



Ilona Simpson

CIO EMEA at Netskope
CIO | Digital & Product-Led Transformation

CONTACT DETAILS

Email: isimpson@netskope.com

SKILLS

- Business transformation
- IT strategy
- Cybersecurity
- Agile methodologies
- Leadership
- Post-merger integration
- Governance and compliance
- Change management

EDUCATION

IESE Business School

Master of Business Administration (MBA)
 General Management

The Ohio State University Fisher College of
 Business

Lean Six Sigma Black Belt training delivered
 by MoreSteam for OSU

Ennis & Co were delighted to welcome Ilona Simpson on board as an Associate of the company in February 2022.

Ilona Simpson is an enthusiastic technologist, problem solver and strategist, named one of 4 Women Making Waves in IoT in 2016 by Silicon Republic. In 2021, Ilona was also named by Constellation Research as a member of the Business Transformation 150 – recognising the top global executives leading business transformation.

Now Chief Information Officer EMEA for a recognised leader in enterprise cybersecurity Netskope, Ilona brings extensive expertise to the Ennis & Co Associate panel from within and beyond the automotive industry, having fulfilled positions at CIO level for the likes of adidas, Innogy SE / EON, DHL Supply Chain, Aston Martin Lagonda and Porsche Cars Great Britain. She is also an active member of a number of technology and advisory boards, as well as a public speaker, and mentor for technology-focused start-ups.

Ilona's expertise within the fields of digital and organisational transformation, innovation and technology strategy also allows for the opportunity to follow her passion when time permits – which is lecturing at IESE Business School surrounding technology and business topics.

As our newest Associate, we wanted to get to know more about Ilona's views on technology as we know it today – and what the automotive industry really needs to focus on for the future...

What does “change” mean to you in this ever-evolving world?

“The term “change” to me represents progress, new opportunities, and excitement, but equally various levels of unpredictability, risk, and fear. My professional career has been shaped by change, whether as a Process Engineer at Porsche or as a Global CIO at Aston Martin.

Change doesn't equal change though, and in addition to scale and impact, I would also differentiate based on the essence of change: from “doing things differently” to “doing different things”

How do different industries learn to adapt?

“One major trend I see that spans across various industries is in truly embracing digital. Businesses – large and small, well established and new – are shifting their interpretation of “digital strategy” from a Marketing or IT department's agenda (as was commonly the case 5 or so years back) to CEO priorities. I would like to quote Leo Birnbaum here, CEO of EON, a 60+bn utilities giant “If you don't work fully digital soon, you will soon not work at all.”

Industries also mature in their exploration of digital business models. Looking at real life examples, Lamborghini and adidas are both experimenting with NFTs – in case of adidas, the tokens allow access to physical product and virtual events. Lamborghini's take on it is different – it takes NFTs to Sotheby's. Whilst Stellantis is using NFT / blockchain technology in-car, with the new Alfa Romeo.

The above examples would have been unthinkable not so long ago, yet they are powered by adopting partnerships outside of traditional value chain. In my view, those deserve recognition.”

Organisational transformation is another common theme across the sectors. “Product-led” or “Systems-led” is scaling from utilities to sportswear to automotive...

What does the automotive industry need to do to remain ahead of the curve?

“I am not sure we can refer to “the” automotive industry as I see the traditional players like JLR, Stellantis, BMW Group, and challengers / new entrants such as NIO and Lucid Motors. I personally would also count Tesla as the latter.

Traditional players must transform the way they design, develop, manufacture, sell and service cars to remain relevant. And to have the opportunity of getting ahead of the curve.

Zooming in on R&D: with software becoming integral part of the car, the complexity increased exponentially. Transformation from component-centric to system-orientation has become the imperative. From

thinking in “body”, “propulsion”, “electrics”, “transmission”... to “safety systems”, “driving systems”, “data management systems” and so on.

CASE (connected, autonomous, shared, electric) as the meta trend is still relevant in automotive industry, but is increasingly expanding to CASEE. The second E being experience. And if you allow me a provocative thought, I would suggest that only those players who acknowledge, embrace and act on the fact that their industry is getting very close to consumer electronics sector, have a chance of getting ahead of the curve.”

What other challenges does the automotive industry face?

“In addition to CASEE? Dealing with the issues of here and now: aftermath of past 2 years of (partial) closures; disruptions of supply chain; and other factors outside of automotive OEMs controls.

I would also highlight cybersecurity as another challenge, the scale of which has not necessarily been understood across the industry. And it ranges from how do you prevent your R&D files from being leaked; to how do you protect the smart factory; to how do you secure your car from being hacked... There's a lot to do!”

Does change always need to be scary?

“Absolutely not, but change means uncertainty, opportunity and risk. To accomplish the change agenda we touched on earlier, we need commitment from the boards, clear mandates to execute and management of the organisational change – buy-in of stakeholders within and outside of organisations for these monumental changes is an integral part of success.”

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