CLOUD REALITIES

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[00:00:00] You know, high performing teams, they're, they're challenging each other rigorously. That's sort of like what we do, but we do it a little bit more viciously. Without the high performing. Sometimes with no grounds whatsoever. Correct. Some would call it unprofessional, Amy, but uh, you know, others would call it a string of HR incidents. Sounds a bit oversensitive, but yeah.

Welcome to Cloud Realities, an original podcast from Capgemini. And this week we are going to explore the human side. of team development, especially when you're picking up teams that are in the platform sections of organizations. How do you align? How do you motivate? And how do you ensure that you're delivering great technology in a complex world? I'm Dave Chapman. I'm Esmee van der Giessen. And I'm Rob Kernaghan.

And I'm delighted to say that joining us this [00:01:00] week is Amy Williams, Managing Director of Cloud Services Product at Barclays. Amy, great to see you. How are you today? Good.

Really well, thank you, Dave. I'm really looking forward to the conversation today. Likewise, likewise. And where do we find you in the world?

Uh, you find me in Cheshire. Um, a slightly grey but not raining Cheshire. Well that's, well that's great. I used to live in Cheshire. I used to live in Stockton Heath. It's a very nice part of the world. It's a very nice part of the world. And I like the way it's sort of equidistant between like Chester, Manchester and Liverpool. So you get like, you know, there's lots of city stuff going on around there as well. It's a good spot. Yes. Yeah, definitely. Lots of nice countryside too. So good mix. Indeed. Esmé is here. Es, how are you doing?

I'm good. Did you notice anything from our background? Oh, the thing's gone! Are you in a different room? No. No, it's the same room. I've just spotted that. Your whole background. What have you done? I've painted it and I've cleaned it up and I have a different carpet and, yeah, I thought New Year. A bit fancy. [00:02:00] Yeah. Now, the photos that are there, did those used to be directly behind you? I can't remember now. Yeah, it was. And it was actually quite some, I had some Lego, but I wanted to buy the new Apple, uh, Max. Fancy. We always have these discussions between Apple and, uh, and, uh, Microsoft, Amy. So, um, please be, yeah, I don't know if you have a, uh, a love for either one of them, but I might have a small bias to Apple kit.

Oh, no, no, no. Although I'm sort of focused on the right things, Ernie, thinking that way. Yes, we are, we are. But it was quite expensive, so I actually sold all my Lego with the excuse to buy the new headphones. Oh, right. How did you sell it on eBay or something? No, there's a shop here in town that actually sells You know, all secondhand Legos, the old and exclusive sets.

How do you know when you buy a secondhand Lego set that all the bits are there? Because [00:03:00] that's like, you know, that would be very disappointing. You get to the end of some massive build and there's a bit missing. No, they actually, they check it, actually. There are people doing that the entire day, which is like a social workspace, the resale happens?

Yeah. What a good job. Yeah. Lego quality control. Oh, man.

Yeah, yeah. You know, when you hear about that, some jobs, you just think, how did you get that job? I've got a friend and he works for An architect. No, he works for a very famous tire company and he's the test driver. And what he does is he rides motorcycles and cars, and he basically drives them to their limit, and then the engineer takes the tyre and says, oh, it performed better with that configuration, He goes all around the world to different climates,

like the desert and the ice and all this sort of stuff, and that's what he does for a living.

And I'm thinking, how did you get that job? You basically pay to drive a car as fast as you can to its limit to test the tyres. Robert's here, everyone. How you doing, Robert? Are you good? I'm all right, David. It's Friday. Yes, it is Friday. [00:04:00] What's been confusing you this week?

Well, uh, loosely coupled to tech.Um, Dave, I've got You usually are, Rob, let's face it. The tenuous link. Um, right. That was his brief for this section, wasn't it? He goes like, should I just do what I'm confused about? I'm like, well, try and relate it to the cast of James River, if you can. Have you ever been Arriving just at the last minute at a train station. Have to, you know, walk fast to your train and then the doors close behind you. I've just made it. I've just made it. I have done that. But you know what I, you know what I refuse to do these days? Run. I refuse to run. You're not allowed to. That's just your age. It is that. It's the knees. It's the knees, Ed. It's the knees. Can't take it. At age, my friend, it's happening to me as well. The um, the thing though is, a train station in Britain has decided to take the trains off the boards three minutes before they're departing. Which I think is plenty of time to get to the platform. And you say that as an anxious traveler.I know, exactly. And so you arrive at the train station. You know that train's there, right? You know it's there, but [00:05:00] the board won't tell you where it is. That's annoying. And that's very annoying for me, and I'm like, well, I can still make me train, because it's a train, right? And it might be on the platform right next to me.

Um, but they've done it to stop people running last minute for the train, but all I think they're going to do is create more panic and confusion on the concourse with people trying to get home. So, I am genuinely confused why they think this is a good idea, because I'm like, don't do this to us. You're just making an already Horrible day, even more horrible, because I've got to wait an hour for my next train to get home. I don't just, you know, when you go, what? Just before we get into this, just remind us again, how this relates to the world of digital technology.

This is removing information from the human, as opposed to giving them more information to try and improve the situation. That is the link, David. Tenuous, I know, but I'm going to use it and stick with it, and I'm going to stand behind it.

I mean, I think you have won the award this week for our tenuous link. Uh, congratulations on that point first of all. But I was, I was going to imagine if that happens to you and it happens, it just like, it'd be so annoying. You go, where's my train? It [00:06:00] is annoying and I would use the uh, train line app. Which is an app Which tells you where it is anyway. Yeah, you'd use digital technology David, because that's you, Dr Digital, of course you

would. There's also, I used to, when I used to do more frequent trips from the northwest to London, there's a, I'll have to go, I can't remember what it's called now, but you can get like a sneaky website. where it will tell you the platform that the trains are going from. That's what you want. That they use to plan all the train routes, and so I used to maybe get to some stations later than I'd ever liked, you know, text the other half if I was struggling for signal, get my cheeky bit of insight, and then run. So I can totally see how that makes the branding worse. Is that the kind of functionality you can pick up on the dark web, Amy?

I spend all my time, obviously. That kind of thing. Pretty exciting. So, Rob, I think we've got to the bottom of it for you. It's just wrong. In this day and age, you don't need those platform things.

Yeah, yeah. I just, why have you done that? For the people who aren't as tech savvy as those

maybe here, [00:07:00] who can use, yeah, the websites exist to tell you where the train is going. Or the people that are on time.

Or the people who are just arriving on time and go, Where's my train? You think it might be cancelled?

It's gone. You're gonna, you're just gonna push more traffic to the poor attendants who already have to answer the crazy questions that they don't have answers to. It just pulls the panic three minutes earlier, doesn't it? Yeah, that's what it does, yeah. I don't think it's gonna help. That's what it seems like to me.

It's what, yeah, I'm sure somebody did a terrific bit of statistical analysis about this. There's maths behind the decision making. We can almost imagine the graphs.

I can almost imagine the surge graphs, and it's like, I'm not sure that just changing the thing, the timing is going to change the surge, you know.

I, I, it must have been a cracking, very interesting meeting, very exciting where they came up with that harebrained scheme. They had a load of the public interviewed about it and not one of them thought it was a good idea. I think there's an opportunity guys, how that decision was made needs to find its way to this podcast.Yeah. Yeah. They're going to [00:08:00] change.

There you go. Robbie. You can actually do that. The first time we followed up a confusion. Yeah. We're going to actually get them on the pod and say, come on, explain to us why this was a good idea. Come on. Yes. That's, that's the kind of consumer investigation stuff we're famous for, I think, isn't it?

Yeah. And that's it. That's right. Consumer advice yet again. Consumer advice yet again. Anyway, look. On, on that note, I think we got to the bottom of it though. I mean, you know, we didn't solve the decision, we found a workaround, found a workaround. Be digital. All right. Look, on that note, Amy, maybe let's start a little bit with your background and tell us the, the steps that you've gone through that are sort of forming your opinion of the most effective way to transform teams.

Of course. So in terms of background, I've been working in the financial services technology industry for the best part of 19 years. The first sort of 10, 11 years of my career were spent at a managing management [00:09:00] consultancy. So I was largely brought in to help client organizations with challenging technology deliveries, complex systems, integration programs.

I've got a little bit of a background on software and integration testing as well as part of that. And then mid 2017, I got an opportunity to come and join Barclays. And I, I'd started a role there to lead the integration effort for open banking. Uh, which was a, a complex piece of regulation across the UK and Europe that required banks to provide external interfaces via APIs for customers to effectively work with third parties as a bit of a proxy channel into the main bank, uh, with all the right things like consent and permission, uh, and on the basis of those third parties were registered with the CMA, all that good stuff.

I don't. use that or managed to use that as a route to get into a CIO role. So at the end of 2019, I joined the Barclays UK technology leadership team as the [00:10:00] CIO So that was running all the technology. And the tech strategy for, um, our small and medium enterprise customers. And at the end of 2023, I was given a new opportunity to move into our infrastructure organization to head up all of our cloud middleware and database products and services, which was a huge, huge change and, and a lot of observations in terms of how

to build high functioning teams throughout that journey.

the Barclays technology perspective is seeing things from the CIO and application development lens and then the infrastructure lens is kind of an inside out product provider and really trying to look at how we operate in silos and how we break down those silos to make, I guess, a more, a more functioning and performant broader group technology organization.

How would you characterize, so it's, it's quite well known, isn't it, that like infrastructure teams and more back office teams have different styles of working, different characteristics perhaps [00:11:00] from say more front office teams or business facing teams. Now, I think we all know that in the transformed world of modern technology, there's less distinction between those two things.

And we maybe come on to that a bit later on, but how would you personally having worked in both and more recently transitioned into a back office style role, how would you characterize the differences?

Yeah, it's a really good and I think a really valid observation when I was sat in the CIO world, my perception of infrastructure teams and I guess that kind of, you know, in inverted commas back off back office type organization was a lack of customer empathy for the products and services they provide out to the broader teams.

a pretty poor customer experience in terms of the acquisition of those products and services, not necessarily clear and good choices as to what your, you know, hosting solutions and answers should be based on your application needs. And in general, a bit of a misalignment, and I guess a huge silo encapsulated away from that broader [00:12:00] CIO landscape.

When I hopped over the side of the fence that isn't technically there, it was really interesting to see, actually, like the that the quality and the passion of those teams that the lack of understanding of the customer because if you'd like, obviously the further in you go, those teams have thousands of customers to support thousands of different applications, thousands of different transformation initiatives.

So it's quite overwhelming when you get into the center and kind of think, how do you gain that empathy and that understanding and experience across the broader team? And there was, there was an absolute desire to do good, but it was about How, how does that manifest itself? How does that become real given, given the scope of the services that, that, that we ultimately provide?

Sometimes it can be difficult when, if your IT organization is structured in a more traditional way with like say, a shared service sort of construct. The layer cake, Dave. The layer cakes. As you would call, as you always say, Rob. The layer, you know what [00:13:00] I always say, layer cakes, hard to change. Yes. And, and they're not only hard to change and difficult because they've been set up to be robust and resilient but also there's so many Chinese whispers between whatever the business conversation requirement might need to be and then how it lands on a program worksheet or a service change or a backlog or whatever the methodology is at the back end.

And it's another side effect of financial lines go back to this is why does the layer cake exists because it was deemed to be efficient and we put all the like minded people together in a group and we say you do your job you do your job you do your job creates a horrible chain of change and then they can become parochial and as you say they absolutely lose empathy

with They don't see the rest of the world because they only do one part of the value chain to achieve the experience at the end.

And so they're left, aren't they, on their own devices and they try and do a good job but they don't have the context or perspective to be able to do what they really need to do. [00:14:00] So you have to have understanding for people who are put into that organization as a function of everybody thought it was an efficient thing to do.

And I think also that that gets compounded by The goals of the team being greater than the goals of the organization overall.

Because everyone's individually saying what their end of year target looks like, what good looks like, what is it I've got to get done in the next 12 months. And that's not necessarily effectively aggregated so everyone can go, oh right, we're going over there as opposed to I'm in my line.

I've got to get to the end of my line. Yeah. So in, in then inheriting the team, you've got this issue. It's, you know, kind of in the center of the IT organization, it might not be as connected as you ideally would like it to some of the business prioritization and those sorts of decisions. You've got that goals being bigger than the goals of the organization issue.

I'm sure you inherited aspects of tech debt and difficulty in the tech stack itself. Where do you start in terms of transforming that into a higher [00:15:00] performing function?

Yeah. So what I, what I started with was, was validating my experience and perceptions of that team with, with, with other peers as CIO.

So I spent, I spent a couple of weeks having some, what ended up being. I think fair, but pretty challenging conversations with, with some peers in the CIO teams to just sort of talk about their experience with, with, with our organization. Um, which led to, uh, a list of things that, that weren't surprising, but nonetheless were pretty disappointing to read, to be honest.

And then I played that back to my new leadership team to. Like guys, first and foremost, I'm here to help this team succeed, but I'm not coming purposefully with a shed ton of infrastructure, knowledge, opinions and experience. I'm here to help the team succeed as part of the group technology organization, and here's what our customers think about us, which I'm not sure is going to be surprising, but that equally that it's not going to make it a huge amount of funds here.

And we talk that through and then Yeah. I had a bit of a [00:16:00] conversation about how they were feeling, right, just making sure that, again, most things are, you know, six of one, half dozen of the other. And then we talked about things we wanted to do differently, um, and how we were going to respond to that. And as part of that, I sort of validated with all of them, and it was absolutely a resounding yes.

Like, my working assumption was we want to be, like, A team and an organization that provides world class cloud hosting products. Um, and just, just making sure that ultimately we're all going to have the same shared goal to help, to help the bank move faster, to help the bank deliver better software, to help, help the bank with it, you know, cost and experience and all that good stuff.

Uh, so we kind of started there.

And in that journey, in your head, what comes first? Is it the people or the tech? It's quite usual, isn't it, in, in heavy engineering environments, that people will, and you look at

an investment plan, and the investment plan will be, you know, tons of widgets, tons of widgets, tons of [00:17:00] widgets, as far out as you can probably see with the backlog that you can't afford.

It's very easy to just dive into trying to fix for that problem.

Yeah, we always tend to create a plan to resolve or fix or develop new technology without considering the new team that will be required to, to a, deliver that and b, to support and run it. So yeah, completely valid point. And as we, as we work through.

what those products and experiences should look like. And we set those plans. What quickly followed was a conversation around, right, are we match fit now? A, to deliver this and B, to run it. And we've got an opportunity now to talk about how we'd want to reorganize ourselves, how we'd want to address any talent gaps, but also most importantly, get the mindset of the team there.

So a lot of our time spent in 2024 was talking to our team about why this was important, why people should feel excited, because we've got an opportunity to influence how, how the bank delivers technology from the inside out globally, pretty [00:18:00] unique point, uh, position to be in. But also to really get the team revved up from that where historically we'd been

Oh, that is ace.

What is that? Was that a notification on your iPad? That is ace. I mean, that was pretty, the deans were rooted, but they were rooted as zencaster. I love it.

I dunno what that was.

That sounded like a baseball score or something. Was It was, oh, there we're, there we're the producer's not gonna, was it the producer? that is been 150 of these? Yeah. That you would think might be on mute, wouldnt you? Was he playing a game? Were you playing a game on your phone in the background? Not paying attention. That is staying in, Marcel.

I was taking a picture and Was that because I gave a really good answer? Do I get a prize? Absolutely trashed an ace answer as well. I think you should apologize, Marcel. Apologize. I took a picture and then the ballpark sort of cheer thing went up.

Is that because we're all having a good hair day? Yeah, yeah. Podcasting hair.

[00:19:00] Oh, no, no, no, no. Baseball wind sound. All right, then, shall we get on with the professional side of this?We can try.We can try.

Okay, so it sounds like a people first strategy. Now, as you set that out and as you're going through it, of course, it seems entirely correct that you would have those conversations and you would set a north star or shared vision and, and all of those sorts of things. But, and it seems obvious.

But why do, why, in your opinion, do so many people miss focusing on that and lap straight into focusing on the technology first?

I think where my head goes to on that is probably two things. I think it's easy to assume that everybody knows what we need to do and why we need to do it.

Yeah. And therefore we don't actually explicitly say, by the way, this is the thing we need to do and why it's important and actually what, why it matters to the organization and why it matters, frankly, to the, to the careers of our [00:20:00] team.

Right? Because if you're going to build new world class platforms, that's quite an exciting

thing to say you've been part of and put on your CV and feel proud about, but I don't think enough consideration is always put to. We should just say the obvious stuff, um, because, because don't, don't assume it. I think the, the other aspect to it is people change is quite challenging.

It's quite easy to fix technology, fixing, fixing humans, so to speak, culture, mindset, values. It's a long game. It's difficult and not everyone's going to get there. And that leads to a set of really difficult conversations.

And there's a really interesting human trait in there at the beginning which is sometimes people assume you know the context and start a conversation halfway through and people don't understand but they're maybe a bit fearful to ask the why question at the beginning to say but why are we doing that and they just they just go on because that's what they're told to do and then you just get this This great, this great confusion [00:21:00] that continues to permeate through the organization and just, just reminding everybody of the, the story so far, like in Star Wars when the text goes up the screen just to tell everyone why we're here and why the film's like it is.

It's the same in corporate land isn't it? You need one of those going on every morning.

Totally right and now Star Wars, Star Wars style reels for infrastructure transformation is going to be in my 2025 gold plan. Um, but, but, but you're absolutely right in that. I also think there's a bit of when a big organization is set a vision or a dream, if people, it doesn't necessarily lend itself to people feeling comfortable to say, I just want to understand that a bit more.

I just want to ask a question because I think there's a risk of either you perceived as being a bit daft or You're challenging the goals of the organization and some of that stuff we've got to break down.

It's part of that shared goal, also that platform mindset, that servant leadership mindset, like we are here to serve the tech teams and we do whatever they [00:22:00] need to have a flow in their work and whatever they need.

Yes, I think absolutely right. Absolutely right. And that's certainly something we're trying to think about, which is, okay, we've now got plans across our products pool. How does that wrap into a broader? platform based ecosystem where we support the data platform, the digital experience platform, whatever else it might be.

And actually you've got almost back to a layer cake, but hopefully a better layer cake than the one that we had before.

I just want to underscore a point that you made a couple of minutes ago, which was the the point about the basics, almost the constant. Communication of basics, I think has got such high value attached to it.

And it reminds me of that thing. I can't exactly remember what it is. It's something like you have to communicate something seven times before you know, people actually really hear it. You know, they, they're only superficial, listen to it. Then they'll stop listening to it and then eventually dunno what it is you, you drill in.

It feels like that to me. You know, like just reinforcing over and over again, like what good looks [00:23:00] like and where we're trying to get to.

Yeah, yeah. And always the why, always the why. And I think there's also a bit around that in terms of do, do we feel proud? And again, forgive the, forgive the Friday morning cheese, but

do we feel proud of the products that we're building?

We're in the business of building and delivering products. Um, So are we proud of what we currently offer, how we offer it, what it feels like? And as a customer, would we be happy to use what we've built? And historically, the answer to that was probably going to be no, not most of the time.

Exactly. So in then taking on this team, you were looking at things like motivation, alignment of the team around goals, clarity of understanding those goals.

What then did you move on to do? differently. I mean, that could be different enough, depending on the state of what you're in, the alignment level that you're kind of inheriting. But, but what, what did you do different and how did you land that with the team in a way that felt, I don't know, safe to them or inspirational or whatever?

Yeah. So, so there [00:24:00] was to the point around saying things seven times, I think I said it weekly, probably every week. So a solid 52 times perhaps. Um, and that wasn't because the team weren't getting it. It was just a reminder in terms of, Why we're doing what we're doing how it connects to the broader group strategy, but most importantly how I wanted that team to feel Which is completely psychologically safe with me as their leader, right?

Tell me what's going on Tell me what problems you have. Tell me a little bit about you obviously to the degree to which the guys felt comfortable because it there is a risk I Scope creep on that topic and obviously don't don't don't want to go the other way But but also then understand because we had a big theme Around how do I then create capacity and time for my leadership team to really focus on those things and, and focus on the underlying people transformation because we then had to cut down into the organization to make sure that all our different hierarchical layers and subgroups understood it as well because I'm not going to, [00:25:00] I'm not going to deliver this, this kind of new vision with 10 people.

We talked a lot about what keeps them busy, um, Which then led to a really good conversation about empowerment and this organizational tromboning of problems where you'd have, you'd have two guys doing, you know, great work, shop floor. We have an issue and then it bumps up and up and up and up the organization because no one feels like they can make a decision or they can take a stand or they can make a priority call.

And so it's just this sort of trombone up and then goes all the way back down. And that was taking a huge amount of bandwidth. So. One of the things we did was double down a bit on what we refer to as like an empowerment drive, which is It must be super dull for you guys to have to ultimately ask me or one of my team to make a decision, like, because we're probably going to send it back and ask what the best, because we're not going to know necessarily.

We might have an opinion. So we spent a lot of time last year really [00:26:00] reinforcing what that meant and looked like, because I think empowerment can be a longish word that organizations use. can possibly be a bit vapid or nebulous and actually what does it look like? It looks like decision making, it looks like escalation when there's no route forward, it looks like us trusting you and creating that safe environment where if you get it wrong.

No sweat, we'll go and learn from it, like mistakes are perfectly fine. But that was something that was a little bit absent previously for sure.

There was a great mantra I once heard very early on in my career and it was let every mistake you make be a new one. which was kind of like that point, which is, it's okay to make mistakes.

Just make sure that you don't repeat your mistakes. That was the key. You live by that every

day, eh Rob? Maybe I forget it occasionally, Dave. Like, when I travel with you and you decide to you know, take me somewhere like Bugsy's and I go, this has happened to me before, I feel like I've made this [00:27:00] mistake before.

I feel like I've, I've been here before. I just can't remember it, I just can't remember it happening before. It's a trap, yes. Is that like a hyper quick retro happening live as in in a monologue? I think it's undiagnosed trauma if I'm brutally honest, I'm just voicing it through the medium of this podcast.

Should we flip context Rob, should we make this a bit, do we want to go deeper on that? No, you really, really don't. It's the last thing you want to unpack right now Amy, unless you want to create the longest episode of the show that we've ever done. I mean, the Guinness Book of World Records. We can turn it into an audiobook.

I'm sure, I'm sure there could be room for that.

I love the idea of an audiobook just called Bugsies. Anyway, sorry, I digress. Go back. Where I was going to go with that is, so you pick up this team and you spend like a lot of time on the humans and the team itself. Now, I'm kind of taking, I'm taking this as an assumption, so feel free to correct it.[00:28:00]

The philosophy of that being, if we get that right, if we get the empowerment right, we get the psychological safety right. other things will start to look after themselves and the knock on effect of that will be increased performance. I guess first of all, yeah, is that the correct assumption and, and how did the performance feed through?

Yeah, so, so absolutely. And it probably happened a bit quicker than I was expecting, which was obviously glorious to find. But what it, what it resulted in is, is a couple of things like peers across that organizational area, I guess, or level, so to speak, started. talking to each other more to solve problems and I was witness to some of that which is sounds minor but when you've got like a couple of hundred people doing that.

It's really quite energizing to see. We also saw a lot of storytelling in terms of, Hey, we fixed this problem. Um, and we've not actually had to go to a director or managing director or anything else, particularly lofty, [00:29:00] that there was a good stat as well. So my general manager for database. Went on holiday for a fortnight. Anecdotally, he tells me that he used to come back to 6, 000 emails, which required some sort of decision or matter of attention from him.

Of course, of course. Last summer, he went on his two week break and came back to 300. So if I'm going to metricize this, that would probably be, that would be my best, my best, my best crack, I think.

And what you're saying there is, uh, you know, you've had an impact when communication pathways rewire themselves and you witness it. So you see different people interacting. That's a lagging indicator, but it's a great indicator of success where if the organization is communicating differently, you know, you've had a material impact on that organization.

It's probably for the better.

Totally right. Totally right. And we had, um, you know, we have a load of internal, you know, uh, pages and we've got a few pages dedicated to technology communities where, you know, our folks will go and solve problems [00:30:00] and post a story, whether it's like observability or SRE or new patterns or whatever it might be.

And we actually saw members of our team posting on problems they'd solved together or

customers, customer problems, or problems they've solved with the customer. And I also had a lot of, and again, a lagging indicator, but I, I got unsolicited feedback from some of my old peers around, had a great conversation with your team today.

They've, they've, they've heard out, they've heard our pain points and challenges. They're going to wrap that into the next iteration of, of the release that comes out in however long period of time. And it, and again, that, that was just, It, it's kind of obvious stuff that you would like to expect is happening.

Yeah. But, it wasn't, and it, and it, and it well certainly wasn't happening before and it was little things like that where you think cri we've, we've actually fit something here. And then organically the the right things are happening.

There's something isn't there. I think I don't exactly know what the alchemy is there, but it, it does seem to me to [00:31:00] be related to just giving people permission to have the space and think for themselves a little bit.

They don't feel like they're being micromanaged on stuff that was decided six months ago that they now have to kind of like grind through whether it's got usefulness or not. So they've got the space to think about things, they've got the space in what they're doing to listen and take in feedback, and then they feel safe to do that.

And safe to go, actually, you know what, I think we should do X, not Y. Because I've just had this chat with John over there and that, you know, and he thinks this and that is generally put under a label of things like empowerment and stuff like that, which sounds trite, but the, but the reality of it is it's like being, just being humanistic, isn't it?

And just like trusting the humans that, that they're trained and they're good at what they do to get on with it. Yeah.

Yeah, and that they know stuff and that they can make good decisions and that ultimately we all want to work for the organization and we like working for the organization and we want it to perform well.

Um, it goes back to, I mean, when I was like super early days in, [00:32:00] in consultancy land, I got a crack in one liner from, um, from, from a guy I used to work for years ago, which was asked for forgiveness, not permission. So if it instinctively feels like the right thing to do, probably go and do it unless it's absolutely wacky.

But I think there was also something around making, like, back to the mistakes point. There was a, almost a fear of inaction or not making a decision in case something went wrong. And people got reprimanded or told off or penalized or put under the corporate microscope. So there was a lot we did to talk about the fact that.

Guys, as long as we've tried something and it's not, you know, it's not completely out of the bounds and the realms of possibility, I'm going to assume you're the experts, right? You care for the work that you do. You want to do it in the best possible, most efficient way. to make a decision and crack on.

And if it's something that you feel is a bit risky, all right, let me know. Cool. I can be sort of ready to, to, to pounce [00:33:00] as needed if there's a problem. They're setting people free, but making sure back to that point on psychological safety was, was, was a real integral part of that.

That first leadership response is critical, especially when it's Friday night and you're tired and you just want to go off to work, then, you know, to, to, to fall back into your old behavior as

leader and you can undo everything that you've done in the past that is actually positive and building towards what you, where you want to go to.

But then that one mistake that makes such a huge impact on those teams that, you know, fall back into their own behavior. Yeah, totally right.

And if I look at, you know, when we've got stuff going on in production. And the difference between, and you know, my guys give me a heads up if it's something we might have caused or we might be part of or something we might need to jump in and support about.

That the first responder question of, okay, what help do you need? Versus, okay, what did we screw up? Like that, that set, that really sets the tone and I've seen that done really well, which is, have you got everything you need? [00:34:00] What can I do? What burden can I take? How do I help? Make sure we we fix and, and get things back on track?

Then we can go, you know, do the good retrospective thing, figure out what we do better next time. But I've seen responses where it's a, whose fault is this or what's happened, which implies blame. Yeah, yeah. Which doesn't make people feel very safe. No, it's like, who was holding the spanner when this went terribly wrong?

It's just not a great place to start, is it? I wonder then, in terms of your leadership kit bag, if you like, for want of a better phrase, you, you going into the situation, what are the kind of the things that you had to deploy and what, what intentional decisions were you making as the leader? Like the one we just talked about, there is a great example of one where there are others that you were thinking through as you're going in.

Yeah. So, so again, I think going back to the fact that I've, I've not got a hugely extensive set of cloud infrastructure expertise or opinions. I made it very clear to my team [00:35:00] that I'm. I'll support their decision making and I will help them work through difficult options and be a sounding board, but I'm not going to tell them what to do because that probably would result in awful things happening first and foremost.

But, but also I, I want them to feel properly empowered in their jobs and actually put some meaning behind what that, what that empowerment looked like. I, I also said that, and, and not, not meaning to sound negative, but I, I said I, I want them to tell their teams. To not contact them unless it really is a dire emergency, i.e. really trying and enforcing it, courage, that mindset being percolated down the firm. We also did like really intentional events. So we put, we put time aside in diaries and took time out of the day job to spend time on this, getting to know each other as a team. creating that psychologically safe environment but also enabling other layers if you like of the organization to do the same.

So we took like days out last [00:36:00] year just to focus on like what, what does this mean for us and actually have a really good conversation about culture and mindset and what this looks like in practice outside of and completely away from the day job. And

that, I think there's something in that. That is massively undervalued generally, I think, and they get even more important when the going gets tough and the general instinct from a number of people is when the going gets tough, you have to knuckle down and you have to really start to drive.

And actually, the reality is that that can be counterproductive if the issue isn't just a base capacity and throughput, if there's something else going on there. They're taking a bit of a step back. One, it gives you the opportunity, as you're saying, to ensure psychological safety pervades through a difficult time, which is hugely important and everyone's on the right track and things, but actually just the act of stepping back might give you new solutions.

Yeah, totally right. And I think there's, there's a risk again when you've got big day jobs and, and you know, you work in a big part of the firm and there's lots to do, [00:37:00] that the things that you ask colleagues to think about become additive. It's like you need to do your day job and you need to innovate and you need to have a strategy and you need to do your mindset thinking and you need to be a good leader and you need to empower your people.

Whereas I think the art of actually saying we're going to take a couple of days out, you know, a period of time, whatever that might look like, and we're going to spend time just on this thing. Which doesn't feel naturally aligned to what we do as an infrastructural organization. I think made, made everyone sort of, to your point, sit back and go, okay, this is important.

Let's actually take some time for this and this in isolation. Like, we're not going to be doing a release today. We're not going to be taking customer orders today, whatever it might be. We're, we're going to sit and talk and really think about what this means for us culturally as an organization. And that was quite powerful.

How did you deal with the skeptics? And, and bringing the sceptics along with you.

And I bet there's still one or two permeated somewhere [00:38:00] through the organisation. Yeah, we might,

we might have some. I think, on the sceptics, though, I'm a huge believer in radical candour. So, be very direct with the things that you want to say.

But, again, to what we've talked a bit about, um, on this episode, like, start with why. So why is it important? So, so when I might have observed or noticed or been informed about, that makes us sound like a spy organization, but um, you know, people that might need a little bit more help in understanding what we're doing and why it's important and, you know, maybe skeptical.

I, I went and had the conversation, which is, not entirely sure you're, you're bought into where we're going. But why is that? Because I genuinely want to understand because to, to, to me and the, you know, the majority of us, it feels like the right thing to do. So I want to know if you've got a different perspective, if you've noticed something that we've not seen, if there's something else in, in experience that tells you we've got this wrong, [00:39:00] but try to have quite a direct conversation around really trying to get under the skin of, of what the What the dis or misbelief might be behind, behind that person not contributing.

Now, we've spent a lot of time in the conversation talking about the more important side of things, actually, which, which always should be the human beings. But obviously there is a mission of the team and the mission of the team is to provide technology. And I'm interested how you connected the sort of the notion of platform based or sort of back office.

underlying supporting technology to say like the purpose of organizations and things like that. How did you create the, the golden thread that made people feel like that they were contributing to say the success of the firm?

Yeah, we made a really good picture. Um, so we made a What, what, what doesn't architecture solve?

Tell me what problems architect can't solve with pictures.

It's a box. It's a couple of lines. Everybody just gets it. Move along now. It's simple.

Exactly right. [00:40:00] Exactly right. There's nothing a box and lines can't solve for. So I'm getting that vibe. I'm certainly getting that vibe. So, so, so what we created was, you know, our, um, our bank's mission is, is simpler, better, and more balanced, right?

We've been talking about that now for about 12 months. What we then laid out was. What does the technology organization do at a macro level to enable that to happen? And then we decompose that into, right, what do our infrastructure teams do to make that happen? And then specifically, and obviously across the broader cloud organization, we're quite a big part of that infrastructure mission.

What are we doing? And we sort of connected the world class products. Delightful developer experience, you know, best in class unit costs right up to that means this for what products and services and technology applications should build that will then drive these following top line business metrics in terms of new products to market or [00:41:00] whatever that might be.

And that then gets us to simpler, better, more balanced. So we actually took time to not do death by PowerPoint, but draw a really simple picture that shows actually we're not just a service and product provider sat in the middle of the company. Responding frantically to whatever requests might hit our door whilst we're on the, you know, tech debt treadmill of doom.

It's like, actually, we've got a huge purpose that can help move the organization forward. And some of that was writing it down, and some of it was trying to explain it in a way that kept it simple, but people actually believed. I think because the organization was, was, was probably run in certain, in a certain way for so long, there was no belief that infrastructure and cloud could be anything different.

Certainly from, from the, the colleagues that maybe have slightly longer tenure with, with obviously new, new people that have seen different organizations or things from a slightly different level would come and go, hang on a minute, [00:42:00] like we're perceived as the engine room, like we're the enablement platform.

We will make this bank deliver amazing technology products. Kind of strange no one else really seems to believe that yet. Right.

I wonder then, maybe just by way of bringing our conversation to a little bit of a close today, what kind of learnings have you had out of it as a leader going in? Obviously you knew how you were going to frame these things, but like as these things always do when you're dealing with complex situations like this.

There's always something that comes along that's different to what there was before, even though you weren't necessarily expecting it, or it's a new area of an organization that you've not worked in before. What are the couple that stand out for you as the big aha moments?

Yeah, I think the, I think some of the conversation we had, we've had today, don't underestimate the value and frankly the need to state the obvious.

The second one is, like the muscle memory you need to build. You don't have like a really amazing all hands call where your team talk about their strategy and our new [00:43:00] mindset and we do that for 90 minutes and then call closed in January, right? That's us done for the rest of the year. It's that repetition of that muscle memory build that we need to do.

to make sure that we're constantly on our, on our game with our values, our mindset, our leadership, our empowerment, and the good technology will follow. But that discipline for me is, you know, don't forget you need to do it.

Es, away you go.

Yeah, so it's that time of year again. So we've all made year plans, or at least a lot of

companies are still in a yearly cycle. And we all think about agile and we want to continuously adapt. But most of the time we're talking about yearly plans and now it's February, end of February, where we're at right now.

And then it comes to how are we going to execute this? You know, how are we going to take this out of PowerPoint into the actions of our teams? And, um, I don't know if you know the book, [00:44:00] Polarity Management. But it's quite interesting. And how does it, does it relate? Well, you have portfolio management, or at least you have projects and leaders need to decide, are we going to go for this or that?

But what I actually hear is that a lot of teams, they want leaders to decide, yeah, but is it going to be a, or B, you know, you need to decide we can't do it all, but the response usually is no, it's end, you know, we're going to do and this. And we're going to do that. And I think that's the biggest struggle for a lot of leaders at this point.

So how do you do that? How do you actually manage those polarities? And if you look at Barry Johnson, who's actually the author of the book, he says, polarities are interdependent. So choosing one over the other has consequences. So it is end. You would assume, but how can you emphasize the best of both worlds?

So it's not only about stability versus change or control versus flexibility or one project over the other, or we're going only a technical depth over new features that always sound more sexy. So usually [00:45:00] they get the most attention in the companies. So I was, I was actually wondering, Amy, what polarities are you managing at the moment?

Do you recognize this?

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. What I've tried to do, and it's a very, it's a very real challenge, both in old job and in, in, in new or current job. The thing I try to do is, is obviously be empathetic to the humans in the team who are sort of looking at this crescendo of work thinking, Oh gosh, how am I going to make it to December?

I try to kind of think about an and when. Because this is all about the priority, like the order of everything, right? Because we can't do everything everywhere all at once, because that would be a catastrophe. You'd end up with very tired people very quickly. But to your point, as on the tech debt versus modernization, versus innovation, versus something else, quite often the thing I found is there are interdependencies between those things.

And if you get your planning right, You can have some delightful two for one occurrences in terms of actually, if we start here and then do this and then do this, we will achieve at a [00:46:00] macro level, all those things in a, in an order, right? Because there'll be a logical sequence. There's also a bit as well for me as like a leader in the firm of expectations management up the line.

So, you know, when we're getting to the point of. unreasonableness in terms of load where we can't do and when, and we can't necessarily get that logical sequencing right. There'll be, you know, part of my job is to say, right, this is our best and final offer in terms of how we think we're going to get this stuff done.

We're going to be ambitious but realistic. Here are what we think the sacrificial lambs are that don't get done this year. It might be a 26 thing, whatever, and try and front run that as quickly as possible.

Is there something on planning horizon too? You mentioned planning there and it seems to me that you know, if you wind back, let's be generous and say it's seven years, but it might actually be more like 10.

Planning horizons used to be these kind of artificially comforting annual plans or three year strategies. It fits exactly [00:47:00] in the window, it's perfect. I know, to 0.25 of a percent. The cost I'm going to take out are the growth I'm going to drive and it's and I'm going to deliver that on the 31st of December this year.

Where are you guys in terms of thinking about planning horizons? Are you still, are you still managing to land annual plans or actually those? You know, in reflection of the complexity of all the dynamics you've just been talking about. And that's before you even think about the market effects that are happening and, you know, the weather outside of the company, so to speak, that means like you might have to be pivoting on a quarterly basis or a monthly basis.

Yeah, so, so we, we've got to, we're running at the minute in my crew with a three year plan. Right. So we are, the constraint we have is an annual budget cycle, and we'll obviously lay down what we think is reasonable in that 12 month window with that budget. But one of the most refreshing things over this Christmas break just gone starting the new year.

And I remember I used to [00:48:00] sort of sit with bated breath every January waiting for my boss to tell me what the new things were we were going to do in that year. Thinking about all the things we haven't quite finished on the 31st of December previously. Losing sleep with the excitement of it.

Yeah, exactly.

The quietly being excited. Um, and maybe the small sweat. Um, and this year the, the, the delightful thing I've got to tell my team is, you know, we all clocked off Broadway on the 20th, 21st of December. We've all come back on, you know, second, third of Jan. Nothing's different. Yeah, no, no new dreams have been invented while everyone's confused in that between Christmas, New Year, eating too much cheese and port window.

Um, we haven't decided anything's more important because ultimately that's a two week period when most people take annual leave. That's the only real exciting thing. Cheese hallucinate a new future. Exactly.

Yeah. No, no, no, no, no cheese. No strategies born out of cheese dreams, nothing, you know, none of that.

And it was, it was really quite refreshing to say, guys, the stuff we said was [00:49:00] important that we got a large chunk of the way through. Well, the chunk we said was in 2025. That's still the work that we've got to do now. There may be some exceptions, but the, I think the, the, the ability of us to do that in a way more mature state was quite powerful because everyone goes, Oh, right.

Cool. Okay. The only thing I've really got to worry about now is how do I lose those five pounds? as opposed to reorganizing the entire team around something new that might have been created.

And again, it's, it's, I go back to blame the finance community again, they've got a lot to answer for, but it's that they set that mindset of annual budgets and new things and new plans and actually running on a capacity and running on a stream of work that doesn't change, you just prioritize it effectively and add things to the queue as you need them.

It's a much better way to organize humans and get them to do stuff effectively, but yeah, yeah, we still get told to do this thing on these periods that must be exact, and I think it's damaged a lot of engineering teams from the way they have to operate. So, yeah. Yeah, but it's, it's artificial as well.

Like the [00:50:00] difference of a December to January is no different May to June or August to September. It's just, we lose our minds when we hit the, oh my gosh, we've changed years. Ah, is that new year? It's all going to be perfect. You bounce out on New Year's Eve with all those resolutions that fail within the first week.

Yeah, exactly.

New year, new team. You know, all that kind of stuff. New me, no. I felt way,

way more positive, right? I have, I've actually seen epics shown up that, that an epic is called leftovers of last year. Yeah. Like seriously. What? Yeah.

It's like, it's still work to do. It's not leftover. Yeah. I imagine if you're on the leftovers team. Imagine. Imagine. Yes. How demoralizing would that be? Yeah. Leftover team for you.

Well, on that note, Amy, it has been delightful exploring the human side of leadership with you today and just how effective that can be, not only in driving up performance of a team, but actually in the delivery of technology in a complex world.

So thank you very much for that. It's been great to see you.

[00:51:00] Thank you so much for having me. It's been an awful lot of fun.

Now we end every episode of this podcast by asking our guests what they're excited about doing next, and that could be, you've got a great restaurant booked at the weekend or it could be something in your professional life or a bit of both.

So Amy, what are you excited about doing next?

Right, I'm, I'm excited. I go personal first. I need to, I need to shave about 30 seconds off my minute per mile run time because I, there's a certain time in it that I want to achieve a 10k in. So, so that is, that is job number one. Very good. That's challenging. It is challenging. Um, I think I need to actually go and procure some new legs and maybe that'll do it.

You need to get a new pair of trainers. A new pair of trainers. You know, some new kicks. I've tried, I've got a few rounds of that. Not working just yet. The number of boxes in our hallways becoming alarming.

I could build a little fort now. So I might just flip into fort building, um, with, with cardboard. That could be sort of a career curveball this year. I think the other one on the professional front is really carrying on the great work that we started this year. Right. So all. all the [00:52:00] brilliant basics that we worked on across the team.

And then how do we use that to get to like 2. 0 of how we perform as an organization and how we capitalize on a lot of, I'd say, difficult work, but highly rewarding. And how do we use that to sort of, you know, 10X how we perform as a team this year?

Yeah. It's lovely, isn't it? When you get into that phase of.

You are all aligned and you are all committed to the same mission and, and now it's just about getting better together. Yeah. Yeah. Brilliant. A brilliant, a brilliant phase in team development. I think

if you would like to discuss any of the issues on this week's show and how they might impact you and your business, please get in touch with us at Cloud realities@capgemini.com.

We're on LinkedIn. We'd love to hear from you, so feel free to connect on DM if you have any questions for the show to tackle. And of course, please rate and subscribe to our podcast. It really helps us improve the show. A huge thanks to Amy. Our sound and editing wizards, Ben and Louis, our producer, Marcel, despite the, um, well yeah.

We could say that we'll never mention that again, but that would be an out and out line. We absolutely will.

There's a list, and I've added it to it. Oh, thank you to all our listeners. See you in another reality next week.

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