OVERCOMING KEY PAIN POINTS IN MOVING TO THE CLOUD

The journey organisations take on their way to adopting cloud are unique, informed by their individual business models and goals. During a recent multi-stream virtual boardroom hosted by Noord in association with Sungard Availability Services, Dell Technologies and VMware, a discussion on some of the challenges faced by attendees in taking those steps gleaned a set of best practices that may prove helpful to other organisations that are planning to take a similar sojourn in the near-term.

A New Way to Work

In the initial session, an inflexible architecture coupled with legacy IT infrastructure initially proved challenging for the College of Anaesthesiologists in Ireland. As a result, and as detailed by its CEO, the College suffered from federated data and an undifferentiated cyber security and risk management strategy.

Overcoming these limitations required developing a business strategy underpinned by an ambitious vision and supported by technology to enable new ways of working. Along with setting key business goals, it attempted to demystify digital transformation among its employees and gain buy-in from the board. Practically speaking, the strategy aimed to break down siloed ways of working internally while improving patient safety and care.

In evaluating this approach the Sungard AS team noted that the pandemic had accelerated some cloud journeys, with many organisations being forced to adopt technology in weeks rather than months, often without implementing an overarching strategy or consulting key stakeholders, with implications for cost, management and governance.

Conversely, not all companies embraced the cloud during the pandemic with many, in fact, struck by analysis paralysis when faced with the complexities of cloud implementation and internal skills shortages. Indeed, the CEO for the College of Anaesthesiologists suggested that while there is no one-cloud-fits-all-approach, any cloud transformation starts with developing a strategy that asks how customers, employees and the organisation as a whole stands to benefit.

Ultimately, by blending the practical with the technological, the College succeeded in moving from digitalisation as a concept to digital transformation in practice.

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Myth Busting and Criteria for Success

When it comes to 'going cloud,' jumping in without fully understanding or appreciating what you're getting into, could prove problematic, even fatal.

One attendee, offering insight into their organisation's cloud journey, noted that their head office was in Japan, which itself presented specific in-country challenges. Not only did that involve overcoming the cultural differences in educating the board on the cloud, including its configuration and controls, it also meant busting the myth that data stored on the cloud is less secure than on premises. This education piece had been essential, as the board was particularly risk-averse and resistant to change. Addressing the regulatory challenge involved in assessing the data held by certain apps and which posed the most risk, ensuring it was compliant with the relevant regulations, which differed between Europe and Asia, made all the difference in the Board confidently moving forward with cloud.

Another attendee stated that many businesses had found themselves using the cloud without realising it, given the rapid take-up of communication applications such as Zoom and MS Teams during the pandemic. Aware that they would ultimately have to move other applications over to the cloud, the organisation had started from the concept of business improvement and then looked at how the cloud could drive increased availability, scalability, usability and security.

Commenting on these examples, the Sungard AS team cited a customer case study in which a large retail bank had embarked on a cloud journey and had been forced to undertake remediation efforts, which had proved very costly. In the subsequent inquiry into the failure, it was determined that the bank had failed to define the success criteria for its cloud migration from the outset — a crucial lesson for other organisations migrating to the cloud.

Modernizing Environments to Achieve Flexibility

Citing recent statistics, including two thirds of companies reported seeing an increased strain on their IT resources during the pandemic, the product marketing and competitive intelligence specialist and, separately, Lead Solutions Architect for VMWare, in their session contended that there must be structure to an organisation deciding to move to the cloud. **They must first choose the right cloud provider, evaluate their current position and future milestones, and finally decide what to modernise and improve.** They likewise noted that 68% of organisations are further expecting to increase spending on hybrid and multi-cloud.

In a discussion on choosing the right cloud provider, one attendee, who represents a global company with a presence in over 30 countries, said that they already had strong partnerships with Microsoft and AWS, which they favoured for their scalability and reliability as well as their respective commercial weight in the market. In fact, this attendee disclosed that local cloud was not looked on favourably unless it could offer native capability.
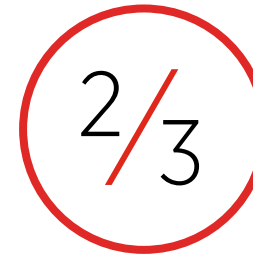
2/3 of companies reported seeing an increased strain on their IT resources during the pandemic.
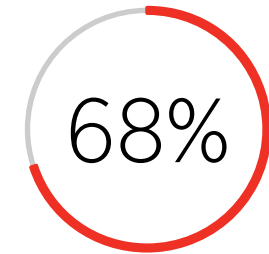
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Another key discussion point was how organisations deal with legacy IT infrastructure — a pain point for many, and one which often prevented organisations from considering cloud in the first place. One attendee suggested that one way of looking at this is 'peeling back the layers of functionality and releasing it into more flexible systems'. While cloud environments are very complex and it can be daunting to juggle multiple security and governance concerns, many companies are taking small steps into the cloud and are seeing quick wins.

The VMWare team also discussed key themes cited by attendees included the challenges of moving to new infrastructure such as Kubernetes and the importance of ensuring security in new, less controlled environments.

Getting Cloud Smart

While many companies perceive public and private cloud as a binary choice, choosing both is often a valid solution.

In a session hosted by a Senior Manager, Service Provider Presales and, separately, a Director, Cloud Service Provider Program, both based in EMEA and representing Dell Technologies, suggested that while global accessibility is a great driver of public cloud, IPR or cost is a great driver of private cloud.

Regardless of the public/private cloud split that companies opt for, the key challenges of adopting cloud environments include the difficulties of migrating, the complexity of operating multiple cloud environments, and poor alignment with business requirements. Conversely, when measuring cloud progress, the top three metrics are cost efficiency/savings, delivery speed of products/ services, and cost avoidance.

This contrast was confirmed by an attendee that said they had started by thinking about what business problems they wanted to solve, getting the right people involved in those conversations and aligning different areas of the business to create a unified approach. Only then had the organisation considered the kinds of services they wanted to consume and potential providers. Lastly, they had looked at what the existing teams could migrate most easily — in other words, the low-hanging fruit.

Another attendee noted that remote working had been a good way to introduce employees to the cloud, and that their company had used this experience as a springboard. However, remote working had also presented companies with a lack of control: One attendee said that applications like Slack posed a huge risk as they are easy to sign up to yet difficult to keep tabs on. In response, their organisation had attempted to strengthen the 'human firewall' through enhanced training and awareness campaigns.

Getting the Most From Your Cloud Investment

As the virtual boardroom drew to a close and hosts and attendees reconvened, a final topic — cloud culture — was discussed, the consensus being that cloud represents a new way of thinking, planning and executing which must be led from an executive level. In particular, one attendee noted that enterprise architects need to be seen as business advisors and gatekeepers to prevent their organisations from making technological mistakes.

Finally, the risk of project failure was discussed. In that regard attendees suggested that successful organisations are ones which take the time to understand their apps and ascertain where they can get the best return for the least effort. In addition, recognizing their limitations and partnering with more experienced parties in the interest of reducing risk and unexpected costs.

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