



## “Digital” and IT4IT

by Mark Smalley

What’s the difference between digital transformation and IT transformation and how can the IT4IT Standard contribute?

For a discipline that is based on zeroes and ones, IT people are exceedingly sloppy with their use of non-programming language. Take the term “digital transformation”, that everybody seems to be talking about. What does it mean? Transformation of what? What is digital anyway? And while we’re at it, what’s the difference between digital and IT?

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### “Digital”

Well, one difference is easy: digital is an adjective, and IT is a noun. Looking at how the term is used, “digital” has several meanings. For the layman, it is used to denote the difference with analogue, in other words it is “something to do with IT”. But in IT circles, it is used to indicate “important IT” (leaving us wondering what to call IT that is not so important). Its importance is usually not about some inherent quality of the technology in question – it’s more about how an organization uses IT.

We can safely say that an organization is digital when information and related technology are strategic to the its business model. “And when is something strategic?”, I hear you asking. When it’s got the board attention. Paraphrasing Humpty Dumpty in Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking-Glass, when the board uses “strategic”, it means just what it chooses it to mean – neither more nor less. That’s their prerogative.

### “Transformation”

OK. Now we’ve dealt with “digital”, what about “transformation”? Simple. It’s just major change. So, what do we mean by digital transformation? Major change in an organization’s strategic use of IT. This usually means that an organization isn’t using IT strategically at the moment but feels that it

needs to.

“Digital” is often associated with having IT embedded into an organization’s services and products and related delivery channels. But you could also make the case that an organization that makes strategic use of IT in its internal production processes or in its interactions with suppliers without the customer having any digital experience, is also a digital organization. It’s unlikely, but it’s good to make the distinction between internal and external strategic use.

## IT Transformation

How does IT transformation differ from digital transformation? As we just explored, digital transformation is about major change to an organization’s use of IT in its processes and/or its services and products. IT transformation is about major change to how an enterprise’s IT function provides IT services. Digital transformation often triggers IT transformation as well, but IT transformation is feasible without digital transformation, for instance if an IT department is under-performing and needs major improvement to restore normal service.

## IT4IT for Transformation and Automation of IT

As an active member of the IT4IT Forum, I can share that we have had many discussions about the core value proposition of the IT4IT Standard. At a high level, the Standard comprises an IT Value Chain that describes an IT function in terms of its primary and supporting activities, and a Reference Architecture that describes an IT function in terms of its data and functions. The IT Value Chain and the IT4IT Reference Architecture are connected by a Service Model, that depicts services throughout their whole lifecycle.

Although the IT Value Chain is a very useful tool to help IT functions improve their IT Operating Model, the combination of the IT Value Chain and the IT4IT Reference Architecture is what makes the IT4IT Standard unique. It describes an IT function end-to-end in terms of standardized data and functions that can be automated to help to run IT as a business.

## Summary

Digital transformation refers to major change to an organization’s use of IT, while IT transformation refers to major change to how an enterprise’s IT function provides IT services. Digital transformation often triggers IT transformation. The core value of IT4IT Standard manifests itself in IT transformation (or just regular change) and IT automation. Automation of IT is the origin of IT4IT: the IT that the IT function needs to run itself as a business.

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