Demystifying Digital: Global Mobility's Digital Journey

The term 'Digital' has become ubiquitous in business today. But what does it mean in reality? What do we need to do to 'become digital' and why does it matter for global mobility?
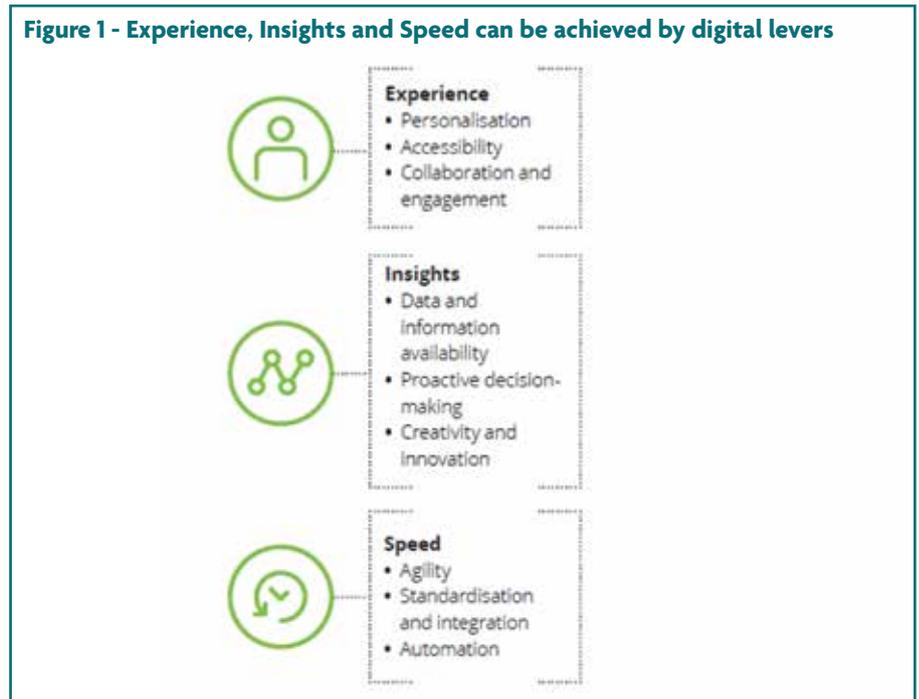
Business leaders are grappling with these questions whilst also navigating significant external forces – demand for greater connectivity, increased competition, heightened consumer power – as well as traditional corporate drivers such as greater efficiency, improved productivity and enhanced employee experience. 'Becoming digital' is a critical element of any strategy to meet these challenges in the 21st Century.

The same themes play out in the area of global mobility. In this article we go back to basics to understand why digital is so important, how you can reimagine a digital future for your global mobility programme, and the areas to consider to practically make it happen.

Why Digital?

When thinking of how we become digital, frequently the first things that come to mind are tools and devices. We make the mistake of focusing on the 'what' before answering the 'why'. If we ask ourselves "why digital?" the answer becomes clearer. It is about becoming connected, integrated and efficient. It's about fuelling growth and continuous innovation through real-time customised experiences,

leveraging predictive insights, and being agile enough to deliver at unparalleled speeds, as we see in figure 1.

Digital isn't 'a technology' but a strategy; a new era of business, to fuel cost-efficient growth.

A proliferation of disruptive technologies are transforming business models and radically changing the workplace – as well as changing how work is actually approached. Additionally, the workforce is diversifying (the alternative workforce is now mainstream,

including contractors, freelancers, gig and crowd) and with this comes a step-change in expectations from workers, with regard to engagement and motivation.

Despite these shifting demands global mobility is in a truly unique position from which to incubate new ideas, forge partnerships from within and outside the organisation, and to foster digital innovation. Increasingly we witness global mobility teams, who serve multiple business

Figure 1 - Experience, Insights and Speed can be achieved by digital levers

Figure 2 - Global Mobility programmes in the digital era
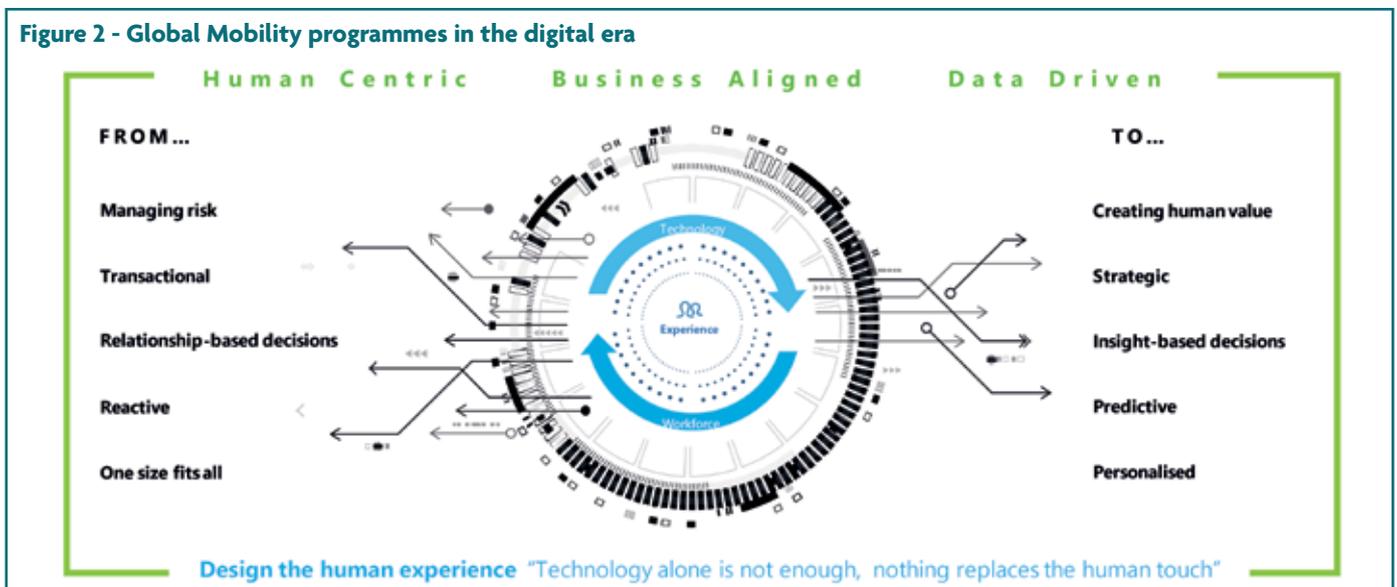
stakeholders and have access to swathes of critical people and talent data, acting as catalysts for wider HR digital transformation.

Reimagining A Digital Future For Global Mobility

Global mobility is coming of age digitally. Once typically viewed as a transactional function that simply delivered international assignment services, mobility professionals have evolved into value-added 'Trusted Advisor' roles, and due to this realigned perception are now being asked to lead strategic initiatives such as digital transformation.

Digital transformation affords the opportunity to step back and truly reimagine the global mobility offering.

The left hand side of Figure 2 shows where global mobility functions have been traditionally focused, but forward thinking organisations are shifting to the right. Digitally-enabled global mobility functions are human-centred, agile, data-driven, strategic and deliver personalised services to employees.
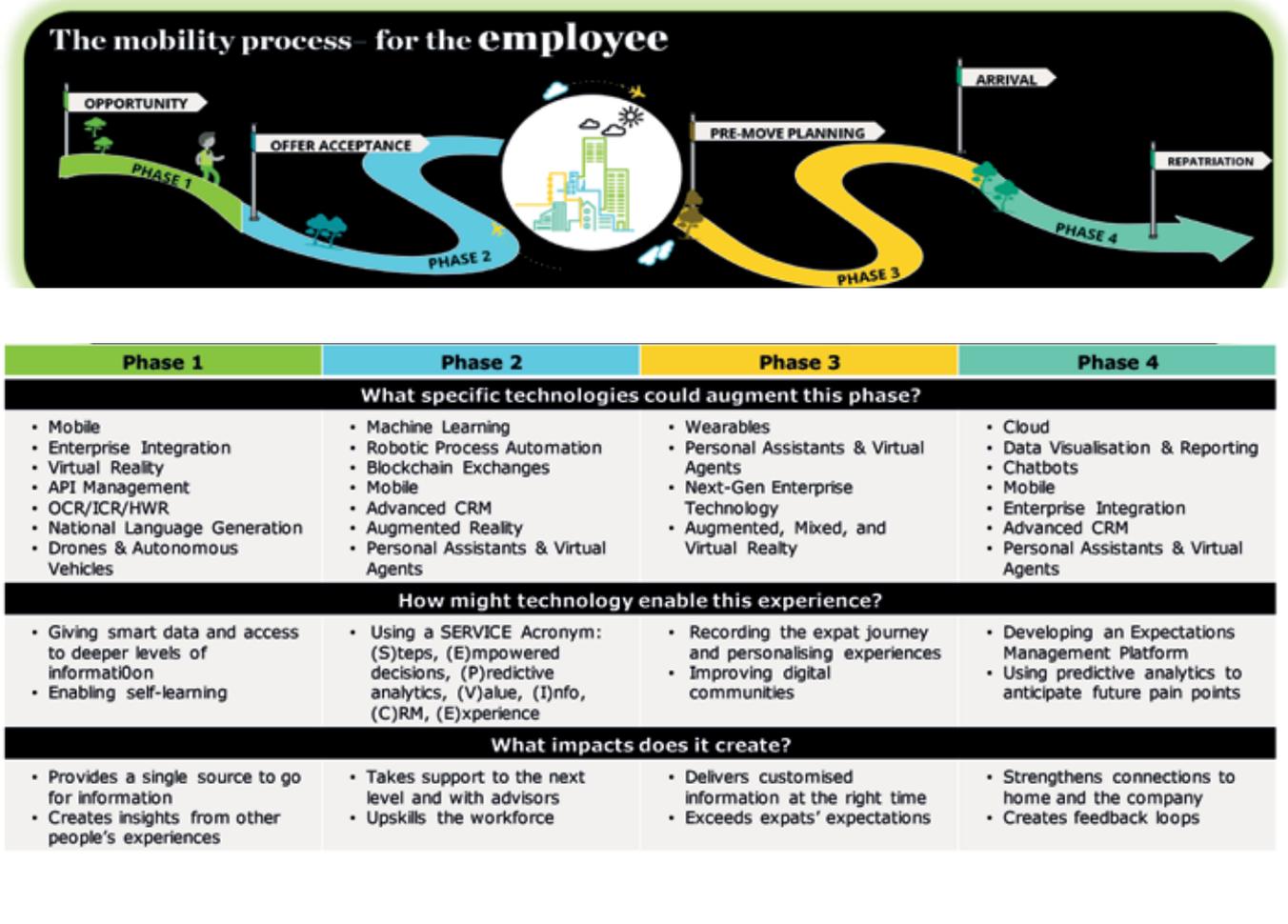
Naturally technology plays a critical role in any digital transformation, and an array of tools and methods are available that can positively impact the global mobility programme. These new digital accelerators are at the disposal of most organisations, but can be overwhelming in a global mobility context. Figure 3 provides a high-level overview of some of the more common digital levers and how they can be applied within global mobility.

To further understand how global mobility

Figure 3 – Common digital accelerators used in Global Mobility programmes

What is it?	Put simply?	Example global mobility use case
Digital content	An umbrella term to refer to many different communication channels in order to better engage employees, such as 2D/3D animations, interactive pdfs, videos, podcasts, gamification, training modules, apps, portals.	**Face to face meetings to educate employees and the business are time consuming and expensive. Employees never read our policies or our newsletters.** Short animations and films could be used to better engage employees and allow them to consume information anywhere, anytime, in bite sizes. Additionally, interactive e-learning modules could be used to provide deeper engaging learning.
Robotic Process Automation (RPA)	Mimicking distinct manual processes carried out by humans and automating them in some way using software. These processes are usually repetitive, high volume and rule based.	**The allowance updates are time consuming and subject to human error.** RPA could be used to manage periodic allowance/exchange rate updates. The 'robot' could logon to the data provider's system, extract the relevant information, upload the data to your system, run the new calculations/balance sheets, check for any discrepancies (such as negative values) and flag these, then send relevant documents to assignees.
Immersive technology	Any technology which replicates reality without the user being physically present in that environment. **Virtual Reality:** creates a digital environment that replaces the user's real-world environment. **360 Video:** provides a new perspective that allows users to look every direction. **Augmented Reality:** overlays digitally- related content into the user's real-world environment.	**'Looksee' trips are costing us a lot of money – especially when the assignment is ultimately not accepted by the employee.** A headset which is preloaded with the assignee's host location so they can virtually explore without actually being there. For example, different neighbourhoods for housing, office location, schools etc. It could also be used after they have accepted the offer so they can find out more about their host location and thereby improve the employee experience.
Artificial intelligence (AI)	AI is the simulation of human intelligence and reasoning by software programmes.	**There is a vast volume of emails received and we are struggling to cope.** Using AI we could monitor a global mobility mailbox, pick out key words in incoming emails and deliver actions on those emails. For example, an assignee asking to be sent a policy.
Machine learning	Machine learning is a subset of AI and is where the software goes one step further and 'learns' by identifying patterns or themes.	**Cost projections are not accurate.** Cost projections are calculations that are usually run over static data which is not updated often. Machine learning could be embedded into cost projection calculations whereby it looks at current compensation data of assignees and learns patterns dependant on rules (such as country, family size etc.). These learnings can then be applied to the calculation for more accurate results.
Chatbot	Software which mimics human interaction with the user either textually or aurally.	**Employees are asking a lot of questions and we don't have the bandwidth to cope.** A channel for employees to ask questions about their upcoming assignment. This could be via a website, text/WhatsApp or a phone line. The chatbot then responds to the answer with the ability to speak to a human if the assignee is not satisfied with the answer.
Data Analytics	Data Analytics uses the power of data to provide valuable insights. It is not just about the visualisation of data – it is using the data to make key decisions.	**We have a lot of data. How do we use it for strategic or operational gain?** Analytics can be used to monitor trends in your global mobility data, and drive programme insight. Specific areas of focus include total programme costs, employee satisfaction, vendor performance, demographics. The only limit is your data!

Figure 4 – Output from Deloitte Reimaging Digital Mobility Lab, 2019

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
What specific technologies could augment this phase?			
• Mobile • Enterprise Integration • Virtual Reality • API Management • OCR/ICR/HWR • National Language Generation • Drones & Autonomous Vehicles	• Machine Learning • Robotic Process Automation • Blockchain Exchanges • Mobile • Advanced CRM • Augmented Reality • Personal Assistants & Virtual Agents	• Wearables • Personal Assistants & Virtual Agents • Next-Gen Enterprise Technology • Augmented, Mixed, and Virtual Realty	• Cloud • Data Visualisation & Reporting • Chatbots • Mobile • Enterprise Integration • Advanced CRM • Personal Assistants & Virtual Agents
How might technology enable this experience?			
• Giving smart data and access to deeper levels of informati0on • Enabling self-learning	• Using a SERVICE Acronym: (S)teps, (E)mpowered decisions, (P)redictive analytics, (V)alue, (I)nfo, (C)RM, (E)xperience	• Recording the expat journey and personalising experiences • Improving digital communities	• Developing an Expectations Management Platform • Using predictive analytics to anticipate future pain points
What impacts does it create?			
• Provides a single source to go for information • Creates insights from other people's experiences	• Takes support to the next level and with advisors • Upskills the workforce	• Delivers customised information at the right time • Exceeds expats' expectations	• Strengthens connections to home and the company • Creates feedback loops

can be re-imagined in the digital age, we asked global mobility leaders from over 25 organisations to share their views. The leaders were asked to envision the ideal end-to-end process for employees, and how their mobility programme might be enhanced across the four main phases of the mobility lifecycle - Opportunity, Offer acceptance, Pre-move planning/Arrival and Repatriation.

Leaders shared their excitement about using digital accelerators to transform their programmes. It was clear that digital transformation, even when undertaken in incremental steps over time, would lead to positive outcomes for both employees and the
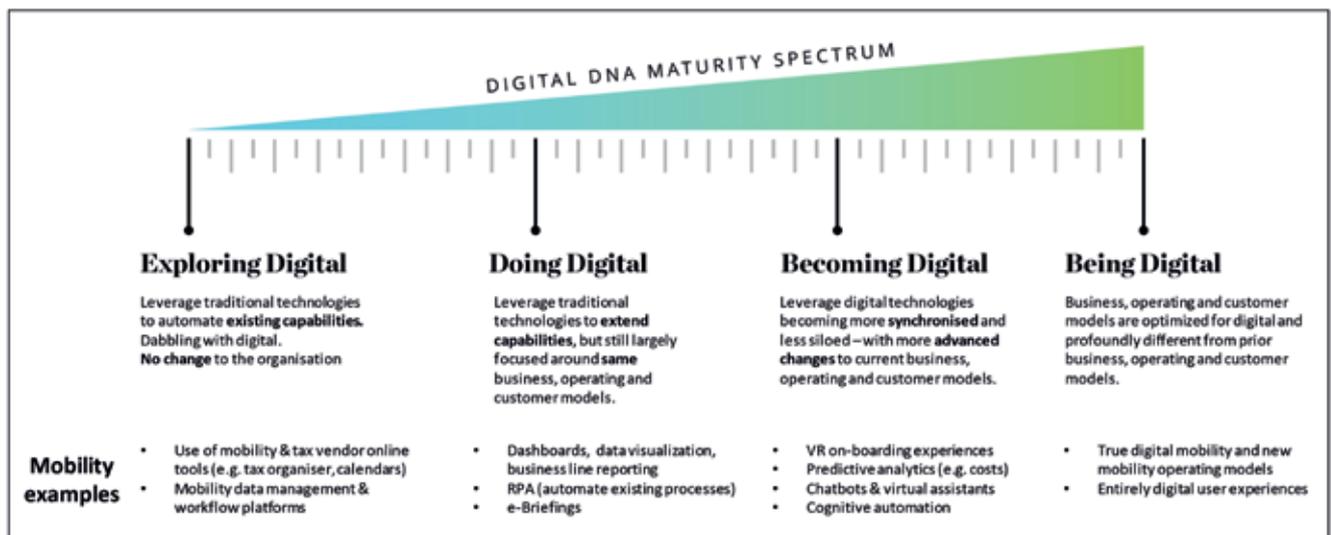
Figure 5 – Deloitte's Digital DNA Maturity Spectrum

Exploring Digital
Leverage traditional technologies to automate **existing capabilities**. Dabbling with digital. **No change** to the organisation

Doing Digital
Leverage traditional technologies to **extend capabilities**, but still largely focused around **same** business, operating and customer models.

Becoming Digital
Leverage digital technologies becoming more **synchronised** and less siloed – with more **advanced changes** to current business, operating and customer models.

Being Digital
Business, operating and customer models are optimized for digital and profoundly different from prior business, operating and customer models.

Mobility examples

Exploring Digital	Doing Digital	Becoming Digital	Being Digital
• Use of mobility & tax vendor online tools (e.g. tax organiser, calendars) • Mobility data management & workflow platforms	• Dashboards, data visualization, business line reporting • RPA (automate existing processes) • e-Briefings	• VR on-boarding experiences • Predictive analytics (e.g. costs) • Chatbots & virtual assistants • Cognitive automation	• True digital mobility and new mobility operating models • Entirely digital user experiences

Figure 6 – Output from figure Deloitte Reimaging Digital Mobility Lab, February 2019

	Exploring	**Doing**	**Becoming**
Enablers	✓ Leadership champions ✓ Process efficiencies ✓ Business growth ✓ Open business culture	✓ Innovative culture ✓ Team expertise ✓ Scalable processes ✓ Outsourcing/supplier knowledge	✓ Funding ✓ Availability of data ✓ Survey results ✓ Alignment of roles, tools and team structure ✓ Existing tech platforms
Blockers	- Time + resources - Budget - Constant change - Stakeholder buy-in - Business priorities	- Cynics and old-school mindsets - Data ownership across functions - Data privacy - Supplier integration capabilities	- Time (too many projects) - Priority alignment - Cross-functional collaboration - Interim solution (band aid) - Team capability or skillsets
MVCs	• Identify leadership champions • Create dashboards to enable conversations with the business	• Create status reports with integrated data • Select small areas to enable through technology • Get the technology investment	• Assess current tools & usage • VC instead of phone call with assignees • Work on a repatriation tool • Conduct user-centered design for stakeholders for predictive costs

business. The lifecycle and some of their areas of focus in each phase are illustrated in Figure 4.

What Does The Journey Look Like?

'Being digital' is a journey, and like any journey it will be uniquely different for each traveller. Businesses strive to constantly evolve, but each organisations' evolution will have different objectives, variable paces between each milestone, and an overall duration that suits their specific needs. The 'Digital DNA Maturity Spectrum' (Figure 5) acts as a first step to understand current state and where the programme ultimately needs to be.

Reflecting on and placing both 'today' and 'tomorrow' on the maturity spectrum is critical in determining the kind of journey, and role, that global mobility can play. In our experience one size does not fit all, and each organisation should align to its own strategy, goals and organisational culture.

When asked about the digital maturity journey, global mobility leaders reported a number of factors to consider. Figure 6 outlines these enablers, blockers and minimal viable changes (MVCs) to drive forward a digital global mobility transformation.

In our view, organisations who have been most successful on the digital journey are clear about the characteristics of the digital impact they need to create, where they are now and where they need to go. We believe that a problem solving philosophy using design thinking methodologies which focus on people will create offerings that are intuitive, and deliver most value when undertaking a mobility transformation. There are many questions to consider across four key aspects in order to define the journey to drive the digital model such as:

1. **Vision & Strategy –** is digital clearly defined for the organisation? Are the strategy and measurable impacts of digital enablement clearly communicated?
2. **Technology –** is there a clear strategy, roadmap for robotics, automation? How is performance measured, visualised, reported?
3. **Talent & Culture –** how is innovation/ experimentation rewarded? Is there the right talent to drive the digital initiatives? Is there the right talent for the future GM organisation? How are new talents defined, acquired, developed?
4. **Process & Governance –** how are augmented teams of human & digital governed? How are employees engaged?

Conclusion

Digital transformation is a journey towards becoming a digital enterprise or programme. This is not a fixed destination: A digital enterprise is continually evolving, always seeking to take full advantage of new technologies to innovate what it offers, how it delivers and how it operates. Digital maturity, consequently isn't an endpoint.

Global mobility functions are undergoing rapid and profound change and need to adopt a mind-set for continuous experimentation and innovation. There is a great opportunity for global mobility leaders to use innovative technologies and communication tools to promote engagement, enhance collaboration, wellness and a sense of purpose with employees. Operating in a digital way will also deliver great solutions, increased speed and decreased costs for the business.

Whilst the overarching concept of digital can seem daunting at first, digital transformation can be easily realised by taking small steps, quickly, whilst always thinking about the bigger picture.

Why not start plotting your journey now…?

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