EPISODE 1429

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] KP: Increasingly, technology groups need to be strategic about the cloud services they adopt. You have to ensure your vendor's pricing is both fair and measured exactly right for your unique access pattern. Definitively answering questions like these can take a significant amount of time and energy from your most valuable engineers. Taloflow is a company trying to make this decision making process easier for object storage and cloud cost management.

In this episode, I interview LV Jadavji about the key questions companies are asking, and how Taloflow helps people navigate them.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:36] KP: LV, welcome to Software Engineering Daily

[00:00:39] LVJ: Thank you, Kyle.

[00:00:40] KP: So, where does your first encounter with software start?

[00:00:45] LVJ: I would say in college, I was pretty active starting a bunch of companies in various apps, started with a nutrition app. And luckily, I got to do a co-op at Atlassian in the developer evangelism team. And so, that's generally where I got familiar with the world of software, in the world of dev tools, and just fell in love with the act of promoting tools and getting to interact with developers across the world.

[00:01:09] KP: So, building stuff or collaborating with developers to build things is a craft that has evolved quite a bit over the years. Can you talk about some of the approaches that you've seen depreciate in terms of design and how you get things accomplished?

[00:01:23] LVJ: Yeah, I actually think one that's quite recent, that I think is surging an importance. I mean, we saw this a lot when COVID really became a major topic, companies

started thinking about the decisions they were making at the margin a lot more and trickling down that kind of information down the stacks, let developers understood some of the impact of features and deployments on the margin.

So, I think that the world of software is coming closer and closer with business objectives, set at the executive level, I think that's super fascinating and interesting. We'll see more of that going forward. And the other thing, I think, that kind of relates to what we do today at Taloflow is just the amount of tools out there has had a tremendous complexity in terms of picking the right tool for your use case. There's more asymmetry, but then before and I think that makes building the right stock even more interesting, and frustrating at the same time.

[00:02:16] KP: So, in all of the projects you've worked on, where you've been building things like the nutrition app, there are technology choices to be made, and those have long-term consequences on the books. Do you have any history with challenges around financing a business and technology?

[00:02:33] LVJ: I've been lucky to have been able to raise quite a bit of VC dollars through the years. And I can tell you, there's always a point where a boardroom conversation ensues, and gross margins start to matter. And the last company I was building, we were 3D printing custom orthotics, and we were doing it by letting users scan their feet. And we did a ton of computer vision in the cloud to basically map their foot and create a custom orthotic from that mapping. Our margins weren't always good, but they improved over time. But really getting down to what was causing surges in costs, or spikiness and all that was really important, and help us get a pretty good hold on things.

I've also seen that at Taloflow, we've always experimented with a bunch of tools, always trying to find the right tool for the use case when we could and sometimes, we made mistakes, and those mistakes cost us dearly. It's always a pain to have to put something in, invest a bunch of time into it, sometimes months, and then rip it out. Because you find out it doesn't work or it doesn't actually do what it was supposed to do. And sometimes you can't really figure that out until you're in production. So, lots of frustrations over the years with various startups on that side of things. It's a problem that I want to solve.

[00:03:46] KP: So, prior to co-founding Taloflow, was there a singular seed moment that said, “This is the time making decision. We've got to build this.”

[00:03:54] LVJ: Actually, Taloflow started with a different mission. And our pivot, I think, is what makes our story a bit more interesting here. So, we started in cloud cost management. We were actually very much like a next gen, cloud cost management tool. The prior generation was like CloudHealth scalability, and a bunch of tools came on the scene like us, trying to kind of shift left a bit and help developers get better awareness of their impact on cloud spent. So, we started that and pivoted about a year ago to helping engineering leaders pick the right tools for their use case instead. And that coincided with the YC Winter 21 batch for us.

And the reason why we pivoted is we found the space got quite saturated, and so we didn't like the space of cloud cost management as much anymore because it was harder to stand out from the crowd. Even though we had a product that had nearly 100 companies using it, including some unicorns in enterprises. But along the way, what informed the pivot was two key insights. Number one, we found that AWS was not always the default option to build on especially for these digital native companies. We were seeing some fragmentation of the stack and to using best in class tools from different providers. And then also companies were really struggling to identify the right tool for the use case they had, they showed us on their Google Docs and Google Sheets, they were using with complex feature matrices and ongoing discussions for months, or sometimes quarters on end to try to research and test different tools. It was just rife with personal bias, and oftentimes, these teams made bad decisions. So that, just clicked for us. We were like, “Someone has to help dev teams make better selections.” And that was going to be us. And that's where we pivoted.

[00:05:38] KP: Well, if you don't mind dwelling right before the pivot for another moment, I've got a question for you about cloud cost management, which is something I've only struggled with myself in a very manual way. I haven't taken the time to look and see what tools are out there. But I'm curious, it always struck me as something like even if I need to get a tool and my companies got a budget for it, that I kind of cleaned my house once, and then hopefully good after that. Are there challenges or under attention? Or do I have the whole industry around?

[00:06:06] LVJ: That might have been true a while back. I think this goes to my point from earlier about decisions being made at the margin. We used to have a high degree of fixed costs, and then those slowly move to step costs, when we moved to the cloud. And now they're becoming more and more so marginal costs. So, I think serverless is a major reason for that in various other technologies, and you're paying much more incrementally than you did before.

So nowadays, the decisions you make day in and day out, virtually every deployment or pull requests can impact your cloud spend, and there are tools out there that have understood that need. And even now, we'll estimate costs within your pull requests, or the cost impact of your pull requests. So, the sophistication has gotten better, so that these tools are no longer just plug in and then take it out after you're done optimizing. Optimization is continuous and informing devs of their impact on spend is a continuous exercise as well.

[00:07:04] KP: So, there's definitely been a fragmentation of available offerings from startups all the way up to enterprise solutions, and a lot of technology companies are looking like stitching these together, whether that's done elegantly or like some sort of Frankenstein monster can kind of vary. In general, how many people are adopting this sort of, let's use any tool we want to approach versus, let's go through strict procedures and signups before we add any new tooling. What does a modern company on average look like?

[00:07:33] LVJ: Well, from the perspective of an engineering leader, you always want rigor around this process. And this process today has become increasingly complex, opaque and risky. It's complex, because there are just too many dimensions by which to assess tools way more than before. It's opaque, because you don't know what is marketing fluff and what our real capabilities. Vendors seem to have become less transparent than before. It's risky, because the decision you make today can really mess things up for you later with future integrations. And the strain on resources if you have to rip something out because it didn't work.

And I think that's why like, there's good and bad to this. But one of the best analogies for the state of cloud or dev tools today is the Cambrian explosion. So, if you don't mind, talk a bit about that. I think it's a very useful metaphor, because keep in mind, I'm not a paleontologist, but 500 million years ago, the Earth’s population of organisms went through a phase of rapid

evolution, diversification. This is when like, all the major phyla started coming on the scene. And the organisms tended to specialize or find a niche, by using different technologies or strategies.

So, we kind of see this today, as well, there's an explosion of tools on the scene. I think this has a lot to do with the amount of VC dollars chasing companies and eventually huge exits with these companies. But there's also been a lot of new categories coming on the scene or reorganization of legacy categories, like APM today, we could say has been reorganized into a traditional APM and observability tools. There are web tree tools now like blockchain or node API's. There are computer vision platforms, and so on. And they all have some kind of unique angle that allows them to specialize in a niche. And in many of these categories are not even winner takes all or even winner takes most, because there's so much niche specialization and use case driven decision making that needs to happen. And that's why I think it's a great analogy for the state of cloud.

[00:09:29] KP: So, let's say I'm a technical founder, I've got to make decisions about tools. What does Taloflow offer me? Do I sign up then? What's the overall experience?

[00:09:40] LVJ: So, if I were to break down the buying decision workflow into a few steps, we tackle only one of them. So typically, when you're looking to buy a tool, you start with discovery, this is where like something like Google or G2 will come and play. You're trying to understand the category at a very high level, maybe pull up a G2 page. Then there's selection which is where we come in, which is where we provide expertise. We help you identify the right criteria for your use case, help you make tradeoffs and triage options, and actually make a decision on the tool you want to go with. There's a bunch of other vendors that focus on the subsequent steps, which I would say would be negotiation, implementation and eventually renewal. But we play squirrely in the selection, or we could just call it matching an analysis phase of a buying decision.

And how we do that is pretty simple. We walk people through roughly a five to 10-minute questionnaire that extracts all the requirements for use case in a given category, like object storage, or cloud cost management, or APM. We then analyze that use case against all the vendor data points that we have, and all the history of cloud usage data we have from our various customers. And then we produce a report that basically replaces the weeks or months of

research you would have been doing in a Google Doc or Google Sheet with your team, and we kind of get rid of that tediousness, and the personal bias that might be prevalent in those exercises with our process. So, that's how it works.

[00:11:10] KP: So, there's a number of factors that go into technology selection, maybe the most transparent one I'm going to guess is cost. Can we start there? What do I get in terms of cost comparison?

[00:11:21] LVJ: Well, you can upload a bill to our service and have it mapped to another provider. For example, if you wanted to compare the cost of Amazon S3 to Azure Blob Storage, or Google Cloud Storage, or some of the upstarts like Wasabi Storage, or Backblaze v2, you could upload your AWS bill, and we'll map the costs over. So, you could see what the storage component of your bill would look like on any other providers. That's the type of analysis we can provide.

But pricing is prevalent in a lot of decisions, and so is compliance and integration. But it really depends on the category, the types of dimensions that people include in their decision making will vary quite a bit. In APM, for example, it's absolutely key that a dimension around, you know, instrumentation and monitoring being included. Whereas in cloud cost management, there's definitely a dimension around optimization that has to be included. So, pricing is a factor, but not always the driving factor.

[00:12:18] KP: What about a company that's engineering focused, and really wants to make technology choices from organizations where they're going to expect their internal developers are going to give good feedback? The last thing I want to do is plant integration, and then start getting bad news for my developers, that the documentation doesn't match and all this stuff. There's always this sort of wariness about a new integration like that. Can you help me get some insight into what challenges might lay ahead?

[00:12:47] LVJ: Absolutely. I mean, that's another dimension that you could include in our process, right? Which would be like ease of use or quality of the documentation. The whole point of decision making we're trying to engender is that it covers all these bases, not just pricing or compliance, but the things that really matter when picking a tool. So, you don't want to

rip it out months later. And you're actually satisfied with the decision you made. And that's why all these factors, including the one you mentioned, have to come into play. I do think we're in an interesting state of the world, especially with digital native companies, where many of these decisions are not top down, even though the VP of engineering or the CTO might be the nexus where the decision making actually does happen. A lot of the impetus for the decision does bubble up from engineers, or mid-level engineering managers as well, and they actually do have quite a bit more influence on the decision making on tooling than they did before.

[00:13:45] KP: Earlier, you mentioned that vendors have become less transparent overall. Could you expand on that?

[00:13:52] LVJ: Well, this is partly their fault, and partly not. I mean, let's just take a single ecosystem, for example, like the AWS ecosystem. AWS started with a few primitive cloud technologies around the storage, networking and computes areas and eventually that led to more diversification in their portfolio. And now they have 180 services and hundreds of thousands of skews. So, it's opaque because, you know, what do you pick? Like, how many ways can you launch a container on AWS? I think it's something like 15. And on top of that, players or ecosystems like AWS have built these marketplaces, or facilitated the expansion of past services built on top of their primitives, like Snowflake or Clumio, for example, which are basically built abstractions and specialized in a way that sort of helps them resell the primitive services that AWS offers, but adding a ton of value add on top, obviously. But there's just so much more complexity and opaqueness as to like, what do I pick for this specific task? There's so much to choose from and I think that complexity does serve the providers well in a sense that it leads to sprawl, which does lead to more spending.

[00:15:01] KP: We've talked about some of the dimensions that go into making those choices. Are there any hidden dimensions or things you find a lot of people are surprised by later?

[00:15:12] LVJ: Absolutely. I think one of the things people do not consider enough is the pain of integration, not today, but tomorrow. How does the decision you're going to make today going to impact the next one or two, or half dozen integrations you have to make in the next year? I think that requires a lot of foresight and planning and wisdom that some teams lack when they're trying to make a decision in the moment. It really sucks to implement a tool. It might work

for the present state of affairs, but then you have to add another tool for some other purpose. And all of a sudden, that kind of path to integration is botched because of the decision you made today. So, I think that's something that many teams struggle with, not in the moment, but later.

[00:15:54] KP: I also know a lot of companies have a fear of switching. And to some degree, I think that's justified. What is a healthy amount of such a fear that one should have?

[00:16:04] LVJ: Switching costs, I believe, will get lower over time. And just the nature of cloud and the development of all these past services that a lot of these services, you don't need to switch from another tool to use. There's a lot of digital natives out there right now that haven't used an APM yet, and are making a brand-new buying decision where it's not necessarily switching, I think that the stuff that is a bit more static and harder to switch are going to be the primitive services. So, storage, compute, networking, basic kind of stuff, simply because of the amount of investment code written at this point. But there are so many abstraction layers on top of that are easier to switch over time.

And as you know, some things like Kubernetes, and service meshes and so on are eventually going to make applications potentially more portable, because of the abstractions they provide. So, I believe the future is bright when it comes from the searchability point of view, and there's enough in the table and enough decisions that companies have to make that don't have high switching costs for a company like ours to be useful.

[00:17:11] KP: The cloud platforms keep expanding, as you'd mentioned, we're now at like 180, something AWS services, at least until the next reinvent, whether there will be a whole bunch more added. I guess, if I was a small player, one fear I have to have is the cloud going to eventually offer a free version of my service I'm building? And maybe instead of remaining a utility, the cloud will keep rising and rising, one strategy could be do less integrations, let's just wait for AWS to offer something native. What are your thoughts on that level of caution?

[00:17:43] LVJ: Well, for the latter, you'd have to wait, which is a problem and sometimes you need something right away. But I do think there is a limit to the economies of scale of these major cloud providers. So, there's going to be some kind of a floor as to how much they can

prices. And we've seen several categories, even in their primitive services where there are real threats to their dominance. Amazon S3 itself has some real alternatives out there, and I do think that if you just take the big picture for a second, AWS doesn't necessarily have to undercut what a lot of these upstarts are doing in any way because, in fact, what they are doing is helping resell AWS services, because AWS is the backbone for so many of these past providers built on top.

So, it's all a bunch of healthy competition where there's a lot of winners in this relationship and I think few losers in the grand scheme of things. So, I don't see this being a race to the bottom on pricing in any way. And I think that we're just going to see more specialization, and AWS will realize that there are some things that can't be best in class in. However, a lot of these differences in terms of how the major cloud platforms behave is cultural. So, AWS has a cultural tradition of having small silo teams that ship things that are tied to customers who commit to spend, and then do a lot but bespoke works, and they don't like to shut things off. So, they have a habit of shipping a lot of new services and features like at the future reinvents, we expect they'll ship out a lot more and not too many. I think, we also take the holistic approach, because it's against our culture and leadership principles.

But on the other hand, you could take Google and presumably their cloud platform and think, okay, well, maybe this team is going to be culturally inclined to add to the notorious Google graveyard over time. So, I think there's a bit of that at play, where you're going to see some of the major incumbents add many more services and others try to simplify their offering over time and let some of the upstarts get the share of the pie.

[00:19:44] KP: Well, any sufficiently large company, especially one that grew without meticulously tracking, the sorts of thing, probably has some low hanging fruit or some ways they could optimize, do cost savings, things like that. Do you have any rough high-level statistics on what the immediate gains are for people who start exploring with Taloflow?

[00:20:05] LVJ: Well, the benefit of using Taloflow is you're just going to avoid a lot of frustration. I mean, if you're an engineering leader today, and you're in the selection phase or your buying process, I mean, really what alternatives are there out there? There are Gartner and Forrester reports that some engineering leaders might reference but digital native

companies especially, I don't think that the opinion of these Gartner, Forrester will be that useful except to get a sense of enterprise adoption, the tools. So, when it comes to use case or making informed tradeoffs, there's a lot of information lacking out there. And we're basically automating the matrices and vandal research you used to have to do or assign several developers to. And so, we do have a lot of anecdotal evidence, definitely a few unicorns, last quarter, we help where they were trying to, let's say, make a decision between DataBricks, and Snowflake, and it's a multimillion-dollar decision for them. And they were all doing that work in a Google Doc or Google Sheet and over several quarters had poured in a bunch of time. It's extremely tedious work and prone to personal bias.

And so, the real benefit of using Taloflow is in a pretty streamlined way, you can go from a need to having something thoroughly researched, and objective and transparent to support a decision or help you make one entirely. So, the real ROI and using Taloflow is I guess, you're saving the cost of a bad decision, and you're saving the developer hours involved in getting to a decision.

[00:21:36] KP: Well, maybe we could walk through a use case. Let's say I've invented some app, and it's growing faster than I expected and I've overlooked that I need some full text search in it. So, Elastic Search is at the tip of my tongue is one of my options that I know. There's some new schism with AWS, and there's probably a long tail of other options, maybe something even alternative to Elastic Search. How do I start making faster decisions?

[00:22:03] LVJ: So, Elastic's offerings themselves. I mean, they're not in the category that we cover today. So, if you don't mind, I'll just talk about a category we support might be more helpful as an example. I'll take something like object storage. There might be a case where you've had an exponential growth in the volume of data, whether it's text, images, audio, and video, and you're at the breaking point where you need maybe something more cost efficient. But maybe the nature of your data is unique, where some providers might work well for you, and some won't.

So, a really interesting use case that works well for a particular vendor is a type of data that you need hot access to, but you don't plan to access it all the time. So that vendor would be Wasabi. They offer hot storage at basically, IA rates, which is really cheap, in comparison to Amazon S3 standard storage tiers. But they do have a Fair Use policy where you cannot read more data

than you write. So, if you read more data than you write, don't use Wasabi. But there are use cases that Wasabi is good for and one use case I would mention would be, let's say body cam footage for police departments where there's the occasion where these things need to be reviewed, and they need to be reviewed within a very short timeframe, and you don't want to pay through the nose to get something out of glacier on AWS. You don't want to wait days for the file to be retrieved. So, you can have hot access to that file on Wasabi as long, again, as you're not reading more than writing. So, that's a very good use case for Wasabi that could work for a situation where you're at a breaking point, because the amount of data you're storing is just growing exponentially. I hope that illustrates the point.

[00:23:43] KP: Definitely, object storage can get pretty complicated. I know there are lots of switches, probably some I'm not even aware of that can help optimize for specific conditions and use cases. How informed does one of your users need to be where they start exploring on a topic like object storage?

[00:24:00] LVJ: So, the level of information you need to be equipped with is fairly low, because the flow or questionnaire that we provide to each user itself will cover 90% of the bases. And then we have experts ready to help you for the final 10%, if there's anything else you need to cover. The questions themselves, whether we're asking for the volume of reads versus writes, or the amount of data you're storing, or let's say the amount of data transfer in versus out of provider, even though those are fairly technical questions that require some level of information, we do a good job of explaining to our users how they should answer these questions and where they can find that information. And if they can't, giving them some sense of here's what someone typical of your use case would answer.

So, you can get to a decision, even if you don't really have all the answers today. And you can always refine that and run different scenarios later, and we see this kind of strategy work across categories. There are several we have in beta, like customer data platforms, where a provider, like Segment is definitely prevalent on the scene, and has been bundling a lot more products into its platform. But there are a bunch of options like RudderStack that came along and are disrupting Segment's connections product with a warehouse first approach, and it's sometimes hard for users to understand well, will RudderStack really work for me? Segment seems to be okay, except it's pretty expensive.

But we do get the use case information out there. And something as simple as asking a customer to bucket themselves into a use case, are you D to C? And have data ownership concerns. Well, if yes, then we will probably apply more weight to the RudderStack side of things than the Segment side of things, because RudderStack will do well, when you have a lot of track users. So, even allowing users to bucket themselves into use case allows us to provide a recommendation that has some degree of sophistication to it.

[00:26:02] KP: There's certainly no shortage of vendors and different services out there for me to research and look through. Can you talk about the scope of what Taloflow will help me investigate?

[00:26:14] LVJ: Definitely. So, the scope today is fairly narrow, because we have a very high threshold to launching a new category. The reason why is that we make all our data points transparent to the user. So, they can go ahead and see like, what was all the logic behind the rules that produce this recommendation. And then on top of that, we work with a bunch of experts who we make sure have no conflicts of interest. We interview dozens of vendors, depending on the category. We talk to real users. There's a lot of research involved to produce the type of recommendations we want to produce. And so initially, we were only live in object storage, and that has been the case of the last year.

Actually, today is the first time we're launching a new category, and that's going to be cloud cost management. So, starting tomorrow, you could come to talolow.ai and get help picking the right cloud cost management vendor for our use case. And by the end of this month, we'll be helping you with APM and observability tool decisions. So, we've kind of cracked the code in terms of adding new products at a faster clip. But it definitely is a science, and we take it very seriously. We're not trying to add as many categories as we can, willy-nilly. The recommendations and the quality of the recommendations we provide has to be very high.

[00:27:33] KP: So, how does your business model work? Who are your actual customers?

[00:27:37] LVJ: So, we have a two-prong business model. On the one part, some vendors basically have it as part of their sales process. They think it's a good idea to have some third-

party validation. So, for example, some vendors in the storage space like storage.io, on their pricing page, they'll link to Taloflow and you can basically trigger an invite to Taloflow to get a cost analysis comparing AWS, Azure and GCP to storage, and it produces some kind of an ROI for the user. This way, storage's prospects get some third-party validation as to, "Hey, what would be the cost benefit of switching from let's say, AWS to storage for storage?"

So that's one example. We charge vendors a collection of usage fees, depending on the amount of reports that are generated on behalf of their prospects or customers. And on the other hand, for other, let's say, there's a prospect or a customer that we refer directly to a vendor that they didn't have prior relationship with, we do get compensated on the referral for that. But we have structured our compensation scheme in such a way as to align our interests with the buyer. So, we're only getting compensated on a recurring basis in the long run. We lose a bunch of money. Let's say, if you pick a tool, we recommend it and rip it out a year or two later. If the decisions we help you make are sticky, we benefit and get compensated better. So, it's a slightly customized depending on the vendor, but it's structured in such a way as to align our interests with the buyer. We do think that eventually we'll launch some SaaS tools that buyers can get a bit more flexibility around how they collaborate with their teammates on these decisions, and so on where we might monetize the buyer side a bit more than we do today.

[00:29:25] KP: So, if I'm a technical decision maker, I can just come in and do one of the questionnaires, and there's no cost to me? I get the analysis, just by being a member?

[00:29:34] LVJ: Absolutely. You don't even have to sign up until you've successfully answered all the questions and satisfied with the report preview and want to get the full report. So, you'll get an inkling of what your decision should be without even leaving your email. So, there's a bit of a benefit to that. We want to help developers and obviously we also want to make some money too. So, that's where the full report comes in and allows us to build a relationship with the developer who's looking to make a decision.

But the beauty about our report is it's fully transparent what we do and what went into our recommendation. So, the developer can go and look for themselves, what was the math behind the recommendation. And we know we break it down in various charts. So, it is shown very transparently and we're pretty big about this. We have a separate editorial process when it

comes to recommendations and how we design our rules. So, we're as free from bias as we can be, and I think it's important to make that point very clear.

[00:30:32] KP: Definitely. Whether you've made, I don't know if it was a formal comparison, or if you just mentioned Gartner and Forrester, when I think of those, I think, in a broader category, maybe something like consumer reports. Is the goal of Taloflow to be a recognized brand authority in that regard? Or do you have a different sort of a mission in those companies?

[00:30:50] LVJ: I mean, our mission is really to help depth teams make the right decisions for their stack, and sometimes that means we're going to borrow some parts of the Gartner playbook, which I think comes into play when we're trying to research categories, and, you know, have a team of analysts that deeply understand the categories. Some parts come from the G2 playbook, where they've crowd sourced a bunch of vendor information directly from users, I think, is genius. And some of that will come into play for us.

But one of the analogies I think is most powerful, does exist in the consumer space, which is Credit Karma, or similar companies where they do provide some level of insights to consumers that helps them achieve a goal, like improve their credit score. And simultaneously, some of the things that they recommend could include you making decision around, which credit card would be the best for you, or selling you other products and alongside that. So, I think the degree of sophistication to what we do will have to be a lot higher, because developers are by nature skeptical, and needed a lot of data to make a decision. And so, by no means don't want to belittle what we're doing by comparing it to a consumer-oriented application. This is very, like, what we're doing is quite sophisticated, and it has a lot of data in it. But the model is similar. We take people in who have an objective, provide some insights about their use case and get them a recommendation, and whether they take that recommendation run with it is up to them. But our interest is in providing you the best recommendation we can.

[00:32:20] KP: When you think maybe five years out in the growth of the company, where to do you want Taloflow to be?

[00:32:29] LVJ: We think Taloflow is in the perfect position to be the intermediary between cloud vendors and buyers, where there isn't really a good one today. And I think what developers

really want is transparency, faster decisions. And I think vendors will benefit from that as well. And we can play that role. Because we're basically bring a lot of rigor to the process that used to be all about testing tools yourselves, talking to some friends, reading some docs and some blog posts about tools. And like I said, compiling matrices, in a Google Doc. And I think that was both for the buyer and vendor, an arduous, tedious drawn out process that I think, you know, shouldn't exist, and that's where Taloflow is going to come in, where we're going to be plugged into every decision of a technical for a piece of the technical stack.

[00:33:21] KP: So, when it comes to the not built here attitude, it's sort of where engineers say, “We don't want to use some vendors tool. We're smarter than them, we're going to build our own version here in house and connect it into our system and the most customized, perfect way”, which maybe there's occasion for that, but I think it's a strategy we're taking a second look at as well. I'm just curious if you see that similar attitude manifest in the research side that even though you've done this custom questionnaire process that leads me to this personalized sort of high-quality matrices that will help with my decision that an engineering lead might feel there's a need to do some follow up, or is that really only when it comes to writing code?

[00:34:01] LVJ: Interesting, okay. So, by the way that the not built here, I think I totally get now and our tool actually does help you make build versus buy decisions as well. And we will even recommend open source options alongside paid options, and there's like an APM there's totally a case where we recommend Prometheus instead of Datadog, right? But when it comes to not researched here, I think, in most cases, we're facilitating a large part of the process that these engineering leaders would engage it anyways. So, even if we get them 90% there, and then they just need to hold one call with a solutions architect at whatever vendor to feel confident of their decision, like we've saved them a bunch of time. And then I understand that last call/last mile verification maybe needed in a lot of cases but to be successful, we don't need to replace that either.

However, for these engineers, they should know that our experts which are in house are available to answer you know any other point in questions around in any of these categories, and we've spoken to virtually all these vendors and all their users – not all their users, but obviously, many of the top users they've had, and some have been happy and satisfied, and some will have it and kind of know the lay of the land. And I even think that the not research

here attitude folks could use us for that last leg, and we're a resource available to them. The reports aren't meant to replace everything, they're meant to replace, probably 90% to 95% of the work you'd be doing, anyways.

[00:35:31] KP: When we think about, I think I've used the phrase engineering decision maker or technical decision maker along the lines here, that can be a person with a variety of different job titles and backgrounds and things like that. To wind up, could you talk a little bit about the common personas for users of Taloflow?

[00:35:48] LVJ: So, depending on the size of company, I mean, we love focusing on digital native companies and enterprises do use our tool from time to time, but digital natives is really our sweet spot. And when I say digital natives, I mean, like folks who were born in the cloud, per se. They've recently raised a series B, or C around. Their engineering org tends to have a lot of responsibility, and also autonomy in making decisions. Let's say they're not, you know, being hampered by FPNA day in and day out, like they have a lot of autonomy in the decisions they make. So, I think that those types of buyers the CTO, or VP of Engineering is going to be at the nexus of a lot of these decisions, and is typically going to be the one engendering the rigorous process around picking the tool.

Oftentimes, like I said, these decisions do bubble up, but they tend to kind of push it back down and say, “Okay, well show me the research, show me the alternatives.” And that's where individual contributors might actually be contributing to the research and discovering of alternatives so that there could be more rigor around the process. It is very much a collaborative, but not always democratic effort that involves a lot of functions and teams. But our ideal persona at a digital native is the CT or VP event. And you know, the ideal stage of digital native for us as a series B or C company, typically, because the velocity of decisions for these teams are so high, that not only can we win them over with it, say, a decision in a single category, but they might be making five or six decisions, that same quarter where they could use our help. And we like that kind of interaction and stickiness with our product, because otherwise, we're kind of a onetime thing.

[00:37:27] KP: Well, how did some of those users get started and checked out the recommendations you have for them?

[00:37:32] LVJ: Well, first, if you're looking for something in cloud cost management or object storage, this is the time to go to our website and to get a recommendation. If you're looking for something in APM and observability, you'll have to wait till the end of February or early March. But we're planning to add roughly a new category every quarter everything from blockchain API's to SMS and voice API's to FinTech API's, to compare in general compute this year. So, we have a lot of work ahead of us. And I think there's a lot of overlap with what digital natives are looking to make buying decisions for right now.

[00:38:08] KP: And remind listeners of the URL.

[00:38:11] LVJ: Of course, that's taloflow.ai.

[00:38:14] KP: Well, LV, thanks so much for coming to Software Engineering Daily.

[00:38:15] LVJ: Thank you so much, Kyle.

[END]