



Tackling Complexity

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How mid-sized organizations can leverage the Cloud to build collaboration.

Summary

For a large, global organization, operational complexity comes with the territory. Disparate platforms, operating systems and applications – not to mention different languages, time zones and cultures – are common obstacles to collaboration and teamwork. But mid-sized businesses can be similarly hobbled by incompatible tools, established practices and inefficient processes. In fact, smaller organizations can be even more susceptible to disconnects, since they often lack the resources to implement and enforce consistent standards. The author outlines how cloud-based models can help businesses of any size enhance collaboration, productivity and value.

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● **Complexity Drivers**

Organizational complexity is a fact of life for any business. Consider these scenarios:

- › **Acquisition:** a rapidly growing small company acquires another small company. One company runs on Windows and the other runs on Linux. Integrating either company to the other's platform will be expensive, time-consuming and disruptive – particularly for the team whose platform is absorbed. In the fast-paced, competitive environment the business operates in, however, delays and disruption are not an option.
- › **BYOD and remote workers:** **BYOD policies** and remote workers are becoming fixtures for business. The flexibility of such arrangements is a critical benefit in a competitive labor market. The downside is the increased potential for non-standard and unsecured applications to make their way into the workplace.
- › **Cultural pockets and personal preferences:** Creative teams swear by Macs. Accountants tend to prefer Windows. Some groups use Webex, while others use Skype for Business. And there's always a curmudgeon who refuses to use the tool that no one else has a problem with. With so many options to choose from, it's easy to imagine how any business can struggle to find common ground for collaboration.

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● **Cloud-Based Collaboration**

Cloud-based collaborative platforms can help address these challenges. In terms of integrating different platforms, a cloud-based solution offers tremendous advantages. If two different platforms need to integrate to communicate, manage and analyze data, three options are available:

- › Make platform A do all the work
- › Make platform B do that work
- › Introduce a technology that spans the gap between the two

Traditionally, IT and telecom organizations pursued a strategy of having one platform or another play the dominant role. Cloud, meanwhile, can serve as a bridging technology that leaves legacy systems essentially undisturbed. This bypasses existing IT and telephony systems to enable a seamless workaround and make the integration much faster, cheaper and less disruptive. Another (and related) key benefit of the Cloud is agility, flexibility and scalability – critical criteria for a fast-growing business with limited resources.

Cloud is also ideally suited to breaking down the barriers between teams, units and individuals – all of whom typically have deeply ingrained habits, preferences and ways of doing things. These ingrained patterns are, in many ways, defined by and a reflection of the technologies used within a team or department. As an example, consider the classic contentiousness between Windows and Mac users. While people are naturally resistant to change, cloud-based solutions can quickly help all parties understand that change can increase productivity with mobile access to shared documents, anytime/anywhere communications and real-time collaboration.

Leveraging Data Analytics

Businesses that deploy intelligent devices to collect and analyze data at the point of critical business activity can also leverage cloud models to enhance their capabilities. Healthcare teams, for example, can get real-time access to data generated by sensors monitoring patients' vital signs. The extensive toolsets of these IoT-enabled analytical platforms include software development, data flow designs, scalable storage and securely hosted interfaces. These capabilities can support thousands of devices globally, as well as ensure compliance with regulatory standards. And because they're affordable, smaller organizations with limited resources are increasingly able to bring innovation to the market more quickly, securely and reliably.

For any knowledge-based business, the ability to verify and search through vast volumes of archived data with ease is essential. Traditionally, such searches have posed a challenge. For one thing, they're expensive. Moreover, while critical for audit compliance and other regulatory needs, such searches are only rarely needed. As a result, businesses have had to pay for compute and storage capacity that they only rarely deployed.

Today's cloud-based search tools enable complex queries of petabyte-sized datasets to be conducted quickly and cost-effectively. Users can scale the service to handle a specific query when needed, document the source and nature of the query and then close it down until needed again.

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The Virtue of Simplicity

aking advantage of Cloud benefits requires a strategy focused on simplification and avoidance of disruption, complexity and delays. “Cloud First” and “Cloud Last” initiatives illustrate this process. A Cloud First approach addresses the complexity of legacy technology with a forced transition to all-new services. A Cloud Last strategy, meanwhile, involves an eyes-wide-open conversion to Cloud architectures.

Email offers an illustration of a Cloud First use case. Years ago, businesses were intent on having their own domains, websites and emails running on in- house infrastructure. Given that the Internet was in its early Web 1.0 days, the capital expense involved to cover the potential risk was justified.

As the Internet evolved into the Cloud, businesses realized that moving locations, acquiring new assets in a merger/acquisition – heck, sneezing in the wrong place at the wrong time – introduced unexpected complications that diluted the cost effectiveness of capex models. So, instead of paying for endless lifecycles of hardware and software care and feeding, companies began moving email to the cloud.

Subsequently, many basic functions such as compliance monitoring, legal archiving and end-to-end encryption were similarly moved to the Cloud, at far lower risk than would have been possible under the old model. Indeed, in today’s cloud marketplace, the burden of internal hosting is becoming less and less financially viable.

The Virtue of Simplicity (Cont.)

Cloud Last is better understood as a transition from a legacy service to an entirely new business model. This all-in approach requires resolve to execute.

Consider these examples:

- > Moving from a physical retail space to an online store
- > Evolving from picking up video tape rentals to receiving DVDs in the mail to browsing movie streaming sites
- > Going from carrying maps and asking for directions to GPS-powered travel

The upside can be the fundamental redefinition of existing industries as well as the creation of new ones. That said, no initiative is without risk. Short-sighted plans that don't anticipate technology limitations can limit benefits. Poor change management during implementation can also be a challenge. In some cases, long-term goals are grander than the financing that supports them.

Managing these risks should be a foundational element of any business strategy. Ultimately, the benefits are too great to ignore. By moving the business away from owning and managing burdensome infrastructure, IT leaders are empowered to focus on revenue-generating activities -- and in so doing help architect the future.

About the Author

Adriana Estivill is a Cloud Project Specialist at Claro Enterprise Solutions. Her areas of expertise include cloud solutions, IT markets, client management, concept development, research, user experience, graphic design and digital communications.