5 skills every leader needs to succeed in the digital world

The growing density of our digital connections is fast redrawing the boundaries of competition and reshaping the sources of customer value.

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In the mid-2000s, health-care providers in the United States began to deploy information technology in clinical settings to improve patient care, redefining the way that medical personnel, management teams and IT departments related to each other. In doing so, they instituted a new role: the Chief Medical Information Officer. Usually a well-respected physician with a forward-looking mind-set, this person had to work closely with key stakeholders to get them on board and ensure a smooth transition.

Today, many companies would do well to adopt a similar practice to spearhead their digital transformation efforts. In boardrooms around the world, the word “digital” is on everyone’s lips. Executives are asking questions like, “What’s our strategy in relation to mobility, social media, the cloud or big data?”

Unfortunately, their answers are all too often limited to addressing the potential impact of each trend on key aspects of running their business, when really what’s needed is a better grasp of a deeper, ongoing mega-shift, which is utterly transforming the very nature of our societies and businesses, and of which mobility, social media, the cloud and big data are mere manifestations.

This profound shift is being driven by the growing density of our digital connections, which is fast redrawing the boundaries of competition and reshaping the sources of customer value. This demands that we take blended approaches, not just to our business strategies, but to our organizational structures and practices. And doing this might require new leadership

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roles, such as Chief Digital Officers.

But digital leadership is more than a job title; it's an entirely new mind-set. Based on conversations with participants of executive programs and reviews of a number of cases on digital transformation, we have started to synthesize the qualities, practices and approaches of the digitally minded leader. In this article, we suggest at least five important dimensions that make up the digital mind-set. They may seem paradoxical or contradictory, but they are more important than ever to deal with the digital transformation upon us.

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