



Mary Finch, Chief Human Resources Officer at DXC Technology



Strategic CHRO

Conversations with leaders who are transforming the world of HR.

"HR Is About Bringing Cross-Functional Elements Of Business Together."

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Adam Bryant fluencer

Mary Finch, chief human resources officer at **DXC Technology**, shared her key leadership lessons with me and my colleague, **David Reimer**, CEO of **The ExCo Group**.

Reimer: How did you get into HR in the first place?

Finch: My career started in consulting. I had a finance and statistics accounting background, and I was a COBOL programmer at one point in my early career. But I found myself always drawn to cross-functional activities and transformations, and the key to transformation is people. HR is about bringing cross-functional elements of business together through people, and it's turned out to be a wonderful career.

Bryant: Both in finance and statistics, the equations tend to add up. Human beings, less so. How do you think about the intersection of those two aspects of HR?

Finch: My secret sauce is that I'm a data-led and mathematical person. Where I've seen things go awry for HR executives is when their approach is too academic. You have to understand the business and be relevant in a dialogue around showing how people can be the critical path to getting something done. I want to understand how the business makes money, and how those elements come together.

It's important to show the evidence. The data part is important for me, and it gives me the

guidepost directionally, but I also make decisions based on instinct. Whenever CFOs find out I have an accounting major, they're surprised. I often don't share that up front.

Reimer: Given the ever-expanding list of responsibilities that CHROs face now, how do you juggle different priorities?

Finch: I'm a connector by nature, so I think of myself as the lead connector. If something needs to be done cross-functionally, I'll pull six people together to figure it out. That is naturally how I operate. I'm a big team sports person. I don't need my name in lights as the leader. But Covid really did test us, especially as a newer management team coming together. Covid hit just six months into my tenure here.

Bryant: Any lessons from DXC's Covid response that apply more broadly to the art of driving transformation?

Finch: Transformation is all about having a destination, a North Star, that you can measure. You have to have a plan for reaching it, but if you need to have a different path to get there, you have to be willing to call it and be agile around that. I learned that lesson multiple times.

So have a plan, but know it's going to change. And when things do change — whether it's Covid or something outside your control like a funding issue, management change, or the sale of business — you've got to hit reset. I don't know any company that's set a long-range multi-year transformation goal that didn't change along the way.

I talk about the “path to yes” all the time with our management team.

But I have seen companies that were overly determined to stick to the original plan, even in the face of change. So you need that agility and perseverance. I talk about the “path to yes” all the time with our management team. Often people will bring up reasons why something can't be done or what the barriers might be. That's when I say, “Let's step back and figure out the path to get there.”

Reimer: Most people are wired to like certainty over change, because change involves more risk. How do you get the whole organization to be open to the transformation process in the first place?

Finch: It's about painting the picture for people of what could be, and how they would have the capabilities and capacity to accomplish a big business goal with a new way of operating. It's about showing them what the return will be on their investment of effort. What are they going to get, because everything's a give and a get.

Our CEO, Mike Salvino, does a great job of making things really simple and defining what winning looks like. It's about providing very clear leadership in an accessible way for the workforce, and being consistent in our communications. People generally are curious. They want to lean in, and then I come with the people dynamic of why it's good for them. It works and it's simple.

Reimer: Given the year we just lived through, what are the X-factors that matter the most in your leaders now?

Finch: We identified several things, and they're fundamental. One is tone, and that is how you show up. Are you positive? Another is "we versus me." There is a lot of solving in silos, but decisions need to be made on what is best for the company. A third is caring. How are you getting to know and understand your leaders and their teams through this unprecedented time?

We are having all of our leaders go through and assess themselves and their teams on how our leaders are doing that. And it starts with knowing people individually. Ultimately it comes down to impact. It's about holding one another accountable to be delivering impact and being very direct about talking about that.

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You can call somebody out if you think either they're not executing or to ask if they need help. These ideas are pretty straightforward, but when you have a fairly new leadership team, the basic things are going to bind you in the beginning.

And we measure impact in terms of our customers and our people. Every leader is measured on what they're doing for customers in this month and this quarter. They are also measured on people engagement. If we lose the people, we will lose the customers, which means we lose the business.

Bryant: If you're hiring for your team, what are the key one or two questions that you ask in job interviews?

Finch: I look for people who like a challenge, and who can explain to me how they work through difficulties and tough decisions. That's where you're going to learn about their level of perseverance. How do you work through change? How do you work through difficult situations? What's the evidence? This kind of environment is not for everyone. I am all about progress over perfection. It's about perseverance and the idea that where there's a will, there's a way.

Reimer: Who were the most important influences early on that really shaped who you are today?

Finch: Probably my dad. He unexpectedly passed away when I was 25. He worked for 32 years in what's known as sales and use taxes. He hated his job but did it to provide for the family. I'm a middle child, and all three of us studied accounting. At one point, we all worked at one of the big 8 accounting firms.

My dad said that if you don't know what you're going to do, get a degree in business, particularly finance and accounting, because you'll know how companies work. That was the best advice. My dad often challenged me at a young age, and in a good way. He wanted me to be the best I could be, and he taught me about perseverance and resilience.