

Collaboration Between Channel Partners Bridges the Skills Gap

Fernanda Catarino, Head of Channel, Alliances and Ecosystem Europe at Fujitsu

Over the last few years, many businesses have accelerated their transformations by deploying technologies and processes to keep remote teams running despite the chaos of the Covid pandemic. But after that initial push, the positive trend toward digital transformation has stalled for many companies as they struggle to find skilled staff.

The current challenge is that transformation is centered on extracting insights from structured and unstructured data. This requires significant technical expertise in fields including artificial intelligence and cybersecurity. Businesses must manage and protect their data while making it available to interrogate and use. And there aren't enough people to do that. There have been countless stories in the news about labor shortages, the skills gap, and, more recently, the great resignation.

One group in our region is bucking that trend – the Fujitsu Partner Ecosystem. This network of channel partners is successfully navigating the skills shortage by working collaboratively and pooling resources. And we have identified several key themes contributing to this success that other businesses can adopt.

All participants benefit, regardless of their size or area of technical focus

Enabling each partner to focus on their superpower works well for the Fujitsu Partner Ecosystem. Not every partner has all the required skills in-house but is assured that these are accessible from fellow partners. This approach removes the pressure on individual partners to acquire a vast selection of new skills, either by training or recruitment. This approach also recognizes that today's transformation projects are so broad in terms of the technologies and systems they touch that no provider can expect to deliver a complete solution alone.

Fujitsu Partner Ecosystem member skills range from deep expertise in topics as broad as cybersecurity to specialist topics with an extremely narrow focus. For example, one partner is focused exclusively on implementing CCTV systems anywhere in Europe. Another is a virtualization specialist ready to work with any partner to define and deliver complex projects regionally. Many are highly focused on specific vertical industries – and partnering with them is a route for others to expand into new markets. For example, a partner can gain the confidence to fulfill specialist RFPs through collaboration with a regional expert in transforming unstructured data into insights for law enforcement agencies, law firms, and government organizations.

A powerful dimension of this approach is the potential for businesses of all sizes to contribute to large projects. The lead partner maintains and deepens the customer relationship and looks like a superstar by delivering best-of-breed solutions. This easy access to solutions, from AI to virtualization, also enables partners to pitch and win bids or contracts that they would otherwise not have been able to deliver.

As business transformation projects continue to increase in scope and scale, they require contributions from numerous experts. The Fujitsu platform facilitates this approach, providing partners with a pre-qualified shortlist of skilled experts. This model also extends to every technology skill. When there's a match for the right combination of skills and partners are ready to collaborate, a clear framework defines the collaboration, ensuring that everyone is compensated fairly.

A problem shared is a problem halved

There are many instances where customer projects don't require full collaboration, but partners can still benefit from others' prior implementation experience. Fujitsu helps bridge this knowledge gap by creating opportunities for partners to share best practices and discuss challenges – primarily via Partner Advisory Board meetings and the TechCommunity.

The Partner Advisory Board convenes officially every quarter, in addition to further informal interactions. Fujitsu focuses on enabling this diverse representation of its partner base to discuss their most pressing issues and share best practices. The main objective is maintaining a dialogue with partners to inform the partner program strategy. Participants also benefit from interaction with a broad cross-section of peers representing different partner types, focus areas, and geographical locations. Diversity is the best catalyst for innovation and conversations held by this group are always dynamic and thought-provoking.

There's also a strong component of knowledge sharing in TechCommunity. This occurs through ongoing dialog and technical discussions and via annual workshops that bring together the best and brightest of the region's Channel technologists, pre-sales consultants, and IT visionaries. There is ample opportunity for participants to interact with Fujitsu experts from the technical competence center who are ready and willing to share their knowledge with partners. The workshop is also designed to create opportunities for partners to share knowledge with their peers via small, interactive break-out sessions.

Each break-out group focuses on a topic, such as data resilience, hybrid cloud, or new delivery models. Guided discussions provide a valuable forum for participants to discuss current challenges and solutions and learn from one another's experiences. This forum, where partners can speak openly and frankly to their peers who have successfully navigated the same or similar challenges, is invaluable. After one valuable exchange at the recent TechCommunity workshop in Barcelona, one partner technologist – who had been working for weeks trying to find the right backup solution for a customer in a niche industry – deployed an approach tried and tested by a peer. This cut their customer's backup time from multiple days to just 30 minutes.

A Self-Guided Approach to Continuous Development

Another side effect of the pandemic was that it disrupted opportunities for workers to access continuous learning. This is proving particularly problematic in the IT industry, as technologies, products, and solutions constantly evolve. Although this challenge has received less focus in its contribution to the skills gap, it has nevertheless contributed to a lack of individuals with up-to-date skills in addition to a widespread lack of job satisfaction.

Our approach is to provide partners with self-guided training options, offering a choice of focus topics and delivery mechanisms – from virtually on-demand to live on-site. Rather than training, which is essentially a box-ticking exercise for accreditation, partners can choose their areas of expertise.

Every partner can access to wide range of training, from detailed knowledge transfer relating to Fujitsu solutions portfolios to valuable insights into vertical industry trends. Partners can focus on deepening their knowledge, keeping up to date, and gaining practical skills in new technology areas when and if required.

Increased diversity

There's another approach that Fujitsu is taking to address the skills shortage – that's to encourage more women into the industry to fulfill technical roles. It's a well-established fact that diversity drives innovation, but women currently remain underrepresented. Fujitsu, recognized by The Times as a Top 50 Employer for Women, undertakes a raft of activities targeted at encouraging girls and young women to consider a STEM education or join the IT industry. We also have mentoring programs for those who are already among us. We are encouraged that female participation in TechCommunity is increasing – just three years ago there were only 3 female participants. This year there were 14. This is not yet enough but the trend is promising.

Partners can always rely on Fujitsu

Of course, partners also have the backing of several Fujitsu competence centers. These centers of excellence focus on key technology areas such as blockchain, artificial intelligence, SAP, or Industry 4.0. They are resource partners who need assistance with pre-sales planning or configuration.

We are all Stronger Together

There is an imbalance between skilled technologists and job vacancies – there are simply not enough well-trained people. To make up for this shortage, partners can rely on Fujitsu's competence centers to bridge their skills gaps and gain insights from experts to develop themselves and seize business opportunities. As an industry, we must come together and collaborate – a rising tide lifts all ships and the opposite affects all.

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London-based, Fernanda Catarino is responsible for driving Fujitsu's Channel Business strategy and business growth by maximizing the strengths of our distributors, alliance partners, and channel partners of all types.



Creating joint value in building solutions to support the business transformation strategies of our joint customers. As Head of Channel, she's responsible for Fujitsu's 27,000 partners in Europe, and her vision is to build a channel ecosystem that connects people, technology, and ideas, enabling the creation of a more sustainable world.