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CPI MEDIA GROUP AND TAHAWULTECH.COM HOSTED THE 2ND EDITION OF THE WOMEN IN TECH AWARDS TO CELEBRATE THE FEMALE TRAILBLAZERS THAT ARE INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION OF FEMALE LEADERS IN THE IT INDUSTRY TO BREAK THE GLASS CEILING.

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The best and brightest women from the technology ecosystem across the UAE explored the best practices that are needed to really enact change."

INSPIRING CHANGE

April's edition of CNME is dominated by female leaders from the IT industry that are using their agency to help foster a more equitable, diverse and inclusive workforce.

CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com hosted the 2nd edition of our Women in Technology and Forum Awards at the beginning of March.

The groundbreaking event brings some of the best and brightest women from the technology ecosystem across the UAE, to explore the best practices that are needed to really enact change, and address the gender inequality that exists within the industry globally.

Our front cover fittingly features all our inspirational Women in Tech award winners.

I also chaired a brilliant panel discussion with some of the most powerful and prominent female executives from the IT sector in the region - and you can check out all the commentary from that panel in the comprehensive coverage we've provided inside.

In addition to this, I also conducted interviews with Simran Bagga, Vice President at Omnix Engineering and Foundation Technologies, and Reem Asaad, VP, Middle East & Africa at Cisco, as part of our ongoing Women in Tech series.

I was also honoured to be invited to the Google Innovation Hub in Dubai Internet City to interview Tarek Khalil, Director at Google Cloud MENA.

In what was an in-depth conversation we explored a huge number of topics such as AI, security and sustainability.

Khalil explained in detail how Google has become the cloud partner of choice for enterprises and governments across the Middle East.

I also spoke to Mohamed Zouari from Snowflake, at their Data for Breakfast event in Dubai, to learn more about their new platform Snowpark, and why users love their products.

TechStars are an early stage mentor-driven accelerator program headquartered in Colorado, and CNME managed to speak to Oko Davaasuren, who is a senior director at the US startup incubator.

He outlined how TechStars harness their knowledge and expertise to nurture tech startups to succeed and achieve unicorn status

In addition to this, we also have an interview with Burger Index, and thought provoking op-eds from Pangaea X and Endava in an action-packed issue of CNME.

Enjoy. 🧽

Mark Forker Editor











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CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com in conjunction with ISACA UAE would like to place on record our sincere thanks to ALL our sponsors for making the Infosec & Cybersecurity Congress Dubai an incredible success.

> Your support allowed us to bring together the key security stakeholders from across the UAE, in a bid to tackle the current issues at hand

A big congratulations to ALL our award winners who were recognised for their outstanding contributions to tackling the biggest issues in the cybersecurity space.

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6 News

CNME rounds up the biggest regional and global developments in enterprise technology, which includes the news that Jeremy Lopez has been appointed as the new CEO of Everdome, Microsoft launch their new Al-driven Security Copilot program - and a focus on innovation will continue to be the long-term strategy for Huawei.

- Tarek Khalil, Director of Google Cloud MENA, outlines how the company has positioned itself as the cloud partner of choice across the region.
- Mohamed Zouari, General Manager META at Snowflake, believes their new snowpark platform will transform the ways enterprises manage their data.
- 32 Simran Bagga, VP at Omnix Engineering and Foundation Technologies, discusses her leadership style and some of the barriers facing women in IT, in the latest segment of our Women in Tech Series.
- 40 Wassim Berro, CEO and co-founder of Burger Index, explains how their technology is helping businesses within the F&B sector to expediate their go-to market strategies.
- **4.4** Oko Davaasuren, Senior Director at TechStars, speaks candidly about his passion for entrepreneurship and helping technology startups succeed.

FOUNDER, CPI Dominic De Sousa (1959-2015)

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While the publishers have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of all information in this magazine, they will not be held responsible for any errors therein.

(L-R) Eric Xu, Huawei's Rotating Chairman & Sabrina Meng, Huawei's CFO.

Innovation remains a longterm strategy for Huawei

Huawei released its 2022 Annual

Report today. The company reports steady operations throughout 2022, having generated USD92.37 billion in revenue and USD5.12 billion in net profits. Huawei continues to strengthen investment in R&D, with an annual expenditure of USD23.22 billion in 2022, representing 25.1% of the company's annual revenue and bringing its total R&D expenditure over the past 10 years to more than USD 140.55 billion.

In face of the on-going challenges, Huawei places technological innovation and research at the top of its agenda. Every year, Huawei invests over 10% of its sales revenue into R&D. The company ranked fourth on the EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard. Huawei executives has always said: "Heavy investment into R&D and innovation has and will remain a long-term strategy of Huawei, committed to open research and innovation".

New clipper malware steals US\$400,000 in cryptocurrencies via fake Tor Browser



Kaspersky researchers have

discovered an ongoing disruptive cryptocurrency theft campaign affecting more than 15,000 users across 52 countries. Distributed under the guise of Tor Browser, the malware operates by replacing a portion of the entered clipboard contents with the cybercriminal's own wallet address once it detects a wallet address in the clipboard. It is estimated that — so far in 2023 — cybercriminals have been able to steal approximately US\$400,000 using this malware.

While this technique has been around for more than a decade and was originally used by banking trojans to replace bank account numbers, with the rise of cryptocurrency, this new type of malware is now actively targeting crypto owners and traders.

"Despite the fake Tor Browser attack's fundamental simplicity, it poses a greater danger than it seems. Not only does it create irreversible money transfers, but it is also passive and hard to detect for a regular user. Most malware requires a communication channel between the malware operator and the victim's system. On the contrary, clipboard injectors can remain silent for years, with no network activity or other signs of presence until the day they replace a crypto wallet address", comments Vitaly Kamluk, Head of APAC Unit, Global Research & Analysis Team.

With Security Copilot, Microsoft brings the power of AI to cyber defence

Microsoft today announced it is

bringing the next generation of AI to cybersecurity with the launch of Microsoft Security Copilot, giving defenders a much-needed tool to quickly detect and respond to threats and better understand the threat landscape overall. Security Copilot will combine Microsoft's vast threat intelligence footprint with industry leading expertise to augment the work of security professionals through an easy-to-use AI assistant.

Naim Yazbeck, General Manager of Microsoft UAE, said: "As the UAE



Naim Yazbeck, General Manager of Microsoft UAE. accelerates its digital transformation, it is essential that businesses are equipped with advanced security solutions to combat the increasing sophistication of cyber threats. With Security Copilot,

Microsoft is empowering businesses in the UAE to proactively identify and respond to these threats. We are excited to bring this cutting-edge technology to the UAE market and remain committed to delivering innovative solutions that address our customers' evolving needs".

Security Copilot is designed to work seamlessly with security teams, empowering defenders to see what is happening in their environment, learn from existing intelligence, correlate threat activity and make more informed, efficient decisions at machine speed.

SentinelOne recognised as a leader in endpoint protection platforms

SentinelOne, an autonomous

cybersecurity platform company, announced that it has been positioned by Gartner as a Leader in the 2022 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Endpoint Protection Platforms. The company is positioned as a Leader for the second consecutive report based on its Completeness of Vision and Ability to Execute. SentinelOne believes its placement further validates its exceptional go-to-market execution and ability to deliver holistic and future-ready cybersecurity solutions across endpoint, cloud and identity with its Singularity platform.

"We are honoured to be recognised as a Leader in the 2022 Gartner Magic Quadrant for Endpoint Protection Platforms", said Tomer Weingarten,



Tomer Weingarten, CEO, SentinelOne.

CEO, SentinelOne. "Our mission has always been to provide our customers with the broadest and most relevant capability set in the market. This recognition is a testament to our commitment to excellence and our relentless focus on innovation. We are proud to play a leading role in shaping the future of cybersecurity and look forward to continuing to deliver value to our customers".

PX1-PRO 90'-130"

Hisense is pioneering the next generation of immersive entertainment

Hisense, one of the largest consumer electronics and home appliances manufacturer globally, has launched its next generation of immersive entertainment with the Hisense PX1-PRO TriChroma Laser Cinema. Unveiled to much acclaim at this year's Consumer Electronics Show (CES), the world's most influential technology event, Hisense's newest TV is available across the Middle East region now.

Built for home theatre, the PX1-PRO features the award-winning TriChroma laser technology to bring true-tolife picture quality with increased colour accuracy and vivid imagery for an experience of colours like never before. It comes with smart features like smooth motion for uninterrupted viewing, game mode for a grininducing gaming experience, Android OS that offers an incredible range of content and streaming options, eye friendly design and sensors that comes with low blue light emission to protect your eyes and most importantly it adopts ultra-short throw technology to generate a super large screen image on the screen as well as on the wall to ensure a best-in-class home theatre experience.

"As a brand, we strive to bring new technology to the region", said Jason Ou, Hisense President for the Middle East & Africa. "We are proud of our achievement in the Laser Cinema segment, and we continue to upgrade our technologies by introducing premium range products that can provide customers with a superior viewing experience".

Barracuda Networks signs Ingram Micro to enhance partner enablement in Gulf Region

Barracuda Networks, Inc., has

announced a distribution agreement with Ingram Micro for the Gulf region. The relationship enables Ingram Micro to offer Barracuda's complete portfolio of email, application and cloud, network, and data protection solutions to resellers through its widespread channel network across the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, Yemen, and Pakistan.

Giovanni Goduti, VP, EMEA Sales, Barracuda said, "The channel remains at the epicentre of our success and ongoing expansion across the Middle East. Acting as an extension of the local team, Ingram Micro will serve to expand our on-ground presence across the region. Their expertise aligns with commitment to our valued partners by strengthening our enablement capabilities. Together, we will empower our partners to identify opportunities in the market — particularly in the



(L) Giovani Goduti, VP, EMEA Sales, Barracuda and (R) Dr. Ali Baghdadi, SVP & Chief Country Executive - MEA, Ingram Micro

education and mid-market segments – and confidently bid for deals".

Dr. Ali Baghdadi, SVP & Chief Country Executive – MEA, Ingram Micro said, "We are excited to expand our relationship with Barracuda in the Gulf Region. With cloud computing being an essential direction for businesses of all sizes, data and transaction security will remain a concern. Barracuda is a vital addition to our solution base to protect customers' email, networks, applications, and data against threats, whether those are in the cloud, in the data centre, or in the inbox".

Everdome Sets Sights on Growth Phase

Everdome is stepping into its 'growth phase' with the appointment of Jeremy Lopez as the new CEO. Lopez previously served as the Chief Operating Officer and has extensive experience in scaling digital startups, drawing upon his knowledge from his tenure at Codewise where he worked alongside outgoing CEO Rob Grvn.

With an emphasis on transparency and proactive communication, Lopez aims to build upon Gryn's concept and expand Everdome further. He believes



Jeremy Lopez, CEO, Everdome.

the community is central to the vision of the metaverse and will focus on engaging them to remain a vital driver for Everdome's future.

"As the new CEO, I take pride in continuing to build upon Rob's concept and further expanding Everdome into a product that will serve our community and our partners in the ever-changing Web3 environment", Lopes stated.

Under Lopez's strategic leadership, Everdome will continue to pursue its vision to become a premier metaverse destination and experience, with an emphasis on product development, revenue-generating fundamentals, scalability and growth. Lopez's work to date has significantly boosted the project's progress, including key partnerships with OKX and Alfa Romeo F1® Team.

The future looks bright for Everdome, with new partnership announcements, a Mars landing event, and full NFT holder access coming soon. Stay tuned for upcoming opportunities to get to know Everdome's new CEO and exciting news about growth, partnerships, and product releases.

SANS Institute enhances cybersecurity skills in Qatar with SANS Doha May 2023



Ned Baltagi, Managing Director, Middle East and Africa at SANS Institute.

SANS Institute, the global leader in

cyber security training and certifications, announced its upcoming training program SANS Doha May 2023, to be held from May 27 - June 1, 2023. The courses offered will qualify participants with a comprehensive set of incident response skills for cloud and traditional systems, as well as strategies to defend industrial control system environments against emerging cyber threats.

Qatar's cybersecurity industry has flourished exponentially, with the cybersecurity market in Qatar estimated at US \$1,016.7 million in 2022, and expected to grow by 12.7% annually to reach US \$1,642.3 million in 2026. Reinforcing this, since its inception in 2021, Qatar's National Cyber Security Agency (NCSA) has enhanced Qatar's legal framework to strengthen cybersecurity priorities,

ensuring government employees receive regular cybersecurity training and working with IT stakeholders to improve the nation's cyber resiliency. The Qatari government has also been proactive regarding the security of its IT infrastructure, pre-emptively defending systems and addressing threats ahead of time.

"At SANS Institute, we are aligned with Qatar's 2030 vision of facilitating a cyber-safe, digital society. Considering the prevalence of cloud security today, modern cloud and on-premises systems are essentially designed to prevent compromise, but in best practice, detection and response are crucial", says Ned Baltagi, Managing Director, Middle East and Africa at SANS Institute. "How incidents are managed to minimise loss to the firm will determine whether or not your organisation makes headlines for data breaches. SANS Doha May 2023 will enable professionals to get into the mindset of attackers, understand their tactics, and use that insight to anticipate their moves and create stronger defences for their organisations".

G42 teams up with Microsoft to explore acceleration of UAE's digital transformation

G42 and Microsoft announced

their intention to collaborate on the development of public sector and industry focused solutions that leverage Microsoft's partner ecosystem and cloud capabilities. These solutions will benefit UAE organisations to address citizen and customer needs.

Formalised in a memorandum of understanding (MoU) that was signed at G42's premises, the agreement will allow both organisations to further explore joint business development and marketing opportunities across a variety of areas G42 cover including healthcare, energy, public sector digital transformation, financial services, climate action, and beyond. G42 Cloud will work closely with Microsoft to enable joint solutions to be developed and

deployed securely and in compliance with regulatory requirements.

Naim Yazbeck, General Manager of Microsoft UAE commented: "Organisations globally, especially in the public sector, are increasingly looking for customised cloud solutions that offer additional choice and flexibility. I am very excited about the potential that a collaboration with G42 could bring to the UAE, and I look forward to combining Microsoft's focus

on resiliency, agility and security with G42s unique capabilities and vision".

Kiril Evimov, G42's Group CTO and Chairman of G42 Cloud commented: "G42 is keen to work closely with Microsoft to create a joint value proposition that can not only serve common customers better, but importantly, spur innovation and deliver agility for the technical community in the UAE and the region. The broad set of solutions that G42 and our clients have developed will benefit from the rich ecosystem and global scale that Microsoft provides. Microsoft will similarly benefit from

> the experience and technical know-how of operating regulated workloads across multiple industries that G42 Cloud is focused on".

> Both companies will be working in the coming months to finalise the development required to ensure regulatory compliance in order to serve customers in the market.

Nokoyawa ransomware attacks with Windows zero-day

In February, Kaspersky experts

discovered an attack using a zero-day vulnerability in the Microsoft Common Log File System (CLFS). A cybercriminal group used an exploit developed for different versions and builds of Windows OS, including Windows 11, and attempted to deploy the Nokoyawa ransomware. Microsoft assigned CVE-2023-28252 to this vulnerability and

patched it today as part of Patch Tuesday. The threat actor also attempted to execute similar elevation of privilege exploits in attacks on different small and medium-sized businesses in the Middle East and North America, and previously in Asia.

While most of the vulnerabilities discovered by Kaspersky are used

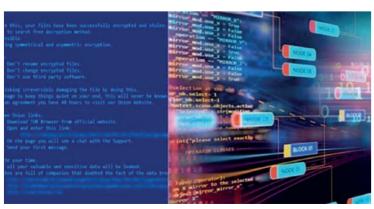
by APTs, this one turned out to be exploited for cybercrime purposes stands out by the usage of similar (CLFS) exploits. Kaspersky has seen at and wholesale, energy, manufacturing,

by a sophisticated group that carries out ransomware attacks. This group but unique Common Log File System least five different exploits of this kind. They were used in attacks on retail

healthcare, software development, and other industries.

"Cybercrime groups are becoming increasingly more sophisticated using zero-day exploits in their attacks. Previously, it was primarily a tool of Advanced Persistent Threat actors (APTs), but now cybercriminals have the resources to acquire zero-days and routinely use them in attacks. There are also exploit

> developers willing to help them and develop exploit after exploit. It's very important for businesses to download the latest patch from Microsoft as soon as possible, and use other methods of protection, such as EDR solutions", said Boris Larin, Lead Security Researcher with the Global Research and Analysis Team (GReAT).



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GOOGLE CLOUD

THE CLOUD PARTNER OF CHOICE

CNME Editor Mark Forker secured an exclusive interview with **Tarek Khalil**, Director, Middle East & Africa at Google Cloud, to find out how the tech giant has become the undoubted partner of choice for governments and businesses seeking transformation across the region, the challenges facing some enterprises – and how the culture of innovation that is fostered by Google allows it to produce innovative products and solutions.

arek Khalil is one of the most respected and revered IT leaders in the Middle East.

Khalil has enjoyed a decorated career across the Middle East region, one that has seen him work with renowned technology and IT behemoths.

Tarek joined Google in 2012 and in the 11 years that have elapsed since then, Khalil has played a pivotal role in ensuring that Google Cloud has become the 'cloud partner of choice' for governments, entities and enterprises all over the region.

He has helped cultivate, shape, manage and nurture Google's cloud journey during the last decade.

CNME were delighted to secure an interview with Khalil, which was conducted



at Google's Innovation Hub in Dubai Internet City.

Khalil began the conversation by providing context on the appetite for change that exists among nations all across the GCC.

"The region has historically been an oil-based economy. However, every government across the Middle East has been looking at ways in which it can leverage the power of technology to completely diversify its economy, and the most tangible example of that in recent years has been the economic transformation that Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) is currently pursuing. I think the palpable desire for change has been a key element in attracting the global hyperscalers to the region, with of course Google Cloud being one of them," said Khalil.

There has been a tsunami of transformation across the region, which we know was accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic in March, 2020.

Google Cloud has been hugely productive in terms of signing key strategic alliances, partnerships and collaborations over the last few years.

"In 2019, Google Cloud signed a strategic alliance with the Qatar Free Zone Authority in Doha, and then in 2020, we announced a significant partnership with Aramco in Saudi Arabia, and just last year, we entered into a new partnership with the government of Kuwait. It is important to understand that Google is a cloud native entity, we were born in the cloud. When we say we were born in the cloud, essentially, what that means is we know every single aspect of the cloud elements, and the success factors needed to help it scale in a very secure and trusted manner. Trust and security are key topics in the current climate, especially for data-driven companies. We have also contributed massively to the open-source community



globally over the last number of years," said Khalil.

Google Cloud is one of the most trusted names in the world, but to earn that trust it takes time, and as Khalil pointed out, they demonstrated their capabilities with their diverse range of first-class products and solutions.

"As I aforementioned above, the fact we were born in the cloud enabled us to showcase our capability to scale to billions of users and consumers for products like Google Maps, Google Photos and Gmail. By being able to deliver those products and services in a very secure manner, resulted in us building great trust. That trust provided us with the

springboard, or platform to then support the vision and strategies being set out by governments across the Middle East region, as part of their efforts to branch out from an oil-based economy, to our new digital economy. It became evident very early on, that Google Cloud was the partner of choice for their digital transformation journey," said Khalil.

When asked what were the differentiating factors that positioned Google Cloud as the partner of choice for cloud transformation, Khalil touched on a number of points, including the autonomy of its 'open cloud' offering.

"Our open cloud gives customers the choice and autonomy to deploy workloads

In 2020, we set out on our mission to run on 24/7 carbon-free electricity (CFE) by 2030, and as of 2021, we've achieved 66% of that goal."

wherever they want. For example, if a customer has already started their journey, we are not asking them to reshuffle their whole strategy to Google Cloud, instead we can meet the customer at any point they want, whether that's on-prem, or on another hyperscaler provider. We have to fulfil this requirement, and our engineering team has created certain products that allow us to achieve this," said Khalil.

Khalil also highlighted the impact the innovation cloud was having on the marketplace – and said the 'culture' the company fosters in terms of its approach to innovation allowed the tech giant to launch a staggering 2000 products and new features in 2022.

"It's not just about the technology itself, it's about how we engage with our customers and users by leveraging the right expertise in specific industries. We have not only utilised the power of Google Cloud, but also of Alphabet as a whole. By leveraging all this knowledge, we were able to launch 2000 products and features last year. We are very agile, and we evolve quickly, and the innovative and cultural approach that we adopt has enabled us to roll out these products and features in such large volume. In addition to this, we are also the cleanest cloud globally, and sustainability is in our DNA. You have to be totally aligned with every government, entity and enterprise's agenda, whether it's in relation to security, flexibility, scalability, clean cloud, or moving at speed. We have fulfilled these























requirements, and that is why ultimately we are the partner of choice for nations across the Middle East region," said Khalil.

Khalil also added that when entering into a new region, it's imperative that you address the niche and specific concerns of each nation.

"We have a dedicated team that addresses key concerns for individual nations. If you look at our expansions globally, we address the infrastructure, the business opportunity – and the rules and

regulations in every country. That's how we operate, and this is the criteria that we follow and pursue when we invest in any region," said Khalil.

It has been well documented that many enterprises across the region have toiled with the demands of cloud transformation, but as Khalil pointed out, it's critical that you have a robust plan for success and the right people to execute the project.

"It is fair to say that a large

number of entities across the Middle East struggle with the demands of cloud transformation, but it's important to counter that with the fact that there has been a large swathe of successful transformation projects. Technology is a great enabler, but to really tap into the benefits provided by disruptive technology then you have to devise a blueprint and a plan, and it needs to be driven by the right people. I also think an issue has been the scarcity of cloud technology expertise in the Middle East region. Cloud transformation is not only about lifting and shifting, it's about redefining the organisation from the top down," said Khalil.

Khalil added that in every country that Google Cloud invests in they always look at capacity building, and claim it is at the very top of their agenda. He cited that a lack of skills and a shortage in talent remains a huge challenge for businesses, not only across the Middle East, but globally.

"We have invested in a centre of excellence in Doha, and last November, we announced another centre of excellence in Saudi Arabia. We are fully committed to upskilling, in an effort to ensure that every country has the required skillsets needed to drive these transformation programs. In Doha, we have trained more than 4,000 participants on our platform and this will continue throughout 2023," said Khalil.

Another huge issue according to Khalil, was the misalignment that exists between the business and IT organisations within many entities, and budgetary constraints.

"We know a major problem for many businesses is a struggle for adequate budgetary resources. Many entities continue to struggle on that front because they continue to look at their IT departments as a cost centre. However, in reality if you look at those cost centres they are the closest to the technology, which means they can directly map innovation to be driven by technology. However, the misalignment between the business orgs and the IT orgs is creating this gap, posing a huge problem," said Khalil.

Sustainability has now

Our open cloud infrastructure gives customers the choice and autonomy to deploy workloads wherever they want."

become a key priority for businesses globally, and with COP28 being held in Dubai in November, conversations around sustainability have been ramped up a few notches.

However, Khalil stressed that whilst sustainability is now very much in vogue across the IT industry, as entities attempt to reduce their carbon footprint, for Google Cloud it has always been embedded in their DNA.

"I believe that sustainability has become the top priority across the Middle East region for CEOs, and we see that surfacing. Over the last few years, we've seen new roles being created within organisations in an effort to drive sustainability initiatives and programs. Sustainability has been in our DNA since our inception as a company. In 2007, we were 100% carbon neutral, fast forward ten years to 2017, and we committed ourselves to run on carbon - free electricity by 2030, which means the way in which we power up our facilities and campuses is going to be matched with clean energy," said Khalil.

Khalil also outlined how the Google Cloud platform is helping customers contribute to the environment.

"In 2020, we set out on our mission to be completely carbon-electricity free by 2030, and as of 2021 we've achieved 66% of that goal. In addition to this, we are also aiming to achieve net-zero emissions across all of our operations and value chainby 2030. We are also empowering our customers to be more sustainable, by moving to our cloud platform customers are acutely aware that they are contributing positively to reducing carbon emissions," said Khalil.

AI is the future, but there have been some that have voiced grave concerns over the evolution of the technology — and have called for greater control and regulations to be implemented before the genie is out of the bottle.

According to Khalil, Google Cloud is an 'AI-first' company.

"We are now in an era where AI has evolved from being the purview of academic research to being a practice. AI underpins the technological advancements that we have made in the new on-demand economy we live in, but AI has also been in Google's DNA from the beginning. We are an AI-first company, and AI fundamentally sits at the heart of our company. In the current climate, it's almost impossible for you to find a product that doesn't have a built-in AI feature within the Google Cloud product portfolio. We look at AI both responsibly and boldly and our focus is to extend our AI products to our consumers within our AI principles," said Khalil.

Security is a complex and constantly evolving threat, but again, Google is top of the leader-board when it comes to cloud security.

"Google was built with security in mind. We didn't build a solution and then

Al has also been in Google's DNA from the beginning. We are an Alfirst company."

afterwards attempt to ringfence it with security, the security was always embedded in the product or solution. That approach is the reason we have never suffered a major security breach in the last 20 years and the recent DDos episode is evidence to that. Our security is built on zero trust."

Khalil concluded a wonderful conversation, by highlighting the three key pillars that guide their Google Cloud security portfolio, and he also pointed to their acquisition of the global cybersecurity and incident response company Mandiant as being a gamechanger for their security offering.

"We have three key pillars. Firstly, Google Cloud is a completely trusted platform, the way we have built our platform is based on a very secure manner, where control sits in the hands of the customer too. Secondly, the zero-trust approach is critical, zero-trust means zero-trust even between the different layers. Finally, operational simplicity is very important. You want to offload your security teams from managing patches to logs by providing them with the right tools.

Our acquisition of Mandiant has been a huge addition for us, they have a strong foothold in terms of working with government entities, and the combination of their threat intelligence and incident response capabilities and our Google Cloud security portfolio allows us to deliver to our customers with a completely trusted environment, where they have nothing to worry about," said Khalil.





SNOWFLAKE

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

CNME Editor Mark Forker managed to secure an exclusive interview with **Mohamed Zouari**, General Manager, Middle East, Turkey, and Africa at Snowflake, at their Data for Breakfast seminar that was held in Dubai last month – in an effort to learn more about their new Snowpark framework – and why the ease of use that Snowflake provides is why the company is loved so loyally by their end-users globally.



NME were in attendance at Snowflake's Data for Breakfast seminar that was held at the Arabian Court, One and Only Royal Mirage in Dubai Marina.

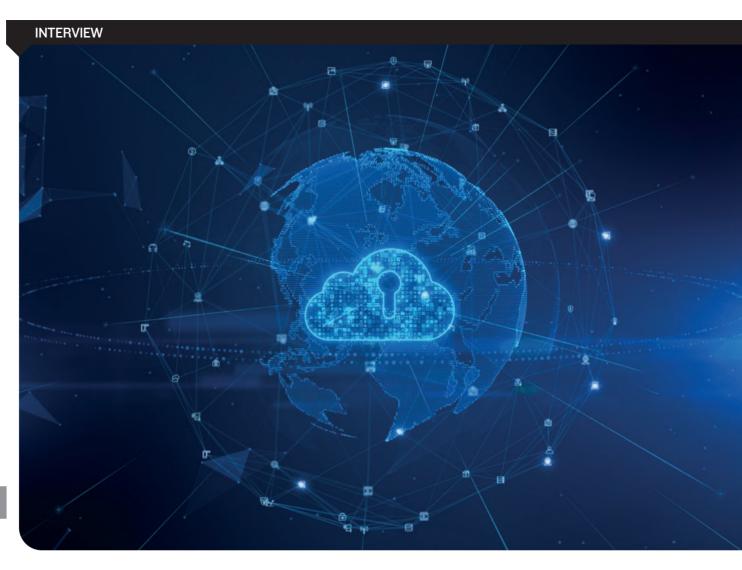
The event is designed to illustrate the power of Snowflake's Data Cloud offering which is complemented by customer stories and testimonials.

Snowflake hosts these roadshows in over 100 cities globally, with four of them being conducted in Dubai, Riyadh, Johannesburg and Cape Town to cover the Middle East & Africa region.

CNME spoke to Snowflake's General Manager for the Middle East, Turkey & Africa. Mohamed Zouari said the symposiums enabled the company to demonstrate their new innovations and highlight the key areas of focus they are looking at over the next 12 months.

"The main purpose and objective of the tour is for Snowflake to showcase and demonstrate the latest innovations that we have in our product portfolio. Customers are eager to participate in these roadshows, because it provides them with the opportunity to understand what are the key areas of focus that we are going to be looking at over the next 12 months. They want to know what Snowflake is bringing to

I think our ease of use is one of the fundamental reasons why our customers love Snowflake.



the table in terms of the AI and data space," said Zouari.

Zouari also added that a key element of the roadshows was the chance for their customers to share their journeys with Snowflake.

"Prospective customers that attend these events like to hear the success stories from our existing customers, as that gives them a better understanding and knowledge of the journey they have undertaken whilst leveraging our technology — whilst they can also engage in peer-to-peer discussion and networking," said Zouari.

In terms of the latest innovations and products that Snowflake were showcasing, Zouari couldn't contain his excitement about its new Snowpark framework.

"I'm really excited about our new Snowpark framework. The vision of Snowflake from its very inception has been focused on providing customers with access to easy-to-use solutions. It's critical to provide users with all the components they need when it comes to ingesting, transforming and using data in one place, which allows the time-to-market to be almost immediate," said Zouari.

Zouari added that Snowpark

gives users autonomy and flexibility.

"What Snowpark allows us to do is enable developers, data engineers and data scientists to keep their language of choice, like python and Java and their development environments. However, we will run it under Snowflake. For them, it's faster, cheaper and inside the same sets of data that the data analysts are already using. It's a big market for us, and when we embark upon innovation we always focus on performance, so it has to be a minimum of

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We are no longer focusing on the IT side of data, instead we are focusing on how much business we can unlock for the customers."

APRIL 2023

2x faster than any existing technology, and we reduce costs by 50-60%," said Zouari.

Zouari said that their ability to understand their customers' needs has given them a huge advantage in the marketplace.

"Obviously, we are a very data-driven company, but we can't see the data of our customers, however, we are able to see their metadata, which enables us to know what the ecosystem of our customers are. Spark and Python are the No.1 workloads running on our platform when we analyse our 8.000 customers. There are a lot of players in the marketplace, but when you consider the challenges, such as separate layers, other technologies, moving the data outside your environment, a lack of governance and security, then that gives us a huge advantage because of our ability to bring all these workloads under Snowflake, and by doing that, we can solve all these challenges simultaneously," said Zouari.

In terms of what differentiates Snowflake from its market rivals, Zouari pointed to three factors, which were its ease of use, which delivered unrivalled customer satisfaction. It's multi-cloud offering and data collaboration.

"I think our ease of use is one of the fundamental reasons why our customers love Snowflake. For six years in-a-row Dresner's Advisory Survey indicated 100% of our customers would recommend Snowflake to others. In addition to this, multi-cloud is key, because everyone, even if they are locked into one single cloud provider, they are

convinced that in the short to medium term they will be in multi-cloud. Some of them are moving completely from one cloud provider to another, so instead of redoing everything on the data and AI space when you have those decisions to make, having a cloud agnostic platform allows you to simply move it to Snowflake, which is a huge benefit." said Zouari.

Zouari said that Snowflake was the equivalent of Google when it came to searching for the datasets you need to consume to enhance your business operations

"All customers today want external data, and they want to share and consume data. Data collaboration is our bread and butter and this is how we build these data clouds. In the current climate, customers are looking for third-party data applications to make their data strategy more accurate. Those datasets are on the Snowflake Marketplace, if you want demographic data because it will have an influence on your strategy, if you want COVID data, if you want weather and transportation data it's all on Snowflake. Our founders call us the internet of data. We have made the data space look like the search engine space. When you need something today you go to Google and you get search results, we do the same with datasets, if you need data on the retail sector, you search on Snowflake and consume the dataset that you need," said Zouari.

Zouari said that Snowflake was no longer fully focused on the IT side of data as part of their efforts to unlock a potential \$3 trillion addressable market.

"The total addressable market of data platforms is \$250bn globally. According to a report by McKinsey on data collaboration, which highlighted the way we at Snowflake are approaching it, suggested that data collaboration can unlock up to \$3 trillion of annual business value. We are no

longer focusing on the IT side of data, instead we are focusing on how much business we can unlock for the customers," said Zouari.

Zouari highlighted how the financial services sector is one of Snowflake's largest industry verticals on a global scale.

"It's all data-driven and there's a huge consumption of data across all financial services. All their decision—making is driven by data. In addition to this, the healthcare sector is also critically important to us, and again, it is an industry that is being driven by data to drive better outcomes," said Zouari.

Last month, at Mobile World Congress in Barcelona, Snowflake launched and announced their new Data Cloud for the telecommunications sector.

"We want to leverage our technology to manage their data across all their lines of business. Telecom operators are always looking to expand, and are desperate to monetize their data. It helps them with their go-to market strategy, and the technology was not previously available for them to do it simply, but that's where we come in," concluded Zouari.

CISCO

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS



CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Reem Asaad**, Vice President – Middle East & Africa, at Cisco, to find out what she believes are the key ingredients needed to be an effective leader, what unique skills female leaders bring to the

table, her opinion on gender quotas – and her main goals for Cisco in 2023.

an you tell our readers more about your own leadership style, and what you believe are some of the key ingredients that are required to be an effective leader? Effective leadership requires confidence, but it's not about being the loudest voice in the room.

Rather, it's about recognising where you can add value and owning it. Throughout my professional life, I have learned the importance of knowing my worth, believing in my current abilities, and striving to reach my potential. Yet, I also recognise the value of asking for help when needed.

A good leader is not afraid to ask questions and seeks out opportunities for self-education. By continuously learning, leaders can form diverse, wellinformed perspectives and earn their rightful seat at the table. According to a Women's Leadership Study by KPMG, confidence is an attribute that women themselves identify as the key to leadership success.

However, throughout their professional careers, women struggle with what they characterise as a lack of it. According to this study, 67% of women said they needed more support building confidence to feel they can be leaders.

In addition to confidence, there are several skills that I believe are essential for good leadership.

Empathy is critical as it allows leaders to connect with

Quotas can serve as a tool to break down these barriers and create opportunities for underrepresented groups to succeed."



their teams and understand their needs and concerns.

Leaders who are open to new ideas and embrace change foster a culture of innovation and growth.

Humility is also key as it enables leaders to listen and embrace new ways of working. Lastly, maintaining authenticity is crucial for building trust and credibility with team members. Leaders who trust their instincts and communicate transparently are more likely to inspire and motivate their team.

We know there have been some outdated stereotypes aimed at female leaders, especially in the political arena in terms of having too much empathy, but surely empathy is an important trait to have when leading a team - and what are some of the stereotypes that still exist that anger you as a prominent female leader in the IT space?



Empathy is an essential trait for any leader, regardless of their gender, as it enables them to understand and connect with their team members, build trust, and create a positive and supportive workplace culture.

Stereotypes that portray empathy as a weakness in female leaders are outdated and destructive, and they should be challenged and debunked.

In fact, studies have shown that female leaders tend to score higher on measures of emotional intelligence, which includes empathy, than their male counterparts, and that this can lead to better team performance and job satisfaction.

As a female leader in the technology industry, I have encountered many stereotypes and biases throughout my career that can be frustrating and disappointing.

One common stereotype is the idea that women are not suited for leadership roles in IT because they lack the technical expertise or are not 'aggressive' enough to succeed in a highly competitive environment.

This stereotype not only undermines the achievements and qualifications of female leaders in this industry, but also perpetuates the idea that certain traits or characteristics are inherently gendered.

Another stereotype that is particularly damaging is the notion that when women are hard driving or assertive, they are perceived as aggressive; whereas men who exhibit the same behavior are seen as confident and strong.

This stereotype not only diminishes the authority of female leaders but also reinforces gendered expectations around behavior and communication styles.

In fact, the key to success is to learn these so-called "soft" skills, which have historically been associated with women but are critical for every leader to possess.

A great book by Julia Boorstin called "When Women Lead: What They Achieve, Why They Succeed, and How We Can Learn from Them" includes interviews with thousands of female CEOs and leaders and found the most common personality trait observed in successful female leaders is leading with empathy.

What are some of the characteristics and skills that female leaders bring to the table that perhaps their male counterparts don't have?

Research has shown that female leaders bring a unique set of skills and characteristics to the table that are different from those of their male counterparts.

According to the Harvard Business Review, women outscored men in 17 of the 19 capabilities that differentiate excellent leaders from average or poor ones.

One of the key attributes of female leaders is their emotional intelligence, which is the ability to recognise and understand emotions in themselves and others.

Women are often more adept at reading and interpreting nonverbal cues, which can lead to better communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork.

Another characteristic that female leaders bring to the table is their collaborative approach to leadership.

Women tend to prioritise collaboration and consensus-building over competition and individual achievement.

This results in more diverse and inclusive perspectives, better decision–making, and stronger team relationships.

Female leaders also have a higher level of empathy, which allows them to have a more supportive and nurturing leadership style.

Furthermore, women are often better multitaskers and are skilled at balancing multiple priorities and responsibilities.

This can result in increased productivity and efficiency, as well as improved time management.

Female leaders are also more risk-averse and cautious, which can lead to more thoughtful and strategic decision-making. This can help minimise risks and ensure long-term success.

We know that the IT industry has made significant progress at leveling the playing field in the IT ecosystem, but the fact remains that 75% of the global IT workforce is male. What are the best practices that you believe need to be implemented to really foster change?

Achieving gender parity in the IT industry requires a comprehensive and sustained effort to implement best practices that foster change.

Encouraging more women to pursue STEM education, creating a culture of inclusion, addressing bias and discrimination, promoting work-life balance, and ensuring pay equity are just a few of the strategies that can help to achieve this goal.



By working together, we can create a more diverse and inclusive IT ecosystem that benefits everyone.

One key strategy is to encourage more women to pursue STEM education and to provide them with the necessary resources and support to enter and succeed in the IT industry.

This can involve promoting girls' education in STEM subjects, providing scholarships, mentorship, and sponsorship programs, and creating more opportunities for women to gain work experience and build their skills.

We should be proud that the Middle East is leading the numbers of Women in STEM – for instance, in the last fiscal year, our IT skills program, Cisco Networking Academy trained more than 240,000 female learners across the Middle East and Africa – representing 34% of total learners.

Similarly, UNESCO figures show that 57% of STEM graduates in Arab countries are women, and 61% in the UAE.

Another important best practice is to create a culture of inclusion that values diversity and provides equal opportunities for all individuals.

This can involve

implementing policies and procedures that address unconscious bias and discrimination, promoting diversity and inclusion in hiring practices, and providing opportunities for women to move up the career ladder and into leadership roles.

Additionally, promoting worklife balance and ensuring pay equity are essential practices to encourage more women to enter and stay in the IT industry.

Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work, part-time schedules, and job-sharing opportunities can help women balance their work and personal responsibilities, while regular pay audits and transparent and equitable compensation policies can help address pay disparities.

The issue of quotas has been a contentious topic, with many feeling it erodes the process of meritocracy, but many are strong advocates of it to quickly address the balance that exists, what are your opinions on quotas?!

While meritocracy is a fundamental principle, we cannot deny the fact that certain groups have historically faced barriers and biases that have prevented them from reaching their full potential.

Quotas can serve as a tool to break down these barriers and create opportunities for underrepresented groups to succeed. According to the UN and the UN's Gender Quota Portal, legislated gender quotas have a significant positive impact on women's representation.

However, it is imperative that quotas are implemented in a fair and transparent way, and that they are not used to simply meet a metric without regard for qualifications or ability.

What companies should never do is seek to simply tick a box. As employers, we cannot and should not settle for a candidate simply because of their background – but always hire based on merit.

Ultimately, our goal should be to create a level playing field where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed based on their skills, experience, and merit.

If we can achieve this, quotas may not be necessary. But until we reach that point, we must continue to explore all tools and strategies that can help us create a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

At Cisco, we strive to have balanced interview panels to learn from each other's perspectives, but also with the intention to reduce potential bias.

I am proud to have earned my position at Cisco based on my qualifications alone. I do, however, find it important to strive for diverse leadership teams.

Visibility is extremely powerful. We want our employees to see people like them in positions of leadership,

so that they too can expand their ambitions.

The decision to appoint someone to such a ranking should not lay with one person alone. There should be consensus from the team, to avoid so-called 'positive discrimination'.

In terms of your own role as VP at Cisco, can you tell us about your key objectives and goals for 2023?

One of my objectives as a Cisco VP is to drive economic empowerment of women through access to technology.

Greater access to digital tools and technology can serve to support new means of inclusive, global economic

While meritocracy is a fundamental principle, we cannot deny the fact that certain groups have historically faced barriers and biases that have prevented them from reaching their full potential."

empowerment. For instance, digital technologies can enhance women's access to finance, with mobile banking enabling them to avoid long journeys.

E-commerce and technologybased businesses offer women more flexibility, helping them to manage home responsibilities alongside paid work. When women tap the full power of digital technologies, vital new opportunities open.

In terms of diversity and inclusion, Cisco aims to increase the representation of underrepresented minority groups, including women,

people of color, and people with special needs.

This can be achieved through targeted recruitment efforts, diversity training, and the implementation of inclusive policies and practices.

Within my teams, I will continue working on evolving and enhancing our inclusive workplace culture by fostering a sense of belonging for all employees, regardless of their background or identity.

This is an ongoing process, which involves providing opportunities for employee feedback, creating employee resource groups, and promoting an open and respectful culture of communication.

For instance, this March we have been celebrating the 10th anniversary of Women of Cisco— our global initiative dedicated to the professional development of women.

It was crafted with the aim to attract, develop, retain, and celebrate talented women as part of a competitive and diverse workforce.

The initiative is very active across the Middle East and Africa organisation and is constantly supporting women in every step of their careers.

Finally, Cisco strives to increase diversity and inclusion in leadership positions, such as at the executive and board levels.

This can involve creating pathways for diverse candidates to advance into leadership roles, providing leadership development and training opportunities, and holding leadership accountable for creating and maintaining an inclusive workplace culture.

22



Jadd Elliot Dib, Founder and CEO of Pangaea X, argues that the advent of cryptocurrency and other digital assets are completely revolutionising financial data analytics in an exclusive op-ed for April's edition of CNME.

ow Digital Assets are Revolutionising Financial Data Analytics

An increasing number of companies worldwide are using bitcoin and other digital assets for a host of investment, operational and transactional purposes.

It is of interest for enterprises to firstly explore the benefits of data analytics to consider as they determine, whether and how to use digital assets. Despite so many industries capitalising on the popularity of cryptocurrencies, the market still has pros and cons to its use.

By using a data analytic system can help uncover trends by looking back at historical data, which crypto investors can use to make informed decisions about where their currency is going in the future.

Data analysis can reveal interesting trends that the average investor is unlikely to spot and interpret.
Embracing this form of data analytics will give investors a competitive edge over those who make investment decisions based on intuition and incomplete data.

Fortunately, big data analytics can solve a plethora of issues, such as by helping crypto users better identify the future of the market and the value of the

thousands of digital currencies available to purchase and trade. That is because data analytics tools can help uncover trends by reviewing the historical data, which crypto investors can use to make informed decisions about where the crypto market is going.

Dashboards are one of the best data visualisation tools in the analytics market because they help bring visibility to investments and finances. When someone connects their crypto wallet to a dashboard, they are able to track their performance in real-time and look at how much they have invested in different cryptocurrencies.

Another benefit of using data analytics in the cryptocurrency industry is the potential to improve regulatory compliance. One of the challenges facing the industry is the lack of uniformity and consistency in regulation across different jurisdictions. Data analytics can help companies identify and monitor transactions that may be subject to regulatory requirements and ensure compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

For example, by using data analytics, companies can analyse the transactional patterns of their customers and identify any suspicious activity that may

Another benefit of using data analytics in the cryptocurrency industry is the potential to improve regulatory compliance."

Crypto dashboards also allow people to study ROI, acquisition cost vs. profit/loss, and the exchange rate of their cryptocurrencies. Examining a particular cryptocurrency's exchange rate history will inform you of how stable the coin is compared to others. This is a great example of the power of data analytic tools.

Big data analytics is an emerging market, and many industries have started adopting its tools and techniques to monitor their financial performance. The cryptocurrency industry, in particular, is one market that can benefit from data tools like dashboards and methods like descriptive and diagnostic analytics to predict current and future trends.

require further investigation. This can help prevent fraud, money laundering, and other illegal activities. Additionally, companies can use data analytics to track their own compliance with regulatory requirements, such as reporting obligations and customer due diligence.

Overall, the adoption of data analytics in cryptocurrency has the potential to bring a range of benefits, from improving investment decisions to enhancing regulatory compliance and much more. As the industry continues to evolve, data analytics will become an increasingly important tool for companies looking to succeed in this fastpaced and complex market of today.

WOMEN IN TECH

that are inspiring the next generation of female leaders in the IT industry to break the glass ceiling.













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26













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28













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30













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OMNIX

LEADING FROM THE FRONT

In the latest interview in our Women in Tech series, CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Simran Bagga**, Vice President of Omnix Engineering and Foundation Technologies, to find out more about her leadership style, the challenges she has overcome during her career – and what are the best practices needed to eradicate gender inequality in IT.

ou have enjoyed an incredible career spanning three decades in the IT industry. However, can you give our viewers an insight into your leadership style - and what you believe are the key characteristics needed to be a good leader?

Last week, during one of my country visits, I was asked what are leadership qualities which distinguished leaders have.
Thinking back on my career, I ranked the 3 topmost in mind.

First, having big bold goals. Big goals for business, big goals for self and big goals for the society where we live and exist.

Second, great leaders are decisive and lead from the front, especially in tough situations. They define the purpose and the vision the company should have.

And thirdly, the most important in my view, have



empathy for employees, clients and appreciate each relationship they have. There are many more, but these were the top most on my mind.

When you started your career there were very few women entering STEM fields, and the IT and engineering industry was a male-dominated environment. What sort of challenges did you face, or encounter during your career that perhaps would not happen now in 2023 - and how did

you navigate your way around those issues to arrive at a point where you are now the VP of such a large organisation? My foray into the ICT world began in 1995 with Hewlett Packard, leading the consumer

In 1999, I moved to Dubai with Compaq and from thereon was privileged to work with HP, IBM, Microsoft until 2015.

business based in India.

I relocated to Singapore in 2015, and experienced a brief stint in APAC with Cambium Networks prior to moving back with them in 2017 to Dubai.

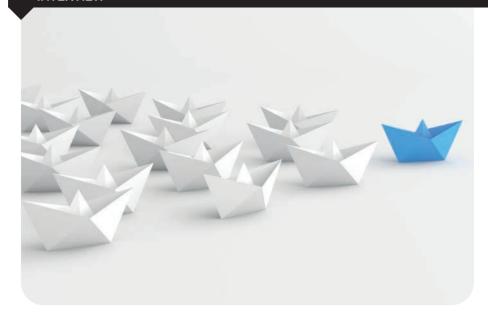
My initial days were very challenging at Omnix as the team I lead is primarily a male dominated environment.

When I proposed the restructuring process, employees who have been in the company for decades were resisting the change and to my style of working.

And for some it is not an easy thing to accept a woman driving a team of over 250 people.

I was under the radar for a good 6 months, eventually the culture changed, and performance improved which placed the doubt of a woman leading from the front at rest.

We know that great progress has been made in terms of levelling up the playing field in the IT and technology sectors, but it's fair to say that there is still a lot of work to be done. From your perspective, what do you think businesses need to do to promote greater inclusion and diversity within their own organisations - does the culture within some entities need to change?



Women in tech is certainly on the rise these days. It's not an easy ride for sure.

Eliminate bias in the hiring process - this can be done by hiring women into leadership roles early in a company's inception.

Close the pay gap- if men and women with the same education and skillset are doing the same jobs in each company, it's time to figure out why that pay gap exists and level the playing field.

Be proactive - there are always opportunities and problems to be solved. Women should step up, act, and demonstrate accountability.

There's lot more work to be done to encourage women to be proactive, agile and lead from the front. Continuous learning, networking, collaborating with diverse nationalities, coaching from mentors are a few areas to focus on to overcome the gender bias, especially in the ICT industry.

You have worked with some of the world's biggest tech players such as Microsoft, IBM and HPE, but what excited you about Omnix

International - and can you tell us more about your specific role within the company?

I lead, manage, and drive the sales, marketing, and technical organisation within the Omnix Engineering and Foundation Technologies under the umbrella of Omnix International.

The team comprises of 3 vertical business units – Value Added Distribution, Industry Support Solutions and BIM Drafting Services with a combined strength of 250 employees.

Omnix International is a leading solutions and services provider across the Middle East.

I joined the company in July 2021 as the Head of Omnix Engineering. And was elevated to the role of Vice President in March 2022.

What really keep the thrill and excitement going in my current role is the 360

view of the business – HR, Finance, procurement, vendor relationships, customer interactions, employee engagements and working with the executive leadership to innovate, create and be on top of our game in a fiercely competitive environment.

You have branded Omnix as a 'People First Organisation'. Is that customer centricity what ultimately differentiates you from your market rivals?

Someone wise once asked me, "Are you guys' thermometers or thermostats?"

We must decide who we want to be growing up. Thermometers read the temperature of the room. Thermostats create the temperature in the room.

That resonated with me. In everything I do and the teams that I build, we are growth hackers. We are stepping into environments that haven't been proven.

Its messy, unclear, and you don't know if there will be an ROI, but you are still requesting investments.

It's always about living in the future and caring for the rest of the organisation to what's on the horizon 4-5 years from now.

Great teams aren't a product of great workplaces. Great workplaces are a product of great teams. Indeed! And always remember "people buy from people".

Great leaders are decisive and lead from the front, especially in tough situations. They define the purpose and the vision the company should have."

APRIL 2023



A key message from our recent Women in Technology Forum and Awards was the fact that we are stronger together.

CPI Media Group and tahawultech.com would like to extend a massive thank you to ALL our sponsors for making such a special and necessary event happen.

We will be back bigger, better and bolder with your support next year.

Congratulations to all the winners!



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Conversations Around Diversity, Inclusion and Best Practices



WIT PANEL

TIME FOR CHANGE

CNME Editor Mark Forker moderated a panel discussion with some of the most powerful female leaders from the IT ecosystem at the **Women** in **Tech Awards**, in an effort to find out what measures they believe need to be implemented to foster a more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce across the Middle East region.

orker was joined on the panel by Leila Serhan, Senior VP and Group Country Manager for North Africa, Levant and Pakistan at Visa, Nigina Bender, Head of Sales EMEA at Jabra, Sheeba Hasnain, Senior PMO and Digital Transformation Specialist at Sharjah Document Department, Haidi Nossair, Senior Director, Client Solutions Group at Dell





36

77/7

Technologies, and Fatima Al Qubaisi, Legal Counsel at a leading UAE bank, and Harvard law graduate.

Leila Serhan kickstarted the conversation by declaring that huge progress had been made in terms of really holding people accountable on topics such as diversity.

"I felt it was a big step forward by organisations because it was the first time that leaders were directly told that they were accountable for the diversity of their workplace. I do believe that in the current climate diversity goes way beyond gender. In the Middle East region, we are serving a very young generation - and recently I was sitting with our innovation and design team, and I told them to go and talk to their kids and see what they want, and what they look for because this is where true diversity lies, and this is who we are designing things for," said Serhan.

In terms of addressing the gender disparity that currently exists within the IT ecosystem, Serhan believes there is still a lot of work to do.

She highlighted the importance of visible role models as key, and also called for the quashing of some outdated stereotypes that are still prevalent in society.

"Women represent just 25% of the global IT workforce, so we are very much underrepresented. I think what we need to do to address this is get girls from the age of 11-15 interested in STEM-related subjects. They are interested at 11, but lose interest at 15,

Businesses need to have a structured approach to adopt diversity and best practices into their organisation."

why is that? We need to focus on the next-generation, and really encourage them to pursue a career in STEM to bridge the gap that is there, and we also need to kill some of the stereotypes that still exist. For example, my 11 year old daughter has it in her mind that she can't be good at maths, but it's just a stereotype that she gets from society, the school, and the environment that she lives in. Role models are so important, and we need to elevate them to show young girls that the pathway for them is there and through hard work they can achieve anything," said Serhan.

Nigina Bender was next to share her views on what can be done to level the playing field.

She was quick to acknowledge that there has been huge progress made in relation to gender equality, especially since she first joined the IT industry back in 2005.

She cited the dramatic changes over the last few years in the KSA as an illustration of the changes that are being made.

"I recently visited Saudi Arabia for work, and the changes that I have seen are incredible. However, it will still take them for us to get to where we need to get to, but you can't help but take great encouragement from the change in attitude in places like Saudi Arabia over the last number of years," said Bender.

However, in terms of what measures and practices she believes needs to be taken to have a more equitable and inclusive workforce in IT, Bender said that education was key.

"Education is absolutely critical. We have to change the attitudes that still exist.





Some people when they think of engineering, they say, well that's a job for a man - and even in areas like Marketing and HR, it is traditionally dominated by women, so there is a misbalance across different jobs. To eradicate this, we need to continue to create awareness and help people better understand the true value woman bring to a job. I do still believe that when a male leader is choosing between a female candidate, and a male candidate for a job, subconsciously they will be biased. That bias is still there, and the only way to change that is through education," said Bender.

Sheeba Hasnain, was next to air her viewpoints, and she started off by saying that diversity and inclusion are not simple topics to address, and called the subject complex.

"Businesses need to have a structured approach to adopt diversity and best practices into their organisation. In the

current climate, we have seen the need for organisations to be agile with new technologies emerging all the time, but we also need to be agile in terms of creating a workforce for the future, one that isn't just based on women empowerment, but instead is focused on human empowerment. We also need a greater diversity of thought, and we need to put in the foundations and the building blocks now to really foster change within the IT workforce globally," said Hasnain.

Hasnain also singled out the important role that needs to be played by parents in order to create a more equitable society in the future.

"My parents nurtured me in a way that made me realise that anything was possible for me. They told me that if I worked hard at something then I could achieve it, and without that support and guidance then I wouldn't have had the career I have enjoyed in the tech sector. Parents are the core pillar in our society, and their support, along with greater education and awareness will drive real change," said Hasnain.

Haidi Nossair declared that we need to maintain the discussion around diversity and inclusion in terms of gender, but it doesn't have to be either or.

"Gender takes the lead now because we need to address the inequalities that exist, but in parallel, we don't need to wait another 10 years to talk about diversity of thought, ethnicity, different cultures, age, and so on. All of this has to happen in parallel, and it needs to happen today. Any organisation in

77

The UAE is leading the region for addressing inequalities for women, and I'm very happy about that."

APRIL 2023

the current climate can't have a sustainable future if it isn't looking at the new talent that they are hiring today, because they are going to the leaders of tomorrow. That's diversity. How many organisations have graduate programs, how many of them take the risk of hiring new graduates with no experience, there are some, but there isn't enough, so we're not building a pipeline for the future – and that fundamentally has to change," said Nossair.

Nossair said that talk was cheap, and stated that it was imperative that organisations were held to account on their KPIs in order to really implement change.

"Talking is not enough. We need to implement KPIs for organisations to meet their targets, but are we checking how they are progressing year after year? We will not make the progress we need to make if organisations, institutions and governments don't work together, and set out the strategies and the KPIs needed to really enact change. If they don't take it seriously then we won't get to where we need to go. It's not enough to simply set the KPI, because if you don't report it then you can't track what is happening, and therefore you can't change things," said Nossair.

Fatima Al Qubaisi, talked candidly about her experiences growing up, and revealed that because she was a girl, she had to follow a lot of rules.

"I didn't have a phone until I was 18 because I was a girl. However, my parents didn't know that computers connected you to everything, so I was using it to learn about so many things, and wasn't just using it for homework! When I was growing because I was a girl, I was constantly told you can't do this and that. There were a lot of rules, however, with age I decided that I was going to do what I wanted to do because that's who I am. I pushed the rules and boundaries and torn it apart," said Al Qubaisi.

Al Qubaisi, again like her peers on the panel, highlighted the undoubted progress that has been made, and referenced a story about her time studying at Harvard as an illustration of that.

"There was one day at Harvard where everyone was saying all the girls need to line up at the steps. I'm an international student, so I never knew what was going on. Somebody got apple juice and they started pouring it on the steps, and we were like what was going on? However, the reason they were doing this was because at Harvard law school there used to be no bathrooms for women for the first couple of years, they had to go to another building to use the bathroom, and they didn't even get Harvard degrees, and this lasted until after the Second World War. They were given Ratcliffe degrees, instead of law degrees. I remembering thinking to myself how lucky I was. I was there in 2017, and that was also significant because it was the first time in Harvard Law school history that they had 50% of women enrolled in the course, and it took them over 200 years to achieve this," said Al Qubaisi.

Al Qubaisi shared a story of a study conducted by Harvard and MIT, which showed that implicit bias is still rife.

"Harvard and MIT decided to conduct a study where they would send out the exact same CV. However, the only difference was one had a male name on it, and the other had CV had a female name on it. It was verbatim the same CV. However, there was a huge influx of responses on the men's CV, saving that they believed he had the right skills to flourish within their culture. But the feedback on the exact same CV, and remember the only difference on it is the gender, was I don't think you're going to be suited to the role. This is the perfect embodiment of implicit bias," said Al Qubaisi.

Al Qubaisi also revealed she was for gender-based quotas.

"People always tell me that we can stand for affirmative action, and that we shouldn't just adopt an approach of let's hire more women at the boardroom level because it's the right thing to do. However, until we address this implicit bias then things won't change. We need these quotas and I am all for them, and the UAE is leading the way. The Federal National Council is comprised of 50% of women, and again that was a quotadriven program. We have an EU law that says women and men have to be paid the same. The UAE is leading the region for addressing inequalities for women, and I'm very happy about that," said Al Qubaisi.

BURGER INDEX

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Wassim Berro**, Co-Founder of Al start-up Burger Index, to learn more about how the company is providing their customers with access to key indexed data that is accelerating their time-to-market in the F&B industry in Europe and the Middle East.

assim Berro and
Maurice Karam are
the co-founders of
Burger Index.
The pair met whilst studying
for an MBA in Madrid.

At the time of the MBA, Berro had been based in Qatar with Shell, and Karam was employed by Microsoft, following the acquisition of Nuance, where he had worked as a software engineer.

However, despite the fact they were both working for huge multinational entities, it became clear to them during the course that they wanted out of their corporate jobs — and wanted to pursue a career in entrepreneurship.

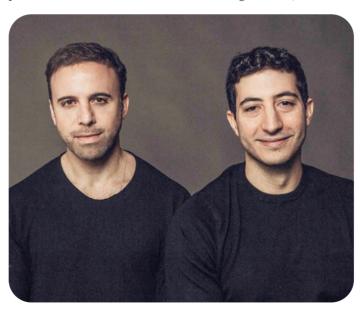
Berro said that the pair were a perfect match to go into business together because of their differing skillsets.

"I was involved in government relations and corporate affairs, and Maurice was a software engineer, so there was a really good balance between us. I was very familiar with that external stakeholder engagement which is perfect for fundraising and sales – and his skillset was ideal for building a tech product. Whenever you are building a founding team, especially if you're building a tech product then you need a co-founder with a tech background, otherwise you're coming up with something that is going to have to be outsourced at some point. Maurice can build the

products, and then I can go out there and do the sales and raise the capital we need to build and drive the product into the marketplace," said Berro.

Berro explains how the whole concept of Burger Index was born during the MBA in a class entitled the 'start-up lab'.

"During our MBA, there was



The simple process of historically indexing information on product prices and promotions makes publicly available data extremely valuable for the clients that we are working with."

APRIL 2023



a four-week module called the start-up lab. Essentially, what the class entailed was the selection of a team of 5 people from over 400 participants on the MBA, who were then tasked with the responsibility of coming up with a business idea. During that monthly period you're given entrepreneurship classes, time to build and validate your start-up company - and you can also start speaking with investors. Following the conclusion of that module, there is then an elective period at the end of the MBA where you can select different subjects, and one of them was called the venture lab. This allows you to spend more time working on your start-up, and then the end deliverable is the presentation of your business plan for your start-up, which becomes your end of MBA project," said Berro.

Berro and Karam identified

that there was a huge gap in the F&B industry in terms of competitive analysis.

"In the process of building any business, your only source of data is Google. You essentially have to go on Google and conduct multiple searches and just hope that you have covered the entire market. However, it's just not an accurate way to analyse an industry, validate a business idea, and know what competitors are out there. The way Google presents the data is a list of information based on a ranking, so again the data isn't even historical," said Berro.

Burger Index has described itself as the Blomberg of the F&B sector due to its ability to index historical data.

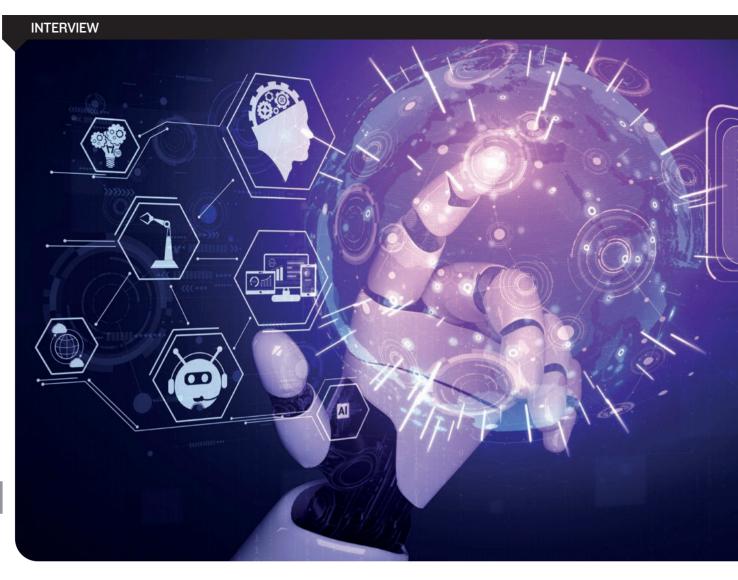
"The reason we called ourselves the Bloomberg of the F&B sector is we thought what if you created a Google of an industry, and index all of the data historically. Essentially, what that means then is every single thing within that industry is tracked in realtime, its indexed historically, and you have access to it," said Berro.

One of Burger Index's first customers was McDonalds in Spain.

"The way a company like McDonalds uses our system is before their marketing team goes and does a promotion strategy for 2023, they can go back in time and look at all of Five Guys promotions last year, when did they do the promotions, how often, what was the duration, what was the discount, and what was the messaging? Now, unless you had a human sitting there for an entire year tracking that one brand there's nowhere online where you can find that information. The same thing applies when you want to track the price of an individual product, you can see the price and the promotion now, but you don't know what the price of that product was 12 months ago, unless somebody was sitting there tracking it and recording it in an Excel sheet," said Berro.

Berro added that by simply indexing historical data helps their customers with their goto-market strategies.

"The simple process of historically indexing information on product prices and promotions makes publicly available data extremely valuable for the clients that we are working with. What we have found is that by having access to publicly available data, using it in the right way,



and then cleaning it gives our clients incredible visibility," said Berro.

Burger Index have built AI models that clean and process the data, but what does that mean?

"Well, for example, if McDonald's in JBR is on Google, TripAdvisor, Talabat and Deliveroo, the system doesn't identify it as four different stores, it links it - and identifies it as one store. When a product is called Kevin Bacon, and doesn't say burger, our system identifies it as burger based on image recognition and the ingredients. What the AI empowers is the fact that whenever you do an analysis, all of the data is

completely clean, and you're aware exactly of how many burgers are in a market, and how many are Shawarmas are being sold in a two-mile radius of your business — and that cleaning process is really what makes the data so valuable to customers like McDonalds," said Berro.

Traditionally, in terms of competitive analysis, McDonalds used archaic methods like employing a marketing agency to conduct research. However, as Berro points out it was always

reactive, whereas Burger Index now allows them to be proactive.

"When we started working with McDonald's in Spain, they told us that they employed a marketing agency that focused on 5-6 of their main competitors to check what new products and promotions they were launching, and this was a process which was done manually — and that is quite shocking when you think about it in this digital age. The value of our system is rather than competitive analysis being a

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Once you create that dataset it then becomes active and all of the insights you receive are completely unique to you."

APRIL 2023 www.tahawultech.com



reactive thing that you do on a monthly, or quarterly basis, it becomes proactive, because anytime your competitor adds a product, removes a product, changes the price, or launches a new promotion then that information automatically comes to you. It enables your team to see these alerts every morning and understand that for example 25 of their 50 competitors are on promotion right now, but why is that? Should we go on promotion now, they are pushing all their prices up, so is this a good time for us to increase our prices? All of this become proactive information that they are receiving on a daily basis," said Berro.

The co-founder of Burger

Index said that one of the ways users can access their data is through their SaaS platform.

"We provide them with a log-in, and the way it works is they basically create datasets. For example, you can create a dataset based on stores in your locality. I want to look at every store within a 5-mile radius of Business Bay that has Shawarma on the menu, so you'll create that dataset. However, you can add other filters like a 4-star rating and above, and a price range. Once you create that dataset it then becomes active and all of the insights you receive are completely unique to you," said Berro.

Berro added that food distributors use their tool is to understand the total addressable market.

"For example, Nestle, has created a plant-based meat called Sweet Earth. They can leverage the power of our system to go and see how many restaurants have plant-based meat on their menus and they can also rank that data. For example, they can rank it based on the stores that have the most locations, the stores that have the most dishes with plant-based meat, and the stores with the highest ratings. Essentially, based on the coefficient of these three things, you suddenly have a leads list based on the businesses most likely to buy high volumes of your product," said Berro.

Burger Index are visible in both the European and Middle East marketplace.

Due to his previous role with Shell, and the fact he has worked in Doha, Dubai and Abu Dhabi, most of his networking connections were based in the GCC, so it made sense for them to target the Middle East marketplace.

"Maurice and I met in Madrid and that's where we decided to build the business. Once we built it, the first paying customer was in Rivadh, a cloud kitchen called Matbakhi, which also recently just raised \$2.3m in seed funding. When we were fundraising, we were getting a lot of traction from the Middle East, but when you are fundraising in markets outside of your base then you also need to prove that the product works and that there is a demand for it there. If you're building a startup in Europe, and you're trying to raise money from the Middle East, then you can't just go and take money from the Middle East based on European revenue, you need to prove revenue in that market," said Berro.

Berro concluded a brilliant conversation by highlighting the appetite that there is for Burger Index in the Middle

"We are very focused on the UAE and the KSA, and we have sold the most datasets in Riyadh. In the GCC region, there is a huge appetite to expand into that market fast, and get there first, but it is a very 'data dark' place. We are able to provide them with social demographic data and F&B cuisine distribution data, and that's very valuable for them, especially when they are trying to determine where they should open," said Berro.

TECHSTARS

STARS IN THEIR EYES

CNME Editor Mark Forker spoke to **Oko Davaasuren**, Senior Director at TechStars, to learn more about his entrepreneurial journey, his passion for entrepreneurship and nurturing start-up companies – and ultimately what differentiates TechStars from other start-up accelerator programs.

ko Davaasuren has enjoyed a decorated career as an entrepreneur, one which has seen operate in multiple marketplaces all over the world.

However, his love for entrepreneurship was born in the USA, when the Mongolian native accepted the offer of a scholarship at Portland State University.

"I am originally from Mongolia, but I got the bug for entrepreneurship when I went to the United States on a scholarship. The entrepreneur culture is prevalent all over the US, but my first foray into that world was driven out of necessity in order to pay my tuition fees. I created my first start-up company, and the success of that business helped ease the financial burden I had to get through college. However, that experience really stayed with me, it was empowering," said Davaasuren.

After 10 years in Oregon, Davaasuren decided that he wanted to go back to Mongolia and see could he harness his new found skills in entrepreneurship to build an entrepreneurial ecosystem in his homeland.



"I wanted to see if tech entrepreneurship was something that I could help my local community in Mongolia with. What that process in the US really helped me to understand was the fact that when we talk about tech entrepreneurship, and the culture that comes with it, it's not just about venture building, or economic activity, it's a really powerful tool for empowering, and building confidence amongst young people - and that's what I really wanted to promote and foster in Mongolia," said Davaasuren.

Davaasuren joined TechStars in 2015, and his first role at the accelerator was to work closely with the Malaysian government to roll out start-up programs.

"I was tasked with the responsibility of working on programs with the Malaysian government to help Malaysian start-ups and entrepreneurship movements in the country. I am so passionate about working with start-ups, so the job was a dream position. I love mentoring new start-ups in an effort to validate their business idea. Over the last 9 years I have helped build ecosystems and start-up communities in so many different countries, and that has been a great experience," said Davaasuren.

However, Davaasuren was quick to point out that in many of these countries the 'language' was a huge roadblock in terms of really driving and developing these start-up ecosystems.

"In some countries you may find that the culture is just not there yet, but the desire to problem solve certainly is. When



we talk about entrepreneurial journeys, and we try to foster these start-up ecosystems, essentially, we are talking about something very fundamental, which is helping young people to believe in themselves, and to take action to solve a problem. It fosters a growth mindset that is supported by this community aspect. It definitely existed in Mongolia when I went there, but what was missing was the language, new trends - and the academic and theoretical work that is needed is predominantly in English, so that was a barrier," said Davaasuren.

One of the first things
Davaasuren set about to do
in Mongolia was create the
translation for the word
start-up, and he did the same
with the word entrepreneur,
highlighting that they used the
Russian version of the word,
as it was very similar to the
English one.

Davaasuren conceded that there is a large volume of accelerator programs worldwide, but he believes the strength of their network is a key differentiator.

"The Techstars worldwide network helps entrepreneurs succeed and our main program is the mentor-driven accelerator program. . There's this element of community and networking infused within the program. If you look at other accelerator programs the one differentiating aspect is the network. If you strip down all the program mechanics, the investment models, and the way in which we all deliver training in entrepreneurship then you can see that the methodology is very similar. However, TechStars created a global accelerator network and opensourced our accelerator model, but what differentiates us is undoubtedly the strength of our network," said Davaasuren.

Davaasuren also added that from its very inception TechStars has always fundamentally believed entrepreneurs are everywhere, and wanted to move away from the perception that to be an entrepreneur you had to be based in Silicon Valley.

Luckily, from my own experience, I got mentored in how to build a community, and leverage a network to support entrepreneurs, and that's fundamentally what TechStars believes in, and that is one of the superpowers behind the TechStars brand. TechStars was not born in Silicon Valley, it believed that entrepreneurs were everywhere, you didn't need to be in the Valley to be

The Techstars worldwide network helps entrepreneurs succeed and our main program is the mentor-driven accelerator program."

46



successful, and that's why we based ourselves in Bolder," said Davaasuren.

In 2022, TechStars invested in 600 companies, which makes them one of the leading earlystage investors globally.

The scale of their investment is off the charts, and in 2023, TechStars are aiming to invest in 800 companies.

Davaasuren believes that those numbers basically represent the fact that there are tonnes of opportunities out there. In terms of the process to join the TechStars program, Davaasuren conceded that it was competitive, but said start-ups can select the thematic program that best suits their business.

"We run around 50+ accelerators globally. We are in Europe, Africa, Asia and the US. The process that typically happens is a founder will look for a program that fits their business. For example, say there is a Japanese company that wants to expand to the US, then they would apply to a TechStars program in Boston, New York, or, LA.

A large number of tech start-ups think that's it's an easy path, and they can exit and have IPOs very soon, but we know that's not the reality."

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In addition to this, some of our programs are thematic. In Dublin, we have our Web3 program, and we also have a space accelerator based out of LA, so you basically choose a program that thematically matches your business idea. Applications are always open because of the volume of accelerators we have globally – and we have a lot of resources on how to effectively submit your application," said Davaasuren.

Davaasuren said that 'mentor whiplash' was one of the challenges that many founders face when they enter the accelerator program at TechStars — and that their business being driven in another direction can be difficult for some founders to digest.

"It is our job to find the correct product marketplace for each start-up. We utilise our mentors within our community to help founders understand our process. For example, each class we run has 10 start-ups, and they will be given access to over 100+ mentors throughout their 3-month period in the accelerator program, and they can be exposed to mentor whiplash. We call it mentor whiplash because those on the program are going to be hearing these experiences from so many investors and entrepreneurs that are volunteering their time, so they are going to tell them the way they see it. They will see a business idea and say, look I have done this, how about this? What happens then is sometimes founders can become resistant to these ideas, and then when they are pointed in a completely different direction to where they think they are headed, they can be like, what the hell just happened? That's why we call it mentor whiplash, but this is all part of the TechStars experience," said Davaasuren.

Another challenge according to Davaasuren is managing expectations, as he pointed out there is no fast-track route to success when building a tech product.

"I think one of the main challenges that I see is some founders have the wrong expectations in terms of what it means to be an entrepreneur. A large number of tech startups think that's it's an easy path, and they can exit and have IPOs very soon, but we know that's not the reality. Statistically speaking, even the successful tech start-ups, it takes them around 8 years to be a tech unicorn, so it's a long process. There is no quick fix, some entrepreneurs have this mindset in which they think I'll build this business for 3 years, and then sell it off, and yes, that can happen, but those start-ups are very much in the minority. It takes time to build a successful product and business," said Davaasuren.

He concluded a wonderful interview by highlighting that the key ingredient TechStars look for, is not in the quality of the product, but instead in the person behind the business — and offered his advice in terms of start-ups and entrepreneurs can be a success.

"We are all about people, people and people. However, we always ask ourselves how coachable are they? The best advice I have heard about being an entrepreneur is to learn really fast. It's all about experimentation and validation. You don't know the answer, so don't be afraid to fail, and be open to being coached and be open-minded. There is a reason why this whole community comes together to makes start-ups successful. However, if you are rigid, afraid and closed off then your journey is going to be very limited," said Davaasuren.

ENDAVA

BUILD OR BUY?

As regional banks attempt to chart their digital journeys, **Nick Curran**, Head of MENA at Endava, poses the question of whether they should build or buy their innovations in an exclusive op-ed for April's edition of CNME.

n a study published last month, McKinsey showed banking to be one of the Middle East's most digitised industries.

The means of brand interaction among banking customers was 87% digital in the United Arab Emirates.

Put plainly, this proportion of customers reported that their engagement was either fully digital or involved remote assistance.

This proportion was even higher in Saudi Arabia (92%), a country that anticipates that 70% of its payment transactions will be digital by 2030. The McKinsey study also showed Egypt's banking sector to have 82% digital interaction.

The GCC has always been out in front of regional peers

with the digitisation of the FSI sector. Dubai's Mashreq launched the appropriately named Neo, the first digital bank in the Middle East.

And Kuwait Finance House developed KFH-Go, the region's first e-branch — an unstaffed business unit capable of providing more than 30 services.

Each of these innovative



48

project teams faced a common question in their journey to "pioneerhood": build or buy?

Today's consumers wait for nothing and no one. If you drag your feet for too long, you miss the boat.

One of your competitors will have done it first. In the early years of the digital era, building was the only option, but today the region is strewn with FinTechs. Their offerings are often API-first, which makes them highly customisable.

However, if we consider the strides taken in cloud technology and softwaredevelopment methodologies that make inhouse rapid deployment possible, we are back to the quandary: build or



buy? Let us look at each in turn. Buying: a no-brainer... with headaches

There is a comfort to be had from procuring a tool or platform that just fits. CIOs are spared nail-biting months of business analysis and user workshops.

All that need be done is integrate a solution that has been rigorously tested, albeit in isolation of one's own business model. In a cloud-native environment, this is even easier. Even if the bank runs core systems on premises, software-as-aservice (SaaS) solutions still end up being easier to bolt in and bed down.

The cloud also adds a welcome element of predictability, not only for project management, but for upfront and ongoing costs.

Already, the "buy" option seems preferable. In a region

with technology skills gaps, buying a ready-made solution — one that may be used by dozens if not hundreds of similar businesses across the region — is a great way of avoiding lengthy recruitment drives.

But buying is not without its downsides. Try as they might, vendors of commercial off-the-shelf solutions (COTS) design their products for a broad operational model and may not be a perfect fit. Even where the requisite amount of customisation is possible, it may come with a list of unacceptable side-effects, including a hefty price tag.

COTS scaling is also challenging, as is its user-acceptance testing, maintenance, and upgrades, given the reliance on an external team.

Of course, I could write a whole separate article on the implications for cybersecurity of having a third party in the technology mix.



And that is before we have even begun to discuss the impact of multiple vendors and FinTechs — which may be necessary to bring the organisation's digital vision to life. The bank would need to employ someone full time to liaise with these business partners, negotiate and oversee SLAs, and police the fine line between these activities and regulatory compliance.

Building: a dream for the control-conscious, but where's the talent?

What CIO doesn't relish the prospect of complete control over the IT stack? Building their own systems gives them that

Development and integration are theirs to command, and use cases can fully govern implementation, rather than the twist and bend that IT has to go through to accommodate even a 90% requirements-fit with a COTS purchase.

Stakeholders can join the dots from aspiration to value for each business unit. CIOs and their teams know the business inside and out and can pivot from the needs of customers and customer-facing employees to cybersecurity and risk management and consider one while developing solutions for another — something COTS vendors cannot do to the same extent.

And then, there is deployment. It tends to be less invasive and more straightforward when its planners are those that oversee the same production environment every day.

DevOps and the CI/CD pipeline also allow the modern



style of rapid development that helps meet market needs in time to reap the rewards.

Building its own solutions also allows the organisation to build its IP portfolio, giving it an edge in the market.

The caveats, then? There needs to be a rich in-house talent pool including IT leaders and analysts who can scope large projects and price them accurately before a single line of code is written. Remember, one of the attractions of COTS solutions is the predictability of their costing models compared with the all-too-common tendency of self-builds' costs to spiral out of control.

It is always possible to bring in third-party expertise to plug these talent gaps. Failing this, the organisation's HR team will need to go on a fastidious recruitment drive before any planning can occur. Lowcode platforms and citizen developers may seem like fine options but without the proper governance, this is a highway to nowhere.

EACH TO THEIR OWN

In the end, the program needs will help to make the build-or-buy decision. Building, despite the control it offers, may still not be right for standard use cases such as CRM and HR, which can be appropriately served by an off-the-shelf solution.

On the other hand, if the organisation has a differentiating vision, then almost by definition, COTS tools will fall short.

The decision maker must be as fluid as the decision and consider the benefits and drawbacks of each approach in the context of the specific use case they are looking to implement.

Even if the bank runs core systems on premises, softwareas-a-service (SaaS) solutions still end up being easier to bolt in and bed down."

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