

FINDING THE PROBLEM: A STRATEGIC NEW ROLE FOR TECHNOLOGY PROVIDERS

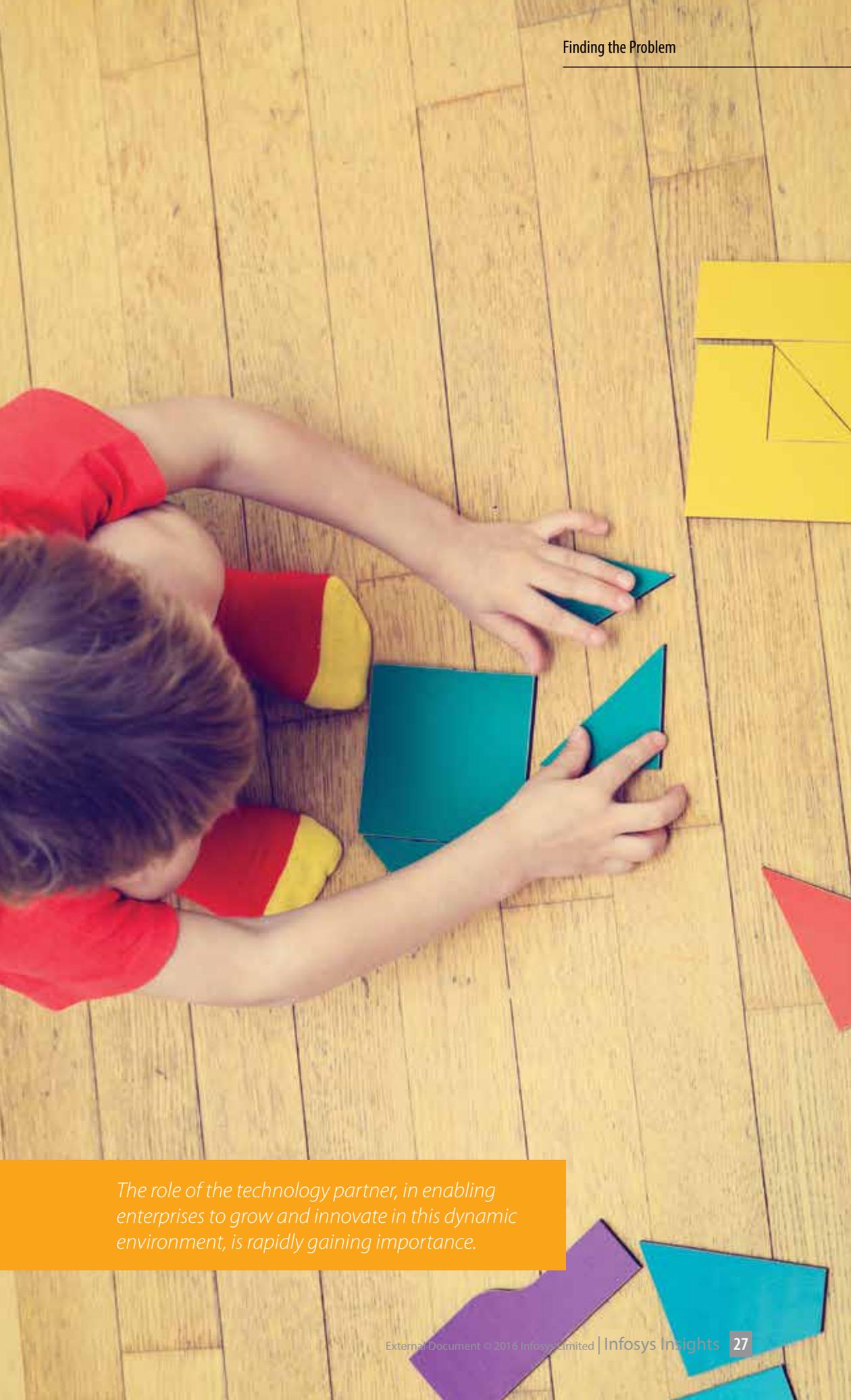
Be at zero-distance from the new realities
of the digital world



Every business is keen to make sense of the digital revolution. As power is increasingly shifting to end users with the intermediary layers fast dissolving, enterprises are striving to survive in a world that will look and feel very different from the one that we work and live in now. Think open source P2P money. Think Internet-based self-care systems, including preventive and personalized medicines. Think smart homes. Think connected cars. Think 3D printing democratizing the manufacture of practically everything. With its roots in software and computing, digitization is making technological expertise a core differentiator across industries.

And the role of the technology partner, in enabling enterprises to grow and innovate in this dynamic environment, is rapidly gaining importance.

In a global survey that we conducted to take stock of the expectations that enterprises have from their technology partners, more than 500 enterprises spoke in unison - they want technology and technology services to rise to the occasion, transcend the silos of projects and mere execution, to participate in a way that they impact the strategic core of the business and create transformational value. The survey revealed four big expectations from technology partners:



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1. Proactive and strategic advice during implementation on how transformational improvements can be made to existing processes, solutions, and systems. While simultaneously focusing creativity and imagination on finding new solutions to new kinds of business challenges.

2. Manage transformation and articulate the value it brings not merely in terms of IT metrics, but also shareholder returns, customer acquisition, service and engagement, revenue growth, regulatory compliance, risk management, and competitive differentiation.

3. Assume end-to-end ownership of large, complex, strategically important programs and drive consensus among key stakeholders.

From technology-specific, business value articulation to buy-in from the top desk – it is all a part of the package that is expected to be delivered.

4. When serving the same client organization, across multiple projects, share knowledge, experiences, and practices. Otherwise, enterprises are deprived of the full benefit of accumulated wisdom and end up spending more time and effort than they would like to, bridging project silos.

The results of the survey are an affirmation of the position next-generation technology services companies have adopted now – to not merely implement solutions, but to also act as strategic partners to clients by aligning technology programs to serve the disruptive and incremental innovation needs of their businesses. For this to happen, there must be a shift in the nature of the conversation with customers – from obsessing over solution-building to focusing first on real problem finding.

This framework is enabling us to focus our energy, our imagination, our intelligence on truly creating, innovating and charting great futures for all of us. We achieve this by renewing, reinventing, and teaching and learning together

To be at zero-distance from this reality, I recommend a five-point framework that must be applied across all engagements:

1. Look, learn, and improve: Best-practices and next-practices garnered from projects across industries can help scale innovation.

2. Make 'what' improvements: Ask what more, what other things you can do, within the engagement, to bring more value to the project.

3. Seek out 'how' improvements: Figure a better, more efficient way to do things – in an ongoing project.

4. Clearly articulate business value: Help the business see the value of each improvement and innovation quantitatively, and substantively, in business terms.

5. Disseminate knowledge: Share information about the improvements achieved so others may be guided by the experience. In doing so, we have to ensure that the information is decontextualized in strict adherence to nondisclosure contracts with clients.

At Infosys, the rigorous implementation of this simple framework as a business imperative across the company, has enabled us to help our clients in managing and forecasting, and looking ahead and around the corners. It has enabled us to focus our energy, our imagination, our intelligence on truly creating, rather than spending more time and effort than they would like to, and charting a great future for all of us. We achieve this by renewing, reinventing, and teaching and learning together, doing more of the purposeful things that we can be proud of.

I am sharing four anecdotal accounts from some of our recent engagements where we applied the five-point framework. These illustrate how we are renewing existing landscapes to extract operational excellence and greater value, even as we work towards new ways of growing and serving our clients.

We looked. We learned. We improved.

Infosys partners with a technology company and global innovation leader known to be several strides ahead of the industry when it comes to consumer experience. As their technology provider, we share their vision of creating the utmost seamless experiences across their range of devices and consumer touchpoints.

Having architected an online presence and conceived an ecommerce portal for several global retail majors, we quickly spotted several opportunities this client's online store presented in opening up new selling options, and creating an even better purchase experience for their customers.

The first improvement was a one-click purchase feature, integrated in the home page to minimize page navigation needed

to complete a purchase. This let customers choose, evaluate, and shop quickly and efficiently without having to trawl through pages of marketing content and 'optional extras'. A collateral benefit would come by way of marginally lower planned hardware capacity during new product introductions, thanks to rationalization of store traffic. We also proposed an alert feature for customers when out-of-stock products became available. Our third recommendation was to provide a visual representation of an order tracking in the store's workflow so customers could check anytime to see what steps remained before the delivery reached their doorstep.

These improvements – inspired by simple, ubiquitous features from the retail online world – is greatly enhancing the store's user experience, especially during new product introductions, delighting customers, and generating additional revenue for the business.



We made it our business to make 'what' improvements

Two years ago, Infosys was contracted by a global networking major for end-to-end development and maintenance of their remarketing applications, routinely leveraged by their executives to manage the refurbished inventory. As the engagement progressed, several 'what-if' questions emerged for us.

- ▶ Data was scattered across BI reports and collating consolidated reports meant days of manual labor. What if we could provide insights on remarketing through a single window with a 360-degree view?

- ▶ What if these reports were interactive with features that supported data trending and mining?

- ▶ What if the data could provide foresight into potential opportunities, new markets, and products in demand as well?

We presented the client with a prototype for the Insights Generation Platform, that could help create greater value for them from our ongoing engagement in which we developed and managed applications related to the inventory, wholesale quotations, and backlog forecasting, among others. The insights platform would give the client the much needed visibility into remarketing business data – including sales by region, product, and manager – as well as key market and product trends.

The platform is estimated to potentially deliver several benefits to the client's remarketing business, including but not limited to, identification and clearance of supply chain bottlenecks, and better demand forecasting for refurbished products.

How we made 'how' improvements

When a leading fashion retailer in the United States decided to tackle the challenge of a shrinking customer base, they realized the need to transform their online channel – and enrich it with 'on-demand' features. Infosys was contracted to deliver on this mandate.

Even as we began executing the project, we realized the importance of testing and its automation for effective solution delivery.

We applied ourselves to figuring out how we might innovate to improve and execute this

in the most efficient manner. Among the improvements proposed was a custom UI Automation Framework, that leveraged an open source tool for progressive testing automation (parallel to development) and to ensure reusability of test scripts. Business layer testing was introduced to validate application logic and other services that are a part of the application business layer. This testing was facilitated

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in parallel to development, ensuring early defect detection (and bug fixing) in the middle layers, thereby facilitating faster time-to-market. Behavior Driven Tests were also conducted to act as points of continuous interaction and validation for testers with business users.

These efforts resulted in a 70 percent reduction in manual test efforts, with commensurate dollar savings. With automation coverage in the range of 92 percent, the detection and fixing of several defects were completed earlier than envisioned, positively impacting the online channel's go-live.



We articulated business value in terms that mattered to them

A leading satellite and pay TV provider in the United States was looking to renew their online portal, to counter the threat of new-age competitors, and enhance viewers' entertainment experience by making it more personalized and consistent across touchpoints. As a partner in this transformation, Infosys assessed their existing website and found that its tightly coupled architecture was hampering scalability, while inflating development and maintenance costs by forcing the client to maintain separate websites for desktop and mobile users. The need to transform the existing technology stack was obvious.

Drawing upon prevailing trends and our experience from other implementations, it was apparent to us that we must advocate replacing the legacy packaged-based architecture with cutting-edge, open source (Angular, Node, Play / Scala) technology. This would straightaway lower total cost

of ownership. We also clearly noticed that migrating the entertainment stack to a responsive and adaptive architecture, which facilitated customization and development as well as API-enabled integration with multiple devices, would support unification of the entertainment experience across television, desktop, and mobile. Further, the adoption of a cloud-enabled, microsite-based architecture would bring scalability and maintenance benefits.

With the help of a proof of concept (PoC), we helped the client understand what this technology transformation might translate to in business terms. We clearly established, through a demonstration and statistical model that this could bring 25 percent savings in development costs and performance improvement for fully loaded pages, and video streaming of 40 percent and 60 percent respectively. This helped engage senior business stakeholders (and influenced buy-in) in what might have otherwise remained an esoteric technology conversation.



We are committed to sharing the learning

The shared knowledge of the improvements we have made, project after project provide a halo, a great context around our collective abilities. The context we find ourselves in is crucial to the tangible results we deliver and the value we are able to create. Change the context, and the same person with the same inherent capabilities, often delivers a changed result. The great context that continuous learning and reskilling can provide goes a long way in greatly amplifying our potential, widening our knowledge, and puts within our hands the power to create a better future for ourselves and our clients.

The ethos that's behind it all

The zero-distance framework has been instrumental in amplifying our potential,

widening our knowledge, expanding our creative freedom, and helping us use it all to create a better future for our clients. This, in turn, is derived from our culture of continuous learning and our adoption of the design thinking approach to problem-solving with its equal-parts focus on cultivating creative confidence, finding problems worth solving, and creating path-breaking solutions with empathy for end users.

I believe, this approach, just as it helped our clients, can help any enterprise not just navigate the digital revolution but also benefit from it by bringing strategic changes to existing systems – renewing them to perform faster, better, and cheaper, even as it creates ways to explore new horizons that are absolutely unprecedented in expanse, vision, and ambition.

About the Author

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Ravi leads the Infosys Global Delivery organization across industry segments, driving digital transformation, application development and maintenance; independent validation services, engineering services, business intelligence, cloud and infrastructure, and enterprise package applications service lines. He is also on the board of Infosys Public Services and McCamish Systems (an Infosys company).

Ravi has over 18 years of experience in the consulting space, incubating new practice lines, driving large transformational programs, and evangelizing new business models across industry segments. He has played diverse roles across organizations within the CRM space for Oracle Corporation, building a next-generation CRM practice at Cambridge Technology Partners. He has also worked on process and technology transformation for the unbundling of Indian State Electricity Boards at PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Ravi has a master's degree in business administration from Xavier Institute of Management, Bhubaneswar, India.

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