CLOUD REALITIES

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Human operating systems with
Michael Hamman

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[00:00:00] For the wider conversation. So Rob, would you mind just setting out just some of the core elements of what goes on a digital transformation from a tech perspective, but almost more importantly, for me, from a human perspective, what journeys do people go on? Sorry, did you mean Rob or Michael? No, I meant Rob.

Me?

Welcome to Cloud Realities, a conversation show exploring the practical and exciting alternate realities that can be unleashed through cloud driven transformation. I'm David Chapman. I'm Sjoukje Zaal, and I'm Rob Kernahan.

In this week, we're going to be talking about the human operating system. What is the human operating system and how [00:01:00] can humans deal with the more complex world of digital innovation?

And for that matter, how is it different? What's different on the other side of the digital transformation from here?

We are delighted to welcome Michael Hamman to talk about this with us. Michael is a coach and teacher. Michael, thank you so much for taking the time to come on the show. It's great to see you. Please take a moment to introduce yourself and say hello. Hello, everyone. So I'm Michael Hamman. And I think what I would say about myself very briefly is that I have been a lifelong student of human transformation.

I brought that into work with startups in the 90s. And then agility hit the scene in the late 90s, early 2000s. And I became very much involved in agile transformations throughout the last 20 plus years. And my focus primarily has been on helping leaders At all levels of the organization develop their capacity for complex sensemaking and high performance ultimately.[00:02:00]

So I thought it might be useful to kick off our conversation by just setting the context of what happens in a digital transformation and use that as a bit of a frame for the wider conversation. So Rob, would you mind just setting out just some of the core elements of what goes on a digital transformation from a tech perspective, but almost more importantly from a human perspective, what journeys do people go on?

What happens in a digital transformation? It's hard to characterize because it's technology and it is people coming together. So in my mind, the big thing about digital transformation is understanding that technology and business are now one and have to be interlinked. So you can't keep it in the corner anymore as that thing that's a cost center go away.

But the technology is the thing that's going to create a new business model. It should be part of your growth and value center. But to do that. There's this traditional paradigm change shift, which is operating models need to change, they need to be business aligned and with that skills need to change as well.

So we need to think more about [00:03:00] assembly to achieve the business goal and what are those components that I need, all those capabilities or mechanisms in the system that are going to be able to allow me to create this new thing that's going to change my business model, my operating structures and all of that stuff.

So for me, digital transformation at the heart is yeah. Changing the way we work, thinking differently about how we interact and changing our business models, using technology to power that all and right at the base of that, the key enabler for me is the cloud gives you the flexibility to allow you to create new, exciting things with technology faster that, fundamentally.

conserve the business. So if I was to sum it up in a surprise question way, Dave it would be that you're welcome. Thank you very much. And I think for me when you talked in the middle there about operating model and the changing nature about how organizations structure themselves. And a big part of that, I think, is empowerment.

And absolutely. And what that means. So [00:04:00] Michael, maybe if I can come to you some first thoughts on it then. So within that different power structure that's trying to do things, let's say in a more creative and innovative way. What are the first things that occur to you in terms of the impact that has on and leaders of all types?

Yeah. So what I would say about all of that is that ultimately what you're talking about, Rob, depends on the skillful means of people ultimately. And the bottom line is, how skillful are people at being able to operate in this new way. And what I have found in years of work, working with people is that, you can teach people new skills, you can teach people new perspectives, but they're not necessarily going to be able to acquire these new skills, or they're not necessarily able to see these new perspectives.

Has that been your experience? Yeah, if you're in a closed system, as I would call it, in a [00:05:00] bubble, say, and some sectors struggle from this, not seeing others do it. It's very difficult to learn by reading a book. It's seeing is believing for me. And it's how do I seed new into the culture so that others can learn from that new in a positive way.

If you try and change from within without injecting something different and bringing new ideas to the table with new people, then I think you can struggle. It can take longer because it seems theoretical to the business, whereas actually going out and finding out what others have done really helps energize the mind to get into that new place, new way of thinking, et cetera.

So yeah, it's I see those that struggle are because they've not gone and found out what others have achieved and done and what great things can be can be created. Yeah, there was also resistance to change, right? Yeah, exactly. So there's all these different things that happen with people, change would be really easy if it weren't for these pesky people, right?

And Rob's been saying that for years, I didn't have to [00:06:00] deal with people. My job would be a lot easier. Yeah. And here's the thing that I have seen through, all these years of working in this sphere, You I'm pretty convinced that in order for people to become be able to engage more innovatively to it, to actually change that something has to shift in the way that they understand themselves, the way they understand other people, the way they understand the nature of reality.

So it actually did something like digital transformation forces us. Fortunately or unfortunately to deal with what we might regard as age old philosophical questions, which is what determines how I see the world and how can I get access to that which determines how I see the world because ultimately it's about how people see the world.

So the source of resistance isn't out there, it's in here. It's in [00:07:00] how we are looking at things, how people look at things and how those of us who are trying to get other people to change how we look at things. So ultimately it points to what I might call a kind of deeper human operating system, like having some way to be able to gain access to that.

Operating system, which, we don't know that it's running in the background, but our actions and behaviors and ways of thinking are a product of that, which that operating system can make available to just talk about that, then in terms of the, my words, not yours, the framing of the world. So like how a person views the world and therefore engages with it.

From a leadership perspective is a good example of that. So the difference between perceiving leadership is about rank or hierarchy versus the nature of the leader happening within a much flatter network. What [00:08:00] we're talking about here, I'll just make a brief comment and then come right to that question, what we're talking about is not so much what we say we believe, so for instance, we might say that we believe in non hierarchical leadership, right?

And it's a good thing to say in today's world, isn't it? The thing is there's a difference between what we say we believe, our espoused beliefs, versus what we actually believe. And so we may, what we might actually believe, say, for instance, emotionally, is that people that are up here are at some level have power over me.

And I relate to them as having power over me. And so that comes from a kind of rigid inner sort of schema and inner way of understanding things in terms of hierarchy, which is a very [00:09:00] different way of understanding the world. And it's a way of understanding the world that. Termines how I make sense of the world moment by moment.

And that's a very different deep level understanding or deep level belief system than that, which truly sees that I am able to step forward with this person who I believe might be of a higher rank than I am. How you describe that it's very good because it explains the where a lot of the human friction comes from because it's really it sounds or it is a really tough thing to rewire our internal way we operate as you go back to the operating system but that is fundamentally at the heart of the digital transformation point is you're rewiring people's systems.

And I think many massively underestimate that and just go, I've got a bit of technology in the corner. Just use that and it'll all magically appear in the new way. And you're like, no, don't think so. I think that there's a lack of focus on people in, in, in that way because technology is easy. So we [00:10:00] deal with the easy bit and we forget about the other bit over there.

Oh, there's a lack of focus in people in a sophisticated way. I think like my view is the whole people process technology thing that gets trotted out and trotted out. It's trotted out so often that it's lost its depth and meaning to me. What they actually mean is put in the technology and maybe fiddle about with the organization a little bit.

They don't really mean what some of the things that you guys have been talking about, which is the world on the other side of a digital transformation is, if done well, profoundly different to the world that you started out in. Therefore, the way that I'm gonna, even just from a task based thing, my tasks are going to change on a daily basis, never mind this whole notion of how I'm going to look at the world or think about my organization.

Michael, what's your observation of organizations that are going on those journeys? Are they addressing this problem in a deep enough way? No, to be quite candid and partly a matter of [00:11:00] depth, but I think for the most part, in most of today's organizations, especially those that are technology, technologically sophisticated, there is an over emphasis on engineering knowledge, so the basis on which we Already understand the world assumes a kind of engineering mindset, a kind of a mindset that is based on a sort of, positivist orientation, which believes that nothing that can't be measured is real.

So there's a fundamental worldview here. And meanwhile. In the human sciences, there's a whole science, a whole technology of human development, and that's been going on for decades. So it's a whole research based science. It's an art and a practice, but it's just, there's a whole science there that tells us something [00:12:00] about the nature of human cognition, the nature of human development, the nature of human sensemaking, and what

we're ultimately talking about.

If we're talking about a digital transformation, we have to be able to address the question of how people. People make sense of their world and not again, how people say they make sense. So this goes back to the great researcher, Chris Argyris who made the distinction between an espoused theory of action, what we say about.

Why we do what we're doing and what we're doing versus a theory and use the actual theory that we exercise in our day to day moment by moment actions and interactions with other people. And it's at that level of theory and use that we need to have access to. And all of that, sorry, I know this is a very long paragraph all of that presupposes.

A [00:13:00] willingness to step outside of the purely engineering mindset paradigm and to embrace something like not get rid of the engineering mindset, but add another dimension to it, which I might call the human technology. We have the engineering technologies, but we also need to embrace and integrate into any digital transformation what I'm calling the human technologies, which is all the things that I've just referred to.

So in your mind, how do I put something like this into practice? Because those of us that have had technical careers or say program management careers, there is a definite bias towards, as you were saying, the engineering mindset, the sort of hard crunchy element of things, the tech. And even though, a number of us have run these transformations and thought about this stuff, I'm not sure it's necessarily always really that successful.

So I think what I'm trying to [00:14:00] get to is. How do you create the conditions within a hardcore, hard edged financial business case, tech transformation to create the right space for the sort of engagement that you're talking about? I believe that the way in is to find... something close to this is already starting to happen or where it could happen.

So basically it's like planting seeds. So from a kind of an organizational intervention, strategic perspective, it's for instance, finding what I often do when I've worked with organizations is I find those places in the organization where thinking is ripe for this kind of thing and then starting to work with that part of the organization to develop.

This human dimension, this human technology dimension, and I can say just in a moment how I, just somewhat [00:15:00] generically might approach that and what ends up happening is that what we see is that when we raise the inner operating system, when we can upgrade that inner operating system, when we can bring people's capacity for sensemaking to a higher level of complexity, both cognitively and emotionally emotionally, Their performance goes way up, their capacity to perform goes way up, and that becomes a kind of beacon.

So if you find one place where you can start to have that happen, other people start to notice, and it's like Geoffrey Moore's, innovation curve, you get like the early adopters, to show that something works, and then the late adopters will take notice and say, wow, that's really interesting.

What are they doing? And so that starts to get people's attention. So I'm going to pause there cause that's a complex field that we're in. Yeah. Can you give some examples of places where to start in an organization? So [00:16:00] anywhere where the kind of thinking that would embrace this. Is already there so find so there's probably within capgemini there are organizations within the company i know it's a huge company but i'm almost certain if i were to go there and just start talking with people i would find wow so there's this little pocket over here.

That seems right to do this kind of work. They don't know about it. See the big, a big

part of the issue is that people, they may want to incorporate this sort of developmental perspective that I'm describing, but they didn't have no idea how to, people often talk about mindset. We want to grow people's mindset.

We want to expand people's mindset, but they really. They genuinely want to, they just don't know how. And so people, so I might find people who are talking about, wow, we just, we need people to shift their mindset. And then I [00:17:00] would then engage in a series of activities to help them develop the ability to understand how they might actually.

Raise people's mindset, based on the the art and science of human development and, other fields. That's a nice way to say it. It's like the pioneering spirit. What is your organization's Oregon trail? And who's, who, and I'm going to mix metaphors now. Who's your Sherpa to help you on that trail?

And then everybody sees it and can follow that trail then, but some pioneer in the early days has to set that pathway for others to follow. Yeah. Yeah. If you look at the history of any sort of innovation, if you look at, the history of innovation was in Capgemini, I'm guessing you're going to see something like this.

The large top down initiatives seem never to work. Except what they do, the benefit they have is that they triggered new thinking, but almost by accident. And so what I do is if there's a big, huge grand initiative, I look to see, okay, so [00:18:00] what new thinking got triggered by that? And let's go there.

And I love that metaphor of the Oregon trail, because that's very much what in of how innovation works both socially and within companies, doesn't it? I think it does. And I want to pick up on a thread that you had in there around complexity and the sort of a human ability to deal with elements of complexity and.

There's a big shift, I think, in digital transformation, where we move organizational thinking or state from a predict and plan style organization into much more of a react and iterate way of working, which in Snowden's connecting framework would be the move from complicated style of working to complex style of working.

And if you look at The best in inverted commas, digital companies. They're extremely good at this style of working. What's going on in that shift for you, Michael, how would you characterize that shift? Yeah, that's a great, [00:19:00] it's a great question. And the. The terminology that I tend to use when I describe this shift is a shift from predict and plan to, and this does borrow from from Kenneth and as well as others sense and respond.

So it's a shift. So you could say, At that shift from predict and plan to sense and respond could be understood operationally in terms of the operational structures and systems and processes of an organization. And that's the most common way in which we understand that we, like from a perspective of how most people talk about digital transformation, it's understood in that way for me.

That shift from predict and plan to sense and respond is key because basically just to say a little bit what that shift is and then say how I understand it in relation to to human technology, that predict and plan A it's a world view. It's a way of looking at the [00:20:00] world. Again, it goes back to Argyris's theory and use.

It's the way that we look at the world and we're completely unaware of that way of looking at the world. So it's a, it's like the water that the fish swim in. It's fish are completely owned by the water. They'd swim in. But they're completely unaware that they are swimming in water. And the same thing for us as human beings.

We as human beings swim in the water of a particular predominant worldview. And the predominant worldview that we as modern human beings swim in is a predict and plan worldview. And it's a worldview in which we just naturally or think that we can predict the future. And on the basis of that, make plans.

And when the plans don't work out, we get upset. And then what we typically try to do is we try to put more control mechanisms in place and so on and so forth. And we do that both in our own personal and [00:21:00] even interpersonal lives. Like just think of conversation that doesn't go the way that you had hoped it would go.

And then we get upset, and then all kinds of reactive patterns get generated from that upset. A predict and plan mindset is a very, it's predicated on the notion that we can essentially control the world, which of course is a totally illusion. Which we know cognitively, intellectually, but we don't know that in terms of how we operate fundamentally, emotionally, interpersonally, we don't know that at that level of our consciousness.

So that's predict and plan. Sense and respond is very different. It's the recognition that, yes, we can have plans and we want plans, and we're not saying throw plans away, right? But it's a recognition that things are ever evolving and that we need to develop the capacity to acutely sense what's going on around us.

So it [00:22:00] means, really developing our sensors. Our ability to be aware, expanding the sort of camera aperture of our awareness so we can sense more of what's going on around us. And on the basis of what we're sensing, be able to respond in a way. That brings greater capability, that brings greater intelligence, that, that does all kinds of those sorts of good things that we need in today's VUCA world, which I believe is what digital innovation is all about, ultimately, is the capacity to respond to complexity.

And what I'm saying here is that, that shift from predict and plan to sense and respond. Is an inner operating system upgrade. It's like moving from to use a very old operating system metaphor from a DOS operating system to, like an NT, remember the old NT operating system.[00:23:00]

Yeah, but it's like that. So it's like a pair. Paradigm shift, not just a, an improvement, but it's literally a shift that makes possible an entirely new range of new capabilities, competencies, skills, and behaviors.

Sjoukje, what have you been looking at this week? So each week I will do some research on what's trending in tech, and this week I want to focus on free skills every new leader needs. As a new manager or a new leader, you might be looking into growing your skills, and you might also think that you need to focus on becoming more authoritative or focus on quickly driving results.

Skills that are typically associated with powerful men. But nowadays it's important for leaders [00:24:00] to develop different types of skills that are more focusing on adaptability, on emotional intelligence and humility. Skills that are very valuable in uncertain times that are more often found in female leaders.

So let's dive a bit in three different important skills. First one, adaptability. A soft skill that means that you easily adjust to changing circumstances and being willing to shift direction when needed. The second, contextual problem solving. A key part of every leader's toolkit. A leader really has to juggle several roles, functions, and needs to solve complex problems.

And the first one I want to focus on is empathy. The ability to understand and share the feelings of another person, and also the ability to step inside of other people's shoes and

better understand them, their needs, and what it will take for them to succeed. So three extremely important skills to have as a [00:25:00] leader for both men and for women, of course.

But in studies, women leaders are found to rank higher than their male leaders in terms of being adaptable and empathetic and in contextual problem solving. So Michael, a question to you. Do you think that these three skills are extremely important for each and every leader? And do you think that female leaders are more capable of mastering these skills?

Yes and yes. The second one, yes, generally, I would say. And I don't know if this is a point in time for me like to elaborate on what I just heard you say. Which I liked very much. And what I would say to every one of these skills is come back to, this is the drum that I beat constantly. That for instance, if we look at adaptability.

Or empathy, for instance, two of the three that you mentioned. We often think of these as naturally present in [00:26:00] somebody or not. And, or that, we think of them as innate qualities that some people have more of than others. And it's true that some people have more of than others. My assertion is that those capacities can be developed in other people, but they can't be developed through the usual learning modalities.

with which we ordinarily apply these things. So for instance, you can't teach empathy. By talking about empathy as like a concept, right? That there has to be a way to get at what are the underlying beliefs, assumptions, and psychological strategies that we as human beings engage in such that Empathy can be really difficult or Michael, you're surely not suggesting that putting a definition of it on a powerpoint and setting an empathy target wouldn't work.

[00:27:00] We kpi'd it Dave, we kpi'd it, it's going to work, that's it, we're done, we're going to be empathetic by the end of the year, come hell or high water. Yeah in today's world, we've gotten a bit more sophisticated, but it tends to. off even the more sophisticated programs, like techniques for empathy, like for instance, active listening, saying back what you're hearing the other person say.

So there's certain techniques that we practice. What I'm talking about is a deeper kind of learning. And it's something that I've been working on a lot lately. Something I call, we refer to as vertical learning. Which is a learning that's related to how we make sense of the world and what vertical learning entails.

It entails revealing the deep beliefs and inner assumptions that we have that we're unaware of, but which determine how we understand the world and determine. Our capacity to develop [00:28:00] qualities like adaptability and empathy and my assertion is that until we can get again, this is getting down into the operating system until we can start to get at that level of how we as human beings operate, it's going to be very difficult to move the dial for people for whom adaptability and empathy are not quote unquote natural.

Oh, they're using the operating system. Metaphor for the human. It would be easy if you just go around and patch everyone. Just give them the 2. 3 upgrade. I'll get in and go, you'll be empathetic in about 22 minutes if everything goes to plan. That's going to happen with the robot army, my friend. When AI is empathetic, they'll all be empathetic.

Yeah, huh. Yeah, that's right. That's right. that's another dimension in your thesis, Shaoqiu, the AI. Yeah. I think when I hear this and also the whole conversation, I think it is extremely [00:29:00] important to create a diverse work environment and diverse teams, both men, women, and robots, right? That's the next.

That's the mix. I do agree with that, of course. And to me, the way that you set out the

characteristics is really interesting and really resonated with me. Like the alpha male characteristic, for example, which I think is the, perhaps the most, sadly, the most obvious characteristic. I'm hoping that we...

Getting into a world now where that feels like it's something from, the sort of last paradigm, a way of thinking. And I think people coming around to the fact that more dimensional and, different traits in leadership become so much more important. Michael, do you think we're past the point that the sort of alpha male style of leadership is the predominant one?

Or do we, do you think there's more road to go? My sense is that we have quite a long way to go. And in general, and if you look at the [00:30:00] leading edge of culture, I have the feeling that a lot of progress has been made there. So if you look at a lot of newer organizations, there's less of that there.

Now the paradox is that we sometimes we tend to throw the baby out with the bathwater. And what has started to happen is a certain, in the interest. Of, for instance, moving beyond the Alpha Mayo. What we do is we put something else in its place. Like we put, like we, maybe we put, like really coming to consensus for instance, is something that I see a lot in Scandinavian countries and companies here in Scandinavia where you know, we can't really move on.

Until we've come to full consensus. So it's a little bit like we jumped to the other extreme. We jumped from that sort of alpha male authoritarian, you do it my way or the highway to the opposite. Like we can't move [00:31:00] on to, we all agree. And so it's that sort of either or ness it's that sort of worldview or that sort of understanding the world in terms of either or that I would want to be able to come to grips with.

Is it really either or, or can we have something of both, so for instance, like polarity management is a whole body of work around being able to hold the tension between polarities rather than jumping from one to the other. And so in the baby out with the bath water.

Yes. But if you then look to the different types of people with. the characteristics they have. If leaders are truly authentic to themselves, we can have all of that, right? Yes. Yeah. Lovely. Michael, it has been a real pleasure to speak to you this morning. Thank you so much for taking the time to come on the show.

Yeah. Thank you. Before we end the show, I just want [00:32:00] to compliment you on your attire. The black jumper scarf combination is one of my personal favorites. So that is looking very sweet. I love that scarf. Thank you.

So we end the show each time by asking our guests what they're excited about doing next. That could be, I've got a really good restaurant booked at the weekend, all the way through to an exciting thing in your professional life. So Michael, what you're excited about doing next? I would say one of the things I'm really excited about is it's new body of work that that I'm bringing out with my colleague, Lisa Adkins, and we call it a vertical facilitation and it's it's a way of facilitating groups so that they not only just get better at what they're doing. But they elevate the complexity of the sense, their sense making in relation to what they're doing.

And what we see that happening when people elevate their [00:33:00] capacity for sense making is that they're able to deal with greater complexity. So very much related to the essential theme of some of the things that we've been talking about here. That sounds fascinating. I very much look forward to reading that and perhaps you may rejoin us for a

conversation to talk about it at some point.

Yeah. Yeah. We'd love to.

A huge thanks to our guests this week. Michael, thank you so much for being on the show. Thanks to our producer Marcel, our sound and editing wizards, Ben and Louis, and of course, to all of our listeners.

We're on LinkedIn and X, Dave Chapman, Rob Kernahan, and Sjoukje Zaal. Feel free to follow or connect with us and please get in touch if you have any comments or ideas for the show. And of course, if you haven't already done that, rate and subscribe to our podcast.

See you in another reality next week.[00:34:00]

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