Q+A with Cisco: Data Is the New Normal

IT is the fundamental core of businesses worldwide in the coming years, according to the technology director of Cisco Spain. He shares insights into how this work is changing.

The amount of big data available to help people and organizations make smarter decisions continues to multiply at a mind-boggling rate. As the technology director of Cisco Spain, Luis Palacios is one of the people responsible for helping companies collect, analyze and act on valuable data. He spoke to 360 about how our new digital world is changing how information technology (IT) professionals are working to propel companies forward.

360: Big data is becoming woven throughout our lives. You make sure this data can be collected, stored and used by the people who need it. Can you give us some perspective on just how big, big data is?

Luis: According to our own studies, the global IP traffic will nearly triple at a combined annual rate of 22 percent year over year for the next five years. There will be more than one billion new internet users to join the global internet community, growing from three billion two years ago to 4.1 billion in 2020. Data is going to be the new normal. The global IP traffic is suspected to reach 2.3 zettabytes which is equivalent to 12 hours of streaming music per day or 33 hours of ultra high definition video streaming for each person on Earth. That's the amount of traffic that we will have during 2020. It's amazing.

In this new distributed digital world, data is the most strategic asset. Powerful data analytics address organization's need to manage, understand, prepare and get information from the data. The biggest problem that everybody will have will be to separate data from useful information. That's the difficult part. We're talking about a huge opportunity for a lot of people, a lot of new business that will come that we don't understand yet.

360: How critical would you say it is for companies to figure out how to monetize data?

Luis: I think it's essential. Data driven enterprises are 26 percent more profitable and five times more likely to make faster decisions. The challenges obviously increase with the volume of data. So, how to monetize it? You have to exploit data analytics in high scaleable ways with infrastructure. This means turning data into action within the network faster than sending everything to traditional data centers and waiting for an analytics report. It becomes extremely important to have a very good infrastructure because we are talking about a crazy amount of data.

360: Do you see a change in the kinds of skills IT people need to be successful now?

Luis: IT as we used to know it has died. People are no longer sitting in cubicle farms worried only about incoming problems they are being asked to fix. IT's completely different now. It's the fundamental core of all the businesses worldwide in the coming years. IT is helping to lead business growth. Technology is being consumed now in a different manner than it used to be. As a result, business processes in the company will change.

For that to happen, there needs to first be changes in every company to culture and education. Otherwise, the change will happen too slowly. It will take 10 years instead of two. To work with big data, you need data scientists, analysts and software people, you also need communicators, collaborators and creators. We need people who have empathy for the customer and have the ability to listen and learn from others.

You can't offer people the right tools and technologies, but not offer them the culture, affordances or spaces that allow them to use those tools to do their best work.

360: Do you see more competition for attracting and retaining people who can do these jobs because now every company is a technology company?

Luis: Absolutely. Hiring people with the right skills will be central to any company strategy. For a happy employee to stay at my company, I need to offer them something that is attractive from human resources, facilities, technology and culture.

It has to be done together and this is something we believe in and that we have conversations about with our customers. Because you can't offer people the right tools and technologies, but not offer them the culture, affordances or spaces that allow them to use those tools to do their best work.

360: How does embracing Agile Software Development, a set of methods where solutions evolve through collaboration between empowered, cross-functional teams, change the way IT professionals work?

Luis: In the past, we might wait for 20 features to be created before delivering a product. Now, we start with what we need tomorrow. For example, we may decide we need to make a phone call over the internet. We might start with audio and one 'call' button, launching it in 15 days. We put it into the market, receive feedback and begin working on the next stage simultaneously. Revenue begins right away and we get to design the next feature using customer feedback.

360: How do you believe the work environment can support people's best work?

Luis: For me it's very clear, we're in the middle of a transformation. We have different types of work we need to accomplish each day. Sometimes you need to concentrate. Sometimes you need to work in collaboration with two or three people, or with a larger group of six or seven.

The workplace matters. It needs to let people know they are not entering a company from a previous era. It's not only the color of the carpet. It's everything. It's a user experience. You should be able to find where to work based on what you need to do for the next hour. Two hours later, you may move to a different space and three hours later you may move to your office, if you have one. When you decide you need to work from home, the technology and human resources policies should allow you to do it. Facilities should have prepared different spaces in the office to support different workstyles with the perfect light, pictures, tables, integration with video, phone, whiteboards, digital whiteboards and more.

To learn more about how IT jobs are changing and what that means for the workplace, read _The Race to Digitize_ in the latest issue of 360 Magazine.

Luis Palacios is the Cisco Spain technology director. He works on enterprise networking and data center technologies as well as collaboration technologies such as Spark Board and WebEx for Cisco in Spain.

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