



Leading Transformation

How Today's CXOs Are Thinking Beyond Tech in the Digital Age





Diving Deep on How Leaders Drive Change

Miriam McLemore, Enterprise Strategist, AWS

As the former Corporate CIO of an iconic brand, Coca-Cola, I set digital strategy and made big tech investment decisions. I learned that these efforts aren't as likely to be fruitful if leaders aren't also simultaneously thinking about core organizational elements like their vision, value prop, and especially their culture.

Now, as an Enterprise Strategist at AWS, I work with executives from the world's largest organizations in order to help them transform their people, processes, and technology using the cloud. While these conversations often start with questions around digital innovation, or what the future of enterprise IT will be, they almost always boil down to the pursuit of a *culture* that allows for innovation at scale.

In the past, I've written about how our unique culture at Amazon—particularly our most important principle of customer obsession—has driven our success. As large as our company has become, we still operate as a “startup,” but we are now a startup at enterprise scale. To become a “startup enterprise,” you need to define your culture and ensure that you have values and practices that make your culture core to how you get work done and go to market.



I find myself increasingly curious about where other C-level leaders are focusing—not just on the right technology initiatives, but also on the company's digital strategy, data strategy, and culture. In my role at AWS, I have the opportunity to meet with customers from all over the globe, and discuss their vision, goals, people development, and leadership philosophies.

We discuss some hard questions: How do they feel about leading change in a time when cloud computing capabilities are creating unprecedented opportunities—as well as unique challenges? What inspires them? How are they being more diverse and inclusive? How do they manage to stay current? What are their secrets for identifying fresh leaders? Does their company struggle with failure or encourage it?

What I'm learning is that while technology solutions continue to be numerous and different, there are some key themes that emerge:

1 Cloud and digital technologies are giving us all historic access to our customers, and leaders need to constantly recognize that the customer remains the most important figure to our organizations. As the earth's most customer-centric company, Amazon and AWS have created strong partnerships with our customers looking to take advantage of the cloud to enrich relationships with *their* customers.

2 Leaders still lead best by example rather than direction. At Amazon, part of our culture is to dive deep: to not be afraid of keeping our hands on the work, while striking the balance with enabling others. I'm hearing this same conviction throughout many of my conversations.

3 Failure is an important and necessary part of the journey—failing ourselves and giving our people the space to fail. Failure is a learning opportunity, and a bridge to other places. Permission to fail is critical. As Jeff Bezos has said, "Amazon is the best place to fail."



For you, the business leader, we've collected some powerful words from our C-suite dialogues on several topics related to leading change in today's enterprises.

We hope you find them useful for insight and motivation, because sometimes even the smallest amount of wisdom from our peers can spark big thinking and inspire great change.



How do you identify and develop leaders?

“ We have been doubling down on new technologies and having to bring in leaders to do things that we’ve never done. For one position, we brought in somebody from another business unit that had the right attitude, the right background, but had no specific experience for it. We gave her a chance and she has raised the bar for what we expect of other leaders.”

MORGAN REED, CIO, State of Arizona



“ Before anything else, I need to know that they are willing to work hard and to learn and to be punctual and operate under pressure. From there, I want to know more about their why, their purpose, what is driving them. Then I watch for how they assign and share work—all effective leaders have to be expert delegators.”

MOHAMMED ALI AL QAED, CEO, Information & eGovernment Authority, Kingdom of Bahrain

“ Good technology leaders partner with the business, show the art of the possible from a technology perspective, and then collaborate with the business to deliver business solutions for our customers.”

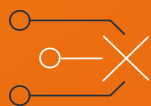
MAHMOUD EL ASSIR, CIO, Verizon



“ After motivation, I’m looking for curiosity. Someone who is focused on how they can drive value for their customers. I’m interested in future leaders who are determined and resilient, who stay with things. They’re willing to face hard challenges to meet their goals. And when they have a setback, they can bounce back.”

ANN CARVER, CIO, Coca-Cola North America





How do you view failure?

“ The thing I push the most to people when they have failures or challenges, is to communicate them. Be transparent about them. Ask for help early. Don't ask for help late.”

SHAOWN NANDI, CIO, Dow Jones



“ We're learning to become more comfortable with it. The whole point of science is you create a hypothesis, you test it against the data, you make predictions, and you run it through a structured, standard process—it's a well-rehearsed pattern. Why would technology be any different?”

CHARLIE EWEN, CIO, UK Met Office

“ I've been asked the question 'What's your favorite failure?' And it's odd because you don't put those two words together normally. I will say that your favorite failure isn't favorite right away. Before being in technology, I was driving complex transactions, and some of them failed. The deals didn't go through, and it has always been a good opportunity for me to reflect back on why it didn't work and ask, 'Did I have a role in that?' 'What did I do well?' 'What didn't I do well?' Self-reflection and feedback are super important.”

HERVE COUREIL, Chief Digital Officer, Schneider Electric



“ When you work hard on something that you believe in and you're trying to approach it in what you believe is the right way—even if it doesn't work out, what I find is that over time somehow it comes back. And there's some value to having done that work.”

ANN CARVER, CIO, Coca-Cola North America





What are your thoughts on diversity?

“ Diversity is a huge area of focus. And it’s an area of focus for one simple reason: our customers are diverse. And we want our product teams, our technology teams to reflect our members and our customers. It also helps us bring diverse points of view in when we’re building products.”

SHAOWN NANDI, CIO, Dow Jones



“ I’ve recently joined our women’s leadership council. Women control something like 70 percent of the purchasing decisions, and make up half of the population, but they’re not represented at that level, especially in the professional and more senior management ranks. I do try to help develop women in my organization. I’ve got several on the team that are very much up and coming leaders and it’s a big focus for me personally.”

ANN CARVER, CIO, Coca-Cola North America

“ I am a big champion of diversity and the value that it brings. We actively have policies and strategies that make sure that we’re not developing in a mono-culture. It’s easy to look at the people around you and think that ‘good’ looks like more of the same people—that can be a dangerous road.”

CHARLIE EWEN, CIO, UK Met Office





How do you stay up with trends and technology?

“ Staying up on technology has a lot to do with watching your customer. How they learn about products and services. How they buy them. How they use our products and services. How we make our network, so we can anticipate their needs and make the user experience very good. That’s been working because we continue to set the standards on our network and product experience, so there’s always a higher bar.”

MAHMOUD EL-ASSIR, CIO, Verizon



“ I follow quite a lot of inspiring people, VCs, and leaders on Twitter, and it’s a pretty good way of knowing what’s around, for getting tidbits of information and food for thought. I also spend a lot of time outside the company with customers, with partners, with VCs, with startups. It helps me to get inspired and uncover new trends. And we try to do it around the world, not just in our backyard.”

HERVE COUREIL, Chief Digital Officer, Schneider Electric

“ I always encourage my team to spend time at conferences, mixing with their peers inside and outside the organization. When there are local opportunities and meetups especially, we encourage them to do that. We ask them to come back and share their experiences with the rest of the organization. That sharing means a lot when engineers and operations folks hear from their peers what they’ve learned.”

SHAOWN NANDI, CIO, Dow Jones





Who or what inspires you?

"

When it comes to people that have inspired me in my 20 years at Verizon, it's hard to point to any one person. I worked for a series of leaders, and each one of them helped to unlock all my potential in collaboration, making investment decisions, driving business results, and other areas. So, it's not one element—it's the combination of how you pick the best from each one of your mentors, then build on it and add your own things."

MAHMOUD EL-ASSIR, CIO, Verizon



"

I once got feedback from a very early leader. She said to my boss, 'He's smart. He's articulate. Doesn't know when to shut up.' That was a huge lesson for me and she stuck with me as a mentor for the next several years. I ended up working for her two times through the course of my career. Getting that candid feedback, being guided by it—and being thankful for it—has been really powerful."

SHAOWN NANDI, CIO, Dow Jones

"

What I learned from my mentor is that if you want to compete, compete with leaders globally. He told me from day one that if you want to achieve something, you have to raise the bar, look at the top markets, and try to get closer."

MOHAMED AL QAED, Chief Executive, Information & eGovernment Authority – Kingdom of Bahrain



IN CLOSING

AWS is inspired by helping our customers achieve their business objectives and succeed in transforming their businesses.



Learn more

[Conversations with Cloud Leaders
with Miriam McLemore](#)

[AWS Cloud Enterprise blog](#)

[Enterprise Cloud Computing at AWS](#)