

Ajay Apte

Distinguished Engineer, IBM Cloud

A few years ago when Ajay Apte's managers and mentors suggested a move away from a team where he'd had huge success into a new part of the business that was well outside his area of expertise, Ajay had plenty of reservations. But he took the job—and the risk. Today, he looks back at that move as a key decision leading to his becoming an IBM Fellow.

"The stage was set over the last few years," he says. "I had hesitations about doing something different from what I'd done and what I was doing well. It took some pushing from my mentors to allow me to take on my current role, but now that I have taken it on, it has been eye-opening how many opportunities can come your way when you decide to take the plunge and do something outside your comfort zone."

After 20 years of working across a broad portfolio of IBM products including middleware and containers, Ajay had earned 30 IBM patents and a reputation as an IBMer who combined technical expertise with business impact. Taking on a new role designing applications for hybrid cloud forced Ajay to use everything he'd learned about infrastructure and the software that runs on top of it—and to bring it to a critical part of the business that will define IBM's next era. "It allowed me to think out of the box, to challenge myself in a way I had not done before. It was one of the reasons my mentors and executives wanted me to take the role."

"I'm definitely excited" about IBM's future, Ajay says. "It's a critical time to morph our business into a cloud-first model, and it's very important that both tech and business leaders work together to make this transformation successful."

Recognizing "The Grand Scheme"

For aspiring IBM Fellows, Ajay urges them to build their networks and know how the work they're doing fits into IBM's mission. "IBM does not sell products, we sell end-to-end solutions," Ajay says. "It's important to know where your work fits, and how your work contributes—where you fit in the grand scheme."

Those connections you make today, Ajay says, will serve you well down the road when an offer may come your way that seems at first glance an odd shift for your skillset—but a move that may lead you to become an IBM Fellow. "Do new things, broaden your scope of influence inside IBM," he advises. "It's a great avenue for aspiring technical leaders who want to do something new and different."

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