

EVENT SUMMARY

2nd annual Innovation@Work Global Week 2022

**Cloud, collaboration and connectivity: how
seamless communication can be delivered**

March 28th 2022

Silver sponsor

M-Files.

Event summary

Cloud, collaboration and connectivity: how seamless communication can be delivered

Introduction

In a world of constant digital communication, where the covid-19 pandemic has sped digital transformation, there is a need for mindsets and services that harness the power of data and democratise access to enable innovation within organisations and societies. To examine how employees can be given the skills and tools required to generate value from information, Economist Impact hosted a discussion between Curt Garner, chief technology officer at Chipotle, and Antti Nivala, the founder and chief executive officer of M-Files, a global leader in information management. Moderated by Andrew Palmer, executive editor of *The Economist*, “Cloud, Collaboration and Connectivity” took place on March 28th as part of Innovation@Work Global Week 2022.

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Covid-19 has brought brands and consumers closer

Mr Garner of Chipotle said covid-19 accelerated transformation that was already underway at his firm when the outbreak began. Previously, a fifth of its business was digital. During the pandemic, that share peaked at 75%, and now it is stable at 40% even as people return to dining rooms.

Digital has opened new channels of engagement and commerce across a lot of industries," said Mr Garner. "People are...expecting to be known more by the companies that they do business with and looking for more information and engagement with those brands." That meshes well with Chipotle's existing focus on offering customisation by letting diners combine ingredients according to their preference.

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Curt Garner, chief technology officer, **Chipotle**

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Pivoting to remote work

M-Files has always been in the business of digital transformation, but Mr Nivala said the pandemic still represented a big change. “We help customers to be efficient and work in the digital, work-from-anywhere world,” he explained, and covid-19 tested their ability to walk the talk. The experience was largely glitch-free, but Mr Nivala conceded that five or ten years ago, it would have been much more difficult.

While M-Files is able to make remote work the default, Chipotle relies on physical locations to serve its customers. Nevertheless, Mr Garner said Chipotle was fortunate to have already invested in collaboration technologies. This applied especially to its large field organisation—with teams out serving hundreds of restaurants, managing construction projects and looking for new sites—but also to its headquarters locations. The social change involved in collaborating as a distributed workforce parallels the move in web 2.0 from people being mainly consumers of content to also being creators. “There was already a culture of collaboration via technology...and that’s what’s enabled many companies to make the pivot so successfully,” said Mr Garner.

“ Understand how you can collect, score, secure and share information broadly across your enterprise—and you’ll unlock the human potential of your teams.”

Curt Garner, chief technology officer, **Chipotle**

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The multi-system, real-time future of data access

Organisations are realising that they have many sources, repositories and systems for data. “You will be limiting your business if you try to solve the complexity by consolidating everything in one system,” said Mr Nivala, who believes information architecture should be distributed, flexible and agile, letting enterprises take advantage of best-of-breed tools.

Mr Garner agreed that businesses will not return to single systems—the internet of things produces too much data for this to be feasible. Real-time access will be the next advance, with decentralisation and democratisation of access helping organisations act quickly on insights. However, technical and cultural obstacles remain. Graduates do not necessarily have the skills they need to program the required systems, or a sufficient understanding of data analytics. But market demand will push people there. “The gaps are going to get filled,” he said.

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A new mindset for democratised data

A democratised data culture entails making room for different ways of thinking. "If we're creating a culture of innovation, that means we're embracing diversity of thought," said Mr Garner. This should extend outside of organisations, so that people widely have access to the information and tools they need to create new ideas and a better world. "Being afraid to empower people with information is really being trapped in the past."

Making the most of democratised data access entails continuous learning. Shying away from the phrase "continuous training", which could sound like employers are pushing staff towards it, Mr Nivala instead favours employee-driven "continuous learning", where companies provide on-demand platforms that empower people to develop skills. He described how LinkedIn Learning has been popular at M-Files, stimulating conversations among teams and managers about the courses they've taken and what they would recommend to others.

Learning also featured in a discussion of how executives should pursue digital transformation. Believing that "the best technologies are the ones that improve human experience," Mr Garner saw the metaverse as a new trend that people are getting comfortable with and likely to embrace, particularly through "simulation-based or experience-based training". Where airline pilots have used these methods for years, now they will spread across multiple industries, especially as the covid-19 situation has raised people's willingness to try new things in the digital realm.

“ Now that most people, especially in knowledge work, are working independently at the time and place they choose, we have to change the culture to make the relevant information available in an on-demand way. ”

Antti Nivala, chief executive officer, **M-Files**

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Cyber-security and the future of digital transformation

Cyber-security is a top concern for executives as the flow of information within and outside firms increases. The risks associated with handling sensitive personal data cannot simply be handed to insurers, Mr Nivala said in answering a question from Mr Palmer. Nor can systems be secured by keeping people out of an office or network. Instead, they must be designed with a zero-trust approach in mind, especially now the home location of any remote worker could be the target of a cyber-attack.

The shift to working away from the office is among the many fundamental and irreversible changes that Mr Garner said have recently taken place in the world at large. Within that context, culture will drive innovation. "At the core of that is going to be the ability to get people information," he said. "My advice to anybody listening is to understand how you can collect, score, secure and share information broadly across your enterprise—and you'll unlock the human potential of your teams."

Mr Nivala concurred. "Let's make information available," he said. "Let's share. Let's be open to the maximum extent." Even in an environment where security concerns may encourage "zero trust" as a technical approach, organisations must build a culture based on trust and transparency to enable innovation and fulfil their aspirations for the future

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Key takeaways

Accelerated digitalisation during the covid-19 pandemic has changed the way consumers relate to brands. As physical interactions moved online, companies learned more about their customers, who now expect greater engagement and even customisation.

A culture of collaboration enabled the shift to remote work. Web 2.0, which invited users to create as well as to consume content, prepared many people for the huge disruptions to working life associated with the response to covid-19.

To extract maximum value from the data that digitalisation makes available, access must be democratised. If they are to create new ideas and a better world, people need the right data and tools, and to continuously learn how to use them more effectively.

There is a need to balance security and trust. “Zero trust” may be a good technical approach to avoid cyber-threats, but trust and transparency are needed to enable innovation and the sharing of information.

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