The HCLTech Trends and Insights podcast

Nick Ismail

Hello, everyone and welcome to the HCLTech Trends and Insights podcast. Today, I'm joined by Prabhakar Appana, Senior Vice President and Global Head of the AWS Business Unit at HCLTech, to discuss how enterprises can move from AI experimentation to scalable, Agentic AI that delivers measurable business outcomes. Ahead of AWS re:Invent, we'll explore what changes as organizations deploy Agentic AI across core business processes, where process redesign becomes necessary and how HCLTech and AWS are working together to turn emerging capabilities into repeatable client outcomes. Prabhakar, thank you so much for joining me. How are you?

Prabhakar Appana

I'm very well, Nick. Thank you so much.

Nick Ismail

No problem. So it's clear now that AI adoption is widespread, but where are enterprises in their journey from experimentation to Agentic AI delivering measurable business value?

Prabhakar Appana

I mean, it's an excellent question, Nick. I mean, if you look at the way we have moved from our initial conversations and how the if if I if I take a little bit step back and look at every generation of technology creates a moment when the rules of competition change right so cloud changed the way enterprises you know built and scale digital changed the way companies engaged with customers and today AI is changing something even bigger and the way work itself gets delivered. So we are moving from AI that helps us answer typical questions to AI that helps us create, reason, collaborate, take action and this is where you know we are currently focusing on from HCLTech perspective and it also depends upon. I mean, the focus of our conversations is not more towards enterprises. How enterprise AI is entering its next phase. The conversation has moved, you know, from can AI work to how quickly can AI transform my business? So that's where we are. And if you look at over the last 18 plus months or so, we have witnessed a fundamental shift. You know, in in in this in segment initially, most organizations focused on isolated generative AI pilots to prove the technology. Today, those experimentations have largely validated AI potential. The challenge is no longer proving AI; it is about industrializing it across the enterprise and that's where our focus is currently on. And what we have also seen is the organizations

creating measurable value. Are those beyond you know who built chatbots, copilots to Agentic AI, where primarily autonomous AI agents collaborate across business processes, systems and functions and deliver end-to-end outcomes. At HCLTech, together with partnership from AWS, we are seeing clients prioritize use cases that directly improve our business performance, customer service automation, claims processing, software engineering, manufacturing, streaming manufacturing, supply chain, financial reconciliation and as well as IT service management. That's where our primarily primarily business use cases that the teams are working on and these are no longer technology demonstrations. They have become more like an enterprise transformation programs with the key measurable KPIs around productivity, your cycle time reduction, cost optimization, customer experience, relooking that entire that business process itself and redesigning it, I think that's that's where the focus is currently on. I think the biggest lesson, if you ask what we have learned, you know, from enterprises, don't need hundreds of AI models and AI use cases. I think they need a handful of high-value, scalable use cases that fundamentally change how work gets done.

Nick Ismail

And you touched on it in your answer just now. But what changes when an enterprise moves from deploying individual AI agents to running Agentic AI securely and reliably across core business processes at scale?

Prabhakar Appana

I mean, see, see, deploying an AI agent is easy. Running, you know, 1000s of trusted AI decisions across an enterprise is entirely different challenge, right? So I think it is the biggest transformation is in the AI itself. It's the it's the the whole lot of operating model around it. I mean, individual agents can automate your individual tasks, but Agentic AI, you know, is more looked at transforming that business process itself because multiple specialized agents collaborate, reason. You know, you need you build the orchestration actions, interact with enterprise systems and on on the way, it continuously learn. You know, within the defined guardrails and boundaries. I think that that's a different scale and challenge in itself and at as enterprises scale, success depends on much more than the model itself and and and that we need to understand. Organizations need to propose a framework, operating model, its governance, security, observability, your identity management, your compliance, human oversight and the entire lifecycle management. I think that that's that should be the more you know main focus as you know enterprises when we when we try to deploy this at an enterprise scale and this is exactly where the partnership with AWS and HCLTech, you know, becomes especially very powerful. I mean, as we already know that AWS provides enterprise-grade AI services, you know, secure

infrastructure, orchestration frameworks and responsible AI capabilities, while HCLTech brings you know four decades of engineering pedigree, delivery excellence, execution, industry knowledge, you know and which can work in the favor of this enterprise's integration and the scale. I think together, you know, you know, we are helping you know clients build AI system that not only intelligent but also trusted, resilient, auditable, secure and and most of all, the scale as as the the businesses adopt you know this technology at an enterprise level, Nick.

Nick Ismail

I'd like to hear more about AWS and HCLTech and our joint solutions. But before then, from what you've said, it's clear that agentic process transformation is about more than simply adding agents to existing workflows.

Prabhakar Appana

Yeah.

Nick Ismail

What processes need to be redesigned entirely for enterprises to capture the full value of Agentic AI?

Prabhakar Appana

I think the biggest mistake enterprises make is automating the yesterday's processes instead of redesigning tomorrow's business, right? So that's the way. That's the way I will put it, because we typically look at okay, what is the business process that I'm currently doing? How can I automate? How can I reduce? How can I make it cost efficient? You know, reduce time, etc. I think I think the the the way you need to look at this aspect is how can I redesign this entire business process itself? I think that should be the focus. And every if you look at from the past you know four decades, every major technology shift has required organizations to rethink how work is performed, right? So Agentic AI is no different. If you ask me, many existing business processes were originally designed around human limitations, manual approvals, repetitive handoffs, fragmented systems and you know lengthy decision chains. But if you look at from an Agentic AI, it allows organizations to redesign these processes from first principles perspective. Rather than asking how AI fits into today's workflow, I think enterprises should ask how work should flow when intelligent agents can collaborate continuously across people, applications, data, technology, right? I think that's that's that's more important and we are seeing enormous opportunities across customer service, claims management, financial operations, procurement, supply chain, software engineering, HR, IT operations and security, compliance. Many of these business

processes that we are currently working on and we are also helping you know the businesses adopt in in more you know more structured and organized way. And the organizations, I think, the organizations creating the the greatest value are. Simply automating existing steps, they are eliminating unnecessary steps altogether. So the the work that we have done in you know the recent one of the in the in the banking sector or in the manufacturing segment, we are learning quite a lot of things ourselves in terms of okay, how do we eliminate the waste? How do we eliminate some of the manual tasks to make it much more agile? You know, automated, obviously within the secure and you know security guardrails, right? That's why I think we described it as agentic process transformation rather than you know just saying agentic automation, right?

Nick Ismail

Absolutely makes sense. And moving now to HCLTech and AWS, we're increasingly developing solutions together rather than simply combining technologies after the fact. What does effective co-innovation look like and how do you take those solutions from development to repeatable client outcomes?

Prabhakar Appana

Yeah, I mean this is an excellent question as well. I think we are moving away from partner integrating technologies. Nick, it's about partners creating innovation together from day one, right? So I think that that's the key focus. I think co-innovation starts with shared commitment, you know, to solving customer problems, business issues, you know, not just selling products itself. At HCLTech, we are working with AWS much earlier in the innovation lifecycle itself, rather than building independently and integrating later. We are jointly redesigning industry solutions, validating customer use cases, validating the latest technology, the services and also from an from a system integrator perspective, we are also looking at building accelerators, bringing repeatability in in that segment, you know and and to market together. So I think all these aspects are co-linked, co-developed, co-innovated with primarily with the partners and our collaborations with AWS fans, you know, across the advanced AI technologies which AWS brings. Like for example, the Agentic AI, the agentic business process transformation, Amazon Bedrock agent core architecture and all the latest Amazon Q. So, cloud modernization, developer productivity-all this-all this makes you know a significant impact in in the propositions that we build and deliver to their clients. I think what makes this relationship unique is the the level of mutual trust that we have built over a decade-long relationship with AWS. AWS deeply contributes to platform innovation, while HCLTech contributes industry expertise, enterprise transformation experience, engineering capability and global delivery. I think once validated with customers, these solutions become reusable assets that can be deployed consistently

across industries, you know and significantly reduce implementation time while improving the the business outcomes as the customers adopt, Nick. I think the the the focus from a partnering angle perspective is about the the co strategy which I which I give it to the client, which is like co-build, co-innovate, co-invest, co-market, co-sell, you know, scale globally through reusable assets.

Nick Ismail

And AWS is putting greater emphasis on business value realization, tying cloud investments to measurable outcomes such as cost savings, productivity and revenue growth. How should enterprises define ROI for Agentic AI before they scale?

Prabhakar Appana

See the outcome of Agentic AI isn't measured by the number of models deployed. I mean, it's measured by how businesses perform differently, right? So, if businesses can scale, you know, reduce effort, relook at of relook at addressing the customer concerns in a much more nimble, agile, fast manner, right? So that's what you know. We you know the real ROI of Agentic is reflect on. I think one of the biggest changes we are seeing is that the AI conversations have moved from being just technology budgets to you know clearly boardroom priorities, right? All the business leaders that I interact and especially now you know some of the business meeting that I'm currently carrying on now expect AI investment to deliver clear, measurable outcomes. Many many many CX leadership want. And organization should establish a clear business KPIs before implementation begins, because you can actually measure, you know, before start of the engagement and you know after implementation, you know whether you're able to achieve your KPIs that you have set and these include these measurable KPIs could be your productivity improvements, your revenue acceleration, or in in one one of the cases, in some of the cases, actually we have worked on customer satisfaction, you know operational resilience, you know employee experience, your development velocity, quality improvements, compliance, security, cost optimization-all this plays a significant role in terms of the measurable KPIs. I think in in cases where the clients are not sure about what should be those business KPIs, etc. So we created a a cheat sheet for the clients depending upon the type of business as to what should be those business KPIs, you know, they could measure, you know, properly and what happens is this helps the clients to go back to their business and see is this what you know your your expectation would be before the start of the engagement. So those kind of conversations and collaborative discussions with the business also really helps when we are implementing any of this, you know, agentic ROI-related aspects. See, I think we need to also understand this technology is pretty new. Many of the enterprises are, you know, decades. You know, have the ticket level integration

experience and the landscape. So when the new technology comes, they also would like to understand what is the impact on the existing technology, what is the impact on the business future. So, so all these you know play a significant role in terms of when we look at you know the ROI aspects for business, Nick. I think you know some of the questions I think we need to answer is can the organization launch you know my product faster, or customer decisions can be made in in minutes rather than days or hours, you know the talent focus that they need to build. So all these all these have significant you know aspects when you are looking at agentic AI engagements and defining the the value hypothesis in in your life cycle.

Nick Ismail

And finally, Prabakar, ahead of AWS re:Invent, how have client conversations changed around AI and Agentic AI over the last 12 months?

Prabhakar Appana

I think you know you were also witness to some of these conversations, Nick, you know a year ago, I think clients were looking at you know from more from an idea pilot and what is generative AI kind of conversations. Today, I think they ask how fast can we scale authentic AI across the enterprises. I think the conversations are more matured and the conversations are moving at a rapid pace, and, and clients also want to understand. See, some of the clients that we talk to, they want to understand not only from their business perspective, they are looking at okay, how a financial services has improved, you know, you know their their KYC process or all the how the financial services are addressing some of these chargeback mechanisms. So, what is the learning for me from a utility and energy sector perspective? So they want to learn, cross learn some of these things that we see, you know, very rapidly in the conversations. And from a reinvention perspective, I think you know, you know, our focus primarily is on not only looking at demonstrating some of the business use cases, accelerators, frameworks, models that we have built. There is heavy emphasis this year. We are going to do on Physical AI as well. So you know that's another you know big chapter that we have opened up and having multiple conversations in various sectors. So we are going to do a clear demonstration on how physical AI is being explored in some of the industries in the healthcare sector, in the manufacturing sector, in the aerospace and defense. So we are going to do some demonstration states, you know, during reinvent, which is going to be very very interesting for our customers. I think the clients are also asking, you know, how to transform enterprise business functions, govern this AI responsibly, modernize the legacy operations, improve the developer productivity, reduce operational cost. So some of these questions are we are addressing, we are answering during our demonstrations and some of the the authentic business process

processes that we have created. So you know we have a solution space where we are doing this in a much more rigorous manner. I think AI is no longer owned exclusively by the by the typical you know the technology leaders or the CIOs or the co or an AI team within the industry, right? I think this is more elevated at the boardroom level. The CEOs, CFOs, COOs and business leaders are now, you know, driving AI strategic strategies, you know, at scale because they recognize its direct impact on competitiveness. So we are we are hoping there will be some new announcements, new technology adoptions over the last one year. What our we as an HCLTech also done in the market? We are going to bring all that together across the landscape, across the industries, across more from a physical AI perspective as well to showcase to our customers. So I'm really, really keen and looking forward to this, Nick. I think the future belongs to organizations that combine, you know, trusted AI platforms, business transformation expertise and measurable business customer outcomes. That's how I leave it, Nick.

Nick Ismail

That's a nice note to end on, Prabhakar. Thank you so much for your time and insights.

Prabhakar Appana

Thank you. Thank you so much, Nick.