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# Technology is not the answer: Why “digital” is not the most important aspect of your digital strategy

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# Overview

Why do large organizations often fail to evolve with the times?

What is your strategy for supporting “digital” evolution and innovation in your organization?

How do you adapt to and benefit from change and new ideas and technologies?



# Overview

In March 2018, Athenaeum21 was commissioned to conduct an environmental scan of how and why digital strategies in a range of organizations succeed, and also why they “fail.”



# Our definition of “Digital Strategy”

“a plan of action for the adoption of institutional processes and practices that transform the organization and culture, to effectively and competitively function in an increasingly digital world.”



# “Digital Maturity”

“How organizations systematically prepare to adapt consistently to ongoing digital change”

(Kane et al., 2017)



# Overview

Our research included a literature review, web review, and in-depth interviews with thought leaders and practitioners in digital transformation and digital skills-building in higher education, non-profits, and corporations.



# Overview

Our final report provides examples of successful practices undertaken by organizations actively managing digital transformation and benefiting from their investments in innovation in Canada, the United States and Europe.

The report also includes examples of so-called “failed” digital strategies.



# What does a successful digital strategy include?

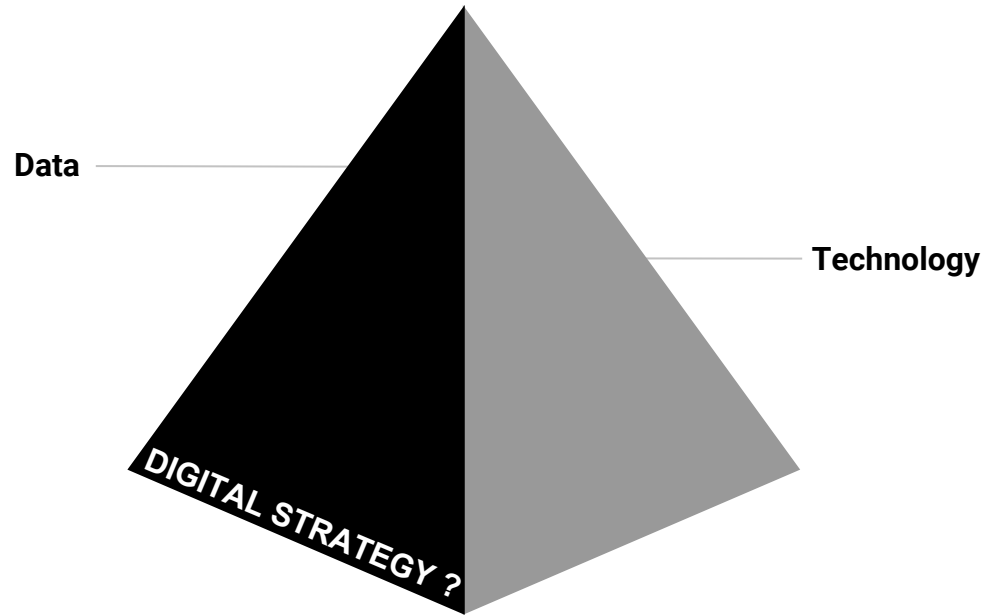
*What should it “look” like?*

Well, obviously, it includes technology.

And don't forget data...



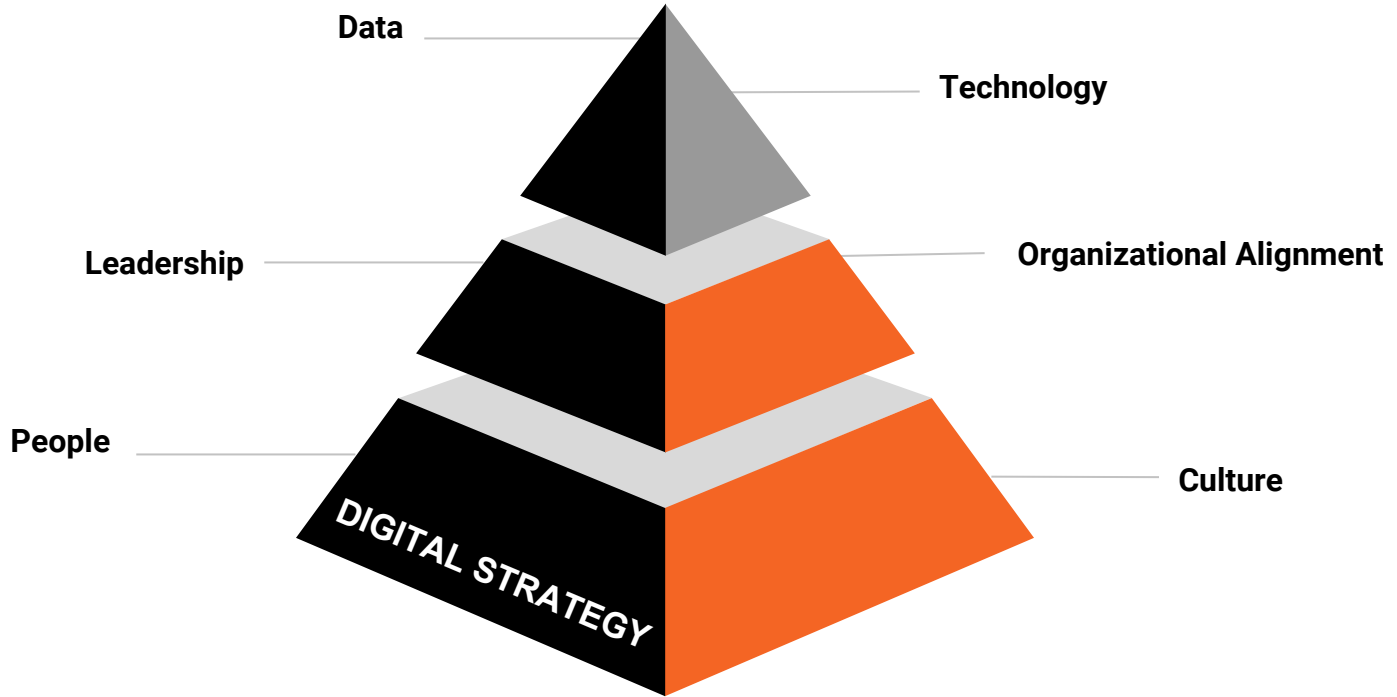


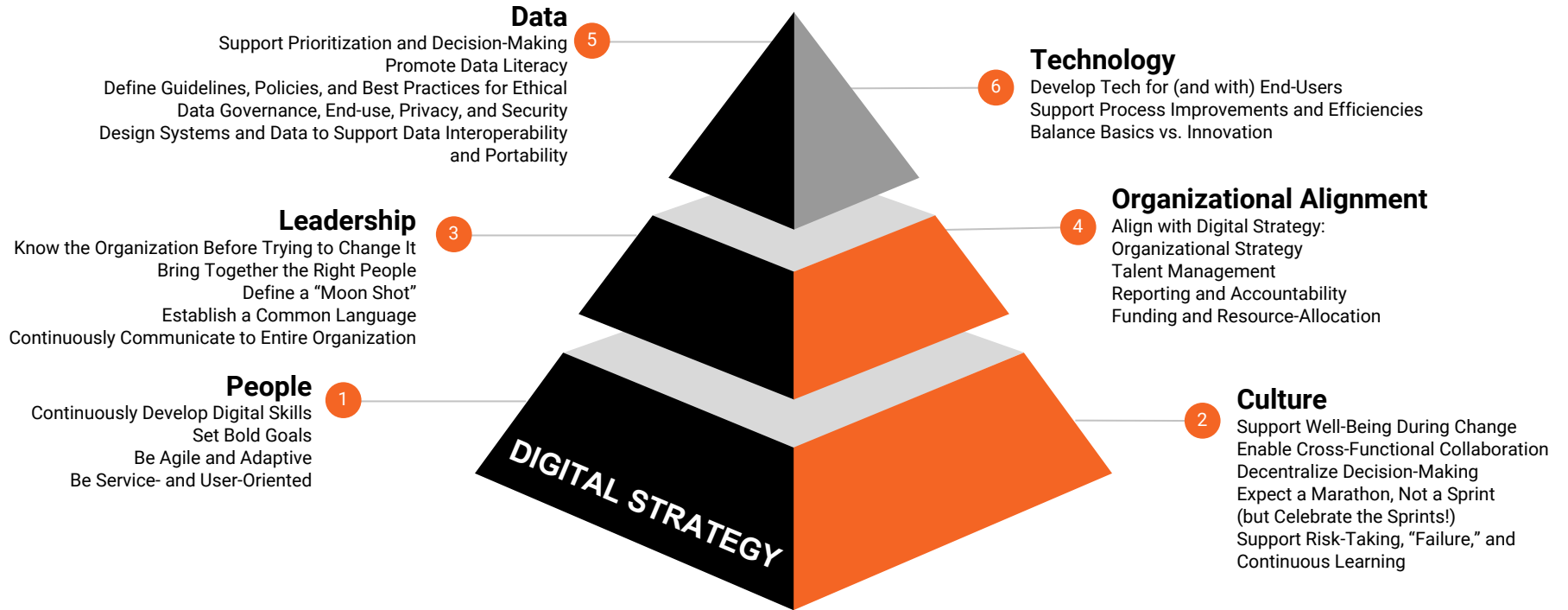


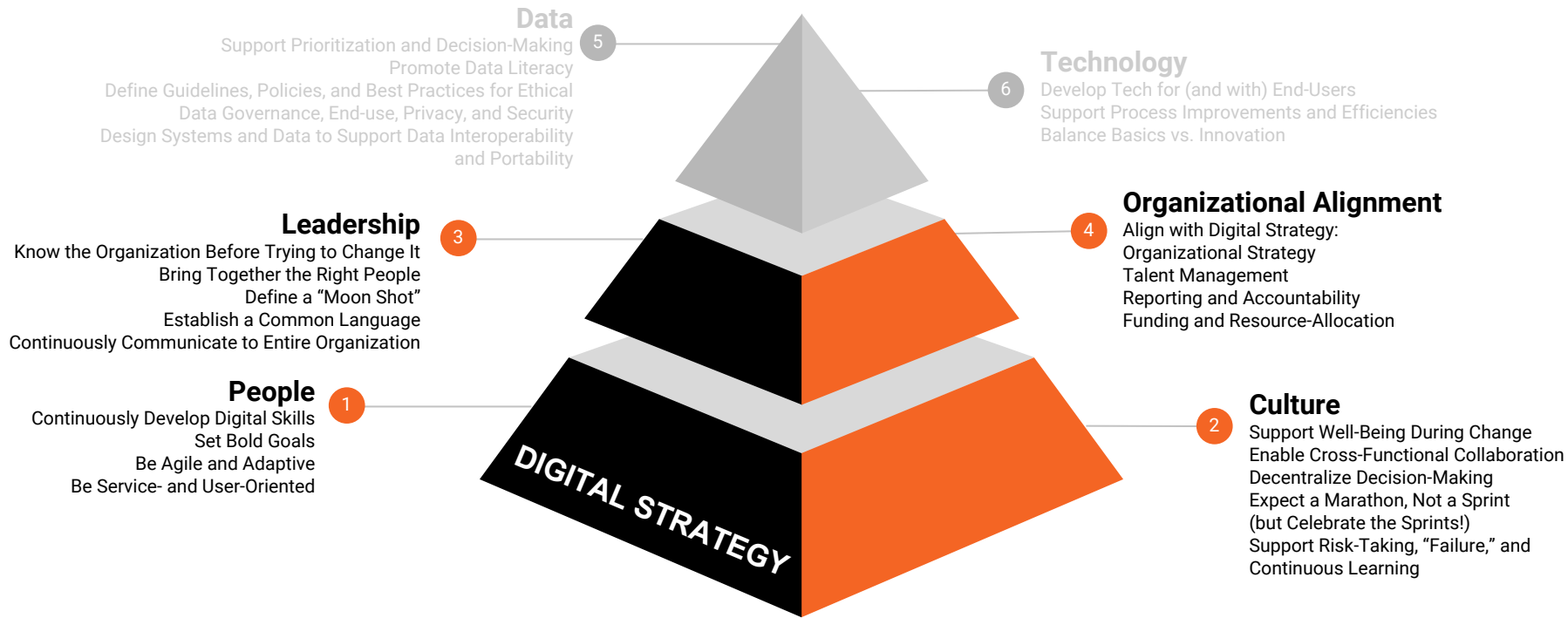
# Our Findings

The answers as to why digital strategies succeed or fail are complex, but we identified that both hinge on six key elements.









# Our Findings

Digital strategies are most successful when they become part of the DNA of the people and culture of the organization.

The majority of the time, success or failure hinge on people, culture, leadership, and organizational alignment. *Not on technology.*



“How an organization implements technology **is only a small part of digital transformation.** In cases where digital transformation does involve implementing new technologies, the **technology is only part of the story.**”

(Kane, Palmer, Phillips, Kiron & Buckley, 2017)

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# People

- Continuously Develop Digital Skills
- Set Bold Goals
- Be Agile and Adaptive
- Be Service- and User-Oriented





## People: Continuously Develop Digital Literacy and Skills

Investing in developing digital skills  
in existing staff is more likely to be  
successful than replacing those staff.

“More than 75% of digitally maturing organizations surveyed provide their employees with resources and opportunities to develop their digital acumen, compared to only 14% of early-stage companies”

(Kane et al., 2017)



# People: Continuously Develop Digital Literacy and Skills

“Bite-sized”

Digital Literacy Support

“An effective way to raise the capabilities of a whole cohort of staff is to offer bite-sized activities that they undertake voluntarily, in their own time (e.g. ‘five minutes a day, for five days’), but [together] in the same time-frame (e.g. the same week). This offers a good compromise between personal flexibility and the cohort effect.”

(Anglia Ruskin University in Beetham, 2017)

Digital literacy expert Dr. Monica Bulger’s YouTube “Crash Course in Media Literacy” series provides a series of short lessons in media literacy.



# People: Set Bold Goals

A 2017 survey of 2000+ companies across all major industries and countries found that digitally mature organizations are *bold* in their digital ambitions.

“The bolder the digital strategy, the more likely the company is to have a successful digital transformation. In our dataset, bold corporate strategies were associated with significantly superior performance on all counts”

(Bughin and Zeebroeck, 2017)



# People: Be Agile and Adaptive

The California Digital Library addresses the need to continually adapt to the broader ecosystem by creating a “Future Trends” document accompanying the strategic vision

(California Digital Library, 2018)

Their future trends provide an external framework for their strategy, allowing the organization to check in from time to time and see if they need to adjust their strategy based on changes in these trends.

This is similar to a scenario- planning exercise that provides a modular structure of variables to help re-assess trends and how well the organization is adapting to the trends.



# People: Be Service- and User-Oriented

For universities, “ultimately it should be student needs which shape their decisions on investment in technology and how to drive forward digital learning”

(Knight, 2017)

“Top performers in our survey...have a better understanding of the human experience that surrounds digital technology. These companies prioritize user experience specialists and creating better customer experience through their digital initiatives.”

(Puthiyamadam, 2017)



# People: Be Service- and User-Oriented

“Their pioneering iLancaster app allows students to do everything from checking for openings in the laundry room, catching a bus, or looking up their exam seat. Everything in the app was chosen by students...”

(Jisc, 2018)



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# Culture

- Support Well-Being During Change
- Enable Cross-Functional Collaboration
- Decentralize Decision-Making
- Expect a Marathon, Not a Sprint  
(but Celebrate the Sprints!)
- Support Risk-Taking, "Failure,"  
and Continuous Learning



## Culture: Support Well-Being During Change

The Jisc *Digital Capabilities Framework* provides a section on the support of “well-being” of staff and students during periods of significant culture change.

“[d]igital change generates anxiety and stress, as well as interest and excitement—and both need to be acknowledged before personal development can happen”

(Beetham, 2017)





# Culture: Enable Cross-Functional Collaboration

*Implementing cross-functional teams that can address specific problems, and design and implement solutions, helps both to move digital transformation forward and to change culture.*

“Where the team actually ‘sits,’ both physically and in the org chart, can affect their ability to influence the cross-functional groups integral to real digital transformation.”

(Libert et al., 2016)



# Culture: Enable Cross-Functional Collaboration

The University of British Columbia (UBC) created a virtual organization of the Learning Technology Hub, but they physically colocated the IT app team members and tech-focused pedagogy team in the same room.

“This made it practically impossible for them not to collaborate. It's a physical drop-in space for faculty and students, and now they are tightly integrated.”

(Concordia Digital Strategy Committee interview with UBC, 2017)



# Culture: Decentralize Decision-Making

Digitally maturing organizations empower individuals and groups to make decisions at the local level, so they can iterate and innovate more quickly.

At UBC's Learning Technology Hub "the accountability sits with the decision-maker...Now we have evaluation guidelines that look at support— we don't want to have to go 4 layers up the organization to get a decision on a \$10k software license. We have thresholds for different levels of decision-making."

(Concordia Digital Strategy Committee interview with UBC, 2017)



# Culture: Expect a Marathon

John Kotter has written extensively—and for decades—on the need for perseverance in any organizational change.

“Real transformation takes time, and a renewal effort risks losing momentum if there are no short-term goals to meet and celebrate. Most people won’t go on the long march unless they see compelling evidence within 12 to 24 months that the journey is producing expected results. Without short-term wins, too many people give up or actively join the ranks of those people who have been resisting change.”

(Kotter, 1995)



# Culture: Support Risk-Taking, “Failure,” and Continuous Learning

According to Jill Leafstedt, Director of the Teaching and Learning Innovation Center at California State University, Channel Islands, one of their biggest successes has been *“creating a space for faculty to feel safe to fail”*

“Since day one, we’ve had presidential support for...risk-taking...across the board... When you’re iterating, you have to embrace failure and move on. I’ve had to learn that myself, and teach my team that it’s OK and to move on. The people that are doing this the best are failing regularly and learning from it”

(Athenaeum21 interview with Leafstedt, 2018)



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# Leadership

- Know the Organization Before Trying to Change It
- Bring Together the Right People
- Define a “Moon Shot”
- Establish a Common Language
- Continuously Communicate to Entire Organization



# Leadership: Know the Organization Before Trying to Change It

The University of Calgary's LabNext studies the changing nature of research practices in order to understand how to improve their library services  
(University of Calgary, n.d)

This research-first approach is in contrast to many libraries, which have taken a very functional approach— thinking first about what the library *already* does and how it could be improved.



# Leadership: Bring Together the Right People

Getting to know the culture of an organization before embarking on change, also means *identifying the people in the organization who can help facilitate change.*

“[i]nvest in comfortable shoes. Achieving change in a large organisation requires you to explore it and understand the different staff and student experiences within it. So walk around, see what’s going on, talk to people and provide opportunities for them to connect with each other”

(University College London, in Beetham, 2017)





# Leadership: Define a “Moon Shot”

“[I]nstitutions must define a differentiated value proposition... While almost all colleges and universities are experimenting and tweaking their models, few institutions have radically restructured their postsecondary experience”

(Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2015)

The Gates Foundation partnered with McKinsey in 2015 to try to understand key themes for successful change in higher education.

They interviewed more than 100 people in higher education and “institutional leaders pointed to three distinct themes they think should be considered to manage the increasing and inevitable changes in higher education.”

**The first among Gates’ themes was the need to do something different or bold.**



# Leadership: Define a “Moon Shot”

Often, an academic institution’s boldness of purpose comes from recognizing their overall responsibility and relationship to broader society.

University of Bergen’s digital strategy is boldly titled “Digitalisation that Shapes Society” in recognition of their broader agenda and commitment to the world outside their university.

For the California Digital Library, strategic vision is about “respond[ing] to society’s need for unfettered information access to confront the critical problems of today and tomorrow”



# Leadership: Establish a Common Language

Digitally maturing organizations draw a picture of what success looks like, and communicate it widely.

The University of Leicester did this directly by creating a section of their digital strategy called “Our Measure of Success: We Know We Are Successful When.”

Their video about the creation of a “Digital Campus” communicated the goals and methods of their digital strategy and enabled a number of stakeholders to have a clear, shared mental model of a digitally-enabled campus.

(University of Leicester, n.d.)



# Leadership: Continuously Communicate to All Levels of the Organization

The leadership's vision of what a successful digital transformation looks like needs to be communicated *to* all levels of an organization and be *inclusive* of all parts of an organization.

“Most strategies for public institutions are written for boards, funders, governors, etc. With that audience, they fall into making shallow, but grandiose, claims. If I had a dollar for every time they mention innovation, collaboration, etc., I would be a rich man. But those kinds of strategies don't mean a thing to the people who do the work. They know...it's not for them.”

(Athenaeum21 interview with Edson, 2018)



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# Organizational Alignment

Align with Digital Strategy:

- Organizational Strategy
- Talent Management
- Reporting and Accountability
- Funding and Resource-Allocation



## Organizational Alignment: Align Digital Strategy with Organizational Strategy

The University of Bergen's Digital Strategy is designed to be an appendix to the University's Strategy

“The two strategies were created in parallel, with the digitalisation strategy as an appendix to the larger university strategy.”

(Athenaeum21 interview with Burheim, 2018)



## Organizational Alignment: Align Talent Management with Digital Strategy

Supporting those who can move culture change forward should be a priority.

*“Don’t put the changemakers in a silo”*

(Athenaeum21 interview with Michael Edson)

“Many companies are adopting new talent models in response to digital trends. *Employees engage in two- to three-year ‘tours of duty,’ engaging in one project or role for a certain period of time, at which point they transition to a new role inside the company or outside in order to continually develop different skill sets.* These efforts are clearly and intentionally designed to allow the company to cultivate diverse talent in a rapidly changing digital world...”

(Kane et al., 2017)



## Organizational Alignment: Align Organizational Reporting and Accountability with Digital Strategy

The success of cross-functional teams depends upon aligning authority with responsibility

Ensure that teams given the responsibility for a project or program actually have the authority to make the required decisions.

This was part of the success of UBC's Learning Technology Hub, wherein they made sure that “the accountability sits with the decision-maker”

(Concordia Digital Strategy interview with University of British Columbia, 2017)





## Organizational Alignment: Align Digital Strategy with Funding and Resource-Allocation

The California Digital Library (CDL) have explicitly outlined the process for aligning resources with their strategic priorities.

Called the “Connect Process,” CDL has established “a mechanism for creating alignment of CDL-wide activities around selected thematic clusters for the purpose of ensuring that the resources are expended efficiently and effectively to support CDL’s strategic vision. Connect activities are designed to analyze, synchronize, improve and prioritize efforts within a given topic or service area. The process can be undertaken by ad hoc or standing groups.”

(California Digital Library, 2018)



# “Failed” Digital Strategies



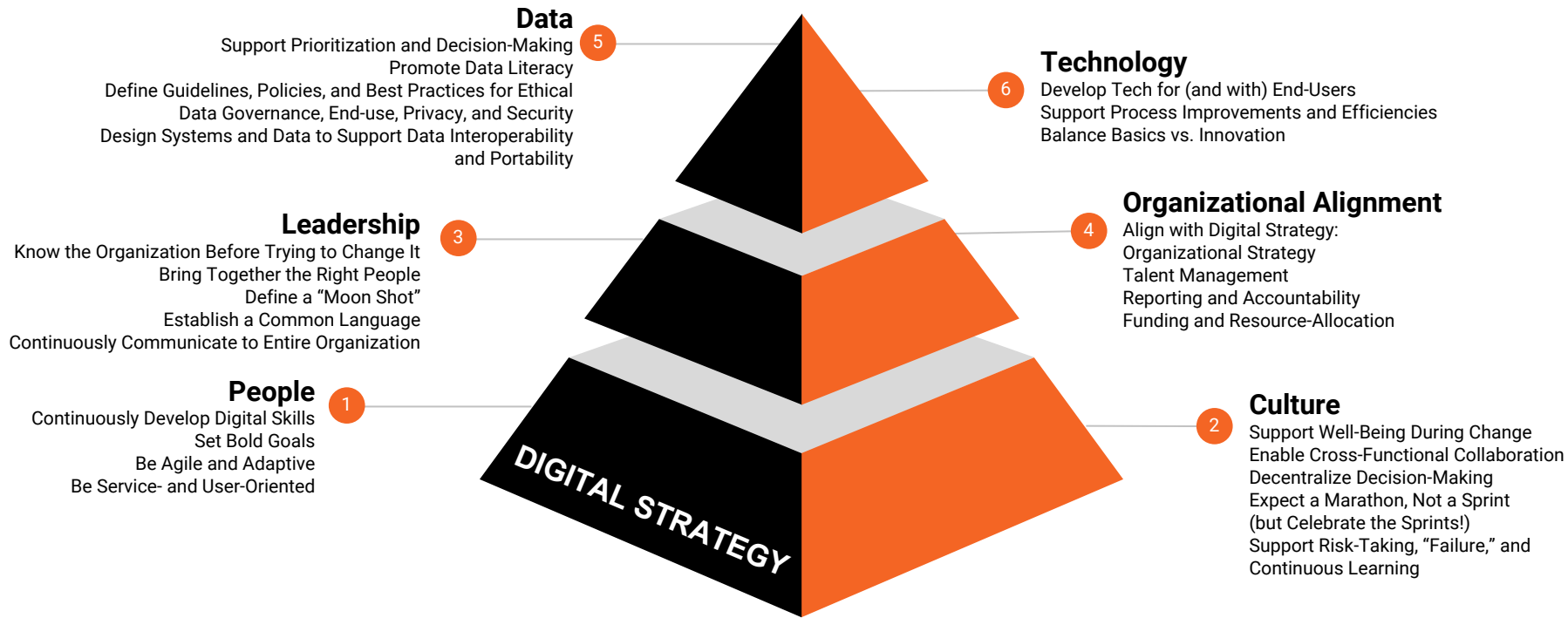
# Characteristics of "Failed" Digital Strategies

1. Ignorance of the primary importance of People and Culture
2. Lack of vision (Leadership)
3. Imbalance between infrastructure and innovation (Technology)
4. Lack of commitment to the marathon (Leadership)



# Conclusion





# Conclusion

Thoughtful, well-conceived digital strategies can successfully

*“transform the organization and culture to effectively and competitively function in an increasingly digital world”*

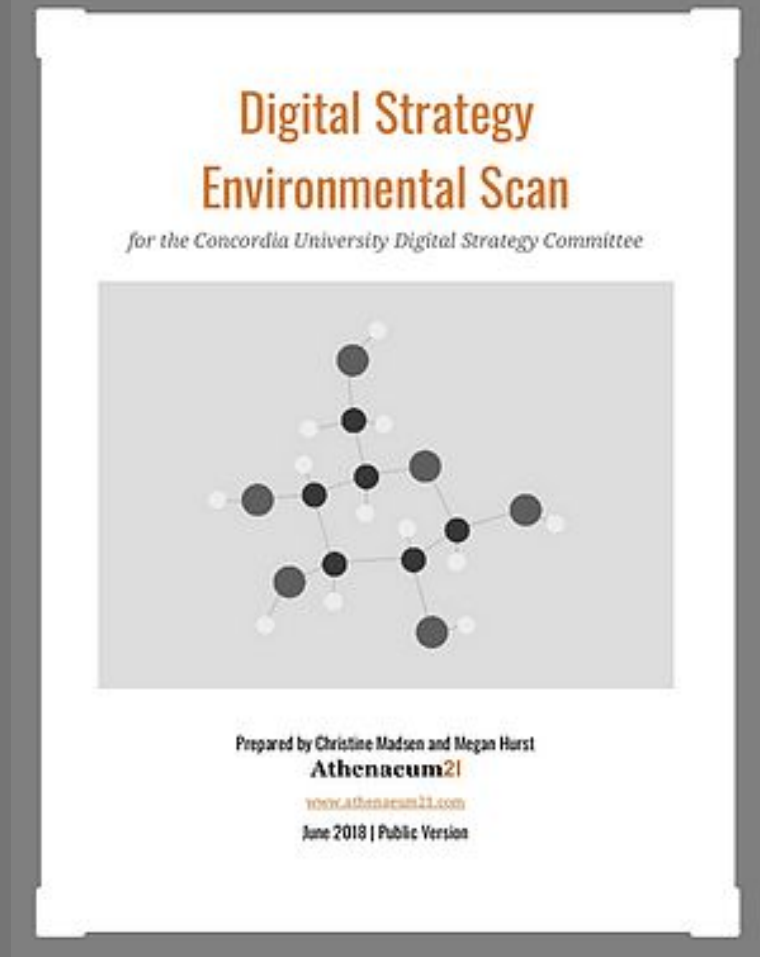
by addressing people, culture, leadership, and organizational alignment as foundational.



*Includes bibliography and references  
for this presentation*

# Read the Full Report

<https://tinyurl.com/athenaeum21-report>



# Discussion

Why do large organizations often fail to evolve with the times?

What is your strategy for supporting “digital” evolution and innovation in your organization?

How do you adapt to and benefit from change and from new ideas and technologies?





# Questions? Comments?

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