# A Three-Step Approach to Engaging People in Technological Innovation

Prof. Dr. Katrien Verleye

Professor of Service Innovation at Ghent University and affiliated with Flanders Make

Successful digital transformation is not just about introducing new technologies—it's about engaging people meaningfully throughout the process. This executive summary outlines a simple but powerful three-step approach that you can use to enable digital transformation and hence turn into an effective champion by engaging others with technological innovations.

Co-identify → Co-adapt → Co-(re)align
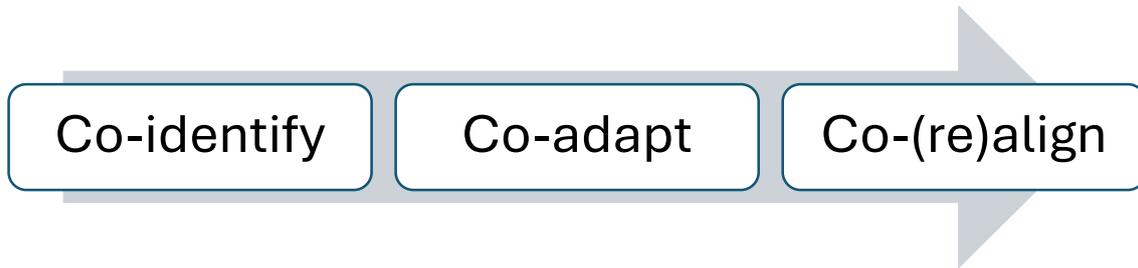
Note. This three-step approach is inspired by recent academic work (see references)

Step 1: Co-Identify

In a first step, effective champions focus on understanding stakeholders' mental models—their habits, beliefs and perceptions about technology and the conditions that enable its use. This involves observing daily routines, listening, and asking the right questions about:

- the usefulness of new technology and/or digital transformation

- the user-friendliness of new technology and/or digital transformation

- the price value of a new technology and/or digital transformation

- the presence of tools and support systems for developing and/or using new technologies

- experiences with new technology and/or digital transformation

- …

Key Insight: Without understanding how people think, feel, and behave, meaningful engagement with technological innovations is unlikely to emerge.

Step 2: Co-Adapt

In a second step, champions focus on creating space for new mental models and practices. This means not only introducing technology but also adapting processes. Champions should facilitate one-to-one conversations and group discussions to encourage shared learning.

This learning should not only focus on understanding the technology ("what-questions") and its functionalities ("how-questions") but also on understanding "why-questions":

- Why are we doing digital transformation?

- Why are we adopting this specific technology at this specific point in time?

- Why are we adjusting the process in this specific way?

- …

Key Insight: Explain the "why" behind the transformation—why this technology, why now, and why these process changes—to ensure stakeholders see innovation as empowering, not intrusive.

Step 3: Co-Realign

In a third step, champions focus on gathering feedback and collaboratively adjusting technology and processes. They pay attention to all voices—enthusiasts, skeptics, and everyone in between.

When technological and/or process failures are detected by gathering feedback, acting upon it through recovery strategies can strengthen engagement—even more than if nothing had gone wrong. Recovery may involve improving technology, adjusting processes, or even replacing solutions.

Key Insight: Co-realignment ensures technology serves people and organizations—not the other way around.

Call to action

This three-step approach calls for champions who collaborate with diverse stakeholders, including end-users, to enable digital transformation. Done well, initial enthusiasm can spread, creating new champions who can help identify mental models, adapt practices, and realign solutions. So, the concluding questions are:

- Who will be the initiating champion for your next digital transformation?

- Who will become your co-champions?

- And when challenges arise, will you support recovery—or act as an anti-champion?

Interested in exchanging your **champion experiences** – that is your positive and negative experiences with enabling digital transformations – and learning from one another by joining our championing network?

Send an e-mail with your contact information to csi@ugent.be and get more information about the championing roundtables at Ghent University.

References

Bonetti, F., Montecchi, M., Plangger, K., & Schau, H. J. (2023). Practice co-evolution: Collaboratively embedding artificial intelligence in retail practices. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 51(4), 867-888.

Henkens, B., Verleye, K., Larivière, B., & Mende, M. (2023). Smart wearables as friends or foes? Engaging boundary spanning employees along smart journeys. *Belgian Service Research Day, Abstracts*. Presented at the Belgian Service Research Day, Leuven, Belgium.

Lim, W. M., Saha, V., & Das, M. (2025). From service failure to brand loyalty: evidence of service recovery paradox. *Journal of Brand Management*, 1-25.

MacIntosh, R., & MacLean, D. (1999). Conditioned emergence: A dissipative structures approach to transformation. *Strategic management journal*, *20*(4), 297-316.

Mehmood, K., Verleye, K., De Keyser, A., & Lariviere, B. (2024). The transformative potential of AI-enabled personalization across cultures. *Journal of Services Marketing*, *38*(6), 711-730.

Tamilmani, K., Rana, N. P., Wamba, S. F., & Dwivedi, R. (2021). The extended Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT2): A systematic literature review and theory evaluation. *International Journal of Information Management*, *57*, 102269.

Van Vaerenbergh, Y., Varga, D., De Keyser, A., & Orsingher, C. (2019). The service recovery journey: Conceptualization, integration, and directions for future research. *Journal of service research*, *22*(2), 103-119.

Venkatesh, V., Thong, J. Y., & Xu, X. (2016). Unified theory of acceptance and use of technology: A synthesis and the road ahead. *Journal of the association for Information Systems*, *17*(5), 328-376.