



DEVOPS BUSINESS VALUE
PROVE IT OR LOSE IT

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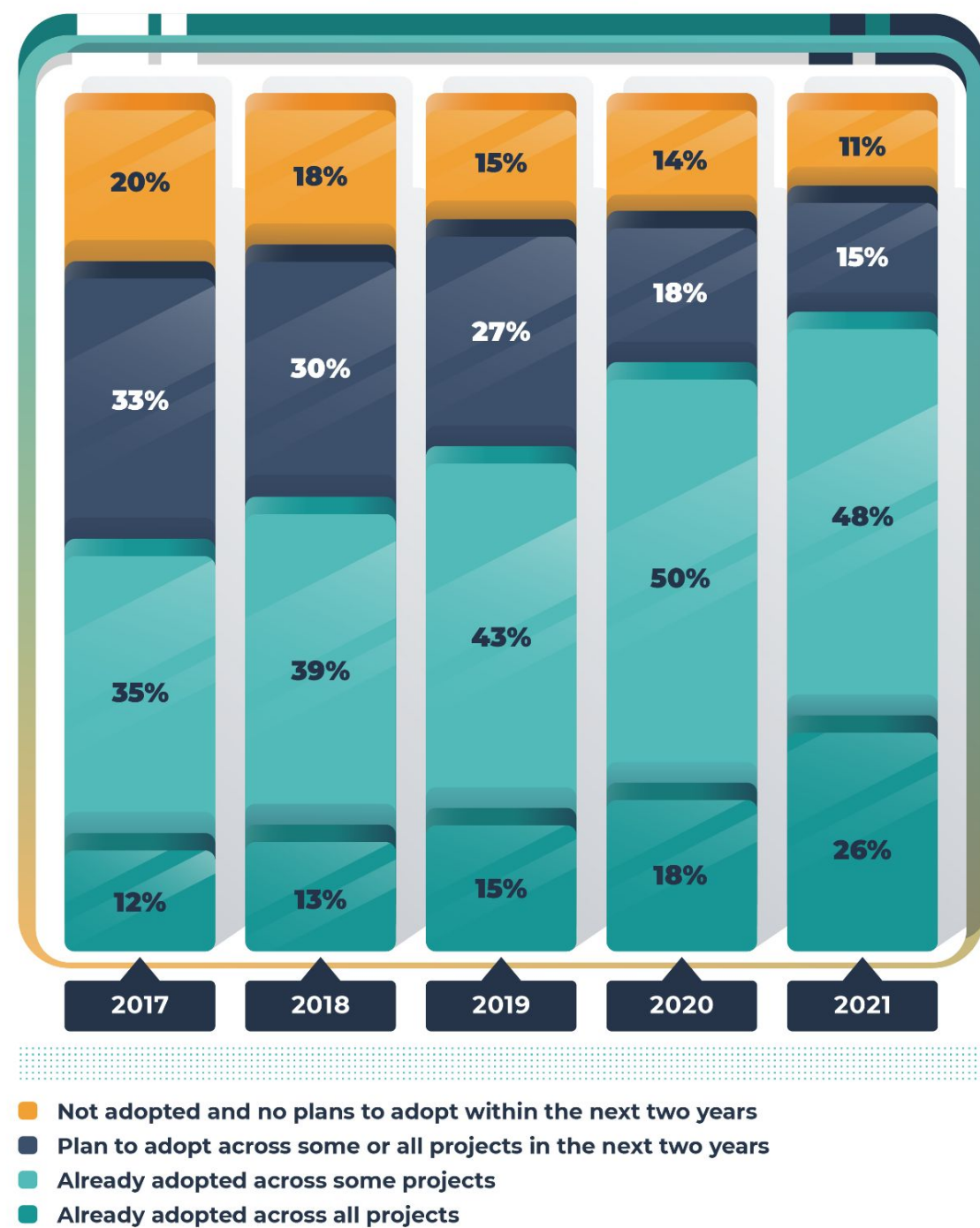
- **Intro** 3
- **The problem** 3
 - You vs the executive team - what matters most 3
 - Culture, collaboration, and sharing 3
 - Efficiency and governance 3
 - Quality and velocity 3
 - Other c-suite appropriate benefits 3
- **The plan** 3
 - Talking the talk 3
 - Being seen 3
 - Better communication with the c-suite 3
- **The epilogue** 3
 - Value stream mapping 3
 - KPIs and OKRs 3
 - Tools and observability 3
- **DevOps business value: In conclusion** 3

INTRO

We know, we know. It's not that you **don't** think DevOps is delivering business value, it's just that you're struggling with *how* to make the case to the executive team.

We hear you. You're working on gut feel - backed up with DevOps metrics - which is more than enough to help you feel confident that DevOps is the way forward. You know it's a force multiplier, helping all the people and teams it touches to optimize, refine, and speed their processes, but that's not necessarily enough to persuade the powers that be of further support, rollout, or funding.

Adoption rates of DevOps, 2017-2021



Source: *The ROI of DevOps Transformation 2020*

DevOps thinking, tools, and infrastructures aren't quantifiable like a product is. Although they all contribute huge benefits to the software development life cycle (SDLC) - team velocity, build/deploy frequency, number of rollbacks, and time to resolve issues - they're not the same as business value. Instead, DevOps is often seen as an operational cost run up by mysterious techies, not something that delivers value to customers or a headstart on the competition.

Simply put, that is why it's proving hard to convince the executive team that DevOps is the way to go.

Moving, but still a long way to go: 26% of respondents say they have adopted DevOps across all projects compared to 18% last year, and only 12% in 2017.

Source: *The State of Database DevOps Survey 2021*

If you've already made efforts to implement DevOps thinking and doing, so far with limited success, this ebook is for you. It will bridge the gap between your efforts and the buy-in - financial, organizational, and mindset - you need from whoever's holding the purse-strings (or reins) in your organization. We'll take a look at where your communication is failing, why it's failing, and how to set it on the right path. Above all, we'll show you how to prove the business value of DevOps and make the case to the c-suite that true business transformation is nigh-on impossible without it.

THE PROBLEM

It may be more than evident to you why it's worth investing in DevOps, but when you're looking at it from the executive team's perspective, it isn't necessarily that clear.

From your personal and professional experience, it's obvious that DevOps offers advantages like:

More customer value by decreasing time to market

Better team collaboration

Faster deployment from idea to production

More stable operating environments

More time to innovate

Early defect detection

Increased visibility of tools, clouds & metrics to everyone

Proactive retrospection

So why isn't it obvious to the c-suite?

One of the reasons you may not have succeeded (yet) is that many DevOps teams and team leaders are techies at heart and may not be used to talking the same language as the CEO or board. Sure, you can see the value of more stable operating environments, but without someone to guide them and draw a line between stable operating environments and competitive advantage, DevOps will continue to be seen as an operating cost with tenuous links to money in the bank.

YOU'RE GOING TO NEED A TRANSLATOR

And that translator is likely to be YOU.

What translation is your executive team hoping to hear? Well, metrics and KPIs that measure the impact of DevOps on business goals, like customer loyalty, market share, and time to market. In some cases, you may be dealing with people who, although non-tech at heart, have read tech leadership books like [Accelerate](#) and so might be familiar with metrics that cross the table, like change lead time, deployment frequency, change failure rate, and mean time to restore (MTTR). If that's the case, you've already got a head start.

Roughly, the metrics that will allow you to talk to the executive team will be divided into three categories that you're already pretty familiar with:

People

metrics that show how culture, collaboration and sharing are improving

Process

metrics that show how efficiency is growing

Tools

metrics that show how the combination of tool and process improvements lead to better quality, speed, and return on investment

Together, all three of these should lead to significant customer and business value, and hopefully, that's exactly what your CEO will hear.

Let's take a general look at how you understand these benefits, and how the executive team is likely to process them.

YOU VS THE EXECUTIVE TEAM - WHAT MATTERS MOST

Culture and collaboration

What you value:

These metrics show how your teamwork is becoming a thing of beauty. Better collaboration among teams is the first place you're going to see silos and dysfunctional organizational behaviour tackled and eradicated, leading to faster, smoother interactions. The bright new DevOps future of a team that trusts each other, shares resources, and collaborates beautifully warms your heart. These teams move fast and confidently, partially thanks to their fluid interactions and partially due to the growing use of automation in the SDLC. DevOps teams are resilient too, easily avoiding bottlenecks and silos, and bouncing back from an ever-shrinking number of mistakes.

What the c-suite will like:

What you need to show the executive team is exactly how these better, faster teams can accelerate time to market and thereby contribute to increased profitability. Most will also appreciate anything that reduces friction, making teams happier, efficient, and more cohesive. This is mostly from a human-decency point of view, but also from a reduced churn aspect. They'll also like the increased flexibility of your department, as that will imply that you'll be able to handle rapid growth and scale, varying workloads, and changing needs or pivots with ease.

Efficiency and governance

What you value:

The category tends to encompass traditional ops values, which makes it especially difficult to truly share with executives or other non-technical profiles. Things like server-to-admin ratios, transactional costs, assorted access rates, and cost of release are all stellar metrics, but you're going to have to be careful how you present them or it's going to sound like meaningless jargon. If your team uses tickets, you may be able to leverage them - ticketing solutions usually provide very accessible metrics and even attractive graphics. If they support your case, use them!

What the c-suite will like:

First of all, remember that although the nitty-gritty of your efficiency metrics might be lost on them, the executive team are still big, big fans of fewer risks and increased compliance - on that front, you are already aligned. It will be up to you to judge exactly how much nitty-gritty you can share, but a good starting place is the success rate of automated tasks and growth of automation. That's easy to translate into man-hours saved and that is perennially popular. The ability of automation to offer more solid governance and control ties in nicely to compliance aspects too.



Quality and velocity

What you value:

These production metrics, traditionally the domain of the devs, run serious jargon risk - MTBF and MTTR, anyone? - but, done right, are actually pretty easy to translate. The key is your monitoring systems, which when treated right, will provide reams of pretty diagrams detailing (how few!) deployment rollbacks, outages, and negative user feedback you're receiving. MTBF (mean time between failures) and MTTR (mean time to recover) are also receiving a lot of business attention these days, and you may be easily able to leverage them to provide some truly insightful metrics.

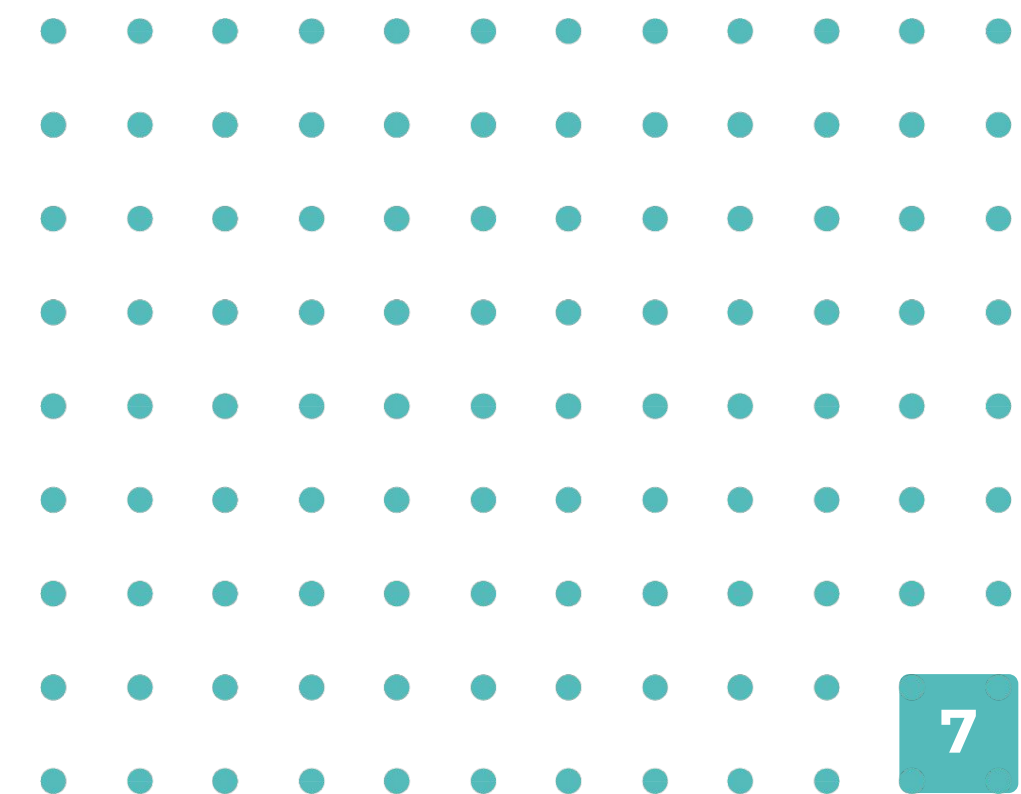
What the c-suite will like:

Continuous integration, delivery, and deployment will be your best friends here. Almost all modern businesses know and understand these concepts and already see how they relate to business value. In basic terms, you'll be underlining quicker response times, higher availability and the impact of this on both customer satisfaction and staff morale - lower stress levels for everyone! Faster development times (thanks to fewer blocks on the operational front) lead to faster delivery times, of which your executive team are already big fans. Finally, any parallels you can draw between your production metrics and agility and scale will come in helpful.

Other c-suite appropriate benefits

Any metrics or evidence you can produce that tie your DevOps actions to the relief of customer pain points (as defined by your marketing or product department) will be gratefully acknowledged. Showing them how your actions relieve these pain points will give some insight into what life might be like in a DevOps-first future.

A little harder to formulate, but great if you can, is how DevOps plays a larger role in your overall organizational goals. The bottom line here is that an organization or department being run along DevOps lines has an explicit and ever-present vision of the company goals in mind. The ability to focus on what is important allows the organization to stay lean and efficient. If you can find a way of succinctly presenting your DevOps team goals to a non-tech audience, they will naturally be aligned with your company goals (if you've done it right!) and can definitely be used in your favor. Read where the pitfalls are with this one in [Section 3](#).



THE PLAN

It's a cliché, but this is the part where we tell you to talk the talk and walk the walk. If you want to convince the c-suite of the value of DevOps, you're going to have to start - or continue - to act like a team that is obviously and consistently adding business value.

We don't mean this in a facetious way - we know you already do this. It's just that well, you have to play the game and make it quite obvious to everyone else too! There are two sides to this. Firstly, you're likely to have to take some steps to change or improve the way DevOps is seen in your organization. Sometimes, this is actually going to involve helping specific people - or a specific DevOps team - be seen. Secondly, if you want to be taken seriously, you must ensure that you can effectively transmit your points of view to the c-suite and to ensure the biggest silo in the company isn't between you and them.

Talking the talk

As a member of the tech team, you're already probably happiest when you're knee-deep in metrics. Now, metrics will certainly help you make your case to executives - just bear in mind that the data that makes most sense to the c-suite is not necessarily the data that makes most sense to you.

Although talking metrics and data is nothing new for those leading tech teams, there is a key difference. Your boardroom metrics will tackle business value and the pressure of competition. In wide brush strokes, you'll need to prioritise the metrics that talk business and not try to convince executives to talk tech.



A pro tip - make really sure to avoid jargon. Most departments are guilty of it, but tech jargon is especially indecipherable!

Being seen

Putting on a good show in the boardroom is one thing, but you're not trying to prove business value short term, you're in it for the long haul. That means that inside or outside the meeting room, you need to be demonstrating that value. You - and your team - are value-adders, and now you need to let it show.

So, how is this going to happen? Really, it's a matter of being active and blowing your own trumpet, to a certain extent. In order to better communicate with the c-suite, you'll likely be modifying and tweaking your metrics and the way you present them. Look for other opportunities to show off the same metrics - participate in demos and share your success stories in all-hands meetings and presentations.

Make sure you're an active participant in meetings and stretch yourself to attend key - but not 100% tech - meetings. Product and business will both benefit from your presence and input. These meetings and your contributions are the perfect way to show everyone that DevOps is a true business asset and not merely a techy operational cost.

Communicating with the c-suite

Obviously there are exceptions to the rule, but very often, you and the c-suite speak totally different languages. It's no wonder, then, that it can be hard to be explicit about the value of DevOps, while in turn, it can be hard for executives to explain exactly what they need from you. If you want to move forward, you're going to have to change that.

Above everything, make sure you understand exactly how your company makes a profit. Bald as it sounds, every single decision made by the executive team boils down to this, so it's important that it forms at least part of the basis of all your concerns too. Start by asking and answering the following questions - once you can convincingly reply to all of them, there's a good chance you understand what makes your c-suite tick and therefore, understand them better:

What will help us grow?

How do the executive team contribute?

How will the competition react?

What's the cost of doing nothing?

What assumptions underlie this idea?

What customer value does it bring?

THE EPILOGUE

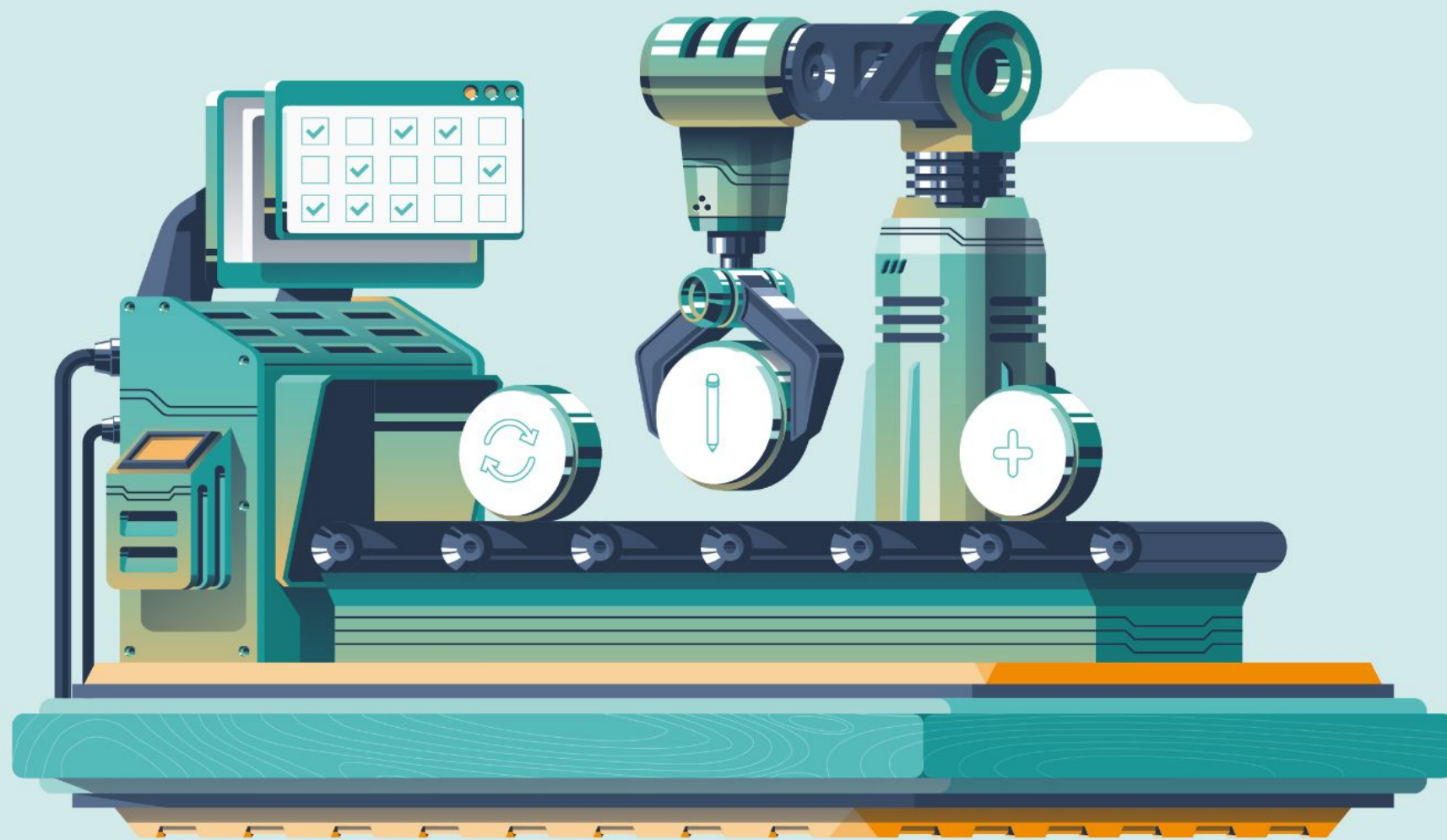
In this final section, we're going to take a look at some of the tools you might think of leveraging to help you in your task. As you might have noticed, it's pretty hard to tell you exactly what to do because the circumstances differ so greatly from one team to another. In your case, appropriate metrics could be influenced by:

What industry you're in

Which individuals make up the executive team

How tech literate they are

And how much they trust the "IT people"!



Instead, we talk about 3 topics that come up a lot in DevOps thinking, and whether or not they're actually of use when you're demonstrating your worth to the c-suite. The rest of the job is up to you.

Value stream mapping

Value stream mapping (VSM) is hot right now and you might well bring it into the discussion in order to impress and convince.

In short, it's a methodology that espouses everything that's important in DevOps and everything that's important in business - it couldn't be more perfect. Just to make sure we're on the same page:

Value stream mapping is a management technique that attempts to track a process (perhaps a feature, for example) from ideation to delivery, recording all the steps in the process to discover where time is wasted and how that can be avoided. Often, you'll find that it's not a person or a team that is slow, per se, it's the administrative side of the handoff coordination that is leaking efficiency. It doesn't affect just delivery teams - approvals, clarification, review, and dependencies are all places that deserve investigation.

Will it help?

Value stream mapping might be in your viewfinder as it's a really common concept in circles that espouse lean and agile approaches to management. In broad strokes, it's a simple idea, with quite complex execution. You need buy-in across the board, and team member engagement is essential. From a whole-company perspective, it's a great way to root out inefficiencies and generally run a tighter ship.

Luckily, it's usually pretty easy to get this buy-in. DevOps-first teams love the fact that any weak points or leaks can be efficiently solved with cross-team collaboration and the c-suite love it because unless a feature is in a users' hands, it doesn't exist - so they are interested in bringing features into existence as soon as humanly possible.

Value stream mapping will either show up problems that DevOps has an active role in solving, or it will show up problems that DevOps can't help at all. Since VSM is something that should happen on an ongoing basis, it's likely that these outcomes will change and evolve - meaning sometimes you'll be on stage, and sometimes you won't. How you can continue to add value all the time, however, is by taking an active role in the management and analysis of the value stream as a whole, bringing your DevOps-first insight and experience to the table year round.

In short, value stream mapping is a great management tool and the perfect opportunity to showcase your soft DevOps skills, but don't always rely on it being able to illustrate your worth in numbers and data.

"In DevOps, we define the value stream as the process required to turn a business hypothesis into a technology enabled service that provides value to the customer."

Gene Kim, The DevOps Handbook

KPIs and OKRs

How do you feel about KPIs? They're often a hard sell to devs, especially those who are not on a feature team. If you've pushed through regardless and made solid KPIs or even OKRs for your people, you might be able to wrangle them into your executive team discussions. But there's a caveat...

Will it help?

KPIs are a bit of a Pandora's box. If KPIs are in place, you need to assess them carefully to ensure that they're appropriate to parade in front of the c-suite. Look out for these 3 pitfalls:

- Has each tech team defined their own KPIs, OKRs, and validating metrics? If this is the case, you're going to have your work cut out explaining, standardizing, and using this data to provide an easy to understand and centralized discussion point for the c-suite.
- We're not suggesting that this applies in your case, but bear in mind that some teams have been known to offer very weak and unambitious goals in an attempt to "get people off their backs". These wishy-washy metrics won't stand up to scrutiny and are best not to put under an executive microscope.
- If your tech teams don't currently have KPIs, it may not be the best idea to try and impose them for this purpose. To get good ones (either good ones full stop or good ones for using with the executive team), your techs need to be really, really invested in the business - are they? Now might not be the time to find out.

Tools & observability

If you've hopped on the observability bandwagon, great - there's real potential in the approach (for tech teams).

For executive teams, not so much, or at least, not so directly.

Will it help?

Much of the data from the tools you will be using is too granular to be presented to the executive team. Your job instead is to take the information and present it in a better way. Sure, use the metrics as evidence and proof, but the opinions and messages you're bringing will have to be yours. You and your team have to be able to process the data, but your specific job as c-suite whisperer is to understand the business impact of this data and link it to business outcomes.

Well established observability and "single pane of glass" approaches allow you to see and measure everything, but it's the human skill of stepping back and interpreting everything that will be crucial in your quest. Depending on your skills, you may need to rope in the help of an experienced SRE to do this, and remember, dealing with the c-suite is not the time to pull every metric out of the bag. As they say, metrics only matter when they matter!

DEVOPS BUSINESS VALUE: IN CONCLUSION

Well, DevOps fans. Proving the business value of DevOps isn't going to be easy but, then again, they say that nothing worth having ever is. Luckily, it is the self-same traits that make you a good DevOps practitioner (we hope) that's going to make the job a whole lot easier for you.

Which traits? **Flexibility, a collaborative spirit, and always having the perfect data for the job!**

When you're rolling out DevOps, especially in an environment where not everyone is convinced of the benefits, it can be tempting to think of the executive team as a strange, closed group forever at odds with the tech team. Whether they don't understand you or they downright don't trust you, it can seem like you are destined to be forever pitted against each other.

It doesn't have to be that way, but you do have to be the person to change it.

In basic terms, you're going to learn what makes the executive team tick and then find the metrics to prove that the tech or DevOps team is the key to the right answers. You'll stay away from jargon and you'll KISS - keep it simple, silly! You'll tailor your interactions with the executive team to best appeal to the actual individuals that are on that team and you'll ensure that no matter what beautiful data you're getting from your monitoring tools, you'll enthusiastically edit it to make it more appropriate.

Finally, you'll usher in a new - or renewed - era in your organization, performing a DevOps PR offensive in and out of the board room. But remember, DevOps isn't just a pretty face - the same approach you apply to interacting with the tech team can be applied to every encounter you have in your company, hopefully leaving everyone in your wake blown away by the fresh, open, and ruthlessly efficient experience DevOps brings to the table.

Between your charm offensive and your beautiful data, soon enough the executive team will be eating from your DevOps-thinking hands!

RESOURCES

<https://docs.broadcom.com/doc/devops-practitioner-series-metrics-that-matter-developing-and-tracking-key-indicators>

<https://devops.com/using-devops-metrics-effectively/>

<https://techbeacon.com/devops/devops-metrics-matter-how-prove-business-value>

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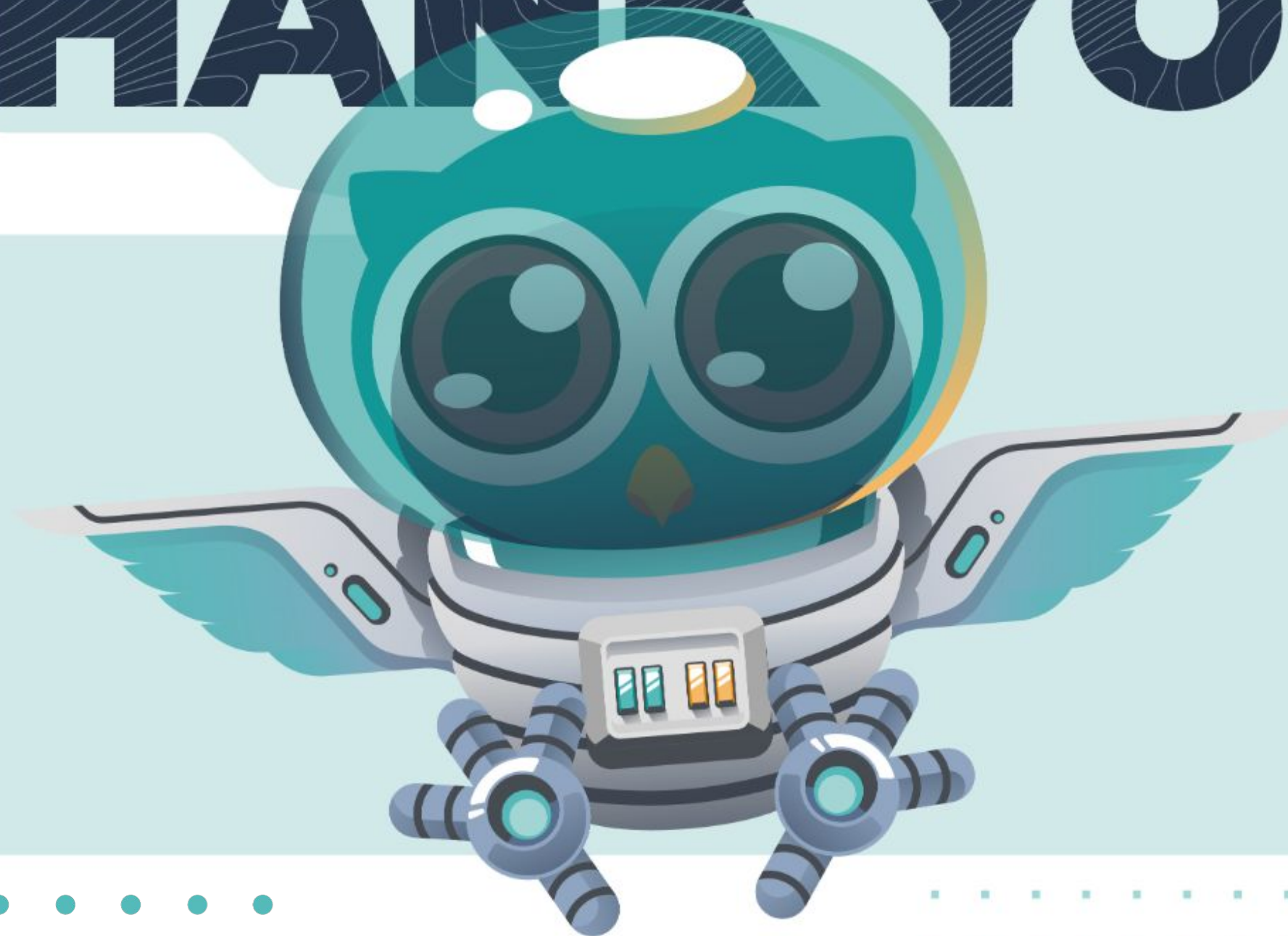
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THANK YOU!



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