This book contributes to a growing area of business digitalization providing a blueprint on leveraging digital advancements for the growth of organizations and achieving sustained commercial success. Though the book focuses primarily on business leaders and leaders-to-be, it is also a useful handbook for executives, managers, policymakers, and digital specialists to understand and appreciate the nuances of a digital organization.

The authors, Professor Christopher Bones (Chairman, Good Growth) and Mr James Hammersley (CEO, Good Growth), have extensive experience of working with businesses that deliver products and services through multiple channels, including digital channels. Drawing from this wide experience, the authors have built comprehensive models and frameworks that provide guidelines for businesses to lead and leverage a successful digital change.

The book highlights several organizational challenges en route to digitalization such as issues related to organizational health, culture, processes, talent, and customers. The authors highlight the need for organizations to develop a comprehensive digital strategy and re-engineer their business processes to leverage it. They also emphasize on the need for organizations to align technology with their business requirements in order to deliver a seamless digital experience to its stakeholders. The authors lay stress on the critical role of leadership in leading a successful digital strategy while also managing organizational culture and expectations of various internal and external stakeholders.

The book espouses the view that, while everything else remains pretty much the same, organizations differ from each other in only 20 per cent of their operational pursuits. Hence, the frameworks and the models examined by the authors are largely applicable across organizations, business contexts, and industries.

The book comprises of nine chapters, with the first two chapters setting the basic premise for digital strategy implementation. Next five chapters examine different success drivers of digital strategy implementation. The last two chapters explore experiences of business leaders in the digital context and summarize the key takeaways for the readers.
The authors examine organizations’ readiness to adopt digital technology and describe critical pitfalls and enablers for successful digital strategy. They analyze digitalization by exploring various drivers of digital success, taking into account multiple stakeholders, and provide actionable insights for successful implementation, some of which are discussed below.

a) Leadership: With the onset of digitalization, the role of leadership is critical and laden with challenges as they tread on uncharted territories. Leaders might not be adequately equipped to deal with digitalization. In some cases, it might not be viable for leaders to opt for specialist support and advice. Hence, the authors suggest that business leaders must develop first hand perspectives of the e-commerce space. While embracing digitalization, organizations often are vulnerable to challenges related to talent development, organization culture, misaligned structures, and unclear objectives among others. Therefore, business leaders must be sensitive to changes in the organization’s environment to take necessary follow-through actions.

b) Organization: An organization with unclear business processes that are not mapped to its objectives is less likely to succeed in its digital strategy initiatives. Therefore, organizations must consider digitalization as an opportunity to introspect and set its fundamental business processes in order. Employees must coalesce around processes and policies to ensure overall success of the digitalization initiative. The authors suggest that it might be helpful to build-in some flexibility in fundamental business processes which will enable adaptation to the changing contingencies of business contexts.

The authors emphasize that an organization’s digital strategy is not just an IT issue but a core business issue, and successful implementation of the digital strategy needs team work with different departments working in collaboration with each other. Treating it as an IT issue alone will lead to poor implementation and perhaps total failure. An organization’s structure might also undergo changes to facilitate successful implementation of digitalization initiative.

Organizations must have a clear idea of what they would like to achieve from their digitalization initiative. Therefore, the authors suggest that organizations should identify and analyze the value which is at stake when moving towards digital businesses. The management must list down their expectations from a digital platform which should coalesce around the operational and commercial elements that are concrete and measurable.

c) Marketing and Operations: The authors emphasize that organizations need to re-align themselves with the customers and their requirements. It necessitates that all activities in the purview of marketing and operations are aligned to achieve the same objective: to serve the customer. Marketing needs to ensure that channel conflicts arising due to use of multiple channels (traditional and digital) are managed. Digital channels must be treated at par with traditional channels when it comes to accountabilities and responsibilities such that their integration with the rest of the organization becomes smooth. Experiences from traditional channels should be considered relevant and applicable to digital channels as well.

The authors briefly discuss digital marketing as a potent marketing tool and derive three models (customer to action model, the customer segmentation model, and the sales funnel model) that will help organizations in exploiting their digital channel initiatives to the fullest.

In many cases, organizations do not track the performance of the digital marketing initiatives or choose appropriate metrics to assess its complete impact on the organization’s performance. Hence, it is critical that executives use reliable and valid measurement instruments to track and correct the organization’s digital progress. The authors suggest that appropriate metrics should be chosen which relate with the commercial and strategic goals of the organization.

d) Employees: Since digital strategy implementation is a recent phenomenon, it is often handicapped due to lack of skilled and experienced talent who understand both technology and business. The authors suggest that organizations should develop talent from within. The authors stress that this will ensure availability of talent pipeline for continued digitalization and facilitate employee retention and engagement with the organization.

The book is quite compelling in its narrative, and the language used is simple and lucid. The book is
well-structured and the concepts are easy to relate to. One of the strengths of the book is that the authors have developed models that aid the understanding of concepts for readers, new to digitalization. The e-commerce management model deserves a special mention as it summarizes the key decisions that an organization needs to make during digitalization. Based on their practical experience, the authors introduce five important elements that contribute to the success of the digitalization initiative of an organization. Though the choice of elements is not justified academically or practically, it brings structure to the book. The author also manages to cover a broad range of topics without diluting its content.

While the authors have managed to capture the dilemmas faced by organizations during digital strategy implementation, incorporating certain additional elements would have aided the understanding of the reader from a holistic perspective. For instance, the authors have not discussed the concept of outsourcing as a viable option with reference to lack of skilled and experienced talent in the digital technology space. While the authors emphasize on the importance of multi-channel approach in digitalization, they fail to discuss issues related to cannibalization that could result conflicts between the traditional and the digital channel teams. The authors also stress on the importance of aligning the organization in accordance with the customers. While they focus on customer attraction and retention, they do not discuss customer complaint handling which is an important element in contributing to customer retention. Although the authors describe the benefits of digital marketing as a tool for reaching consumer markets, the flip sides of delving deep into data and digital marketing such as delayed decision-making and increased cost have not been stressed upon. An inappropriate approach to digital marketing can also have adverse and irreversible impact on firm’s reputation and profitability. The downsides of substandard digitalization have not been stressed on, giving a biased view of digitalization.

Digitalization is an emerging phenomenon with far reaching effects on an organization’s performance. If organizations want to capitalize on opportunities that arise from digitalization, they need to embrace it fully. From that perspective, the book creates a positive impression by venturing deep into this phenomenon and making some realistic and practical suggestions. Overall, the book does not disappoint and the readers will find themselves reflecting on the points put forward by the authors, long after the book is finished.

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