

Mark Rees: Capitalizing Cyber Security in Public Sector



To glorify an endeavor, a leader is required to bestow the courageous path of a successful journey along with his passion and impeccable ideologies. Catering to the justification of a leader's triumph through one's tireless efforts and skill, CIO Look presents you the journey of an avid leader, **Mark Rees**, the **COO** of **Secucloud**.

Below are the highlights of the interview conducted between Mark and CIO Look:

Give a brief overview of your background and your role in the company.

I joined Secucloud's management team in 2016 at the point where, Dennis Monner was transforming it from a start up to a mature company. As a team we have driven the change in organization, processes and culture so that we have become larger in terms of both staff and business, whilst maintaining our start up velocity. A 100% focus on our supply / value chain and efficiency of our work environment is the key to achieving this business growth. Our Mantra is "how can we do our tasks better and faster next time round?" i.e. continuous improvement. As we have attained the switch from a startup (the integrative phase in classic company development) within 18 months, my specific focus is now moving more and more to the external market environment (aka the associative phase) e.g. promoting the company globally, handling regulatory issues / certifications, stakeholder management and analyzing strategic market trends from a business development perspective.

How do you diversify your tech solutions that appeal to your target audience?

Our vision and therefore our mission is to democratize enterprise grade cyber-security for a wider economy and so offer total cyber security protection using network based protection and when relevant supplemented with endpoint protection. Our solution provides threat protection in any type of network (mobile/fixed line), on any type of device (Smartphone, PCs, IoT), for any type of user group (consumer, SMEs, enterprise). Because we have utilized cloud technology from scratch, our solution can operate at any size – well over 100 million devices simultaneously. At a concrete level, we package different security modules into market relevant suites that serve the needs of the diverse user groups: ECS² Advanced, Premium and Expert Suites for Telco subscribers and business customers; Secusclær for SMEs/enterprise.

What were the past experiences, achievements or lessons that shaped your journey?

I think the most important experience that shaped me in my 20+ years in management is not being afraid of failing. It doesn't actually hurt in terms of physical pain. Instead it presents one with new and unexpected opportunities to grow. Fear of failure holds people and organizations back, make them passive and inward looking, thus they end up being out of touch with external threats and opportunities. These two factors should be continually addressed from a strategic business perspective. In terms of achievements, I think that every objective I have approached as a challenge and with the attitude of making a difference, which resulted in a step forward, is an achievement.

Kindly brief us about your take on the "Situational" style of leadership, which you've always advocated.

This is a management model by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard, developed in 1970s and was perhaps the first time that a consequential all-round view of people in systems was utilized in management theory. An effective leader must be able to switch between styles according to the prevailing context and objectives in which he/she and the team/organization operate at any particular time. Should there be a crisis, then Directing (hands on, task oriented) is the required style. High performance teams of highly skilled experts that have a strong inter-team relationship are best led by Delegating (a hands-off approach, relationship oriented). An experienced leader should be able to identify situations immediately and adjust the style accordingly, like changing your jacket to deal with the change in the weather.

Could you provide us with a few details on how your perception of leadership was derived?

Basically I think through trial and error and for the most part in the sub-conscious. Consciously I learnt to use self-reflection in questioning myself and my deeds (skills and personality). Outside help has been essential, beginning with formal training so as to engage the brain cells and capture impulses. I worked closely with a personal coach, which I believe to be a pre-requisite for the facilitation of the ability for self-reflection /-criticism.

What were some of the primal challenges and roadblocks that you faced during the initial phase of your journey?

I have worked in the ICT industry now since the mid-nineties and not having a formal engineering background has made that part of my career a challenge and that will continue to be the case. When one thinks of the high velocity changes in ICT, I don't think higher level management can stay on top of all that dynamic knowledge. It is important therefore to be fortunate in having a very tech savvy team, whose expertise covers all the steps in the supply chain. Without a team no one – either as a team member or a manager – can be effective and successful. The day you think the opposite, is the day you begin to fail. Change is of course intrinsic to this type of environment and over the past 30 years of digitalization, in various industries, I have often come up against instances of resistance to change. Again I perceive fear as being behind such resistance and the challenge therefore, is how to alleviate the fear and map out a coherent path through the change for those affected. On the whole the change is usually experienced as "well it wasn't as bad as we thought" once the process is complete. This gives me encouragement for leading in such situations.

With ascending in the number of pivotal and ground-breaking technological advancements the role of technologists is continually evolving. How according to you, has this role changed over the years?

I think early on, ICT was seen as just a tool for faster and efficient digital processes, which were in themselves perceived as a simple way "to get from A to B". The role was therefore more of the

tradesman fulfilling a brief and without the responsibility for the end result. I see this has changed over the past 20 years as ICT is now so much more complex and intertwined (networked) so that the engineer has mandatorily taken upon a kind of social responsibility for the results generated by his/her work. Whereas in construction there is the architect and the builder, I believe that in ICT these two roles are more and more combined in the remit of the technology engineers. The modern role requires problem analysis, problem solving skills (creativity) and the willingness to take on responsibility and I believe this will become ever more manifested going forward.

Describe some of the vital attributes that every tech individual should possess.

Creativity, thinking outside the box, analytical skills, solution orientation, social responsibility, courage to try and no fear of failure, an intrinsic curiosity etc.

How according to you can leadership be efficiently influential in a business ecosystem?

By providing two things: firstly, a robust organizational environment in which productivity can be maximized and continually optimized; and secondly, making space and resources for the organization's members to be creative and continually improve their skillsets.

Where do you see yourself in the near future and what are future goals?

I see myself in the Cyber Security domain at Secucloud working with this fantastic team on our fantastic product. I also lecture Leadership and Strategy at university level, which I also want to continue. In both cases my own personal goal is to continually improve what I do and how I do it. Whatever new objectives turn up, I want to find the best solutions and implement them.

What is your advice for the emerging tech enthusiasts?

You are the engineers of our 21st century, you are building our world. Be aware of your overall responsibility for our digital world! But don't be scared of being responsible. Be creative, be hungry, and solution orientated. If something or some process annoys you – and others – pick up the ball and run with it, i.e. change it/fix it! Improvements are always appreciated.

About Secucloud

The international security specialist Secucloud provides telecommunications and mobile telephony companies with a comprehensive, completely cloud-based, enterprise-class security system. With its international partnerships and group contracts with multiple well-known telcos, Secucloud already reaches just under 1 billion subscribers around the world. The modular Elastic Cloud Security System (ECS²) is installed directly into the carrier's network infrastructure, enabling it to protect its customers from all cyber-threats on the internet in a centralized way. Customers do not need to install any software on their devices, so no setup or maintenance is required. The Secucloud solution scales elastically and can protect more than 100 million users effectively and in real time. While customers are surfing the web, the various analyzers in ECS2 scan all data traffic for malicious and damaging content. To ensure extensive protection, Secucloud combines multiple powerful security technologies, including multi-AV engines, next generation firewall, packet analyzers (including deep packet inspection as well as IDS and IPS systems), global cloud intelligence, DNS layer analyzers, SSL scan decision, trust & reputation analyzers, APT sandbox analyzers and content analyzers.

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