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AI Engineering Capabilities Study

Series: What's AI Storytelling?

AI-CLOUD CHANGE PILOT CXO's:

Bimodal mentoring & multimodal skills

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Introduction:

Digital Businesses fly on Cloud and AI. Tom Davenport's talks on a MIT Sloan research report suggests using the pilot- copilot- engineer analogy to depict the future-proofing roadmap for the CIOs and IT teams.

While the MIT research report talked about What has changed in terms of CIO and IT teams' roles and expectations, the Cloud and AI Community continues working on Why and How these changes need to be done and can be done, to transform organizations across all sectors, into strategically relevant and competitive Digital Powerhouses.

Cloud and AI-ML-Data Science are the most essential pivots not just for digital-native net-new businesses, but also for converting traditional businesses into exponentially efficient and effective value delivery platforms for their customers and citizens.

Consequently, the business and IT leaders' community is bound to explode in terms of usage of AI as the most essential brainstorming platform and also an indispensable source of latest knowledge about the Digitalization Toolboxes.

This is in complete sync with the key messages from Tom Davenport, where Tom explained with his characteristically fabulous example of CIO and IT teams & roles morphing into pilot, copilot and engineers when the new digital businesses are taking to the blue skies of opportunities, from the firm grounds of traditional successful businesses.

Hands-on AI-cloud Practice Leaders in most enterprises do have a first-hand realization of the need for strong FinOps knowledge in the IT teams that deliver and run cloud, AI, big data analytics workloads daily. These are the most practical brainstorming and enabler platforms for leaders and their teams across end-user businesses, to share ground realities, experiences and best practices, to get the best out of cloud and AI for their companies.

The India Stack for instance, built on the JAM trinity of Jandhan-Adhar-Mobile phone, is already emerging as a full-stack "data to API to services" growth and value driver, setting an example for the world. Cloud and AI community is slated to act as a key lever for it, as the time is NOW for a cloud and intelligence-accelerated journey for nation-wide business transformations. The supply chains are fast becoming agile intelligence-driven value chains.

Consequently, there's never been a better time to be a worker with the right skills and training, because these people can use cloud-AI-open source technologies and data, to create and capture value. However, there's never been a worse time to be a worker with only legacy skills and abilities because genAI, agentic and robotic AI – from Gemini to Anthropic to Agentspace to Copilot, are acquiring these skills and abilities at non-linear rate.

In this massive change context, CEO-CXO's across all organizations and industries must move fast from labour and cost arbitrage to data and intelligence arbitrage. To operationalize this neo-digital strategy in their businesses and production systems, they need to aggressively promote

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holistic “Change Training” programs, visibly led by and starting from themselves as the Change Pilots.

The Change Programs should include:

- Muti-tier training programs from awareness to expertise, to different user groups basis their needs and AI leverage opportunities, with the basic programs providing fundamentals of Cloud and AI while the second cohort upwards will focus on specialization streams
- Specially crafted and customized program, meant for IT and tech leaders, business and functional leaders, given enterprise AI is fast becoming all pervasive, and especially with agentic AI there’s no business process, task or function that’s immune from change
- Hands-on learning and experimentation within regulated boundaries and enterprise sandboxes with pre-curated tech and data, from their business-specific real-world use cases, demo labs
- AI practice forums and consortiums of leaders, with sessions by fellow CIOs exchanging ideas of what works and what doesn’t, challenges and experiences with different AI tool stacks, models, cloud infrastructure options, GRC and data security, privacy requirements by their industries and regions
- Complementary certification opportunities across the layers of the company, from early starters like analysts and engineers, to team leaders, managers, and CXOs.

Bimodal mentoring: A simple yet effective way of Change Pilots

- In the context of CXO’s as Change Pilots, bimodal mentoring e.g. both forward and reverse mentoring, can be highly relevant. For example: The business and IT leaders and CXO’s directly connecting with the early-starters, digital-native workforce of AI-first engineers and analysts etc.
- In a forward mentoring mode the leaders will familiarize the freshers with the practical business problems and challenges that can be handled and experimented with AI.
- In the reverse mentoring mode, the freshers and juniors will educate and experiment along with the CXOs on the latest algorithms and tool stacks.

ACTION ITEMS: Target Quadruple Skill-mix for the CXOs and teams

Assimilating the key take-aways, here are the actionable pointers for the New (Transformational) CXO leaders, and their teams:

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1- Practice tightrope walking as Multimodal CXOs

The New CXO stories are pivoted on the multimodal balancing acts of:

- Keeping the lights on- maintaining business continuity, resilience & reliability,
- Enabling disruptive digital innovations with agility and elasticity,
- Keeping tech debts and ops costs under control, while steering the organizational leverage of full digital tech stacks in cloud-AI-data

Example Storyboard: A large insurance company's AI journey story

The fast-changing scenarios between the pre-and-post COVID worlds forced both healthcare and insurance industries to quickly adopt and reinvent themselves. Focus of their IT capabilities shifted to fast enablement of virtual service platforms, mobile-first designs and value propositions.

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AI-ML tech stacks like voice synthesis and pattern recognition and computer vision enabled use cases are no longer just fancy POCs or experiments. They have become market realities and part of standard customer expectations.

Now, these digital service delivery platforms and their backend tech workloads often have unique and new consumption patterns different from traditional brick-and-click models (e.g. late-night usage spike).

These services cannot be delivered without cloud and smart orchestrators and intelligent automation. Hence, the IT teams have the unenviable task of maintaining the traditional service platforms with predictable and consistent set practices, while rapidly inventing and implementing new tech use cases to deliver and support the new services and operating models.

All these operations needed to done while keeping the third critical pillar intact- the regulatory compliances, given that healthcare and financial services and insurance companies operate under stringent regulatory environment. AI-first autonomous operations ensured that the best personalized customer experience was delivered with the least possible risks of a data privacy breach or leakage.

2- Build Bridges, not just on cloud, but purposefully With Cloud

CXO's and tech leaders in any enterprise are the new architects of any business. They need to construct bridges between existing legacy business processes and operating models and the new digital ones, as described in the previous story. Integrating huge data galaxies to build one quality-checked curated pre-processed data Lakehouse and accelerators catalogue, is a mandate that is both complex and a voluminous task.

The data lakes are universal source of truth for all stakeholders, i.e. employees, customers and partners. They require much more than just a huge elastic underlying infrastructure. A robust data strategy requires new and different IT skillsets, knowledge of governance of big data workloads and their behavioral patterns, and potential issues that may arise from rapid parallelization. This is a reality that all digital tech stacks face, given that they operate on the new currency of speed and a new Unit of Time- seconds, not hours or days, let alone weeks/ months.

Across the domains of automotive to credit insurance companies to pharma and healthcare to media and entertainment, these challenges emerge in different forms and shapes. They can be handled with innovative leverage of new tech stacks on agentic AI e.g. autonomous learning and reasoning with feedback during inferencing, both powering rapid elastic and agile infra and exponential value from data.

3- Get comfortable being in the limelight

The AI-First Change Pilot CXOs and their teams must get comfortable in their new skin as front-runner business value contributors and change leaders. For example, the IT services teams are no longer in the shadows running the back end black boxes and skinless blades at data centre

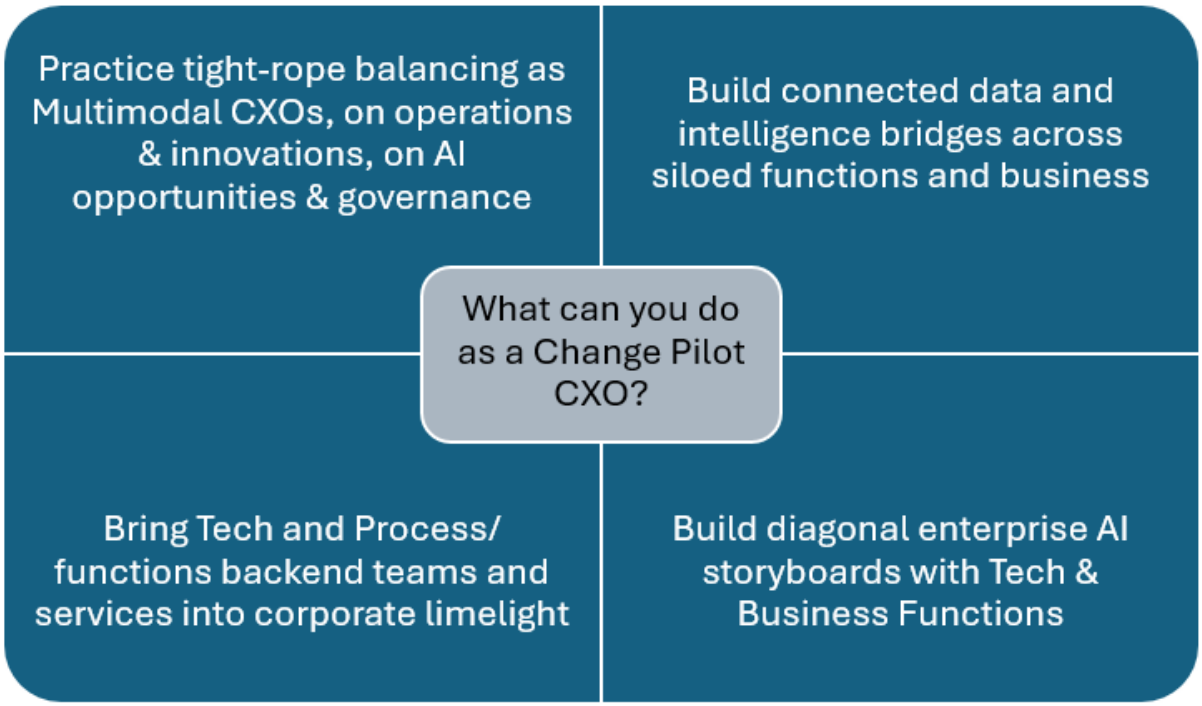
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racks. They are fast emerging as the relevant capability hub enabling every digital business context, to enable the data and algorithms running critical operations, sales, fulfilment, financial supply chains.

4- Build the Cloud-AI capabilities on a diagonal story boarding canvas

These are the most interesting Diagonal Storyboards that the tech teams can draw with business leaders- the horizontals being the vanilla tech infra-app tool stacks, and the verticals being industry specific data models patterns and knowledge bases.

These balanced and proven formula for success in rapid and business-impacting cloud-AI adoption shows that a hybrid diagonal approach works best and in the most 360 manners, for these tech stacks to work seamlessly and generate strategically relevant sizable business value.



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