

Technical Debt Doesn't Matter

In today's world, architectural technical debt is the new normal. There is no longer advantage in analysing the poor design of current systems. Instead, organisations must focus on how their systems serve stakeholders throughout society and make best use of emerging technologies

My last column for BP Trends, in May 2021, "Paying down your digital debt" discussed how it used be the norm for enterprise architects to make grand plans, implement them over a period of years, and build to last but this is no longer how IT works. In October 2021, I gave a Plenary Keynote to Enterprise Architecture Europe that set out an alternative vision for the Enterprise Architect of today. Here are some of the key points.

First, the pace of technical change has accelerated to the point where it is no longer possible to keep up. Between 2020 and 2021, only two of Gartner's Top Strategic Technology Trends remained constant (Hyperautomation and distributed cloud) and one of the others (Multiexperience) was subsumed into a wider trend (Total experience). All the others were new – seven in 2020 and six in 2021, a total of thirteen. What organisation could possibly maintain this level of change within one year?

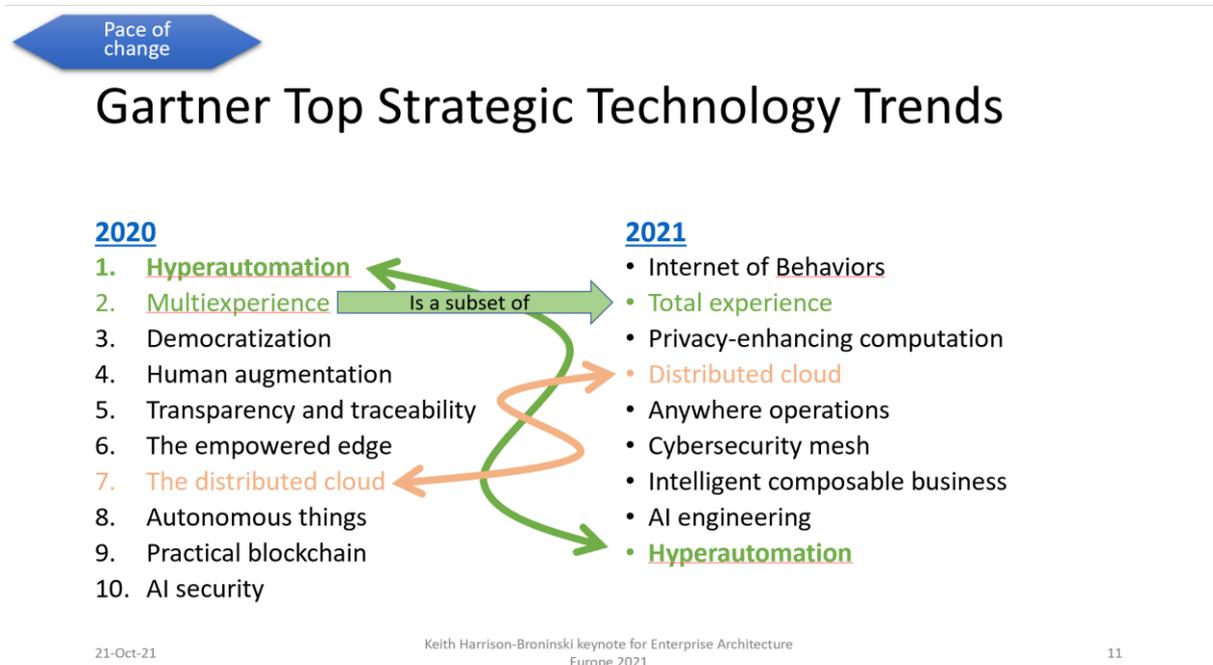


Figure 1: Gartner Top Strategic Technology Trends

Second, what do you get from trying? Evolutionary biologists know well how specialist species such as pandas and rhinos are far more vulnerable to change

than the generalist rats and raccoons. Efficiency – being perfectly suited to your habitat - is the enemy of adaptation. In a world changing as fast as 21st century global society, it makes more sense to adapt than to keep up.

Third, our old models of organization design are based on the notion of fixed value streams – i.e., unsuited to adaptative behaviour. As an alternative, I propose a model that learns from the success of Google, Apple, and other big tech platforms. Organizations can learn to be platforms, by positioning themselves as enablers of diverse services to the communities in which they operate. These services are provided not only internally but also by third parties who use the organization’s infrastructure as a platform.

Case Study

Organisation as Platform

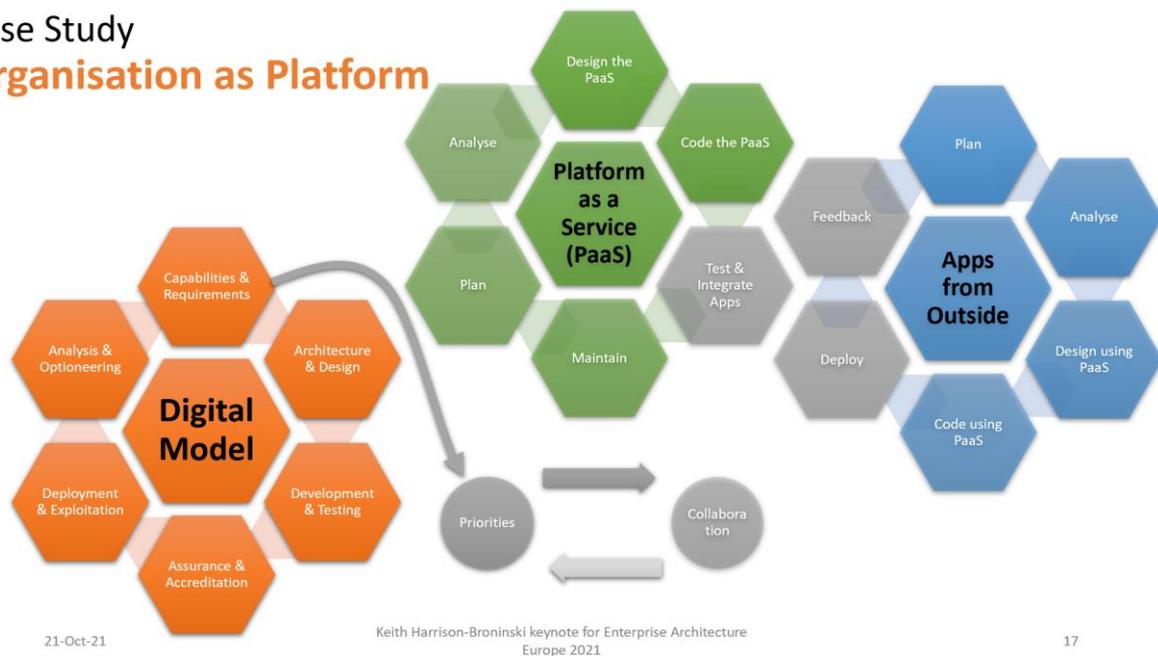


Figure 2: Organization as Platform

To accomplish this transition, an organization must learn to think of itself as a community asset, which means engaging in purposeful, structured collaboration with the communities they serve. In effect, the organization becomes an enabler of the Supercommunities model for development of antifragile ecosystems. This model is explained fully in my 2021 book "Supercommunities", and you can find a summary (including a useful infographic) at www.supercommunities.info.

Organizations have been learning that their supply chain is actually a supply network and that their customers are actually stakeholders. An organization that wishes to survive and thrive in the turbulent 2020s needs now to go further and learn how to become a community asset, by providing infrastructure to support the human processes that deliver value to its stakeholder communities.

Author

Keith Harrison-Broninski FRSA is an author, speaker, and technology/business consultant specialising in collaboration across organisational boundaries as well as social technology for wellness, community, and finance.

Keith's first book was "Human Interactions" (2005):

- "Set to produce the first fundamental advances in personal productivity since the arrival of the spreadsheet" (Information Age)
- "The breakthrough that changes the rules of business" (Peter Fingar, author of "Business Process Management: The Third Wave")
- "The overarching framework for 21st century business technology" (BP Trends)
- "The next logical step in process-based technology" (Chair of the Workflow Management Coalition)

Keith went on to **develop these principles for cross-boundary collaboration in further books and research** and lead **award-winning social enterprises for healthcare innovation, wellness, and community finance.**

Keith's latest book "**Supercommunities**" brings together insights from recent academic research with original ideas about wellness, collaboration, and finance to explain how communities everywhere can become antifragile through social trading.