Sounding Board Sessions:

1/16/24

We added this at the very end… but Brandon needed an outlet session today so we went for it. He says someone stuck a quarter in him and we couldn’t get it turned off. ;) Brandon was talking and Shannon was recording notes. We actually grabbed some really great and important notes considering current problems and needs.

* Brandon and Alan were discussing some topics this morning, and these were some further thoughts from Brandon.
* What are our goals?
* What do we have the time and energy for?
* Structure within Adilas is a sensitive issue? How do we address that? Do we?
* One of the main questions Alan and Brandon kept coming back to was who is going to manage this? Who is going to oversee these projects and progress? We keep coming back to this question. Who is going to be in charge of the different pieces??????
* Steve and Brandon were also chatting this week about some items - and Steve was expressing some real concerns with AI (artificial intelligence). What is going to happen with AI? Is it going to take over?
* How would we even compete with AI? Or some of the new technologies coming out? AI is a current trend and buzz word for sure.
* Adilas is a gold mine of data. If we can help get more data into the hands of our users, in easier ways, that would be a huge win!
* We allow people to do their operations and because they can do their operations, we can facilitate so many of the accounting pieces. We don’t call it AI but we have trained the computers, or written the code to know what to do with the operation pieces. That is something really unique to our business. Maybe we need to switch our marketing, or shift how we talk about things and use or utilize some of the AI buzz words in our conversation. We have a lot of computer intelligence and dynamic mapping.
* Right now, we have tons of queries and tables and can pull back our client’s information. This is somewhat of a traditional model. As a new trend, what is starting to happen now is that they (other companies) are creating big objects to feed to an AI engine. They, the other companies, then have to train the AI and feed it these ‘objects’. The AI is then used to help interpret and use these objects. AI has to be ‘fed’ and ‘trained’ to keep working. We have never marketed our stuff as AI, and we don’t know if we want to claim that as such. But if we feed in good operations and train people, and/or our computers what to do, we are doing some of those base functions of AI. We have aspects of that inside of adilas right now.
* Database tables and structure - We have already transitioned from hard core, really big tables, to more of the object-based storage options for some things. We are trying to grow our databases vertically (adding new rows and records) vs horizontally (adding new columns). To grow vertically, we need things like what is the id’s, setting name, and the value per setting per corporation.
* One of the ways to store things is called a JSON object (JavaScript object notation). We already create a number of JSON objects, as needed. We may even move to creating more of these type of objects. We are already doing a hybrid of both tables and objects. We will stay with using a lot of our columns and rows because there is a lot of value in that with where we are headed. But there may be some further places for us to continue using more objects as well. Looking forwards, we want more ways for the computer to filter, chew up data, look through things, come back with sums, counts, totals, etc. Computers love this! This is what computers do! What they excel at! We have the data, we could do a lot there.
* Switching away from objects, there is a whole other round of data aggregation that we would like to do. This could be a huge benefit to all adilas users. Things like counts, sums, totals, averages, maxes, mins, etc. We would love this.
* We use objects where they work best and rows and columns where they work best. We will keep using both technologies where they work best. We will keep doing our own hybrid model.
* The tables and rows help us get to certain data immediately. This isn’t something that the computer has to chew through, process through. The objects will take anything. But you have to search through it, have it process that chunk of info to find what you need. It is faster for us to search through tables for specific items, columns, and indexes.
* Hybrid - use the best technologies for the goals and needs that we have. We need and use both objects and classic database tables. Keep doing that.
* Back to the meeting with Alan - the number one question we keep coming back to is --- WHO??? Company structure? Who? Who will do what? Who makes the decisions? The Jellyfish Model - organizing company structure, defining roles.
* Who??? Where??? What???
* Product development - where should we go? What industries/companies do we want to pursue?
* Steve’s friend said that queries were a thing of the past. Brandon was expressing how that is not a good, or full approach. You will hurt yourself if you completely get away from traditional queries. You don’t want all of your data in objects that AI always has to sort through and interpret. That takes a lot of time, training, and effort over and over.
* This is an acronym used for data warehousing. ETL - Extract, Transform, and Load - this would be amazing for operating at the BI (business intelligence) level. We could come in and look at things in summaries, totals, chunks we want to look at (groups, groupings, etc.). Not having to go find our sub pieces, a piece at a time. It would be so cool to have AI, objects, normal aggregates, and other custom date to help us do our aggregates and BI info levels. We really want this. As a side note, this is part of the second main project in the adilas lite plan (fracture and adding the BI level).
* We are building a robust, generic tool. That is what we have done and what we are doing. Out in the world there are tons of industry specific apps, widgets, programs, software, and then they do what is called a “mash up” (mixing lots of smaller pieces together to get a semi-whole). They then try to marry all of their pieces to try and track what is going on with their business. We have seen this for years. But now we are having to start competing with more of these apps and programs that use AI, that can excel in these certain specialized pieces. Even though AI is coming, and we don’t want to ignore it, but we need to plan how we can fit into this changing technological world and live with more AI. Also, to grow the pieces of our system that already use our own AI. We need to keep going where we are going because we can help so many people! Let them find their little apps that help with specialized pieces. But we have a business tool that people need to run their business. That’s great if they need an AI piece and app, they still need to track their business and we have all of that within one system.
* We could go so many places with our industry specific skins as well. That can get us a huge amount of the way. Also, great, if they find some other pieces that do specialties that we don’t want to create or make. We still have great value in our tool.
* Different topic - We are also having some problems with some of our rep/consultant models. We have had the model where our reps were in the prime spot (direct interactions between adilas and the client) for years. Now we only have just a couple of reps left in that spot that is still external to Adilas. We have really tried to pull these reps and peoples in more internally to Adilas (adilas provides the services vs an independent rep providing the services). But we still have a few of these reps that have been so successful out there that will not let some of these clients come back to Adilas. Some of these clients are wanting to leave the system because the reps rates are getting so high, because the rep is so swamped, but they (the reps) won’t let that client fall back into the Adilas internal care. This is a difficult spot here. We are having challenges here.
* If we can keep clients on and keep them under our umbrella that will be huge. We need more in the training, consulting, ease of use for our clients so that we can have successful clients who can do all the pieces they want.
* We also have some clients that want to connect with a 3rd party and then feed data of some sort to another 3rd party for the clients. So, we are starting to see a stacking of 3rd parties between our clients and some of these industry specific pieces they want. This is more prevalent in super deep industry specific areas.
* Looking at upcoming projects… We see, or have, a summary of the project we see next as necessary. 1. Who (company structure)? 2. What and where (product development – value add-on core model)? 3. Education - getting people trained. 4. Services – marketplace 5. Adilas Cafe – efficiency and access to people who can offer services and skills. 6. Fracture and Adilas Lite - aka new code and re-write the application. And number 7. Budgetting, finances, and other business plans.
* See this link for more information on the outline of where we are headed: https://data0.adilas.biz/adilas\_master\_plan\_outline\_round\_1.pdf
* If we go directly to fracture (project 6 in our list) we will likely still flop. We really have to shore up our underlying structure with these first steps so that we can be successful when we move to fracture and Adilas Lite.
* Who is going to train our clients and be as competent as some of our best reps? Who is going to take care of clients if we bring them all internally?
* We have so many projects that are 1/2 - 3/4 baked. We tend to always look for what is next, next, next? Or new, new, new. But there are other needs here - like all of the projects that have not gotten finished, or need to be reworked and refined to make it a usable project/feature. But again, who is planning this? Who is coordinating this? Who is taking charge? You can’t have one person take care of all these things. You need a team. An MVT - we need a minimal viable team that is more defined, that has more specific roles and responsibilities, so that less things fall through the cracks. Here again, the big question is WHO??? Who manages, watches, organizes, and directs “ALL” of these pieces?
* We have spent so much money on some of these projects. It is painful to see them sitting there unfinished (virtually on a shelf). They aren’t accessible to our developers either. We need the plan of what to do to break it into manageable pieces. We are all going in different directions, there is not a focus or a vision, and we don’t really know the end goal. We also don’t have a defined person to manage it, or oversee certain parts, so we all just tend to do all of our own things.
* We have all of these co-owners but no one that consistently stays as the manager. The company structure currently seems to be one of our biggest stumbling blocks. We all dip in and out of roles but nobody stays in a defined role, especially as a management or admin. We have to get some admin players that are really able to help us constructively work for our goals and visions.
* We can see that we have all sort of challenges and problems, but what we are seeing as we have more and more conversations, is that the biggest problem for us is the company structure. Not having someone in charge to lead, to organize, to report to, to get direction from, to work toward the goal and vision. These places are big, deep, and heavy. We don’t want to be in these positions, which is why there is no one filling them. It is too much for one person to carry. No one wants to stay in these sections. None of us want to stay in the crushing spots, they seem like a plague (just being silly). We all want to avoid that. It has to come down to MVP or MVT (minimal valuable person or team). Right now, we are just a lot of independents trying to work together. It works at some level but there are so many holes and so many pieces falling through the cracks.
* Biggest challenge - WHO?? Who is our Admin? Who is in charge of overseeing things? What is our company structure? People want to play in the more comfortable places, not the areas that are so challenging, difficult, and painful to be in at present. People pass through these places but don’t stay there. The 3 main plague areas are: Admin, Project Management, and Sales and Marketing.
* No written plans, no channels of accountability, etc. We are mostly passing on things verbally between multiple different parties. There is some amount of project coordinating going on but not deeper project management, not a project plan, steps, requirements, written and defined pieces to the plan. It makes it really challenging. For development we basically get a couple sentences written down and maybe a video. The rest of the project details have been passed along verbally, light explanations, possible ideas, emails, etc. We, by our actions and habits, make it really hard to succeed at the level we are wanting and hoping for. Things are too wide open.
* We are all wearing different hats, we have too many roles, and we don’t really know all of the processes or sub processes. We don’t have anything defined enough to keep things going through smoothly. We have really good people, but we don’t have a good structure and that makes it so hard for all of us to succeed as a team.
* We really, really need to determine - what is the MVT, the minimal viable team? Because we are missing key players that are essential for us to succeed or grow to the next levels. We don’t even have the next levels planned. We are just chasing whatever seems like the next little piece. Basically, whatever a client asks for next.
* We really need to define the roles, and who is in the roles, how are things going to go through our process? What is our process? When we make a process, who is going to be over which pieces?
* We need the correct planning to break these projects into smaller pieces so that we can be successful in small sprints, or small pieces of the project. Part of these agile performance pieces would be planning. We need timelines, we need to check-in within time frames, we need plans of how we think we can approach the first pieces, the next pieces, set your new goals, help push it along, etc.
* Alan and Brandon may try to pick up some of these pieces helping oversee planning sprints, teams, pieces, etc.
* Adilas goes through these continual cycles of build up, grow, get more people, more developers, then oh no, we don’t have enough money, trim down, trim down, pull back, clear down to being down in the dumps, then back to slowly building up, build up stronger, back to needing more help and people, then run out of money again, trim back, and keep going through the cycle.
* We have a general business tool and then we try to get too specific for certain things (servicing certain clients and their special needs or requirements). We have to get ourselves out of these bigger cycles and get to a more sustainable place. Hopefully by working towards smaller, known, building pieces vs huge undefined projects or features.
* We can help companies handle 85% of their needs out of the box. We are a general tool and we have so many pieces that can help our clients. But then we try to get more specific, we end up trying to get this client 10% more of their needs met. We spend $10,000 on a project of custom code to get this client that pays $300 a month. Which they likely could have found a tool that did that smaller piece for them that we didn’t need to build custom code for. We get some new features which seems cool to use but none of our other industries really uses it, so it is not really a huge asset to us.
* We also have some of our projects that are half baked, that, if finished, could get the out of the box percentage up to 90% or something. It could overall just help the entire product to be elevated as the general tool. Then we don’t need to chase these custom code small percentages and trying to help these clients. Not to say that we won’t do this (custom code) but we need to be smart about it. Will it server other clients? Has it been requested before? Etc.
* Some of these clients we chase and chase and chase. We chase and spend so much time and money and then they bail out. We have done so much time and spent energy chasing something that doesn’t materialize and it wears us out, us and our resources.
* Who is even capable of taking over some of these roles (back to dealing with who is going to do what – internally)? Is it someone that is already a part of Adilas or do we need outside help and expertise for some of these roles?
* Again ….. WHO, WHO, WHO??????
* We have a small team, our budget can only afford so much, we are forcing people into roles without definitions, people end up doing whatever they do. Some of it we like, but then it also creates so many pain points.
* We have in many ways REJECTED certain roles, traditions, structure, etc. Having said that, we have also liked that model in some ways but it also creates so many pain points!!
* Dysfunctions - rejecting, not allowing certain primary functions to take place or do their jobs. Rejecting structure, responsibility, time management, defined roles, pricing structure, etc.
* Overall, we have to say though that it is amazing how we are still surviving and staying afloat with a sub-optimized team. Not that our members aren’t great but that we aren’t organized and defined well. Huge props to Steve for all he has done and how he has helped to keep things going.
* Money is going to be the biggest issue for us in implementing these things. That tends to be the main limiting resource right now. That is why we keep operating as we do.
* We are kind of hovering around a certain mark and haven’t been able to break beyond that level of revenue. If we could get our team set up and working better we think it would trend upward again. We have had growth and progress but we have somewhat limited ourselves.
* We keep saying that word who, who, who? But a lot of us (internal team members) answer “not it” or “not me” to that question. We don’t want that spot, which is partly why it doesn’t get filled.