

BLOGBOOK #2 - 2018

# DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION



# DIGITAL TRAINING: MY ADVICE TO EXECUTIVES IN THE MIDDLE OF A CAREER MOVE



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Digital training? But what the hell is digital in the first place?

Digital training in the information age seems pretty straightforward, and yet the very definition of the digital domain is mind-boggling and fuzzy. Where does it start and where does it end? Also, choosing a digital training programme, like any other kind of

training programme for that matter, in any area, implies that executive students spend quite a lot of time thinking about what they want to do in future.

This is why I have written these few bullet points, in order to help them with their choice. As you may or may not know, I am a programme director at Grenoble Ecole de



Management (aka GEM, a leading European school), in charge of the Advanced Masters in Digital Business Strategy which welcomes 40 students from various origins every year.

Approximately 30% of these are executive students. A lot of these executive students have questions and issues they are trying to solve through a digital training programme, which remains a means for them to put a stake in the ground and show both management and themselves that a career move is nigh. In this piece, I have put together some advice for them to ensure that they choose the right programme and to help them with their career choice.

Advice #1 : above everything, focus on your career move: an executive student's focal point must be her/his career move

You have to avoid throwing everything away just because you are going through a midlife crisis. The first thing I do when I interview executive students for my Master's is to check that their motivation is positive and not negative. I understand that frustration at work can happen, and that execs may have had enough of working with the same people. For somebody like me who has worked for more than 30 years, it's not very difficult to imagine or understand what's behind frustration. I have been in your shoes before.

Yet, all negative motivation (I hate this!) must be turned into a positive one (here is what I want to do!). To put it in the words of Daniel Porot, think of your move as a runway and imagine you are landing and not just taking off. Landing is more important, as it's the end state that matters. As a recruiter, if I do not understand where the candidates will be landing, I'll try to help them with their plan and if I still can't understand what they want to achieve, I will try to evaluate a better solution for them. Obviously, digital training and digital in general must be part of the landing plan if one wants to join the masters.

Advice #2 : "do not take digital for what it's not"

What do I mean by that? Digital is trendy and if you want to keep up with the Joneses it's fine, but this is not sufficient. For one, digital is all things to all people, so it's easy to say that you like it even though you've never tried it and hardly know what it's all about. Besides, it's a hyper- and multi-specialised domain which implies a lot of technicality, both from a marketing and an IT point of view. As a result, dual profiles are necessary if you want a career in digital but they are also very difficult to define. Because they will never be the same depending on your starting point or what you want to achieve in the future. Engineers may want to try and become marketeers and there's

nothing wrong with that. They might run into a number of issues but most will overcome them if they are sufficiently motivated, and vice versa. Nothing is impossible. Once again, the starting point doesn't matter, what matters is the landing, your final career objective.

A digital strategy / marketing training programme will not turn you into a programmer

Otherwise you have to get to programming school and opt for IT training. But most executive students are already in a job and wish to become managers or directors or CDOs etc. and it is rare in that case that moving into programming is a clever career move. Do not misunderstand me, I am not saying that programming is annoying, rather it's the contrary. And I even know quite a few marketeers who have become real technical wizards (and to be honest I have some in my teaching teams and in the past, I have been one of them).

Yet, one not does need to be a programmer to be in charge of digital and manage programmers. I have done this quite a few times in my career. I have learned programming all by my own, out of curiosity, with a language which doesn't exist anymore and has nothing to do with modern Web languages. However, I know enough to be

able to work with IT guys and enjoy working with them and understand the value of their contribution. Programming does not help, it's best to leave it to experts. And besides, some analysts aren't even sure if it will still be there in the future.

You will have to start from scratch and go back to school.

And this won't be easy to some, mostly those who are 30-50 years old and haven't been to school for a long time. You may be quite frustrated as there are some difficult tasks such as assignments and live business cases and the infamous final master project (FMP). All this is not very easy to manage when you are a professional and you're not used to sitting for exams anymore. It's a bit school-like, but since it enables you to gauge your knowledge and abilities, it's worthwhile.

Advice #3 : a career move is also a full-time job

Do not believe that you are going to do this on top of your day job and that one day, a miracle will occur and your career path will change. Big businesses, barring a few rare exceptions, aren't waiting for you at the end of the programme with a red carpet and a trophy. You will have to find a new job by yourself



*Focus on your career move*

within your business or outside your business, if there are no opportunities internally.

In other words, you are in charge of your future and this kind of training is a good means of setting the record straight, then deciding to start from scratch and taking your future into your own hands. It is a diving board, not an end in itself.

Professors and lecturers will teach you a lot of things. Yet, all main learnings will always come from you.

Even though you have passed your exams and the final master project, you will still be in charge and it's you who will make a difference

at the end of the day. It's you who will ensure that your training is either a success or a failure, not your teachers, not me, even though I might help. Most of the time, you will have to find yourself in a position where you are able to put your knowledge in practice on the ground. If you have learnt things but you are forced to wait 2 to 3 years before you can actually implement them in the field, there is something wrong and you have to know that you will have to start from scratch. By that time, you would have forgotten everything that you had learnt during the training programme, owing to a lack of practice. Do not forget that what matters most is what you have implemented by yourself. This is why our teaching is essentially based on practice

and flipped teaching etc. But even that doesn't suffice if you are not in a position to practice all by yourself. If so, get back to the previous bullet point and ask yourself the question whether you have done everything you could to change your career or not. I have seen executives come to the decision to quit their job in order to focus entirely on their new career. You may also have to take a sabbatical. In principle, one cannot refuse it. You could even work in a new job during a sabbatical which will enable you to test the waters and see how it goes and if you like your new life.

When it comes to training, you have to ensure that your mastery of the English language is, at least, good.

I don't think I need to develop that point. All students whose expression is weak or bad are systematically rejected. Mastering languages (and not just English) is a must in today's world, in my opinion.

Here are my advices for executives searching for a digital training programme as a means of evolving their career. I suppose the next step is to look at the programme and ask for more information, either by contacting me through LinkedIn or contacting the school directly and having a chat with the person in charge.



# TODAY'S DIGITAL WORLD EXPLAINED BY FACEBOOK



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I had the chance to attend a Facebook event in Paris, and I learned a lot. Let me share with you some of the cool things I heard. Besides their amazing offices, the foosball tables, and the snacks, the speakers intervened on a very relevant topic: the challenges of measuring efficiency on the web. It is challenging for marketers, data analysts and researchers. Customers and Internet users in general have a very short attention span, but this is completely normal. They use multiple devices, and have a tendency to multitask. Just think

about yourself every evening, watching TV, with your Laptop on your lap, and your phone in one hand (and probably a tablet charging in the other room). Do you imagine how difficult it can get to captivate users' attention?

The online environment seems super easy and fun, but behind the scenes, it is a very complex world. As Richard Moore, author of *Writing the Silences*, would say "Simplicities are enormously complex". This is why it is important to always measure and



conduct an analysis in order to understand this environment. During this seminar at Facebook, Anne Bioulac, partner at Roland Berger consultancy, gave us an overview of the environment: she focused on the growth of mobile, and the impact this trend has on consumer behaviour. Then, Georges Augué, Facebook's regional measurement lead, talked about the different approaches and methodologies that are used to measure effectiveness. Following that, Anais Abbou who works at Kantar worldpanel made a speech about consumer panels, and the impact of a given campaign. The last part of the seminar, presented by Kathy Dykeman, Monetization and Analytics Manager, and Manohar Paluri, the applied machine learning manager at Facebook, was extremely interesting and impressive to my taste. It is rather difficult to explain everything in one article, but I will summarise the key points.

### An ever evolving environment

Today's data sharing and content growth are exponential. In the past, it took a year to sell 1 million iPods in Paris, today it takes half a day to sell 1 million iPhone 6 phones.

All this change is obviously impacting consumer behavior in all industries and all sectors. If in the past it was easy to forecast and come up with predictions in terms of a

technology's evolution and change, today it's more complicated to do so. The company that survives today is one that is agile and always ready to adapt.

### 5 key trends

As you might have guessed, mobile phone usage is growing at an incredible pace. On the street everyone is looking at their smartphone. 60% of the population in 2020 would be using a smartphone.

But people are not using smartphones only, they're using multiple devices anywhere and

anytime: This cross-device trend is spreading across the different generations. E-commerce is the third key trend of 2014-2019. Actually, if you think about it for a second, ordering products online is becoming normal.

Today, consumers seek information: they browse and search for products on the Internet, before going in-store, or ordering them directly online. And social media is the main source of information for them. They get reviews and opinions from people with the same interests and tastes.



We can't forget the new star of the digital ecosystem: video. As you might have seen, everybody is going crazy over videos. They are a fun and creative way to attract a user's attention.

### The test and learn approach

People today are connected using different devices. This uninterrupted 24/7 connection makes them exposed to huge amounts of content. Today it is not content that is rare, but it is time. People do not have time to focus on all the content they come across on the Internet. To target the user with the right message at the right time is the main challenge.

Indeed, one has to be very efficient in the digital world, and for that, there are two golden rules. The first is to know your customers and their use of mobile. This will allow you to understand what kind of messages could have an impact on them. The second is to develop a test and learn approach: As we said before, one cannot predict trends anymore. Instead, one can launch campaigns and monitor the impact and the ROI afterwards.

### Artificial intelligence means a lot to us and to Facebook

Artificial intelligence is nothing to be scared of, as it bridges the gap between machine and human knowledge. A lot of people are curious to understand the magic behind artificial intelligence and computer vision. Manohar Paluri explained to us during the seminar how Facebook develops its Artificial Intelligence unit. The magic trick: teaching machines how to analyse information. Yes, you have probably heard about machine learning, and it is very impressive. To teach a computer how to identify a picture of a pizza, one must use a lot of different pizza pictures. The computer crunches all the different information and annotations from these pizza pictures. By doing so, it learns how to recognize one alone.

Artificial intelligence is neither developed solely for entertainment purposes nor to simply develop computer knowledge. It can also be used to help millions of users across the globe.

You might ask yourself how does image recognition help people?

To answer this question, I will talk about Facebook reader. Some people are skeptical when it comes to computer intelligence.

Personally, I think Facebook reader is a fantastic tool. Manohar played a very touching video that was more of a testimonial of blind people who could «see» and imagine the picture through Facebook description. Thanks to Alternative Text, Facebook reader reads everything that is on Facebook, such as photo descriptions or statuses.

I want to thank the Facebook team again for that amazing seminar. It was very impressive, fascinating and interesting.



# FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY: WHEN COMPUTERS TURN MANNEQUINS INTO MODELS



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The world of fashion photography for e-commerce is facing a problem: consumers. They are looking for more visuals (about ten in the Chinese market, and around five in Europe) to reassure themselves about the products they are about to purchase. The problem is that these visuals are expensive. People and technology are needed to create these photos. Allure Systems, a French-Chinese start-up, has developed a solution to address this problem.

The new revolution of fashion photography

This period is truly over. Make way for the new industrial revolution of fashion photography for e-commerce, a revolution that is just beginning. A piece of Franco-Chinese technology gives us a taste of what is to come.



To help you understand the ongoing changes in the field of fashion photography for e-commerce, I interviewed Fanny Forgeau of Allure Systems. It is almost frightening when one becomes aware that the photographed characters are recompositions. We notice details here and there that make us aware that these images are made – or reconstituted rather – but the result is nevertheless spectacular and artistically very successful.

There is indeed a small slice of “science fiction” herein, to use the words of Fanny from her interview. We also see that the technology is still a work in progress as only part of the automation of the process has been created by Allure Systems. In the meantime, I invite you to dive into the future of fashion photography with Fanny Forgeau.

### What is the origine of Allure System ?

Gabrielle Chou is a French woman who earned her PhD in China and has been living there for around 20 years now. She has an exciting story to share with people.

She actually set up three start-ups in China. In fact, Allure Systems is the third startup that she founded two and a half years ago with Jérémy Chamoux.

### A need for expensive visuals to better sell online

The basis of the founding idea of the company was an encounter with the boss of showroomprive (A French equivalent to Gilt or Hautelook). She discovered that the challenge of all e-traders today is to meet the strong demand of selling product visuals on the internet.

The consumer wants to understand the product he has in front of him when he goes shopping online. Up until now, one or two visuals would suffice. Today, we need a minimum of five visuals. In China, consumers need to see at least a dozen photos.

However, a photo shoot is very expensive and very difficult to organize, not to mention the lack of guarantee of quality and homogeneity. What Allure allows, in addition to the productivity gain, is the simplification of the shooting process. Usually, make-up artists, hairdressers, models, photographers, and stylists are needed, but with Allure, a stylist is all that is necessary to manoeuvre mannequins into virtually created real people.

### Step 1: to model an “ideal” body from several reconstructed dummies

We virtualize the body, which allows us to produce mannequins that will be accurate replicas, with slightly improved proportions, of these models.

You can take the head of a person, the hands of another, the body of a third ... One can thus produce an “ideal” body, and create the silhouette that will perfectly interest the target. “Ideal” may mean different things to a variety of e-merchants. Large size would be ideal for some, while small would be ideal for others.

We combine several technologies that allow the virtualization of mannequins: a camera, a dozen cameras, or a couple of rotating cameras. By doing so, we ensure the best possible outcome.

The operation of assembling an “ideal” mannequin is quite technical. The process was created by people who previously worked on video games or special effects. The engineers can manipulate files in 3D. We can imagine that this will be done in a more automated way in the near future.

## Step 2: Make a Resin Manikin from the “Ideal” mannequin

The second step is to make a resin dummy from this “ideal” mannequin. We deliver a turnkey studio to an e-trader who owns a shooting studio.

Finally, we need one or two photographers to create all the editorial photos that will add an artistic touch, even if what the technology does is already close to the quality requirement.

## Step 3: the assembly of the photos to prepare the setting online

The sending mechanism is incorporated in an online portal that is made available to the merchant. Once they are able to access it from the studio, we receive the photos that are combined automatically with technology. We lay the picture of the garment on top of the photo of the virtualized model.

The quality control allows us to make necessary edits and then put the visual directly online, all within a few hours.

## The future of this technology

We are currently working with a very large American distributor, for whom we are creating a studio in California. Inevitably, this technology is going to change a number of aspects of photography, just the way digital has done for years.

On the other hand, I do not think this marks the end of photographers. We still need artists to make quality editorial photos. Moreover, our team includes photographers who are involved in the artistic part of the project.

We are in full internationalization, and the English market is responding very well right now. Our primary challenge is R & D, because we always want to be slightly ahead and to be able to automate our processes as much as possible. Another of our problems is to respond to the massive challenge of 3D virtualization. We know that’s the direction we have to head in, and we are actively working on it.

# SKIING CONNECTED: DIGITAL IS A MUST, ON AND OFF THE SLOPES AT SKI RESORTS



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**Only 4% of French people go  
totally offline while on holiday**

The snow is here. The mountains put on their beautiful white coats and it's time for the ski season. Before, the ski vacation checklist was limited mainly to the equipment: skis, jackets, gloves, and boots. Today, everything is different. The list also includes: tablets, laptops, and primarily smartphones: It is out of the question to travel without technology! Only 4% of French people go entirely offline when on holiday, and 81% of Americans admit that their smartphone is their number one travel accessory. People will always wish to

go skiing, and the snow industry has a bright future, but no one wants to be cut off from the world while on a mountain. We are entering the era of skiing connected!

We are living in the era of immediacy and sharing. As skiers, we want everything to be done in this way to make our vacation a unique customer experience. There is a real revolution in behavior. The resorts have understood the stakes and the interest for their image and notoriety: Today, for more than 80% of [French



skiiers], Wi-Fi access is a selection criterion when choosing a ski resort. Also, 31% of people in America only select a hotel if it offers free Wi-Fi. Every year, resorts are investing more in IoT and connected infrastructures. Resorts have even implemented something called smart station – a new technology that is available to facilitate the lives of holidaymakers and ensure their comfort.

### Skiing Connected: Wi-Fi for all and everywhere

The primary objective of the ski resorts is simple: to offer access to Wi-Fi to everyone everywhere, whether through optical fiber or radio links, a free Wi-Fi central point, or an individual pocket wifi. All amenities at ski resorts are created to satisfy the customer. (e.g., since 2015 the resort of Les Gets [has offered] its holidaymakers a pocket Wifi system enabling them to stay connected everywhere, even when on holiday)A customer’s satisfaction starts with internet access. Nowadays, we want to be able to share everything immediately. The resorts that understood this need have acted to improve. There are more and more photo points installed in front of the most beautiful photo spots of different ski areas. The photo points ensure beautiful photos and selfies for skiers, that of course – thanks to the connected structures – can immediately be shared for our greatest happiness.

### Mobile applications for a better customer experience

Which resorts do not have their own applications? If only one! Mobile apps are the favorite digital tools for resorts. And ours too. These are our vacation companions. Applications accompany us from our very idea of a snow vacation until our return home.

A question? A need? A desire?

Ski resorts and mountains across America are using an app called “EpicMix” to enhance the skiing digital experience.

The applications are there to make our life easier. We can book our stay, our packages, find out in real time the weather, snowfall, snow conditions, and openings/closures of the slopes; we can find our friends and know everything about the resorts and their region. Thanks to the beacons and sensors scattered everywhere in the resorts, one can choose the most suitable itinerary for their level, but also according to the affluence of the lifts, and much more. Everything is within a smartphone’s reach.

### Webcams, video, camera and TV: all the means to skiing connected

Today we do not talk about smartphone without talking about video. Thanks to the implementation of Wi-Fi in most areas, holidaymakers can access the Web TV and Youtube channels of the stations but also of the regions, and the webcams of the domains. Skiers can then judge for themselves the state of the slopes and have real-time information on the weather and possible activities. To complement these services, some stations even install large screens near the slopes to show skiers the less traveled routes of the resort so they can thus make the most of their day.

If the Wi-Fi is developing, it is the same for the different video devices that are dispatched on the domains. More and more slopes are installing these kinds of devices. No need for an onboard camera or third parties to fix our memories or film our exploits. Photos and videos are taken automatically.

Some stations even put terminals in place that identify the person with his hands-free ski pass and trigger cameras that will film his passage. You can receive your video immediately on your smartphone or download it later.

A virtual reality experience at a ski resort in





## Data and customer's loyalty at the heart of skiing connected

France contributes to the skiing connected experience.

Not to mention the resorts that offer 3D and augmented reality services – with or without a VR mask – to discover a region or domain, to be able to find one's way or even to follow snowshoe itineraries.

### Data for the Use of Skiers and Resorts

Sensors located everywhere – on the slopes and lifts, but also in the strategic locations of “towns and villages”. The sensors are serious assets for the resorts:

Station trackers are notified in real time of any problem. Staff can open or close tracks to skiers through a dashboard.

Ski slopes can collect data (the famous “big data”) on the habits and preferences of their tourists. They can then offer companies beacon advertising campaigns or dynamic displays.

“The digital revolution is well on its way for French slope maintenance services – both in terms of skier enjoyment and safety. Ski patrol equipment is being updated with new geo-localisation devices. In introducing these resources, Val Thorens is a truly pioneering and visionary force in terms of what will become a common practice in 3 or 4 years' time.” These were the words of Benjamin Blanc, head of the Belleville Valley slope maintenance service (Feb 2017).

The connected station today is a reality. A reality that meets a need and that develops at the same pace as the latter. While all the stations do not offer the same services in terms of connected infrastructures, videos, sensors or IOT, the will is there, and the trend is not going to reverse.

“Ski resorts have nothing to envy smart cities...” The French mountain resorts, which represent a market of 9 billion revenue by the end of 2016, have inevitably entered into a process of optimizing the management and operation of their infrastructures and are now relying on the IoT power to inform the decision-making process of their operators.”

The goal of the smart station is threefold: relying on the IoT power to inform the decision-making process of its operators.”

### The goal of the smart station is threefold:

The customer: improving the customer experience for a higher customer satisfaction.  
The data: the possibility of collecting data throughout the skier's stay but also before and

after it. Through applications, we can give our opinion on everything, suggest improvements and detail what we liked; we can even answer questionnaires. Even after our stay, we can provide essential data that complements our preferences during our stay. The stations love data for analyses, these are priceless!

The notoriety: All the sharings, likes, comments and others alike, actively and freely (in both sense of the term) add to the familiarity of a resort; word of mouth takes all its sense and proves its impact.

With one and only one priceless finality: customers' loyalty!

Thus, the digital revolution is definitely on and resorts have no other choice than to get smart. In the snow industry, the equipment and clothing sectors also have to follow the pace: customers not only want to be connected, but also want all their equipment to be connected. Get Skiing Connected!

# UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL INNOVATION



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In a recent discussion with a founder of Anaxago, a crowdfunding startup, I was asked a seemingly simple question: what's digital innovation? In what respect is digital innovation different from innovation alone? As we are entering an age of digital transformation where “software is eating everything”, I'd like to initiate a discussion on what this major industrial revolution is all about.

## 2 ways to look at digital innovation

I would say that, to start out, there are really two ways to look at digital innovation:

First of all, one can look at digital innovation from the perspective of an established company with an existing value chain.

Second of all, one can look at digital innovation from the perspective of the startup which aims at replacing established companies operating a free digital value chain.

## Understanding digital innovation from the perspective of established companies

As noted in my discussion with Luka Mucic, Chief Operating Officer of SAP, digital innovation is really a profound process of transforming a company's existing value chain with digital equivalents. One looks at the entire value chain from resource acquisition to operations, marketing, sales, distribution and servicing. One would list every single production activity along this value chain and see how the same production output can be achieved using digital technology.

I'll provide an extremely simple example to make my point: 30 years ago, individual contributors working in large companies used to correspond with one another in face-to-face meetings and paper envelopes. Now, they may use digital tools that can replace face-to-face meetings, Skype or telepresence to mention a few. Not to forget, they routinely use texting and emails in place of paper-based letters.

In addition, in a discussion I had with Bruno Delahaye, I learned that Dassault Systèmes is developing an end-to-end solution which aims at optimizing the company's existing value chain. I was particularly struck by the solutions features of organizing this online in

order to get suppliers to bid and suggests the best resources at the lowest price.

So basically, digital innovation from the perspective of an existing company is really meant to optimize the company's operations by using digital technology.

## Understanding the meaning of digital innovation from the perspective of a startup

Startups, as opposed to established companies, don't have to build an existing value chain. They create their own value chain using digital technology from the very beginning. This allows them to focus their attention on creating more value for the customer based on digital technology. The example of Nest comes to my mind. It's a connected thermostat which replaces the existing thermostat and is based on a different business model. In the past, a thermostat would cost approximately \$250 which was broken into two different costs (the cost of the thermostat itself and the cost of installing the thermostat at home). Nest is a connected thermostat which requires no installation and no special expertise.

So, the consumer is only paying for the price of the thermostat itself, which helps to lower the cost. In addition, the thermostat collects data on energy consumption and identifies

patterns before suggesting ways to reduce the energy bill. Also, consumers may program the thermostat to start before they make it home, which provides additional benefits to all of us who prefer walking in a heated room in cold, wet weather.

Here, digital innovation not only replaces the existing thermostat but also provides additional features which both help to lower costs and accentuate product differentiation with a new value proposition.

These examples provide a definition of what digital innovation is all about. What's your take on digital innovation?

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