

MWC 2016: Four Takeaways for Leaders

A pulse check of current trends and a barometer of the “next big thing,” Mobile World Congress (MWC) remains one of the best ways to witness the rapid and dramatic evolution of mobile. Even as recently as six years ago when we held our first MWC-related event, the conference primarily drew technology leaders from telecom-focused companies. This year demonstrated the vast reach of mobile, with a strong presence of CEOs, CMOs, CTOs and chief product officers from an expanse of industries, including financial services, automotive and entertainment, to name a few. Spencer Stuart explored the shift in dynamics and the innovations at MWC 2016, hosting two exclusive events for senior executives to capture diverse perspectives on mobile and the implications for talent. Many executives told us that despite the new possibilities presented by things such as 5G, virtual reality (VR), the Internet of Things (IoT) and the connected car, the most powerful force they see is simply “connectivity.” Here are some key takeaways for leaders in a world where, as MWC’s theme attested, “Mobile is Everything.”

Organizations need leaders who can harness the power of data.

A common thread running through the myriad innovations at MWC was the pervasiveness and granularity of data. Organizations must first sift through overwhelming amounts of information and then discern actionable insights in order to monetize data; as a result, the importance of — and demand for — data scientists has grown significantly, with some organizations creating chief data officer roles. Specific sector knowledge remains vital to ensure that data-driven recommendations translate into real business value.

At the organizational level, big data requires a deep integration between technologists and non-technologists and dramatically different business processes to truly have an impact. There must be a commitment from the top to direct resources to the most meaningful business issues and opportunities and to promote a culture that places quantitative analysis at the center of business decision-making.

Software's dominance and the rise of "Everything as a Service" are redefining talent needs.

In the early days of MWC, hardware was the focus; this year, software was the clear star. Some observed that the pace of Moore's Law — Intel co-founder Gordon Moore's prediction that the number of transistors on a single chip of silicon would double every two years — is slowing, and decelerating hardware innovation along with it. As we near the limits of silicon, software will continue to rise in prominence, creating a greater need for software product development talent. Sales leadership will also be critical; 75% of software leaders we recently surveyed said that sales, alliance management and distribution are the most important functional areas for the business.

In addition, software itself is evolving. Software-as-a-Service is giving way to Everything-as-a-Service (XaaS), where every software, hardware, IT or business process can be offered as a cloud-based service. Companies are pursuing XaaS (and diversifying their offerings in the process) in order to deliver solutions instead of products. In this scenario, rather than selling cars, an automaker will sell "transportation solutions." From a talent perspective, this will represent a significant shift as product-focused companies bring on executives with a service mentality. This movement toward XaaS will undoubtedly spur the creation of new, unconventional partnerships between seemingly disparate sectors. As a result, success will depend on leaders who can integrate new knowledge and bridge distinct organizational cultures. Agility, creativity and the ability to build relationships will become increasingly important.

The far-reaching implications of mobile innovations demand outside-the-box problem solvers.

According to one leader, "There are very few products. They are all solutions." Connectivity applications and platforms will be the kings of the IoT ecosystem in order to offer seamless and immediate answers to users' needs. Interestingly, while IoT is much heralded as a consumer solution, it is projected to deliver the most revenues and profits in the B2B segment — requiring both B2B and B2C leaders to rethink assumptions about strategic opportunities. As IoT and other digital technologies remove barriers between organizations and the end user, the distinction between B2B and B2C decreases, which will reshape how marketing leaders and their organizations engage with clients.

VR garnered buzz as the next game-changer, but its true power may not be in the technology, but the connections it enables. "CMOs are going to love virtual reality because it's the best way to connect people to a brand,"

commented one VR industry insider. VR will also redefine entertainment and media approaches, demanding tech-savvy content leaders who can tell compelling stories (and reinforce the brand value proposition) in a three-dimensional way.

The most successful leaders in this landscape will be those with an innovative, problem-solving mindset who are not limited by current restrictions. "IoT leadership is not about tech talent or worrying about tech constraints, but about re-writing the business," said the CEO of a B2B IoT leader. Executives need open minds about the potential use cases of these technologies, as well as a strong learning orientation. Senior leaders also must be adept at developing talent and fostering a culture that enables their teams to "fail fast" and learn — or risk being outpaced by the competition.

People- and purpose-focused leadership is becoming the standard.

Connectivity has driven a paradigm shift. “As everyone focuses on IoT, Facebook continues its focus on the IoP — the Internet of People,” commented a senior executive from the social media pioneer. MWC revealed how mobile has inspired a growing awareness of social issues and the chasm between the possibilities of technology and practical realities. Numerous leaders agreed that connecting the billions of people in the developing world to the Internet will not be enough. Many organizations have begun initiatives and investments in innovation aimed at supporting humanitarian efforts. According to the CEO of a Pan-African telecom company, the role of telecommunications providers needs to go beyond providing new capabilities at a low cost and, at the same time, governments in these regions should

not only view mobile as a source of tax income, but as a way to improve education, employment and their GDP.

There is a call for senior executives who both demonstrate an acute understanding of the innovation landscape and are sensitive to the larger developmental issues surrounding them. A business model and organizational culture that emphasizes social responsibility can also be a talent attractor for a generation of innovative tech leaders — particularly millennials — for whom purpose is a priority and motivator. As the digital divide closes, companies need to recognize the expectations of a changing, global talent pool and think outside their own geography for talent.

ABOUT SPENCER STUART

At Spencer Stuart, we know how much leadership matters. We are trusted by organizations around the world to help them make the senior-level leadership decisions that have a lasting impact on their enterprises. Through our executive search, board and leadership advisory services, we help build and enhance high-performing teams for select clients ranging from major multinationals to emerging companies to nonprofit institutions.

Privately held since 1956, we focus on delivering knowledge, insight and results through the collaborative efforts of a team of experts — now spanning 56 offices, 30 countries and more than 50 practice specialties. Boards and leaders consistently turn to Spencer Stuart to help address their evolving leadership needs in areas such as senior-level executive search, board recruitment, board effectiveness, succession planning, in-depth senior management assessment and many other facets of organizational effectiveness.

For more information on Spencer Stuart, please visit www.spencerstuart.com.

Social Media @ Spencer Stuart

Stay up to date on the trends and topics that are relevant to your business and career.



@Spencer Stuart

© 2016 Spencer Stuart. All rights reserved.
For information about copying, distributing and displaying this work,
contact: permissions@spencerstuart.com.