Culture: The Engine of Transformation
It’s no secret: Enabled by technological advancements, digital transformation is driving unprecedented opportunity in all kinds of enterprises.

In many ways, however, achieving genuine transformation requires more of a cultural shift than a technological one. Specifically, success hinges not only on making the right technical decisions but on building the right cultural foundation as well.

But while addressing cultural issues is a basic part of classic change management theory, it’s still too often overlooked in transformation initiatives.

We believe that as organizations embark on this journey, their executive teams should pause to discuss the needed cultural shift. Every leader should be able to clearly articulate what’s needed to drive enterprise-wide cultural change rather than viewing digital transformation solely through the lens of new technological capabilities. Every leader should fully understand transformation’s impact on both culture and people as a prerequisite to launching any initiative. In this Executive Conversation, we’ll discuss putting people first, building strong cultures, and helping everyone, at every level, embrace change. Keep reading to learn more.
THE ‘JAZZ’ OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Bryson Koehler: It’s time to kill the idea of digital transformation as a point-in-time, Big Bang initiative. Transformation is now the standard operating mode. Consumer — and employee — expectations and technologies are constantly changing, and organizations have to evolve how they deliver. The tech industry is shifting from a project mindset to a product mindset, meaning that development cycles, team structures, processes, and the pace of change are all becoming long-term, iterative, and real-time. Delivery isn’t a start-stop mechanism; it’s in constant, fluid motion. I compare it to music: We can no longer prerecord our tracks. The new wave of digital transformation demands that we perform “live.” At a concert, if there’s feedback in the sound system, if the drummer drops his stick, if the guitarist drops her pick, they all have to react on the spot — supporting each other quickly, getting back in the groove, and making it better. After all, the show must go on.

The stakes are higher than ever for technology professionals because we’re now front and center on the company’s main stage. Strong operations, stellar customer experience, and future growth — the success of these things hinges on having impeccably orchestrated technology. In the past, technology was typically viewed as a back-office support function; now it’s a mission-critical one powering the business. That’s so much the case that many companies, including Equifax, are now emerging as truly high-tech companies because a product-led mindset is driving the technology investments we’re making.

Long gone are the days when business leaders could dismiss their lack of tech savvy by saying: “Sorry, I’m not very technical.” Today, just about every employee needs to have some level of understanding about technology. They don’t all have to be experts. Not everyone needs to know how to write code. But they do need to understand how technology can make the overall enterprise better and more efficient and how that, in turn, can be used to outsmart the competition. Making that cultural shift — and ensuring that everyone buys into it — is essential for driving change.

Akhilesh Tiwari: No question about it: That cultural shift will be challenging for all involved. First, the speed of change is faster now than ever before, meaning organizations must create environments that not only keep pace but embrace and adapt to the resulting uncertainty as well. We all need to be agile and nimble because everything around us is constantly changing much faster than before.

Secondly, innovation must be part of our DNA. Today, every day, we need to be thinking about what could become a reality tomorrow. Third, learning about technology, along with understanding and appreciating what technology can do, becomes imperative for the business side. At the very least, people need to be tech-aware, if not tech-conversant.

All that becomes part of an organization’s DNA or culture. Of course, creating culture is easier said than done. Leaders can’t just announce

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BRYSON KOEHLER, EQUIFAX
“OK, today, we’re going to work on culture” and hand out checklists. Instead, they need to take the long-term view. They must set the stage, model the right behaviors, and nurture the right attitudes. We’ve both lived this lesson acutely in the last few years.

WIRED FOR GROWTH, OBSESSED WITH CLOUD NATIVE

Bryson Koehler: Equifax has been around for more than 120 years because we never stop innovating. As we like to say, we are wired for growth. Our latest transformation might be our most significant — reinventing our technology, security, and data stack in the Equifax Cloud. We started this journey a few years ago with a $1.5 billion investment to migrate to a fully cloud-native platform, bringing all our data together securely in an enterprise data fabric. We chose this bold reset — versus smaller, incremental upgrades — to create an entirely new foundation for future growth. By breaking down data silos and implementing a best-in-class, services-based infrastructure, we knew we could unlock more scalable value for customers and shareholders. Our approach is also building competitive advantage by combining the composable architecture typically only accessible by nimble startups with the deep expertise and scale that comes from being in business for nearly a century and a quarter.

Moving to the cloud is a companywide effort. The tech overhaul is a huge piece of that — decommissioning all our data centers, sunsetting our old systems, and rebuilding our applications as cloud native. But the people aspect is even more important. So we’ve upskilled and equipped our teams with the best tools and with training in cloud engineering, agile product delivery, and leading-edge data and analytics techniques.

The bright minds across our global team are driving our movement to become the world’s leader in decision intelligence. We attract the type of talented people who like to learn and solve problems. If you’re a dedicated engineer, product professional, data scientist — or any number of roles needed to build industry-leading products — you can continually grow and evolve your role here. And you get hands-on experience. We’re innovating with artificial intelligence (AI) and building an MLOps [machine learning operations] culture to create those intelligent solutions.

But implementing these changes required us to recast our culture and operations. We had to think about how to innovate and get to market faster. Equifax launched more new products in 2021 than during any single year in its history. To do that, we had to realign our tech and product KPIs in business terms, linking more closely to revenue and profitability. We had to transform the back office as well, reinventing our billing system. We had to be sure we could bill, track, and service customers as seamlessly as possible as we launched new products. We had to become the easiest company to work with, reimagining how we onboarded customers through self-service.

We also made our application programming interfaces (APIs) and software development kits available to the developer ecosystem through our own portal and our data and product marketplaces. To thrive in the new cloud environment, we are putting unit economics at the core of our operations, leveraging leading-edge FinOps [financial operations] tools and methodologies.

What does this mean for technology teams across industries? Essentially, we need to take a more aggressive approach to owning our role on the company’s main stage. That means rising above the day-to-day operational metrics that can lead to tunnel vision. We have to relentlessly improve technical excellence as new technol-

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ogies become available while also putting ourselves on the front line by embracing sales and EBITDA [earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization] targets. The customer feedback loop should be as sacred as our performance metrics to ensure that what we are delivering is meaningful and future-focused. Tech and product transformations aren’t ultimately written by code; they are scripted by customer needs, business opportunities, and a compelling vision that motivates teams to drive forward what they never thought possible.

WHAT STRONG CULTURE LOOKS LIKE

A solid culture is one where people trust their teammates, managers, and subordinates, one where the whole stack has trust. Trust is really about getting to the point of vulnerability. We want people to feel comfortable exposing their weaknesses, saying what they need help with, and asking those questions they’d otherwise be uncomfortable asking.

That’s important because we need to embrace failing fast so that we can learn fast. As leaders, we have to make sure our teams stay focused on delivering value. That’s tougher than it sounds. It requires establishing clear success measures tied to each interval — and holding everyone accountable for them. You have to avoid pitfalls such as the sunk-cost fallacy or the commitment fallacy. Then when you decide to pivot, you can celebrate what the team has learned while inspiring people to keep pressing forward into new terrain.

Akhilesh Tiwari: Since the advent of the pandemic, organizations have been forced to change faster than ever before, ensuring that they’re adaptable, resilient, and purpose-driven in this unprecedented era. An employee-centric culture based on learning, caring, and quality helps enable people to embrace the change.

Recently, TCS partnered with Equifax to transform its customer experience through cloud transformation and “APIfication” — offering functionality and data as a service for systems to use — to help the company make data-driven decisions. Of course, adopting cloud requires a change in mindsets, skill sets, behavior, and culture in every organization and in the broader ecosystem in which it exists. That shift goes well beyond embracing a new business model.

Leaders play a crucial role in the success of such initiatives. As previously mentioned, they must model the right behaviors and encourage the right attitudes.

PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

At TCS, we believe in creating engaging workplaces. It’s not just about professional development and compensation; the environment in which people work is very important as well. In our experience, if that environment provides a culture where people feel they can thrive, that’s more important than money. TCS has launched an organization-wide innovation culture program, which offers employees across roles and designations the opportunity to participate in weekly “ideathons,” hackathons, and competitions. These events let associates generate ideas, wireframes, and prototypes as well as develop innovative solutions to a range of customer problems.

TCS supports our employees’ families and communities, too. For instance, we partner with schools and universities to teach young people about technology, with a focus on reaching out to the less-privileged sections of society affected by the pandemic. With employees working remotely, TCS provided virtual counseling sessions and medical help desks along with communitywide vaccination drives. To support health care needs, we set up isolation centers and modular treatment facilities for employees and family members infected with or at risk of contracting COVID-19, providing respiratory systems for treating serious cases (see “Scaling Culture and Talent During a Pandemic”).

That’s the kind of culture that makes people stay with the organization because they can see that there’s a purpose beyond making money. That’s what we focus on.

Bryson Koehler: At Equifax, my team spans roughly 10,000 full-time and contract colleagues, and I focus on three things with them as a leader. First, I want my people to love what they do. Second, I want to empower people for success with the clarity of mission and the tools they need to do their jobs. And finally, I want to equip them with the skills they need to be more employable, whether that’s learning a new way of doing product development or a new language or a new way of modeling. Yes, they can always move on to another position outside
the company. But ultimately, if you invest in people, if you do the right thing, that will be a good thing for the team, the culture, and the outcomes you’re trying to achieve.

One of the most valuable experiences I can offer to an employee is a hands-on horizontal experience in cloud engineering and in data and analytics transformation, where they can contribute to a breadth of work they likely couldn’t dig into at a larger company. That experiential learning in the trenches is critical for personal growth, but we complement it with formal learning. By the end of 2021, we had close to 1,000 people with cloud certifications on our team. Three years ago, that number was basically zero. It’s been great to see people investing time in themselves, with us supporting and paying for that. It’s been a big change.

With the cloud, you have to build resilience into your architecture. And you have to know how not to overbuild a capability so that you end up paying too much for it. Those things are important on the cloud side.

One big shift with cloud is that you build it, run it, and own it. In the old world, one team would build it, another team would run it, and then someone else sitting in another building owned it. But in the cloud, you now can treat your infrastructure as code. You can change how a team works. Our system reliability engineers work in self-contained teams that can now build, run, and own code with the handoff just to themselves. This development style promotes a great culture of constant improvement because that team doesn’t want to be woken up at night with calls about problems, so they fix any issues. They want to automate; they want to have the right monitoring. But the system reliability engineer is a jack-of-all-trades, who knows a lot about different parts of the architecture stack, the network databases, operating systems, code execution, and so on. That’s a very hot skill set that has a whole level of specialization within it.

HELPING EMPLOYEES EMBRACE CHANGE

Digital transformation can quickly jolt changes throughout an organization. Many people will resist extensive change in a short amount of time. So we have to help our people adapt by having a culture that fully supports such shifts.

Scaling Culture and Talent During a Pandemic
By Akhilesh Tiwari, Tata Consultancy Services

At TCS, we’ve been aggressively investing in building our talent pipeline to meet the growing demand for employees.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we’ve hired tens of thousands of new people over the past two years. Today, we have more than 606,000 employees worldwide.

We faced enormous challenges in bringing so many new employees onboard with everyone working remotely. However, the organization’s leadership and managers committed to keeping employees productive and engaged through extensive use of collaboration platforms and activities such as regular town halls. Those efforts enabled us to sail through that difficult time.

Essentially, we found that people stuck together because of our highly inclusive culture. Now we’re returning to both in-office and hybrid work environments. We view the shift to hybrid as an opportunity to improve our performance for clients. We provide employees with virtual inductions, training, and integration processes to ensure that they stay relevant to customers and in line with industry demands.

The hybrid work models provide a great chance for TCS, like the rest of the technology industry, to benefit from almost unlimited access to talent. To that end, we’re exploring the concept of a talent cloud, an algorithmic-based marketplace and gig workers community that pairs talent with jobs anywhere, anytime, based on business requirements.

The combination of the talent cloud and hybrid work option, along with TCS’s existing location-independent agile methodology and Secure Borderless Workspaces model, contributes immensely to employee engagement, development, and collaboration, ultimately helping us reach new levels of value.
In technology, we have to make sure we don’t spend too much time admiring the last great thing that we did. We have to allow a bit of poking fun at the old so that we begin to accept that constant improvement is normal, and we should always be brainstorming around the new. It’s a delicate balance, but our goal is to ensure that nothing is off-limits to change. I understand the difficulty of that because I have built systems in my career that I’m super-proud of. Some are still in production, but some have been decommissioned, so I understand the personal attachment. But we don’t want to let nostalgia get in the way of the teams’ thinking about the opportunities that lie ahead.

Akhilesh Tiwari: Creating a culture where all employees feel included and that their contributions are valued is vital to success. Organizations need to provide opportunities and suitable platforms for people to grow as individuals, fulfill their potential, and create an impact. At TCS, we try to make change as easy as possible for our people. A firm belief in organic talent development and investing in people has helped us navigate through multiple waves of technological disruption over more than five decades, pivoting and adapting each time to rebuild relevant new capabilities through reskilling the workforce and helping customers realize the benefits of emerging technologies. Our focus on upskilling and innovative training methods has resulted in industry-leading outcomes. For example, when skills development is a challenge, we use AI-based sentiment analysis to gauge the workforce’s interests so that we can provide necessary mentoring and guidance. Thereafter, we use Xcelerate, our flagship career guidance system, to steer employees to the learning paths aligned with customer needs and their own career aspirations.

We deploy our internal learning portal, which is enabled on mobile devices, so that an employee can learn about and prepare for next-gen technologies with no peer pressure. Our Wings program, which operates in collaboration with both product vendors and academia, provides role-based training and is aimed at developing our future senior transformational professionals. Diversity and inclusion play important roles in ensuring that all employees feel safe, respected, and valued. We’ve established innovation hubs and TCS Pace Ports to encourage our employees to develop creative solutions to address industry business needs.

Bryson Koehler: People are motivated to change when they’re inspired by a higher purpose. At Equifax, we make sure that everything we do is built around our vision of helping people live their financial best. Our people connect to the idea of making a positive impact globally, whether that’s part of our day-to-day work opening up access to credit for the credit invisible through our powerful alternative data sets, or being part of our mission to reach net-zero carbon emissions by 2040. So when we incorporate new data, new analytics, or new ways of working to improve financial inclusion, for example, it makes it easier for our people to jump into action. It takes on this grassroots, bottom-up push for change, which is very important.

One of the biggest lessons we have learned, even before the pandemic: In a transformation, time is your enemy. You have to go much faster than you feel comfortable going while executing at the highest standard. The market’s moving at a high velocity and so is your competition. Your old systems will become obsolete. Your new systems are already aging. In many ways, playing it safe is the riskiest thing you can do for the long-term health of your business.

But to work at that fast pace, you need true partners around you who understand your goals and can move nimbly with you. We’ve had great success in working with TCS. To Equifax, TCS is not a vendor; they’re a part of the team. Culture is just as important with your partners as with your staff. This isn’t about a statement of work, it’s not about a contract. It’s about collaboration. We work together as a unified team. Big challenges require passionate people to solve them. We’ve found that a great way to tap into our teams’ creativity is by creating a vibrant culture. We want people to bring their whole selves to work so they can be at their best and deliver greatness. That’s why our rallying cry is “live your best.” When you build a vibrant workplace that champions inclusion, wellness, and empowerment, your people can break barriers in ways that you never before dreamed possible.

Technology is now as commonplace as running water. An hour of computing time costs less than an hour next to a parking meter. With the cloud, high tech is no longer a “high barrier” — it’s more efficient, economical, pervasive, and powerful. Technology components are raw materials that can be assembled, like building blocks, into a
competitive advantage. Each composable part on its own might be a commodity, but as a whole, a well-oiled infrastructure can unlock a company’s unique value proposition. Still, true transformation goes beyond just implementing a modernized tech stack. Cultural transformation is what drives long-lasting change. It occurs when a smart, passionate workforce embraces the idea that to advance, their business should remain on its front feet, in a state of constant reimagining. Flexibility — for people, processes, and technology — is increasingly the strongest currency.

Akhilesh Tiwari heads the Communications, Media and Information Services business for TCS in the Americas. With more than 25 years of international and multifaceted leadership experience, Akhilesh serves as a business adviser and innovation enabler for some of the world’s most renowned companies. Under his leadership, TCS has received several customer recognitions, partner awards, and leadership rankings from leading industry analysts. He received an MBA from the MIT Sloan School of Management, a master’s degree in materials technology from the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay and a bachelor’s degree in metallurgy from the National Institute of Technology, Raipur.

Bryson Koehler is the chief product, data, analytics, and technology officer at Equifax, where he leads the product and technology organizations. Previously, he drove efforts to bring IBM Watson together with a full suite of cloud-native capabilities as a common platform for providing world-class, developer-friendly cognitive tools. These efforts culminated in the relaunch of IBM Watson and Cloud Platform. Additionally, he was chief technology and information officer at the Weather Channel Companies (later acquired by IBM). He serves on the boards of directors for the Technology Association of Georgia, the Atlanta Chief Information Officer Advisory Board, and Realogy Real Estate Services. He received a bachelor’s degree in political science and communications from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

ABOUT TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES
Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) is an IT services, consulting, and business solutions organization that has been partnering with many of the world’s largest businesses in their transformation journeys for more than 50 years. TCS offers a consulting-led, cognitive-powered, integrated portfolio of business, technology, and engineering services and solutions. Part of the Tata group, India’s largest multinational business group, TCS employs more than 606,000 consultants in 46 countries. The company is listed on the BSE (formerly Bombay Stock Exchange) and the NSE (National Stock Exchange) in India. TCS’s proactive stance on climate change and award-winning work with communities across the world have earned it a place in leading sustainability indices such as the MSCI Global Sustainability Index and the FTSE4Good Emerging Index. For more information, visit www.tcs.com.

ABOUT EQUIFAX INC.
At Equifax, we believe knowledge drives progress. As a global data, analytics, and technology company, we play an essential role in the global economy by helping financial institutions, companies, employers, and government agencies make critical decisions with greater confidence. Our unique blend of differentiated data, analytics, and cloud technology drives insights to power decisions to move people forward. Headquartered in Atlanta and supported by more than 13,000 employees worldwide, Equifax operates or has investments in 24 countries in North America, Central and South America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific region. For more information, visit www.equifax.com.