



# The **DIGITAL** **LEADERSHIP** **PLAYBOOK**

*A Step-by-Step Model*

From the Digital Leadership Specialists

Jeremy Blain & Robin Speculand

# The DIGITAL LEADERSHIP PLAYBOOK

The Digital Leadership Specialists

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“

It is not about having a digital strategy but a strategy to compete in a digital world.

”

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# Introduction

The first three months of the 2020 global pandemic created as much activity in the implementation of digital than the previous three years. For many businesses to reach their customers, implementing digital shifted from being *optional* to *compulsory*.

**What worked yesterday will no longer work tomorrow  
in today's pandemic environment.**

In 2019, less than half of the C-suite leaders had the topic of digitalization on their agendas, according to our Ticking Clock research. Now, because of social distancing and other regulations, leaders are looking at new operating models to work with customers whilst realizing cost efficiency as their working capitals shrink.

Consider how the insurance industry can no longer rely on agents visiting customers, how retail businesses have been forced to sell online, and how universities can no longer conduct classes on campus.

Organizations that successfully adopt digitalization are able to operate more efficiently, offer their customers more of what they want and need, and are more profitable. For examples, the top five companies in *Harvard Business Review's* "[The Top 20 Business Transformations of the Last Decade](#)" saw gross profit increase by an average of *857 percent* over the last decade.

**The *Digital Leadership Playbook* is designed for leaders to understand how to successfully adopt digitalization into their organization and to build their own implementation playbook by answering the fundamental questions throughout the playbook.**

## Strategic Positioning

One of the first challenges in implementing digital is to recognize the role it plays in the organization's overall strategy.

***It is not about creating a digital strategy  
but having a strategy in the digital world.***

Framing the question correctly in strategy is imperative. The question is not “what can digitalization do for your organization” but “what is your strategy, in a digital world, to meet and exceed customers’ new necessities?”

This Playbook goes beyond the basics of digital transformation and addresses what it takes to successfully transform the whole business. That means assisting leaders to position “adopting digitalization” at a strategic level and to guide them through its execution. It does not address digital literacy, such as how to analyze data or the role of scum masters.

In *The Digital Leadership Playbook*, we aim to provoke thinking that leads to action by:

- Understanding what digitalization means to your customers and organization
- Providing a model to guide you through your digitalization journey
- Highlighting the goal of each digitalization implementation step
- Providing warnings from others whom have failed before you
- Asking provoking leadership questions for each of the three strategic stages and 11 steps
- Providing related digitalization insights and stories
- Presenting informative examples in sidebars
- Provoking thinking at each step through video introductions by the authors
- Providing worksheet pages after each of the of the three strategic stages and 11 steps so you can build your own playbook.

Throughout this Playbook, you will find numerous examples that focus on DBS Bank as a model of excellence in adopting digitalization. This is because the bank successfully transformed a traditional bank into the world’s best bank by *leveraging digitalization*. Also, one of the authors, Robin, has worked closely with bank leaders to document this digital transformation. As a result, he has published [two university case studies](#) and a book about DBS’ journey to become the world's best bank.

Before starting your journey, it is helpful to identify your readiness to transform to digital—your digital maturity. The next section introduces the Digital Maturity Index.

# Foreword

There is probably no more important topic on the agenda of executive teams now than digital transformation as they adjust to the new strategic landscapes around the world.

While most organizations have a sense of urgency and are adopting a wide range of digital initiatives to prepare their organization for the future, most digital implementations fail short of meeting customer requirements and organization's objectives. Digital transformation is exactly that, a transformation and not a project or initiative. It typically involves greater customer understanding, adopting new technologies and venturing into unknown waters. It is a journey with many steps and stakeholders and many hurdles.

Challenges include the shift of mindset in the organization, building a digital culture that is widely embraced and exploring new digital business models. It is less about the technology, urgency and commitment of the organization and more about the struggles in implementing digital approaches. Of course, designing a proper strategy is paramount to the success of any organization, but implementing the strategy is equally important.

And here is where the *Digital Leadership Playbook* by Jeremy Blain and Robin Speculand (AKA the Digital Leadership Specialists) comes into focus. It is a hands-on guide for leaders to improve the implementation of strategy to compete in a digital world. Jeremy and Robin have built a framework based on their solid research with over 1,800 leaders on the state of digital. It not only provides the framework and a necessary common language for digital implementation but also it is full of worksheets, user cases and best practices.

The *Playbook* weaves together all the important topics, pivotal questions and frameworks that matter for digital implementation. From vision and mindset, via customer obsession to empowering employees and obtaining good metrics on your progress. It equips a leader with the questions and considerations that guide them and their teams through the journey of digital implementation. A hands-on, necessary playbook for the digital age.



**Mark Greeven**

Professor of Innovation and Strategy  
IMD, Switzerland

# Digital Maturity Index

To assist in identifying your digital maturity, the purchase of this Playbook includes 25 complimentary six-minute, individual online assessments.

After completing the Index assessment, you receive a report describing where you are on your digital maturity index. The report includes recommendations for further development.

Please use one of the two links below to take your assessment:

1. <https://form.typeform.com/to/dYbaLNak>



The resulting report describes three unique stages of digital maturity.

## 1. Reacting Stage

Professionals typically find themselves responding to a spark or impetus to understand digitalization. That spark often comes from the marketplace, customers, or employees. Because of the digitalization activities around us, you may find yourself responding to these pressures. This early stage of digital maturing is reactive because people are provoked to take action.

## 2. Embedding Stage

Professionals find themselves in the middle of their digital maturity journey. Their work and life is likely already affected by digitalization, or perhaps they want to become more customer obsessed. They get focused on the business implications of digitalization, which include customer journeys, data collection, artificial intelligence, bureaucracy reduction, and reorganization.

## 3. Strategic Stage

Professionals at this mature stage have imbued the challenges, language, and techniques of digitalization. They can proactively identify and leverage strategic opportunities and even recognize a sizable revenue potential. They also appreciate the value of partnering with other organizations through open APIs while building ecosystems that enhance the customer offering. In addition, they constantly track advancements in digitalization to ensure they're ready to adopt them when required.

# The Digital Leadership Specialists

The Digital Leadership Specialists are supporting organizations to make digitalization happen.

Who are they? Robin Speculand is CEO of Bridges Business Consultancy Int and Jeremy Blain is CEO of Performance Works.

In 2019, we launched this collaboration through our research surveying 1,847 leaders across North America, Europe and Asia Pacific. Our goal? To identify the state of digitalization in business.

The four major conclusions from our research were:

1. Almost half of all leaders interviewed are not prepared for digital transformation.
2. Digital is leveling the competitive playing field in the three continents we researched.
3. Bureaucracy in Western companies is hindering their digital transformation.
4. Given these results, alarm bells should be ringing in boardrooms worldwide.



*Jeremy Blain and Robin Speculand present the Ticking Clock® model.*

The key outcome of the research led to developing a model that guides leaders through the tough challenge of adopting digitalization. It's called the Ticking Clock<sup>®</sup> model.

The Ticking Clock<sup>®</sup> model is explained on the pages that follow.



## Jeremy Blain

PerformanceWorks International

Jeremy Blain is an award-winning business leader, a recognized International GameChanger™ and a human capital expert. He

is the chief executive of [PerformanceWorks International](#) (PWI), a company that helps organizations, executive boards, leaders and teams succeed in the digital climate amid disruption, opportunity and uncertainty.

Jeremy has extensive experience globally as a transformation leader and adviser at the board level. He has successfully launched businesses and turned underperformance into excellence. This included a seven-year international posting as CEO for an international consultancy based in Singapore and operating from India to the Pacific.

Jeremy helps leaders and managers define strategies to implement digital and human transformations. He assists in developing fit-for-purpose plans that drive culture change at an operational level to embed the required skills for modernization. Globally, Jeremy is a proven expert for all stages of the business lifecycle, from start-up to internationalization. He has been known for raising profiles and profits throughout his career.

Over the past 10 years, Jeremy has published more than 25 industry White Papers and, in 2020, his first book *The Inner CEO – Unleashing leaders at all levels*. He lives in the UK.



## Robin Speculand

Bridges Business Consultancy Int

Robin Speculand is a recognized pioneer and expert in strategy and digital implementation. He is driven to transform strategy implementation globally by inspiring leaders to adopt a different mindset and approach. The founder of three companies and three business associations, Robin is CEO of [Bridges Business Consultancy Int.](#) and co-founder of the [Strategy Implementation Institute](#) and the [Digital Leadership Specialists](#). Robin is co-nominated with Piyush Gupta, CEO of DBS Bank, for the Thinkers50 "Ideas into Practice Award." He is also a TEDx presenter and facilitator for IMD, Duke CE, and Singapore Management University. A prolific author, he has written five best-selling books including *Excellent in Execution* and *World's Best Bank: A Strategic Guide to Digital Transformation*.



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# Why Implementing Digital Fails

Organizations are failing at digital execution and doing it at an extremely alarming rate. To succeed in today's turbulent world, leaders need a different mindset and approach than they had yesterday.

**Implementing digital can be overwhelming to leaders because of its multiple moving parts.**

Two examples of these failures are household names. Ford Motors started a new digital service separate from the rest of the business and failed to integrate this digital solution into the whole organization. Nike was one of the first companies to promote wearable hardware with its FuelBand fitness tracker, but this initiative lasted only two years.

## Digital Fact

According to articles in Forbes magazine and IBM, the failure rate for executing digital strategies is **84%**.

**Digital transformations don't fail because of the technology.**

## It's Not About the Technology

When you examine the top reasons why implementing digital fails, technology is not included. Rather, technology enables the transformation. It's implementation and usage are being constantly improved.

*Business success in the digital economy will rarely be a function of technology. Companies that succeed will likely distinguish themselves by working smarter.*

– Jeanne Ross,

Director, MIT Center for Information Systems Research (CISR)