



INTERVIEW WITH MR. DHAVAL PANDYA, CIO & CDO – JSW Paints Private Limited

The term digital transformation has different connotations for different enterprises. What is your view of digital transformation? Do you believe that the term ‘digital’ itself has evolved in the past few years, and if so how?

You are right. It is one of the most widely flashed terminologies today; especially given the situation of recent times which has presented enterprises with unprecedented challenges. Clearly it is not being looked at as if something that can “also” be explored. While its importance has not surfaced only recently, the term itself has definitely evolved over the past few years – from being explored as a productivity improvement option to cost reduction option to a disruptor to a frontline revenue generator and engagement lever to a full-fledged business model. Interestingly the evolution has not been at the cost of shedding the existing value proposition but encapsulating and imbibing it into the next avatar. There are a plethora of companies emerging with a “digital first” model which essentially means that digital is core to their offering.

What are some good practices to build an agile and effective digital strategy?

In my mind, keeping the below mentioned three always helps when formulating a futuristic digital strategy

- While by nature it has to be futuristic, the essence of the term futuristic has definitely changed. It no longer can be a long drawn five-year plan. Anything in my mind that is longer than two years has its pitfalls – one, it will be obsolete sooner than you expect; and two, it may entice you into tying up with rigid technologies. The strategy has to be malleable enough to change with your changing customer; else you are always playing catch up. The strategy needs to have a guiding component (the vision) and a rolling component that can be reviewed every six months at best, not any later.
- Have milestones that are clearly defined and can be measured with quantifiable KPIs. I hear a lot of companies say that “well not everything can be measured”. My view is



breaking it down does reveal measurable components or relevant proxies at the least. These further need to be distributed and form a part of the KRA of the relevant personnel. This will ensure a concerted effort to achieve the goals rather than chasing irrelevant excellence.

- It always helps from drawing references or building upon – another widely used terminology, “best practices”. One should never hesitate to adopt from success models elsewhere as long as there is a strategic correlation. Where organizations falter in my view is taking a short-term view and joining the copying bandwagon & doing it for immediate benefits. Always ask the question, having done this “what next...?”

How have enterprises leveraged digital for business performance?

There are umpteen examples of how the adoption of digital has proven to be a formidable disruptor and taken away the “incumbent advantage”. If I look at it closer, it has always solved a “significant problem” that either the customer was living with or had not taken cognizance of (latent needs). Broadly it has attacked the below three areas.

- **Customer experience** – say for example the radio cabs. The concentration was always on taking the pain away as well as the frustrations & uncertainties involved with engaging local cabs that resulted in disgruntled customers. The app is only a manifestation of the thought process that went into identifying, acknowledging, and solving this problem. The important thing being close looping it with real-time two-way feedback. This helps them identify lapses and preserve the level of service and hence the customer experience.
- **Operational excellence** – the Industry 4.0 bandwagon. The problem being a lack of control – expressed as a lack of visibility, flexibility, predictability & being prone to personal judgments. We have always had planning systems, however, the levers that allowed full flexibility to “run it as planned” on the shop floor were not fully available. Connected machines provided the potential to realize the vision of truly “fully automated” operations.
- **Reduction of non-value adding activities** – there has been a constant fear that most jobs would be automated very soon leaving a huge workforce unemployed. One such level of automation being RPA that focuses on applying business rules and automating redundant and non-value-adding activities. An example where enterprises have fruitfully employed RPA is the entire Accounts Payable workstream. It has not only reduced the cycle time to process the vendor invoices but the accuracy has also significantly improved. The result – happier vendors.



There are several examples of lots of digital transformation initiatives failing. Is there any 'rule book' or equivalent that when followed increases the chances of success

Well like with everything else, there cannot be a sure shot formula that guarantees success. I would like to go back to my response to the earlier question on digital strategy. Doing it because someone else does it, does not make sense to me unless it has become table stakes & a must to engage with your customer. The incremental benefit that you as a copier realize will definitely be lesser since the incumbent has already taken that position – and it may be regarded as a failure. How you build upon it and differentiate will decide what position you acquire; ask yourself “what’s next...?”

Another key factor is alignment (or the lack of it) of the vision of the digital initiative. Like I mentioned there has to be a concerted effort of every relevant resource in the enterprise towards that common goal. It takes time and there has to be due cognizance of that fact—that is where smaller measurable milestones help and provide the course correction. There needs to be continuous reinforcement of the common goal And then there are classical reasons – “delivering what you think the customer wants” or not piloting it. Classical but still relevant. Remember that the consumer of this digital asset is not you, so hear out the user and build for him. Also running it on a small scale to establish the value proposition never harms. As they say – build fast, fail fast. I would add “fail small” to it.

Could you please detail a few key digital initiatives that you led at JSW Paints and what kind of business impact these have delivered?

We being a Paints company, there is always a lot of thought around how can we make the choice of colors exciting for the consumer. Our color visualization mobile app narrates our vision in the same. We are a startup, a very new company, and been market operational for barely about eighteen months if you factor in the COVID impact. Also, the visualizer has been around for a very short time frame. What kind of impact it delivers, is yet to be seen.

There are a few others that are still on the anvil and we are all looking forward to it, however, now would not be the right time to discuss those.