



NEXT GEN ENGINEERING: THE ERA OF INTELLIGENCE

WALK IN THE CLOUD

AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

Host:

Ellen Bencard

Speakers:

Abidemi Ogunbowale-Thomas, Managing Director, Accenture Next Gen Engineering, Tech Imagineer

Abidemi Ogunbowale-Thomas Bio:

Abidemi is a disruptive thinking Technology Managing Director and Tech Imagineer with over 20 years of industry experience. He is known for being a technical, creative, entrepreneurial culture-maker and for his approach on making businesses more 'humanbydesign'.

Abidemi is trusted working with local and global cross-industry teams to deliver innovative people-centered business transformation utilising cloud-enabled, full stack, modern engineered product, and service solutions. Abidemi successfully and credibly brings the business and technology (inc. C-Suite) together for the purpose of creating teams to deliver meaningful outcomes for clients and customers. This has resulted in several team and tech awards over the years.

Abidemi is a proactive ally and mentor for Diversity, Inclusion and Equality representing our people in various forums – including the techUK Skills and Diversity Council.

In 2020 he won the Accenture UKI Greater Than Awards 2020 Most Inspirational Leader Award, Accenture Global 2020 Equality Awards Equality Champion UK Award, and appeared on the EMpower Global Top 100 Ethnic Minority Future Leaders List 2020. Abidemi's passion as a people advocate has organically led to him becoming the Accenture Executive Co-Sponsor for the Accenture UKIA African Caribbean Network; and the Accenture Executive Sponsor for MOBOLISE, a partnership between MOBO x Accenture.

Intro: Walk in the cloud.

Ellen: What do management consultants, GPS and parents of teenagers all have in common? They all go on about the need for change, so much so that their audiences can get a bit desensitised to the message. My guest today is here with a wakeup call like A-levels on the horizon or sky high blood pressure readings, Abidemi Ogunbowale-Thomas says that technical advances in the last year have been so dramatic businesses are truly at a change or die place. That's our topic on today's Walk in the Cloud.

Abi, welcome.

Abidemi: Hi Ellen. How are you doing?

Ellen: I am great. Now you have made the bold claim that the evolution of virtualisation in its many forms is now about to tip the balance so far that we must reinvent civilization as we



know it. That's a big claim. To understand what you're getting at, first, let's unpick virtualisation. What do you mean by that?

Abidemi: When I talk about virtualisation, I think about anything that's being generated by computers and it mimics reality, but it obviously isn't reality, but also what we've been finding over the last decades is that that virtualization is actually impacting and influence the lifestyles that we lead. And we think about from when the mainframes were in place. When you had your own single PC at home where you could do any anything, but only when you're at home to the laptops and the mobile social, all of these things have been rapidly but steadily changing the way that we as humans live, but now we've got arrived at the Gen AI era. The era of intelligence, if you will, and quantum computing is not too far off in of itself. They are creating challenges in terms of the traditional way civilizations have been set up. A technology system such as Gen AI, offering the ability for people who aren't as large as enterprises or even small startups to enter the market and so now it's really challenging us to think about what sort of civilization we need to be able to govern these great technologies, but also remain human at the same time.

Ellen: What you're describing is a pretty steady evolution since the beginning of computing. What has us at this tipping point right now? Now you mentioned AI that of course has been an evolution for a while, but you know this is the year of Gen AI. What what's new in the past year that's pushing us to this place?

Abidemi: I'd say it's basically the opening up of the marketplace. There's always a sense of entry criteria you have to get into the market. But over the last year, what we've seen is a proliferation of entrepreneurs being able to use these powerful technologies, but with creative use cases that challenge and compete in the market. Then you have the enterprises who are obviously trying to deal with the cost of living crisis and the heightened costs of running their businesses in terms of total cost to serve and they're having to basically race to the bottom in order to balance out their profitability in many cases. So, we've seen a lot of the tech companies reducing their headcount in order to achieve this, but then also you've got the

startups and the challenges, and they've been doing really well over the last number of years and disrupting their markets. But what they're also finding is that the customer expectation is so rapidly changing, that all three groups are finding it difficult to create stability in an area or an era of hyper change.

Ellen: Are there specific technologies that all three groups are either using or need to use?

Abidemi: I'd say they're definitely the onslaught of the various AI services that's moved on from basically single large language modules on one specific skill, but now given us the ability to generate and create content or assets within inside the value chain means that even a 7 year old with a good Gen AI system can compete with the best when it comes to creativity in terms of businesses, and that democratisation of access is the real game changer.

Ellen: When you talk about entrepreneurs, how many of these people are techies?

Abidemi: Many of them don't have to be anymore. So, if you think about things like drop shipping, many of them could be as a result of the pandemic person looking to find another means of generating revenue to for their household and finds a niche ability to be able to identify the products by using these technologies that identify sentiment or popularity, and they take that information and go to these drop ship platforms. They don't have to create their own warehouses anymore, they don't have to create their own supply chains. They can plug in and partner with those likes of Amazon. And so before you know it, they're generating businesses that are generating revenues of 10s of millions of pounds. Even in the UK and that it's that democratisation, as I say, where it means that people are now much more confident in going it alone, if you will, because they know that there's a sizable amount of revenue they can generate.

Ellen: If that world is democratising, where do the CIO's and the deep engineering people fit



in? Because clearly, coding is still important, yes?

Abidemi: 100 percent, and I think that's where the thought process needs to be. I talked about the decades of evolution, but actually in parallel with that, we've announced lots of challenges in virtualisation. Whether it be cybersecurity, whether it be the ability to manage identities and be confident that who a person asserts they are is who they actually are. Whether it be the fact that the boundaries have been elapsed in terms of my company being able to become global overnight in terms of the trade that I do, or the ability for us to think about the governing of some of these areas. So, we've always had things like data governance, but even more so now we think about AI, how do we keep it ethical? How do we act responsibly with these really powerful technologies? Those items, along with the challenges of people themselves, when you think about the attention span that has dwindled over a number of years because our attention has been so economised by the platforms we've been using, it creates a large number of challenges that we need to sell for. So, the CIO's, the software engineers, the security specialists - they're all still very relevant. It's just that their relevance now has to pivot towards, how do you create those platforms in a way that your weakest link is understood and catered for? Whether it be the cloud partnerships, whether it be the technology partnerships, because as much as I would like to say, you can press a button and just synchronise everything you want to, there's always an underlying complexity that sits underneath it that people need to understand when things go wrong.

Ellen: And are you seeing corporate cultures change so that the entrepreneurial thinking that puts these building blocks together, how does that mesh with the traditional tech mindset?

Abidemi: Really great question. So, when I talk about the democratisation outside in the market, what we're also beginning to see is that happening inside companies. So, you hear a lot of people talking about things like inner sourcing, where you're trying to enable as much of the people inside your business to be able to make good decisions at the point of context as opposed to the traditional command and control

that comes from the headquarters and tells everyone what to do. So, we see two things. One is a simplification of strategies so that everyone in the business understands the hinge sheet if you will, that they should be singing from, but then also an empowering of those people in terms of self services. So, we hear a lot now more recently around platform engineering, which is really an evolution of Dev-Ops and itself as a mindset of empowering people, to become more self-sufficient. So, if you democratise access the software and tooling inside businesses to enable the people in your business to be more productive with their potential and their insight, well, you now generate innovation inside your own business. You're now asking people to really challenge the way you've done things, but that requires some other technologies to be in place. And I'm sure we'll talk a bit more about those shortly.

Ellen: Well, go ahead. Tell me. Tell me what else needs to be in place?

Abidemi: So, the first thing is actually an aggregation of data. With many companies the data is sporadically placed and therefore in its isolated nature it doesn't provide you the aggregated insight that you could garner from that as a business. And so, over the last number of years we've been seeing people talk about data lakes and machine learning to bring those things together. But actually some people are finding it really difficult to move the data from their legacy platforms and spending millions and millions of pounds trying to do that. So, the evolution over the last year is actually to challenge that orthodoxy and say, well, is there a way I can leave the data in their current locations but still create an aggregated view of insight from those things and obviously, run the machine learning appropriately? And if I can do that, it provides me the ability to learn from that information and then apply with experience and experimentation intelligence, my end user.

Ellen: And can you do that?

Abidemi: You actually can.

Ellen: All right, what else?

Abidemi: Well, so one of the things I've observed over the number of years I've been in



business and looking at technology and how it enables, is there's often a disconnect between the business who are hyper focused on obviously strategy and the end user and the customer and the technologies team, who are often around enabling technologies for the business. But what we really need to get to, is a customer centric business. One that everybody is reverberating around that central customer and how they collectively can bring their superpowers to be able to serve that customer. Why? Because the revenue is generated by those end users. And while they are going between industries or experiences, let's say a Starbucks where you check in and suddenly that heightens their expectations, businesses need to be able to evolve and adapt to that as quickly as possible, and those who don't, who still want to maintain the traditional way of doing things, often find it difficult because of those emerging competitors I talked about, whether startups and challenging mindset or individuals you want to run their own businesses and entrepreneurs.

Ellen: So, I'm guessing that most CEOs and CTOS get this, yes?

Abidemi: To a certain extent, but I think they're most focused right now, especially in the backdrop of the economic crisis as we're seeing is actually reducing cost and so a lot of the investment is actually about how they take out costs from their business and how they right balance that profitability in terms of the way the business is run, whereas it needs to move past that in my mind.

Ellen: I mean, if they're stuck fighting that fire, **how do they...**

Abidemi: Get to that world?

Ellen: Yeah.

Abidemi: Exactly. And that's why we talked before about that democratisation. If we're spending too much time, and I use this term politely, but infighting around traditional ways of doing things and fiefdoms and areas of the traditional mindset - the world outside is not waiting, it's not stopping and we see the same thing even in government and some of the health and public services where they're also trying to address the agenda of a lack of

digitalisation in some of their services by trying to advance those things. So, at some point, if you're not moving in tandem with that market, you become obsolete. We've seen that in the UK a lot over the last number of years with companies who took their eye off the digitalisation agenda and before they knew it, they were inside administration and bankruptcy. So, these things are really fundamentally important when we think about companies succeeding or thriving in the future.

Ellen: And do you have any UK examples of people you think are doing this well?

Abidemi: Well, I think for us as a team that reviews across all the board, what we're seeing are the companies who do this well are the ones who pay close attention to their customers. So, the likes of Sterling Bank, the likes of Aviva, the likes of Cinch where they're not trying to be everything to everybody, but they're trying to be hyper relevant to the customer on a specific need. They're also inviting the customer into their business. So that voice is heard way before you invest lots of money into publishing or producing or manufacturing software or services or products that aren't relevant. And it's that sense of a learning environment that you need to create inside your business with learning tools, so if you think about that data I referred to before, providing a way for all of the people in your business to be able to learn from that common intelligence in terms of how they may apply themselves to impact is really critical.

Ellen: It's a very long way from companies telling us what we need and how we can have it.

Abidemi: Right, exactly.

Ellen: Let's go through some other board members, just as we approach the end of our walk, give me a one sentence thought that each of these people needs to think about. The Chief Financial Officer?

Abidemi: Procurement is challenging, but if we maintain the old ways of procuring, we could be limiting the innovation that propels us into reinvention. So, I think it's really important that they think about new funding models to be able to support the adaptability businesses need.



Ellen: How about the CHRO?

Abidemi: The effect of the employee experience is really profound now, especially after the pandemic. People want to engage with businesses in different ways, and it's really important for them to see CHRO's to think about what is the employee experience you're offering? Because it is a talent war out there and because of that shortage, it's important you provide the best package for your people. Otherwise, you'll find the most important parts of your business walking away.

Ellen: I suspect the word experience may come up again. How about the Chief Marketing Officer?

Abidemi: Indeed, experience and engagement is everything. But actually one of the things I think with Chief Marketing Officers is actually to think about the tooling they have - does it enable experimentation? You know, one of the best ways we as humans learn is through experimentation. But if you think about the traditional software delivery life cycle, the experimentation isn't as easy. Whereas if you think about people like the Adobe test and targets or the AB testing platforms like Optimizely, they allow you to test in market in production with a subset of your users. To understand how they react to certain changes which then verifies through hypothesis driven engagement, whether it's going to have a positive or potentially negative effect before you commit to then delivering it inside your actual software.

Ellen: Makes sense. And let's wind up with the CEO. What do you tell the boss?

Abidemi: I think the boss is really the one who needs to bring that vision of the importance of adaptability and reinvention, one who challenges the team to think about the orthodoxies that they hold and that are holding them back. And so, in that sense, it's really about bringing to life the stories of what's happening in the competitive market so that people can imagine a world outside. I often say to businesses, it's really important that you don't become an echo chamber, that you don't

become a team that only sees the world the way you've always seen the world. And the best way to do that is to burst those bubbles by learning from the market consistently and constantly. And not just your own industry because we're seeing great experiences in one industry translate well into other industries.

Ellen: So, we can learn from them all. And that is our walk and our revolution for the day. Thank you, Abi.

As with your GP's advice to exercise more and drink less, you can ignore this, but it might be at your peril if you're keen to learn more about cutting edge technologies and what to do with them. Do you have a look for Accenture Tech Vision 24 which tackles lots of great topics like this and helps you look to the world ahead.

Outro: Walk in the Cloud.

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