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What should system administrators know about DevOps?

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5 Answers

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I think the most important thing to know about DevOps is that it's a culture, not a role or a toolset. Once you understand that both Development and Operations is more about people than tools, and more about process than roles, then it becomes more apparent how to integrate the DevOps philosophy in your way of doing things.

DevOps is a way of looking at the Software Development LifeCycle (SDLC) as a process in which everybody contributes, and role boundaries are blurred. A DevOps culture is one that emphasises the process by which an application grows iteratively from concept to a production-grade deployment, and includes an Project Management methodology (usually of the Agile variety), a Continuous Integration process, toolset and delivery mechanisms.

Core values of DevOps include repeatability, testability, an emphasis on metrics and monitoring, iterative development, sharing and openness.

To say that sysadmins run servers and devs deploy their apps on those servers is to set hard boundaries - I see this as a very traditional way of doing things. In opposition, a sysadmin adopting the DevOps culture will have a say in the way the application is developed and delivered, and can contribute with ideas and code to those processes.

For example, a sysadmin could write Chef recipes, propose to store a certain category of app data in a different data-store such as Redis, alter app configuration to make it portable across environments, or develop better app health-checks to harden the monitoring systems.

Note that a developer can do and should do those things as well - it doesn't have to be a matter of role. Even in enterprise organizations, while the actual work can be split according to roles, the decision-making process will always be shared and open.

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