

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY AND THE CLOUD IN BUILDING A RESILIENT BUSINESS

With the business landscape always evolving, being able to respond to unforeseen circumstances is critical to business survival and prosperity. At a recent roundtable event, Sungard AS and leaders from organisations in the UK and Ireland looked at the role leadership, technology and the cloud plays in ensuring businesses can remain resilient in a challenging commercial environment.

► Opening Session

2020 was a year marked by adaptation for both Sungard and its customers, accelerating transformation programmes but also bringing about a cultural shift, with all levels of management forced to be more open to change. From an IT perspective, the greater number of endpoints on networks were having implications for security, while businesses' vulnerability to cyberattacks had increased. In this context, the need to have resilient IT systems remained more important than ever.

In that time Sungard had seen a significant increase in consultancy requests for ITDR governance and framework creation, gap analysis, and penetration testing. While many businesses had carried out tactical projects during the

so-called 'lost year', strategic programmes had been put on hold and companies were only now starting to strategize. Whether companies had already adopted cloud strategies or not, it was clear that inertia is not conducive to business success, and that leadership will play an increasingly crucial role in future.

With physical servers which were adequate but lacking in resilience, a delegate to the virtual boardroom detailed how he developed a cloud strategy with Sungard to address some key issues identified. Moreover, Sungard had assisted the company during two major cyber incidents, and was praised as an organized, flexible and well-resourced partner which acted in the delegate company's best interests.

▶ Boardroom Session 1: Resilient Leadership

Resilient leadership comprises four components which are key to the success of any business: complexity, agility, partnerships, and protection.

Under complexity, businesses need to develop trusted relationships with executives and use clear, concise language to brief senior leadership on challenges. Agility involves moving quickly, with the point made that companies already working on the cloud had been able to upscale more quickly. Partnerships are also important in terms of managing operational resilience and supply chain risk. Lastly, in terms of protection, businesses must choose which assets to protect, with the pandemic having forced some companies to reassess what they deem important.

▶ Boardroom Session 2: Resilient Technology and Complex Recovery

While cloud transformation was not a new phenomenon, it had been accelerated by the pandemic, and companies had embraced this change to varying degrees depending on their business model. With companies working from home, it was felt that supply chain resilience had become as important as internal business resilience.

Another theme was the increasing number of state actors in the cyberattack space. As a result, it was important for companies to look at tiering data within the IT system and identify vital data assets, including their interdependencies and structure. Unsurprisingly, companies that had done well throughout the pandemic were the ones that had avoided 'analysis paralysis', working swiftly and cohesively.

▶ Boardroom Session 3: Challenges of Hybrid Cloud Adoption

Hybrid systems give companies better footing to react to the unknown. Cost was mentioned as a major factor in hybrid adoption, with companies over the past year 'lifting and shifting' but rarely transforming as part of a defined strategy, which had implications for security. Another factor related to governance in terms of data security and ownership, as platforms are merely data vehicles rather than governance tools.

Lastly, delegates discussed the idea of agility with respect to how organisations manage skills shortages. The point was made that it is difficult to recruit the right IT people or strategize effectively if IT doesn't fall within an organisation's core remit.

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Complexity



Agility



Partnerships



Protection

► Closing Panel Discussion

During the closing session, delegates reconvened for a dedicated panel discussion. The panel was composed of speakers from the round-table discussions and the session gave audience members a chance to ask any questions.

There was a discussion around remote based leadership, with the feeling that while this way of working was effective for BAU activities, it didn't provide sufficient opportunity for the 'human collisions' that often spark innovation. One delegate explained that while remote working had proved effective across their company, remote onboarding remained challenging. Another delegate felt that the real challenge was still to come, with the easing of lockdown restrictions meaning that teams were split between remote working and office working and therefore difficult to coordinate.

Delegates also discussed the concept of a business's 'recovery philosophy' in light of the cyberattack on Microsoft at the beginning of 2021. In response, it was felt that data lakes ought to be segmented, and while companies cannot protect everything, they must prioritize protecting their vital assets. Crucially, it was felt that if companies don't react appropriately to cyberattacks, they

may never recover their business profile or credibility, nor be able to drive innovation. In that respect, the pandemic had clearly raised the profile of IT systems and had demonstrated that businesses simply cannot function without resilient systems.

This led onto a discussion around understanding a business's risk profile, which requires a culture shift towards assigning a specific cyberattack team, understanding the way hackers operate and formulating a recovery plan. The importance of tertiary copies was mentioned, as these can be examined and sanitized, and have a smaller risk of being infected, particularly by malware which has been lying dormant on systems for a long time.

Lastly, there was discussion around the future of CIOs as brokers rather than providers of services considering businesses adopting hybrid systems. In future, it was felt that they will be more technology agnostic, acting as spokespeople for businesses as well as partners capable of accelerating business aspirations.

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