



## **A REVOLUTION IN ADOPTION, BUT OLD DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION CHALLENGES AWAIT**

By Affiliate Professor of Strategy and Digital Transformation [Didier Bonnet](#)

Chemin de Bellerive 23  
PO Box 915,  
CH-1001 Lausanne  
Switzerland

Tel: +41 21 618 01 11  
Fax: +41 21 618 07 07  
[info@imd.org](mailto:info@imd.org)  
[www.imd.org](http://www.imd.org)

*We're all digital workers now, but the COVID-19 effect is unlikely to miraculously enable full large-scale digital transformations. The spectre of future crises should.*

Are we witnessing changes that will fizzle out when we go back to a more “normal” way of working or is this a more profound evolution? This is the million-dollar question.

By now, you may have heard the joke circulating on social media. Who accelerated your digital transformation: your CEO, your CDO or COVID-19? There is a genuine perception among some that the pandemic has allowed companies to leapfrog complex, lengthy and arduous stages of digital transformation in a matter of weeks.

There is some truth in this. Anyone who has tried to introduce new digital tools as part of a transformation will be all too familiar with the adoption challenges and internal resistance. Well, the pandemic has done what few executives could - and in a fraction of the time.

We all now use digital tools because we have to and because they work, whether it is video conferencing meetings with Zoom, organizing work with Microsoft Teams or sharing files on Dropbox.

The number of Zoom users, for example, rocketed from 10 million in December 2019 to 200 million in June. Data traffic soared as much as 60% during the lockdown - equivalent to a full-year increase in one month.

The crisis has resulted in one of the great global social experiments of our time, and it is likely that this mass adoption of digital tools will last. Adoption at this scale could never have happened without disruption because so many companies were nervous about the impact on productivity and control on creating devolved, autonomous workforces. Even now, some remain unconvinced.

In any case, adoption is just one part of the extensive digital transformation journey that companies need to undergo to remain competitive in the years ahead. For those companies attempting large-scale transformations across their processes and infrastructure, such as projects involving the Internet of Things, it is likely that the same old challenges and pitfalls will remain all too real as we ease out of lockdown.

What has been clear is that those companies that had already embarked on digital transformation journeys have been better equipped for, and fared better, during the crisis than those who had yet to make any changes. This is perhaps the biggest lesson and motivation for accelerating transformation. Get ahead before the next crisis strikes.

**Don't mistake tools for total transformation.** The adoption of new ways of working does not mean your company has undergone a digital transformation.

**Digital transformations are still necessary.** The crisis has shown that even the most tricky parts of transformation can be achieved under the right conditions, but it does not remove the need for deeper transformation in most industries.

**Act now or live to regret it.** There is a unique opportunity to either begin or accelerate digital transformation, harnessing the momentum of forced changes to working patterns. Companies should seize this chance to enhance their operations before the next crisis hits.