

The Rackspace Technology Trends Viewpoint
Volume 3

The Evolution of People, Process and Technology



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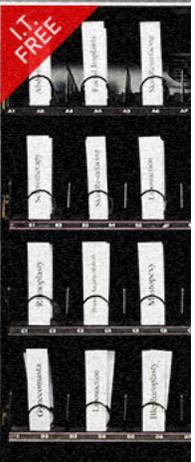
Chief Technology Evangelist

Jeff has 25 years of experience in IT and technology, and has worked at Rackspace Technology for over 10 years. Jeff is a proven strategic leader who has helped companies like American Express, Ralph Lauren, and Thompson Reuters create and execute against multi-year digital transformation strategies. During his time at Rackspace, Jeff has launched and managed many of the products and services that Rackspace offers, as well as supporting merger and acquisition activities to enhance those offerings. Jeff is the father of two young men and husband to his wife Michelle of 27 years. When not at Rackspace or around San Antonio, you can find Jeff doing land restoration on his ranch in the Texas hill country.

Table of contents

Introduction	4
Trend #1: Finding the right location is key in cloud – making the journey longer and harder for late starters	5
What's happening?.....	6
Why the declining relevance of private versus public matters to tech leaders.....	7
Trend #2: IT isn't who it used to be	8
What's happening?.....	9
Why the proliferation of buying power matters to tech leaders	10
Trend #3: Low/no-code comes for data	11
What's happening?.....	12
Why low/no-code data engineering matters to tech leaders	13
The final word: The natural evolution of people and process first, technology after.....	14
About Solve.....	16
About Rackspace Technology.....	16

APPS & TEC



Introduction

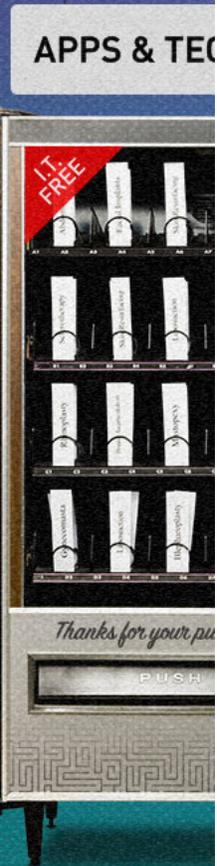
The story of technology in the enterprise has often been one of proliferating adoption touching more roles and impacting more people. We appear now, however, to be at an inflection point. Increasingly the story tends to be one of more people using technology and making decisions about what technology to use in a corporate environment. This volume we're covering three trends that we feel best illustrate this point.

First, the questions people ask when embarking on their cloud adoption journey have a profound influence on their direction and speed. For many years, one of the first questions has been where to move applications — private or public cloud? This is still the case, but the line between clouds is becoming more and more blurred.

Our attention then turns to the ever-expanding circle of people who constitute enterprise tech buyers. Here, the role of IT is being redefined as lines of business, project and product teams take on more influence — or straight-up buying power — when it comes to procuring technology. Having once been the single source of truth and authority on tech, IT must now try to drive an enterprise-wide technology vision while acting primarily as a facilitator and advisor for powerful non-IT stakeholders.

And finally, we take a look at how the advent of low/no-code development solutions mean that not only are more non-traditional IT teams and functions buying more technology: they'll soon be doing an awful lot more with it too. We're seeing the early impacts of these solutions on developers across data, IoT, security and infrastructure engineering.

Ultimately, each of these predictions should be welcomed. More people-centric technology and process is where IT should've been heading in the first place. Still, they challenge habits and processes on which entire careers have been built, so it's a lot for IT leaders and their teams to contend with.



Trend #1:

Finding the right location is key in cloud — making the journey longer and harder for late starters

Questions of where — private or public cloud — are becoming increasingly irrelevant and reveal more than a lack of cloud maturity. They're also a sign of outdated thinking and a roadblock to adopting transformational technologies.

~~“Location,
location,
location.”~~

Harold Samuel, 1944

APPLICATION,
APPLICATION,
APPLICATION!

What's happening?

The question of whether an application and its infrastructure should be in the private or public cloud is a question as old as cloud itself. But it has become increasingly irrelevant as leading cloud adopters and technology vendors have matured in their cloud thinking.

In the old days, applications were built based on the infrastructure that they had to run on. Today, with DevOps as a key driver (though not the only one), we build apps based on what they need to do and any infrastructure choices follow from that.

As a result, the days of functional IT are all but gone. The most successful IT organizations no longer have teams organized by function. Instead, they have application teams providing services to customers and users.

So when infrastructure is there only to facilitate applications, that flips the traditional cloud conversation on its head. With an app-centric mindset, the “where” question (public, private, edge) is actually dictated by what the application needs.

This is welcome, but there's trouble coming. Leaders are setting a brisk pace, but the majority of organizations have yet to embrace the cloud. And when they do, they still tend to enter the conversation with the preconception that one of the first questions they need to solve for is whether and when to adopt — or combine — private cloud versus public cloud.

More than indicating low maturity in cloud adoption and deployment, this indicates outdated thinking. Treating the cloud like a data center to drop stuff into is treating IT as a function as opposed to a team member and the journey towards truly transformative technologies and services is going to be longer for these organizations than they anticipate.

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Why the declining relevance of private versus public matters to tech leaders

For those companies that haven't started their cloud transformation or are in the very early stages, this is a little-considered roadblock — but potentially a big one. It means a considerable leap in understanding is required in order to effectively engage vendors and service providers who are moving beyond questions of where to put compute and storage, and into the cloud native realm of best serving your applications (versus best serving functions, such as storage).

Crucial to making that leap is to express typical IT problems as applications. Because even if the service being delivered is traditional computing, in modern IT it is still being delivered as a service versus a corporate function.

On that basis, it's important to establish what you're trying to solve for long before the conversation turns to location. Location could be important if the challenge is that you need to get out of a data center because of an expiring lease. But if your problem is upgrading the corporate website, then you've failed by selecting a platform first. The cloud works best when you think in terms of changing the way you deliver applications, not which data center you put them in.

Compounding the difficulties here is the fact that with public cloud there are often five or six correct solutions for every problem. Physical hardware providers continue to innovate, hyperscalers launch new services all the time and startups continue to enter the market. When faced with a bewildering array of options it can be tempting to think, "Well we're a Dell shop" or "We've always been Microsoft shop." The only shop you'll become with that approach is a closed one. The missed opportunities will stack up, fast and you probably won't even know what you're missing.

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Trend #2:

IT isn't who it used to be

Users are increasingly empowered to make buying decisions around technology, redefining the role of enterprise IT as we know it.



What's happening?

Enterprise IT's increasing focus on services and application delivery is related to dramatic changes when it comes to what and who influences IT decisions and drives IT strategy.

Consider this: [LinkedIn's Age of Agility](#) found that 63% of technology purchasing decisions now sit outside the IT department. As the report says, "We are in an era of decentralized technology purchasing decisions, with non-IT functions playing a greater role in determining their company's usage of technology."

If that's true — and in our experience, it is — then that completely redefines what IT is and does. Within many businesses the heads of teams, big or small, each now own a slice of IT as it pertains to their department or group and its objectives. They are increasingly empowered to make decisions around the technology they use, and around which IT services must then be designed.

That puts IT in a tough spot because an organization with a combination of product managers, data and BI teams, sales, marketing, finance and more, may end up making many different cloud decisions.

Why the proliferation of buying power matters to tech leaders

As LinkedIn's Age of Agility report also notes, "This places increased responsibility on IT to help guide and advise the decision-making process owned by powerful non-IT stakeholders — enabling them to rally around a shared vision for their technology outcomes."

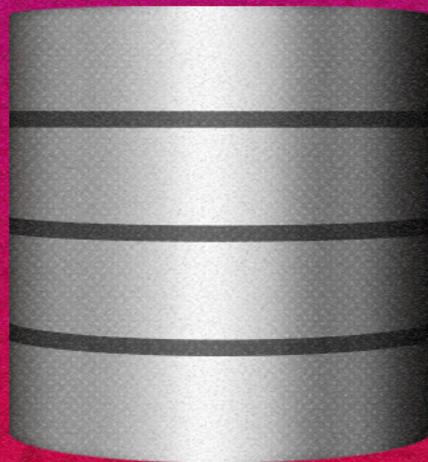
That's easier said than done. The decisions made by an organization's dozens or hundreds of newfound IT micro-procurers are not all going to be compatible with each other. Crucially a business product owner, marketing or sales lead has zero visibility of (and concern for) the delicate work done to drive cost savings and efficient operations in the company's wider IT landscape. They're rewarded for providing a specific business or customer outcome, and they'll pursue it how they see fit and within their budget, not yours.

And they move fast. The modern workforce is more technically literate than they were in the past, so they're able to make decisions very quickly, spinning some services up and then back down, and moving on to the next one before you even knew they existed. For examples of the impact here, consider the emerging role of SaaS platforms which can be easily procured by business users, allowing them to discover new business intelligence or process transformations.

Trend #3:

Low/no-code comes for data

The nascent impacts of low/no-code solutions are already being felt by developers, but the impact is likely to be greatest in the data engineering space, and specifically AI and machine learning.



What's happening?

Not only are people far outside of traditional IT teams and functions buying more technology, they're soon going to be able to do an awful lot more with it. Beyond just driving efficiency in their corner of the business, or making their lives a little bit easier, small teams and business units are likely to become engines of transformation in their own right.

That's because low/no-code solutions are making it easier for workers of any background to leverage powerful technology. The way things are developing, we could be as little as 12-18 months away from low/no-code solutions that can manipulate data without input, which has huge implications for the way organizations adopt AI and machine learning.

This is the point on the road at which the previous two trends meet. Because as technology — and therefore IT — becomes less functional and more outcome focused, it must also get closer to the source of need for those outcomes: users. And a “user” is not a specific role. It's everyone.

That leaves technology leaders — and vendors — catering for people without traditional tech CVs. They have none of the skill sets we would expect to see, and no prior history and experience with enterprise technology on which to layer on new developments. In a practical sense, this at least has implications for security and cost management.

Right now, the impacts of low/no-code technology are working their way through IT teams. For example, a web application developer using low/no-code solutions can now build entire applications end to end. That application will work, but its maker's lack of knowledge around security best practices will surely be apparent.

But it's when low/no-code capabilities make it into the data engineering space that things will get truly interesting. By empowering non-traditional IT roles to work with data, AI and machine learning becomes more approachable. And for BI teams and data developers, their output can be transformed by allowing them to focus on adding value, instead of the laborious data management and infrastructure concerns that have weighed them down in the past.

Why low/no-code data engineering matters to tech leaders

IT leaders need to begin to map out a place for these solutions in their teams and in their environments, in order to both better manage their impact but also leverage their strengths to improve service delivery.

Their first consideration should be the enablement of developers. When developers don't need to know everything to be successful, it makes their talent less rare, improves individual productivity and lowers the barriers to entry for next-generation technology, including cloud native services.

The next thing to consider is the potential for these solutions to allow your teams to build ever more complicated technology with the same, standard set of skills. A developer that has up to this point been focused on a single skill set can suddenly do more things – for them and you. That's transformative to their job satisfaction and to the scope of your ambitions.

But the biggest consideration is the eventual evolution of low/no-code solutions to the point where they can deliver data engineering capabilities to those outside of traditional technology teams. At that point AI and machine learning will take a decisive step towards true democratization.

Figuring out what happens next should be top of mind for technology leaders. Everyone has accepted the de-functionalization of IT, but data is still considered a specialty, and not just inside data teams. That will eventually no longer be the case. So while right now, those the most concerned about low/no-code are developers, specialty data teams should be braced for significant disruption.

From IT to data to the rest of the organization, low/no-code is getting closer and closer to transforming the relationship between enterprises and their data.

The final word:

The natural evolution of people and process first, technology after



The final word

The developments explored here give new meaning to the accepted wisdom that IT, when done well, is a question of people and process first, technology after.

Perhaps what we're seeing today are the first glimpses of a future that follows this to its natural conclusion, where enterprise technology is entirely driven by the needs of users.

It's too early to say definitively what that would mean for what we call IT today. Current trends around democratized IT buying and mass-audience development technologies are only playing at the very the edges of what it takes to maintain an enterprise technology infrastructure. But we shouldn't bank on them being peripheral forever. If the recent history of technology and digitalization is anything to go by, experimentation can become disruption very quickly.



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About Rackspace Technology

Rackspace Technology is the multicloud solutions expert. We combine our expertise with the world's leading technologies — across applications, data and security — to deliver end-to-end solutions. We have a proven record of advising customers based on their business challenges, designing solutions that scale, building and managing those solutions, and optimizing returns into the future.

As a global, multicloud technology services pioneer, we deliver innovative capabilities of the cloud to help customers build new revenue streams, increase efficiency and create incredible experiences. Named a best place to work, year after year according to Fortune, Forbes, and Glassdoor, we attract and develop world-class talent to deliver the best expertise to our customers. Everything we do is wrapped in our obsession with our customers' success — our Fanatical Experience™ — so they can work faster, smarter and stay ahead of what's next.

Learn more at www.rackspace.com or call 1-800-961-2888.

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Rackspace-Ebook-Technology-Trends-Volume-3-SOL-TSK-4083 :: April 19, 2021