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Leadership in a Disruptive Digital Landscape

*In an exclusive interview for stars, **Amit CHATTERJEE**, CEO of Open Systems, San Francisco, shares his insights into the future of cybersecurity, how to cope with challenges facing companies going global and how to become a better leader. The interview was conducted by Sophie Liu, stars alumna, on the sidelines of the 11th stars Switzerland symposium in September 2018 in Stein am Rhein.*

Sophie Liu: Cybersecurity has become a critical issue for any company and organisation. In your view, which key trends will shape cybersecurity in the next five to ten years?

Amit Chatterjee: First, the major trend in network and cybersecurity is the secure software-defined wide-area network (SD-WAN). It means that eventually networks will no longer be based on hard-wired connectivity. Instead, they use internet backbones as well as your enterprise's existing primary infrastructure. This allows companies to be a global business much cheaper, in a more reliable and more scalable way. Second, instead of north-south architecture, networks are becoming the centre of your business. They not only protect your data centre, but also your data on Amazon, Microsoft and Google as well as in the thousands of Software as a Service (SaaS) applications that people use. Historically, this data only used to be protected by a two-way firewall, but now from a cybersecurity perspective we have to protect all data in all the clouds and SaaS applications. We are just at the very beginning of that transformation, but we expect it to move very quickly as this is where network security needs to go.

Open Systems provides network security solutions for global organisations from a technical perspective. In addition to such technical solutions, are there any other approaches needed, for instance from a policy perspective?

Outside of technical solutions, a couple of things around security look at sharing global data. Understanding how your customer data is being moved globally is very important. The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a good example of regulation. This type of government discussion has forced a lot of organizations to rethink how to store and manage their data. Many organizations and businesses are global, but at the same time their data is managed locally. This is a big reason why companies want to work with us.

You were recently appointed as CEO of Open Systems with the mission to lead the business through global expansion – what are the opportunities and challenges you expect in this process?

The globalization opportunities are very obvious. First is the ability to serve our customers at their greatest pain point – any customer's headquarters. The second opportunity is that we get to pursue the best talent around the globe. For example, no matter whether it is the best marketing person in Hong Kong or the best technologist in Australia, we can just go and hire them. Having a global talent pool is key. Last but not least, as a global player we can work with local partners to provide our clients a global perspective. Rather than having 17 relationships, they can collapse their relationships and just have one relationship with Open Systems and still be as effective as they need to be. On the other hand, one of the challenges of going global is that you always have to invest ahead of

market return and you have to worry about how your value proposition fits within the cultural domains of a new market.

As a successful business leader from Silicon Valley, what challenges do you experience in leading a European company? And what advice do you have for an organization to grow better in a globalised business world with its multicultural environment?

The first challenge is to adjust your speed to the pace of the company. You may be going at 100 miles an hour, but if everybody else is going at 20 miles an hour, that doesn't make any sense. If you take time to communicate and educate your colleagues, the rest of the company will scale a lot faster together with you. That means you probably need to add 30 percent more time to identify and communicate the most important question, which is not who or what, but why. If you do that, you will find common ground because you understand the motivation behind why you are being asked to go global, and you understand the purpose around what happens if we are successful when we go global. To achieve that is not an overnight task, I find myself repeating the same thing for 18 months, because as you go global, you have to make sure that everyone can be very clear about why what they do changes because we are now a global organization. Everyone also has different ideas on what they mean by globalization. For example, we have had instances being global means taking 100 percent Swiss culture and to bring it to China or Japan – which will not work. So we need to understand that we have to integrate Swiss culture to a more global culture that reflects the good part of Swiss culture and to magnify the skillsets. Another often asked question is, how to find the symbiosis? One of the examples is that the person who runs the Google site is a Swiss, but the team that built Google is in Silicon Valley. You can be proud that certain parts of your operations are Swiss, which is what differentiates you in the market, however, in other situations you may want to say that the sales and marketing team is very much American style and adopt it accordingly.

The vision of stars is to develop better leaders of the next generation and to be the premier platform for these future leaders. In your opinion, what are the essential qualities of leaders of the next generation?

Number one is to be globally aware, which means really understanding what it means to enter new markets. Second is to embrace mature technologies, because they are the technologies that companies should invest in. If you are an organization that is trying to go global, or as a next generation leader, failure has very different connotation in Europe as it does in Silicon Valley. For us in Silicon Valley the focus is on what you learned. In Europe it means you failed. It also has very different implications, so companies have to be very deliberate about what they invest in, so that's why I think future leaders will be the ones who embrace not the most bleeding edge, but leading edge technologies that provide a business differentiation. Thirdly and probably most importantly, leaders of the next generation therefore must have a passion for learning. Satya Nadella at Microsoft said that he does not want to have a group of "know-it-alls" but of "learn-it-alls". If you think you have the answer for everything, I think you are sorely mistaken. Being a leader means constantly focusing on learning.

What advice would you give to stars alumni to help them build up these qualities?

My advice is to schedule time to reflect on your business and to figure out where you can learn to do better. It does not mean spending more time in meetings, but to spend time by yourself to examine your business and to ask yourself, could you be doing better? That doesn't happen enough and I think that's where the biggest focus should be. As a leader you don't have to be doing everything, it is about focusing on two or three things that

present the biggest opportunities to grow, so you should think about questions like: What do I not know? What do I think is going well? What do I feel we can do better?

How do you define innovation? And what have you learned in your businesses about success and failure in innovation?

First, innovation does not always equal technology. Innovation can take place in any part of the business. In my experience, when I was building the energy company Hara, we built the first inside sales SaaS business after Salesforce. We went without a direct sales team for over 2 years. Selling over the phone and using the web to demonstrate the technology was changing a business process, because up until that point, enterprise sales had been very much dominated by door-to-door knocking. This was the first time we were doing it over the phone, and the innovation could be scaled up easily. Our SaaS product, however, was not innovative and almost had no real niche technology, on the contrary it was a very mature technology. So that's an example where business process innovation matters greatly. Second, technology innovation used in the right situations can transform a business, i.e. deploying a novel application, building customer apps that are more purpose-built than just packaged software, and these are all real obvious differentiations for companies. Third is people innovation. One of the hardest things that we see in the world today is that employees either get what they want out of the business, or they leave. As a result, as an employer you have to think very differently about the war for talent than you did five to ten years ago. Nowadays you need to engage your employees like you engage with your customers about what the value is to work with us. You need to enable people to grow and get ready for the next challenge, either in your organization or somewhere else.

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