Three Key Trends Defining the Future of DevOps

According to many analysts, DevOps is rapidly changing the face of IT. They've said that DevOps is the new normal. That DevOps practices improve IT performance. And that it's too late to go back to the old way of managing IT.

We at New Relic agree that the potential of DevOps is huge. While no one has a completely reliable crystal ball, three important trends are already underway and can be expected to continue over the next two to three years.

TREND #1:

Larger companies will embrace DevOps— sooner than you think

The most significant development in DevOps could be the expanding adoption of DevOps by larger, more traditional enterprises. And their biggest challenge is the need for a culture shift—not always so easy in these large, established IT groups.

According to Eberhard Wolff, the previous adoption pattern of agile development methods by large companies provides a reasonable template for how enterprises will approach DevOps adoption. Wolff describes that in 2000, Agile was the province of techy devotees—it was not on the management agenda. This is roughly where DevOps is today. By 2005, most developers and technical managers had bought into Agile—it was being implemented en masse.

For startups and small, agile companies with fewer than 50 developers, adopting DevOps from the start is not only relatively easy, it's a great way to get a jump on competitors. Also, since they haven't been in business long enough to develop an elaborate legacy culture, small groups typically adapt to DevOps culture with fewer problems.

Large enterprises—with hundreds or thousands of programmers and a rigid, established culture—have a much different problem. However, they also have models that they can emulate. Once small startups themselves, Web giants like

Google, Facebook, Amazon, and Twitter are now running bigger data centers than even the biggest enterprises. Execs at both tech vendors and non-tech corporations increasingly see those Web companies as bellwethers setting the standard for mainstream enterprise IT.

In addition to Agile development, the classic example is Linux. Once considered wacky by serious IT people, now even staid companies rely on Linux.

TREND #2:

Open source tools will evolve to meet enterprise requirements

There's a raging debate about whether or not open source tools will have to give way to proprietary tools from the large vendors for DevOps to succeed in the enterprise. While there will no doubt be a role for proprietary tools, there's also a bright future for open source tools, in large part because the spirit of innovation that spawned DevOps is already focusing on the scaling problem, with some notable successes.

This pattern mirrors the evolution of Linux. Originally a geeks-only operating system, Linux has grown into a stable enterprise-grade product—still open source. Vendors such as Red Hat built huge businesses by adding the components required by enterprises—development platforms, technical support, consulting services—while working within the open source movement. We can expect similar models for open source tools for DevOps.

TREND #3:

DevOps can create career opportunities—if you're ready

DevOps is becoming a valued skill for IT Professionals. For example, a Linux hiring service found that 25% of respondents were seeking professionals with DevOps expertise.

What exactly does that mean? The resume of a DevOps practitioner should ideally demonstrate experience and knowledge of people, process, and technology skills—both coding and tool use. As might be expected, expertise in specific programming languages and tools is usually not a requirement. Smart and flexible people can always learn new tools and technical skills. The real trick is in finding people who truly understand what DevOps means and how to move an organization towards processes that support the core tenants of DevOps.

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As the future unfolds, DevOps will continue to expand into companies of all sizes, especially as they see evidence of the correlation between strong IT performance and competitive advantage. Puppet Lab's 2014 DevOps survey, for example, indicated that companies with high-performing IT teams are twice as likely to exceed their profitability, market share, and productivity goals. Those are the kinds of results that will get the attention of even the most conservative enterprise.

For more on DevOps, see our DevOps hub and our informative Kickstarting DevOps ebook.

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