



# THE DIGITAL CHAMPION

Connecting the dots between  
people, work and technology

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## so what exactly is a digital champion?

So far we have a rather nice slogan, ‘to connect the dots between people, work and technology’, and a few stakeholders, but what is it that a digital champion actually does?

A digital champion’s primary objective is to help solve business problems using digital technology. First and foremost this is a business improvement role and although a digital champion may have an IT background (but this is not necessary as we will discuss later) their approach should always serve the business first and the technology second.

Successful digital champions generally share three key characteristics. The first of these is generosity. Digital champions need to love listening and love helping people. A good digital champion needs to have empathy for people who don’t necessarily ‘get’ the technology and are often quite fearful of it (undoubtedly the digital champion will also be called upon to do a little ‘help desk’ work every now and

then). They have to take the time to engage directly with the people using products (face to face rather than SMS) to understand the problems behind the problems that they are dealing with. A good digital champion will never forget that their role is primarily about solving people's problems, not implementing digital solutions.

The second characteristic is curiosity. Digital champions should be constantly testing out and trying new things. The rate of change in the digital space means that there is an ongoing battle to keep up with the latest developments<sup>10</sup> and so curiosity, a strong desire to know and learn, is an incredibly important part of staying relevant. One way of looking at it is that generosity is what drives the digital champion to understand the problem, curiosity is what helps them identify potential solutions. Either one without the other won't deliver value back to the organisation. In fact, curiosity without generosity is likely to be a constant form of distraction.

The third characteristic of a digital champion is laziness.

Yes, laziness.

I once read a great blog post that the best developers are lazy<sup>11</sup>. They will program in a way that minimises the amount of code they need to write, which subsequently

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<sup>10</sup> A good digital champion will enlist their army of users to help identify and test new ideas but it is unlikely that the digital champion will ever stop being curious.

<sup>11</sup> <https://medium.com/@vinodkumaar/the-lazy-programmer-27ae8abdd8ff#.gx0pjgcb0>

minimises the amount of code that a computer needs to run. The outcome is a reduction in the amount of computing resources and time needed to run the program.

I think at this point it is important to distinguish between laziness and disinterest. Disinterest is when I don't want to do the work, while laziness is when I want to do as little work as possible but still deliver the outcome. Someone who is truly lazy will do more work upfront to do less work later on. In effect the principle of laziness is the basis of all business improvement activities; it is the idea of working smarter, not harder.

Digital champions should always be looking for the laziest projects, the ones that require the least amount of effort to implement but still generate reasonable returns (see the chapter 'Rabbits and Rhinos' for more on this). They should also be capable of understanding and engaging the business based on the return on effort, or how much time needs to be invested to save much more time later on. This return on effort is a key part of the business case that digital champions will develop as they investigate their projects.



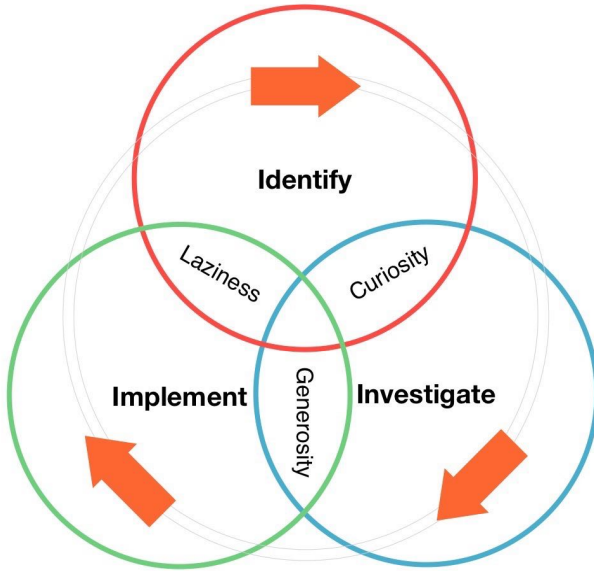
## the digital champion's approach

Alright, we now have a rather nice slogan, a bunch of stakeholders and three common characteristics of a digital champion (generosity, curiosity and laziness)...but still no actions. Well, you will be pleased to know that almost the entire rest of this book is devoted to what a digital champion actually does. But all those subsequent pages can be summarised as three key activities.

A digital champion identifies possibilities, investigates opportunities, and implements projects. As you can see in the illustration below there is a connection between the characteristics of a digital champion outlined in the previous chapter and these three activities. The ability to identify suitable projects requires a combination of laziness to identify the problem and curiosity to identify potential solutions. Investigating opportunities requires curiosity, too, but also the generosity to work with stakeholders and help meet their diverse objectives. Finally implementing projects is best done with both generosity and serious thought on how



it can be done with the minimum amount of disruption and effort.



**Illustration 5 - The activities of a digital champion**

Is that it? Pretty much. In the subsequent chapters each of these activities will be expanded on in more detail but for now it is useful to think of them as a funnelling and filtering process for possible digital projects your organisation could undertake. The widest part of the funnel contains the

possibilities, which are then narrowed down to opportunities and finally reduced to a smaller number of projects<sup>12</sup>.

At the identifying stage our options are both numerous and fuzzy. They may consist of a common business problem that is currently lacking a solution, or even a solution (an app, platform or piece of software) looking for a problem to fix.

As we gather more information some of these are prioritised and more effort is put into their investigation and development. These are the genuine opportunities and in this stage the digital champion's role is to try and assess their suitability and potential return. Some of these will turn out to be unsuitable and others will be postponed but the rest will move towards implementation.

At the implementation stage the funnel gets narrower again and it is still possible for projects to be withdrawn or postponed. Even at this point there will still be the *known unknowns* and the *unknown unknowns*, as Donald Rumsfeld so eloquently put it. The known unknowns are the potentially project breaking assumptions that need to be tested to prove the viability of the project. The unknown unknowns are the potentially project breaking assumptions that also need to be tested...but we just don't know they exist yet.

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<sup>12</sup> In the above illustration this is represented as a Venn diagram because at any point in time a digital champion is likely to be doing these activities concurrently, even though for a particular project they follow a specific order.

These three activities are sequential for any one project, though depending on the size of the projects undertaken a digital champion may manage multiple projects concurrently. As they are doing implementation on one project they are likely to be investigating another, and while working with users to investigate or implement projects there is always the opportunity to uncover new unknown problems and new possibilities.

Ideally, a digital champion should always have a runway full of potential projects ready for take off. As they are finishing up one they will be already starting on another. As pointed out earlier the average size of each project that a digital champion manages might be small, which means that more projects can be managed at once.