motives, either to accept digital achievements with enthusiasm or to reject them with a high degree of skepticism. A view at required political measures for a socially and humanely justifiable transition into the digital age 4.0. Along with this, we take a view at our changing working world. How will we work in future? How do we want to work in future? Does digital work 4.0 offer us the chance for individual fulfillment or does it mean an increase in external control and exploitation? In order to approach these questions we firstly have to clarify why, and to what extent, we interact with digital achievements today.

8.1.2 How Does Our Association with Digital Media Function?

It was Aristoteles, who put forward the thesis that happiness was the highest asset and ultimate goal of every action, in "Nicomachean Ethics". According to latest findings in brain research Aristoteles was not only right, but our decisions are made even before we realize it, in the orbitofrontal cortex. If no reward is recognized there is no positive decision. The reward principle describes the influence of positive reinforcement, according to psychology. This is one personality trait of the human, which also works in the digital world. If users receive an answer to a question, support or help in everyday life and the working world, it is felt as a reward – Aristoteles would have called this happiness. It is an important reason why only applications, which produce genuine added value for the user, can be successful: they reward the user. We immediately recognize the advantages of digital communication and collaboration, if they facilitate our analog daily life. We are

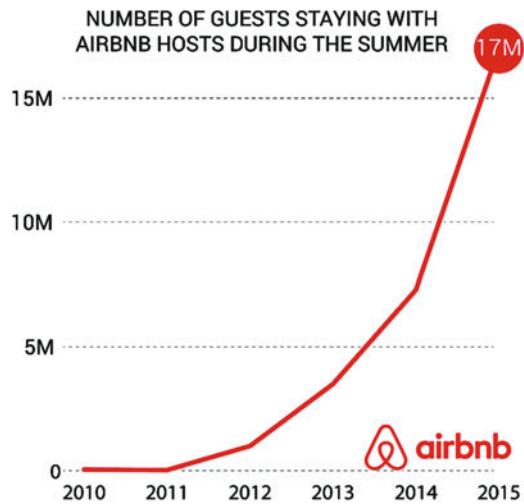
rewarded by not having to go to supermarkets, not having to take our shirts to the laundry, and being able to book our tickets online.

8.1.3 Key Success Factors

We won't have to go to the travel agent anymore or to line up at a desk, admission tickets will not have to be printed anymore or to be picked up at the ticket agency, etc. . . . the further development of these digitally organized services will escalate rapidly. In this development it will be exciting to see which innovations really ease our daily life, reward us by using them, and therefore soon become a part of the digital achievements which have an above average half-life value. An essential success factor of the generation of measurable digital added value will be the finesse of usability through which we are literally enticed to move from the well-worn analog trail to the new, alluring, and convenient digital path. Applications such as, for example, Airbnb, succeed in giving, with apparent ease to the user – whether it be guest or host, a responsive user interface so that one is positively seduced to join the Airbnb community by one click, s. Fig. 8.1.

There is nothing which hasn't already been considered by the makers and integrated into the UI design. This is not meant to sound deprecatory – quite the contrary. In this instance, it has been possible to successfully reproduce the real world and its complexity in a digital process. The interaction with other users turns into social collaboration. In spite of heterogeneous user structures a homogeneous entity is produced for those who participate, who receive their personal and individual advantages, who are rewarded and would like to continue.

Fig. 8.1 Number of guests staying with Airbnb hosts during the summer



A successful application, such as Airbnb, attracts other services like a magnet. In the periphery surrounding the practical everyday function, which renting out private living space brings with it, a number of add-on services have been created or have smartly docked onto the success. These are, of course fully digitalized, cleaning and housekeeping services, car and bike sharing services, delivery services of different flavors, etc. . . . This momentum is, on the one hand, stamped by economic interests, and, on the other hand, shows how important suitability of digital applications for everyday use has become. Practical use is in the foreground. The user wants to be positively sanctioned for his digital action – at best, immediately and noticeably.

In this connection, the pragmatic use of new media technologies has become second nature to most people for quite some time. They are happy to use mobile devices and apps, especially in view of the fact that they not only become more attractive, but also more user-friendly with every innovation and new version. Besides the joy of gained time, new application areas, the esthetics of new media, and one's own gain of multimedia competency, the digital revolution also brings with it complex challenges to the inhabitants of modern digital life – mentally, socially and psychologically.

8.1.4 Typical Factors to Fail with an Application

If the users are overly challenged by the possibilities of an application, or if they feel overburdened by the mass of information, they will be irritated; the app will never be used again or de-installed immediately.

Applications, which push their way into the foreground, will be found to be troublesome by users. In the meantime, there are many smart phone users, who have moved away from Android, because this annoys them immensely: being constantly confronted by unasked and unwanted messages on their device, which bring no noticeable use or advantage. Here, the digital industry must understand that it is no longer dealing with undiscerning users, but increasingly with digital natives, who know exactly what they want and have a deep understanding of what is technically viable today.

8.1.5 Mature User

Users have become more demanding. The demands on mobile devices, smart phones, tablets and their apps have risen exponentially during the last few years. Not so long ago we were happy if we were able to surf and mail on our cell phones, but today we expect a fully-fledged computer, equipped with OS and apps, which organize and optimize our everyday life with one click, anytime and anywhere.

8.2 Work and Private Aspects

How do our behavior patterns vary in association with digital media, when we navigate through our private everyday life, or move through our working world? Are there any differences at all?

8.2.1 More Stakeholder, More Complex Demands

How does cooperation between employees happen today and how do digital technologies and media change future collaboration within a company? In this case, the situation is similar to the everyday and private aspects: about the direct and instantaneous added value of a new technology or mobile application, which decides success or failure. Only in this case, contrary to the private world, there is a far larger variety of stakeholders, usually with diverse interests, diverse duties, and diverse benchmarks for the qualification of added values.

Concretely, this means that the meaningful deployment of digital technologies in the enterprise environment places even more complex demands, than already exist in the consumer market. If it is only left to the IT departments to try to do justice to the digital transformation, with however much enthusiasm, boundless innovation and much know-how, efforts of this kind, nevertheless, are doomed to fail.

8.2.2 Strategy vs. Culture

Only if the corporation dares to admit that it doesn't know the perfect route itself – vertically and horizontally – and that it needs cooperation from all departments and employees, then it is able to move into the digital age 4.0. The underused networking potentials, which sound so enticing using the buzz word “Industry 4.0 and digital transformation”, can only be identified and utilized by interdisciplinary working groups.

8.2.3 The Importance of Culture

In plain language, however, this also means that a revolutionary philosophy and culture change needs to take place within the company. Management Guru, Peter Drucker, once said “Culture eats strategy for breakfast” [1], s. Fig. 8.2.

This “old” realization suddenly becomes red-hot when we talk about the digital transformation in our working world and when senior staff wants to successfully drive the digital transformation within their department or the entire company. Company culture is certainly not the panacea for the sick and lame patient, but it can unleash cascading effects, which are necessary to excite the employees to take new digital paths.



Fig. 8.2 Culture eats strategy for breakfast

Company culture gives the initial impulse to embark on the path together in order to find and invent a new and suitable work place of the future together. In the implementation, however, there are a number of stumbling blocks. The enterprise not only has to take new paths technologically, but organizationally and process-oriented as well. There must be a collaboration of teams and communities, which are interested in a genuine and profitable digital transformation for all interested parties and the corporation. The immediate and direct involvement of workers' councils must not be neglected in this process.

8.2.4 Collaboration and Humanization of Work

Here, it is necessary to get across to the employees that it would be fatal to oppose or be skeptical towards digital transformation, simply because of the technical changes necessary. After all, ultimately a genuine digital collaboration, in combination with the associated company culture, is precisely what workers' council committees always demand – collegial cooperation and humanization of work.

8.2.5 Success or Failure

Ultimately, the success or failure of the “digital revolution” in a company, is decided by the end user (employee). If he or she sees reward (added value), if he or she utilizes the newly created digital features of the employer, not only will there be wide acceptance, but excitement in the way the potentials of industry and work 4.0 can unfold in the entire corporation. That means Aristoteles continues to be right in the enterprise environment, as well. The reward principle determines our actions, whether we want to or not: faster results, less annoying and unpopular work, simpler communication and collaboration, more agreeable working environment, better working conditions (analog or digital, real or virtual, offline or online) or more (free) time, is all true “bait” for our actions.

Fig. 8.3 Henry Ford (1863–1947). An American industrialist and the founder of the Ford Motor Company

***„If I had asked my customers
what they wanted, they would
have said faster horses.“***

- Henry Ford -

8.2.6 Real Added Values for the User

In order to produce a positive balance of resonance it is, however, not enough to simply give the employees digital tools. Besides the digital spaces, for example enterprise social media, new analog spaces must be created. The new collaboration tool alone does not produce appreciable added value for the employees unless it is embedded sensibly in a total work 4.0 concept: a total concept which doesn't only drive digital aspects, but which cleverly networks these with working place economy, innovative room architecture, working time models, conferencing systems, work-life-balance concepts, and the new design of production facilities and office space. The employee has to be at the center of this – the person as an individual with her or his individual world. Digital applications need analog partners in the real working and private world so that they can be an experience with real added value for the user, s. Fig. 8.3.

8.2.7 Digital Germany

Regarding the digital transformation in Germany, the EU Digital Commissioner, Günter Oettinger indicated: “We have lost the connection”. Is this true? Has Germany already missed the digital transformation bus?

“75 years ago Konrad Zuse presented the first functional computer in Berlin: the Z3. The pioneering country of the past has turned into a follower. We are suffering from the symptom of neophobia – the fear of the new” [2].

I consider these views to be exaggerated and, ultimately, they only mirror a part of the truth. Germany also boasts successful start-ups and companies which have actively devised digital change, recognizing the potential of these new technologies (e. g. Scout24, KaufDa, Jimdo, reBuy, daWanda, QYPE, Sport1, SoundCloud, etc. . . .) However, there could be far more companies, IT departments and organizations, which could follow the digital transformation in a smart, fast and safe fashion, if they were only courageous enough to more precisely analyze, adapt, and implement the already tested recipes for success. Nobody has to reinvent the wheel – neither the analog nor the digital one.

Aristoteles 4.0!

Perhaps another quote from Aristoteles may gain significance for enterprises and entrepreneurs if they do not want to miss the boat with the ever-increasing velocity of the digital transformation: “The beginning is half of the whole”.

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