

Microsoft's Satya Nadella: Life as an orchestra conductor

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Russ Edelman

Microsoft's week-long, next generation "Ignite" conference took place May 4-8 in Chicago and it pulled in close to 25,000 attendees. The keynote on Monday was led by none other than Conductor Satya Nadella. Why conductor you may ask?

Because like an orchestra that has an abundance of instruments, Microsoft has an abundance of products and services. And at the very center of this instrumentation, whether cacophony or music, we find Mr. Nadella. This conference is the first of its kind in that it consolidated a number of other standing Microsoft conferences such as the SharePoint, Exchange, Management Summit and the Tech Ed conferences. Walking through the massive exhibit floor or paging through over 1,000 sessions, even the most weathered industry veterans could be overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of Microsoft's and the other exhibiting partners' offerings. Think of the shock to the newbies who are entering the Microsoft ecosystem.

As a point of "orchestrational" reference, allow me to share just a few examples. First, Bill Baer, Senior Technical Product Manager at Microsoft (@williambaer) shared how Microsoft is working very diligently on providing continuity across One Drive for Business and SharePoint document libraries. Where One Drive for Business is focused on basic file sharing capabilities and SharePoint provides a rich, workflow-oriented approach with comprehensive metadata support, both, by design and orchestration, share a common UI and other key features. Second, Joe Belfiore, VP Operating Systems (@joebelfiore) shared how Windows 10 will provide a completely consistent experience across all device types and with the Universal Application, developers can develop once and have the software run across all platforms without concern for device type. Third, Microsoft has worked closely with companies such as Salesforce.com and Docusign.com to harmoniously have their technologies work together in a very cohesive fashion.

Beyond these references, the intent of this article is not to dive deeply into any specific technology offered by Microsoft. Instead, this is a look at Microsoft through a different lens so as to provide guidance for those using or considering the use of Microsoft technologies.

First Note | Statistics at the conference report that 1 out of every 7 people in the world use Microsoft products in some form or fashion. That is a staggering number and one that illustrates the girth and might of this giant.

Second Note | When an orchestra is on its game, the magnificence of the depth and richness of the music is unrivaled. With instruments and musicians operating as a practiced unit, there is a higher degree of predictability and consistency in terms of what is played and what is produced and again, when the orchestra is led effectively by the conductor, the results can be magical.

Third Note | Enter technology – as much as technology runs the world, it is hard to create, it breaks and it takes consistent upkeep and innovation. Enter Microsoft and their massive suite of technologies. Microsoft arguably represents the biggest inventory of technologies and services available from one vendor.

Fourth Note | Despite the complexities of this inventory, Microsoft has forged ahead and made a massive amount of this technology work together in a fairly harmonious fashion. And while every part is not at perfect pitch, tempo or volume at all times, a lot works well and works well together.

Fifth Note | What is the alternative to Microsoft? There are a lot of alternatives and for some businesses and organizations, these other technologies may be justified. Microsoft is not always the best fit. Yet, Microsoft, as the 800 pound gorilla, has pulled off what no other mortal software company has done: built an orchestra, had the orchestra perform for billions of users, and improved the orchestra as needed and demanded.

Sixth Note | There are unquestionably a lot of Microsoft naysayers, and there are one-piece, two-piece and five-piece bands that will always hold some appeal over Microsoft's orchestra. However, despite Microsoft's imperfections, it is truly the only band in town that can bring a robust suite of products together that for the most part work together. You can of course glue a collection of other products together, some of which may include Microsoft. In any and all cases, the integration of technology breeds challenges. How you deal with those challenges is what will make you successful.

Seventh Note | Satya and the team at Microsoft remain committed to listening to clients and industry pundits and in doing so, they seek to improve the entire product and services stack. This has now broadened into a much more open strategy in supporting other platforms that were perceived as competitive (Apple, Google Android, Salesforce.com, etc.).

So, where do all of these notes ultimately leave a discriminating business/technology decision maker for most organizations?

Metaphorically, organizations may need to coordinate their own collection of isolated band members and challenges will unquestionably arise as the musicians all like to play their own way. Alternatively, one orchestra can be coordinated and in doing so, there is a centralized theme and continuity across the musicians.

Practically, the introduction of cloud/SaaS-based products and solutions may provide for individual departments/business units to succeed; however, the coordination and integration of these systems at an enterprise level is unquestionably more challenging. And at times, there are simply no other choices.

However, the vision and execution offered by Microsoft is powerful. Microsoft's approach allows for a broad set of capabilities that are highly and uniquely integrated across Microsoft on premises and cloud-based platforms. And through Conductor Nadella's vision, Microsoft continues to collaborate with their technology partners such that more Microsoft software can work on other platforms and vice versa. Once again, an orchestration of massive proportion no one other than Microsoft can take on and execute successfully.

Russ Edelman is CEO of Corridor Company and co-author of "Nice Guys Can Get the Corner Office."