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TEKSYSTEMS DOJO ISSUE | WINTER 2023

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LEVEL UP YOUR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

How Training Dojos Transform the
Organization's Learning Culture

Gamify Your Growth:

A Dojo-Driven Revolution in Workforce Development

Every organization should have an education, training and professional development program for their employees. But in the technology world, as we know, things change fast. Traditional learning models are often inadequate, especially since not everyone learns best in the same way. Add to that the fact that there's already a big—and widening—skills gap, and the situation looks pretty dire. There aren't enough folks to fill available roles, and that means organizations are struggling to keep up and maintain the pace of innovation.

Enter the concept of a dojo. The Japanese word literally means, "the place of the way," and the term was originally applied to martial arts training methodology. A dojo is a place where students go to take part in experiential, immersive learning. In 2015, Target CIO Mike McNamara famously applied the concept to his IT teams at the retailer to help Target modernize their tools and methodologies and increase the IT organization's efficiency. Hey, if it's good enough for Target, why not try applying it to your organization?

Implementing a learning dojo concept can transform the way you train your team, help your organization merge learning and performance, and enable a more effective learning environment for all employees, no matter their current level. This is the way.



Sharon Florentine
Contributing Editor



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THE CHANGE AGENT

As organizations embrace innovative approaches to learning, they pave the way for a future-ready workforce capable of navigating the challenges of the digital age.

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THE CHANGE AGENT

As organizations embrace innovative approaches to learning, they pave the way for a future-ready workforce capable of navigating the challenges of the digital age.

LEVEL 01

Achievement Unlocked: How Dojos Can Power Up Your Workforce

In the evolving landscape of today's professional world, the pressing need for continuous skill development has never been more apparent. The pace of change, fueled by [digital transformation](#), artificial intelligence (AI) and the swift adoption of cutting-edge technologies, has created a significant skills gap that traditional learning methods struggle to bridge. But that hasn't stopped investment. In fact, [U.S. training expenditures passed the \\$100 billion mark](#) for the first time between 2021 and 2022.

Rapid advancements in technology have outpaced the ability of traditional educational systems to produce professionals with the requisite skills. As organizations adopt and implement new technologies, their workforce can struggle to keep up with demands for new skills. This gap not only hinders innovation but also leaves organizations vulnerable to the next disruption.

Bridging this divide requires a multifaceted approach, including robust training programs, strategic collaborations with educational institutions and a shift toward cultivating a culture of continuous learning within the workforce. Failure to address the skills gap may impede an organization's ability to harness the full potential of emerging technologies and to adapt to the dynamic demands of the digital era.

**U.S. companies
spent \$100 billion
on training in 2022.¹**

Any IT professional will tell you that [training](#) is an ongoing endeavor, essential for seasoned professionals and employees who are just entering the workforce. Continuous skill refinement and adaptation to emerging technologies are crucial. When delivered effectively, regular training yields many benefits. It diminishes the need to outsource roles, saving time and costs. However, achieving lasting success has its challenges.

- **Lack of retention:** Research shows that [a typical learner will forget about 70%](#) of new information within a day of the training's end. This increases to 90% within a week unless learners actively work to remember it.
- **Lack of flexibility:** Off-the-shelf training is typically premade content incorporated into a training module. It doesn't provide any flexibility to pivot the content based on the learners.
- **Diversity of learning styles:** Traditional training programs might not cater to different learning preferences and styles, making it challenging to effectively engage and educate a diverse workforce.
- **Lack of real-world context:** In knowledge work, no training program can align with the context of a learner's scenario, which forces high cognitive load on the trainee to contextualize abstractions for the problem at hand.





But all is not lost. Instead, this sets the stage for the application of immersive learning concepts as a transformative approach to upskilling the workforce. Immersive learning offers a departure from conventional educational paradigms. Traditional methods, while valuable, often fall short in engaging learners and providing the hands-on experience necessary for transformative, real-world outcomes. As organizations demand more adaptable and versatile talent, immersive learning provides a more effective and engaging way to acquire and refine skills.

Technology expected to transform 1.1 billion jobs over the next decade.²

At the heart of this transformative approach lies the concept of “dojos,” specifically “DevOps Dojos.” Drawing inspiration from the traditional Japanese training spaces for martial arts, in the educational and professional development context, modern dojos serve as immersive environments where learners actively engage with highly tailored content. This adaptation of dojo culture proves pivotal in creating an atmosphere conducive to skills acquisition and mastery.

As organizations embrace these innovative approaches, they pave the way for a future-ready workforce capable of navigating the challenges of the digital age.

MARKET PERSPECTIVE

Here, we explore part of a white paper from [IT Revolution](#) that provides perspective on what organizations should consider.

Navigating Barriers to Change

There are many barriers to changing an organization's learning culture. Leadership plays an important role in that transformation. Here, we explore part of a white paper from [IT Revolution](#) that provides perspective on what organizations should consider.

Q Why is culture and leadership important?

+ A

IT Revolution: A product-centric operating model requires high levels of empowerment, collaboration and experimentation. As Peter Drucker is widely attributed as saying, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast."

It's critical that you focus on leadership behaviors and fostering a culture to ensure that the organization can thrive as it moves to this new model. Core DevOps principles such as collaboration and empathy are necessary when an organization is striving to accelerate its ability to deliver highly targeted value to customers continually.

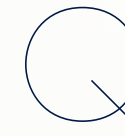
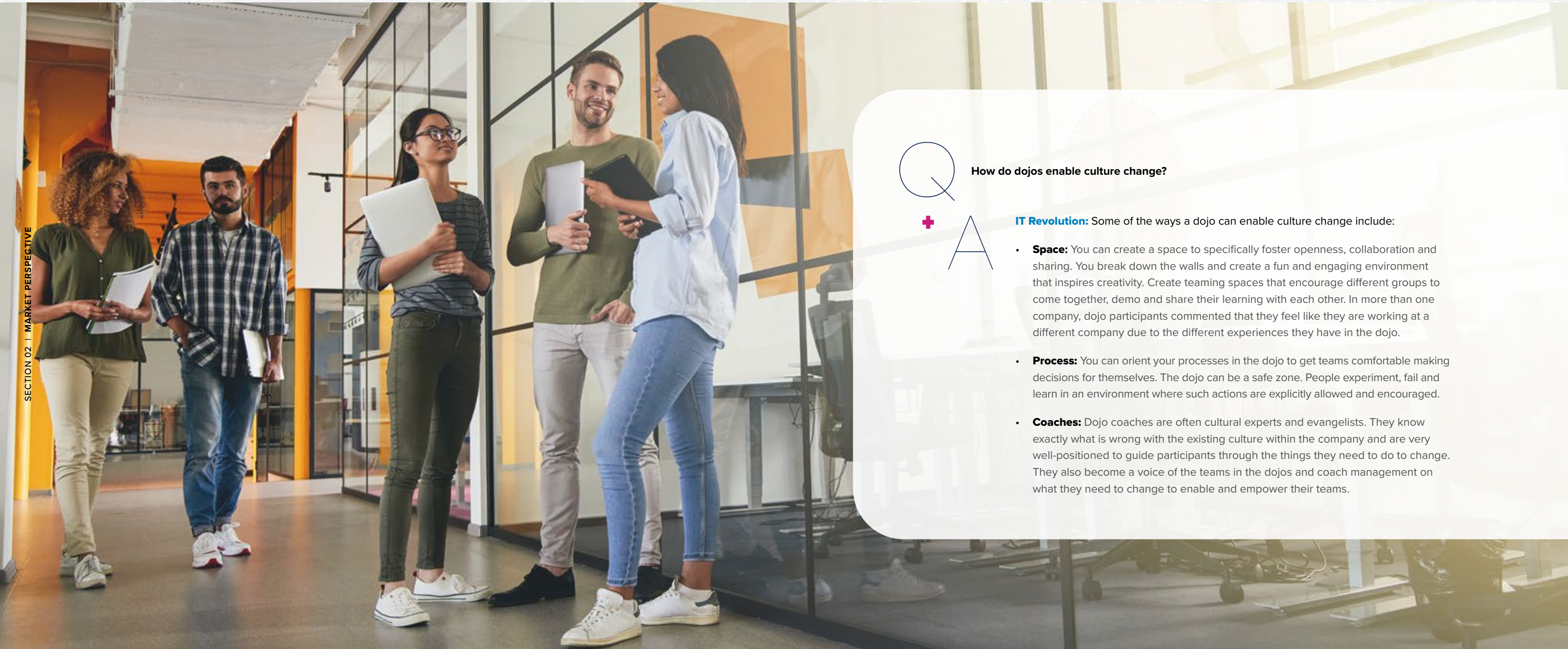
Q What is culture and leadership?

+ A

IT Revolution: Effective leadership is critical to the success of any transformation. In this context, leadership includes technology executives, business executives and middle management. In the interviews, we asked what was done to align these different stakeholder groups and what specific leadership behaviors were focused on.

Culture is a frequently discussed topic in the DevOps community. The levels of collaboration, sharing and learning orientation needed to operate effectively when you are optimizing your organization for speed often require a significant cultural change. There are a lot of great tactics in the DevOps Enterprise Forum paper [Tactics for Leading Change](#) that will help you on this journey. Additionally, we will identify some key tactics that enterprises have been leveraging to ignite and grow their project-to-product transformations.





How do dojos enable culture change?



IT Revolution: Some of the ways a dojo can enable culture change include:

- **Space:** You can create a space to specifically foster openness, collaboration and sharing. You break down the walls and create a fun and engaging environment that inspires creativity. Create teaming spaces that encourage different groups to come together, demo and share their learning with each other. In more than one company, dojo participants commented that they feel like they are working at a different company due to the different experiences they have in the dojo.
- **Process:** You can orient your processes in the dojo to get teams comfortable making decisions for themselves. The dojo can be a safe zone. People experiment, fail and learn in an environment where such actions are explicitly allowed and encouraged.
- **Coaches:** Dojo coaches are often cultural experts and evangelists. They know exactly what is wrong with the existing culture within the company and are very well-positioned to guide participants through the things they need to do to change. They also become a voice of the teams in the dojos and coach management on what they need to change to enable and empower their teams.



OUR PERSPECTIVE

TEKsystems leaders Prakamya Choudhary, Drew Deal, Jason Gibson and Danny Lopez share their points of view on how the dojo model transforms the organization's learning culture.

LEVEL
03

Leveling Up Amidst Change

Advancements in technologies, business models and work methodologies significantly influence a company's foundation—their people. While transformation introduces new technology, the absence of the right talent to drive initiatives reveals vulnerabilities. Companies must focus on identifying, quantifying and delivering training and development programs that foment new skills, behaviors and mindsets across the entire organization.

The rapid pace of change demands that teams and individuals embrace accelerated learning, unlearning and relearning. This environment requires novel perspectives, innovative work methodologies, and a leadership and cultural norms shift.

Enter the dojo, a term borrowed from Japanese culture, meaning “the place of the way,” or a place where a student comes to practice. Essentially, the dojo—in the context of digital transformation and software development—embodies a cultural movement geared toward aiding organizations in enhancing and expediting their software delivery. Teams and leaders emerge from the dojo experience invigorated, having applied contemporary software delivery techniques to their own products. Successful organizations recognize the dojo as the paramount vehicle for team modernization, where newfound knowledge and the drive for continuous improvement take root. Optimal learning and growth occur when individuals apply newly acquired skills to their product backlog, transcending existing organizational constraints.

The dojo offers a hands-on, immersive experience that refines a team's thinking and working methods, empowering organizations to expedite product delivery to customers. The dojo method of learning offers a long-term solution and has a lifelong impact on participants, which reshapes their thinking and mindset in professional and personal pursuits.

“The dojo approach not only helps you learn new practices, it actively helps you unlearn old habits and behaviors through the repetition of better working patterns on a team level. If we don't put an end to the old ways of working, the modern practices we aspire to are that much harder to establish.”



Drew Deal
TEKsystems



TAILORED LEARNING SOLUTIONS

In a dojo environment, the trainers are seen as “coaches,” who teach technical and interpersonal skills. The coaches work with company leaders and participants in a roadmapping session that tailors the training to the class' specific needs. The planning stage is informed by data and metrics to uncover problem areas, skills gaps and other areas of need. For example, an organization could identify what they believe to be a bottleneck in product development where they have reliance on too many vendors in their ecosystem, creating product delays. Dojo coaches can validate the problem via a value stream mapping exercise. The coaches discover that it takes three months to send out a simple product update communication to customers, whereas it takes far less time to build a feature update. Rather than relying on too many vendors, the organization needs to adjust the communication processes and improper expectations within the product development life cycle. Using this data, the dojo coaches can focus on the problem itself rather than simply treating the symptoms.

“When the training is delivered, we're taking into account that it's an ideal world scenario. Often times, when participants walk away from traditional training, they wonder how to apply it in the real world. A dojo experience is so much more real by applying concepts learned in the actual environment.”

Prakanya Choudhary
TEKsystems

SECTION 3

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“Dojos aren’t just a type of team-level engagement; rather, it is a vehicle for organizational change. The dojos offer a way to scale the various types of transformations your organization is going through.”



Danny Lopez
TEKsystems

Coaches work very closely with the participants to understand each individual’s unique ways of working and approaches to problem-solving. This human-centric approach enables the coaches to build customized training solutions for the class. Through repetition, the coaches help participants retain information and master the content via a “see one, do one, teach one” method. A core tenet of the dojo is that coaches teach participants how to think rather than what to think. This approach accelerates a shift in mindset for participants and acts as a foundation to change the learning culture across the entire organization.

PUTTING TRAINING TO WORK IN REAL TIME

Traditional training methods can cycle large numbers of workers through training sessions, but the training is often abstract, and employees quickly find themselves back at their desks wondering how to apply the lessons.

In the dojo model, participants practice by doing and teaching others. What separates a dojo from other forms of training is that in the dojo, participants are developing and honing their skills in the actual testing and dependency environments where they’ll be working in the real world. Users gain practical experience, build muscle memory and form new habits through these real-life training applications. Participants can then take those learnings back to the organization to help drive cultural change.

KEY OUTCOMES INCLUDE:

- **Cultural shift:** fostering a change in mindset and behaviors within delivery teams and leadership
- **Best practices:** imparting and reinforcing knowledge to guide teams toward modern work methodologies
- **Experimentation:** providing a distraction-free environment for teams to apply experiments and integrate learnings

“One of the biggest challenges with traditional training is retention. Rather than hoping to remember 25% of what you’re learning, a dojo builds on repetition. Building on learning and practicing right away builds deeper understand and increases long-term retention.”



Jason Gibson
TEKsystems

Real-World Application:

Target

Target initiated DevOps Dojos to address common challenges, such as a static engineering culture, intricate IT systems and a project-centric focus. Grassroots groups emerged, evolving into flash builds, 30-Day Challenges and eventually Dojo Challenges. Internal coaching transformed mindsets, reducing hardware and software provisioning time from months to hours.

Teams now establish environments in 300 seconds, fostering a shift from project to product orientation. Persistent teams, cultivated in the dojo, return to their home environment, promoting continuous learning and delivering customer-centric value to partner teams.

To date, more than 70 teams have now come through the dojo at Target. The dojo has won accolades both within and without the company. Calling it “probably the best space we have in technology,” former CIO and Chief Digital Officer Mike McNamara told Forbes, “The energy is magnificent. Having twenty teams who are working together to create something is fabulous.”

Meanwhile, other companies are knocking on the door, asking to tour the dojo with an eye to copying the concept. When asked about the most common reaction from visitors during these tours, Schwartz said: “People think this is one of the most innovative things they’ve seen in years. Basically they want to buy up the dojo and take it home with them.”



TEKsystems' Tips



Embrace immersive learning: Recognize the limitations of traditional learning methods and embrace immersive learning as a powerful tool for skills development. Foster a culture that values hands-on experiences and real-world application in the learning process.



Integrate dojos thoughtfully: When integrating dojos into learning initiatives, do so thoughtfully. Consider the unique characteristics of the dojo approach and tailor its implementation to the specific needs and goals of your organization.



Promote collaboration and problem-solving: Leverage the collaborative nature of dojos to encourage teamwork and problem-solving. Create an environment where learners can actively collaborate, share insights and collectively overcome challenges, mirroring the collaborative spirit of traditional dojos.



Address resistance to change: Acknowledge and address any resistance to change that may arise during the adoption of immersive learning and dojo culture. Communicate the benefits clearly, involve key stakeholders, and provide the necessary resources and support for a smooth transition.



Cultivate a continuous improvement mindset: Instill a continuous improvement mindset within your organization. Use measurable benefits and key performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of dojo-based learning and identify areas for enhancement.

By incorporating these tips and best practices, organizations can maximize the benefits of immersive learning and dojo culture, creating a dynamic and future-ready environment for continuous skills development.



TEKsystems Portfolio

• **IN GOOD COMPANY**

Transformational technologies demand equally transformative partnerships. Full-stack capabilities coupled with depth and diversity of experience in leading platforms that help organizations grow, innovate and thrive.

- As an **AWS Premier Tier Services Partner**, TEKsystems covers the full spectrum of Amazon Web Services (AWS) initiatives. From design, migration and implementation to adoption and improvement, continuous integration and delivery (CI/CD) to infrastructure as code, Lean-Agile and more—we're there.
- As a **Google Cloud Premier Partner**, we support the full spectrum of delivering Google Cloud initiatives, from design, migration and implementation to adoption and improvement, covering CI/CD, infrastructure as code, Lean-Agile, data analytics, AI, ML and Gen AI.
- As a **Microsoft Solutions Partner**, we bring qualified expertise and deep experience to help you maximize ROI and achieve real value. From discovery and design to adoption and improvement—we'll tailor our solutions to meet your needs and help you stay ahead of what's next.
- As a **Red Hat Premier Business Partner**, we provide qualified technical leadership, open-source expertise and scale to help you get the most out of your Red Hat products—no matter where you are in your modernization journey.
- With 30-plus SnowPro certified architects, our **Snowflake Elite Partner** status highlights our proven skills and experience to help you leverage Snowflake's innovative technology and achieve data-driven results.
- As a ServiceNow Elite Partner, we bring experience and subject matter know-how to help you drive your ServiceNow initiatives. From implementation to optimization—we'll tailor our services to help you stay ahead of the curve and accelerate the adoption of ServiceNow solutions.

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About TEKsystems®



We're TEKsystems. We accelerate business transformation for our customers. We bring real-world expertise to solve complex technology, business and talent challenges—at global scale. We're a team of 80,000 strong, working with over 6,000 customers, including 80% of the Fortune 500 across North America, Europe and Asia, who partner with us for our scale, full-stack capabilities and speed. We're strategic thinkers, hands-on collaborators, helping customers capitalize on change. We're building tomorrow by delivering business outcomes and driving positive impacts in our global communities. TEKsystems is an Allegis Group company [TEKsystems.com](https://www.teksystems.com).

Sharon Florentine, Contributing Editor



[Sharon Florentine](#) is the contributing editor for Version Next, Now, TEKsystems' quarterly publication. She is an award-winning independent writer and editor with more than 20 years of experience in the tech industry. Her work has appeared in Computerworld, PC Magazine, CRN and eWEEK, among others, and she is a passionate advocate for equity, diversity and inclusion in tech and beyond. Most recently, Sharon was a senior writer for CIO.com, where she covered software development, Agile, IT careers, learning and development, and DEI. She lives near Philadelphia.

Listen Now



Don't miss TEKsystems' leaders on The Agile Brand podcast. In a special series, host, author and business expert Greg Kihlstrom sits down with leaders from TEKsystems to discuss how the dojo model transforms the organization's learning culture.



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Sources

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