

Transpersonal Leadership Series: *White Paper Eight*

Digital Transformation

Creating a Digital-First Culture through Transpersonal Leadership

DUNCAN ENRIGHT



Transpersonal Leadership

Routledge and LeaderShape Global in partnership are pleased to announce a series of quarterly White Papers around the subject of Transpersonal Leadership, all connected to the book entitled *Leading Beyond The Ego: How to Become a Transpersonal Leader* which was published in March 2018.

So what is Transpersonal Leadership? The concept was first published in a report on tomorrow's leadership based on a leadership development journey developed by LeaderShape (Knights, 2011). The word "transpersonal" was inspired by the use of the word in "transpersonal psychology" (Bynum, 2010). "Transpersonal" is defined as "Extending or going beyond the personal or individual, beyond the usual limits of ego and personality".

The complete definition of a **Transpersonal Leader** is:

They operate beyond the ego while continuing personal development and learning.
They are radical, ethical, and authentic while emotionally intelligent and caring.

They are able to:

- embed authentic, ethical and emotionally intelligent behaviours into the DNA of the organisation
- build strong, collaborative relationships, and
- create a Performance Enhancing Culture that is Ethical, Caring and Sustainable



LeaderShape Global is a UK headquartered organisation with a global culture that operates without borders. It exists to develop people around the world who can lead beyond their ego to be radical, ethical and authentic, i.e. Transpersonal Leaders. It provides work-based learning through a faculty of senior executives who are accredited coaches and experienced facilitators, blended with online content and web-based tools. www.leadershapeglobal.com

Get involved in developing the conversation around Transpersonal Leadership, join the LinkedIn Group "Transpersonal Leadership – Leading beyond the Ego" at www.linkedin.com/groups/8257117

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Digital Transformation

Creating a Digital-First Culture through Transpersonal Leadership

By *Duncan Enright*

This is our eighth White Paper, entitled 'Digital Transformation: Creating a Digital-First Culture through Transpersonal Leadership' written by Duncan Enright.

This insightful paper, which argues that digital transformation requires transpersonal leadership to be successful, follows these seven popular white papers:

- Ethical Leadership: How to Develop Ethical Leaders
- Women, Naturally Better Leaders for the 21st Century
- Sustainable Leadership: Rewire Your Brain for Sustainable Success
- Leading Across Cultures: Developing Leaders for Global Organisations
- Leadership in India: A Need to Keep Pace with India's Growth Story?
- Leadership in China: Harnessing Chinese Wisdom for Global Leadership?
- Adult Development: Its Role in the Leadership Journey

Summary:

Examples of successes and failures litter the rocky road to digital transformation, like monuments or gravestones depending on outcomes. Such a fundamental change, in a changing world, poses significant challenges. This paper offers insights, examples and solutions to leaders. It is instructive to look for reasons for difficulties not in technology or even strategy, but through leadership. The factors of success can be found in understanding and restating the core purpose of an organisation, by looking at the climate and culture of the organisation, which drive behaviours, and by considering the styles of leadership on display.

During digital transformation, high-performing organisations require visionary leadership. In addition, a democratic style within an organisation will liberate talent, and harness diversity in support of transformation, including the perspectives of digital natives. Finally, customer focus (and involvement) is key, and the empathy required to lead beyond as well as within the organisation will play a critical role in helping leaders understand the needs of all stakeholders, including customers and staff.

To survive digital transformation, leaders need to transform themselves.

Duncan Enright is a director and faculty member of LeaderShape Global engaged in developing transpersonal leaders. His background is as a publisher in scientific, technical and medical fields, who has been part of the digital transformation of the industry. He spent thirty years developing publishing programmes to support professional development, and in the last few years has led work across the world to promote evidence-based knowledge solutions at the point of decision for doctors, pharmacists and nurses. This included leading the British National Formulary and creating a multi-award winning reference series at specialist publisher Evidence-based Networks Ltd. Duncan is an experienced leader, coach and trainer, and has held senior posts in the UK National Health Service, and elected positions in local government and national politics.

See his full bio here:
<http://leadershapeglobal.com/duncan-enright>

Introduction

Leaders throughout the public, private and third sectors face the same challenge: to excavate and articulate core purpose, describe how it will be pursued in the new digital world, and plot a course through digital transformation. Leaders need to become transpersonal – leading beyond the ego. All departments and all staff, as well as partners, clients and customers, contribute to and operate under the climate and culture. In particular, this paper is for the board and the division or team leading digital development, giving insights into the perceived reluctance of other departments and stakeholders to engage.

The culture of our organisations and businesses needs to change, and individual behaviours emerge from the new culture, to reap the benefits of new digital transformation in services and enterprises, and increase confidence in what we do for customers.

Leaders throughout the organisation need to be confident to explore and back new approaches, experimental services, co-produced services and new relationships with citizens, service providers and partners. This requires a different kind of leadership and working: purposeful, open, constantly challenging without losing focus or friends, and engaged with customers as never before.

The main messages are the following:

- Digital transformation requires us to foster a climate and culture that is confident to face the challenges of change, while safeguarding core purpose and values.
- Behaviours that support innovation and change in every part of an organisation need to be fostered.
- Insightful leaders will recognise the need to change themselves in order to be able to drive change, displaying vision, empathy and using a democratic style to engage everyone in transformation.
- It is crucial to develop a strong senior leadership commitment to developing leaders capable of delivering change and sustaining a climate in which tradition is valued but innovation is nurtured.
- Digital transformation plans must acknowledge and accommodate the latest understanding of the emotional, physiological, psychological and neuroscientific impact of change on people with the behavioural implications of these (e.g. fight or flight).
- Leaders must display empathy and optimism, seeing themselves as champions of customers, active facilitators and supporters of change; having a sense of the 'possible'.
- Practical steps must be identified in each office, department and geography and between them to grasp the opportunities of digital transformation.

Digital Transformation

All around us the world is changing faster than ever before. The pace is driven by many factors, and commentators struggle to identify the key elements and divine their implications.

For example, Robert Tucker wrote of six “driving forces” in the late part of this decade:

- economic recovery,
- the arrival of Millennials as a dominant demographic,
- brand disruption,
- “real time responsiveness” and convenience as differentiators,
- the adoption of artificial intelligence, and
- the decline in deference or “social trust” (Tucker, 2018).

Yet each is just a wave crashing ashore from the huge disturbance of digital transformation.

In developed economies, over 80% of people have mobile phones of which two thirds are smartphones, connecting half the population to advanced digital capabilities. Overall mobile digital technology has reached the point where predictions are being made that poverty, hunger and other Millennium Development Goals may be achieved (GSMA, 2018).

The ruins of former (many long standing) industrial giants lie around us like Ozymandias (Shelley, 1817), conquered and supplanted by agile new competitors or superseded by new activities and enterprises. Table 1 lists a number of the fallen, and the victors who have risen in their place, thanks to digital disruption.

Vanquished former Titans	Digital Disruption
Blockbuster Video	Offered a chance to acquire Netflix in 2000, this \$5 billion behemoth closed its doors because of agile digital competitors like Netflix in 2014 (Downes and Nunes, 2013; Satell, 2014).
Kodak	A Kodak engineer invented the first digital camera in 1975 but was allegedly told by senior leaders to hide it to protect the film business. Incorrectly, the leadership of Kodak believed themselves to be in the (doomed) film chemical processing business (Mui, 2012).
Borders	Despite being well loved and a major and innovative retailer of books, Borders' leadership failed to make their own digital move until too late (Sanburn, 2011).
Encyclopedia Britannica	The home reference of choice was swiftly replaced by digital references, and was unable to innovate to compete as the Internet emerged as a dominant source of reference (Greenstein, 2016).
Toys 'R' Us	In a final irony for a retailer swamped by online competitors, commentators claim Amazon considered taking over some of its stores (Townsend, Coleman-Lochner and Soper, 2018).
Digital Equipment Corporation	Even the most digital, most innovative companies can founder because of cultural issues (Mangelsdorf, 2011).

The following case study describes such a transformative impact on an industry sector, with resulting disruption to organisations, stakeholders and business models, resulting in profound consequences.

Case Study 1: Open Access and Academic Publishing

Academic journal publishing has been a robust and strongly growing sector for the last century, driven by the growth in research activity and the increasing requirement to publish results. In particular, the sciences have driven this imperative through growth, and the number of journal articles published passed 50 million around 2009, and approximately 2.5 million papers are published every year.

The advent of the internet, along with pressures on budgets, persuaded academics and research funders to propose and instigate “Open Access” publishing – articles published free to view online. This posed a significant challenge to traditional “subscription journal publishers, of whom the largest is Elsevier (owned by RELX Ltd).

In 2004, at the height of the debate about the best way to publish journal articles, the UK Parliament’s Science and Technology Committee called the Chief Executive of Reed Elsevier, Crispin Davis, to give evidence, and gave him a hard time over pricing, quality of research published, and the limits placed by subscription on access. (Publications. parliament.uk, 2018)

Reed Elsevier invested in digital technology, changed the structure of the organisation, and introduced shared values across the whole company (customer focus, valuing our people, innovation, boundarylessness, passion for winning), demonstrating a commitment not just to technology but to the culture and behaviours of the organisation. Today Elsevier is the second largest open access publisher in the World (Elsevier.com, 2018).

Steps to Success

Digital transformation projects are fraught with difficulty, and because of their wide reach into the operations of organisations are hard to control. Budgetary and time overruns, unforeseen consequences and catastrophic failure are commonplace (Carey, 2018). Digital transformation is not completed through just the successful execution of a standalone project. It has become clear that a comprehensive overall business strategy review is an essential precursor of such a transformation. Without an ambitious strategy no transformation project can succeed.

However, the best strategy on its own is still not enough. Too often strategy is decoupled from deeper thinking about development, and in particular culture, values and behaviour. Figure 1 illustrates the usual main operational focus (on the left), whereas the developmental focus (on the right) is fundamental but often overlooked.

Vision to Performance

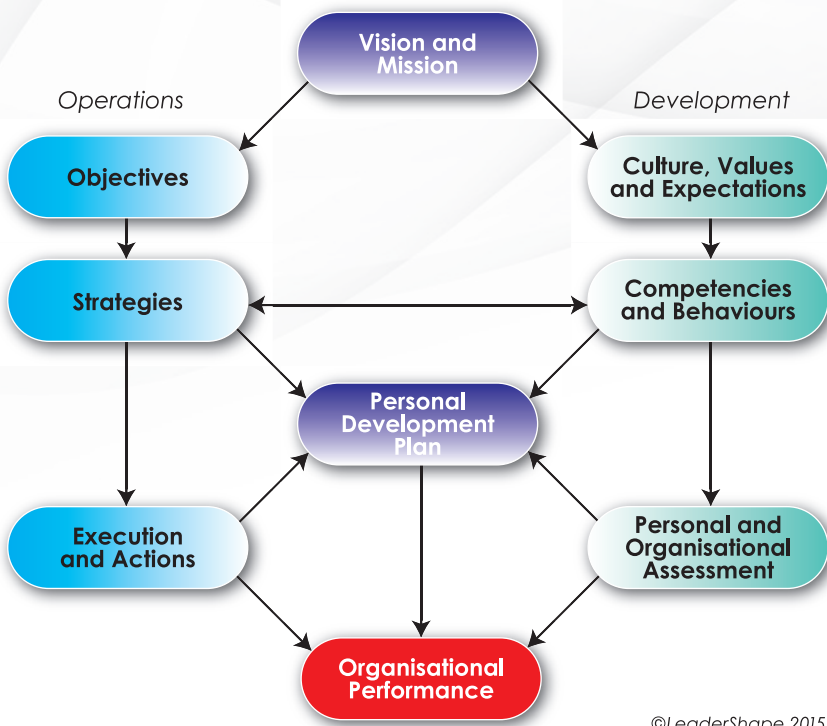


Figure 1: Vision to Performance (Knights, Grant and Young, 2018)

Strategic thinking cannot reach far enough to encompass the breadth of its consequences, prepare for unforeseen outcomes, and cope with the inevitable continuing change required in the modern world. Another change must take place; that change is in culture, values and behaviours.

Those organisations undertaking digital transformation projects must excavate a common understanding, throughout their organisation, of shared core purpose. To do this they must engage all stakeholders, address the climate created by leaders, the culture that ensues, and thus shift the very nature of power and control. Radical, ethical, authentic leadership, or transpersonal leadership, is required. And that means leaders need to change themselves too.

Leading Digital Transformation

“The role of a leader is to generate followers, bring them to a place they would not ordinarily go, and to inspire new leaders” (Knights, Grant and Young 2018, p.22). Digital transformation means going to new places, but that takes a new sort of leader. It is also critical that the organisational culture is transformed for the journey, and that too takes leadership. A new digital future will not just feel different, it will actually be quite different, and it will demand different things from all stakeholders. Leaders will look to bring customers along on the journey and trust the leaders. Successful leaders will engage staff fully, have a clear understanding of the reasons for change, and be optimistic that the journey is worthwhile during even the most difficult periods

of change. The confidence of shareholders or owners will be a priority. Ideally everyone will be inspired, and working towards the common purpose. That takes radical, ethical, authentic leaders – transpersonal leaders.

Transpersonal Leadership

By its very nature, leadership is nothing without other people. The concept of and journey to “Transpersonal Leadership” is described inspiringly and at length by John Knights (Knights, Grant and Young, 2018). It is defined as “extending or going beyond the personal or individual, beyond the usual limits of ego and personality”. A transpersonal leader uses emotional intelligence, and empathy in particular, to master and deploy six styles of leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002). These are shown in Figure 2.



Figure 2: Six leadership styles (Knights, Grant and Young, 2018)

In addition, transpersonal leaders exercise ethical judgments, working with and for the interests of all stakeholders. In brief, they make emotionally intelligent choices for the greater good.

The challenges of digital transformation are many, and require radical, ethical, authentic leadership skilled in all styles of leadership, and willing to lead beyond the ego. In particular, a leader will need to display visionary leadership and the ability to create leaders throughout the organisation through the democratic style.

An organisation will need a sustained innovation culture, which will be created and nurtured by the climate – itself set by the leadership. Customer Focus is a core ingredient, with leaders engaging customers and displaying empathy in working with them.

Finally, leaders need high levels of optimism to drive the organisation through the difficult phases of change. A durable model of the psychological process of change was developed by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross in her treatise “On Death and Dying” (Kübler-Ross and Byock, 1969), and this model has been applied in many organisational change settings such as, for example, the introduction of electronic medical records (a difficult element of digital health transformation) (Shoolin, 2010).

Visionary Leadership

Defining Core Purpose, Finding the Pivot

The six leadership styles are all important in their own right. For example, the Commanding Style, while widely overused (and often seen as a default) is of value in situations when compliance with orders is required, as in emergency situations.

Digital transformation requires intelligent use of the visionary style of leadership. An essential component in any strategy is a vision consistent with the organisation’s core purpose (Hanna, 2016) and recognising the long-term nature of the change envisaged. Visionary leaders can create high energy in an organisation based on a motivating shared vision, or story, about the change ahead (Knights, Grant and Young, 2018).

In particular, it is the task of the visionary leader or leaders to engage all stakeholders in the search for ‘core purpose’, and this is the pivot on which digital transformation can take place. The benefits of building a core purpose and becoming a visionary company are manifold, and cannot all be discussed here, but for more examples of doubling down on customer value and core purpose read *Built to Last* (Collins and Porras, 1998) and *Blue Ocean Strategy* (Kim and Mauborgne, 2005) as great examples.

Digital transformation is an ongoing endeavour, and like any change programme leaders will seek to protect against fatigue, sabotage or resistance. Visionary leaders carry optimism for the organisation, and maintain a strongly positive influence on colleagues, illuminating the mission and the core purpose.

By tethering core purpose, and describing how it will be enhanced or served by digital transformation, leaders can provide a clear picture for staff, partners, shareholders and customers alike (Swaminathan and Meffert, 2017). Digital transformation without core purpose is doomed to be a rudderless reaction to technological challenges, and adds little to the overall value of an organisation. What’s more, it can be hard to gain understanding and support from across the organisation, which leaves projects prone to failure. Case Study 2 shows the way a clear vision with strong underpinning values and stories can drive even a multi-faceted transformation programme with great success.

Case Study 2: e-Estonia, Leading through Vision

In 1991 the Estonian Government faced a huge problem. Its economy had fallen way behind neighbours such as Finland during nearly 50 years as a Soviet state (Marzouk, 2017), and it risked losing ambitious outward-looking highly educated citizens to other richer countries. Without other infrastructure and resources its economy started behind its neighbours but at the birth of the World Wide Web its leaders recognised one domain in which it could compete. "We had to set a goal that resonates, large enough for the society to believe in" said former chief information officer of Estonia, Taavi Kotka (Heller, 2017).

The new government of independent Estonia, a country of only 1.3 million people, had a major asset – trust among its people (Ehasoo, 2017). It chose a deliberate path to create a digital future for the country and now stands at the forefront of digital nations, using technology not just for public services and government but as a strategic national asset. Digital identity is a foundation, but that could only be created and accepted with a shared vision and trust in government (Shen, 2016).

Almost twenty years later, Estonia is a model of the digital nation, with a transparent identity system trusted by its people, services run efficiently, democratic processes offered online, and public services including health, security and taxation now managed digitally through a series of national transformation projects (e-Estonia, 2018).

Thanks to a clear initial vision of a digital society, empowering citizens and involving them in the journey, Estonia has weathered storms and created an efficient, competitive and successful society and economy (Jaffe, 2016).

Democratic leadership

Empowering Stakeholders

"Occasionally a leader comes along who has excellent ideas and has the charisma to carry everyone with them without using the Democratic style – but this is a very rare exception to the rule. Not recommended for most of us mere mortals!" (Knights, Grant and Young, 2018).

Leaders can often think they know all the answers. However in the case of digital transformation (as in many highly complex situations) it is unwise to believe so. A Democratic style of leadership builds engagement, commitment and buy-in. This alone is enough to recommend this approach. However, it is also extremely valuable when building a culture of innovation, encouraging employees to exercise specialist skills, or harnessing expertise throughout the company.

One key group to engage, both within the organisation and among customers, is digital natives, those who have grown up, gone through education, and entered the workforce since the ubiquity of the worldwide web. They will be younger – the millennial generation born between 1980 and 1994 along with younger members of the previous Generation Y (unlike the author of this paper!) constitute a group not usually yet in senior positions, but with a radically different approach to digital technology and a hugely valuable and forward-looking perspective to offer. Only a democratic style of leadership will engage them fully, and only a visionary style will inspire them to contribute (DeVaney, 2015; Frith, 2017).

Note the importance here of using the visionary and democratic styles in tandem. One possible limitation of the democratic style is procrastination, so it is essential to keep things moving by reminding everyone of the goal, and motivating them to reach it. The Affiliative style is often required to get through the tough times during a project with team spirit intact. More detail on the power of the leadership styles is available in John Knights' work, particularly Chapter 8 of *Leading Beyond the Ego* ((Knights, Grant and Young, 2018).

Sometimes the best source of insight can be suppliers, or partners in enterprise. One company with a great record of innovation is the John Lewis Partnership from the UK. Although the specific word "partner" is used to refer to staff at John Lewis, the company operates in partnership with suppliers (despite the inevitable tensions and demands of the retail environment) as is clear from the supply chain efforts and innovations such as JLab, discussed in Case Study 3.

Case Study 3: John Lewis: Engaging Partners to Drive Digital Innovation

The John Lewis Partnership is an employee-owned company and leading retailer based in the UK. Leaders have developed a Partner Ideas programme (Beswick, Bishop and Geraghty, 2015)

to involve the whole organisation in its innovation strategy. John Lewis Partnership has invited start-ups to participate in finding solutions through its JLab programme, accessing the ideas of digitally native innovators. A recent JLab prize winner provides a way for staff to know when a customer enters the store to pick up an order, through their smartphone signal, so the order is ready at the desk by the time they get there (Ghosh, 2015). John Lewis encourages its staff, or "partners" as they are called, to contribute, adding engagement and capturing front-line experience. It introduced "partner devices", tablets to allow staff to check stock levels and product details, through just such an idea. Sienne Velt, director of online product, describes the impact: "This means the partners were really invested in the outcomes" (Brown, 2017).

Coaching

Getting the Best From Your Team

One of the least observed and most valuable and positive styles of leadership is the Coaching style. This is never more the case than at a time of great change. Coaching leaders provide support for team members to develop and grow, using their talents to the full. It is a positive style because as well as making space for insights, it has a very positive impact on morale. The Kubler-Ross change curve (Kübler-Ross and Byock, 1969) describes the psychological journey through change. Coaching can help individuals cope with the stages of change they find most difficult.

The successful digital transformation of airline SAS was analysed and is a good example of using a coaching style (Bygstad, Aanby and Iden, 2017). This example, like most other successes, includes a significant level of employee engagement.

Customer Focus

The Power of Empathy

Digital transformation means engaging people throughout the business, including customers. Especially customers. A transpersonal leader will always think beyond the organisation and put themselves in the shoes of all their stakeholders but especially their clients wherever possible, involving them in thinking of solutions and contributing to outcomes beneficial to all parties. This is not about using marketing personas to guide product development, nor is it an extension of customer service. Both have an important place, but customer focus goes way beyond this. Diversity at senior levels of an organisation helps avoid groupthink, and allows leaders to reflect the range of customer experiences. Core to the leadership skills is empathy, and it is this which allows an organisation to understand the needs of customers more closely.

Empathy is not the same as sympathy. Empathy is objective, whereas sympathy is sharing the emotions with someone. Empathy involves stepping into the shoes of another person, in this case the customer, and walking with them through their experience.

Leaders can create space for customer focus through coaching, encouraging employees to reflect on their own reactions to what is happening around them, and understand what it is like to be in a customer's shoes. For example, a commonly used proxy for a customer in the marketing strategy meeting is the "persona" which can be built from data (Duran, 2018). A good leader can coach a marketer to dig deeper into the customer experience and create real empathy through engagement. Ask customers, and you will find out what they really think of you! In fact, marketers who use a coaching style with their customers to find out their issues and their real need will be in an even better position to provide the right solution.

One bank realised something we customers have known for years, which is that the less we see or do with the bank, the better. But at their best they can come to the rescue, stand alongside us, and be on our side through life's adventures (The Economist, 2018; Bloomberg, 2016).

Case Study 4: DBS Follows the Customer

DBS is Singapore's largest bank, and on a growth curve thanks to new digital technology (The Economist, 2018). All banks are moving for digital advantage, so what clues can we find behind DBS success? "If you can digitally engage people, they tend to do more. That's the bare bones of our thesis," says CEO Mr Gupta. Focus on and involvement of customers lies at the heart of success. (Bloomberg, 2016)

Creating a Culture of Innovation

Democratic and visionary leadership can lead to a culture of innovation. But it is the climate created by leaders that encourage organisations to perform highly. Our behaviour is conditioned by our reactions, many of which are innate – fight or flight reactions to stress, for example. But creativity thrives in a company led by transpersonal leaders who are emotionally intelligent, self-aware, skilled in leadership styles, ethical in purpose and empathetic.

The climate set by the leadership of an organisation is translated, through staff behaviour and values, into a culture that can foster innovation and meet great challenges. The four culture parameters (Knights, Grant and Young, 2018) are based on the work of Charles Handy (Handy, 1993) and are described as Power, Structure, Support and Achievement. It is the last of these, achievement, that is the driver for digital transformation, with a heavy dose of support to prevent burnout or loss of focus. This culture needs to be shared with all stakeholders; the sense of purpose, urgency and consistency with values imbues successful projects, and a fine example of this is in the great survivor of the world of digital transformation, IBM.

Case Study 5: IBM Culture of Innovation Standing the Test of Time

IBM prides itself, rightly, on its enduring culture built on strong values, as stated up front (<https://www.ibm.com/ibm/values/us/>):

Dedication to every client's success.

Innovation that matters - for our company and for the world.

Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships.

These values run through the expected behaviour of every so-called IBMer, and contribute to radical thinking and constant innovation (Lombardo, 2017). A company which has lasted over 100 years at the forefront of technology implementation and research, with many tactical switches and strategic moves when required to support their values, IBM remains on a strong and steady course that means managers all over the world still repeat that "nobody ever got fired for buying IBM" (IBMers will remind you that it was customers, not employees, who coined this much repeated phrase!)

Conclusion and Action Points

Digital transformation is a commercial imperative, touching every part of commerce, government, education, services and driven by the convenience, control and efficiency it offers every one of us. New digital entrants find it easier than ever to compete. To avoid becoming a gravestone rather than a monument on the road to the future, it is necessary to take action.

1. Establish the core purpose of the organisation, to act as a pivot during digital transformation
2. Create a vision – and visionary leadership – to inspire and maintain optimism
3. All aboard! Recognise the power of democratic (and affiliative) styles
4. Use empathy, and a deep and detailed customer focus, by letting clients be involved
5. Change the culture, and make digital transformation as a continuous process
6. Pursue transpersonal leadership: leaders must change themselves!

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