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INTEGRATING DIGITAL ISLANDS

Akshay Lamba, CIO, Deloitte Middle East,
talks about the broader technology strokes
with the advent of digital

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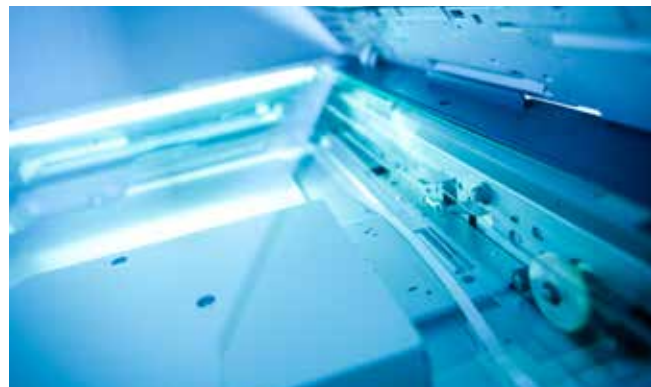
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INTEGRATING DIGITAL ISLANDS

For this month's Industry Watch, Akshay Lamba, Chief Information Officer at Deloitte Middle East, talks to Intelligent CIO about the company's three-lense approach to technology, the broader value of cloud, and, addressing the advent of digital.

Can you describe recent technology initiatives at Deloitte and how they serve your business needs?

The foundation principles of enterprise architecture principles ensure that there is strong alignment between technology initiatives and business outcomes at Deloitte. We view technology initiatives through three different lenses – long term strategic initiatives, medium term business focused initiatives and short term optimisation initiatives.

Long term strategic initiatives are platforms that have the potential to disrupt and transform the professional services industry. For example, the advent of automation as envisaged in the last few years has the potential to substantially impact the way we conduct and deliver our services. Similarly, technologies such as blockchain has the potential of changing the way financial services are rendered in the market place and hence require due attention.

Medium term business focused initiatives are platforms that require re-architecting the current landscape of applications, infrastructure and services to deliver a business outcome. These initiatives may be in the shape of adding an application to the technology stack, creating new interfaces for integration between current systems, re-architecting business processes, enhancement of current systems for additional features and functionality or leveraging technologies such as cloud to restructure current capabilities.

Short term optimisation initiatives are platforms that enable us to either drive cost benefits or greater client insight. These include a number of services based initiatives such as structuring our in-house capabilities vs outsourcing opportunities for internal technology services. This platform is also used for digital initiatives that enable us to extend our applications

FOR A TRANSFORMATION TO BE EFFECTIVE, IT REQUIRES AN EFFECTIVE STRATEGY WITH THE OVERARCHING GOAL OF MINIMISING DISRUPTION WHILE DELIVERING MAXIMUM RETURN. CLOUD IS NO DIFFERENT

to new age platforms for easier access by our clients that reach out to us for thought leadership.

How has been Deloitte's journey in leveraging cloud technologies?

Elastic growth is a reality of the new world – in the ME region or anywhere else. Economically this means that the demand of a particular good or service is directly affected by its price. Due to the nature of demand in the region it becomes critical for businesses to be able to scale up as business volumes rise and scale down operating costs as demand diminishes. Cloud services offer this capability to the business.

Leading CIOs are looking at cloud adoption as a journey. They realise that they cannot just re-purpose their infrastructure and application stack overnight to cloud and expect to achieve operational efficiencies. It is important to look at cloud beyond the attributes of faster, better, and cheaper, by collaborating with business stakeholders to re-engineer technology units into discrete and manageable services.

Why are some organisations unable to realise the broader value of cloud?

Just like any transition, the move towards cloud capabilities requires a

sound strategy and a solid foundation of economic considerations prior to starting the journey. For a transformation to be effective, it requires an effective strategy with the overarching goal of minimising disruption while delivering maximum return. Cloud is no different. The disruptive nature of cloud demands tighter collaboration with business stakeholders and various functional units across the business — including finance, marketing, sales, sourcing, risk, compliance, and HR. Collaboration with these various functional units is a key to realizing the benefits of cloud.

It is not uncommon to see cloud as an IT or technology-only effort. Cloud may offer increased IT capacity, but this is not the only motivating factor. Could service providers promise simplified management, high availability, variable environment options, and reduced deployment time. These offerings are compelling, but are often not sufficient in addressing business needs – remember the concept of “Necessary but not sufficient conditions” are true for a cloud environment too.

To address these needs, a more holistic approach to cloud should be adopted. While cloud provides a business opportunity, it comes with a cost.

...THE CAPABILITY TO INTEGRATE BETWEEN THESE ISLANDS OF INFORMATION TO DERIVE BUSINESS BENEFITS AND THIRD, THE CAPABILITY TO RUN ANALYTICS ON LARGE DATASETS TO GENERATE INSIGHT FOR BUSINESS LEADERS TO TAKE DECISIONS TO CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES



It is often helpful if decision makers evaluate cloud using the same dollars-and-cents approach a CFO would use. This understanding is critical and encourages the behaviour that drives business results.

How has Deloitte addressed the advent of Digital?

Digital is really three islands on technology capabilities that need to work in tandem to derive business benefits. First, the creation of distinct ingress technologies, namely, marketplaces, IoT, physical analytics,

data traffic inputs, and beyond. Second, the capability to integrate between these islands of information to derive business benefits and third, the capability to run analytics on large datasets to generate insight for business leaders to take decisions to create new opportunities.

The crux of the matter is that the money moved to new age platforms. Paper money is no longer the primary means of exchange of goods and services. Payment methods grew from card based payments to e-wallets,



digital currencies and mobile payments. Businesses reacted to this change by enabling a number of payment mechanisms primarily.

The second powerful change that came around is the change in consumer behavior patterns compounded by the way the digital native population interacted with businesses. A number of businesses saw preferences change of their consumer base during the last decade. This wasn't limited to their preference of a product or service but also the way they prefer to interact

with a business online or offline. Here is a class of consumers for whom internet, mobile technology, digital payments, etc. were always part of the world they lived in. Social media and communications are the most prevalent and comfortable modes of communication for them.

At Deloitte we have to keep pace with this change on two fronts – for our clients and for our employees. As a result, digital has become a cornerstone in our service delivery strategy for technology functions. Enabling, mobile

ABOUT DELOITTE

Deloitte in the Middle East

Deloitte & Touche (M.E.) is a member firm of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu Limited (DTTL) and is the first Arab professional services firm established in the Middle East region with uninterrupted presence since 1926.

Combining the global insight and innovation of a worldwide firm with local knowledge and industry expertise, Deloitte offers powerful business solutions that help clients excel. To address the growing market needs, it has expanded its specialised professional services in the Middle East, leveraging local and global talent in areas such as Financial Advisory Services, Enterprise Risk Services and International Tax Services. Deloitte has also continued to play a pivotal role in serving the region's high-growth industry sectors such as tourism, hospitality and leisure, construction, telecoms and financial services, as well as major sectors such as oil and gas, the public sector and the Gulf region's sovereign wealth funds.

Presence in the Middle East

Deloitte is among the region's leading professional services firms, providing audit, tax, consulting, and financial advisory services through 26 offices in 15 countries with more than 3,000 partners, directors and staff. It is a Tier 1 Tax advisor in the GCC region since 2010 (according to the International Tax Review World Tax Rankings). It has received numerous awards in the last few years which include Best Employer in the Middle East, best consulting firm, and the Middle East Training & Development Excellence Award by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW).

only applications, gamification of learning systems and leveraging social tools for enterprise interactions has become table stakes in Deloitte.

How have recent projects helped Deloitte distinguish itself in the marketplace?

The short answer to that is execution capabilities and thought leadership. Our position in the professional



...DIGITAL HAS BECOME A CORNERSTONE IN OUR SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGY FOR TECHNOLOGY FUNCTIONS. ENABLING, MOBILE ONLY APPLICATIONS, GAMIFICATION OF LEARNING SYSTEMS AND LEVERAGING SOCIAL TOOLS FOR ENTERPRISE INTERACTIONS HAS BECOME TABLE STAKES IN DELOITTE

services industry requires us to execute consistently at a high level of quality and efficiency. These attributes are enabled by a number of the technology platforms available to our practitioners as they work with our clients.

Moreover, given our role in the market ecosystem a number of our clients look towards us for thought leadership. This requires us to not only have the conceptual understanding of latest trends but also have an appreciation for the nuances behind implementing a number of business drivers which are supported by technology solutions. For example, we bring real world

experiences in large scale technology transformation programs.

There is a general perception among most CIOs that IT is not adequately heard in top-level executive management talks. What do you think about this school of thought?

To be perfectly honest, I haven't faced this scenario at Deloitte Middle East. IT topics are a significant part of any executive discussion in the region. Strategic technology management is frequently addressed by our regional leaders across functions such as Finance, HR, Marketing, etc. and our service lines such as Audit, Tax and Consulting.

To be fair, in our part, the technology team ensures that during the discussions we behave and articulate ourselves like market leaders and not techno-commercial managers. As a matter of fact, more than a few technology team members come from our market facing functions and hence have a deep understanding of market challenges and opportunities when engaging with our top leadership.

Your advice to aspiring IT leaders?

Taking a page of Prof. Robert Kaplan's playbook (Professor at Harvard Business School), my advice for an aspiring leader would be to ensure that the trilogy of "Vision - Priorities - Alignment" are in sync. Leaders need to be able to articulate their vision well and successfully communicate that vision to a range of people in their sphere of influence. Based on this vision, they must have very clear priorities and not lose focus on driving these priorities. Lastly, the alignment between this vision, their priorities and the teams supporting their vision becomes critical. Keep these three levers well managed and there's no stopping you.