THE TECHNOLOGY TAKERS
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CHAPTER OUTLINE

1. The Technology Takers of the Digital Era 1

2. Technology Taking as a Strategy 19

3. Create Value through Data Analysis and Behavior Change 39

4. Playbook to Digital-era Change Leadership 59
   Play 1: Envision Continuous Change Management 68
   Play 2: Govern Technologies and Change 81
   Play 3: Engage to Sponsor and Advocate for Change 95
   Play 4: Equip People with the Skills of the Future 108
   Play 5: Measure Managers’ Embrace of Technology Change 121
   Playbook Completed: The Next Frontier 134

5. Being a Change Leader in the Digital Era 159
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CONTENTS

List of Figures and Tables xi
Case Index xiii
Preface xv
Acknowledgments xvii

1. The Technology Takers of the Digital Era 1
   The Digital Era Defined 2
   Technology’s Price Takers 3
   Reluctant Technology Takers 5
   Technology-taking and the Behavior Change Delta 5
   Changing Behavior 8
   Value Creation in the Digital Era 9
   Change Management Playbook for Technology Takers 10
      Play 1: Envision — Create a Change Management Function 11
      Play 2: Govern — Establish Governance of Technology Adoption and Adaptation 12
      Play 3: Engage — Sponsor and Advocate for the Constancy of Change 13
      Play 4: Equip — Train Technology-taking 13
      Play 5: Measure — Evaluate Managers’ Embrace of Technology Change 14
   Leading Change in the Digital Era 14

2. Technology Taking as a Strategy 19
   Digital-era Dislocations and Disintermediation 20
   Maker, Taker, Tinker, and Tailor: The Adoption—Adaptation Strategy Matrix 21
   Technology Taker Strategy Guiding Principles 24
      Principle One: Consider Technology-taking as the First Option 25
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle Two: Position Technology Above People and Process</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle Three: Base Management on Data</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan for a Digital-era Strategy</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Interconnectivity</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Era Leadership Challenges (You Can’t Lead What You Don’t Understand)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Your Strategy for the Digital Era?</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy for the Future</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Create Value Through Data Analysis and Behavior Change</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is Value?</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Generate Value</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Through Cost Avoidance and Reduction: Universities in the Middle East</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Capture Through Data Analysis: Workday and Tesco</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of New Value Streams: Electronic Health Records and Cat Videos</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resulting Behavior Changes (What Are the Data Telling Us?)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Driving Behavior Change: Lyft and Uber</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Structure and People Permit Change and Drive Value</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limits on Behavior Change</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Playbook to Digital-era Change Leadership</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Change Requires a New Form of Change Leadership</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changing Organizational Culture</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Building Digital Era Behavior Change Capacity</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtuous Cycle of Change</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide the Journey With Five Plays</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play 1: Envision Continuous Change Management</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envisioning Change</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop a Business Case</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From a Change Management Office to a CMF</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enabling-era Change Management Office</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital-era CMF</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsourcing Change Management Efforts</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits of an Internal CMF</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CMF Responsibilities for Implementing Technology-taking
  Manage the Adoption of Digital-era Technologies 76
  Coordinate Adaptation to Digital-era Technologies 78
Challenges of Establishing a CMF 79
Enable Change With a CMF 79

Play 2: Govern Technologies and Change
  Why Governance Matters 81
  Create One Organizational Governance Structure 82
    Refer to the Organization’s Mission 83
    Convene a Governance Committee 84
    Establish Real-world, Digital-era Policies and Procedures 85
    Develop a Unitary Policies and Procedures Manual 87
  Foster Managerial Responsibility for Policies and Procedures 88
    Make Managers Policy and Business Owners 89
    Empower Business Process Experts 89
  Monitor Compliance With Policies and Procedures 90
    Train on Policies and Procedures 91
    Communicate 92
    Analyze Data and Audit Behavior 93
  Ready the Organization for Change in the Digital Era 94

Play 3: Engage to Sponsor and Advocate for Change
  More than Sponsorship Required for Digital-era Change 95
  Digital-era Sponsors 97
    Change Organizational Culture 98
    Sponsoring Actions for the Technology Taker 98
    Verbalize the Commitment to Technology-taking 99
    Mandate Behavior Changes 100
    Suspend Use of Outdated Processes and Require Global Best Practices 101
  Digital-era Advocates 102
    Creating Advocacy 102
  Advocacy Actions for the Technology Taker 103
    Develop a Strong Network in All Functions and Geographies 103
    Model the Desired Behaviors 104
    Reinforce Adaptation within the Sphere of Influence 105
  Engaging Organizations in Technology-taking 106
Play 4: Equip People with the Skills of the Future

- Invest in People to Equip Them for the Digital Era 108
- Train on More Than Technology Use 109
- Explain the Reasons for the Change 111
- Relate to an Organization’s Mission 112
- Build a New Mindset 113
- Imbue New Habits 114
- Convey a New Skills Philosophy 115
- Digital-era Skills Enumerated 116
- Invest in Digital-era Skills 117
- Build the Skilled Workforce of the Future 119

Play 5: Measure Managers’ Embrace of Technology Change

- Measure Embracing Change 121
- Hold Management Accountable 122
- Measure Digital-era Competency 123
- Connecting Digital-era Literacy to Individual Performance 125
- Prepare to Be Measured 127
- Encourage Risk 128
- Accept Failure 129
- Embrace Technology Change 131

Playbook Completed: The Next Frontier 134

5. Leading Change in the Digital Era

- Joining the Behavior Change Delta with the Adoption—Adaptation Strategy Matrix 159
- The Technology Taker Strategy 160
- Virtuous Cycle of Change 161
- Playbook Liner Notes 162
- Change Leaders in the Digital Era 163
- The Technology Takers 166

Bibliography 173

Index 199
LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: The Behavior Change Delta ................. 6
Figure 2: The Adoption—Adaptation Strategy Matrix: Maker, Taker, Tinker, and Tailor ................. 22
Figure 3: The Virtuous Cycle of Change ................. 64

Table 1: A Tale of Two Committees ...................... 122
CASE INDEX

TECHNOLOGY COMPANIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

Alphabet
Apple
Artificial intelligence
Blockchain as a Service (BaaS)
Cloud-based technologies
Data as a Service (DaaS)
Driverless trucks
Dropbox
Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems
Facebook
FarmVille
Google
GoToMeeting
IBM
Instagram
KiK
Microsoft Office
MySpace
Office 365
SalesForce
SAP
SAP Concur
SharePoint
Smartphones
Snapchat
Software as a Service (SaaS)

Twitter
Unisys
WebEx
Workday

INDUSTRIES

Agricultural commodities
distribution
Airlines
Banking/banks
Digital cameras
Education
Fishing fleets
Footwear
Sharing economy
Taxis
Transportation
Truck manufacturing
Trucking
Tugboat Operators

COMPANIES/ORGANIZATIONS

African Mothers Health Initiative
Amazon
AT&T
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company/Institution</th>
<th>Company/Institution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blockbuster</td>
<td>Starbucks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMW</td>
<td>Tata Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cargill</td>
<td>Tesla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Schwab</td>
<td>Uber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHG Healthcare</td>
<td>UK Government Digital Service (GDS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disney</td>
<td>UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domino’s</td>
<td>UN Development Group (UNDG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity</td>
<td>UN Development Programme (UNDP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Electrics (GE)</td>
<td>UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSBC</td>
<td>UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBM</td>
<td>UN Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Atomic Energy (IAEA)</td>
<td>United Nations (UN)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Society for Technology (ISTE)</td>
<td>US Federal Trade Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Wal-Mart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimmy Choo</td>
<td>Wells Fargo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodak</td>
<td>Whirlpool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyft</td>
<td>World Food Program (WFP).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McDonald’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netflix</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NewsCorps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scania</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
WHY READ THIS BOOK

If you are standing on the sidelines wondering how to jump into the digital game, this book is for you. If you have seen others pour endless sums of money into failed technology experiments and want to avoid a similar fate, this book is for you. If you are concerned that your organization may be wedded to outdated technologies, this book is for you.

We offer a proven approach for capturing the benefits of new technologies while limiting your business risk. We offer a simple strategy for winning at the technology game, by taking the best of what is available, rather than trying to invent everything yourself. By recognizing that taking on new technologies requires willingness to learn and continually change. We invite you to enjoy the journey.

IDEA IN BRIEF

Digital-era technologies lead organizations to become technology takers, the equivalent of economic “price takers.” To be a technology taker is to assent to the behavior transforming benefits of modern technologies. This playbook offers technology takers tactics to manage change, create value, and exploit the digital era’s strategic opportunities.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN ARGUMENT

Users of twenty-first-century digital-era technologies are “technology takers,” accepting of and adjusting to whatever the market offers them.
Similar to small firms that lack the market power to set prices and are economic “price takers,” managers today are increasingly unable to customize the digital-era technologies their organizations use. Technology takers have little influence over the capabilities of the technologies they adopt; they cannot expect to improve on or customize for themselves the features of Facebook, Google, the iPhone, the blockchain, cloud-based enterprise resource planning systems, or other game-changing technologies.

The inability to modify available information technologies is a shock to leaders and managers alike. Cloud-based technologies arrive with set processes developed by others, and users must learn new ways of working each time the technologies themselves evolve. But refusing to adopt and adapt to digital-era technologies is increasingly not an option. Change in the digital era is constant and behavior-transforming. Leaders must respond to these changes, or they will get left behind by those who do. The constancy of change also means that organizations have to do more than launch typical, one-off change management or transformation projects to succeed.

To adopt efficiently and adapt effectively to behavior-changing technologies, astute leaders should employ change leadership techniques as a strategy for the digital era. This book offers technology takers a playbook to manage change, create value, and exploit the digital era’s opportunities. The book draws on research and recent case studies to explain what it means to be a technology taker. Organizations and their managers are offered change leadership plays, which emphasize the iterative nature of change management in the digital era. The book also describes how technology-taking can create value through data stream analytics and be used to respond proactively to the challenges of the digital era.
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We are thankful to the support for this book from past and present colleagues. Importantly, the views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors’ alone and do not necessarily reflect or represent the views of the authors’ past or present employers or affiliations. Examples of case materials within this book are examples based on limited and clearly referenced sources in the public domain. Assumptions made within the book are our own and are not reflective of the position of any of the sources cited.
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CHAPTER 1

THE TECHNOLOGY TAKERS OF THE DIGITAL ERA

Digital-era information technologies induce organizations to become technology takers, the behavioral equivalent of economic “price takers.”¹ In a perfectly competitive market, buyers cannot establish the price they desire for the good they want; these price takers must accept the price offered.² Twenty-first-century technologies are beyond the influence of any one organization to customize to meet specific requirements.³ Organizational leaders become “technology takers,” changing their own work behavior to adapt to whatever the modern information technology market has to offer.⁴

Digital-era technologies are ever-changing, frequently updated via cloud computing, and not proprietary or unique to any one organization. This contemporary technology requires two reactions from its users: first, that they adopt the technologies by conducting their work through the technology’s processes; and second, that they adapt by modifying their actions use more efficiently the ever-evolving technology.⁵ Users exchange their autonomy for efficiency, in that the digital-era technologies used to determine how users must modify their behavior. Most cannot resist using the technological systems that enable modern life; neither can the user refuse the almost daily changes foisted upon her by continuously updating systems.⁶ Users must take digital-era technology as it comes and must react in novel ways relevant to the modern age.
THE DIGITAL ERA DEFINED

The fundamental characteristic of current, digital-era technology is that it obligates users’ acceptance of its processes and systems. The dominance of cloud-based products gives today’s organizational leaders little influence over the functioning of technologies used in the workplace. Failing to change the tech, the users themselves must change. In contrast, twentieth-century technologies were, in most cases, electronic enablers of existing processes, obligating no true, fundamental change of user behavior.

Consider the different behaviors adopted by mobile and smartphone users. The twentieth-century mobile phone enabled conversations via portable, rather than landline, phones. How things were said and how information was accessed did not change. However, smartphones are twenty-first-century digital-era technologies that modify users’ behavior because of constant, built-in, system changes. Smartphones access voice, Internet, text, and global positioning data, revolutionizing where, how, and with what information and data streams people work. Smartphone users are technology takers of the options provided by either Apple or Alphabet. Users cannot specify their phones’ operating systems, but smartphone use has come to dominate every aspect of modern life, from the time the user awakes to the minute they dim the screen and closes their eyes at night.

Similarly, customized enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems enabled organizations to convert existing business procedures into specified electronic processes. Now, in the digital era, organizations adopting software as a service (SaaS) cannot affect the specifications of the available cloud-based processes. Instead, SaaS defines and constantly redefines shared, globally applicable processes to which users must adapt. Certain SaaS systems, such as Office 365, Dropbox, GoToMeeting, SAP Concur, Salesforce, Workday, and WebEx, have become virtually ubiquitous. From their users, these require constant adoption of their latest process changes and ensuing individual behavior changes to adapt to using these processes. Collaborative technologies also require equal adaptation from all users; as he fumbles to mute his microphone or share his screen, a less-than-fluent user can prevent all others’ from having a productive or understandable meeting on WebEx or GoToMeeting.

Like SaaS, data as a service (DaaS) and blockchain as a service (BaaS) too are technology services. Users must use the services’ naming conventions and the way the data is broken down; these cannot be modified.
Digital-era technology platforms also require user adherence and conformity. Blockchain is a platform, a distributed digital ledger where transactions are recorded sequentially and publicly. Software firms have developed application software, and programmers have developed open source applications, using blockchain. Companies can also write their own applications using blockchain (including BaaS). These platforms require adherence and are services from a process perspective. Users can apply the blockchain differently but cannot change the way the distributed ledger works.

The digital era also is characterized by the use of and research about artificial intelligence (AI). Python is an AI language that is a technology tool. Using Python does not require adherence to defined business processes, in that an application written in Python is built to specific business process definitions. However, the average user cannot change the AI software embedded in some hardware devices or the AI algorithms in some application software. These must be taken as they come. This AI-enabled hardware and software can be used to control robots. Robotics is a mechanical engineering application of information technology and is the very embodiment of the digital era.

**TECHNOLOGY’S PRICE TAKERS**

The relationship of digital-era technologies and technology takers is similar to the reactions of small firms in a globalizing marketplace. The transactions of small companies and individual consumers are unable to affect the market price of a good. The price is set by the greater forces of supply and demand. Businesses must accept the prevailing prices in the market for the sale of their products, and they must distinguish their products in some other way than price. Small firms are price takers and obtain profitability through decreasing production costs, increasing the volume of sales, or through some other internal effort.

The economic model of perfect competition, which leads to price taking, makes several assumptions that can be analogized to the behavioral model of technology-taking. In a perfectly competitive market, goods are identical and cannot be distinguished from one another. The market has a large number of buyers and sellers; so many, in fact, that none can affect the market price. Although the perfect market already has many
competing firms, more businesses may enter or exit the market at any time. Finally, the perfect competition model assumes that each player in the market has complete information about the market’s prices and operations and that information costs little to obtain.

Technology-taking in the digital era is similar to the ideal market underlying the microeconomics of price taking. In the perfect competition market model, there are many buyers and sellers, and the products offered tend to be quite homogenous. Similarly, smartphones, whoever their maker and regardless of whether based on systems by Apple or Alphabet, have flooded the market and tend to be very similar in product scope. Digital-era applications are globally applicable processes available for sale to organizations (SaaS) or at zero cost for the general public (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Google, etc.). Low general or relative cost makes consuming digital-era technologies exceedingly easy to do. For example, SaaS-based ERPs are comparatively cheaper than their alternative, customizable ERP options, because the buyer of customizable systems has ever increasing update and maintenance costs.

In a perfectly competitive market, there is low cost of entry and exit for price takers. Absent regulatory restriction, anyone can set up shop selling vegetables or cooked food or widgets; and, if the business is not profitable, it can be closed. Analogously, twenty-first-century technologies that drive technology-taking are rarely proprietary or restricted to one user or organization at the point of adoption. And some digital-era technology is offered free at the point of consumption, as is the case with Amazon, Google, and Facebook applications. Virtually every modern consumer technology is based on the Internet, itself with very low costs of entry.

Small firms cannot opt out of the marketplace, for the market is the ecology in which the firms operate and find their customers. There is no alternative. Users of smartphones and SaaS too cannot decide to use only some of their technology’s operating systems. To accept a part is to accept the whole ecosystem of an iPhone or a cloud-based ERP; both require the full adoption of the product offered. Yes, a user could never open, say, the mapping application on her smartphone; but, it is always there in the background, its global position system enabled and its data stream uploading to the cloud. The minute the user accesses Facebook or Google via her smartphone, these systems obtain the user’s geolocation data from her smartphone to create a bespoke Facebook or Google experience.
Arguably, the information about the price and functioning of digital-era technology is offered at low cost to all interested users. Applications on smartphones are free or cost pennies and have made widely available smartphones’ almost endless capabilities. Information is amply available about modern tech, often through the very cloud-based systems on which these technologies rely.

RECENTLY TECHNOLOGY TAKERS

The technology taker concept works in different types of markets with different levels of competition. For some digital-era technologies, the taker is forced into that position by monopolies or oligopolies of the technology. Prices (or our technology-taking analogy) are set either because there is much choice or because there is too little choice to meet demand. Where there is lots of demand and few options, the price (or preferred and possible technology offering) is set artificially high: a singular technology option is restricted to those able to access and afford it. The marginal effect of one more user demanding a technology is nil, but for a different reason than in the perfectly competitive market. In monopolies, the tech maker would determine the functioning of the market, because demand would not matter at all.

Google is a near-monopolist of Internet search, but one that has decided on a price point of zero. So too is Facebook a monopolist of social networking with no price. The user of these technologies takes them as they come and has little influence on their offerings. Users may not have contemplated the true costs of using the “free” services of Google or Facebook or Amazon marketplace. The cost extracted by digital-era technologies, where, moreover, the perfect competition model of tech meets reality, is that these technologies require users to change their behaviors.

TECHNOLOGY-TAKING AND THE BEHAVIOR CHANGE DELTA

Technology-taking requires constant behavior change of users of digital-era technologies. Behavior change implies an explicit need to manage that change. As defined for the digital era, change management is the acquired organizational skill set of dealing with the entrenched inability of
managers and their organizations to recognize the need to (1) adopt, rather than resist, the technologies that are now fundamentally changing entire industries, and (2) adapt behaviors, rather than customize the technologies.

Those in denial of the digital era’s demands put people, processes, and technology on equal footing when implementing change. In classic, project-level change efforts, people or processes would drive change. Technology was at the bottom of the Behavior Change Delta, not at its apex, because there was no harm to a process or people-first approach. Technology building blocks were seldom sufficient for business transformation, certainly did not cause business transformation, and their lack seldom held a business back.

In the digital era, technology takers must recognize that technology is now at the apex of the Behavior Change Delta. Because of constant, technology-driven changes, the processes workers must use are increasingly becoming subsumed by technology. Now, the intersection among technology, people, and processes is the focus when managing behavior change (Figure 1).

As faculty and advisors to managers across industries, we have used string to lay out the Behavior Change Delta areas of process, people, and technology on the ground. We then ask students to step into a particular triangle to indicate answers to two questions. First, we asked them to

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**Figure 1: The Behavior Change Delta.**

![Diagram of the Behavior Change Delta with Technology at the apex, followed by Behavior Change, then People and Process]
step into the triangle where their past and present organizational change projects had taken place. Most stepped into the process triangle; a few lurched, almost apologetically, into the technology triangle.

Then, students were asked to move into the triangle they considered most important for an organization undertaking a change project to support the organization’s mission. To answer this question is challenging from a change management perspective. The answer also indicates an organization’s ability to deliver on its mission while remaining successful in the digital era. Usually with a sense of relief, most students stepped from process to people. A few stayed in the process delta, but rarely did anyone stay or move into the technology triangle.

Clearly, the idea of technology-taking has not fully caught on. Prior to the digital era, strategy work, as well as change management, was focused on people and process. Many change management projects tried to ensure the hiring of people with skill sets that matched those demanded by customers. Or change was planned around either strategic or tactical actions driven by a marketing or a production method or a new set of strategic goals. Or internal processes were the starting point for customizing an ERP. In these examples, people and process changes would be enabled by technology in support of the expected or resulting behavior changes, which in turn were calibrated to support the organization’s mission or strategic intent.

Now, technology has ascended to the top of the Behavior Change Delta. Twenty-first-century technologies are not merely replicating or enabling existing processes or ways of doing things; they are forcing changes in standard/grandfathered practices. It would be hard to find a chief information officer from the 1990s who would have predicted the death of formal, validated business requirements and the rise of a technology-first adoption process. Organizations and their leaders must adopt digital-era technologies that are interrupting entire industries — from retail (Amazon) to political campaigning (Facebook).

Further, people and organizations must adapt their workplace behaviors to these technologies, and adaptation to digital-era technologies is constant and never-ending. Technology takers are in an iterative game because the technologies they use are constantly being updated and revised. Change management, including leaders’ sponsorship of change, too must be continuous and geared to the long term.
Digital-era technologies are beyond the influence of any one organization. Instead of accepting and managing the inevitable changes of the digital era, many organizations are still vigorously trying to fight them. These organizations insist on redefining, re-engineering, or rejiggering internal processes. But no one user has control over the algorithm of Google Search and would be somewhat silly to try unilaterally to improve it. It is the dominant search technology for its ease of use and comprehensiveness. Yet some libraries still argue that their own, dedicated search engines provide better academic research facility than Google. The proof is in the virtual pudding: Google controls 72% of the search engine market share, with other search engines not even coming close to this level of use.

The futility of process re-engineering in the digital era results in the loss of tangible space for management. Previously, managers were experts in the proprietary processes they led. Now, organizational processes have been supplanted by global norms dictated by the technology used. Managers may be highly resistant to the behavior changes demanded of them because these require a wholesale reinvention of workplace roles and responsibilities.

This resistance must be managed. Technology takers focus on strategy and commit to using technology to avoid being run out of the market by other companies using the same technology. They then support their organizations to match their processes with those required by the technologies used. Technology takers realize that using digital-era technologies will require behavior changes that will put the organization in a better position to create value.

**CHANGING BEHAVIOR**

To be a technology taker is to assent to behavior change. Facebook offers a free service for billions of individual users. In exchange for no-cost access to social media, the user consents to Facebook’s sale of the individual’s data stream to advertisers. To opt out of Facebook is to opt out of access to the social marketplace. Instead of losing entry to the online world, Facebook users have altered their behavior and expectations to accommodate Facebook’s requirements.

Blockchain is another example. This technology harmonizes all users’ behavior because blockchain offers no ability for users to change the