

Optimise your retail business in turbulent times

In this guide we explore how to shape a validated and prioritised roadmap for business optimisation. You'll also gain insights into how retail organisations like Boohoo Group and a leading UK supermarket are ensuring early and lasting value from their optimisation initiatives.

INVQA



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a white top, is smiling and pointing at a laptop screen. She is in a collaborative office environment with other people in the background. The laptop screen displays a mobile app interface with various buttons and a grid. The background shows a brick wall, a green storage bin, and other office supplies.

Why business optimisation is key in times of economic uncertainty

Storms continue to hit our business environment – from the cost-of-living crisis and increasingly higher interest rates to global supply chain disruption, changing customer expectations, and the fallout from recent political events.

The forecast is pretty bleak, and there's probably not a single retailer out there that isn't concerned at the moment, to paraphrase former John Lewis marketing head, **Louisa Nicholls**, speaking at a recent Inviqa [seminar](#).

But we know this industry is notoriously resilient. Time and again, retailers have weathered volatile business environments and lived to tell the tale.

The global pandemic is a testament to this capacity for resilience and adaptability. Years' worth of transformation programmes were reconfigured and executed in a matter of months, enabling many retailers to survive (and thrive, in some cases) as traditional channels closed and our lives moved online.



Resilience and adaptability are not innate qualities, however.

They require a mindshift, together with real and constant practical application. Instead of thinking in terms of traditional transformation projects, i.e. a finite initiative with a set objective to achieve, your retail organisation must develop a continuous improvement mindset and a capability for ongoing and effective change.

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COVID taught us that we're able to mobilise huge tanker-ship businesses in an agile way when our back is against the wall.

Louisa Nicholls, board advisor and former marketing head, John Lewis

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This continual adaptation must span multiple dimensions – people, processes, and platforms – to ensure you're able to proactively meet changing market dynamics and evolving customer expectations.

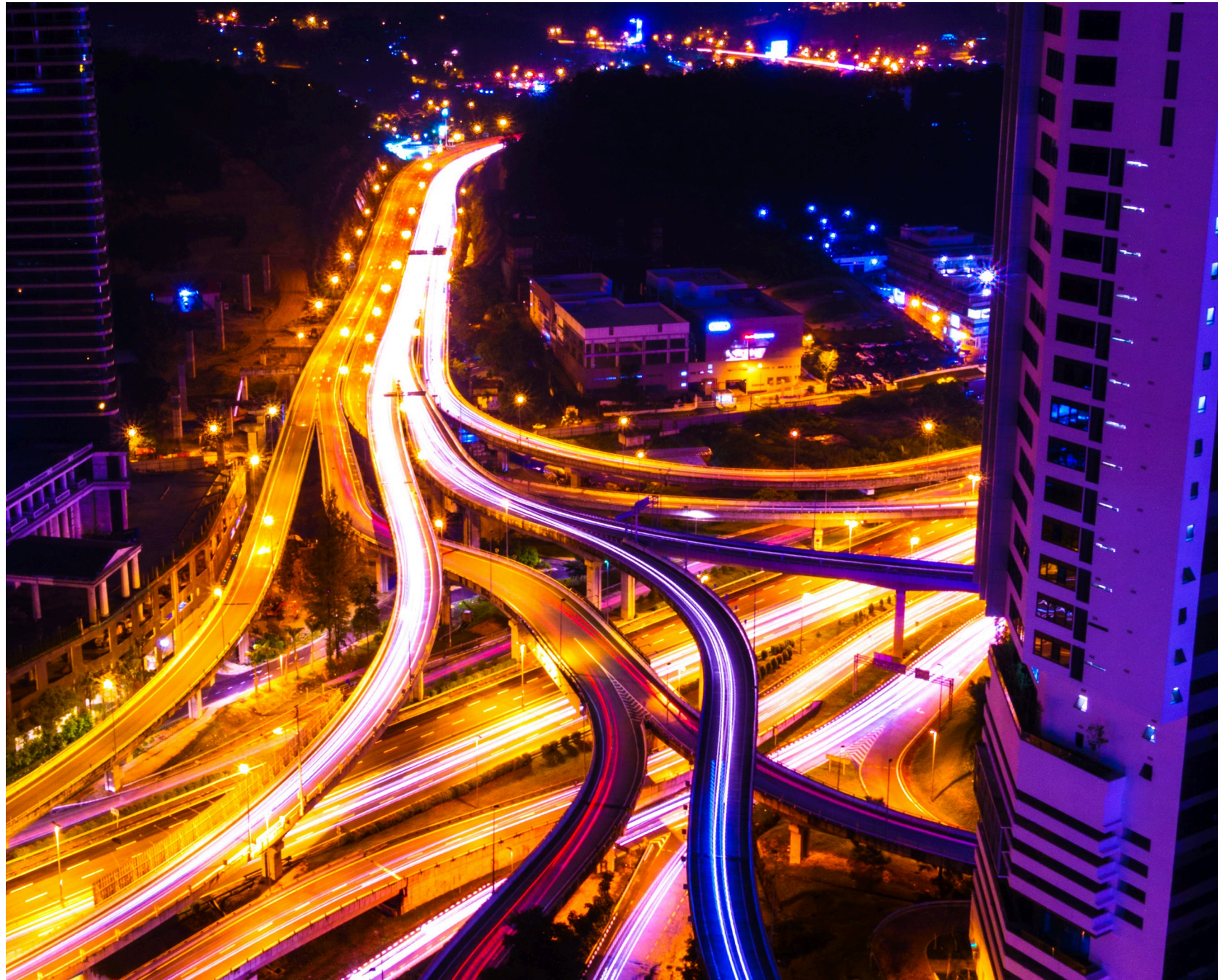
The shape and nature of this adaptation are nuanced and informed by your organisation's maturity level and strategic ambition. Faced with an economic downturn, however, optimisation

should focus on improving efficiencies and squeezing out positive change such as:

- **Cost reduction**
- **Accelerated time-to-market**
- **Increased capacity**
- **Reduced risk**
- **Improved quality**
- **Enhanced customer satisfaction**
- **Reduced churn**

Retailers can catalyse these operational improvements using digital technologies and iterative tech modernisation. But tech and platform optimisation cannot be approached in isolation. It's inextricably linked with people and processes and must be viewed through a strategic lens.

All this might sound complex, but it doesn't need to be. In this guide we explore how to shape a validated and prioritised roadmap for business optimisation. You'll also gain insights into how retail organisations like the Boohoo Group and a leading UK supermarket are ensuring early and lasting value from their optimisation initiatives.



The different dimensions of business optimisation

At a high level, driving efficiency can be broken down into three key focus areas: people, processes, and platforms. Each of these has its own degree of maturity, with the capability to deliver higher levels of productivity and efficiency as that maturity grows.



People

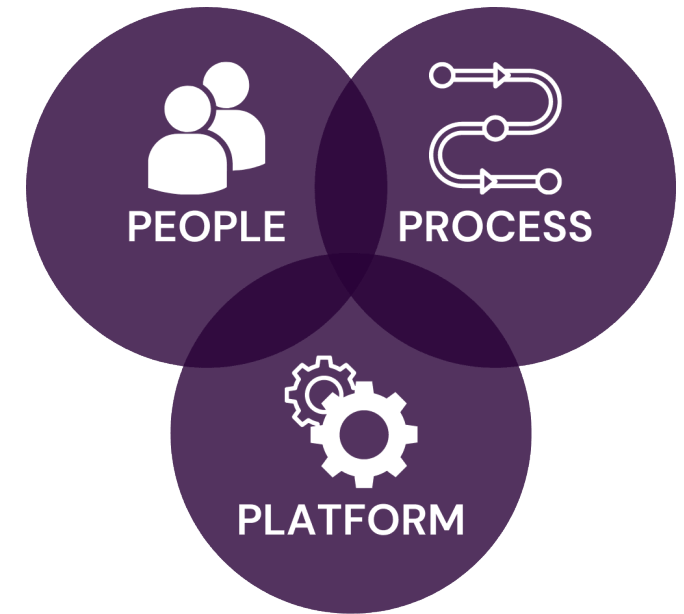
The 'people' dimension in business optimisation is ultimately about enabling your workforce to focus on the areas where they can add the most value. This means embracing technology-assisted ways of working, automation, and machine learning in all areas where human input is secondary. It's about progressing towards a future state where your people are deployed where they can have the biggest impact – where human engagement is indispensable, and where you've got highly considered decision-making that's not easily digitised.

Process

Process optimisation is about transitioning from a model where outdated, non-standard, and fragmented practices are widely used towards one that applies best practice and uses digital technologies to support end-to-end business. A culture of innovation is the driving force in optimal business processes, where the business is empowered to continually seek out new and inventive ways to make operational improvements.

Platforms & technology

Tech optimisation is ultimately about transitioning from a model of minimal automation to a future state where AI and machine learning are no longer buzzwords. It's a journey through data science application and escalating levels of autonomy towards a model where artificial intelligence is fully embraced and relied upon by the organisation to foresee and proactively meet upcoming business challenges head-on. This means transitioning to a state of being 'future-ready', so that your technical environment can easily adapt to meet the changing needs of the business as it evolves. Tech optimisation is also the catalyst to reaping maximised and sustained benefits from the improvements made in the process and people dimensions.





How optimisation enabled REISS to attract a buyer

A programme of prioritised business optimisation enabled REISS to stabilise, grow, build cash reserves, and ultimately attract a buyer to the business.

After appointing Inviqa as its technology partner, the retailer focused on platform optimisation, rearchitecting and updating its core tech stack to unlock flexibility, address technical debt, and create a scalable and sustainable platform for growth.

Our partnership contributed to a sustained period of business growth that exceeded REISS's forecasts and was essential to attracting a buyer to the business.

Highlights included:

- a 48% year-on-year rise in summer sales online revenue and
- a 30% year-on-year rise in online revenue.

Optimisation and adaptation across your people, processes, and platforms must be supported by a mature data strategy, and it needs to grow in line with business operations.

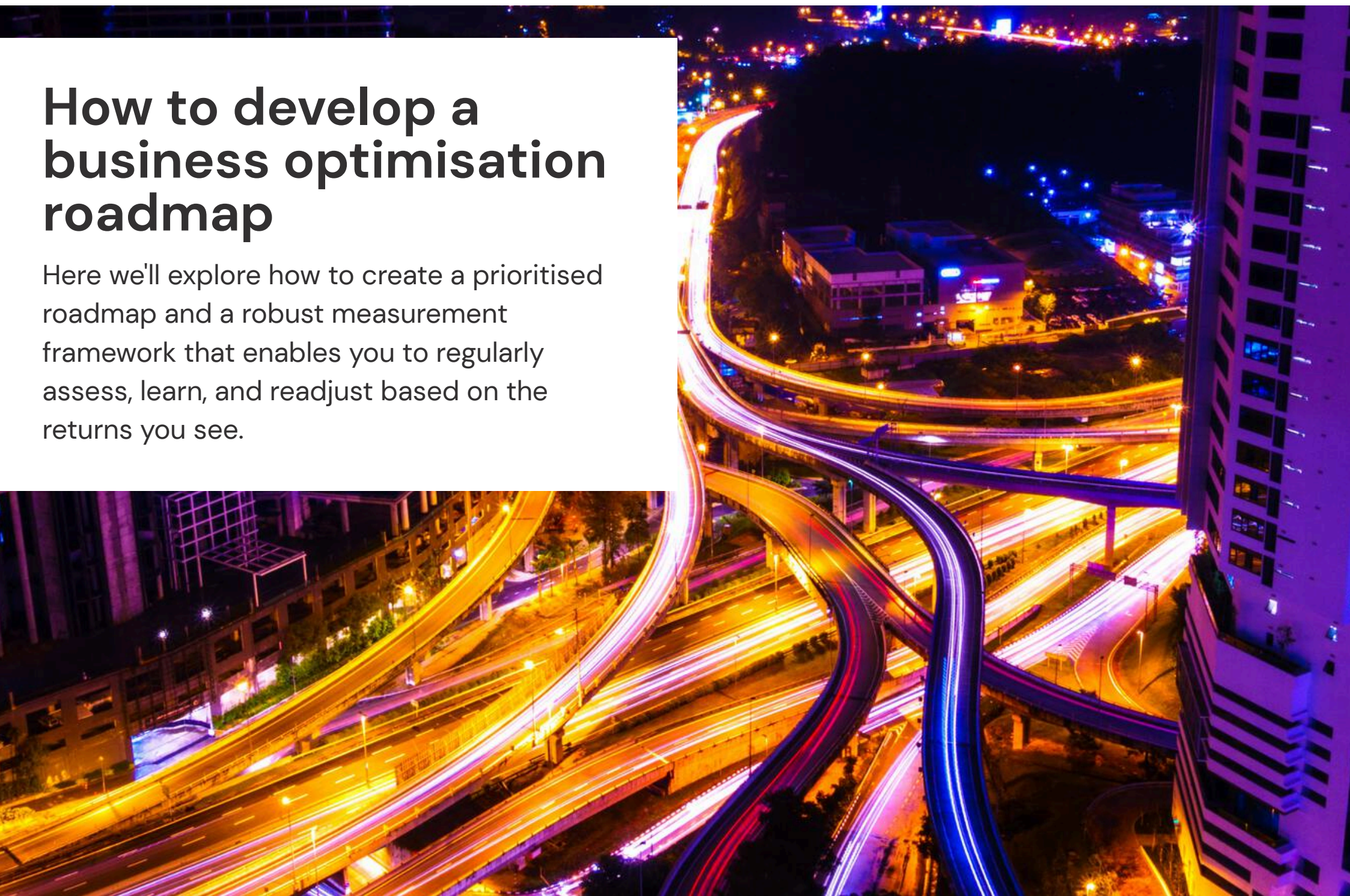
You need to start with consistent, complete, and reliable data, and then iteratively progress towards a model where insight-led decision-making is commonplace. You want to arrive at a place where overall strategy is built upon detailed, diverse, and real-time data models, where AI models predict trends and forecast potential outcomes.

But there's often a huge gap between your current state and where you need to get to. And with so many potential focus areas for adaptation and optimisation, how do you find your focus and identify the most valuable improvement opportunities?



How to develop a business optimisation roadmap

Here we'll explore how to create a prioritised roadmap and a robust measurement framework that enables you to regularly assess, learn, and readjust based on the returns you see.





Does your organisation have a clearly defined digital roadmap with a technology & architecture strategy that supports your digital vision?

- ☐ Yes, we do.
- ☐ We're in the middle of establishing one.
- ☐ No, we don't.

Post answer

Retail business optimisation is a journey that starts with understanding your organisation's current state and how you got here.

From here you can identify where you want to be in the near and long term, the tools that can aid your decision-making, and the high-impact opportunities you can pursue to get there.

You'll need a prioritised roadmap and a robust measurement framework that enables you to regularly assess, learn, and readjust based on the returns you see.

The following five steps outline how you can undertake this journey with a low-risk, low-cost, and fail-fast approach.

1. Assess your current state

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efore you can consider where you want to be as a business and how you can get there, it's important to reflect on your current state.

Run analysis and audits to replace your assumptions with evidence and verify whether your perceived challenges are actually what's hampering progress towards your vision and goals. Depending on the nature of your specific challenge and opportunity areas, this could include anything from business process audits, to heuristics testing, CRO and website auditing, and technical audits.

Questions to ask:

Where is the organisation right now and what's your current situation?

How did you arrive at this situation and which decisions and actions led you here?

What has and hasn't worked, and why?

Where do you think the business is going wrong?

Which valuable learnings and trends can you apply and project forward?



2. Explore your desired future state

Clarify and align on the outcomes you want for the business and your customers.

Questions to ask:

Where and what do you want the organisation to be?

What is the nature of your vision and objectives?

Are you looking to achieve something?

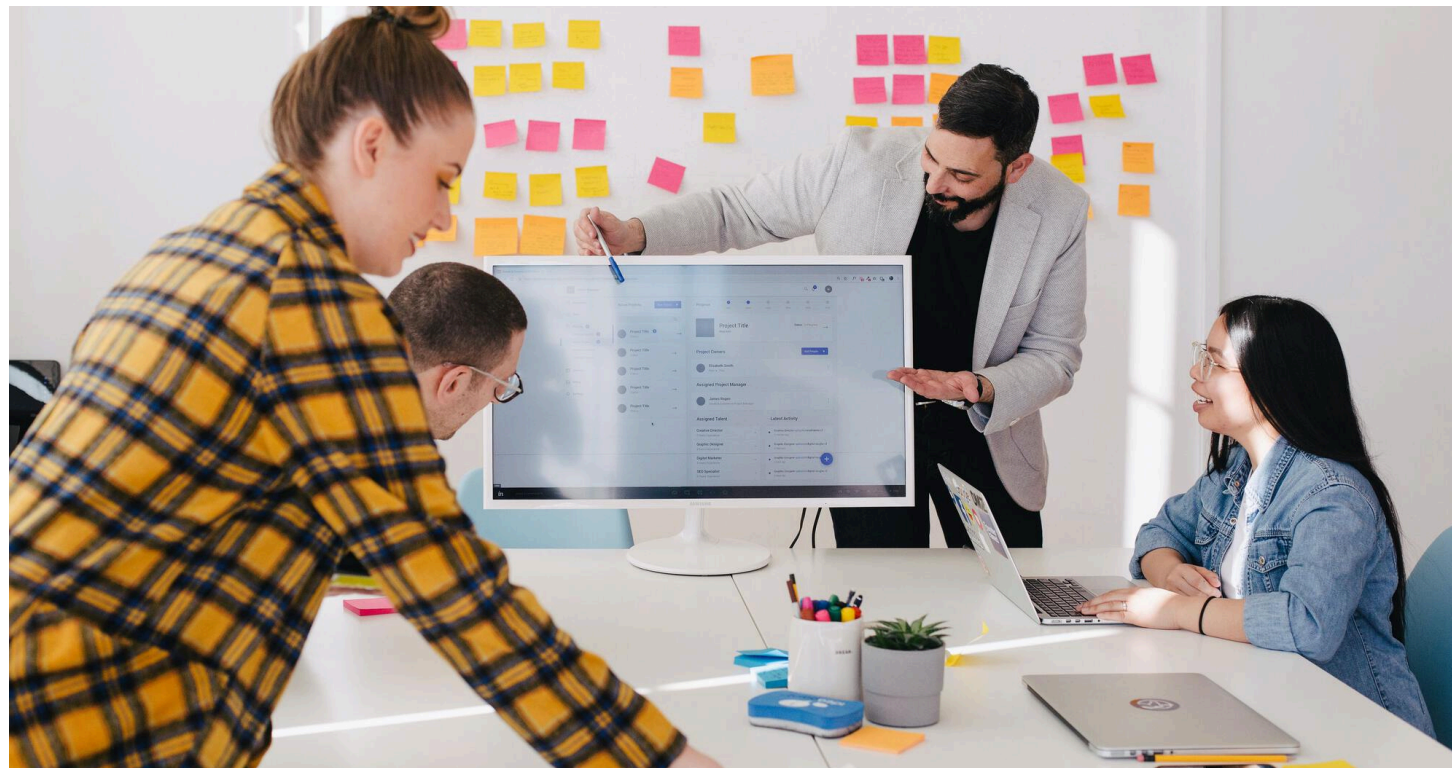
Or do you want to fundamentally transform something?

Are you ultimately looking to solve a problem, or is your vision more aspirational?

Think about the milestones and strategic objectives the organisation must achieve to progress towards this vision.

- How might you align on and communicate these objectives?
- Have you considered the key obstacles to achieving your strategic objectives?
- What's blocking the pathway to your desired future state?

Be sure to look across 'near' and 'far' horizons in your future state. Which fires do you need to tackle immediately versus the opportunities you're looking to tackle in phase two? Consider where your competitors might be heading, too. You'll need a forward thinking vision with clarity on what's going to create your point of difference.



3. Diagnose the problem

Using the evidence you've gathered, diagnose the root cause(s) of your challenge or opportunity. What's holding you back from achieving your desired future state? Where you think you have a technical or platform-related challenge, consider whether there's also a people or process dimension to the challenge that you need to consider.



4. Ideate and assess your opportunities

Combine your learnings and the evidence you've gathered to identify key business optimisation opportunities that can contribute to your strategic goals and vision.

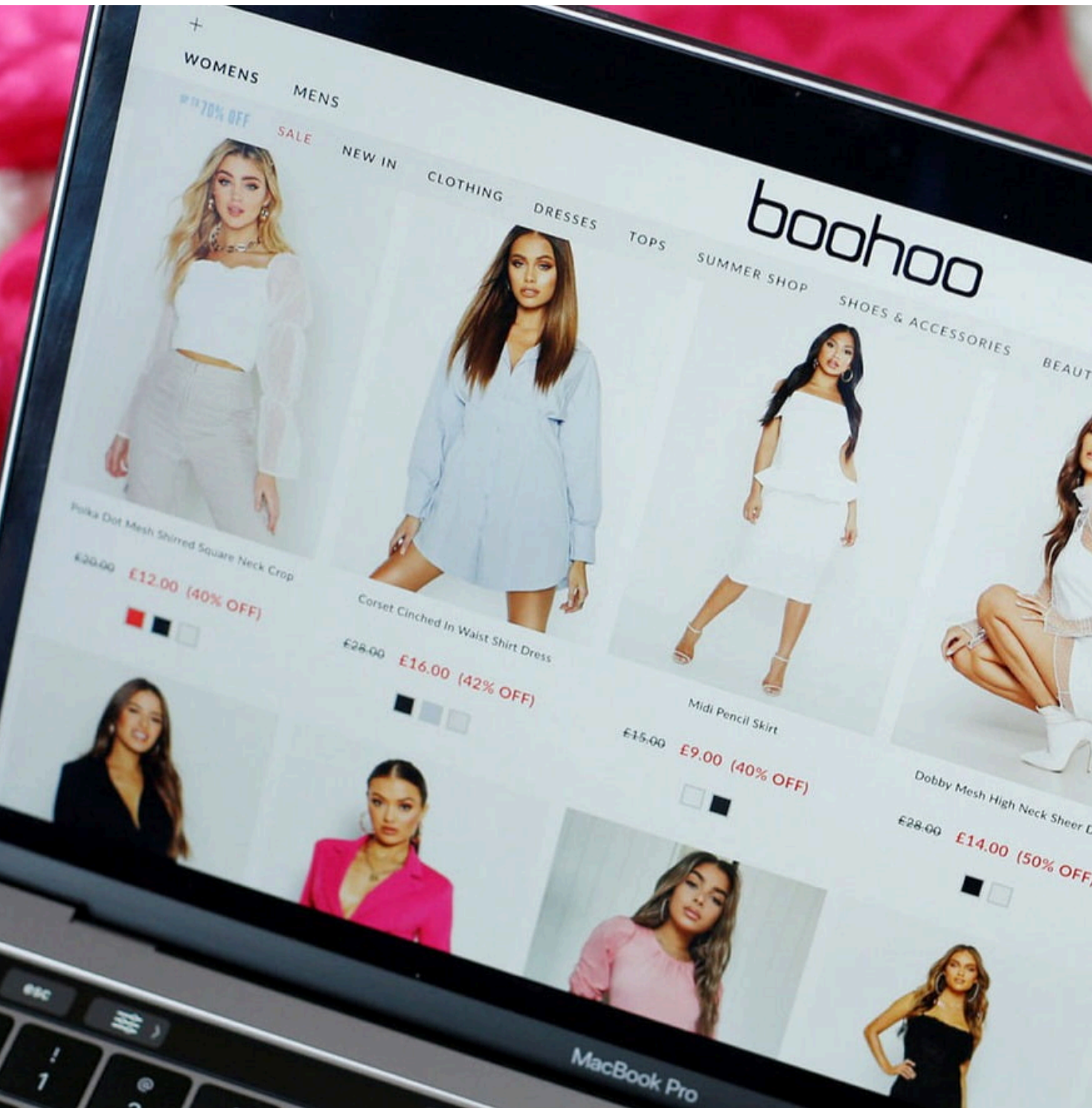
Use a Cartesian or quadrant system to map these initiatives based on their ability to deliver strategic value against their associated cost or complexity (or a combined measure of both factors).

This enables you to prioritise opportunities on a cost vs. value basis and to differentiate between near-term opportunities that are low risk, low cost, high impact, versus longer-term opportunities with higher impact but greater cost and complexity.

5. Distil your opportunities into a prioritised roadmap

Start by developing a prioritised, 'near horizon' roadmap of high impact, low complexity initiatives. Prioritise based on time to value, but with the flexibility to move things around based on the returns you see as you iteratively deliver on the roadmap.





How Boohoo Group PLC optimised a critical business process to cut cost, risk, and time to market

A case study

Boohoo Group has seen remarkable growth in the past five years.

Its revenue was just shy of £2 billion in 2021 – with 62 million orders and 20 million active customers to its name. During the global pandemic, it smashed growth targets and almost doubled the size of its brand portfolio, expanding into new and adjacent markets.

Behind this success story is a thriving business model centred on speed, scalability, and innovation.

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We reduced the time to execute a critical business process – from 25 minutes to two or three.

Will Clayton, Head of innovation, Boohoo Group

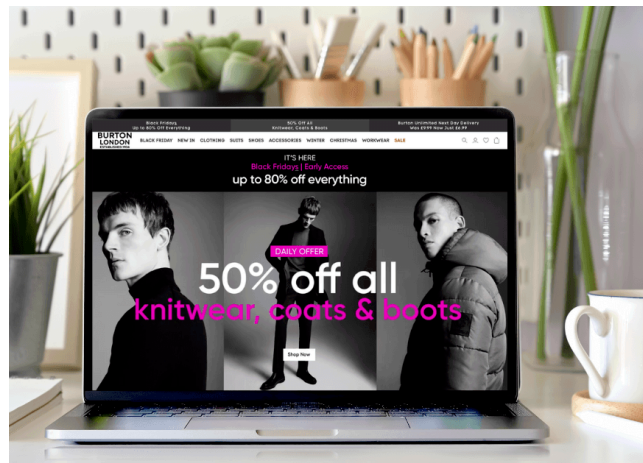
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‘We really monitor what’s going on in the market, how trends are changing, and we react to that’, explains head of innovation, Will Clayton.

‘We rapidly test small volumes of products, launch them in the market, and see which ones work.

From that, you can make decisions about which ones we’re going to keep and buy into, and which ones we’re not’.

But the group’s rapid growth and expansion were outgrowing its legacy processes, many of which were very linear, manual, and time-consuming. And when your business model is built around speed, that’s a big problem.



Boohoo Group at a glance

Vision:

To be leading the e-commerce fashion market for 16–45 year olds.

Scale:

- £1.98bn revenue
- 62.4m orders
- 20m active customers

Brands:

- 2006: boohoo
- 2013: boohooMAN
- 2017: PRETTYLITTLETHING, NastyGal
- 2019: Karen Millen, Coast, Misspap
- 2020: Oasis, Warehouse
- 2021: Debenhams, Burton, Dorothy Perkins, Wallis

'We were doing things very manually, writing things onto paper, copying it into our ERP...data was often incorrect and lacked validation. At times, products were being attributed in completely incorrect ways'.

When head of innovation Will Clayton joined Boohoo Group, he was clear on the task at hand: 'We were asking the question: how do we optimise our processes to support the growth that we're going through? How do we make better use of data to optimise our processes and become more efficient?'

The group needed to drive efficiencies in core business processes – especially the creation, publication, and categorisation of new products – to cut time and overheads, and bring scalability and agility to the group to support its growth ambitions.

'The first thing we did with this process was put in place a digitised workflow', explains Will.

'That's something we called Order App, which gives buyers and merchandisers a tool they can use on their phone...to create a product and order wherever they are in the world'.

Order App delivers superior data capture and efficiency, reducing the process of creating products and setting them up in the ERP system from 25 minutes to a 2–3 minute timeframe.

Boohoo Group then turned its attention to another critical process: product enrichment and product information management.

'We put in place a better backbone to our product information. What we've done by implementing a PIM [product information management] that links with Order App is to ensure data integrity... The workflow for getting a product from the point of creation through to the websites is a lot simpler. It's data driven and dynamic. This is a great foundation and provides one source of truth everyone agrees on'.



As innovation lead, Will's focus then turned to: 'How can we take this step further and get more efficiency from it? How can we use AI to take that step further?'

This led Will and his team to look at the processes around publishing of product data, many of which heavily relied on manual workflows, gradually weakening data quality. Take the example of assigning categories to products, which is important in order to make products visible to customers in the way they are searching for them – ensuring best possible sales performance. In the past, the ecommerce team manually checked images of up to 2,500 new products per week and assigned them to 1500+ categories per brand, often needing to assign as many as 15 categories per product.

Introducing a digitised process based on AI and automation, Auto Categoriser removed the manual burden on the ecommerce team by changing their role from being one of assigning individual products to assigning the rules that will automatically assign those

products. And that really provides you that scale and the ability to categorise on mass and at speed. 'What that gives us is this ability to have efficient, data driven publishing for our products'.

Check out [this 14-minute video](#) to learn how Will and his team combined data, product information management, AI, and iterative tech modernisation to drive ongoing business growth and optimisation.

'Now we're digitally creating products, storing that data in a consistent, centralised way, supplementing it using AI, and automating the way we do category assignment.'

And by doing so that really optimises our workflow and sets us in a position that we can carry on with sustained growth'.

Will Clayton, Head of innovation, Boohoo Group PLC



boohoo

Optimising processes & driving innovation in retail

Will Clayton
Head of Innovation

How the leading UK supermarket optimised order fulfilment to improve efficiency

A case study



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e enabled a major UK supermarket to improve operational efficiencies and costs with a streamlined fulfilment system. This equipped the grocery giant to become the first UK retailer to achieve one million online grocery orders within a single week.

Fulfilment plays a key role in our client's ability to grow profitably, minimise costs, and ensure operational efficiency. After all, any issue can create a ripple effect that impacts people and performance. And every fulfilment workflow involves real-time change and decision-making.

There's even more room for error when your operations are as large and complex as our client's. The firm has 5,000 stores, 10 click and collect models, and four types of fulfilment centres.

The scale and requirements across these locations vary massively. And over time, this created siloed fulfilment systems and inconsistent workflows.

Manual. Some fulfilment systems relied on manual input from order pickers, managers, or delivery drivers. This added time, effort, and room for error. One example was vehicle safety checks – a legal requirement in the fulfilment journey. The legacy process was slow, paper-based, and prone to error. It also required oversight from a manager. This made it difficult for drivers to hit the road quickly.

Disconnected. The grocery retailer has multiple backend systems. These handle everything from vehicle allocation to traffic routing. But many were not connected to each other. This made it hard for managers to proactively manage workflows. And solve potential issues in real time.

Difficult to scale. The lack of an open, flexible system made it difficult to innovate and scale processes using data and automation.



The retail organisation therefore wanted a single, streamlined fulfilment system to drive operational efficiencies. The system needed to unify, simplify, and improve fulfilment management processes.

Qualitative research, including in-field [ethnographic research](#), allowed us to scrutinise the end-to-end fulfilment journey. We gained deep insights into key workflows and pain points – and how to meet diverse user needs. These insights informed the Design Sprints and [digital prototyping](#).

We tested incremental system improvements with staff to see how they impacted behaviours and operations.

Working closely with the retailer's data science teams, we designed a fulfilment system that better meets user and business needs. The evolved system increases efficiency and simplifies user journeys using algorithms, automation, data-driven decision making, and just-in-time support.

'The order fulfilment process generated triplicate paper copies – now we are paper-free with virtually no errors'.

We helped the supermarket giant to digitise, streamline, and standardise its end-to-end fulfilment system to create better outcomes for staff and the business – and ultimately their customers.

The new fulfilment system, Infinity, is designed to improve operational efficiencies by minimising error, cutting time and costs, and improving decision-making. Digitising this process delivered savings in the region of £1.5 million per year, and improved customer satisfaction.



Multiple backend systems and data points are unified for better dataflow and visibility of end-to-end journeys. And the open, flexible, scalable design helps our client to learn, innovate, and grow.

The deep insights we gained through observing staff in the field helped us optimise each stage in the end-to-end fulfilment journey.

A great example is the vehicle safety checks process: a manual check is required before every dispatch – but Inviqa's analysis revealed that this process was slow and error prone. The 'Greenlight' app was delivered to simplify and digitise this process, designed to improve driver confidence in their decision making, reduce vehicle breakdowns, and drive positive impact operationally.

‘The new digital checklist is 40% faster, enabling quicker, more reliable customer deliveries’.

The evolved system was put through its paces during the global pandemic where it demonstrated immediate value and played a key role in helping the retail business to scale operations quickly and efficiently. Inviqa's enhancements to the retailer's delivery scheduling tool halved the delivery window from 30 minutes to 15 minutes, enabling twice as many customers to be served than pre-pandemic.

‘Redesigning the driver app UX helped increase delivery frequency by 100%’.

With the popularity of online grocery shopping [set to continue in a post-pandemic world](#), our partnership is enabling the supermarket to meet changing customer expectations and achieve its ambitious growth targets.

Explore our [case study library](#) to learn why retailers like Boohoo, REISS, Brompton, and Starbucks choose Inviqa to prime their digitalisation programmes for success.



Develop a capability for continuous and effective change

Whatever you're looking to achieve with your retail optimisation programme, a forward-looking vision and a continuous improvement mindset are critical success factors.



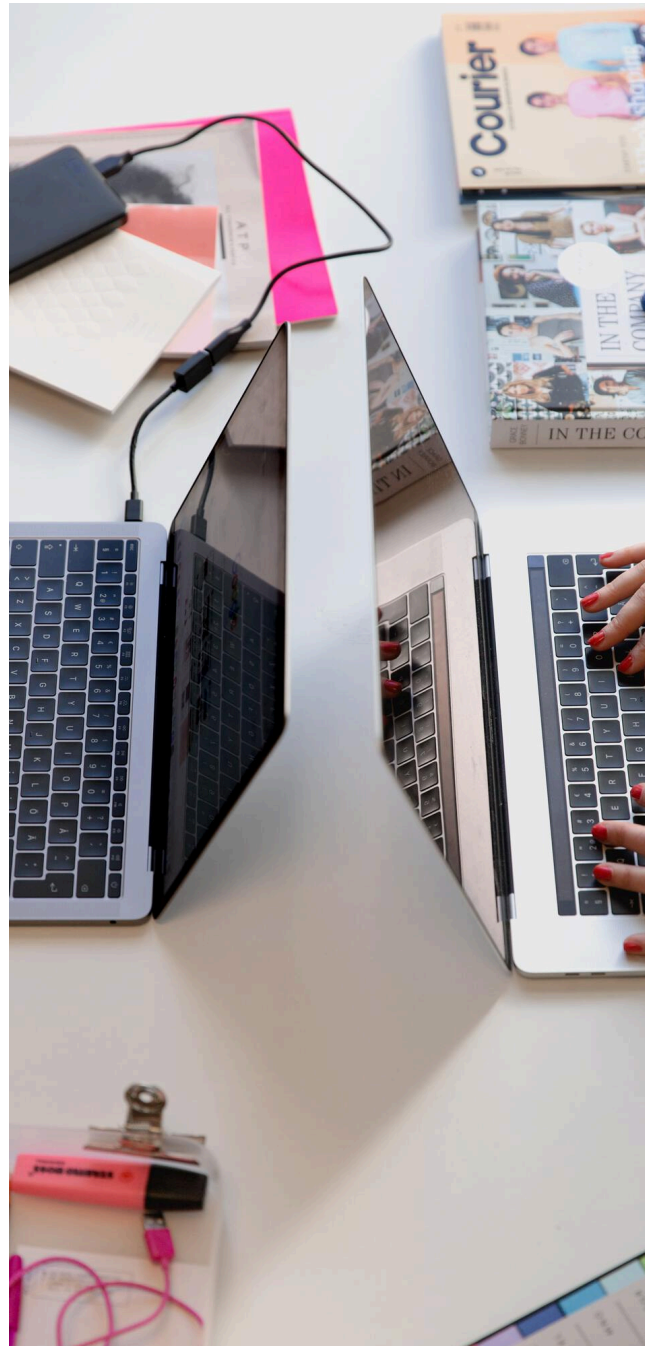
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hat these two case studies demonstrate is that to survive and thrive in our turbulent business environment, retailers must adapt across the dimensions of people, process, and platforms.

But what's more important is to do this with a forward-looking vision for the organisation and a continuous improvement mindset. Only then does your organisation have the capability to embrace ongoing and effective change.

To achieve this, it's essential to commit sufficient time across leadership and exec teams, as well as to plan for meaningful investment across a number of years. You will need a long-term budget to keep improving continuously – traditional transformation projects that have a finite objective and life-span are a thing of the past.

That's why we believe a change from a project to a product mindset is required – a challenge we continue to see in retail. Invest in product



management to aid your shift away from project thinking. Though in many organisations product owners (PO) and product managers (PM) are the same person, there is a nuanced difference in that product managers are owners of forward vision. They're your best ambassador for continuous and effective change.

For any optimisation or transformation programme to be strategic, you need to know what you're doing is actually working. It's therefore fundamental that you provide a measurement framework enabling you to base decisions on dependable data, empirical insights, and reliable trends.

But your platforms and processes are only as good as the people that hold them together, so apply a people lens to everything.

Don't underestimate the importance of communication, culture, and change management – all of which require ownership and accountability.

Developing a strategic capability for continuous and effective change requires fresh ideas, and these might need to come from new people. That might mean hiring a new chief digital officer (CDO) or working with an external trusted advisor to eliminate incumbency bias and assumptions in your thinking and approach.

There's value in having an independent third party that looks dispassionately at what you've got.

Many organisations find they've grown too close to things and subsequently have biases, flaws, and blindspots in their thinking and decision making.

One way around these incumbency biases is to augment your capabilities and ecosystem with a comprehensive agency that has the ability to bring in the right partners. Even if you're opting for a 'buy' instead of 'build' approach, you're still going to need someone with the experience to orchestrate that process and own that strategic capability. This capability needs to encompass the ability to also understand and meet continually changing customer needs.

In our experience, it's sometimes tricky for a retail organisation to commit time and energy to closely observing their competitors and wider industry. Hence, working with an

external trusted advisor can bring both retail and cross-industry experience that you might struggle to gain internally.

All this might sound complex, but it doesn't need to be. Our experienced retail consultants can support you in your strategic optimisation programme to drive lasting value for you and your customers. With over 40+ years' combined experience in the retail industry, we can help you create and implement a roadmap that has continuous improvement at its heart and navigates factors like risk and cost while keeping you on course to hit your goals and deliver game-changing experiences for your customers.





Why we're passionate about digital optimisation

We care about creating the best possible outcomes. For you, for your diverse customers, for your own teams.

Our partnerships are based on trust, where we set you up to succeed long after we're gone. We believe in empathy, collaboration, purpose, transparency, and learning.

Leverage our years of cross-industry experience to set your optimisation programme up for success – eliminate biases, challenge assumptions, and validate approaches.

Get in touch today!



Together, let's ensure lasting value
**from your digital
optimisation initiatives**

Speak with our consultants today: info@inviqa.com