

# Never stop learning – Thoughts after four years with our epic team

On New Year's Eve, I raised a glass (the last one for January) on four fantastic years at Xpirit. On a regular basis, I validate what I'm doing, both personal and professional. There's definitely going to be a five-year celebration. My job gets a solid 10 out of 10. Actually, the only situation that could make me hesitate would be the F1 Red Bull team offering me the same job. It's been an amazing journey, and since one of our values is "Sharing Knowledge", I feel the urge to finally contribute to our magazine some of the learnings that surprised me the most: my imposter syndrome, another perspective on IT for many organizations, and our BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal – a goal you'll set to give direction, but probably won't ever actually make – 'Built to Last' from Jim Collins).

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You could wonder why it took so long, especially since I'm the one helping new colleagues to overcome their imposter syndrome. Every new colleague is a bit overwhelmed by the Xpirit crew and what we've achieved so far. If you add a culture in which we continuously help each other by focusing on what we can still improve, that sometimes can become a bit scary. The suggestions come from a good heart, and everyone can make a mistake, but still. 'Out of our Xpirit-sight' I started coaching computer science students from a university on Agile and Growth Mindset. I even gave three guest presentations at the university of Utrecht, but never dared to do a dry run for the group. Asking for Xpirit-feedback during a dry-run is also one of the things I try to motivate new colleagues for.

Arjan and Rob, especially, helped me (without knowing) to take this step. Arjan kept asking me for an article for the magazine and was persistent. Rob motivated me by what he did: a gazillion blogs and presentations since he joined Xpirit, a month after I did. He described overcoming his fear in a recent blog post. Rob describes his journey in overcoming his imposter syndrome and he's doing a great job. In a few years, he has grown to become a respected source of information for many people on DevOps and GitHub. He gives real meaning to "Sharing Knowledge". And together with Rob, there are many colleagues that share our knowledge. This time, I'm finally joining them in our awesome magazine.

I guess the imposter syndrome naturally comes when you join a great team, and you don't have a big ego. It is uncomfortable to break the barriers of your own imprints, but sharing knowledge is incredibly motivating and gives an enormous amount of positive energy. And, you will probably learn something new in return. An open mindset helps to be receptive to the learning part. The open mindset should also help you ask for some help if you get stuck. Really, it's ok that you don't know everything.

Another thing that gave an inspiring epiphany was reading 'Seat at the Table' by Mark Schwartz. The book describes the C-level perspective on IT.

# "Big Hairy Audacious Goal – a goal you'll set to give direction, but probably won't ever actually make – 'Built to Last'"

– Jim Collins

For most domains, for example Marketing, a budget should lead to a maximum result. Adding budget should hopefully provide more results. During many conversations with customers, I experienced what the book describes: a C-level looks at IT in the same way. We purchase solutions that should lead to a certain result or service. This is true, but only half of it. It is true, IT-solutions are most often purchased or built to achieve a certain goal. But as soon as it's in production, it must be maintained. Mandatory maintenance to mitigate new risks. In general, if you don't maintain software, it will get "bit rot": vulnerabilities or hacks that will jeopardize the stability and reliability of the solution. From a risk point of view, IT-budget should be addressed as budget to prevent catastrophes. You can spend a limitless budget on IT, but the question is the other way around: what risk are you willing to take, and how much budget is needed to mitigate the risks you're not willing to take. This is one of the reasons why IT budget may feel unpredictable at times; you never know what new threats arise.

The last topic I would like to address is our main theme for the upcoming period: Creating Engineering Cultures for our Customer. Here is my two cents on why and how C-Level should embrace this.

IT keeps innovating at incredible pace and most companies are highly dependent on IT. By now, you could argue most companies are mainly IT-driven. Changes used to take years and it was fine to take years to adjust. However, the current IT landscape changes daily, with regular updates in the cloud, and newly added open-source possibilities, but also with new vulnerabilities and threats. To keep up, your IT colleagues are like the true Avengers, continuously saving the world and your company from destruction. Yes, by spending time and money, but there is not only a downside to this; there is a great opportunity if your company wants to become a great IT employer. How? Here are some ingredients:

*People First:* everything starts with your colleagues. Give them trust and autonomy; they know what they are doing. If you take good care of them, they will take care of you, taking into account what's important for your company. Put people at the beginning of everything you do. Happy colleagues will lead to a happy business and happy customers.

To make sure your IT colleagues know what they are doing: facilitate continuous learning. IT won't stop evolving, and your people must stay on par with what's going on.

Attending conferences and meeting peers will help them do a better job. Yes, education and seminars cost money, but the learnings are priceless compared with what may happen if your company has a security breach.

As C-level you should understand and truly adopt an Agile mindset. Agility is mandatory if you want to keep up with the ever-changing IT world, but Agile is not an IT-trick (nor is it the solution to everything). C-level has to blend in: for instance, by celebrating successes but also showing an open mindset when mistakes are made. Learn and move forward. (don't create a procedure to prevent the same mistake.). Agile is a company way of working, not an IT one.

These are some of the aspects for empowering your IT-crew and creating and truly adopting an engineering culture that will help your company to attract and keep top talent. Follow Xpirit and my colleagues on LinkedIn to find out more about the topic.

Inspired by a lot of inspiring conversations and some recommended reading: *Seat at the table / Time to Think / Getting Naked.* </>

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