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**Headline: Want digital transformation to succeed? Get leaders to champion it through actions**

## **Want digital transformation to succeed? Get leaders to champion it through actions**

For any organisational transformation to succeed, support from top management is crucial. But getting your C-suite to endorse the change with words is not enough, found a new study by Singapore Management University – Executive Development (SMU-ExD), Tata Communications, DBS Bank, and KPMG.

The study entitled “Cultural Transformation in the Digital World” was conducted in partnership with Fons Trompenaars of Trompenaars Hampden-Turner (THT) and is based on quantitative and qualitative insight from 48 C-suite leaders and 401 anonymous executives.

All C-suite level executives surveyed agreed that digitalisation is the ‘new normal’, with a universal belief that embracing digital transformation was urgent and critical for the organisation to survive and thrive. Furthermore, 80% highlighted the importance of purposefully focusing on ‘people aspects’ during digital transformation journeys, suggesting an emphasis on the importance of inclusiveness.

However, that alone is not enough to ensure successful digital transformation. The study also found that leader effectiveness is directly correlated with perceptions of organisational readiness for digital transformation and that transformation initiatives will only succeed if they are championed by the actions – not the words – of an organisation’s leader.

More than four in five (87%) of respondents agreed that culture created bigger barriers to digital transformation than technology and 70% agreed that their leaders had the ability to lead on digital transformation, but only 50% believed that they were appreciative of implementational challenges.

Having identified that teams will only embrace change if they understand why transformation is needed and if they have faith in their leaders; the study recommends CEOs to assume the role of ‘chief evangelist’ of digital transformation to persuasively, persistently and convincingly articulate and communicate the ‘why’ behind each initiative and champion changes, to create positive business impacts.

While each transformation journey is unique, the research suggests common cultural attributes for those who are successful. This includes openness, flexibility and agility.

It noted that today’s winners are focused on incremental change, flatter structures and experimentation, with 71% of mid-level respondents acknowledging they needed to adopt new leadership behaviours including agility, risk-taking, accountability, leading change and digital adoption.

The creation of small, agile, nimble-footed teams that are highly empowered to drive digital transformation, as opposed to making large-scale enterprise-wide changes that could be intimidating for employees, is a preferred implementation tactic. However, only 41% of those surveyed believed they had the skills that were necessary for the digital age, suggesting there is a pressing need to increase access to training to plug the ever-present skills gap.