COOi studios

Digitally Transforming

with Love

Applying a human-centered approach to solving business challenges

Digitally transform with love

The current pandemic has fundamentally shifted the business landscape. Most notably, we've seen changing organisational strategies and markets as the need to digitise has become more urgent.

Digital transformation has not only changed the way we live and interact but also how companies are redesigning their business strategies to enhance service delivery. While business leaders have had the daunting task of plotting a path forward for their organisations, questioning business processes, technologies in place and their people construct, they are also realising that business can't be purely guided by bottom line thinking, but should be geared to consider humans. This means crafting business strategies that are guided by data and analytics, responding in a human-centered manner while also unlocking business value.

South African Context
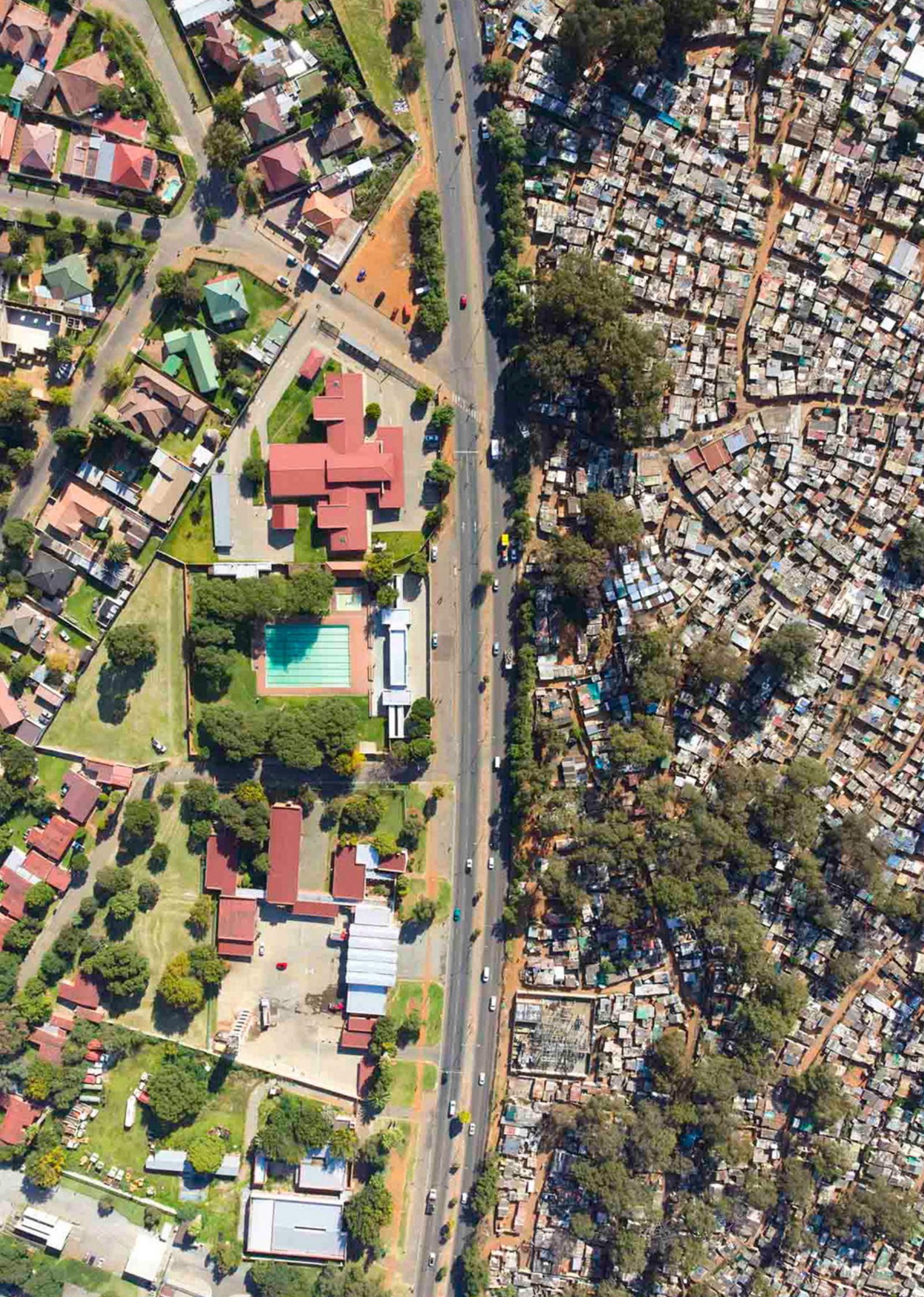
Post-apartheid South Africa faces many developmental challenges, some old and some new. As businesses look to digitise their services in South Africa, they will need to consider the country's historical context, which is often ignored in the face of emerging technologies and innovations. Both private and public sector players need to consider the socio-economic aspects with the geography: educational levels, literacy, and access to infrastructure and resources that enable participation in the digital era before even considering human centricity.

Participation in the digital economy is more often than not isolated to a minority who have multiple access routes to digital literacy in their socio-cultural environments. The less privileged majority, however, still come from under- resourced socio-cultural backgrounds where digital technology is rare, and access unevenly distributed. And this is the case in South Africa – which is considered to have the highest number of domains and websites of the Southern African Development Communities (SADC).

Digital is not simply digital in a landscape marred by societal disparities and a growing deep divide between the haves and have-nots. And while it can potentially be empowering for users (gaining them access to e-government or digital financial services), the lack of infrastructure to grow digital skills at educational and community levels remains problematic. In this light, it is an imperative that businesses and governments allow digital solutions to be influenced – or at least cognisant – of these inequalities by considering user digital literacy and other socio-economic factors during development.

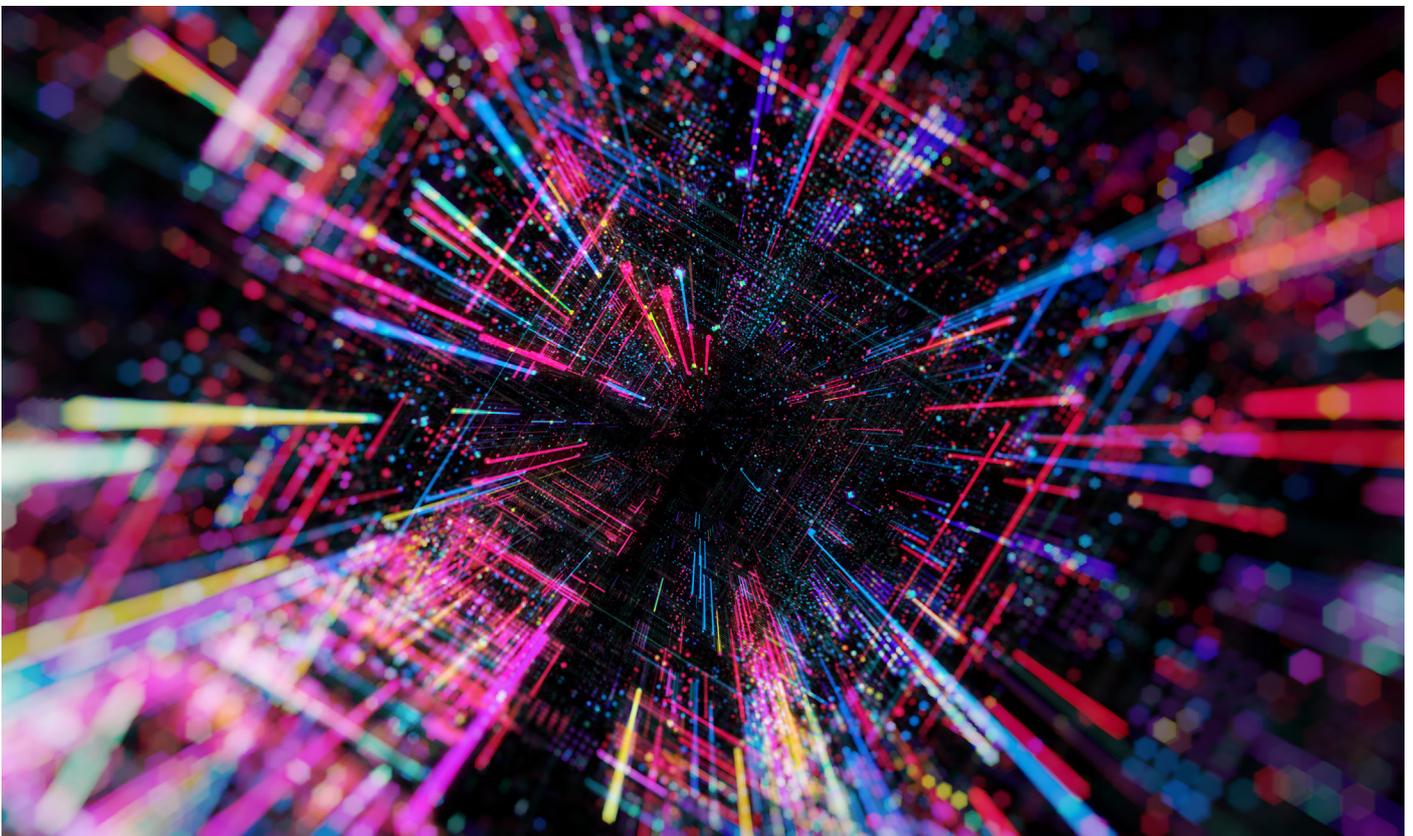# Case for Digital Transformation

The creation of strong technological solutions is important for dealing with social challenges, bringing with it the potential to help us address challenges. One example where we've seen this is the rapid adaption amongst universities and their students who were seamlessly able to move to online distance learning when the nation-wide lockdown was announced almost a year ago. Online platforms that the universities had been investing in for years to provide support to lecturers and students, changed overnight into core solutions to allow the academic programme to continue.

The implications of digital transformation are being felt by businesses and governments in both developed and developing economies. However, for the most part, developed economies have had an upper-hand due to the availability and ability to utilise and maximise resources in their digital agendas. Nonetheless, it does not mean that businesses and governments within developing economies are not in a position to take advantage of the benefits presented by digitalisation.

In fact, digitisation success is correlated to investing in the correct initiatives. Indeed, digital transformation is facilitated by taking advantage of change-driving technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, virtual reality, cloud computing, robotics and the Internet of Things (IoT), but organisations will need to be mindful of spearing ahead without a clear digital strategy in mind.

They must make concerted effort to identify where to best take advantage of digitalisation and invest in the activities that will have the most positive impact and accelerate their performance in the long term. Even more so, those that succeed at capturing value from their digital transformation investment will be those who took the time to understand their users better, that truly seeked to take a human-centric approach before diving straight into new and shiny projects that promise pools of value.

How to Digitally Transform with Love

Digitally transforming with love is a blend of human and business; truly taking on a human-centric approach to digital transformation. In the current landscape, taking this multifaceted approach is fast becoming a business imperative in order to capture the intended value from digital investment. This means that technology and innovation leaders will need to carve a vision and strategy that is cognisant of the local context and the rapidly changing world, while taking into account the wants, needs and constraints of individuals.

This means looking at users beyond customers and employees but as individuals with thoughts and feelings, and actively working to unearth their motivations and attitudes. Time spent in understanding humans is in itself an investment and a step towards digital success, especially when it considers both their current circumstances and their future.

As leaders begin or continue to accelerate digital transformation within their organisations, to truly do this with love, they will need to consider 3 activities:

1. Understanding the socio-economic factors of individuals and communities:

Leaders and innovators need to consider their users circumstances with regards to income, education, employment, community safety, and social support, all of which can have a major impact on the ability for humans to adopt a technological innovation. Companies must seek to better understand how people live by conducting ethnographic and other studies within their target communities to guide solutions that are best suited for the environment.

2. Listening to user feedback:

Whether through data and analytics, simply asking users for feedback, businesses should seek to pay attention to what the users wants, and make use of that information to inform future developments or subtractions that affect the user experience. These insights can reveal what's most important to customers - as well as what motivates and inspires them. If businesses and governments engage in a human-centred approach to solving for problems they will continually regenerate the customer confidence needed to drive better customer experiences - and effectively business growth.

3. Recalibrating the proposed solution:

Once leaders have thoroughly considered socio-economic factors and customer preferences they can couple this information with future innovation trends, enabling them to build for today, with tomorrow in mind. But the work doesn't stop there: businesses and governments need to be abreast of further developments across emerging technologies, to allow scalability as the product evolves. Today the solution may be a singular technology, but the customers' needs may force a combination of technologies in the future to better address the business problem. Innovation teams need to build blueprints that are responsive to individuals, government regulation changes and in some cases further limitations in resources.

Organisations that successful digitally transform will be those who do so with love, keeping a balance between business or government needs versus human needs. Those organisations who dare to try new things, embrace new sources of information, while keeping the user at the heart of the solution, will win the digital race and capture meaningful value from their innovation investments.

COOi Studios is committed to human-centricity across every service we offer. From idea validation where we empathise with the user through interviews, focus groups and more, to prototyping that allows us to test the solution and tweak it based on user feedback before we scale the solution, we ensure an amalgamated approach of business and human needs to our innovation developments across industries namely; consumer goods, mining, financial services, public sector and health.

Looking to start or continue a digital transformation project? Make sure you do it with love. Looking to partner with a team passionate about all-things digital? Contact COOi Studios to explore ways to drive customer and business value led by data and analytics.

About COOi Studios

COOi Studios, an Open Innovation Studio, that helps enterprises move from a strategy refresh, to rapidly solving a problem to a tested solution using design thinking methods and emerging technologies. When it no longer makes sense for corporates to outsource innovation services, we help large enterprises build internal innovation capabilities. We are an ecosystem enabler that provides access between local and global start-ups to the African market.
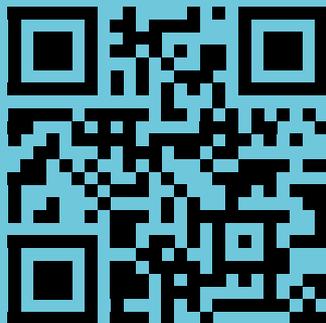
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