

What it takes to be a digital leader

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IESE professors offer winning tips to help today's leaders step over the digital divide, so that technology becomes a source of innovation rather than alienation.

Unless you were born in the 1990s, then you are probably a Digital Immigrant, meaning that your ability to use a smartphone or tablet and interact via social media networks does not come as naturally as it does for Digital Natives.

Being an immigrant to this brave new world means that you may struggle to grasp the full implications of digital technology for your business and for your role as leader.

But as with any experience of being an immigrant in a foreign culture, there are new languages, attitudes and mind-sets that can be learned, which will ease your transition to this new environment.

Three professors from IESE's Information Systems Department highlight the new capabilities that will help leaders and organizations to step over the digital divide and "go native."

Becoming digitally fluent

The willingness to undergo transformation — both for leaders and organizations — is the crucial first step toward embracing the digital world.

If you're over 30, you will likely have "analogical baggage," says IESE's [Javier Zamora](#), adding that "even with your analogical accent, you can learn to speak digital."

In the program **Business Transformation in the Digital Age**, Zamora, together with

IESE's [Evgeny Kaganer](#) and [Sandra Sieber](#), teaches executives how to become digitally fluent, so that they can integrate digital thinking into their everyday management. Once they "see the digital scaffolding behind the physical world," they can begin to transform the way they manage their companies.

A more collaborative environment

One important transformation is that IT departments can no longer be treated in isolation, nor can technology be regarded as a discrete business area. Instead, information technologies become central to empowering employees and integral to everyone being able to achieve strategic business goals.

An example of this shift is the trend toward BYOD ("bring your own device") whereby employees are encouraged to bring their own mobile devices to work and allowed to connect them to corporate networks, accessing workplace applications and privileged information.

Alongside this is the widespread use of social media networks, which have created new types of customer engagement, obliging companies to become much more customer-centered.

These trends throw up a raft of new issues, which IESE's Sandra Sieber explores in two programs: **Advanced Digital Media Strategies** and the **Advanced Management Program in Media and Entertainment**.

"The challenge is not the technology per se, but rather how business leaders adjust organizational processes and cultures to take advantage of the benefits the technology offers," says Sieber, who also delivers the plenary session "Business Goes Digital" as part of the **Fast Forward** program.

"No doubt we will have to break down communication silos and migrate toward a more collaborative culture and environment, which facilitates teamwork and supports a process view (as opposed to a purely technical view of IT activities)," says Sieber. "For many organizations, these are big changes."

Use the information, not just the technology

Perhaps the biggest step to cross the digital divide concerns the issue of big data:

"Information is power, but only if you know what to do with it," says Javier Zamora, who leads a session on "Connecting the Dots with Big Data: Turning Gigabytes into Business Insights" as

part of the **Fast Forward** program.

Certainly, understanding how to transform big data into decisions that improve business performance should be at the top every executive agenda. But beyond using big data to benefit business, we should also be considering how to use it to boost individual performance.

"Think about all the e-mails you send every day; all the calls you make; all the apps you use on your mobile devices: These reflect your work habits, your productivity patterns, your movements, your sleep patterns," says Evgeny Káganer.

"The most powerful aspect will come when you start to integrate these dimensions: What is the relationship between my work habits, productivity patterns and daily activities in terms of my personal well-being? We, as individuals, can then start steering the conversation, telling businesses how we want products, services and business models to be, instead of the other way around."

Willingness to experiment

As part of the **Fast Forward** program, Evgeny Káganer, Sandra Sieber and Javier Zamora offer further suggestions for leading the digital transformation within your organization, and they outline the leadership competencies essential to drive change forward.

"Nowcasting" — a way of forecasting by reading the public mood using real-time social media tools like Twitter — is fast becoming a key capability to gain immediate insights into rapidly evolving customer preferences. Harnessing the potential it offers requires streamlined, nimble processes and a willingness to experiment.

Digital leaders must be able to encourage constant creativity and establish internal processes that spread learning across the organization rapidly.

Leaders should also encourage employees at all levels of the organization to develop digital competencies themselves. The more digitally literate a workforce, the greater their potential to contribute to value creation.

Simply having a smartphone to hand and hundreds of LinkedIn contacts is not enough. Crossing the digital divide requires a change of chip. Inspiring opportunities lie ahead for those willing to take the plunge. Are you one of them?

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