

Organizational Culture and its impact on the BizDev interface

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CCS CONCEPTS

• **Software and its engineering** → *Agile software development*;
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KEYWORDS

BizDev, Business-Development Interface, Organizational Culture

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1 INTRODUCTION

Currently, organizations are looking for evolving and adapting software engineering methodologies targeting a wider and healthier collaboration among its functional areas. In this context, the interface between business and development includes all the interactions between the IT and the business sectors within an organization. The term BizDev is used to represent this link between business strategy and software development [1], complementing how DevOps represents the link between development and operations. Understanding how the BizDev interface works in different methodologies and contexts is relevant to have an in-depth characterization and, then, improving towards the continuous flow and healthier collaboration between these areas.

The goal of this research is to obtain empirical evidence about the BizDev interface, to allow a better characterization of the interface and the roles inside it. For this, we conducted a case study at a Brazilian tech company, performing two phases of semi-structured interviews with fifteen participants from both development and business areas. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Grounded Theory [2].

Among the results of this research, we observed a phenomenon in which the IT sector (development) act in business. The organizational culture has a strong influence in this phenomenon,

motivating and shaping its behavior. Despite the benefits of such influence, we highlight the culture also influenced developers to act in business without proper alignment with the business area.

2 IT SECTOR ACTING IN BUSINESS

From 12 interviews (out of 15), we observed development analysts and leaders working on the definition and prioritization of requirements, analyzing business indicators, engaging in brainstorming sessions for coming up with new ideas for company's products, and even presenting their feature propositions to company's directors.

Eight participants indicate that people from the IT sector worked constantly on the prioritization of requirements and tasks. The entire development team was able to take part in prioritization sessions. One characteristic of this involvement was being strongly data-driven, with developers constantly extracting and presenting metrics to validate their prioritization propositions, specially when justifying prioritization for features and requirements proposed by the technology team itself.

We observed technology people constantly idealizing, defining and implementing new features. From several segments, we observed that nine features proposed by developers ended up being implemented and released. Besides proposing new features that would be directly integrated to the main products, we observed situations of technology people idealizing business flows focused on optimizing and automating recurring demands of business teams, and also coming up with solutions to optimize and reduce operation costs to increase product's margin.

Technology people also made two business propositions that ended up originating two different products inside the company, leading to the creation of a different business unit focused on these new products. These two cases were mentioned by different participants and considered a success case that inspired technology people to act in business. Although we identified many cases of features proposed by the technology team, different participants shared that the majority of requirements would still be proposed by the business area, and that most of the proposals from the technology team would be for relatively smaller features.

3 CULTURAL INFLUENCE

We observed the organizational culture was a main influencing factor for technology people to act in business. There are different cultural aspects and values at the analyzed company that motivate technology members to get involved in business, and five different interviewees reported these values were strongly present in employees' routine and shaped their behavior. Tech leaders would take

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effort to share and enforce the company's values to their teams, as mentioned by four participants.

One of the company's values is about the sense of ownership towards the company and its products, encouraging employees to take an extra step to impact on business. Through this cultural value, technology people are motivated to acquire business knowledge, to monitor product indicators, and to try to apply this knowledge by getting involved in business decision-making processes: *"One of the values I like the most is the sense of ownership. (...) The company makes you feel like an owner, it empowers you, and shows that, regardless of your position, you can impact the company strategy"* (Head of Technology). Tech leaders would specifically try to motivate their teams to acquire and apply business knowledge, constantly bringing information about the company's strategy. The company's business leadership also shared business and strategy information, through recurring presentations where the CEO would share business results.

An important aspect of the company's environment was that all teams were very open to receive suggestions and questioning, with technology teams able to bring business discussions to business teams and vice-versa. Three different participants credited this behavior to company's culture, like stated by the Growth analyst: *"The receptivity is very good, and I credit to company's culture that overall all people are very open to receive suggestions, and very comfortable to give opinions on what we are proposing"*. One development leader shared this incentive was present since her/his career beginning at the company and that, as a leader, s/he also encourages this behavior.

4 LACK OF BIZDEV ALIGNMENT

From several interviews, participants described situations in which IT people acted in business without proper alignment with the business area. As a consequence, the development team defined and delivered features that would harm some aspects of the business. We also observed the perception that some features proposed by the technology team were not successful due to this lack of alignment with business teams. The main motivations observed for this behavior regards the company's culture and structure, especially to the encouragement of the sense of ownership towards the product. Five participants reported moments when developers were not in sync to other teams about business decisions.

One product manager observed the organizational culture made developers eager to impact the business by proposing new ideas and led to situations in which developers implement features without proper alignments in order to deliver faster: *"Here we have the urge to create things, it's the company's entrepreneurship aspect, part of the culture (...), but we end up forgetting there are other people with other expertise (...) that should be involved. (...) If you put area working in silos and delivering things, they will be faster (...) because there is less work involved in taking the decision"*.

One business leader reported developers would implement features without considering the current business direction taken by the company. S/he felt the developers had limited business vision, choosing a simplistic approach when trying to solve a product issue, focusing only on the specific issue being solved and ignoring other business aspects of the product. Two business participants

reported they did not agree with some of the ideas implemented by the development team, considering their business point of view.

Three different participants reported that some features proposed and implemented by the development team could have achieved better results if there had been a better alignment with product and design areas. One designer reported not being involved for a certain feature, which prevented her/his team to support and enrich the feature. For the same feature, one product analyst also reported little involvement, stating that due to this lack of alignment with the business area the feature lacked the necessary political power to convince company's high leadership.

5 FINAL REMARKS

From this study, we could observe the organizational culture can impact the BizDev interface. At the analyzed organization, company's values were strongly present in employees' routine, being able to strongly motivate technology people to acquire business knowledge and act in business, mainly through the prioritization and definition of requirements. This stimulated sense of ownership towards the company and its products, combined with how receptive the business area was for BizDev communication, motivated and empowered technology people to take an extra step towards impacting the business. Among the benefits of having technology people acting in business, we highlight nine new features being idealized and implemented by technology people, including two business propositions that originated two different products for the analyzed organization.

Even though we observed successful cases of technology people acting in business, there were also cases of technology people defining and implementing features that harmed some aspects of the business. These cases were characterized by a lack of alignment between technology members and the business areas, with developers acting in an isolated manner. We observed influence from the organizational culture in this behavior. The sense of ownership towards the product motivated developers to act isolated to deliver value faster, since aligning with other areas would slow this process.

In conclusion, we advocate that organizations should review their organizational values and culture to consider how it could motivate technology people to acquire business knowledge and impact the business. We've seen agile methodologies claiming that the business area should be closer to the development process, and correspondingly, we propose that the technology area should also become closer to business strategy. However, without proper process and security measures, developers may act in business without proper alignment with the business area, leading to situations where the business could be harmed. For this reason, we claim that identifying how companies' organizational culture could motivate technology people to act in business while establishing security measures to prevent business decisions from being made solely by the IT sector presents a relevant industrial challenge.

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