

Will 2019 see the end of the term 'digital transformation'. Is it just a buzzword?

Is the term digital transformation just a buzzword? As Shakespeare could so easily have said: "digital transformation by any other name smells so sweet." Sooraj Shah isn't quite Shakespeare, but he doth consider whether the digital transformation process will continue, even if its name may change.



The term 'digital transformation' feels like a buzzword, after-all, in some cases digital transformation is little more than a thin veneer.

In the IT industry, there is a tendency to talk in buzzwords or phrases, but after a few years, those terms tend to slowly be phased out with new terms for similar technologies, or new ideas altogether coming along to replace them. The term digital transformation is a buzzword (or phrase,) however, that has transcended the IT industry and has gone mainstream, and doesn't seem to be losing its appeal as a phrase used for organisations undergoing some sort of transformational change involving people, processes and technology.

"I don't think it will be as we'll continue to see traditional businesses looking for ways to offer digital services," says Lindsey Gibson, head of group IT at national awarding organisation [NCFE](#).

Indeed, many within the industry think the term will still be used for the next couple of years, but that 2019 marks a turning point.

“We’re at a time when the difference between veneer and substance will become painfully distinct,” says Adrian Webb, chairman at independent digital agency [Lab](#).

“Digital transformation based on bold insight and brave restructuring can still flourish but it will be easy to distinguish genuine innovators from those who are late to the party effectively embarking on CPR for their business,” he adds.

Digital transformation may be a buzzword, but what matters is that the world is changing, and businesses must respond to the change

We might be at the end of the road for ‘digital transformation’ as a term, according to Dmitry Bagrov, director at global technology consultancy [DataArt](#), but he believes it shouldn’t really matter what term is used anyway.

“What matters is that the world is changing, and businesses must respond to the change. It could be called ‘organic growth of business’ or ‘vegetarian transformation’ the term is irrelevant, the key issue is how to transform business to match changing reality,” he says.

This may be true – but there is a reason that those within the industry latch on to certain terms; there needs to be a universal acknowledgement of what a term is, in order to get the board approval for any strategic initiatives, as well as getting the credit for it by their peers if projects are successful.

Angus Ward, CEO of [BearingPoint Beyond](#), a digital platform provider, suggests that a better question to ask is what we call the phase after ‘digital transformation’, when companies and organisations have completed the process of digitising their operations, back-end systems and their channels to market.

IT analysts Gartner, who have coined many of the buzzwords – or at least make buzzwords catch on within the industry, are already talking about the next phase, which it is dubbing as “Continuous Next”. The difference?

Well, not an awful lot – it seems like a refresh of what has become a stale term.

Indeed, the term has been around for so long that it may have become superfluous.

“Boasting about being in a ‘digitally transformed’ company, at this point, is about as effective as boasting about having a telephone. Everyone’s already expected to have it. To not have it is far from the norm,” says Melanie Kanavakatini, front end developer at [vouchercloud](#).

“At the beginning of the lifecycle, digital transformation was indeed a concept to strive for. As more and more organisations became digitally transformed in parallel to the increasing digitisation of our day-to-day lives, the term has lost that original meaning. It should be called the ‘digital landscape’ – it’s now about catching up to the norm than joining something new and exciting,” she adds.

So while the term ‘digital transformation’ is still divisive in regards to its definition, and which companies can really be considered ‘digital’, it seems like it is here to stay for the short-term at least, a buzzword perhaps, but not one that is going away soon. But with Gartner already looking at a rebranding exercise, it seems as if a new term – continuous next perhaps – will be replacing digital transformation in the years to come, just so that businesses that haven’t caught up yet may feel like they’re embracing something new and exciting. The argument will be that continuous next is something new, and is the next stage of digital transformation. That may well be the case, but wasn’t the whole point of digital transformation to not be a one-off programme, but continuous improvements with no end-date?

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