



# Reshaping Business Excellence Through Technology

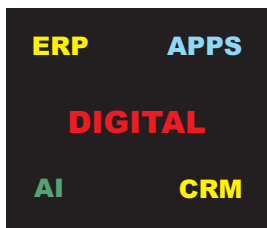
KYLE WHITEHILL\*

**M**y career started off in 1984, when I took my first job as a Sales Representative working for L'Oreal in London. In those days the only business tools that they provided was a car and a box full of customer records. There were no mobile phones, tablets or laptops, and weekly reporting involved a call to my boss every thursday evening to talk him through all the units I had sold during the week. He would then add my sales to the rest of the team's results and circulate a report. We would only meet as a sales team once a month in Cambridge and get introduced to any new products, then sent back out on the road working our way through the different salons we had been assigned. Without having a mobile phone, if my boss wanted to get hold of me, he would have to ring several salons to find out where I was, and leave a message for me to call him back – you definitely could not have called this business excellence.



The first phone I had for work, was a car phone. As an ambitious sales man, I spent more of my time with my customers than in my car. However this led to the first argument I had with my boss, around his concerns that I never answered his calls. I pointed out the fact that I was spending my time with customers selling more products, but if he preferred me to sit in the car to wait for his calls I could do that. He obviously agreed that it was more productive to spend my time with our customers.

When I think about business excellence in those days, it was shaped around the quality of your product and the quality of the way that you are able to talk to a customer, and I genuinely do not believe that has changed. What has fundamentally changed, is the technology that is available to us now. We are living in a world of millions of connected products and services.



## Global Challenges and Advancement

The reason I am able to make this statement is because following my

introduction to the world of business at L'Oreal, I spent 15 years at Vodafone Group. From 2001 to 2016, I worked across various senior leadership roles such as CEO, COO and Chairman in a variety of countries including the UK, Qatar, Ghana and India. During this time at Vodafone, I was at the forefront of the revolution in communications and that allowed me to see first-hand the transformational impact that these advancements had on helping to deliver business excellence for our customers.

## Reshaping Business Excellence Through Technology

In order to reshape business excellence through technology, we have to simplify what technology means. In the end, it is still a person that has to deliver the technology. There is often a confusion that technology is the answer, whereas, it is actually people who have to execute the benefits that the technology can bring.

An example of this was when I was CEO for Liquid Telecom in South Africa. We wanted our customers to become digitally engaged with us. We felt that our retail stores were an old fashioned concept and in order to fast track our digital engagement program, we closed them all. We expected our customers to conform to the business excellence plan through the technology idea. They didn't. The result was chaotic, and we went from collecting over 200 million ZAR (\$13.3m) per month to nothing. In reality, our customers only wanted to pay me by cash or cheque, and despite my digital aspirations, they could only do this through our network of stores. Needless to say, all of the stores were quickly re-opened.

W. Edwards Deming quoted, "The transformation can only be accomplished by man, not by hardware (computers, gadgets, automation, new machinery). A company cannot buy its way into quality". ([quotes.deming.org/10155](https://quotes.deming.org/10155)).

My view therefore, is that technology's role is to replace something that is not being done particularly well and should subsequently add value to people and customers. The Total Quality Management & Business Excellence journal, Volume 21, 2010, Issue 11 states "...customer relationship management profitability is not only dependent on the quality of information systems but also on service orientation and service processes".

**Technology has definitely had an impact of reshaping business excellence.** It has enabled businesses to create new business models, upgrade the value of product and service and do all

of this faster, why? Because it is digital.

Today, I continue to be at the heart of the digital revolution. Having been appointed CEO of Avanti Communications Group in April 2018 and now six months into my tenure, I am bringing all the strands of my experience together to help with the transformation of the company. We are a British company listed on the Stock Exchange and we have launched 3 satellites that are orbiting 36,000 km above the globe. We provide our customers with world leading connectivity solutions in the most remote areas across EMEA. Our service connects people, countries and continents, helping businesses to grow and trade anywhere, giving all children the same potential to learn, and

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When I started this role, it was quite clear to me that we needed to reshape ourselves for business excellence, and this involved 3 specific tasks:

Firstly, I had to take a close look at all of our customer's touch points and understand how we could improve the complete customer experience. The reality

is, if you want to reshape your business and customer experience, you need to utilize technology to make that happen. For example, we have created our own proprietary tool, which enables us to map absolute network experience by customer. This allows our customers to then understand their customers' experience, and proactively make any required performance improvements on the network in order to optimise customer satisfaction.

Secondly, I had to be creative. As a business, we have spent \$500 million on launching satellite capacity above Africa. Africa is a great

unconnected continent due to the lack of existing infrastructure, so we needed to work collaboratively with interesting partners to build creative technological solutions to help us bring WiFi to the most rural parts of Africa. The 400 million people in Africa who are currently not connected will hopefully be connected within the next five years.

Finally, I needed to ensure our processes support the customer. Quite often you end up in internal meetings where discussions take place of what our technology does for us, when we need to focus on what it does for our customers. For example artificial intelligence is a digital process that could actually benefit our customers not just us. So I am a strong believer that any process of improvement still relies on human intelligence to make the applications, analyse the data and deliver the end results. Not the other way round. You still need great people to deliver the technology.

In addition, you also need to have a new approach and style of leadership. It is impossible as a CEO nowadays to truly understand the depths of the ever-changing technological landscape. The style that I have had to adopt is to primarily be a good listener in order to understand the benefits of new technologies. Only then can I empower great people to deliver the significant change that is required.

There has been a huge amount of change since my days at L'Oreal. What has not changed however, has been my continued focus on the customer, ensuring they are always at the heart of the why, how and what you change as part of any business transformation. And I can't foresee the importance of this changing at any time in the near future.

My mantra has always been - improvement excellence comes from a focus on how and what you improve, with a focus on the customer always at the heart of this. I can't foresee the importance of this changing in the near future.

\* **Kyle Whitehill** is the CEO of Avanti Communications PLC

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