

THE ASTRIX DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PODCAST SERIES

Decode the Generations: Leading the Digital Evolution



Program #8: July 2022

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A conversation with Christian Del Valle, director of Astrix Costa Rican nearshoring operations

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About this Episode

Generational impact in digital transformation is a complex challenge that all companies face as they reinvent business models, leveraging technologies that streamline processes and empower personnel with knowledge and tools to do their job more effectively and innovate faster. Understanding 'inclusive digital transformation' will enable you to master digital evolution and cultivate the next wave of Gen Z Digital Leaders. ResultWorks, an Astrix Business



Christian Del Valle
Director of Astrix Costa Rican
nearshoring operations



Kevin: I want to thank everybody for joining us for today's podcast. This is the Astrix Digital Transformation podcast series in which we bring interviews with thought leaders from around the globe and throughout the life science industry. They provide expert insights and actionable advice that is designed to help you develop a successful digital-first strategy, hopefully, to help transform your business in a positive way.

My name is Kevin Miller and I'm proud to be the host for today's podcast, and I want to thank everybody for listening. So, let's get into it. Today's topic is called "Decode the Generations: Leading the Digital Evolution". We're going to have a rather unique focus today on a challenging but powerful aspect of digital transformation: generational diversity and inclusivity. Again, it's a tough one to say, generational diversity and inclusivity.

So as companies reinvent their business models, and by that we mean they could be leveraging technologies that streamline processes or empower staff with information and tools that enable them to do their job more effectively, understanding inclusive digital transformation is going to allow you to master digital evolution and cultivate the next wave of Gen Z digital leaders.

Joining us today to lend his insight into this thought-provoking and rather complex topic is Christian Del Valle.



Christian is the director of Astrix Costa Rican nearshoring operations, where he manages a multidisciplinary group of folks engaged in scientific software development as well as customized support solutions for Astrix customers.

He brings over 15 years of experience in laboratory informatics and scientific software and has played several key roles in the delivery of informatics services and solutions to many commercial as well as academic institutions.

So first and foremost, Christian, I want to welcome you to today's discussion. I'm looking forward to speaking with you. We have chatted before in some other venues, so it's great to talk to you again. And you're dialing in from one of my favorite countries in the world, which is Costa Rica. So, welcome, Christian!

Christian: Thanks a lot, Kevin! Thanks for having me today and for allowing me to share my experience. Digital transformation and generational gaps make a complex topic that could take us hours. Right?

Kevin: Definitely. And I'm sure within your center down there; you have to manage this probably on a kind of a day in and day out basis, I would expect.

Well, like I said, we're super excited to have you here today. We're excited to help you shed some light on the key principles necessary for developing a successful long-term business strategy around digital transformation. Hopefully, it includes different approaches to digital experiences across a wide span of generations that allows for value and relevancy for people who are maybe at various stages of digital maturity.

So, to help set the stage for our listeners, could you maybe start off by highlighting some of the demographics behind the generational gaps and how they may factor into developing an inclusive and sustainable digital transformation strategy?

Christian: Sure, with pleasure, Kevin. First of all, I would like to say that digital transformation has at least two different sources to drive the change. One is

productivity and compliance in an industry. And the other one is the people, both as a workforce and consumers.

So going back to the generations, the current workforce is composed of categorical generations: the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, also known as 'Millennials,' and Generation Z, or 'Zoomers.'

Each has a different perspective, roughly speaking. That includes communication, motivation, and work styles. All due to what each generation has been exposed to. Let's think about their surroundings, parents, education rates, economy, and technology.

So, if we imagine a gradient of generalized digital exposure from 0 to 90, and then we put on one end the baby boomers, these are generally less tech-savvy but range from no technology exposure to tech experts. And those could most likely be pioneers and early pillars of mature technology from the enterprises today.

Please note that when I'm saying this, I'm not characterizing this as black and white. There's no chronological age to how digital maturity we can find in a given category.





Kevin: It makes sense, though. I get it. As I'm a son of a baby boomer and part of the generation myself, that technology came about. So, I totally get that. And you're spot on. You can have folks that are 80 years old that are technology wizards. And those that are 25 and can't turn on the television. So, you're going to get both ends of the spectrum, for sure.

Christian: If we run through our imaginary gradient, then we would have next to the baby boomers, Generation X, Y, and Z, in that order, each with more exposure to digital technology than the previous one, to the point that we could almost say that digital technologies feel almost native to Generation Z.

So, with that idea there, if a given business has, let's say, four categorical generations as part of their workforce, I would assume that a company has already experienced some sort of digital transformation even if the business is unaware.

Digital evolution is not just a marketing term; it is indeed an evolution flow. If the company is unaware of it, it may experience high attrition, poor productivity, and difficulties competing in the market.

To help me explain this, I'm going to use an analogy; I hope you don't mind. I want to compare, let's say, a dead tongue as Latin with English, which is not a dead tongue. Latin is a dead tongue because no one uses it actively. It never changes. You can go read something in Latin, and that's it. It does not cascade into anything. But English is actively evolving as new generations make up new words, and those end up being incorporated into our vocabularies and dictionaries. In other words, they get accepted.

Similarly, the new generations have "digital behaviors" that eventually cascade into the industry. And if they are not accepted, they become gaps if not attended to accordingly.

The challenge here is that we're dealing with four different generations simultaneously. Not sure if I'm being clear, Kevin? If this analogy helps with this scenario?

Kevin: Yes, that makes sense.



Christian: All right, to keep describing then, I'm going to go through the generations a little bit, talk about them.

So, baby boomers, for example, generally are service-oriented, dedicated, competitive team players with good communication skills and emotional maturity. And that makes them very good mentors for younger employees. I know this by experience. But on the other hand, they dislike change. They wanted the things as they were, as they remember.

And then next to them are Generation X. They like changes and challenges that lead to professional development. They have an entrepreneurial spirit. They are more independent and prefer to work alone. But also, they value speed over quality.

The next one will be generation Y, which is described as an independent generation. They're optimistic, creative, and tech-savvy. They crave meaningful work and enjoy multitasking. They value having a work-life balance and expect to be able to work when and where they want. On the other hand, they require supervision and need to be praised for their efforts. Also, they are not very interested in teamwork. And if you see, well, if they want to work where they want, it was difficult at that time to be part of a team, be a team player.

And then the last one, Generation Z, they're ambitious, natural entrepreneurs, expert multi-taskers with different devices at the same time, driven to make an impact. They also prefer face-to-face connection with management over email. But they are not company loyalists. Also, they have over-reliance on technology to solve problems.

So, it would seem there are more differences between all of them. In some cases, they could be perfect complements. Some other cases would be difficult to put them to work.



Kevin: That makes sense. That's a great breakdown of those four for sure, and what their kind of corporate culture personas look like. That makes sense.

So let me ask you this real quick. When we talked earlier, you described yourself as having kind of one foot in science and one foot in technology. That's an interesting thing, obviously, and we deal very much in R&D, and we deal in the world of science and tech. This is an absolute prerequisite for success in today's tech-forward approach to science.

Can you tell us a little bit about your personal career journey and how you see this very rapid advancement of technology, what that's doing to inform the next generation of scientists in the workplace, and how that's impacting them?

Christian: Well, let's see, I am a member of Generation X as well. And I was lucky enough to have started my career simultaneously with one foot in Science and Technology, as you mentioned. This is no longer an advantage for me. But the experience that created is helping me concentrate on developing the next generations, which I enjoy.

And when I started, finding talent that met both natural sciences and computer sciences skill sets was difficult.

We were not many. It was good and bad. But also, the mentors I had, and my customers were all baby boomers. And they liked face-to-face interactions. And were not so mindful of the budget at that time. So this led to lots of traveling around the US and Europe for me. We were meeting at different companies in person. This opened my horizon in many ways.

For example, I had planned process tours that helped me understand my customers and the process that they were dealing with. I was able to talk to the users directly, who could explain to me their needs visually, with the tools and everything in front of me.

So, it was easier for me to create a complete picture in many cases. It allowed me to grow and have different roles through time, from being a mentee to supporting others, growing new departments, leading them and then becoming a mentor.

In my early days, technologically speaking, the products the company I was working for to "digitize labs" were trying to just mimic their customer's current workflow but in that computer. This was in order to reduce change and promote adoption of the tool.

So, scientific software tends to evolve slowly. And this is mainly the cost of keeping the system validated and

compliant with regulations and so forth. It really doesn't matter how fast the vendors produce the next version of the tool that they're selling. The customers just want full interface. It's very expensive.

But still, the ELNs and lanes today are changing. The processes don't look like manual processes anymore in computers. It's changing, really changing. The technology is streamlining the processes to improve productivity. Data science is helping as well. And advanced analytics are accelerating the need for digital transformation.

For example, I remember visiting one of the prestigious universities in the US. This was for a routine customer care meeting. And I remember a young student that was very determined to make a point. He was demanding features for ELN that were, well, not so common at that time, but those are very common now in current ELNs across the market, along with cloud and so forth.

Also, finding skill-ready recruits in science and technology are still challenging to find. But it's no longer a challenge to train them, as the technology comes with these younger generations. Many people have smartphones these days and use many apps and platforms as part of their routines. The technology

does not feel foreign to them. A workplace is no longer where people get introduced to technology anymore.

So, of course, we still need to close a few gaps. Because enterprise technology is different from consumer technology, but this is a very nice challenge to have, for example.

Kevin: For sure. Yeah, of course. And obviously, there's a prevalence of cloud technology now. And I think probably someone who's been in just the technology side for 25 years, people's understanding of more complex topics like, what is the cloud, is more prevalent today than it's been in the past because people understand what cloud computing was.

Whereas, when I first got into technology, if I had to sit down and explain to somebody what client-server computing was versus dumb terminals, that would be an hours-long discussion.

But today, you do have most people, from my kids to professionals, have a general understanding of what the cloud is because, of course, they're all using cloud technology in schools now. So, they're coming out kind of cloud-ready, if you will. What are your thoughts? I mean, what kind of impact is that having on your type of work?



Christian: We say the new generations come with a chip already in their heads. That's why we say it. At least with my daughter. But it's not like... I remember people that were technophobic, that -- I don't deal with computers, I have real issues with Excel, I cannot print, and things like that. I don't see those things anymore. It's so natural, which is making it easier. And then the cloud is making it even easier because it's connecting everybody from everywhere.

For example, we have a training program in Costa Rica. This one tries to keep an eye open, and a channel open also, between the more experienced professionals and new talent. And we're trying to communicate with them in different ways to create a generation-inclusive culture that allows us to produce new experts. We teach them new technologies, the ones that we currently use with our customers, to help them produce

and resolve problems. And for this, we use online content and train and lead sessions. We have follow-ups, discussions, and other things that allow us to achieve our goals.

So, the cloud is playing a major role here. Because we are remote. We are in Costa Rica. We can have sessions that are interactive enough with our co-workers in the US or Brazil, for example, without issues. And this is making it great.

This training program started just before the pandemic. And the pandemic didn't disrupt the schedule. It is booming, and we're trying to improve on every iteration. We're bringing and training new talent that, in return, is going to improve and create an Astrix culture that goes beyond and is impacting not only internally but our customers as well. So, I would say all these differences are cascading all the way to our customers.

Kevin: I also wonder, too, if one of the side effects of the pandemic and the prevalence of the use of tools like Zoom and others, I wonder if that forced a generation who maybe wasn't as either willing or maybe accustomed to adopting that kind of communication. The older generation, who, again, prefers face-to-face. Now, I'm a Gen X'er; I prefer shaking somebody's hand and meeting somebody face



to face. I'm from that kind of school. But I'm as comfortable using digital technology. But I wonder if the widespread use of things like Zoom over the course of the last two years has accelerated that? Or has that changed and made it easier for you to handle that at all?

Christian: Well, it's making it easier for me, definitely. I think the most impacted people are outside the business, like at home, our parents, and things like that, for example.

There were a few elder people that had an advantage before the pandemic because maybe they had relatives that had moved to other countries, and maybe connecting over Zoom or any of these technologies was the only way to be in touch.

But some others didn't know at all, and they had to learn overnight, and maybe without help, and that was not fun.

But in an enterprise scenario for Astrix was not something new because we were already remote. We were working from home. We were ahead of our time. It was one of our key things, I would say. And I think the rest of the companies now are leveraging a little bit with what we can do because of the pandemic.

But let's put it this way. With the training group that I have here, it's very interesting because I'm creating a place where they can have a culture where they can make friends, where they can collaborate, and we're not just training them to know the technology; we're training them in many different aspects. We're looking for them to be team players, to work together, to collaborate. There are things that they were not so used to. Maybe they're really happy being here in the office. So, I don't have to call them. They come here when they want. And it's very nice because there's a positive attitude. And they're like sponges that want to learn.



Kevin: That's great. And that brings up another point. I think probably one of the last points I'd like to bring up really quick, and then we could probably wrap up, would be how do we harness the power of some of this digital evolution? How do we turn that group, that Gen Z, into the next generation of leaders or digital leaders?

Christian: Well, that's the key question. I would say first, we need to stimulate the change internally. We need to have our peers help put this together.

For example, if you have baby boomers, they're great mentors. Get them involved. Make it fun so they can participate. Reinforce collaboration, and let them, between the generations Z, Y, and baby boomers, and of course, us, Generation X, help each other on technology and any other business-related topics. Then leverage the tools to effectively navigate this remote environment that we have today.

Everybody is distributed. We have people in Brazil, for example, the US and Costa Rica. And we can just push a project all the way, meeting deadlines and everything as if we were in the same place.

I think it's important to have the right tools. Not to have too many. We don't have too many. We don't want to have too many. That's a burden.

And then I would say, learn a practical playbook for applying digital transformation in a generational inclusive approach. This is important because as you move forward, you're going to learn lessons, and technology keeps changing and faster than we want.

For example, today, I may be downloading an update for one of my apps on my phone. And tomorrow, I may be downloading another one. And in a month, the application may be changed completely. The platforms are doing the same for us. I think Windows 11 came too soon, to tell the truth. But that's an example. That's how fast technology is changing.

And technologies are changing the behaviors of the new generations, and as they come into the business, then you're going to need to adopt what are the new "words" as related to the analogy I presented to integrate so that we can run smoothly. And then they can feel that they belong and they stay with us. So, make them feel that they belong, that they are part of it, and trust them. Give them responsibilities.

For example, our training program in Costa Rica makes a difference internally with our customers and allows us to make cost-effective options for our customers, making them more productive. So that's one of the things that I would share.



Kevin: Definitely. Yeah, and certainly with Astrix in particular, the work that Astrix is doing with customers goes far beyond just – help us implement this ELN or this lens and make it work to specification. That's part of it. But obviously, the other part is helping to shepherd companies through this digital transformation. And obviously, science-based organizations are probably going through this transformation not as quickly as companies in Silicon Valley did, of course, because they led the way. But it's companies like Astrix that are out there helping people understand not only the buttons that have to be pushed for digital transformation but the culture that has to change for digital transformation and helping companies understand that the culture of digital transformation has to include folks from different backgrounds and diverse backgrounds, in different places on this scale of technology adoption.

Christian, it's always great to speak to you. It's great to obviously hear the different types of things that are going on with your work in Costa Rica and Brazil, and of course, in the United States and dealing with a very diverse and dispersed workforce. Always love hearing your opinions on things, always like hearing your work on things. Happy to let you kind of close this out here with any final thoughts on that, and then we can wrap up.

Christian: Sure. Well, what I can say is that I love working at Astrix, Kevin, and the opportunity you have to develop new talent is what I enjoy every day. The trainees keep me current. I learn from them as we try to teach them. For example, I recently received feedback from one of our customers that is adopting the process created by one of our recently graduated trainees. And as advice, I would say just trust your employees by staying focused on goals, have solid communication, and be aware of your audience. Because their perspectives may be different depending on where they are seeing stuff, let them be creative. Digital evolution is a nice journey full of lessons. And we can learn from them all.

And also, be aware that Astrix can help you as well. We can provide you with highly capable personnel to help you in this journey, and we can help you increase your organizational efficiency, improve quality, and facilitate regulatory compliance as well.

Kevin: Great. Well, I really appreciate that. And, of course, for everybody that's listening to the podcast, we'd like to extend a thank you to Christian for joining us today and giving us his insights on it.

The podcast series is about digital transformation. It's predominantly focused on the life science sector, and we



talk about different topics on a week-in and week-out basis. So, this was a really interesting one where we talk about how do we accommodate and work with different generations of folks who are on different levels of the technology adoption continuum if you will. Interesting topic, for sure. We hope you enjoyed the discussion.

Keep an eye out for our upcoming podcasts. We make them available pretty frequently on the website, and we typically send out some notes to folks who are following them to let you know that there are new ones available. They are available on all the major platforms, including Spotify, Apple, etc.

That's going to go ahead and wrap us up for today's digital transformation podcast from Astrix. I want to again thank everybody for downloading and listening in. We appreciate it, and stay tuned for the upcoming sessions.



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