Shalini Kapoor

Kapoor discusses transformation through technology

Distinguished Engineer, Director—Watson IoT India, IBM Cognitive Applications

Throughout an IBM career that spans more than 23 years, Shalini Kapoor has personified the expression “doing well by doing good.” As a leading responsible steward of technology, Shalini is committed to the principle that technology and business must deliver benefits to society as a whole.

“I am passionate about transformations that shape people’s lives,” Shalini says. “Inside IBM, this could take the form of leading the infusion of AI into our offerings while adopting Watson technologies, or motivating more people to skill or re-skill themselves in AI. Externally, it has meant leading some of the Good Tech projects that impact us as a society.

What energizes me are IBM’s Good Tech projects that engage millions of school children so they can learn 21st-century skills and be ready to transform their own lives.”

Shalini is leading the AI infusion effort across IBM’s AI Applications business unit. Her objective is to drive a realignment of skills and culture to enable rapid uptake of AI across all of IBM’s offerings. “Our AI infusion initiative will help cement IBM’s market leadership in AI,’’ she says, “and will position us to help partners and customers on their collective journeys to the future.”

Shalini’s journey at IBM has included leadership roles in Technical Sales, Research, and Development. Her many accomplishments include creating the Watson Internet of Things (IoT) and AI Lab in India Software Labs, and seeding the Global Systems Integrators Technical Mission. Shalini also helped build out IBM’s IoT ecosystem by enlisting partners and working with start-ups across numerous industries. She also pioneered the concept of IoT Recipes, which provides partners with step-by-step guidance for integrating their offerings with IBM Watson IoT solutions on the IBM Cloud.

“I started working on IoT incubations by studying client requirements even before the business unit was formed,” Shalini says. “Those were exciting times, as the only governing principles were the clients’ goals and objectives. We eventually merged these incubations into several offerings that we launched in Watson IoT. We did all we could to capture the market while behaving like

a start-up, including technological explorations, partner comparisons, ecosystem on-boarding, reshaping legacy offerings, and launching first-of-their-kind solutions."

Skills-Based Growth

Shalini's entrepreneurial drive is only matched by her deep technical expertise. She holds 12 patents and was one of the first two female IBM Distinguished Engineers in India. Shalini received the Technical Role Model award from the global management consulting firm Zinnov in 2012. And in 2015, she was awarded the Woman in Technology award from eMERG India. Shalini also is a nominee for the Economic Times Prime Award for Technology Leader of the year 2020—a top award in India.

"Transformation today is both more comprehensive and more nuanced," Shalini says. "It's about both skills and a growth mindset. AI skills will be the most important to have in the future," she says, "and I love seeding those thoughts in people's minds and helping them grow."

Within IBM, Shalini advocates for the cross-functional skills development that will democratize future AI leadership. "Python programmers, IoT experts, and mobile applications developers need to acclimate themselves to the mindsets of AI and machine learning," she says. "There is a great talent at IBM, and I have seen how cross-unit collaboration and stretch assignments can morph into new client offerings that extend our lead in AI."

Young India student leaders from government schools exhibited STEM experiments at the "Escape Velocity" fair organized by Shalini (center, in red)

Outside of IBM, Shalini is dedicated to helping the next generation of AI leaders through her support for STEM education in schoolchildren. In 2014, she founded an NGO, Ankurit Foundation, to promote innovation and curiosity among primary and secondary school students and conducted Escape Velocity, a first-of-its-kind, corporate-funded STEM fair for more than 3,000 school children. Shalini is also working with the Indian government to introduce AI into the core curriculum for millions of students—many of whom are disadvantaged.

"Transformation begins within," Shalini says, "but it is not limited to you. To affect positive change, you have to scale and reach across traditional borders to engage people so you can help shape their lives for the better."

→ ***Shalini Kapoor on Linkedin***

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