Jon Green

LinkedIn Operation Inversion

The operation inversion of LinkedIn in 2011 was a game changer in terms of how development teams view the software development methodology. It was a bold move by Kevin Scott (VP of Engineering) to essentially turn the development world on its head in terms how updates are distributed and deployed. This event was special because it completely revamped the deployment process for LinkedIn at a moment when the entire world was watching for their next move. Despite being on the global stage, the decision to step away from proven developmental practices worked in their favor and changed the world in terms of how companies understand the software development process.

Since its inception, LinkedIn conducted software deployments much like other companies such as Amazon and Google. The deployment strategy was simple and consisted of the development team creating updates and website changes that would be set to deploy at a predetermined time. The timeframe was designed to minimize user impact while the updates were taking place. This timeframe could range from daily, every few days, to every few weeks. The frequency of the updates would be dictated by the incremental changes that needed implementing. Smaller updates would be deployed first, and then larger updates would be deployed. This deployment schedule is common the software development world and LinkedIn was no different until the operation inversion.

In 2011, LinkedIn transitioned into a public trading entity. This meant that potential investors worldwide were now watching the progress of the company in terms of beating the competition and staying competitive in the marketplace. The pressure was now increasing for a company that had already proven itself to be successful. Things looked great from outside of the company, however it was the opposite internally. The development team was struggling to maintain consistent updates and to meet deadlines for the deployments. The problems stemmed from the company growing exponentially and not being to keep up with the user demand. This type of situation can present a “make or break” moment for a company.

LinkedIn was starting to implode due to the uptick in traffic and search queries. Kevin Scott realized that this model was not sustainable and crafted a groundbreaking new strategy. The strategy that Kevin utilized was to halt all deployments for the next months. The goal of this plan was to allow the development team to restructure, reorganize, and re-prioritize the method in which they were deploying updates. This process was intricate as it required the creation of new systems and processes to accomplish the goal. Some of these new systems included self-service deployment, continuous integration, and trunk-based software development. The restructuring also allowed the development team to work on smaller individual components. This allowed the development team to be more efficient in terms of prioritizing updates as well as being more organized.

The operation inversion proved successful in that it showed the importance of slowing down and restructuring. Kevin Scott new that the company could not survive in the current state, therefore he made the courageous decision to stop deploying updates until the company could regain control over the software development aspects. This decision created breathing room for the developers in that they could reorganize resources and change strategies. The risk was beneficial as it put long term goals ahead of short-term gains. This new strategy created a sustainable model that was better for the developer and the consumer. The increased workload being limited for 2 months during the halt was a better option than having the team become burnt out over the long term due to constant overworking.

Sources:

*PressReader.com - Digital Newspaper & Magazine Subscriptions*. (2024). Pressreader.com; Press Reader. https://www.pressreader.com/usa/san-francisco-chronicle-late-edition/20130415/282179353563419

‌

Vance, A. (2013, April 12). *Inside Operation Inversion, the Code Freeze That Saved LinkedIn*. Bloomberg.com; Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2013-04-10/inside-operation-inversion-the-code-freeze-that-saved-linkedin?embedded-checkout=true>

Scott, K. (2017, July 20). *It was October 2011, a few weeks before LinkedIn’s second earnings announcement after going public. The business was doing well.* Linkedin.com. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/when-your-tech-debt-comes-due-kevin-scott

‌

‌