Simon Elisha (00:00):

Hello everyone. Welcome back to the AWS podcast, Simon Elisha here with you. Great to have you back. And today we're talking about something really interesting. We're going to dive deep into the transformative world of cloud migration. Now, this is a journey that can be both critical and complex for organizations who are looking to harness the power of the cloud. How do I get there? What do I do? Our main focus today is going to be on something called the migration readiness assessment or MRA for short. Now, this is not just a box to tick off before you start doing stuff. It's actually the foundation of the whole of the migration acceleration program or map, which is designed to get everyone in your organization on board and ready for the big move.

(00:40):

Through interactive workshops and through very deep analysis, the MRA helps companies figure out if they're ready to move to the cloud from a technical business and organizational standpoint. And it's like doing a big checkup before you embark on a long journey, making sure you've got all the things you need and that you're in the right shape for the journey and the trip. I've got the perfect person to help us understand this process better. This gentleman is a cloud migration expert who's helped many companies make the switch to AWS. Please welcome to the podcast Mohamad Charaf, a migration specialist and senior solution architect. Hey, Mohamed, how are you doing?

Mohamad Charaf (01:12):

Hey Simon, thank you so much for having me here.

Simon Elisha (01:15):

Good to have you here. We're going to talk about something that I know a lot of folks listening have either considered going through, are going through or have gone through to different levels of success or joy. And really I think what we're here to do is dive deep, so let's start straight away with the migration readiness assessment or the MRA. What is the point? What is it there to do?

Mohamad Charaf (01:36):

The migration readiness assessment or MRA as we call it, it's really an assessment that we run or we help our customers go through in order to help them pave the way towards their cloud migrations. We wanted to make sure that when our customers are moving into AWS, they have very clear roadmap. And doing this means that they need to understand the consensus between all the different parties like the IT operations that they are running today and the dependency between the business and technical teams and make sure that they understand or realize the gaps, any gaps that they have towards this journey. And during this assessment, we go over the different aspects and try to identify these gaps and make sure that they have a plan to attack these ones.

Simon Elisha (02:32):

It's interesting, often when you talk to technologists or you talk to business stakeholders, the hardest part of any technology program is arguably the people, and that's because we all see the world slightly differently. How does the MRA help to driving that cross-functional alignment and even the excitement about we want to do this thing?

Mohamad Charaf (02:53):

Migration Readiness Assessment

When you look at any organization, you will always notice that they are running in different groups, hierarchies, some technical teams, business teams. And although their goal might be the same, but the way they do business or the way they run their operations are different, which means that they will have different viewpoints. And there are many times when we go through these assessments and find out that different groups are having different understandings of where they are at today. For example, you might be speaking with a subject matter expert in the organization and they think they are at a very good position when it comes to security. Then you speak to a security expert in the same organization and then realize that they have some gaps, so always differences, but they will probably are not communicating for many reasons.

Simon Elisha (03:50):

It's like just talk to each other.

Mohamad Charaf (03:52):

Exactly. They don't talk to each other because they are in different groups, sometimes different silos if I would call them. And when we run the migration readiness assessment, they sit together in the same room, they go through the same questions, they have to agree as I'm going to tell you in a bit. And when they do agree, now both will realize that there is different viewpoints. Now they need to reach to a consensus or an agreement on the topic, so that's how it really runs.

Simon Elisha (04:19):

And that's the thing is consensus doesn't necessarily mean wild agreement, but it can help at least align and overcome those challenges to some degree. But maybe let's deconstruct that experience. We've talked about the MRA as a concept, but there's this thing called an MRA workshop, and that's where the rubber hits the road. Paint a picture for us of what that activity is and what it feels like for folks.

Mohamad Charaf (04:43):

The workshop, it's a one day or sometimes two half days' workshop, and we run these workshops in person, so we go to our customers or they come to us in one of our offices. And then we go through a set of questions and these questions are there to start conversations. The questions are covering several aspects, the aspects of the cloud adoption framework. When we go over these questions, each one of these questions, we start asking our attendees to select a rating of their organization on this question. And then we start seeing the answer of this question like a poll style. And then we see if they all agree on a specific rating, it means that they all realize where this specific point is. If they're not, then we start or we begin having more questions. Do you see a difference? What are the different points of view and so on?

Simon Elisha (05:44):

Do you find that often people are surprised by the fact that there are, they may have thought they're all in agreement, but they're actually not? Are you seeing that a dichotomy happened a lot?

Mohamad Charaf (05:53):

In some cases, and it depends on the organization. The larger organizations or organizations that are coming out of different mergers, so they are running in silos. Now they were really like five different companies in one and now they need to agree on their cloud strategy. So they sit together and that's where sometimes they are surprised. But maybe more coherent types of organizations would all agree

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in some way, shape or form on where they need to go, because usually their cloud strategy is part of their whole business strategy as well. It really depends on the organizations, but we have seen different ones.

Simon Elisha (06:36):

And what about duration and preparation? What do people gear up for?

Mohamad Charaf (06:41):

It all starts one month or three weeks before the actual workshop day. It all starts where either our team proposes that this is a good exercise or the customer or our customers, they know about it and then they say, yes, okay, let's do it. We start one month before. We start by an introductory call where we speak with the executive sponsor or the champion within the organization. That's the person who is leading the cloud migration or leading the initiative.

Simon Elisha (07:16):

The initiative or strategy.

Mohamad Charaf (07:18):

Exactly. And we let them know what it is and we go over all the details of the steps. And then we also make sure that we define the types of roles of people that are to be like to join, because the MRA requires that we have different people from different organization units or different roles. We want to make sure that there is this time, the three weeks or four weeks in order to make sure that everyone gets to know that and are ready to join when the time comes. Then we go over, of course, the timeline and the dates and whatnot, and we send a pre-assessment questionnaire. A very small subset of the questions, we send it to everyone. And the reason for that is twofold. First to make sure that our attendees understand or see the type of questions, so we don't want surprises. We want them to see what to expect.

Simon Elisha (08:21):

To get in the mode of what they should be thinking about.

Mohamad Charaf (08:24):

Yes, very true. And also for us to get an initial understanding of their cloud initiative or their cloud strategy, so when we go there, at least we are prepared to dive deeper or ask questions where it belongs that are relevant to their business rather than going totally on a clean slate. We send these questions and then we get an answer. In most cases, we get the answer, we analyze these, and then we go on the day of. The actual workshop takes four to six hours, and it includes, as I mentioned, the set of questions. It also includes several activities that we run through. We talk about for the people or the platform, we take this and we dive deep into it what it is and how it's different in the cloud when you compare it to running on-premise on a data center. We start having these discussions to make sure that we bring in discussion points so that when we go on the questions, we have everyone primed and ready to contribute.

Simon Elisha (09:31):

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I think that as with most things, preparing is very important because you want folks to be in the room on the same page, ready to discuss and find their consensus. You don't want them having to do the basics while everyone else is waiting.

Mohamad Charaf (09:44):

Yes, yes, that's very true. Actually, we consider successful MRA to be the one that has multiple people who were participating. If we put on an MRA with several people, with only a single person answering all the questions, that's not-

Simon Elisha (10:02):

That's a red flag.

Mohamad Charaf (10:03):

... the exercise. That's not what we want to do. Otherwise, we would have sent that a list of questions to be filled up, so that's not the essence of it. We really want to make sure that we have this discussion. I wanted to raise an important point here at this moment. When we run the MRA and when we run these questions, we are not in any capacity trying to audit this organization. We are not trying to judge them. We go there as a facilitator, totally unbiased, and we deliberately never record these sessions because we want these sessions to be a safe environment for everyone to share their points of view, whether they are positive or negative. Because at the end of the day, we want the organization to identify these gaps so they can get them to get the action items or get the roadmap to cover these and succeed, so that's an important point. And by the way, we make this point very clear in the beginning when we have the first call or the first meeting with the customer for that, so I wanted to raise this point.

Simon Elisha (11:09):

I think that's important. You touched on that concept of a facilitator. I think it'd be good to expand upon that the person in the room or one of the Amazonians in the room is a trained experienced facilitator who are there to help folks get to an answer. They're not there to tell the answer or to predict an answer. It's a nuanced thing and not everyone can do it.

Mohamad Charaf (11:30):

Yes, that's true. The facilitator is a solutions architect, and this solutions architect is trained and goes through a set of courses before they run an MRA. But they don't only go through these courses, they also get to attend and shadow multiple MRAs before they can lead one. And it's very important that this facilitator is a cloud expert where a migrations expert, in order to make sure that they are driving the conversation where it belongs to make sure that the different pillars that are covered are discussed in a proper way.

Simon Elisha (12:10):

Once again, to get to a practical outcome that's achievable. Not just an imaginary solution.

Mohamad Charaf (12:16):

Exactly. And that's how they go about it. Another important point in this exercise, we don't go through solutioning. In this exercise, we try to make sure that we only facilitate the discussion, make sure that the different parties are getting to share their points of view, get the right rating that they think their

organization is on each of these questions, and then identify the gaps, the obstacles, the pain points that they have. And we don't go through solutions at the same time because there is time for the solutions which comes after.

([12:56](#)):

Once this exercise is done, reconvene back maybe one week after where we provide the readout. The readout is the output of what we have been through and we provide a set of artifacts or outputs from the exercise. This week between ending the workshop and the readout is maybe the most intensive week for the facilitator or the solutions architect. The reason for that is that's the time where the facilitator will take all these answers, all these ratings and start to bring in their own expertise in order to identify the types of activities or the action items that can be provided or recommended for this organization to help them through the journey. In other words, giving them the different artifacts, different actions that they can use to implement their own roadmap towards the cloud migration.

Simon Elisha ([14:04](#)):

It's a very customized kind of output that you get that really is bespoke to your and only your organization based upon the ground truth.

Mohamad Charaf ([14:13](#)):

For sure, because each and every exercise is different, like the outputs, like the different problems or the different gaps that are there for each organization is different. And then we provide the different activities according to these. It's not just one list of actions that everyone is going to follow. That's not the way it goes. Let me give you an example. You might see one organization that are very good where it comes to project management, so they can manage projects, migration projects, and everything is good, but they have a big problem with the operations. They have never run any workloads on the cloud. They all have expertise on-premise running on data centers.

([15:03](#)):

The focus now is on operations, how to run these. A different organization might have big problem with their business alignment, the businesses like the C-suite, the VPs are not aligned on their cloud strategy, but they have a very strong cloud team. As you see here, they're not all the same. It really depends on the organization. And that's why we have this exercise covering the different cloud adoption framework pillars-

Simon Elisha ([15:32](#)):

Exactly.

Mohamad Charaf ([15:32](#)):

... like the business people, governance, platform security and operations. As you see here, covering all the aspects, making sure that we cover the obstacles or the pain points in any of these different pillars.

Simon Elisha ([15:45](#)):

Well, it's a classic challenge that we face with all situations, which is it depends, is the answer. And so we're trying to drive that outcome. If we're moving through the stage of understanding alignment and potential roadblocks, et cetera, how does that feed into the mobilization phase of the migration journey? Because for a lot of organizations getting started is often the hardest part. What does the MRA do to contribute to making that maybe a little easier or smoother?

Mohamad Charaf ([16:13](#)):

When we go through the exercise and during this week I told you about, we come up with some action items according to the specifics of this organization. These action items are usually the input to the next steps beyond the MRA. And these next steps are going to be helping with mobilization or the mobilized phase as we call it, to make sure that the organization is ready to move to the cloud. For instance, if one of the outputs that we identify is them not having the proper landing zone or the proper set of accounts that they need to use on AWS, then that's one finding. And then that's where we recommend a next step to go through building the landing zone. We do not only just suggest that, but we also provide different types of workshops to help build the capacity within this organization's team to build this landing zone.

([17:14](#)):

Another thing can be if we find out that they need a cloud center of excellence because they need to have one entity within their organization to orchestrate the cloud strategy and the migrations, especially if they have multiple migrations or they have multiple organizational units that are going to be doing migrations, they need some entity to organize. We suggest that they have a cloud center of excellence and then we help them build the cloud center of excellence. Many of these are the outputs of the MRA exercise, usually the entry point to next steps and next activities that help the cloud journey.

Simon Elisha ([17:56](#)):

It really helps frame out that plan and let you invest in the areas that you are maybe weakest in and leverage the areas that you are strongest in.

Mohamad Charaf ([18:05](#)):

Yes, that's very true.

Simon Elisha ([18:07](#)):

And then in terms of the starting point and really trying to make sure that it's successful, what are the prerequisites for engaging in an MRA session? As a customer, what do I need to make sure I can have to be successful?

Mohamad Charaf ([18:21](#)):

It's very important when we start the MRA that we have a sponsor. If the organization or if the customer is having the executive sponsor who sees the value or who understands that we are there to help, they will facilitate for us to run this exercise. At the end of the day, this exercise is all about having a good communication between the different parties. In order to make sure that everyone gets in the room and they get there with the right stance, they are ready to share, they know that this is a safe environment to share and have the same goal, that's very important. That's why when we discuss the MRA, we identify the types of roles that we suggest that they attend, and we also ask them to join the meeting or to join the call if it's virtual with bring in all their points of view for sharing this in exercise.

Simon Elisha ([19:23](#)):

Having the right level of sponsorship I think can't be understated because you're asking the organization to do something that's beyond the day to day. And so without leadership for that, we're not going to make the progress that maybe people hope.

Mohamad Charaf ([19:35](#)):

Yes, of course.

Simon Elisha ([19:36](#)):

Let's talk about some of the common challenges. You've run many MRA sessions, I'm sure it's not all sweetness and light and easy because again, we're dealing with people, we're bringing people together. What are some of the challenges and things that you find happen during those sessions and some of the outcomes you get out of that?

Mohamad Charaf ([19:53](#)):

There are definitely some challenges. The most prominent challenge is when you get in a room with five or six people and nobody is speaking and nobody is sharing, they're just there because they were told to be there. And then you see a single person only speaking, giving you their point of view. When the organization is of this type or when the group of attendees is of this type, that's not a successful MRA. And we tend to sometimes maybe ask them to either contribute or if they need to have time to have this exercise something, but if it's not, it's going to go this way, then it's not giving value, right?

Simon Elisha ([20:36](#)):

Yeah, yeah.

Mohamad Charaf ([20:39](#)):

Worse than having this exercise is when you have one that has one or two persons only attending out of 10 people that you invited. That's also a big problem. And probably this happens because teams are busy and maybe not everyone that was invited understands the exercise, what they are going through or going to be going through, and they probably don't show up. That's an important point. That's why when we start this exercise, when we start the MRA, we tend to send multiple emails and calls to make sure that we make it clear that this is an exercise for collaboration. Really like the assessment is a workshop for helping our customers and we want them to understand this point, so when we are in the room, they share and we get the value out of it.

Simon Elisha ([21:36](#)):

I think it's also really useful for customers to self-assess in a way their own readiness or are things as they thought they would. I think from a sponsor's perspective, they get a lot out of it purely by assessing the difference, if any, between their perception of the organization's readiness and what the data tells them. It's not always the same.

Mohamad Charaf ([21:56](#)):

Of course, it's always like the successful ones. Let me give you an example of that. I was running an MRA like a couple of weeks ago, and this one was very peculiar customer because they have their own SaaS product. They don't do migrations, they rather do deployments, it's migrations, but it's different. Everything is different. And the MRA running there was really opening up a lot of aspects that they never thought of because their focus is usually on building the SaaS, adding features and whatnot. Now they are looking at it from a different perspective when we were bringing in the questions and the different pillars and really opened up many, many discussion points between the different groups like the development teams and the infrastructure teams who are now going to be moving to manage these

SaaS products running on the cloud and so on. Definitely they not only assess their organization, they also open up to new paradigms, if I would call it, when they go over these. That's very important.

Simon Elisha ([23:11](#)):

It can really change their focus and surface things that weren't being paid attention to.

Mohamad Charaf ([23:16](#)):

Yes, that's very true. And one more thing is they get the opportunity now to learn more what we can provide, like the different services that we have on AWS after the MRA. When we provide the action items and all these roadmap artifacts, now they find out a lot of opportunities using different services because we provide the workshops and building the capacity within their team as part of the outputs of this MRA. I've not seen an MRA hit that doesn't have at least one workshop after that where the technical teams would go over and learn a new migration tool or CI/CD pipeline mechanism or-

Simon Elisha ([24:00](#)):

Some sort of uplift. How often should an organization do an MRA and what should they think about if they decide the period of that?

Mohamad Charaf ([24:09](#)):

Usually, it depends on the organization and how the organization is structured. Usually, you run an MRA and then you come up with some action items. You have like a roadmap. If the organization is following the roadmap and they are doing change, they might need to run a second one maybe one year after, six months or one year after, so they see the differences. They have done some change and now they want to see the differences. You see where they are advancing, maybe where other areas now that they can fine tune on and pursue and whatnot. Some other organizations are working on huge ones or big ones they might run, like they have multiple org units that run separately. And each one of them might be having their own migration, which happens in many cases, especially with a public sector for instance. And then in this case, you can run multiple MRAs to these different departments or different organization units.

([25:14](#)):

It all depends on the size of this organization, but if we take the classic example of one organization, then they might run it once, then do the changes, follow the strategy, follow the roadmap, and then maybe run it one year after to see where they are going. And by the way, we use for the MRA, we use a tool and this tool shows a lot of graphs and artifacts that helps them realize or identify these different aspects. And the tool will also enable the same customer, when they run more than one time to do a comparison so they can see where they are advancing or which gaps they tackled and so on, so really very helpful to show a before and after.

Simon Elisha ([26:03](#)):

Nice way to visualize any change and progression. And so what do you see as the future evolution of the MRA? Is it always going to be the same or are there changes in store? What's happening to it?

Mohamad Charaf ([26:16](#)):

We have tremendous support for the MRA. We have the MRA service team who are always looking for feedback and they are investing a lot to build more and more of them. Now we have multiple versions of

the MRA that suits different types of organizations, and we are building more of these. As we speak today, we have multiple flavors, one that is maybe suitable for a large organization that is migrating into AWS. Another version that is more towards advanced users or SaaS providers who are more focused on their workloads and wanted to see more of the gaps that they have towards the cloud only, but not for their processes because they have been there for long and so on. And we have multiple of these versions now and we are building more and more of these. Really the MRA is there to stay and we are helping a lot of our customers, both in the commercial sector and the public sector running their migrations using that.

Simon Elisha ([27:21](#)):

Fantastic. Look forward to seeing the changes that happen in the future. Mohamad, thanks so much for coming on the show and telling us all about it.

Mohamad Charaf ([27:27](#)):

Thank you. Thank you so much.

Simon Elisha ([27:29](#)):

And there'll be links in the show notes for further information if you want to run an MRA or have an MRA run for you. And as of course, as always, we do love to get your feedback. Awspodcast@amazon.com is the place to do it. And until next time, keep on building.