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Cloud Evolution

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How have you defined success for your own career?

I'm a strong believer in the principles of Ikigai, which is the Japanese concept of having a sense of purpose in life. I believe that we need to associate a purpose with what we are doing at every stage of life. Until we can do that, we are missing the core objective of the specific role we're performing, be it in our personal or professional lives.

I see my success as helping people grow in their careers, or enriching them with new knowledge and techniques that can help them progress. By virtue of that, I also teach at my local college here in New Jersey. Although I teach machine learning to a class of MBAs, I want to expand my horizons to also give them career guidance.

How do you help your mentees develop a sense of purpose in their careers?

I look to Ikigai, because a sense of purpose is the true definition of it. But when I talk to my juniors I don't typically stay within the principles of Ikigai. I define three overlapping circles. In the first circle I ask them to identify what they're good at. There are a lot of people of all ages who are not able to identify their strengths. The second circle is what you want to do. What you are good at and what you want to do are two different things, but they can overlap in certain cases. A lot of people think that if they're good at something, they will love doing it. But we often

discover that our interests are in some other area. The magic happens when both of them intersect.

The third circle is very interesting, because it's what the world wants. I have a daughter who's now working in financial services. When she was picking her major in college, I told her to make sure it was something she wanted to do, something she was good at, and also something that would allow her to flourish in her career. She was good at language arts, analytics, mathematics and statistics, so she picked up finance and accounting because that's what the world wants.

As another example, one of the reasons I went from telecom to healthcare was that I wanted to contribute to a social cause. In one program where I built the largest private cloud, it was very close to my Ikigai because the program helped that specific health insurance company adhere to the Affordable Care Act (ACA). In terms of enrollment timelines and its societal impact, it helped a lot of uninsured people get health insurance. I could connect with that cause of helping people get their health benefits, which will help them access the medical procedures, facilities and care they need. Whatever program or project you are doing, regardless of the industry, you need to associate it with a cause that is very close to you. If you're working on an artificial intelligence program for a smart hub, then how can you make life simpler for people through that work?

What are the most common cloud adoption pitfalls, and what are the consequences?

I was instrumental in building the cloud practice at my organization. But many organizations aren't doing cloud transformation; they're doing cloud migration or cloud enablement in different silos. It's not happening across the enterprise to enable full digital transformation.

Another pitfall is that most cloud projects are considered technology projects, rather than business projects. Most are hopping onto the cloud bandwagon not only to associate themselves with the latest technology, but also for cost benefit. They are not associating it with the larger potential for business value, such as increasing the company's innovation capacity, entering new markets or reducing the time to launch a new product.

And the third pitfall is something that has become very prominent. A lot of people are following the cloud-first approach, which is good because it will be further enhanced. But people are working on large-scale, high-investment transformation programs that take years, without defining the future state and creating a roadmap to achieve that future state. I'm calling it "future state" rather than "target state" because it's ever-evolving with the advent of new technologies and new business models. Most organizations are making large-scale investments and want to do a large-scale transformation in one go. They're trying to include too many things in one transformation program. That's okay if you define some low-hanging fruit as your milestones, but that makes executing those programs much more complex.

How do you see cloud programs evolving in the near future?

In terms of cloud programs, what I foresee will happen is that instead of migrating and transforming to move to the cloud, you may do a lift and shift first before you transform. That will become both much faster and simpler. Then you can create cloud-native applications, or greenfield applications directly in the cloud. Then you will continue to evolve those applications through new functions.

Why has cloud become a board-level topic, rather than a C-Suite or VP discussion?

When we adopt cloud in silos it hampers the potential for success because it's like putting a bandaid over a wound. We may be just doing cloud transformation for the customer-facing side, but our back office still continues to work on monolithic legacy systems. So even though we may become composable or agile on the front end, we are still very monolithic and rigid on the back end. The concept of a composable enterprise enables you to become much more agile, but agility is not speed. Agility is speed to change, irrespective of whether you are only doing cloud on the front end, or if you're doing an end-to-end cloud transformation. When you look at it from the perspective of a CEO or CxO, those roles are not going to reap the true benefits of that. That's why cloud has become more of a board discussion nowadays, rather than a topic for the CTO or VP of Engineering.

How can CTOs present a more holistic picture of cloud benefits?

I talk about three horizons of cloud and most of the cloud providers, like Microsoft and Amazon, are working in the same direction. The first horizon is where you focus mostly on infrastructure or cost. You reduce the cost of resources you consume to run any application when you move to cloud, and you also reduce the efforts associated with managing it. It's primarily a lift and shift or rehosting kind of activity that gives you an immediate ROI. You can take it to the CFO and they will approve the business case.

Horizon two is where you move towards becoming a cloud-native enterprise. In a cloud-native enterprise, the ultimate objective is making it easy to create, deploy, secure, manage and consume products and services for your employees, customers and partners. Then you're connecting the complete business value to that particular case. I don't talk about the 12 factors, which most technologists focus on; I don't even talk about cloud functions like S3 buckets, EC tools instances or databases.

Horizon three is changing the enterprise. That means adopting what I refer to as industry cloud. For example, if a healthcare provider wants to launch major telemedicine initiatives, how can they use that cloud? That industry cloud is the point at which you can link innovation to business value today.

Is the cloud space at a pivotal point, and if so, where will it go in five to ten years?

We will see hybrid cloud, including multi-cloud, for the next five to ten years at least but the hybrid mix will change. The big conglomerates will always adopt a multi-cloud set-up even for public cloud. They will not just fixate on GCP, AWS, Oracle Cloud or IBM. You will always find two or three hyperscalers or cloud providers in a big enterprise.

Another change we'll see is that instead of having 70% of workloads in their own data centers or in a hosted environment, that split will become the opposite. Today, it's typically 70/30, with 30% on public cloud and 70% on-premises, but eventually it will be the other way around. And the percentage that is on-premises will slowly go down to 10% in the next ten years.