Adopting a Culture of Speed
Accelerating in a world that won’t wait

NOVEMBER 2020
Executive summary

So much has changed since the global pandemic began in early 2020. The world has moved to a virtual paradigm, and enterprises are adapting to new ways of reaching out to customers and employees alike. But most importantly, institutions and businesses around the world are developing an insatiable need for speed. They can no longer afford to wait to implement newer technologies and risk being left behind by the competition.

As the pandemic continues to run its course globally, the need for faster everything is critical. Technology heightens our expectations, and then we use it to surpass those expectations again and again. In a race to remain relevant in this repeating cycle of acceleration, companies are under constant pressure to get to market faster with products and services that bring speed and personalized experiences to their customers. Slow has become another word for obsolete.

While strategies to speed up will be unique to every organization, many advancements in technology can be leveraged to begin to build and flex your organization’s fast-twitch muscles.

Read on to learn more about the drivers of this culture of speed, and how organizations need to make a big pivot and adopt this culture to survive and thrive in a continuously changing marketplace.

How to keep up — and pull ahead

• Adopt a technology-forward mindset
• Maximize investments in automation
• Hyper-personalize customer experiences
• Digitally transform the workplace
• Leverage predictive analytics
• Innovate to new business models
• Secure assets with AI and machine learning

Table of contents

03 What’s the rush?
04 Speed has changed the name of the game
09 Speed bumps in the way of acceleration
11 Culture of speed creates a new, better way of life
12 About the author
13 Sources
As lockdowns in countries around the world began in early 2020, nearly every aspect of life changed in a matter of days.

What emerged as critical during the early days of lockdown were high-speed wireless internet and smartphones, providing instant access to information about the pandemic. Entertainment, online shopping and groceries were other high-speed necessities — along with work applications for many — all eliminating the need to leave the house. Social media use also increased with users checking in on a worldwide network of friends, family and followers in real time to see how they were managing in the months without much in-person interaction, tracking COVID-19 outbreaks in their area, and following the latest news and health and safety recommendations about the pandemic.

Lockdowns forced enterprises to shift into online-only survival mode, existing technology had to be leveraged quickly and seamlessly, even as they juggled disrupted supply chains. Businesses had to employ every tool at their disposal — automation, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, the internet of things (IoT) — to move employees, almost overnight, to remote work while also extending them the same user-friendly, digitally enabled capabilities they had come to enjoy in their personal lives.

Cut to a few months into the pandemic, and enterprises had to continue to find ways to critically unite the digital and physical worlds better and faster. The “appification” of services used technology to provide customers with ultra-convenient access to everything from food delivery and curbside grocery services to virtual dating services. With so much power at their fingertips, it’s little wonder that today’s consumers and business people have the power and flexibility to work, shop and be entertained anytime, anywhere. And thanks to the oceans of data fed by billions of connected devices, companies are using big data analytics, AI and more to better understand their customers and serve them even faster than before.

A cycle of acceleration

The last decade of transformative technological advancement, led by a handful of groundbreaking companies, has both challenged and inspired countless other organizations. Amazing achievements that bring speed and convenience to customers have repeatedly raised the bar on what qualifies as fast. Competitors have been forced to follow suit, making big bets on innovation to give them an edge in the pursuit of operational agility and customer loyalty, and engaging in a never-ending game of one-upmanship. And this trend will continue as the world reinvents itself post-pandemic.

The abundance of conveniences helps people do everything faster, and online business seems to be busier than ever — because the bar has been raised for the enterprise, as well. Given the power of constant connectivity and simple tools for every job, employers, employees, coworkers, friends and family all expect more. Busy people will always put a premium on solutions that save time, so the demand for speed will only grow as the cycle continues.
Speed has changed the name of the game

When it comes to technology, speed is a relative term. Every second counts, and yesterday’s fast is today’s too slow. Next year’s hottest new service could find itself outpaced by a competitor’s offering the year after that. The culture of speed has changed the dynamics of the marketplace. And it’s altering the way businesses compete to win. Some of the time-honored rules of engagement have been significantly revised, or even turned upside down.

The pandemic has eliminated the luxury of companies taking their time to develop products slowly and methodically. An article by McKinsey shares that companies “had to increase the speed of decision making, while improving productivity, using technology and data in new ways, and accelerating the scope and scale of innovation.” Companies have to pivot quickly to stay afloat. The McKinsey article further cites how “a US-based retailer launched curbside delivery in two days versus the previously-planned 18 months” and how “an engineering company designed and manufactured ventilators within a week.”

In many industries, cloud and as-a-service technologies have torn down barriers to market entry, allowing nimble and aggressive competitors to scale quickly and challenge incumbent leaders. Customers have myriad choices for the products and services they use. If they can’t find what they want on one website, they move quickly to another. Additionally, they’re presented with thousands of marketing messages every day that make them keenly aware of the latest and greatest. When it comes to convenient customer experiences, it’s important to note that the global cart abandonment rate for online shopping is over 75% and that 27% of customers leave because the checkout process is too complicated.

Product quality still matters, of course, and brand loyalty may still exist, but companies can no longer bank on either. What matters more is being fast to market (if not first) and constantly innovating to stay a step ahead of (or at least in line with) competitors. The companies that can keep pace with their customers’ increasing demand for speed — in a world that’s constantly evolving — will win the day.

How to keep up and pull ahead

While strategies to speed up will be unique to every organization, technology leaders at NTT DATA have compiled recommendations to help organizations begin to build and flex their fast-twitch muscles. These seven areas of opportunity include adopting a technology-forward mindset, maximizing investments in automation, hyper-personalizing customer experiences, digitally transforming the workplace, leveraging predictive analytics, innovating to new business models, and securing assets with AI and machine learning.

By adopting a proactive and aggressive approach in several (or all) of these areas, businesses can optimize critical processes, improve their speed to market, empower their employees, delight their customers, and open new doors to continued growth and prosperity.
Adopt a technology-forward mindset

AI is already beginning to outperform humans in some tasks. And the next 10 years could bring working quantum computers that enable exponential jumps in computing power. Tomorrow's most successful companies will be led by executives who understand the implications of rapid technology development in areas like AI and quantum computing. Those executives already recognize the urgency to evolve technologically and can engage the entire organization in that process.

Forward-thinking organizations like INDYCAR put technology at the forefront. To keep its 70 million global fans engaged, INDYCAR worked with NTT DATA to develop the INDYCAR Mobile App. The app’s enhanced features enrich the spectator experience, whether attending a race in person or watching remotely. It includes a two-screen viewing experience with video-on-demand from featured drivers’ in-car cameras. And it allows fans to listen in real time as spotters and strategists talk to their drivers.

The INDYCAR Mobile App has proven itself a winner, able to deliver real-time race-day data to as many as 100,000 concurrent app users. By the end of the 2019 racing season, usage had gone up 36% over the prior year, with user sessions averaging three minutes longer. All this helps INDYCAR expand its fan base to younger fans, who expect to be connected wherever they are, and extend the race community.

Tomorrow’s industry leaders will be companies that embrace the potential to improve every part of the business through powerful technologies.

Maximize investments in automation

Companies worldwide are making major system upgrades in the name of digital transformation. Yet, in many cases, they’re not taking full advantage of the automation products they purchase or already own. In a 2020 study by Oxford Economics and NTT DATA, two-thirds of executives and over half of employees expected supply chain complexity to have a negative impact on operations over the next three years. And the systematic failure of most manufacturers during the COVID-19 crisis underscored this sentiment.

This could be due to a variety of reasons, including supply chain disruptions and complications, resistance to change, limited capacity to implement the needed organizational and process improvements, and lack of support for integrations across multiple parts of the organization. Or it could be as simple as not understanding a tool’s full capabilities. In all industries, there’s a clear opportunity for companies to improve efficiencies simply by gaining a more complete understanding of how to make the most of their equipment and software.

When organizations do fully realize the investments they’re making in automation, game-changing developments often follow. Rocket Mortgage, for instance, uses AI and robotic process automation (RPA) to mine for data and fast-forward the loan qualification process, giving customers a mortgage approval in mere minutes. By making speed its brand, the company has become one of the top mortgage lenders in the country in only a few years of existence.

One of our clients, a major healthcare insurance provider, uses RPA to enable rapid claims decisions. Although this task is central to any insurer’s operation, the work is repetitive and often mundane for employees. By automating the parts of the job that don’t require human skills, the insurer is able to cut processing costs, serve customers faster and make better use of employees’ time.

The 2020 Oxford Economics and NTT DATA study also indicates that, “Moving quickly has become even more important, as disruptive competition materializes rapidly and innovative responses to COVID-19 could mean the
difference between success and failure.” Further, 47% of executives in the study believe failing to implement AI in some way will cause them to lose customers to competitors, and 44% think the bottom line will suffer. And yet the study concludes that “organizations could be moving faster to adapt. Less than one-third of executives and employees describe the pace of technology change, process change or executive decision-making at their company as fast.”

Despite the implication that automation comes at the expense of human employees, the World Economic Forum estimates that automation will create 58 million net new jobs by 2022. While some job losses are inevitable, the technology can also be used to elevate the performance of existing employees and free them to focus on higher value work.

**Hyper-personalize customer experiences**

In the digital era, customer preferences are tracked and cataloged on a daily basis, and then used to continuously customize their next interaction and influence their behavior. In the wake of the pandemic, companies will need to deliver hyper-personalization at scale; it will be critical for engaging and retaining customers. A 2020 study by NTT DATA and Longitude Research cites customer experience as the biggest beneficiary of data use, with 48% of respondents saying they’re very effective at using data to improve customer experience.

The convergence of data analytics, AI and machine learning allows companies to offer a seemingly bespoke experience to individual customers and employees alike, anticipating their needs and interests and presenting just the right solution. This is an important part of the speed equation, as it makes the decision-making and purchasing processes faster and easier. A seamless, fast and cloud-enabled shopping process has helped many big box retailers, like Target and Walmart, thrive in the first half of 2020. Online shopping, combined with fast delivery or curbside pickup, caters to the needs of impatient consumers.

This type of thinking applies not just in retail environments, and not just online, but in thousands of consumer-oriented and business-to-business use cases across industries. For example, Hilton Hotels merged its digital presence with brick-and-mortar hospitality to create an unparalleled customer experience. With the Hilton Honors app, guests can not only book online, they can choose the exact room they want, adjust the thermostat, preorder a snack and request extra pillows. When they arrive, they can breeze right past the reception desk, unlock their room with their phone and find everything waiting as ordered. And in the wake of the pandemic, the hospitality industry is introducing a host of measures such as social distancing, enhanced cleaning and disinfecting, and, in Hilton’s case, using equipment with electrostatic sprayers and testing ultraviolet lights in its rooms.

In the future, fast, easy and personalized service won’t be considered novel or luxurious; it will be the minimum acceptable standard.

**Digitally transform the workplace**

The workplace literally moved from the office to the home overnight, and companies have scrambled to ensure secure, productive and effective working solutions for their employees. NTT DATA transitioned more than 40,000 team members in 40 countries to work from home with cloud-powered workplace solutions in a matter of weeks. And because most employees today are already heavy users of technology in their personal lives, they have come to expect the automated processes and effortless user experiences provided by their favorite websites, apps and streaming services. A new paper from NTT DATA explains that “The silver lining in the COVID-19 cloud is that it has forced companies to rethink their workplace technology strategies, revealing opportunities to make improvements with lasting benefits to the organization and its employees.”
As the economy rebounds and business settles into new rhythms, companies with progressive digital workplaces will hold a distinct advantage over those who only seek a return to their old ways. The IT organization is a great place to start. Multiple NTT DATA clients have implemented self-service tools and AI-assisted chat to handle common employee requests. They also use AI and data analytics to predict and prevent productivity-killing outages.

Of course, the opportunities to digitally transform the workplace don’t stop with IT; they extend throughout the organization. NTT DATA has helped companies integrate technology to better support their business and their customers. One client in the food industry adopted blockchain to track products through the supply chain and isolate contamination issues in minutes. Prior to the pandemic, another client, a medical supply distributor, moved its customer relationship management (CRM) system to the cloud to support its salespeople in an aggressive expansion into new geographies.

In every instance, speed is the common denominator. And the investment in workplace technologies that employees want and need delivers an undeniable return. A study from NTT DATA reports more than 70% of companies that prioritize employee feedback, employee upskilling and organizational change management are beginning to see the benefits, including greater productivity, improved employee retention and enhanced revenue.

Leverage predictive analytics

Whether through ecommerce applications, social media monitoring or IoT sensors, the connected world generates an unfathomable amount of data. Organizations of all types are analyzing that information to gain unprecedented insights into how to operate more efficiently, meet customer needs and capitalize on emerging opportunities. Consequently, competing in the culture of speed requires more than just being fast. In a way, companies need to be able to predict the future.

Thanks to the convergence of big data, statistical modeling, AI and machine learning, organizations are better equipped than ever to gain an edge through predictive analytics. Financial services companies use it to forecast market trends. Energy companies can predict spikes in electricity demand. Retailers can better understand what incentives will spark more sales. The City of Las Vegas, Nevada, relies on predictive analytics not for commercial gain but to improve the lives and safety of its citizens and visitors. IoT-enabled cameras and sensors installed throughout the city provide real-time feedback on traffic conditions, pedestrian activity, parking, air quality and more. The city parses the wealth of data it receives to make informed decisions and plan incremental improvements. Like the Smart Cities platform, NTT DATA is now helping businesses in any sector glean critical workspace insights, such as crowd analytics, monitoring spaces for accuracy, overcrowding and social distancing and remote health monitoring.

Innovate to new business models

In the culture of speed, disruption isn’t a possibility; it’s a certainty. Companies must find ways to invest in growth while remaining flexible enough to pivot when the industry changes course. Digital transformation can help even the most traditional companies find new ways to grow. It reveals opportunities to invent new business models, open new revenue streams and tackle the threat of disruption head-on.

The benefits of digital stores extend beyond inventory and convenience.

Innovating to new business models is a critical step in staying ahead of the competition. NTT DATA works with clients in the retail industry to create more convenient and enjoyable shopping experiences for customers. Among the leading-edge technology retailers may be able to leverage in the future is contact-free shopping via cashless digital stores. Our Catch&Go™ solution, piloted early in 2020 in Japan, features facial recognition for contactless customer payments and dynamic pricing linked to a store’s inventory to enable real-time price changes as stock and demand changes – perfect in a post-pandemic scenario. The benefits of digital stores extend beyond inventory and convenience. A cashless-store model allows companies to extend into...
new markets faster, reduce overhead costs for hiring and labor, and serve more customers at a time. The possibilities to rethink the status quo are as diverse as the business landscape itself. Today’s technology can make seemingly outlandish ideas come to life. It’s how some grocery stores are using driverless vehicles to make home deliveries. Several restaurant chains now offer a fully automated dining experience with no human interaction. Some furniture retailers let customers use virtual reality to see what a new couch would look like in their living room. Such bold and innovative concepts will surface even more frequently as technology expands.

Secure assets with AI and machine learning

While organizations are under pressure to accelerate operations and get to market quickly, they can’t afford to sacrifice security in the name of speed. Threats of identity theft, financial fraud and other cybercrimes are at an all-time high, and nothing will send customers fleeing to a competitor faster than a data breach. The good news is that cutting-edge technology helps strengthen security measures without impeding the customer experience. For example, AI and machine learning are being used to look for holes in network defenses, covering ground that would require a host of human cybersecurity experts. The technology can monitor, detect and thwart hacking attempts, preventing attacks without human involvement. In that way, security can be viewed as a tailwind, rather than a necessary obstruction.

From the consumer perspective, Apple’s new Apple Card may be a sign of how high security can coexist with a quick and convenient customer experience. The physical credit card, which has no numbers on it, is linked to the user’s iPhone and generates a unique code with every transaction, overcoming common security threats that are problematic for bank-issued cards. Whether or not the card gains traction, this is yet another sign of how technology will continue to disrupt traditional industries with faster, easier, better solutions. (This idea is discussed further in NTT DATA’s research on the financial services and insurance industries, highlighted in “Digital to the Core.”14)
Speed bumps in the way of acceleration

There are plenty more examples of companies large and small doing great work with technology and pushing the pace of innovation. But there also are many businesses trailing behind, struggling to adapt to the pace of change. This is especially true of non-digital natives, long-established companies born of the analog age and now faced with an urgent need to reinvent themselves.

The pandemic has led many executives to jokingly question, "Who led digital transformation in your company: the CEO, the CTO or COVID-19?" The answer, ironic or not, no longer matters. It's happening. And Statista reports that worldwide spending on digital transformation technologies and services is expected to increase by 10.4% in 2020, to US$1.3 trillion, despite the challenges the pandemic presents.15

As the business world moves quickly to a digital future, what's keeping some companies from achieving change, or even prioritizing it? Our experts have outlined several constraints that might be holding companies back. They amount to a combination of technical and process issues.

Outdated systems

On the technical side, legacy systems adopted years ago can be a major impediment to speed. Legacy CRM or enterprise resource planning systems, for example, that weren't designed for the business realities of today, are often incompatible with newer software, lacking in modern capabilities and/or rooted in expensive on-premises hardware. They're often wrapped around outmoded business processes that stifle innovation and evolution. This may be most prevalent in the public sector. In April 2020, New Jersey's outdated unemployment system was overwhelmed by a 1,600% increase in unemployment claims, which its legacy technology couldn't handle.16

Legacy systems that once represented a major investment in state-of-the-art technology are now a source of technical debt from which it's difficult to break free. That's not to say there's no escaping legacy systems, but it will take a methodical approach to modernize the enterprise. Undertaking a thorough portfolio rationalization process can help organizations identify which applications are in place, and how they map to current and future business priorities.

For example, when Jackson National Life Insurance enlisted the help of NTT DATA, over 40 of its commonly used applications were more than a decade old, written in code no longer supported and lacking proper documentation. We helped the insurer update its applications with more modern functionality and user interfaces, lowering maintenance costs and enabling users to be more efficient, productive and responsive.17

Overlooking automation

It's a mistake for any organization to spend time and resources on activities that could be automated. Whether it's order management for a manufacturing company or student administration for a university, RPA can get it done faster and with fewer errors. By leveraging automation, organizations can direct more resources to high-value activities such as winning new business, developing new products and delivering an excellent customer experience.

For NTT DATA client Masergy, automation was the key to optimizing the global technology company's financial processes. By upgrading to the Oracle Fusion Cloud

Never has the ability to embrace and harness change been more important.
Platform, it took advantage of new functionality to automate interfaces and streamline workflows, which helped the company pay invoices and process employee expense reports faster, among other improvements.18

Data in silos

Big data is only getting bigger as the pace of data generation increases exponentially. Despite its powerful potential, many companies struggle to take full advantage of the data at their fingertips. It could be because the data is gathered by one particular department but not made available to the larger organization. Or the data may be trapped inside a legacy system that’s incompatible with newer technologies. In either case, breaking down those barriers will be an important step toward a data-driven future. In a recent study by NTT DATA and Longitude, data silos are the top challenge for all organizations when trying to derive value from data.6

Resistance to change

In the same data study, culture and leadership emerged as strong barriers, too. On the human side, some companies are simply reluctant to change, for a variety of reasons. In some cases, long-entrenched leadership fails to recognize the urgency of the situation. Their “we’ve always done it this way” mindset stands in the way of more ambitious initiatives to accelerate business performance. Other decision-makers understand the need but are hesitant to rock the boat. Transformation often comes with growing pains, and leaders may fear the possibility of breaking something they can’t fix. There are a lot of valid business reasons for transformation — a disruptive competitor, a financial crisis or a new trend — but a global pandemic is perhaps one of the most compelling. There’s no denying the need to transform during a time of accelerated change. Never has the ability to embrace and harness change been more important.

Technological transformation may necessitate organizational changes, as well, such as staff reductions, massive reskilling or other complexities many executives would rather avoid. However, these challenges can be better managed by making employee experience a key focus area for major technology initiatives. An NTT DATA study on this topic found organizations that conduct extensive due diligence about the needs of their workforce and build their strategy around those findings experience a faster and smoother digital transformation.19

Thinking too big

The business world is constantly abuzz with news of the latest game-changing digital disruption. It’s easy for executives to feel overwhelmed by the daunting pressure to deliver their company’s own amazing breakthrough.

But it’s important to remember that technological progress doesn’t have to be disruptive. Rather than searching for a technological holy grail — and getting nowhere — most organizations are better served doing the step-by-step work of digital transformation (implementing automation and analytics, improving the user experience) that will amount to a net gain.

It’s also worth noting that sometimes even companies with a realistic plan for digital transformation simply lack the capacity to do it successfully. Achieving widespread adoption of new technologies and reimagining business processes takes not only willpower but the technical skills and change management expertise to make it a reality. If those capabilities don’t exist in-house, it may be time to consider a third-party partner with appropriate expertise.
Culture of speed creates a new, better way of life

Languages, customs and ideologies vary, but the culture of speed is universal. Every developed nation, its businesses and its people are engaged in the race against time. Our global society’s obsession with speed has become a long-term, if not permanent, trend.

For companies to claim leadership in this new reality, striving for digital transformation is an essential part of the process. But organizational change is equally important. Beyond deploying new technologies to accelerate the business, companies must also adopt a mindset of speed within every department at every level. It begins when top executives recognize and accept the inevitability of change, and visibly champion new ways to drive efficiency and delight their customers.

For the foreseeable future, transformation can no longer be viewed as a finite initiative to be completed. Competing in the culture of speed is not a single sprint to the finish line. It’s a new way of life for every business, its employees and the customers it serves.

Places to find more speed

Whether the goal is to streamline internal operations or bring solutions to customers fast, look to the following five areas for potential improvements:

**Digital operations**
To compete at high speed, companies have to modernize their workplaces to optimize operations and deliver an unfettered employee experience. From upgrading enterprise applications to automating routine business processes, opportunities to work faster are everywhere.

**Cloud**
Taking advantage of infrastructure, storage and/or applications as a service, companies can scale up quickly to meet growing demand, test new offerings or expand geographically, with reduced risk thanks to variable costs.

**Data intelligence and automation**
Intelligence is a foundational element of speed, because knowing what’s needed and where is half the battle. Through IoT solutions, data analysis, AI and machine learning, companies can efficiently gather and process critical data to remove internal friction and serve customers faster.

**Security**
Security should be the common thread that runs through every technology initiative. But it doesn’t have to be an impediment to speed. Advanced security technologies and techniques can automate monitoring and defenses, simplify authentication and remove human errors that lead to breaches.

**Customer experience**
Today’s customers expect quick and easy access to everything they need. That’s why every organization should be using social media analytics, design thinking and digital marketing to understand customer needs and deliver technology-driven experiences to make their lives easier.
About the author

Eric Clark, Chief Digital Officer, NTT DATA Services

Eric Clark focuses on advancing digital-first and cloud-first agendas for NTT DATA Services and our clients. As a key contributor and spokesperson for NTT DATA Services, he is often called upon to deliver his insights to clients, media and analysts on topics such as the development and execution of strategy and operations for digital transformation, cloud, mobility, internet of things and security. Eric has more than 25 years of experience in the IT industry. Prior to joining NTT DATA Services, he held global senior leadership positions with ServiceNow, Dell, Hewlett Packard Enterprise Services, Arthur Andersen Business Consulting, Ernst & Young and Bank of America. Eric is a board member for the DFW World Affairs Council and has served on the Advisory Board for SMU Digital Accelerator. He holds a master’s degree and a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration from the McCombs School of Business, The University of Texas at Austin.

Let’s get started

See what NTT DATA can do for you.

Visit us at nttdataservices.com for the latest insights and our complete portfolio.
Sources


