And so, addressing the human side along with leveraging the continuum of cloud capabilities will be critical for this next wave of cloud adoption. And in our upcoming research, we uncover actually what happens when companies prioritize the people as much as their technology.

Todd Pruzan, HBR

In Accenture’s research, you found a group of companies that’s extracting the most value from the cloud. The report calls them champions. What are these cloud champions doing differently?

Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture

So we surveyed a 1,100 CXOs, and we found that a subset of them have radically outperformed their peers in realizing cloud values. And this elite group represents only 18% of cloud leaders. And they achieved 60% greater cloud value on average across financial, business, and workforce dimensions. The other striking similarity across these modern cloud champions is that they unlock value by continuously investing in their people and aligning the cloud strategy to business growth. So, these cloud leaders who prioritize people transformation as highly as they did technology transformations are winning the value game. And that’s how we decided to label them cloud champions.
Our research indicated that champions embrace cloud-native practices at scale, which is super powerful. For example, they foster cultures of empowerment, experimentation, and innovation. And they’re more likely to create an environment where people are encouraged to take risks and to learn from them, and actually to develop experiments and ideas that drive innovation. And that actually strengthens the learning muscle. And champions are more likely by two times to do this. And they democratize access to data and technology. And that allows all the way into the edges of the organization, individuals and teams to make more of their own decisions with data without explicit leadership reviews and approvals. And what that allows is a speed, agility, accountability, and decision making.

Todd Pruzan, HBR
OK. So that makes a very strong case. How do the efforts of cloud champions translate into outcomes?

Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture
Well, cloud overall is a powerful enabler of human potential and ingenuity. And cloud technology allows us to work remotely, to collaborate seamlessly, to make decisions with real time data, to experiment with new products, to personalize experiences with AI, and to deliver value to our customers faster. Those modern cloud champions that recognize that none of these cloud benefits could be possible without leadership, talent, cultural practices to work effectively in a new digital environment. And what we saw is that these champions were over four times more likely to develop future-ready digital talent at scale, meaning that they prioritized and invested in cloud digital skilling, not just in IT but across the entire company, to actually gain the benefits and stay ahead of the competitors. They also told us that cloud skilling is not a one-time event but rather a continuous part of what you do to build a culture to stay primed for future waves of technology. We also found that these champions have more than two times stronger alignment among the C-suite leaders on what they define as their cloud ambition, their strategy, and the allowable tradeoffs. Significantly they also reported 2 times stronger partnerships between IT and the business, and almost five times more organizational maturity and cross-functional collaboration.

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Todd Pruzan, HBR
Thanks. Can you explain why it’s so crucial to invest in people on the journey to the cloud?

Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture
So I would say because we believe in what we’ve seen through the research that while cloud creates enormous value for organizations, people are what liberate the power in cloud. The skilling, the capabilities, cloud skilling can feel really like an infinity loop for transformation leaders. It means that this is a continuous cycle that organizations have to get into.
As cloud skills evolve, the organization has to enable people in to actually develop to move towards those cloud skills. And we really define those cloud skills in two broad categories. One is around tech skilling. And we learned around that there are only six skill areas that really move the needle. So, there’s cloud. There’s full stack engineering. There’s agile, data and AI. There’s DevOps and security. And every cloud program, regardless of the journey are going to need those skills.

But also, I guess an unexpected learning is that the real value is in how we apply these skills across the enterprise. This means we need to expand our definition of cloud skilling to include digital behaviors and practices. And we need to expand the learning audience to include the entire enterprise.

And when we talk about digital fluency skills, we’re talking about value optimization, data driven leadership, cross-functional collaboration, continuous innovation, customer centricity, change agility. And all of these allow the organization to kick start a culture that allows the organization or enables the organization to increase speed, agility, and innovation.

Todd Pruzan, HBR
OK. Continuing on to the people theme, did you uncover specific skill gaps that are holding companies back from mastering the cloud?

Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture
We really did. And the skill gaps occurred in both areas that we’re speaking to. So, companies that were champions made a decision to build the skills that I just described inside of their organizations.

So, if you think about the build, the buy, the borrowed decisions that all organizations have to make, obviously every organization has an ecosystem. These organizations made commitments inside of their talent to enable people to be cloud capable as well as building the partnerships with the ecosystem.

And the skill gaps occurred both from a technology perspective—because legacy technology skills are not the same as the cloud skills that I just described—and around those cultural capabilities to drive innovation, agility, collaboration. And those skill gaps have to be closed through cultural programs and behavioral programs that set expectations and allowed risk taking and experimentation that allowed legacy organizations to behave like cloud native.

Todd Pruzan, HBR
How do you cloud champions effectively address these skill gaps, both quickly and at scale?

Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture
Well, what we found is that there’s a tendency for organizations to feel like if you just address skill gaps, you will get all the benefits that these champions have. And as it turns out, that is not true. You have to pull a number of levers. The levers around first alignment and the skill gaps and creating the right kind of culture overall in order to drive the benefits, and also a focus on leadership and enabling people to function in the new. So, all of these capabilities together actually drive the benefits. And each one of them is a cumulative effect of those capabilities that enable organizations to win.

Todd Pruzan, HBR
So what types of operating models do the modern cloud champions have?
The page contains a transcript of a conversation between Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture, and Todd Pruzan, HBR. The discussion revolves around cloud transformation and the importance of focusing on the three A’s: alignment, ability, and adoption. Silverstone emphasizes the need for continuous collaboration between IT and the business, as well as the development of new skills within the organization. Pruzan asks about the next steps for cloud transformation and the advice for unlocking value in modern cloud champions. Silverstone responds by highlighting the importance of human ingenuity and the future of every organization looking at where they are and how to apply this in a way that makes them even more capable and drive greater value.
Thank you. That sounds like a very helpful checklist. Yaarit, thank you so much for joining us today. This was an incredibly enlightening discussion. We appreciate your time and insights.

Yaarit Silverstone, Accenture
Thank you so much. I appreciated the time being here.