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THE CIO TABLE

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Leaders Transforming Corporate Finance

We choose our cover stars for one reason: a reader in a similar seat could learn something from them. Lamont Johnson, Google, is a clear case.

Innovation gets the headlines; finance decides what gets built. Lamont Johnson on giving finance a real seat at the table at Google, and on the cultural change behind an AI transformation.

Our cover story follows Lamont through the choices that shaped the work, from the early years to the decisions being made now, and asks what other leaders can take from them.

Also in this edition: Finance can only move as fast as its data. AI adoption in finance teams has levelled off at just under six in ten, and most users report modest early gains. The constraint is less the technology than the data definitions finance and IT have never quite agreed.

Then: The first 100 days of a new CIO. Listen, decide, show. Whom to meet in the first fortnight, the three conversations that matter most, what not to announce early, and what to tell the board at day 100.

And: Layne Lewis: Engineering a better way to work. She spent nine years as a systems engineer supporting NASA. Then Layne Lewis took on a different mission: designing a company where serious engineering and a full life share the same blueprint.

Read it with a pencil in hand. We hope at least one idea makes it back to your own table. ■

The Editors



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COVER STORY

LAMONT JOHNSON

The architect of strategic financial transformation

Innovation may capture the headlines, but finance decides which dreams are built and which remain ideas on a whiteboard. Beneath every line of code and every prototype lies a question that only finance can answer: what is the worth of imagination? In the age of intelligent systems and exponential computing, finance has become something more than arithmetic; it is judgment, foresight, and courage disguised as numbers.

For Lamont Johnson, it is also about people. He believes that financial leadership begins with culture, creating trust, empowerment, and shared purpose that allow innovation to thrive. Numbers tell the story, but people give it meaning.

ALIGNING FINANCE WITH INNOVATION AT GOOGLE

Lamont views leadership as the art of inclusion; ensuring that finance is not just at the table, but valued at the table. His approach begins with trust, empathy, and consistent communication. He often says that strategy may start with numbers, but it scales through relationships.

By creating psychological safety and encouraging open dialogue, Lamont turned finance from a compliance function into a trusted partner for innovation.

First, cultivating trust and relationships. Lamont and his team invest heavily in establishing the finance organization as a credible and proactive partners with their Engineering and Product counterparts. This strong foundation of trust allows finance to participate not just at the review stage but

immediately following the ideation phase. The goal is to shift from being a rubber stamp approving projects after the fact to becoming an active participant in business design, helping to shape the financial viability of a product or service before significant capital is committed.

The second step is agile capital allocation. Given that strategy can evolve daily, weekly, and yearly in this environment, Lamont ensures that the financial structure remains equally agile. His team utilizes a real options approach to capital expenditure, allocating initial, smaller pools of funds to high-potential, innovative projects. This allows them to test and learn rapidly, failing fast on non-viable ideas and doubling down strategically on breakthroughs. It ensures that capital deployment is aligned with the company's broader, often shifting, innovation priorities.

REDEFINING FINANCE THROUGH AI TRANSFORMATION

Leading through transformation required more than a technological shift, it demanded a cultural one. Lamont prioritized transparency and inclusion at every step, turning potential resistance into shared ownership. He regularly held cross-functional "open office hours," allowing teams to voice concerns, challenge assumptions, and see how AI-enabled processes would empower rather than replace them.

He embraced a two-fold vision for the initiative. The first was strategic cost avoidance and unlocking efficiency. Lamont framed this as a necessity to free up future capacity and unlock institutional efficiencies that would pay for the next wave of innovation rather than simply cutting costs. By leveraging AI across core financial processes, from anomaly detection in spending to predictive modeling in resource utilization, his team designed a system that optimized how resources flowed across the business and decreased future operating costs.

The second core element was establishing finance as a strategic influencer. Success required broad organizational buy-in, so Lamont worked across multiple business lines to build consensus through a highly transparent approach that connected every step of the ideation and implementation back to the company's long-term strategic mission. This collaborative, results-oriented execution fundamentally reshaped financial operations into a proactive, efficiency-driving force, earning the finance organization a massive win in the trust column with senior executives and stakeholders across Google.

BALANCING TECHNOLOGY ADOPTION WITH FINANCIAL DISCIPLINE

Lamont fosters technology adoption by embedding financial discipline directly into the decision-making process. He remains fully aware that the ultimate solution must justify the investment, which means being careful to define the business problem first, whether it is a bottleneck, a risk exposure, or a lack of real-time insight, before identifying the appropriate technological solution.

He steers his teams with a clear focus on the Total Value Creation metric, moving beyond a simple accounting ROI. Lamont mandates that every significant technology investment be evaluated for the full spectrum of benefits it delivers, including financial returns, time saved for teams to execute higher-value strategic work, and the improvement in predictive accuracy and efficiency. If the investment is complex, time-consuming, and expensive, the return must be commensurately transformative. This ensures that every technological adoption directly reinforces sound financial fundamentals by either reducing risk, driving cost optimization, or improving the speed and accuracy of strategic decision-making. For Lamont, technology is used to amplify financial discipline, not complicate it.

DRIVING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH CULTURE AND STRUCTURE

The forty percent improvement in productivity under Lamont's leadership was catalyzed by a deep, evidence-based focus on eliminating organizational drag. Structurally, he launched a comprehensive, bottom-up efficiency initiative by surveying his teams and conducting deep-dive workshops to precisely map and understand the primary time blockers related to manual and non-value-add tasks. This intelligence allowed him to allocate resources not to new projects, but to aggressive process automation and tooling investments targeted specifically at those bottlenecks.

Culturally, Lamont drove a shift from a culture of effort to a culture of impact. He empowered teams to rigorously challenge legacy processes, rewarding individuals who drove successful automation and systemic simplification. This transformation accelerated the efficiency journey and helped create an environment where productivity was directly tied to measurable business outcomes.

ANTICIPATING FINANCIAL TRENDS IN EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

Lamont's anticipation model is built on twin pillars: real-time data visibility and long-term scenario mapping. He enhanced agility by relying heavily on the Central Analytics team to develop internal, dynamic dashboards. These tools provide instantaneous, granular insight into investment velocity and return across the emerging technology portfolio, allowing rapid pivots in capital allocation decisions.

For foresight, Lamont's long-term strategic planning relies on comprehensive scenario modeling.

Instead of predicting a single future, he and his team model three to five plausible industry and geopolitical outcomes such as hyper-regulation or AI commoditization, and stress-test the balance sheet, R&D commitments, and foundational investments against each. This forward-looking approach ensures that investments remain resilient and strategically aligned with enduring value creation.

TURNING DATA INTO STRATEGIC ACTION

For Lamont, the translation challenge of massive datasets is fundamentally one of context, rigor, and disciplined metric definition. At the operational level, he focuses on in-line analytics, embedding real-time, granular data directly into the workflow of managers. This is achieved through the disciplined use of Key Performance Indicators and predictive metrics that move the team beyond descriptive reporting, answering not just what happened, but forecasting the immediate impact of resource choices.

At the executive level, Lamont's process emphasizes strategic synthesis. He focuses on transforming those granular KPIs into predictive insights that directly inform capital deployment, risk exposure, and talent strategy. These insights are packaged into a clear narrative that links operational performance to strategic priorities, influencing both tactical and executive decisions.

REIMAGINING THE FINANCE SKILLSET FOR THE AI ERA

Lamont believes that the core imperative for the modern finance professional is to evolve from being a data reporter to becoming an intelligent process architect. The new skill set revolves around three critical areas.

The first is process automation design, understanding how to leverage low code or no code platforms and robotic process automation to drive systemic efficiency, freeing analysts from manual work. The second is advanced insight generation, shifting analytical focus toward developing and utilizing data models to generate improved, predictive insights into organizational performance, cost drivers, and market opportunities. The third is holistic risk management, developing the acumen to manage a broader spectrum of risks including those arising from data governance, algorithmic bias, and cyber threats, and integrating them into core financial planning.

Crucially, Lamont pairs this technical mastery with a cross-functional product mindset that allows finance to proactively co-create value alongside Engineering and Product teams.

STORYTELLING AS A STRATEGIC FINANCIAL TOOL

To Lamont, storytelling is leadership in action, it aligns teams, bridges silos, and inspires belief. Whether he's presenting to engineers or executives, his goal is not just to inform but to unite people behind a common mission. His narratives turn data into direction, and direction into shared conviction.

He achieves this through three guiding principles. The first is simplifying impact, not reality. Lamont distills the most complex decisions into clear stories about user benefit or mission alignment. For instance, a multi-year investment plan is not just a spreadsheet but a story about securing the future of the open web. The second principle is creating emotional resonance. The story must connect the dry numbers to the human element, ensuring that cross-functional teams from product managers to engineers understand how their daily work directly fuels the financial strategy. The third principle is driving alignment. By grounding every financial strategy in a shared purpose, Lamont ensures all teams are aligned on the "why" behind resource constraints and investment priorities, making it easier to execute complex, global initiatives.

WHERE REAL OPTIONS THINKING COMES FROM

The real options approach to capital described in this story has a long academic history. The MIT economist Stewart Myers is credited with coining the term "real option". His paper Determinants of Corporate Borrowing, published in the Journal

At a glance

NAME	ROLE	ORGANISATION
Lamont Johnson	Leader	Google

of Financial Economics in November 1977, treated a company's growth opportunities as options whose value depends on investment decisions it has yet to make.

Myers drew a financing lesson from the idea. A company whose value rests mainly on growth opportunities can support less borrowing than one whose value sits in assets already in place, because risky debt can deter shareholders from making the later investments that give those options their worth.

The practical idea is straightforward. A large project is split into stages, and a small first commitment buys the right, but not the obligation, to invest more once results are in. Funding in stages lets a finance team stop a weak idea early and put more money behind a strong one, which is the test-and-learn pattern Lamont applies to innovation spending.

HOW FAR AI HAS REACHED INTO FINANCE

Gartner's surveys show how quickly finance functions have taken up AI. In a 2024 survey of 121 finance leaders, 58% said their function was using AI, up from 37% a year earlier. The most common uses were intelligent process automation (44%), anomaly and error detection (39%) and analytics (28%).

Adoption then levelled off. Gartner's 2025 survey of 183 chief financial officers and senior finance leaders found 59% using AI, and 91% of respondents said the impact so far had been low or moderate. The biggest obstacles they reported were data literacy and technical skills, and the quality and availability of data.

The uses had also shifted. In 2025 the most common were knowledge management (49%), accounts payable automation (37%) and error and anomaly detection (34%). A quarter of respondents said they were unsure how to move from planning to a pilot, and 16% had no AI projects planned for the coming year.

The obstacles Gartner identified sit close to the skill set Lamont describes for the AI era, from automation design to data models and data governance. Gartner also found that teams further along in adoption were more than twice as likely to report moderate impact and nearly three times as likely to report high impact.

THE SCALE OF CAPITAL AT STAKE IN BIG TECH

Capital allocation at the largest technology companies now involves very large sums. Alphabet, Google's parent company, spent $91.4 billion on capital expenditure in 2025, according to chief financial officer Anat Ashkenazi on the company's fourth-quarter earnings call.

For 2026 Alphabet guided to between $175 billion and $185 billion. On the third-quarter call in October 2025, Ashkenazi said roughly 60% of that quarter's capital spending went on servers and 40% on data centres and networking equipment.

Sums of this size explain why the disciplines described in this story matter. Scenario planning, staged commitments and close tracking of returns are how finance teams keep investment programmes of this scale tied to evidence rather than momentum.

DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF FINANCE LEADERSHIP

For Lamont, leadership in the modern era is about designing systems that empower people as much as they optimize performance. He sees finance leaders as culture builders, custodians of trust who can guide organizations through uncertainty with empathy and vision.

"Sustainability, culture, and innovation are not optional checkboxes," he says. "They are the coordinates that guide every financial decision we make."

Lamont believes that the modern finance leader is uniquely positioned at the intersection of data, capital allocation, and risk management. This position provides the leverage to proactively embed innovation metrics into R&D funding, champion ethical and equitable capital deployment to reinforce a desired culture, and ensure that sustainability targets are financially underwritten, making them non-negotiable strategic pillars. For him, finance is no longer just about reporting the future; it is about funding and designing it. ■



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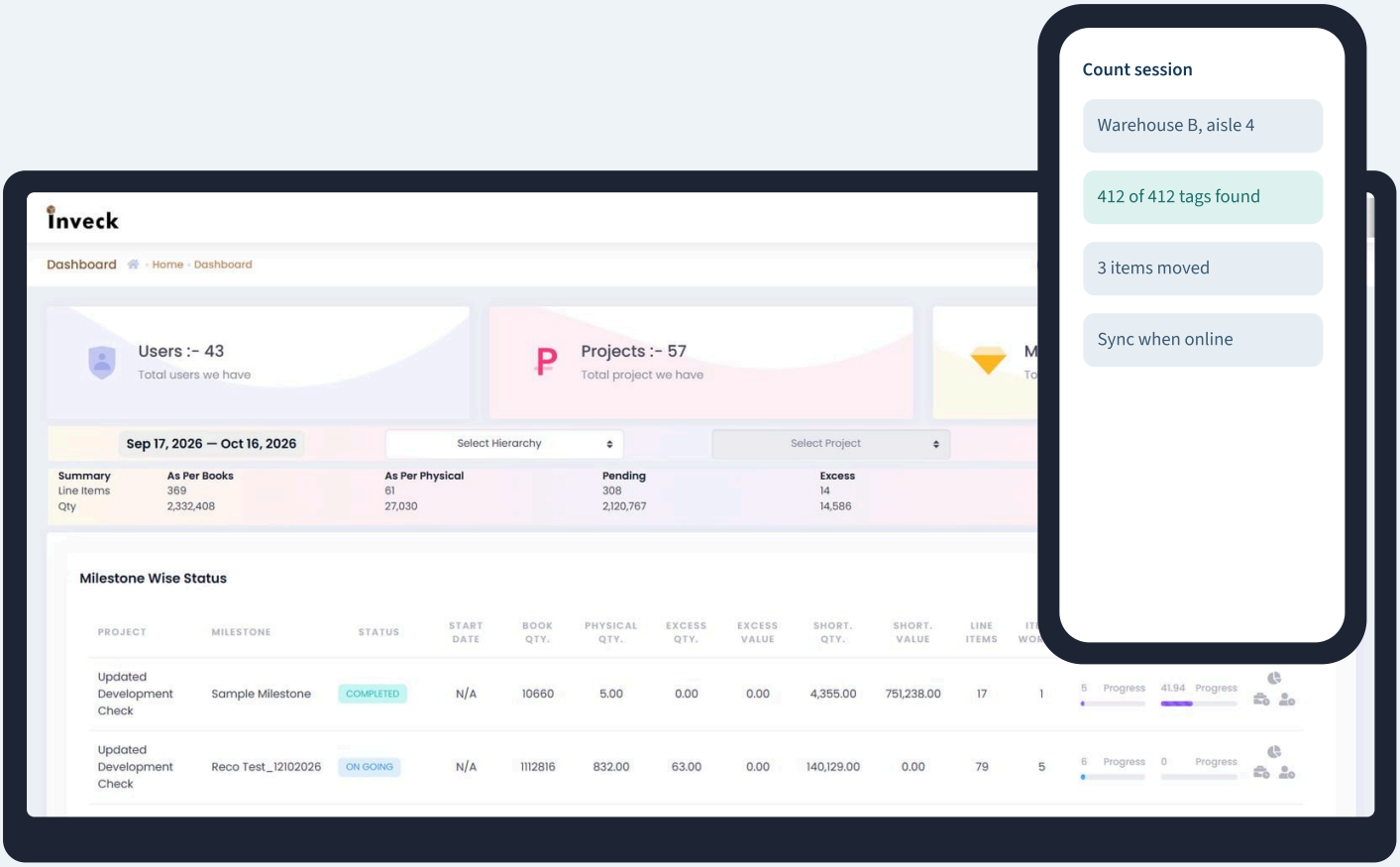

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ANALYSIS

Finance can only move as fast as its data

AI adoption in finance teams has levelled off at just under six in ten, and most users report modest early gains. The constraint is less the technology than the data definitions finance and IT have never quite agreed.

The modern finance function is meant to close the books quickly and spend the time it saves looking forward. The software to do this has been on sale for years, and AI was supposed to speed the shift up.

The evidence so far is sobering. Gartner's 2025 survey of 183 finance leaders found 59 per cent using AI in their finance function, barely changed from 58 per cent in 2024 after a jump from 37 per cent in 2023. Of those surveyed, 91 per cent reported low or moderate impact at first. The largest obstacles were data literacy and technical skills, and inadequate data quality and availability.

THE CLOSE IS A DATA PROBLEM

The month-end close is where this shows first. APQC's benchmarking of about 2,300 organisations, published in 2018, put the median close at 6.4 calendar days. The top quarter finished in 4.8 days or fewer, while the bottom quarter needed ten days or more.

The figures are several years old, and the reasons behind the gap are more instructive than the numbers. Low adoption of a standard chart of accounts added about two days to the close, as teams bridged inconsistent account names and numbering across sites. Poor data quality, weak data governance and unclear cut-off dates for bookings and accruals did the rest.

None of these is fixed by buying a close-management tool. They are fixed by agreeing definitions: what an account means, who owns a master data record, when a period ends. That work sits on the boundary between finance and IT, which is often why it ends up as nobody's priority.

QUICK WINS FIRST, FORECASTING LATER

Gartner's research also suggests a sensible order of work. Straightforward uses such as data extraction, payables and receivables automation and report creation typically reach their expected value within nine to ten months. More complex applications, including forecasting and scenario planning, generally take longer.

Adoption follows the same pattern. Among finance teams that have implemented AI, the most common uses in 2025 were knowledge management at 49 per cent, accounts payable automation at 37 per cent, and error and anomaly detection at 34 per cent.

The sequencing makes sense. Payables and reconciliations run on structured data with clear rules. Planning and analysis depend on operational data from across the business, such as headcount, sales pipeline, inventory and pricing, much of it owned by other functions and defined differently in each. A forecasting model fed inconsistent inputs produces confident numbers that nobody trusts.

Experience compounds. Gartner found that teams further along in adoption were nearly three times as likely to see high impact. At the other end, 16 per cent had no AI implementations planned for the coming year, and a quarter were unsure how to move from planning to a pilot.

When the data does arrive clean and on time, the planning team's job changes. Analysts spend less effort assembling the forecast and more on challenging it: testing assumptions with operating managers, running scenarios before decisions rather than after, and explaining variances while they can still be acted on. That is the version of business partnering that boards notice.

ONE ROADMAP, NOT TWO

This is where the relationship between the chief financial officer and the chief information officer matters more than any single tool. A KPMG survey of 102 senior executives and their direct reports at large US companies, published in 2025, found that 92 per cent described the relationship as collaborative.

Underneath, the picture was less tidy. In the same survey, 59 per cent of CFOs and 61 per cent of CIOs said they were the one in charge of AI and

BY THE NUMBERS

59%

Finance leaders using AI in their finance function in 2025

Gartner, 2025

6.4 calendar days

Median monthly close in APQC's 2018 benchmark of 2,300 organisations

CFO.com, APQC data, 2018

nine to ten months

Time for simple finance AI uses to reach expected value

Gartner via CFO Dive, 2026

technology investment. The two sides also disagreed on measuring returns: 39 per cent of CFOs and 49 per cent of CIOs called technology ROI a contentious area.

Two executives who both believe they hold the pen will tend to produce two roadmaps. Finance then ends up with automation built on data the technology team never prioritised, or a data platform that does not reflect how finance actually closes and forecasts.

WHAT FINANCE LEADERS CAN DO THIS YEAR

The practical fixes are unglamorous. Appoint a single owner for finance master data, with authority across both teams. Agree before any project starts how its return will be measured and who will sign it off.

Sequence the work so that close and payables automation clean up the data that planning will later depend on, and use the early savings to fund the harder projects. Publish one roadmap that both executives sign, and review it together each quarter.

The finance leaders who get furthest will not be the ones running the most AI pilots. They will be the ones who treated the chart of accounts as a strategic asset before anyone asked them to.

Sources: cpapracticeadvisor.com; insurance-canada.ca; cfodive.com; cfo.com; kpmg.com. ■

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ANALYSIS

The first 100 days of a new CIO

Listen, decide, show. Whom to meet in the first fortnight, the three conversations that matter most, what not to announce early, and what to tell the board at day 100.

BY THE CIO TABLE EDITORS

The first 100 days is an arbitrary measure, but a useful one. It is long enough to understand an organisation and short enough that the organisation is still watching closely. A new chief information officer can fail in that period in two opposite ways: by acting before understanding, and so committing to decisions that later have to be unwound, or by understanding without acting, and so becoming part of the furniture before changing anything. Dividing the time into three phases (listen, decide, show) guards against both.

LISTEN: DAYS 1 TO 30

The first fortnight is for reading and meeting, not for opinions. Start with the last two years of board and audit committee papers on technology, which show what the board has been told and what it has been promised. Then the technology budget, comparing plan with actual, and the register of contracts with their renewal and notice dates. Then internal audit reports, any correspondence with regulators, the incident log for the past year and the reviews written afterwards. Finally, the project portfolio, read twice: once as reported, and once after asking the project managers what the status really is.

The meetings should go well beyond direct reports and executive peers. Meet the heads of the largest business units, the head of internal audit, the largest suppliers by spend, and the people who run the service desk, who know better than anyone where things break and how often. Ask everyone the same questions: what



works and should be left alone, what should stop, and what a newcomer is most likely to misjudge. Individual answers matter less than the patterns across them.

THREE CONVERSATIONS

Three conversations in the first month shape most of what follows.

With the chief financial officer, the aim is a single agreed account of what technology costs. Spending is

often scattered across business units, capital and operating budgets, and contracts signed outside the technology function. Agree the baseline before any strategy is written, along with what the CFO believes technology returns and which commitments are already locked into contracts. A strategy built on figures the CFO does not recognise will not survive its first budget round.

With the chief executive, the aim is clarity about why the role was filled and what decisions it carries. Which one or two business outcomes must technology support this year? What can the CIO decide alone? How does the chief executive want to hear bad news, and how much disruption will the business tolerate to fix what is broken?

With the head of security, the aim is to learn what is known but not yet said. Ask which risks are understood but unfunded, which have been formally accepted and by whom, what nearly went wrong in the past year, and whether bad news reaches the board intact. If security reports to the CIO, discuss openly how its independence will be protected.

The listening phase is also the time to choose the early fix: pick one from the complaints heard, so that it can start in the second month and land in the third.

DECIDE: DAYS 31 TO 70

By the second month the patterns are visible, and the temptation is to announce. Resist it. Reorganisations, platform replacements, vendor exits, headcount figures and a branded new strategy all belong after day 100, not before. Early announcements are made on incomplete information and are hard to retract. They put the existing team on the defensive at the moment its knowledge is most needed, and they reach suppliers, who adjust their negotiating positions accordingly.

Decisions should still be made in this phase, but privately: tested with the chief executive and the CFO, costed, and held until they can be presented together with the reasoning behind them.

SHOW: DAYS 71 TO 100

One visible early fix earns the credibility that the larger programme will need. The right candidate is something many staff complain about, which the existing team can fix within weeks, with existing budget and without a new supplier. Slow laptop provisioning for new joiners, unreliable meeting-room video or a cumbersome password reset process are typical. Avoid anything that depends on a vendor change or a large migration, since a delay would turn a quick win into an early failure. Give the credit to the team that delivered it. The fix matters, but so does the signal that good work will be noticed.

THE BOARD AT DAY 100

The day-100 report to the board should be short and plain. It should set out what was found, including what the predecessor got right; the three or four priorities for the coming year and the things that will stop to make room for them; the risks the board is currently carrying, with those formally accepted listed separately; what the plan will cost against the baseline agreed with the CFO; and how progress will be reported at each subsequent meeting.

Close the paper with a request for one specific decision rather than a general endorsement: approval to retire a system, to fund a security gap, or to accept a named risk for a stated period. A board that has made a decision about technology within the new CIO's first 100 days has begun a working relationship. A board that has only noted a presentation has not. ■

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PROFILE

Layne Lewis: Engineering a better way to work

She spent nine years as a systems engineer supporting NASA. Then Layne Lewis took on a different mission: designing a company where serious engineering and a full life share the same blueprint.

HER JOURNEY AT A GLANCE

- 9 years as a systems engineer supporting high-profile NASA missions
- 3 cities (Reston, Houston and Huntsville), each adding to her technical range
- 2 companies: TenXsys, which she co-founded, and Willowview Consulting

Willowview's purpose, in a sentence: lift up clients, employees and communities through deep expertise and genuine humility.

A CAREER THAT BEGAN AMONG THE STARS

Some people drift into engineering. Layne Lewis was drawn to it. As a girl she was captivated by flight and by the enormous, unanswered questions of space, and that curiosity carried her all the way to a degree in aerospace engineering.

The reward came quickly. Her first major role, with Booz Allen Hamilton, put her in support of NASA's Space Station Program, the kind of assignment many young engineers only dream about. Over the next nine years she worked as a systems engineer on some of the agency's highest-profile missions.

The job kept her on the move. Assignments based her in Reston, Virginia, in Houston, Texas, and in Huntsville, Alabama, giving her a close-up view of how different NASA operations run and a breadth of technical experience that few engineers build so early in their careers.

Every relocation strengthened her résumé. Each one also taught her something no job description mentions:

ambition has a price, and it is often paid at home. Learning to weigh a demanding career against the needs of the people closest to her would become one of the defining lessons of her working life.

RETHINKING WHAT SUCCESS MEANS

Distance eventually forced the issue. Layne's family lived in Tennessee, where her father was coping with long-term health problems, and every new posting seemed to put more miles between them. When she lost him, the grief brought a hard question into focus: what did she actually want her career to make possible?

By then she was married with a young son, and the answer was clear. She needed work that kept her close to the people she loved and gave her the flexibility to be present for them, not just a title that looked good on paper.

TRADING CERTAINTY FOR POSSIBILITY

With her family's full backing, Layne and her husband moved to Idaho so she could join Hewlett-Packard, hoping for a healthier balance between work and home.

The role offered stability but not fulfilment. Much of the work was repetitive, and it left her entrepreneurial instincts restless. Instead of settling, Layne went back to school, completing an MBA with HP's sponsorship and adding the business toolkit that engineers rarely acquire on the job.

That education became a launchpad. Layne co-founded her first company, TenXsys, stepping outside corporate structures for the first time. Building something of her own reminded her how much she loved pushing into unfamiliar territory, and it sharpened a new ambition: to create progress not only for clients, but for the people doing the work.

A COMPANY DESIGNED AROUND PEOPLE

Those hard-won lessons became the blueprint for Willowview Consulting. Layne set out to build a firm where flexibility, wellbeing and community impact were not perks but design requirements.

Under her leadership, Willowview supports a diverse workforce, encourages the passion projects that enrich life beyond the office, and values openness and collaboration as highly as hitting targets, with the flexibility to fit very different lives.

Its purpose is easy to state and harder to live: to lift up clients, employees and communities through deep expertise and genuine humility, the same values that shaped Layne herself.

THE PATH TO WILLOWVIEW

- Aerospace engineering: a degree built on a childhood fascination with flight and space
- Booz Allen Hamilton: supporting NASA's Space Station Program
- Nine years in systems engineering: high-profile missions from Reston, Houston and Huntsville
- Hewlett-Packard, Idaho: a move made for family and balance
- MBA, sponsored by HP: the business toolkit to match the engineering one
- Co-founder, TenXsys: her first company and first taste of building from scratch
- Willowview Consulting, LLC: a firm designed around people, purpose and flexibility

PROTOTYPES OVER PROMISES

Willowview is built to get useful technology into clients' hands quickly, and to make sure they know how to get the most from it. Its work spans three areas:

- Engineering consulting: seasoned engineers who help clients design complex technical systems with confidence.
- Program management: on time and on budget, from planning and prototyping through testing, deployment and beyond.
- Tailored training: from facilitated workshops to full online curricula, built around each client's roles and work environments.

JUST ENOUGH, JUST IN TIME

Rather than spending months on theoretical designs, Willowview follows an agile, "just enough" approach that puts a working prototype in front of users quickly. Real-world feedback arrives early in the development cycle, when changes are cheap, and flawed assumptions surface long before they can become expensive.

For clients, the economics are compelling. Instead of sinking money into lengthy pre-market research, they

validate value fast and direct resources toward the features testers have shown to be genuinely useful. Decisions rest on evidence from real users, not guesswork.

Prototypes also make stakeholder reviews far more productive. Rather than reading about progress in a report, decision-makers can see it, handle it and react to it, which keeps everyone aligned as a project evolves.

Training completes the picture. Because each course is shaped around the client's own people and processes, organizations finish an engagement with a capable solution and the knowledge to keep improving it independently over the long term.

CASE STUDY: TURNING WEARABLE DATA INTO SAFER, SMARTER TRAINING

When the Army needed a way to capture training performance data from soldiers' wearable devices for its Soldier Sync program, it turned to Willowview. A team combining veteran experience with aerospace, engineering and military backgrounds understood the challenge from every angle, and worked side by side with key stakeholders to deliver a customized solution within budget.

- Real-time sync: device data flows automatically, without manual uploads
- Better training: improves both effectiveness and safety
- Within budget: a tailored build shaped with stakeholders

WHERE DIFFERENT MINDS BUILD BETTER

Layne deliberately mixes experience at Willowview. Specialists who served in public-sector roles work alongside colleagues from private industry, and that blend is the point. Candid conversations expose blind spots that any single background might miss, unconventional thinking is encouraged rather than filtered out, and the team can design solutions that no single discipline would reach alone.

Learning is treated as part of the job. Willowview subsidizes continuing education, offers on-the-job rotations into other departments, runs regular seminars on emerging topics and shares wide-ranging reading lists, while multicultural employee resource groups offer community and support. The result is a workplace where fresh ideas, and voices that too often go unheard, have room to rise.

CANDOUR AS A CLIENT SERVICE

The same openness defines how Willowview works with clients. Assumptions are discussed openly and tested at every phase, expectations are agreed early so that both sides pursue the same goals, and senior leaders remain accessible, bringing the directness Layne is known for.

Two-way dialogue catches disconnects before they grow, and decisions are made together rather than handed down. Clients come away confident that Willowview understands their world and will fight for their interests, which is the foundation of long partnerships.

TOMORROW'S TOOLS, TODAY

Layne keeps Willowview close to the frontier, so that what the team learns in pilot programs can be transferred into every sector it serves. Model-based systems engineering ties the work together: digital twins let engineers explore configurations that once required physical builds, documentation is generated directly from the models, and stakeholders review clear visualizations instead of dense specifications.

Inside the innovation lab, the team is exploring:

- Computer vision and language AI: experiments that apply AI to automate routine processes
- Humanoid robotics: testing robots that could take on dangerous tasks
- Immersive simulation: validating designs virtually to save cost and avoid risk
- CIMBEO.com: a platform in development that merges live data from many sources into federated digital twins for rapid what-if analysis

CIMBEO.com is the most ambitious of these. Once complete, it is designed to give leaders a full operational picture and evidence-based decision support for their most complex challenges.

PURPOSE BEYOND THE OFFICE

Layne wants Willowview's sense of purpose to travel well beyond its contracts. A flexible volunteer-time-off policy lets employees give real time to the causes they care about without spending their own paid leave, and colleagues often volunteer side by side, strengthening friendships as well as communities.

She leads by example. Every week Layne coaches with Girls on the Run, an organization that helps young girls build confidence and life skills. As a board member of Women Innovators, she champions gender diversity in technology, and Willowview extends that work through networking events and professional development workshops that open doors for the next generation.

Partnerships with universities and non-profits complete the picture. Students and interns take on real responsibilities with guidance from senior mentors, non-profits receive pro bono support, and capstone projects regularly produce ideas with genuine potential to scale.

SCALING UP WITHOUT LOSING THE PLOT

As Willowview expands, Layne is determined to protect the qualities that brought it this far. The structure stays flexible so the firm can adapt quickly, calculated risks and bold ideas are still welcomed, and an incubator-style environment keeps generating new business opportunities. Layne brings the same pioneering mindset that founded Willowview to helping others advance their own ventures.

Many founders fear growth will dilute the intimacy and responsiveness of the early days. Layne's answer is to scale deliberately, carrying authenticity and empathy into every new process, and making people decisions, from talent sourcing to decentralized oversight, that reproduce Willowview's supportive culture wherever it operates.

A LIFE WITH ROOM TO BREATHE

For all the intensity of her career, Layne makes room for a well-rounded life. Her great outdoor passion is competitive horse racing with her horse, Atlas. When injuries sidelined her, she committed to rebuilding her strength until she could ride again, a lesson in grit her team has watched up close.

She speaks openly about lifelong health challenges and about the value of prevention, and she promotes a rhythm of challenge followed by rest. Colleagues notice that she pursues life with the same energy she brings to her responsibilities, and they feel free to do the same.

Home is a rural property where the daily routine of feeding animals and caring for the land clears her head after demanding weeks. That calm gives her perspective. Problems look different from a fence line than from a conference room, and stepping back helps her see the bigger picture when she returns to work.

THE AUTHENTICITY BEHIND WILLOWVIEW

Layne builds trust by telling the truth about her own path, including the injuries and setbacks. That honesty, together with an appetite for learning that never faded despite her academic success, makes her approachable to clients and colleagues alike.

It also attracts like-minded people to Willowview, who find a culture where living fully outside work is expected rather than tolerated. Clients feel understood because Layne leads with professionalism and shared humanity in equal measure.

For Layne Lewis, building a better way to work was never a side project. It is the mission, and Willowview is the proof that serious engineering and a balanced life can share the same blueprint. ■

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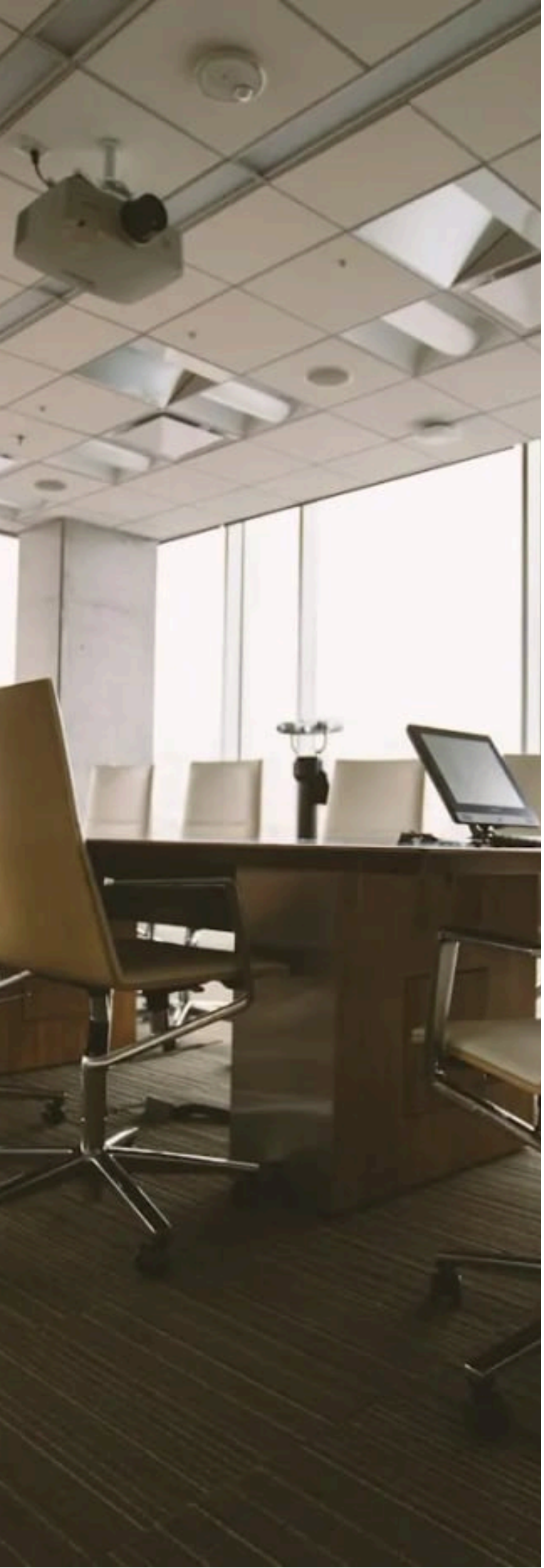

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