Changing
Headwinds

Navigating the Rapidly Evolving World of Tech

Sailing Toward Prosperity

> We won't experience 100 years of progress in the 21st century—it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today's rate).
>
> – *Ray Kurzweil, The Singularity Is Near*

We are two decades into the 21st century and the progress to date has been exponential. Toddlers argue with Alexa, over 5 billion people own smartphones worldwide, and autonomous vehicles cruise the highways. And we're just getting started. Corporations such as Amazon, Tesla, and Virgin are making the possibility of galactic travel a reality in our lifetime.

The changes in tech and human behavior toward that tech are difficult to predict. Consider CLEAR, a program that uses biometrics such as eye scans and fingerprints to allow faster access through TSA security lines. Every day, people willingly give away deeply personal information to move more quickly through airports. It's not hard to imagine this technology being met with considerable skepticism just a few years ago. A program that asks for biometrics leaves consumers pretty vulnerable should this information fall in the wrong hands.

So what happened? In essence, human beings place an extraordinarily high value on efficiency, convenience, and time. We are willing to sacrifice things like privacy to make our lives smoother and easier. Whether we like it or not, technology is the driving force behind these shifts in human behavior and we are sailing into a future of technological advances many of us cannot imagine until they become our reality. If a business wants to thrive and succeed, learning how to adapt to these changes is imperative.

The Winds of Change

Navigating these advances in technology and predicting shifts in human behavior is a trying challenge. Developments in tech represent massive change, but they often come in increments making it extremely difficult to anticipate the right decision or the best move for your business. Imagine a ship sailing in unknown waters. The headwinds are constantly changing and if the captain hasn't prepared properly, the ship can steer off course, fall apart, become lost at sea, or undergo a mutiny.

If you are not prepared, your business could experience a rash of complex issues resulting in real revenue and talent loss. Four of the biggest challenges to consider are:

1 **Losing touch with who you are and where you're going**
You need a clear destination in mind. Without a defined purpose, your business could experience a loss of identity. If not everyone in your business understands what the company stands for, it can be difficult to make important decisions regarding technology strategy.

2 Fear of change

It's human nature to be afraid of the unknown. But the truth is, failing to modernize your legacy systems will result in being left behind. Perhaps you're leery of implementing new tech because of costs or because time spent learning new systems could be spent acquiring new business. Whatever the reason, if you do not move past your reservations, your business could flounder.

3 Changes in consumer climate

Human behavior is mercurial. And with individuals being powered by mobile devices, new behaviors quickly become the de-facto standard. Predicting consumer behavior is like predicting the weather without the proper tools. If your business is not harvesting data properly, the competition can outpace you.

4 Acquiring and keeping the best talent

If your business is not empowering your people with the best tools and strategies for success, you may lose more than customers to your competitors. Top talent can become frustrated and lose motivation if they aren't well equipped. They might even jump ship for clearer waters.

While these challenges may seem daunting, you are not alone. Everyone is experiencing them and there are factors you can control. The right philosophy will allow you to embrace evolution and set the best course in these uncharted waters.

The Waypoints for Successful Navigation

There are practices consistent among businesses of all sizes, from startups to larger heritage enterprises, who successfully navigate these changing headwinds. To know if your business is prepared to weather the rapid changes of the current climate, you will need to assess these four things:
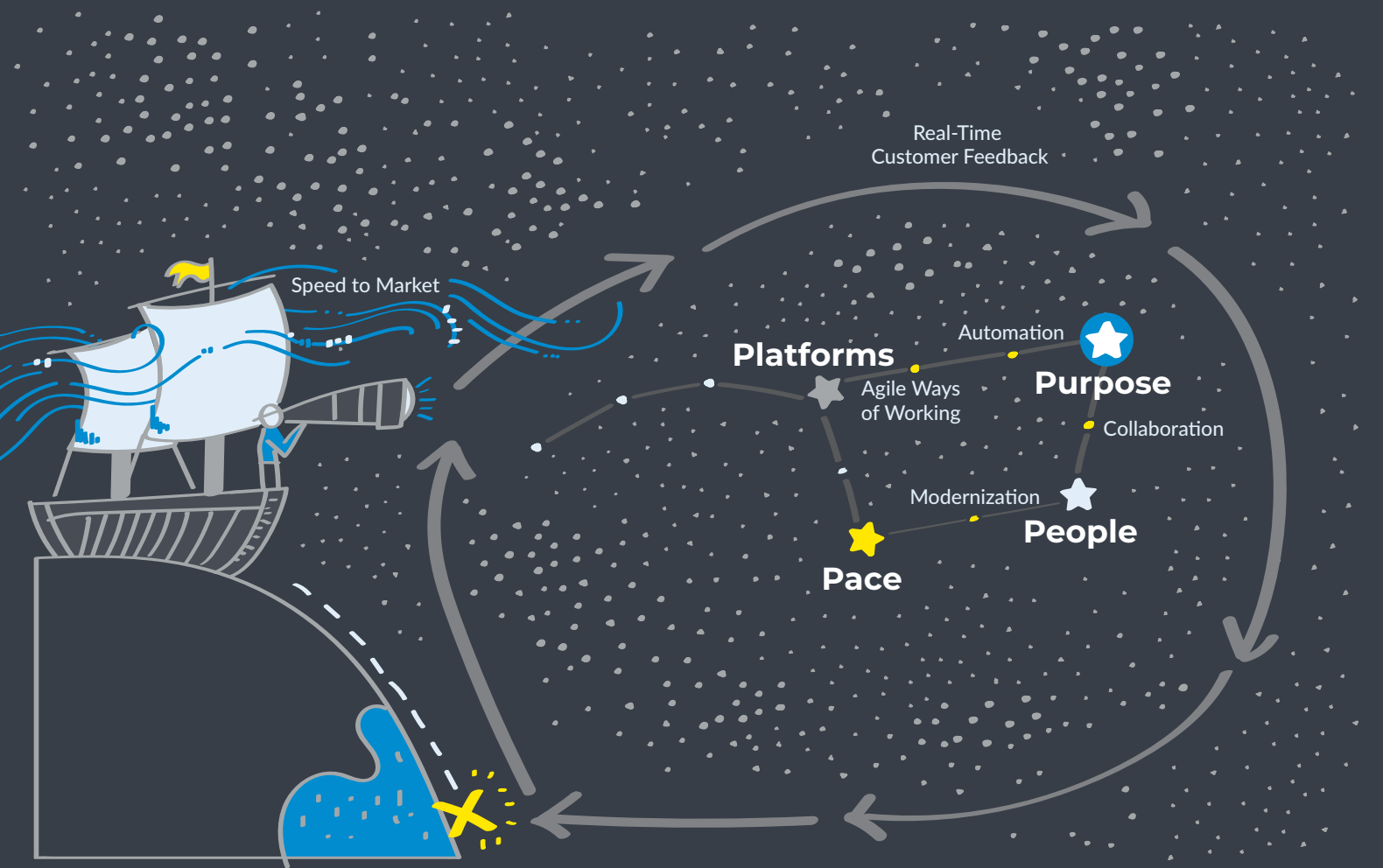
- ✪ **Purpose**
- ⭐ **People**
- ⭐ **Platforms**
- ⭐ **Pace**

Imagine a sailor lost at night. By mapping the stars and constellations in the sky, the sailor can eventually determine where he or she is and find the proper course to follow. These four areas are your most prominent stars or **waypoints** in a constellation you can use for navigational purposes. Once you've located all the stars, you'll be able to navigate the changing headwinds.

The clearer your sense of each of these areas, the easier it will be for you to determine where you are and where you should go next.

Speed to Market

Real-Time
Customer Feedback

Platforms

Automation

Purpose

Agile Ways
of Working

Collaboration

Modernization

Pace

People

Purpose

Successful companies understand that people look for meaning in their actions.

In order to build a business that truly matters, companies must establish a deeper purpose than simply making more money or disrupting a market. A clearly defined purpose serves as the foundation for identity and can help decision makers select the best choice. If a business crafts a meaningful message that is understood at every level, this can eliminate uncertainty, long term revenue loss, and prevent a company from losing touch with its consumer base.

Take CVS for instance. It stopped selling tobacco

products—a short term revenue loss estimated around $2 billion—because it did not align with CVS' stated purpose of helping people on their path to better health. The result, however, was an improved image and a step toward its stated purpose of helping people get healthy. Not only did CVS make a considerable dent in the reduction of number of cigarettes sold per year nationwide, the company received accolades from the market and is on the path to launch a fleet of 1,500 HealthHUBs by the end of 2021.

Meanwhile, pressure mounts for competitors, as the FDA recently outed a similar pharmacy for being the top violator for selling tobacco to minors among all pharmacies.

Here's one thing that's pretty certain:

Articulating a purpose and committing to it in all key decisions resonates with customers and employees, achieving an almost nirvana-like state: Loyalty at the core and an engaged team of brand ambassadors in the field.

What's more, if purpose isn't maintained in this technology forward future, you're subject to follow your competition or spend money on upgrades and systems without a clear understanding of how it will affect your customer experience.

People

Your people, not your tech stack, are your most important asset and one of your major waypoints.

Ensuring your team is equipped with the best tools and data to do their job at the highest level is vital. Relying on legacy systems and failing to outfit your team with the best technology will result in a lack of motivation, slower performance, and a loss of talent to competitors. Businesses that empower their people to optimize how they work, provide continuous learning of the newest technology, and upskill their teams in complementary areas experience far less attrition. People wish to stay

and grow with these businesses. Modernization is crucial as the talent pools changes. Experts predict by 2020 that nearly 59% of the workforce will be made up of millennials and Generation Z workers. While familiar procedural programming has served the Baby Boomers and Gen X workers for decades, incoming talent will be uninterested in learning old, rote processes and systems. And with good reason. As tech evolves, these old systems are unexciting and sure to become outdated.

One thing businesses can do to empower their people is adopt automation. (If it helps, think of **automation** as a sister star adjacent to the more prominent **People** star.) When Quality is automated and embedded during the build and release cycles, time spent seeking signoffs is freed leaving more opportunities for your talent to hone their skills, create, and produce. Time freed by automation enables people to play to their strengths and spend less of their day on mundane tasks. High quality automated software can operate day and night never tiring, taking care of necessary but menial tasks while your team focuses on what you're paying them for: their talent, ideas, and intellect.

Platforms

We've already talked about the importance of **modernizing your business** to keep your people motivated and empowered. But modernizing can also give you an edge when it comes to growth, efficiency, and sustainable innovation by moving to a **modern platform**. Platforms enable companies to build future products faster and cheaper than stand-alone products. In essence, a platform is anything that you can continue to build upon in the same technical framework. And platforms enable companies to evolve into new areas of business. Think Amazon. They started as a digital bookstore and now they are one of the largest brick-and-mortar grocery stores. Not to mention AWS, a world-class cloud computing platform that many of their competitors use.

However, moving to a modern platform is not easy. The diversity and interdependency of capabilities required to connect all the dots such as refactoring, automation, securing the data, and using tech to interact with your customers creates layers of complexity. Traversing such an intricate change without experience in modernization can be incredibly arduous and costly.

If the thought of moving to a modern platform keeps you up at night, know this is a natural fear and the number one reason people rely on legacy systems. Making the switch to a modern platform isn't easy and the switch requires a team of experts, but it is worth it. While you can measure the systems you might lose in the process of change, there is no way to calculate the metrics you cannot see by not doing anything. There is no way to quantify the talent and developments you are missing out on by relying on dated systems.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, "It always seems impossible until it's done."

Pace

While there is no argument that the pace of change is accelerated and exponential, it is important to resist the urge to move at the highest possible speed simply because you can. Nor is it wise to relax and take a breather because you're growing tired. Finding a sustainable pace is tantamount to keeping your business on course. If your strategy is to move as fast as possible, you may find yourself off course and rapidly moving further and further from your target. If you are frustrated with your business' growth and change seems glacial, you already know you need to move more efficiently before you're left behind.

Implementing **agile ways of working** into your IT and business domains can greatly improve pace.

In fact, one of the core elements to agile principles is bringing business people and developers together to achieve speed to market and quicker user-response times. This makes it one of the best ways to manage the changing headwinds. Using cross-functional teams allows for incremental advances, speed to market, and real-time customer feedback. **Collaboration** across teams is a silo slayer, breaking down isolation and cultivating a culture of idea-sharing and more efficient production.

One of the greatest benefits is that the path to production becomes easier and easier to repeat as new developments are made. Efficiency builds on efficiency. This approach requires senior experts and is the surest way to build a platform while modernizing and automating. And you can reap the benefits of scalability as various teams work in parallel with clear goals and autonomy while openly collaborating without the delays caused by silo communication. Not only will you constantly be improving while developing, you'll be better prepared for the changes ahead, even in such a fluctuating climate.

The Best Course for Your Business

Assessing the waypoints of People, Purpose, Platforms, and Pace in your business will help you discover the right decision for adapting to a connected future and a tech-infused humanity.

- Does your business have a clear and defined purpose to guide key decisions? Can you describe the impact your business makes on the world and share it with others in a succinct and captivating way?

- Does your business empower its people with the best tools for success? Does it maintain a culture of collaboration and open communication?

- How well does your platform serve your business and customer? Does it integrate seamlessly with existing technologies and showcase alternative technologies?

- Is it reducing overhead? Can it be delivered continuously?

- Are you operating at the most efficient pace? Do you feel you're moving too quickly and without direction? Too slow and falling behind?

If the answer to all of these was "yes" you may be able to navigate the changing headwinds with a cheap fix or DIY solution. But if you answered "no" to any of the above, then it may be time to work with an experienced team of experts.

A Crew of Experts

Modernizing your ecosystem and moving to platform is no small task. Experts with ample experience, fine-tuned skills, and keen intuition are needed to successfully navigate the journey.

Imagine a world where seasoned experts work alongside you and your teams to get more done with less. That's our vision. Equal Experts only hires experienced technologists that share our desire to solve the bigger problems, make software better, and build effective teams.

We don't have junior technologists on our team. We are all Equal Experts.

This is a defining factor that enables us to perform at the highest levels in less time and with less waste and oversight. We find great success in pairing with clients during the organization, design, and build phases moving in smaller increments and enabling your teams to continue long after we leave.

We believe in the multiplier effect of an active ever growing, network. Our clients and our associates are part of Equal Experts forever. The result is a shift from vendor to partner. We work with your current systems as we begin the platform journey. We practice a three-point approach to break through existing technical complexity and break down the organizational silos. We:

- Build, borrow, and/or buy strategies for a flexible, pluggable technical architecture
- Employ cross-functional platform thinking and market/user feedback to evolve platform strategy
- Exercise Lean/agile practices to ensure business and technology alignment

As we move along, we measure against five goals for progress:

- Deliver Faster
- Build EcoSystems
- Gain Insights
- Experiment Responsibly
- Compelling Experience

The Future Won't Wait

We believe there is a better way to help business solve problems through design thinking and technology. We bring experts from our network and clients together in a space of freedom to explore, develop genuine relationships, and build. Our specialties include digital strategy and transformation, product innovation, platform thinking, mobility, tech@scale, and data engineering with a focus on our clients' best outcomes and sustainable success.

EQUAL EXPERTS

Let's embrace the future of connectivity and technology together.

About the Author

Lisa helps organizations create meaningful, scalable differentiation at speed with business strategy, technology, and service design. She works with executive leadership to address the growing opportunities and challenges that organizations are facing today and develop ways to enable innovation in order to compete, differentiate, and sustain a thriving business. She brings a proven track record of successfully developing and implementing business, technical, and organization strategies in an eclectic mix of industries – retail (bricks and e-commerce), CPG, finance, manufacturing, hospitality, and software start up companies.

Ready to set sail?
Contact Equal Experts today.

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