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Crisis Driven Digital Transformation

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Crisis-Driven Digital Transformation

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Digital transformation has been a top priority for information technology leaders over the past several years (Society for Information Management 2019). Digital transformation uses combinations of information, computing, communication, and connectivity technologies to trigger significant organizational improvements (Vial 2019). Digital transformation technologies may help incumbent organizations update their legacy processes and systems to remain competitive (Sebastian et al. 2017). Unfortunately, few research studies offer insight into successful digital transformation efforts (Vial 2019). The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question: *How does digital transformation unfold?*

To answer this research question, we conducted a longitudinal case study with DistribuCo from 2016-2020. This company was attempting to transform its organization with digital technologies several years before the March 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. This research examines how the environmental turbulence associated with the COVID-19 pandemic forced DistribuCo to quickly pivot and reinvent how it interacted with its customers, employees, and other stakeholders in order to remain solvent during the crisis. Through this process, DistribuCo relied heavily upon the lessons it had learned and the technologies it had developed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The primary focus of the research is on how DistribuCo utilized SMACIT technologies to adapt to the challenges it faced as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. SMACIT refers to technologies using social, mobile, analytics, and the Internet of Things (Vial 2019). In the pre-COVID era, DistribuCo had experimented with using various SMACIT technologies in an effort to increase profit margins. Our case describes how DistribuCo re-packaged these technologies to craft a unique, swift and emergent response to COVID-19.

We are currently collecting and analyzing our data using a grounded theory approach (Urquhart 2013). As we iterated between our data and the literature, we discovered a close link to resilience theory (Williams et al. 2017). Resilience theory posits that organizational resilience is a function of pre-adversity capabilities, in-crisis organizing and adjusting, and post-crisis resilience responding. The research shifts the digital transformation conversation from the assumption that digital transformation is a planned corporate strategy (Simsek et al. 2020; Vial 2019) by showing that DistribuCo's digital transformation efforts unfolded emergently and quickly to survive the business impacts of COVID-19.

References available on request.