

DO PROCESS MODELS EXIST FOR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS?

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines whether a model for digital transformations exists. Especially during the pandemic, digital transformation became one of the most critical issues on the management agenda of many companies. Starting the change is a massive task. Procedures for this are essential. According to literature research, there are many different approaches, but none have prevailed. This paper shows which components are relevant for a digital transformation process from the experts' point of view.

Keywords: Digital Transformation, Change Management, Covid-19, Pandemic, New Era.

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes how digitization and Covid-19 have worked over the past two years. Management had to develop new business models and strategies as quickly as possible to generate profitable and sustainable business despite the difficulties. The digital transformation was initiated years ago. In times of Covid 19, it took on a completely different meaning. Companies had to act quickly. Anyone who slept in the past, before March 2020, and did not initiate the transformation, worked up a sweat during Covid-19. Many companies only became aware of the topic of digitization because of the pandemic. Even after two years of the pandemic, there is still much to do in this area. This raises the research question, "Do process models exist for digital transformation projects?". Expert interviews were conducted on digital transformation and its numerous side topics. It should be shown whether and how the digital transformation took place in times of Covid-19. In addition, it should be recorded which aspects went well. Furthermore, reference is made to KPIs to measure how advanced a digital transformation is in the company. In addition, there are the topics of change in general, change process, and phases.

Digital transformation and digitization are essential topics, especially for companies. These issues are complex and multifaceted. Management strategies, frameworks, process models, and tools are required to implement such projects (Hess, 2019).

One item on all management agendas is digital transformation. It clarifies how companies want to and have to position themselves in the future to survive in the market. They want to achieve profitability and sustainability for their business (Mithas, Tafti, & Mitchell, 2013). The biggest challenge today is that companies always have to change and evolve due to the never-ending process. Companies must be competitive and determine their unique selling point (Deekeling & Barghop, 2017).

Since 2020, the economy has been heavily burdened by the coronavirus. Restaurants could only be opened to a limited extent, sports and leisure facilities were closed and retail activities were increasingly reduced to the most basic. Various countries have only opened their borders to commuters, severely restricting economic activities (Blagov, 2020). Working from home has become the new standard. Many employees had to work entirely from home from March 2020 (Schröder, 2020). Outside the IT sector, numerous companies had to implement new regulations for the unique working style so that the home office could be carried out. In addition, business structures were adjusted (Alipour, Falck, & Schüller, 2020). Employees had to learn new skills as companies started to sell online instead of offline (Engels & Rusche, 2020). Parents also had the challenge that they had to look after the children at home and had to work at the same time. Due to the very challenging situation, stress arose in many families (Walker, Brewster, & Fontinha, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a mixed-method approach, which is based on qualitative interviews and statistical analysis

The qualitative research method, according to Mayring, is applied. This approach enables social issues to be considered and supports them to be reproduced literally (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). The core of the qualitative research method consists of the interpretation of non-numerical or verbal data (Bortz & Doering, 2006). The data is collected through an expert interview or observation at work, in shops, or at home. Qualitative research is theory-driven (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2011). According to Mayring (2010), qualitative analysis can make connections understandable and recognizable.

Since this paper uses qualitative data collection in the form of content analysis of problem-centered expert interviews, according to Mayring, an in-depth description now follows.

Nine expert interviews were conducted and analyzed to answer the research question in detail. This procedure is one of the oldest and most famous methods of gathering information. In addition, this method is often used to obtain respondents' subjective experiences and opinions and analyses unstructured relationships (Wittkowski, 2013).

Therefore, nine problem-centered expert interviews are conducted for this paper. The respondent can answer as freely as possible. A semi-structured survey gives the interviewee the feeling of participating in an open discussion. The topic or challenge is explained in advance. The interviewer has examined the problem and can ask specific questions (Mayring P. , 2002).

One of the standardized interview categories is the problem-centered expert interview. A guide is used to give the experts structure. The main aim of the interviews is to get expert knowledge on the core topics. Key questions are asked, which the expert can, at best, answer directly. A fluent conversational style should develop. Therefore, the order and wording of the questions are irrelevant. In addition, further questions can also be asked, enabling a detailed analysis of specific facts (Gläser & Laudel, 2010).

Individual interviews are conducted so that there is a pleasant conversational atmosphere. This fact is considered advantageous in the literature (Mayring P. , 2010).

In the following, the underlying sample of this dissertation is presented. Nine experts from various companies and management functions were interviewed to obtain the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the current pandemic situation regarding digital transformation. The interviewees are presented in the table below:

Table 1 Data of Experts

No.	Gender	Name	Company	Position	Age	Length of time in this position	Length of time in this company	Years of working in total
1	Female	Expert 1	IBM	Senior Manager and Practice Leader	31	0-2 years	5-7 years	12
2	Male	Expert 2	Fujitsu	Head of Corporate Development	56	3-5 years	7-10 years	36
3	Female	Expert 3	Atos	Head of Transformation and change	35	0-2 years	7-10 years	10
4	Male	Expert 4	Fujitsu	Head of Central and Eastern Europe	55	5-7 years	More than ten years	33
5	Male	Expert 5	Fujitsu	Head of Sales in Central Europe	42	0-2 years	More than ten years	23
6	Male	Expert 6	Google	Key Account Director	46	0-2 years	1-2 years	24
7	Male	Expert 7	Spirit 21	Head of Infrastructure Services	49	0-2 years	1-2 years	31
8	Male	Expert 8	Konika Minolta	Head of Digital Solutions	53	0-2 years	3-5 years	35
9	Male	Expert 9	Logicalis	Head of Microsoft Business	58	0-2 years	0-2 years	31

Teams were used to conduct the interviews. The interviews were recorded online. The experts did not receive any relevant content in advance, so they were free in their answers. Respondents were informed that the interviews were used to collect data for a qualitative dissertation. Gläser and Laudel (2010) defined basic principles for questions used in the interview guide. Questions should always be formulated openly. This helps the respondent understand the question directly. The main thing is that all relevant data can be collected. Furthermore, the survey ensured that the study did not harm the interview partner (Gläser & Laudel, 2010). The interview guidelines were structured as follows based on the principles mentioned and the critical question formulated:

Table 2 Interview Guide

Sector	Question
Company Data	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Which is your specific responsibility in the company? 2) How long have you been in your current position? 3) How long have you been with the company? 4) Is digital transformation a topic on your management agenda? 5) Which of the top three strategic directions is your company currently pursuing? Cybersecurity? Automatization? Cloud Platform?
Components of the digital transformation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6) How important is digitalization for your company? 7) What does the change mean for you and your company? 8) Which components belong to a change process if you consider the different stages (Prelaunch, Launch, Postlaunch, Implementation)? 9) In your opinion, what is the maximum time a change process can take these days? 10) What do you understand by digital transformation? 11) In your opinion, which components belong to the digital transformation when you think of the company organization, the products, the technology, strategy, culture? 12) Have you set KPIs for the digital transformation? 13) Have the KPIs been met? 14) Has funding ever limited your decision to go digital? 15) How far has your company's digital transformation been completed? 25%? 50%? 75%? 100%? 16) Will the digital transformation process ever end in your opinion?
The digitization process in times of Covid-19	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 17) How has the way you work changed since the pandemic? 18) Has the pandemic accelerated the digital transformation process for you? 19) Which projects did you do in times of Covid-19 to advance the digital transformation? 20) Did you have process models? 21) Which company projects have been prioritized differently due to the pandemic? 22) How did you feel about the effects of Covid-19? 23) What did you have to change ad hoc in the company? 24) What kind of changes in the process of digital transformation between the pandemic year 2020 and 2021 have been made? 25) What challenges did you face with the digital transformation during Covid-19? 26) Is there anything that you would have liked to have done differently afterward?
Outlook/future	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 27) Will you keep for example the home office regulations due to the pandemic in the future? 28) What kind of regulations will you pick up to undo when the pandemic is over? 29) What change aspects would you recommend to other companies if they want to transform themselves? 30) What kind of future topics will be relevant for your company?
Closing question	Are any aspects that have not yet been addressed but are essential to you in the digital transformation in times of covid-19 context?

The interview questions are divided into main categories, which, depending on the answer, are supported by the detailed questions mentioned. The first block of topics includes the company-related data of the respondents as well as the strategic direction of the company. The second block

filters out the components that belong to a digital transformation. The third thematic block presents the digitization process in times of Covid-19. In the last relevant topic block, the future perspective is examined. Finally, questions about components that have yet to be considered in the interview so far are asked.

In addition, the interview's greeting, opening, and closing took place during the discussions, but these are not part of the interview guide.

Nine problem-centered expert interviews were conducted and analyzed according to Mayring's (2002) qualitative content analysis. This method should be used to study problems, cultures, and circumstances (Mayring P., 2002). Especially when researching previously unknown phenomena, perspectives, and experiences, content analysis should be used. The evaluation includes the analysis of the data based on verbal communication and the category-based text analysis. A special procedure is used for this. Teams was used to transcribe the interviews and saved them in a Microsoft Word file. The lines of the interviews were numbered to be able to name precise sources in the analysis and presentation. With this rule-based word processing, the thematic information is in the foreground.

The edits took pauses, filler words, and grammatical errors into account. However, these were not used further in the further course of the evaluation (Mayring P., Qualitative Content Analysis, 2012). The interview was scheduled to last 60 minutes. Due to the different flow of speech and the wealth of information, the interview times varied between 24 and 48 minutes. The total length of all interviews is 324 minutes and 8 seconds.

The general process model of content analysis according to Mayring comprises ten steps. This model is used before the overall assessment.

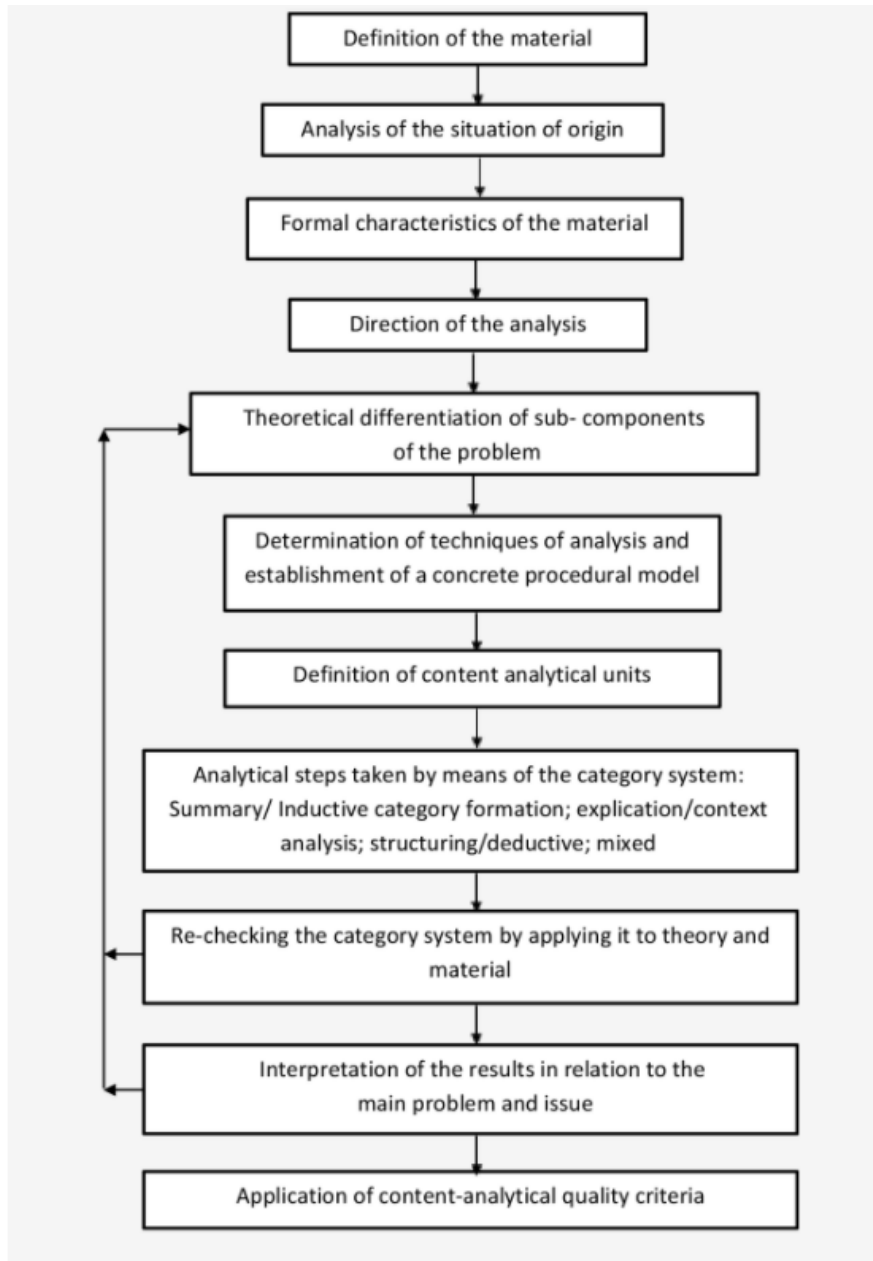


Figure 1 General content analysis model (Mayring P., Qualitative Content Analysis, 2000)

In addition to the Mayring analysis, an odd ratio test was also carried out. Here, the chances and risks were evaluated when a woman or a man makes the statement that a transformation ends or not.

Implication

The pandemic has highlighted the increasing reliance on information technology (IT) for businesses in every sector.

New structures had to be created. New business models were designed and implemented ad hock. Infrastructures had to be changed so all employees could work from home. As a result, the

positions of Chief Information Officer (CIO) and Chief Digital Officer (CDO) have become increasingly important. According to a study among CIOs, information security, digital collaboration, and digital business models are today's fundamental challenges (Roscher, 2021). The pandemic has hit almost all companies. However, there were differences. Retail was not affected as severely as, for example, the tourism sector or gastronomy. In addition, larger companies could withstand the pandemic's impact more than smaller ones. (Golubeva, 2021).

The pandemic accelerated the digitization process. In addition, of course, there was more pressure on these projects due to the acute need (Expert Interview No 9 line 601).

Changes had to happen everywhere. The situation prompted a rethink. Adaptations should be approached proactively, so there is no need to react to external circumstances (Expert Interview No 4 lines 103-113). The workforce sort of split into two groups. One group thought the change and progress in digitization were significant. This step was great for them because they are part of the future. Half of the employees were skeptical about the changes (Expert Interview No 8 Lines 77-98). Selling works differently now. There needs to be more storytelling and cross-selling (Expert Interview No 5 line 169-292). In addition, the contact persons are also changing. Young people are more in demand than ever. They occupy some management functions as the online business is becoming more and more valuable (Expert Interview No 6 lines 146-150).

Working from home made it easier to plan. This way, private appointments could also be scheduled and attended to precisely (Expert Interview 1 lines 663-683). Even if arrangements could now be designed better, the working days often got longer in the home office (Expert Interview No 6 line 503). In addition, it was very noticeable that the travel time, for example by plane, takes a lot of time and is, of course, more expensive. (Expert Interview No 1 lines 666-679). Furthermore, many managers had to relinquish control over their employees and place them in trust (Expert Interview No 2 lines 607-613). Short-time work was also used, and 95% of the salaries were still paid. Management waived 10% of salary (Expert Interview No 8 lines 470-475).

The pandemic has increased working from home. Most colleagues are already familiar with being in the home office a few days a week in the IT sector. Overall, just in the first year of the pandemic, the pace was lost. Customers stopped projects or were initially cautious. The issue of trust also played a significant role. For example, it used to be easy to build up through personal contact or shared experiences at the trade fair. This is extremely difficult, if not almost impossible, online (Expert Interview No 6 lines 714-724). The pandemic has resulted in weight gain as most sports facilities have closed. In addition, it was noticed that the nerves were getting thinner, and the sound was getting rougher (Expert Interview 8 line 705-710). There were many frustrating phases where projects did not progress correctly and a lack of personal exchange with colleagues and customers (Expert Interview No 3 lines 510-515). The prioritization of projects and tasks became very important because there were suddenly many virtual appointments. In addition, there were no surprises. So, one no longer saw any customers spontaneously at an event or a trade fair. There was also a lot of looking inside the company, for example, with employee feedback. Now the focus should be more on the customer (Expert Interview No 2 lines 849-867).

The last two years have encouraged people to reconsider their habits and see whether specific topics cannot be approached differently (Expert Interview No 4 lines 550-586).

RESULTS

The pandemic has accelerated the transformation. One task is to design new business models, which have become much more intensive and faster due to Covid-19. Another significant advantage was that everything became more international. This meant that calls could be made to Asian countries in the morning and the American states in the afternoon (Expert Interview No 8 lines 948-953). Transformation projects also had to be carried out because of the pandemic. The overall situation was, of course, not easy. Nevertheless, process models help take the proper steps in one's company and with the customer (Expert Interview No 9 lines 689-691).

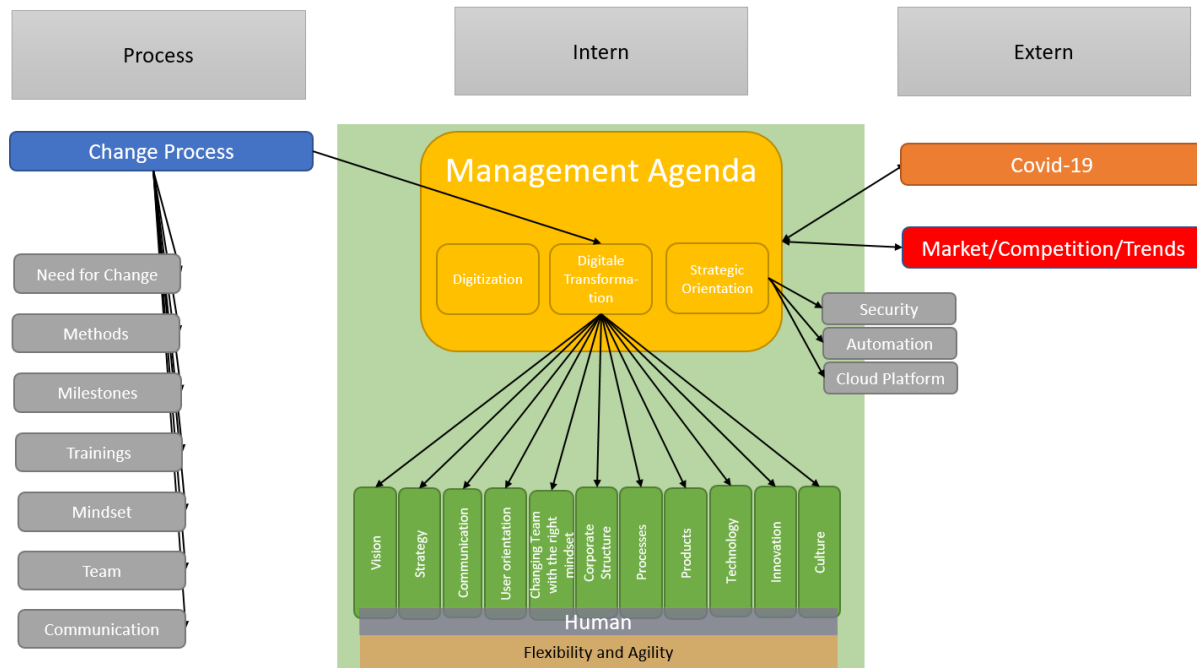


Figure 2 Own compilation: Experts' results

Process

Assessments should be carried out first to establish a status quo (**Need for Change**). Then the concept with the different **milestones** should follow. Possible solutions and projects should be considered. The biggest challenge in the transformation is winning people's trust for the new ways of working/tasks (Expert Interview No 6 lines 627-690). There are differences. For example, a classic roll-out of a virtual working place was carried out according to the traditional waterfall model. In contrast, new initiatives, such as how the workforce wants to work in the future, are structured differently. This type of project starts with a high-level vision that is openly formulated as a result (**Methods**). This is followed by the design of the measures and the creative processes with the employees (**Team**). For example, improvement labs are held where the workforce can speak openly and contribute. In this way, mood pictures can be captured, which is helpful for further measures (Expert Interview No 3 lines 421-449). The management style is also changing. Managers have to manage the pool of resources and have the employees' backs accessible so that the experts can fully anchor themselves in the topics (Expert Interview No 2 lines 728-736). Then there is flexibility. That is one of the success factors. If the company can react flexibly to the market or external circumstances during the transformation process, it has won (Expert Interview No 5 933-951). In addition to flexibility, curiosity about new things and a willingness to take risks are essential characteristics in a transformation (**Mindset**). Both are far outside the comfort zone.

(Expert Interview No 4 lines 734-755). Communication is very relevant in the whole process (expert interview no. 3 lines 112-136). It is also important to offer training so that a change can be internalized and implemented in the long term (expert interview no. 3 lines 112-136).

Intern

There will never be a standard answer for a transformation in any sector, as every company is different. However, there are always certain components that should be taken into account. It has to start with the **vision** and the **strategy**. In addition, it should be clear which values should be represented and how they should be **communicated** (Expert Interview No 1 lines 381-391). In addition, **user orientation** is very important in a digital transformation (Expert Interview No 5 lines 371-404). Next to the **changing team**, the **corporate organization** must be considered as well. It includes **processes, products, technology, innovation, and culture** (Expert Interview No 4 lines 214-231). Finally, it is important to mention and note as a tip that a digital transformation only ever happens with and through people (analog). The **human being** has to be the center of attention at all points (expert interview no. 2 lines 1386 -1411).

A more or less "one-sided" project plan was drawn up in the past. Now it's more of a collaboration between the teams or the company and the customer. There is no longer a one-size-fits-all solution but individual solutions (Expert Interview No 7 lines 305-322). **Co-creation is key**. The top-down approach no longer works these days. People want to contribute and create something together that they are a part of (Expert Interview No 3 lines 756-763). The image of a never-ending skyscraper illustrates a transformation. The company is allowed to take small steps, floor by floor, to achieve and celebrate success. After that, the achievements can be built on so that a robust construct is created (Expert Interview No 6 lines 987-1002).

Extern

Digital transformation only came onto the management agenda of many companies when the pandemic (Covid-19) was already there. As a result, the external impact had an enormous impact on the acute management issues. This, of course, has accelerated the transformation for most companies. In addition to the pandemic, the market with the latest trends must of course be considered (expert interview no. 8 lines 291-300).

KPIs are an excellent metric to see how successful a company is. They also provide essential indicators of how far a company has progressed in digital transformation. It is necessary to distinguish between hard KPIs and soft KPIs. Hard KPIs are, of course, the financial company figures. Soft KPIs are employee surveys, customer satisfaction, diversity, and how the CO2 balance regarding the sustainability aspect is, e.g., is. For a healthy view of a company, a mix of hard and soft KPIs should be considered (Expert Interview No 4 lines 238-278).

Table 3 KPIs for a digital transformation

Expert	KPI	Soft or hard KPI
Expert 4 (Expert interview no. 4 lines 261-326)	Financial numbers/ Time to Revenue	hard
Expert 4 (Expert interview no. 4 lines 261-326)	employee surveys/score	soft
Expert 4 (Expert interview no. 4 lines 261-326)	Diversification (Gender, internationalization)	soft
Expert 7 (Expert interview no. 7 lines 380-392)	High-quality pipeline	hard
Expert 3 (Expert interview no. 3 lines 218-255)	Degree of automation	hard
Expert 3 (Expert interview no. 3 lines 218-255)	Number of bots for knowledge transfer	hard
Expert 6 (Expert interview no. 6 lines 281-346)	Speed/breakthrough time	hard
Expert 6 (Expert interview no. 6 lines 281-346)	Efficiency gain	soft
Expert 6 (Expert interview no. 6 lines 281-346)	Time to Revenue	hard
Expert 6 (Expert interview no. 6 lines 281-346)	Time to Market	hard
Expert 6 (Expert interview no. 6 lines 281-346)	The speed of success in a new team	soft
Expert 5 (Expert interview no. 5 lines 432-470)	Customer satisfaction	soft
Expert 5 (Expert interview no. 5 lines 432-470)	Sustainability	soft
Expert 1 (Expert interview no. 1 lines 446-529)	Skills	soft
Expert 1 (Expert interview no. 1 lines 446-529)	Stock-market price	hard
Expert 1 (Expert interview no. 1 lines 446-529)	Number of projects	hard
Expert 1 (Expert interview no. 1 lines 446-529)	Number of training	hard

It was also essential for the experts to highlight that KPIs must be flexible during a transformation (expert interview no. 4 lines 337-339). In addition, mistakes give one the space to dare and move forward (expert interview no. 6 lines 281-346).

In addition, an odd-ratio test was carried out about the gender of the experts and their statement as to whether a transformation process will ever end.

		Transformation Process	
		ends	never ends
Gender	Female	1	1
	Male	2	5

Odds-Ratio = $(1*5)/(1*2) = 2,5$

The chance is 2,5 times higher than a female expert thinks that the transformation ends.

Risk-Ratio: $[1/(1+2)]/[1/(1+5)] = 2$

The risk of a woman saying transformation never ends is 2 times higher than that of a man.

DISCUSSION

Digital transformation was an important topic in many companies even before the pandemic. Many companies have already tried to digitize themselves more and more. It is questionable whether the companies had to act aggressively during the pandemic or whether some things were already prepared. In addition, it should be questioned why many companies only started to transform during the pandemic and not before. Another critical point is the financial framework. It must be questioned where the financial resources for the transformation come from. In addition, the procedure of digital projects must be examined. It must be questioned whether companies made a plan beforehand and, for example, defined the vision and strategy or whether they had to act directly because of the exceptional situation. Another point of discussion is the KPIs. It should be questioned which KPIs are the most relevant and whether every relevant KPI can be carried out as usual. The mindset, for example, is just as much a part of a digital transformation as specific sales figures. Here, the weighting and the importance of the individual KPIs should be questioned. It should also be discussed when a digital transformation is complete and what is involved in ending the process.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it can be stated that specific framework parameters help a company carry out a digital transformation. Nevertheless, it is essential to ensure that every change is different since every company has another point of view and starting point. Certain elements can, of course, be adopted, such as an order of a particular process. Nevertheless, vision, strategy, communication, user orientation, team, mindset, corporate organization, processes products, technology, innovation, and culture should always be looked at so that a transformation can be carried out successfully. Last but not least, it is important to mention that all processes and steps are carried out by people so that people themselves can never be ignored.

In summary, it can be said that there is no holistic model that companies can go through to start the digital transformation.

RECOMMENDATION

Furthermore, it should be considered that the survey should be extended to verify the result. In addition, long-term studies could help get a different perspective on the investigation.

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