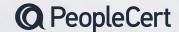




> HOW DEVOPS
LEADERSHIP
AND SRE HELP
ORGANIZATIONS
BALANCE SPEED
AND STABILITY

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Craig Pearson has been a DevOps instructor for over ten years and a Site Reliability Engineering (SRE) instructor for just over five years. He worked at the intersection of software development and operations since before DevOps was a formally recognised thing. In 2007, he helped an organisation bridge the gap between developers and operational staff who had long worked in silos.

That experience – improving communication, breaking down barriers, and seeing the value of collaboration – led him to focus on training, development, and better software delivery practices.

Here, he examines the two disciplines, discussing the benefits they provide to organizations and the advantages for practitioners who pursue certification in both DevOps and SRE.

BALANCING SPEED AND STABILITY

DevOps extends agile software development paradigms by focusing on speed of delivery, prioritising the testing and release of new features to production. These features may be small updates to applications like Zoom or whole new mobile banking services. While this emphasis on speed is valuable, it can introduce risk. Rapidly releasing updates can create instability or errors, despite the widespread testing that takes place, potentially undermining user trust.

This is where SRE comes in. Originally developed by Google, SRE evolved as an approach to DevOps, applying software engineering principles across the DevOps domain to give renewed focus on reliability. SRE plays a critical role in ensuring that customers can trust the digital products and services they use. It also aligns the organisation around the goal of reliability.

When performance or reliability issues arise, SRE provides an opportunity to pause and address these concerns. This may involve the decision to stop all releases until the existing problems are resolved. Once systems are stable again and everything is running smoothly with customers happily engaging with the platform, the pace of feature delivery can be increased.

The balance between feature velocity and reliability is a crucial element of SRE.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

With the adoption of SRE and DevOps leadership, traditionally technical goals have evolved into strategic objectives that are now recognised by the executive team and leadership board.

In SRE, service level objectives (SLOs) are established to set clear expectations, such as ensuring that services are reliable, perform well under pressure, and respond quickly. As organisations increasingly embrace digital solutions, the importance of reliability targets becomes even more strategic. A notable example is the recent cyber-attack on Marks and Spencer (M&S) – the major UK retailer – where its reliance on digital platforms meant that a breach had a significant business impact.

The aim of effective DevOps leadership and SRE practices is to prevent such occurrences, identify problems before they affect operations, and address issues not only at the technical level but also from a strategic perspective. It is essential for executives and leadership teams to understand the balance between updating platforms and ensuring their reliability and, as highlighted by the M&S case, their security.

Although this example may be exceptional, it underscores the need to elevate discussions about reliability and security to a strategic level. As technology becomes increasingly central to business strategy, conversations regarding reliability, risk, and delivery should move from the IT department to the boardroom.

REAL-WORLD IMPACT: LESSONS FROM INDUSTRY

A gaming organisation faced a surge of customer complaints. Although it was quickly shipping new features, the stability of the platform suffered. To address this, the company adopted SRE practices and embraced DevOps leadership, introducing a concept called a"change chill". This approach involved slowing down feature delivery when reliability issues arose and then speeding up again once service performance improved.

In some cases, a complete freeze on changes may be necessary, especially when the platform is struggling or when serious issues emerge. During these situations, the organisation prioritises stabilising the platform to ensure users are satisfied.

As a result of these changes, the company experienced fewer disruptions, higher user satisfaction, and a more sustainable delivery model.

Another example involved a government department that faced challenges with rushed releases and poor-quality, untested solutions. As a result, support teams became overwhelmed, often working extra hours and responding to problems at inconvenient times, which created a stressful environment. In SRE terms, this situation is referred to as "toil", akin to a farmer toiling in the fields.

To address this issue, the department shifted responsibility for quality back to the development teams. By doing so, the development teams took ownership of the quality, availability, and reliability of their services. They stopped allowing shortcuts, acknowledging the negative consequences of short-term decisions.

This approach resulted in significant cost savings for the department, allowing them to concentrate on scaling and enhancing their services more efficiently. It also demonstrated that embracing DevOps and SRE can provide both human and financial benefits. By reducing toil and alleviating the pressure on teams responsible for supporting unreliable services, the department ultimately created a better workplace for everyone involved.

WHY CERTIFICATION MATTERS

Understanding DevOps and SRE is essential, and effective leadership brings them to life. The DevOps Leader certification from DEVOPS INSTITUTE by PeopleCert is designed to empower individuals at a strategic level to advocate for the principles of continuous delivery and rapid flow associated with DevOps. However, it's equally important to maintain a focus on reliability. Leaders don't need to know every detail of coding or infrastructure as code, but they should recognise the importance of these areas within their organisation.

Many organisations are adopting DevOps principles but aren't progressing as quickly as they could, often releasing updates only weekly or monthly. It is vital for leadership to address the challenges causing this slowdown, such as governance issues, bureaucracy, and cultural barriers.

DEVOPS INSTITUTE DevOps Leader certification helps leaders overcome these governance obstacles. It empowers them to encourage the organisation to focus on key metrics like release frequency, cycle time, and availability. By disseminating these metrics throughout the organisation, significant improvements can be achieved.

DEVOPS INSTITUTE certifications such as SRE Foundation and SRE Practitioner, as well as DevOps Leader, keep practitioners updated on the latest trends in SRE and DevOps. DEVOPS INSTITUTE's materials are regularly refreshed to reflect current market developments. Furthermore, it helps professionals clearly understand the benefits associated with adopting DevOps and SRE practices, ensuring they can be applied effectively in the appropriate situation.

Certification helps you speak the same language as your teams and your boardroom.



BOLD LEADERSHIP IN PRACTICE

Effective DevOps leaders should foster environments that encourage experimentation while prioritising reliability. In SRE, for instance, there is no need to wait for issues to arise; courageous leaders can intentionally test system failures to observe the outcomes. This method contributes to building more resilient services.

This attitude aligns with the development of the DevOps movement itself, which was not a pre-planned initiative. Rather, it emerged organically as individuals from different backgrounds – developers, operations specialists, testers and security experts – came together out of curiosity and a desire to collaborate on common problems.

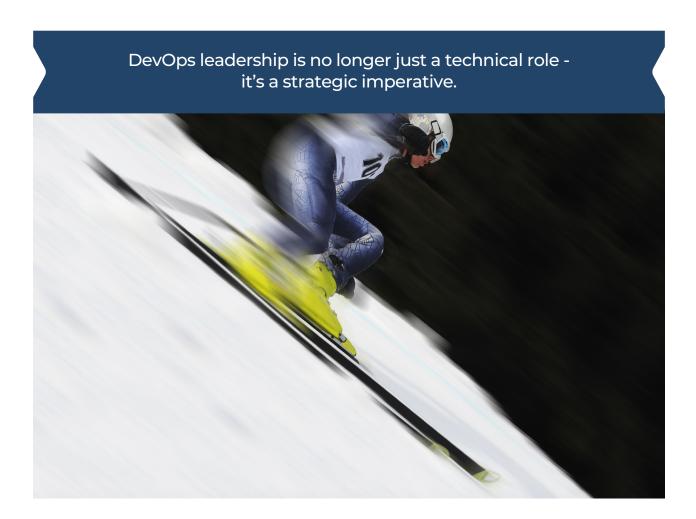
We've seen exceptional leaders who boldly push the boundaries of digital innovation by leveraging key DevOps practices, such as continuous deployment and continuous experimentation. By striving to foster better collaboration among teams, these leaders work to dismantle organisational silos that often lead to delays and miscommunication as different teams and departments hand off tasks to each other.

EMBODYING THE SPIRIT OF DEVOPS

Ultimately, achieving a healthy balance in the DevOps and SRE field requires a combination of formal certification and active participation in the DevOps community. Participating in DEVOPS INSTITUTE DevOps leadership courses allows professionals to embrace the spirit of the DevOps movement, which emphasises community, knowledge sharing and active participation in events. For example, I founded a local meetup group that provides a platform for DevOps practitioners to engage in meaningful discussions.

In today's digital-first world, DevOps leadership and SRE certifications are no longer optional; they're essential. It's crucial to continue developing skills and staying aligned with ongoing advancements in the field. The DEVOPS INSTITUTE DevOps Leader certification is consistently evolving and refining to meet current industry needs, empowering leaders to align strategy and execution while delivering value more quickly and reliably.

Want to build digital reliability in your organization? Explore the DEVOPS INSTITUTE certification portfolio.



Become the next success story!

Connect with us to share your journey and challenges. Together, we can craft a solution that propels your organization forward. Your success could inspire our next success case story.

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