

# How Adaptability is Changing the Rules of Client Relationships

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A few months ago, we had a chance to sit down with a group of networking customers to get their insights about the challenges they face in a rapidly changing marketplace. Many of them talked about the importance of adaptability. They admitted that **the speed of change is accelerating** so fast that they aren't sure what they will need next.



These conversations confirmed something I have been sensing for a while now. Client purchasing is becoming less transactional as clients look to make more transformative impacts to their enterprise environments. It is not good enough to address a business challenge at a specific point in time. Enterprises want partners with the expertise to help them address both evolving opportunities and threats, including some that they haven't even anticipated.

I see adaptability as the primary pathway towards growth in a digital age. Adaptability is more than just updating old products or building customized solutions. It's about applying advanced thinking to attack new things—changing a business destiny, rather than just seizing it, and thriving in an 'anywhere' environment.

The lessons for achieving successful outcomes are adaptable in themselves and can be applied to companies of any size or industry. For this new approach we need to keep three things in mind.

## Knowledge drives the relationship

Over my career, I have seen the volume of what a sales force needs to know to grow significantly. We used to ask clients primarily about feeds, speeds, and geographies—such as where their sites were and what they were trying to connect to. Then we would provide the right

equipment and make the appropriate fiber connections.

But today, smart networks and a simple digital portal allow CIOs to re-route network traffic themselves, and the growth in hybrid workplaces means sending data to a wider array of destinations (like an employee's home office). Now we must have a better grasp on business problems, economic and regulatory pressures, supply chain challenges, and client cycle management. CEOs expect us to show how our adaptable solutions can ensure their success and survival.

## **Build trust through curiosity**

Being adaptable requires a commitment to be curious. We can provide all the information a client wants to hear, but unless we ask the right questions, that information might miss the mark. I recently chatted with a CEO who wanted us to build for them a networking infrastructure. It was an expensive proposition, and we were upfront about the cost. But we also took the time to truly understand the client's business challenges and used that knowledge to outline how to achieve success. Curiosity led to trust, and trust became a value-add that justified spending more for our solution than those offered by other competitors. Curiosity and trust are critical investments towards building long-lasting client relationships.

## **The need for speed**

In the past, when we talked about speed, we focused on network performance—how quickly can companies send and receive applications and data. Of course, managing latency continues to be a major concern, especially as more enterprises depend upon the cloud for their storage needs. That's why we rolled out an Edge Computing solution designed to cover 97% of the United States Enterprise demand within 5 milliseconds of latency or better. We have made the shift from network routing as the primary way to reduce latency by moving data and applications to the Edge and putting it nearer to consumers or users.

However, adaptability offers a different way to look at speed. The new challenge is how fast you can identify what a client needs, put that new solution into development, and then deliver it in time for a customer to benefit from it. You need corporate cultures comfortable with change and agile work processes that circumvent hierarchical thinking.

John Wooden, one of basketball's most successful coaches, once said, "Adaptability is being able to adjust to any situation at any given time." Whether on a basketball court, a high-tech assembly line, or the fluid confines of a digital marketplace, victory often goes to those who know

how to respond when opportunities present themselves.

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