Why mindset may matter more than technology adoption

Hosted by Neil AmatoJune 18, 2026

Recorded live at AICPA ENGAGE 2026, this episode of the *JofA* podcast explores the reasons that mindset and leadership may be even more important than technology adoption as finance and accounting professionals navigate an era of nonstop transformation.

Joel Morris, a vice president at Wolters Kluwer, and Tom Hood, CPA/CITP, CGMA, executive vice president–Business Growth & Engagement at the AICPA, discuss what separates future-ready organizations from those struggling to keep pace, focuses on AI, workforce development, and strategic thinking. Morris and Hood also explore the human skills, trust, and risk management practices needed to help organizations adapt, innovate, and remain relevant in a rapidly changing profession.

One key component mentioned in the conversation is the Rise2040 report and initiative.

What you'll learn from this episode:

- How each speaker defines the "perpetual transformation state."
- Why Hood says mindset—not technology—may be the biggest factor in future readiness.
- How Morris distinguishes organizations who are getting "ahead of the wave" from those that say they're too busy to devote time to thinking about growth methodologies.
- What Morris and Hood see as the biggest barriers to successful AI adoption.
- The reasons that human skills are becoming more important, not less, in an AI-powered profession.

- How trust can help accountants and finance professionals navigate ongoing transformation and why Morris calls trust "that through-line into everything that you do."

Play the episode below or read the edited transcript:

— To comment on this episode or to suggest an idea for another episode, contact Neil Amato at Neil.Amato@aicpa-cima.com.

Transcript

Neil Amato: Welcome to the *Journal of Accountancy* podcast. This is Neil Amato with the *JofA*. Back for another episode. We're recording at ENGAGE. It is June of 2026.

Our topic today is being future-ready, riding the waves of transformation. I'm joined by two guests: Joel Morris from Wolters Kluwer, Tom Hood from the AICPA. To both of you, welcome to the *Journal Accountancy* podcast.

Tom Hood: Great to be here, Neil.

Joel Morris: Thanks for having us.

Amato: Thank you again for being here. I mentioned Joel. Joel is vice president and segment leader–Research and Advisory with Wolters Kluwer Tax and Accounting. Tom, a familiar name on this podcast, is executive vice president–Business Growth & Engagement. To start, our publications covered a Wolters Kluwer report on [future readiness for CFOs]() earlier this year. That report says CFOs are operating in this perpetual transformation state. I guess for Joel first, but either of you can weigh in, what are some of the examples you see of this perpetual state?

Morris: You have some of the regular items that keep folks up at night. The tax changes are constantly coming through, regulation changes, staffing, dealing with potential shortages there. But the reality is at the highest level, AI is ushering in a wave of transformation. That alone has implications in almost every facet of the business. When you talk with folks, you can almost pick every domain that they have to manage, and it’s changing.

Hood: I gotta say ditto for that, and that was a really good report, by the way, Joel. But our Future of Finance group is exhibiting everything you’re saying there, Neil, and everything Joel just said. It is perpetual transformation, and I think that was one of the things that once the group wrestled with that concept and basically said, the reality is it’s not going to end. It used to be set in context with their teams and they’d say, We’re going to do this project, and it’s going to be three years out or four years out, and then we’ll be done. Then they would get done, and the next big software thing would be there. Gen AI is ushering in this whole new era. I think I really love that concept here at ENGAGE, riding the waves of transformation. I think that’s huge. That’s one of the ways that we talk about it.

Amato: Thank you both for checking the bingo card. We’ve said AI in a podcast in 2026.

Hood: And transformation 10 times.

Morris: Already, that’s right.

Amato: But yeah, from your vantage point, we’ll go with Tom first. What do you think distinguishes organizations that are truly ready for the reality that’s coming versus those that are still in a read-and-react state?

Hood: It’s actually in our Rise2040 report that we’re proud to be releasing here at ENGAGE. If you think about it, we talked about that report as Rise2040, shaping the future of finance and accounting. That’s corporate management accounting and public accounting, as we would say, writ large. What does all that mean? What happened is, in that report, there’s a whole section on transformation, and it basically goes like this. It’s from research that we did at CIMA: Mindset, skill set, tool set. Mindset’s 39% of what makes people understand and want to change. That's the biggest piece about being future ready, and that's where we believe the positive vision from Rise will help with that idea.

Morris: I love that. Mindset is critical and, to me, change of this magnitude starts at the top. When I think of readiness for organizations that I speak with, a lot of it revolves around does leadership have the vision and are they putting the things in place to make sure they get ahead of the wave, so to speak.

That comes down to allocating resources to put groups together to test new technologies, new billing methodologies, new growth methodologies. To give you a good example, I talk with some firms who say something to the effect of, we're so busy with compliance, I can't really even think about that. That makes me nervous. That means the leadership is leaving some risk out there because they're not putting things in place to start to get ahead of what's coming. On the flip side, you have other firms who already have some level of advisory and they're talking about growth strategies. Those are two very divergent positions to be in. I would aspire to try and get folks who are uncomfortable, like testing things closer to the side where they're putting stuff in place.

Hood: Joel, that's the same thing on the corporate finance side we're seeing. There's a group of CFOs that you talk about their top issues, and in there, obviously, AI is always in that mix, but growth and innovation is a major one, not cost control, not compliance. They know they have to do that, but they've moved beyond that. Yet, to your point, there's plenty who are still stuck in the grind, and if they can't pick their heads up, they're going to get knocked over by that big wave.

Morris: I think that's exactly right. I think from the perspective on the corporate side, the business side, I'm an entrepreneur myself, so I've lived a lot of my life on that side of the equation. These tools, same story. They need to be putting teams in place to test them and bring them forward, ready to change patterns quickly because they open up a whole new world of planning and strategy that didn't exist even a year ago.

Amato: That's great. We've mentioned AI, how can you not? But, AI adoption — no longer experimental. It's happening. What are the gaps showing up in implementation and in practice, both in the corporate finance world or the management accounting world, and the public accounting world?

Morris: To me, the No. 1 gap that I see is training. That's critical that I think it's overlooked is that you can bring it in. But if you're not properly thinking about how to help people learn and leverage the new tools, it's the same age-old story of it won't get good adoption.

Underneath that, some of the gaps are making sure that, you know, trust accuracy, security, the diligence at all levels — even the smaller companies out there need to make sure that they're diligent about the tools and where the data is going because risk is a really important thing to mitigate. And it can become problematic really quickly if you don't take the time to truly ensure that everything you're doing in this new AI space has those bounds in place to protect information.

Hood: I think one of the findings of Rise2040, again, across all constituencies was, we're in the early stages. It's basically awareness and pilot, not many scaling. As we look at that adoption, relative to the report, there's all this optimism that, yeah, we can lean into AI, but the risk is, if we don't, we risk irrelevance. I think that's the big one that's troubling us. I do agree with Joel that training is the No. 1 thing. We introduced a whole AI accelerator for both finance and public accounting to help give them those skills and their hands-on skills, and believe it or not, a bulk of that training is human skills.

Morris: It is.

Hood: It's strategic thinking and storytelling with data and things that we're not great at, and yet you need that when you get AI doing a lot of the analytics.

Morris: That's exactly right. You raised another point, scalability. In my world where I help to develop a lot of technologies in this space, scalability and repeatability is a really important factor and a gap that I think people are, I wouldn't say ignoring, but they need to be looking out for. Because when you think of one person doing something versus 10 versus 100, it's a totally different story.

Hood: In that story of adoption, we asked them, what's the No. 1 barrier to you adopting technology? Now, we expected what you and I were just talking about. Oh, we're too busy. We're stuck in the compliance, all those things. That's partly it, but the No. 1 answer was ourselves. The profession at a rate of, like, 90%, Joel. They admitted that we've met the enemy, and he is us. We have to get our mindset right in this whole profession to move as we think we need to.

Morris: That makes sense.

Amato: You mentioned Rise2040. I want to hit on that a little bit more. Some of the concepts of hard and soft trends noted in that report, how do they fit in with all of this talk about AI and waves of transformation?

Hood: That framework comes from a global futurist named Daniel Burrus, who we've worked with for quite a bit. It's really unique in the sense that CPAs can understand it. It's very logical. The trends are technology, and that happens to be an exponential trend right now.

The second bucket would be regulations and standards. As new technologies come along, there's always new regulations and standards. Our profession happens to be embedded in understanding those standards and applying them to accounting.

Then the third one is demographics. That's been another trend that's been plaguing our profession, the aging membership base in the Western civilized countries, especially US, UK, Europe, etc. That's where the talent shortage is coming from.

But those hard trends, what we say in this Rise2040 exercise is we have to have an opportunity for each trend you identify. When they're discussing and identifying their trends, it forces them to go, well, what could we do if that trends, a hard trend's going to happen whether we like it or not? What could we do? And that gives them that positive sense of we can control this a little bit.

Amato: Risk management, regulatory complexity, definitely two areas where the finance function can add strategic value. For Tom or Joel, what are some examples maybe you've seen from leaders who are leaning into that and adding value for their organizations?

Morris: I spend a lot of time with folks talking about advisory. Advisory is broad, but to me, conceptually, it's strategic guidance and advice that whether you're on, whatever your position is that you can, you know, apply to either it's a client or you're the person in the business that's managing it.

The people leaning in that I work with are using our AI tools or other AI really to aggregate and put intelligence on top of data to be much more proficient at strategic planning, at looking forward into what's coming. I've done so myself. I think that it's pertinent to find solutions out there that are going to make that more palatable at the individual's fingertips so that they can have a robust set of information looking forward into the future of their businesses.

Hood: It's the same on a corporate side, as well. Like, the CFO has to do more strategic advisory. The controllers now are moving from more of a compliance role to a strategic role. They're embedding inside the business units and helping them manage against the future because they now have more predictive capabilities. I think that's the opportunity that AI is lending to us. It can give us room for more human work.

Morris: It completely can and that work then, like you said, inside of the businesses, those folks can go become the same level of more strategic partners for the different business units, which is more of a social skill. It's a different skill set, it's a different level of how you operate, and that's happening on the firm side as well. The soft skill of social skills and the ability to influence and collaborate and tell the story to bring forward that data. I firmly believe that's going to be a more important thing to consider going forward than it might have been in the past in these roles.

Hood: It's funny, Joel, you just describe what we call the T-shaped professional. Those broad, boundary-crossing skills that you just identified. Strategic and critical thinking, collaboration, storytelling, communication, they sit on top of your deep accounting knowledge. And soon your AI data knowledge because that's the other technical knowledge you're going to have to get good at.

Morris: That's right. But it's interesting because you talk with a lot of folks, and it requires almost a self-reflection because they think of their value as the vertical part of that T. Now everyone realizes we're going to need to move up and across, and this becomes a more holistic picture for everyone that's working in the space, not just a select few.

Hood: Higher value and a lot more fun.

Morris: It is. Once you break into it and through the discomfort of change, it is a lot of fun because you get to spend more time with folks and you get to be a little bit more in that collaborative environment than the responsive environment.

Amato: This really has been a great conversation. I've enjoyed it, learned a few things. It's been great getting to know you, Joel. We'll give you both an opportunity. Closing thoughts on this topic today?

Hood: I'll let Joel go first.

Morris: I think from the reporting, it's been pretty clear that one thing that excites me about this entire profession is it's got a foundation of trust. We talked about that yesterday, Tom, and that's not going to change. No matter what, all these technologies, everyone still needs trusted advisers, trusted folks that they can go to, but trust runs deeper when I think about it.

When you're thinking about technologies to use, companies to work with, ways to organizationally change, trust is that through-line into everything that you do because that at the end of the day is the brand proposition for the profession. That would be my word of advice as I speak with everyone is make sure that pillar stands strong.

Hood: That was one of the findings of Rise. I'm going to close with probably one of my favorite quotes. Came from a guy named Jon Kabat-Zinn, who said, "You can't stop the waves, but you can learn how to surf." We look at Rise2040 as the surfing lessons.

It's got all the stuff in there for people to sit there and think about and it's going to have an AI-powered chatbot for them to actually go in and chat with all the data about the future and help them think about the future in a disciplined way. I got to say, Joel, for you and the CCH Wolters Kluwer team, thank you for being our exclusive year one sponsor to help us bring all this to life.

Morris: Yeah, 100%. We're happy to help, and, I think in times of extreme change, I like to be a partner that helps to see the opportunity in the future. Just honored to be part of what you guys are doing.

Amato: That's great. Seeing those opportunities, surfing through those waves of transformation, also the concept of trust, all of those things will be included in pertinent links in the show notes for this episode. Again, Joel Morris, Tom Hood, thank you for being on the *JofA* podcast.

Hood: Thank you, Neil.

Morris: Thank you.