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Patrick McClory on Building Successful DevOps Organizations

BY [GEORGE V. HULME](#) ON JULY 6, 2017 — [0 COMMENTS](#)

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Patrick McClory has been writing code, managing DevOps and designing scalable application infrastructures for more than 10 years. Most recently, as COO and CTO of DualSpark, he served as an expert Amazon Web Services consultant, helping clients capitalize on the benefits of cloud architecture and design with modern and innovative software, infrastructure and automation strategies leveraging AWS. After DualSpark's recent acquisition by Datapipe, McClory assumed the role of SVP of Platform Engineering and Delivery Services, where his expertise is put to good use overseeing Datapipe's global automation and DevOps, as well as its strategic consulting and platform teams. In this role, he manages

several teams, including Datapipe's client-focused service delivery team focused on enabling customers to transform their businesses by leveraging cloud-based patterns and practices.

DevOps.com: Tell us a little about your cloud experience, your consulting background and your role with Datapipe?

McClory: I found myself in the Amazon partner channel probably a little over eight years ago. I worked for a couple of Amazon partners, and then I eventually went to work for Amazon. After having helped lead some of their consulting work in their professional services organization, which was fairly fledgling at the time, I left to form my own organization. It proved to be an interesting divergence for me. Where I previously spent a lot of time helping clients solve technical cloud problems—which is typically technical and very straightforward—I found myself transitioning to the greater software- and people-problem challenges around effectively taking advantage of cloud technologies.

That's really how DualSpark was born, both in terms of cloud data architecture, design and consulting. We helped customers understand how to take advantage of the cloud from a business perspective, as well as dive all the way down into the deep, nitty-gritty of exactly how they should technically do it. After eight years of consulting in that world and Datapipe acquiring DualSpark, I found myself in an interesting place where I now run the consultative, the engineering, the client-face role for Datapipe. I also run our platform-engineering team. The big story behind that is trying to take all the knowledge and all the patterns and all of the collective wisdom that we've gained over the years, between myself and the team, and building product to help our customers get there faster.

DevOps.com: We're many years into the movement toward DevOps. What do you think we've learned the biggest challenges to be when it comes to getting DevOps right?

McClory: What we've learned is that the technical side of the argument, when it comes to actually achieving a DevOps workflow, is probably the least complicated. The real challenge is getting people aligned and focusing the effort in the right direction. For me, that's been the challenge. But people gravitate toward the tools because they're easy. Realistically, you can't take advantage of the tools if you don't get yourself organized and going in the right direction.

I'm going to tell a story. There was probably a span of six months where I had the, "What continuous integration tool should I use?" discussion. Invariably, every time, everyone ends up with the same sets of tools. Everybody ends up with Jenkins and, realistically, no one's always terribly happy with it. Still, it was a six-week conversation, no matter what they eventually chose. Then, rather than starting from nothing, I decided to come to these meetings with a pre-configured system. I would load it into their AWS account, or wherever made sense. They'd see Jenkins hooked up, fully, to their source control toolset. It was highly available and had all of the plug-ins they sought. We took away everything to discuss. We'd

then take the next two hours to configure it, play around with the bells and whistles and knobs. Fit it to their purpose. They could always shift to something else down the line.

We couldn't believe it, but that tactic worked. I no longer had six-week discussions about CI and what tool to use. I had a two-hour, fit-for-purpose discussion. At that point, bells going off in my head, going this is very interesting. What if we could do this more deeply? What if we did this all the way through the entire stack? What if I gave people multiple options and we just went through and picked it, like a menu? I'm not going to say that's the overall product design. It's a little bit more complicated and more intricate than that. The whole goal is to help customers get to the transformative place where they want to be, faster, by avoiding some of the common pitfalls of technologists who like to chase shiny things.

DevOps.com: With that in mind, what are some of the biggest challenges when it comes to getting the processes and people in place?

McClory: IT as an organizational concept within companies that hasn't done themselves any favors in the last 20 years. There are several different takes on this, but all basically converge on the idea that since the IT service management boom, IT as a discipline hasn't really matured. Since then, there have been many, many inflection points and/or maturity moments when IT can provide services. But there's this awesome gap that continues to grow between what the typical IT organization can deliver and what the business is demanding. That's where shadow IT shows up. It's like to divergent lines and that gap is shadow IT.

What's happened is that IT never, and I say this with the internal acknowledgment that I'm a part of this community as well, really done a great job of connecting our mission to the value of the business. The cost center, the revenue center, there's all these ways to look at it but at the end of the day, IT is a burden, not an enabler. That's why a lot of these technologies in DevOps are such a focus. The pain is so great that organizations don't want to fix the systemic problem because they need to stop the bleeding. Often, what we've found is that there's a combination approach that's really necessary to build trust within that relationship.

DevOps.com: What do you think IT teams must do to flip IT from that unhelpful department to become more aligned with business objectives and profitability? Not that IT must be a profit center, but be more aligned with the business.

McClory: Being more aligned with delivering value, right? I think it's two vectors. There's the one half that's easy and stereotypical and that's just because that discipline hasn't really aligned that way for so long. As silly as it sounds, I find that there's so much animosity between business and technology organizations on the stereotypical kind of day. There's a little bit of corporate therapist that we play and we help build bridges, help to realign, help to translate. It's a surprisingly entrenched issue of people at an interpersonal level.

It's not simply between the technologist and the company and the business. It's also even within the technology organization, between your typical developers and operations organizations. Getting those three views aligned to serving the value of the business is, a lot of times, a matter of helping people to acknowledge that other people are a part of it and that they're all there to serve the same mission.

On the other side, there's also this misnomer that there is a silver bullet, from a tooling capabilities perspective. There are some great tools out here and I've both built partnerships with them and used their tooling heavily. One that comes to mind, particularly, is Chef. I love their tools. They don't solve every problem I have, though. There's a landscape of tooling that I tend to end up back at that standard configuration management, continuous integration, testing and deployment management, monitoring and alerting. You end up finding good options in each one. Not that they're perfect solutions, but a lot of organizations are looking for that DevOps in a box. They're looking for that one capability and they forget that it's not one thing. Even if people have tried to market it that way. It's very much a technology plus an organizational culture issue. Not a single technology.

DevOps.com: Where do you see your clients now in the curve of DevOps adoption?

McClory: If you're looking at a bell curve and cut it into quarters, I think we're probably in the early phase of the second quarter of adoption. There's a ton of interest and I think that's what I would look at, in terms of volume. I see lots of people who're interested. I don't remember who said it but to paraphrase, there's a lot of people talking about it. There are very few people who actually achieve it.

At the same time, I don't believe that, to your point, DevOps isn't a destination, it's a way of doing things. It puts you on a vector, it pushes you in a direction. It's never about the destination, it's about the journey.

In that respect, I think there are a lot of DevOps practices that start to seep in at the cultural level. As organizations try to be more efficient, we see them coming into some of the automation practices and the tooling side of things much more eagerly than they are the organizational collaboration side. Even that's starting to break down and, oddly enough, I don't know that I would blame it on the influx of newer developers or younger developers into the market. Certainly, it plays a role as the—not to wax poetic—the culture of sharing economy, the open visibility outcry from the hipsters perspective, or the millennial view. I think a lot of that I really positively impacted organizations behind the scenes, to open up a lot of that collaboration and visibility that's necessary to get DevOps right.

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