

Improving business fluidity with the Cloud

by Andrew Dobbins, Verizon's vice president of Asia-Pacific

Our perception of what is the working environment and its perimeter in time and space is shaped by the pervasive use of smart mobile devices, and Cloud is a business-enabler, rather than a technical construct, for this transformation. Organisations begin to rely on 'dispersed expertise' that can be reached remotely, with information traversing the globe in both directions. Cloud breaks the departmental barriers for data sharing. Merging and cross-referencing data from disparate sources provides new insights in ways that were not previously contemplated. The Cloud allows staff to focus on high-value activities and business goals rather than the mechanics of managing applications and data. There is no doubt that business will be transformed by the Cloud's enhanced flow of information.

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A seasoned catalyst of change and transformation, Andrew Dobbins has provided leadership at Verizon Business since January 2007. Since then, the company has grown into a key player in the regional network service provider space. Among some of the industry recognitions that Verizon Business has garnered include being ranked in the leaders' quadrant in Gartner 2007 and 2008 Asia-Pacific Network Service Provider Magic Quadrant, and receiving a 'Strong Positive' rating from Gartner in its 2008, 2009 and 2010 Market Scope for Managed Security Services in the Asia-Pacific report. Verizon Business was also ranked a leader in IDC's latest Asia-Pacific Next-Generation Telecom Service Provider in Asia-Pacific, 2010 report.

Prior to this, Andrew Dobbins was Asia-Pacific vice president of sales for Orange Business Services. In this role, he was responsible for the sales organisation across Asia. The group focused on the multinational corporation (MNC) market for international network services and solutions. His key achievement was to help transform the organisation from a network-only company to a services and solutions provider. In total, Mr Dobbins worked for Orange Business Services for ten years. He held various key appointments including director of sales, Australia and New Zealand and director of sales Hong Kong, eventually becoming vice president of sales, Asia Pacific.

Prior to this, Mr Dobbins spent five years in Telstra, addressing Telstra's international MNC customer base during a period a deregulation and significant change.

In an economic downturn, improving business performance often equates to cutting costs. It's the obvious place to start. In short order, the easy cuts have been made, the hard cuts have been made, and you can't move forward by slashing any more. As the old adage goes, if you think you're drowning, stand up and walk out of the water. Companies today have an opportunity to refocus on innovating their processes and offerings, so they can be armed with the ability to be more aware and agile than ever before. These are critical success factors in competitive markets that enable them to emerge from the downturn better positioned to grab market share and to lead.

Adopting Cloud computing is a journey that companies should embark on, enabling them

to gain competitive advantages to make a real difference to business performance - whether they seek shorter time to market; services that can be quickly turned up or down; or reduced upfront IT costs, to name but a few. Yet despite its continued evolution, concerns remain. Is Cloud computing secure? Will it provide reliable availability? Can an organisation maintain control over business-critical systems and data that exist in the Cloud? Above all, is it an enterprise-ready solution that can deliver on all its promises for better business performance?

The case for Cloud computing

In the Cloud computing environment, functionality is transferred out of the network,

and made available to enterprises on demand. Gartner defines Cloud computing as 'a style of computing in which massively scalable IT-enabled capabilities are delivered 'as a service' to multiple customers using Internet technologies'. In essence, service providers can leverage economies of scale to provide a highly reliable platform with greater cost and management efficiency. Companies gain flexible access to large amounts of scalable computing power, giving them the freedom to adjust capacity up and down to support the natural cycles of their business. Resources can be added, turned off or reassigned whenever necessary. Cloud computing should therefore be thought of as a business-enabler rather than as a technical construct.

The mobile workforce - changing the concept of 'work'

By 2015, Gartner predicts that the typical knowledge worker 'will own several wireless devices, will be continuously connected and will communicate and collaborate in a wide variety of ways without being tied down to specific locations and services'.

The pervasive use of mobile devices today has already expanded the traditional notion of work so that it includes not only activities performed by on-site employees during traditional business hours, but also work that is performed at other time periods and from remote locations. This acceleration of mobile device usage in the work place is fuelling demand for multi-platform applications, increased bandwidth, and the computing power to operate them. IT departments are already straining to accommodate diverse smartphones, tablets and laptops.

In fact, we should expect further shifts in the concept of work when employees can interact with one another and business information from more types of devices and enterprise Cloud applications. Companies should thus make an effort to anticipate this conceptual shift, the operational changes resulting from this shift, as well as the general changes in work culture that are sure to emerge.

The enterprise Cloud - an off-premise, public utility-type model - will enable organisations to quickly expand their networking, computing and storage capacity in a way that is secure and reliable. Not only can organisations move applications, processing, and storage into the Cloud, they can enhance the distribution of data and information as well - delivering data and applications to any connected device, whether it's a desktop, notebook, tablet, or smartphone. Users receive enriched, real-time information exactly when and where they need it. These new ways of interacting with information and services will help improve decision-making and performance at both the individual and organisational level.

The fully aware enterprise

As organisations adopt the enterprise Cloud and the new generation of enterprise applications that it will facilitate, the culture of the organisation will change. The organisation as a whole and the individuals within it will become more aware of the business information the applications generate. They will have better capability to act on that information in ways that benefit the organisation. These benefits will extend

throughout a business's ecosystem as the fluid exchange of information extends to business partners, suppliers, customers, as well as employees.

Thanks to the intelligence of the enterprise Cloud, mobile decision-makers can instantly access an ever-expanding wealth of data that can be turned into actionable insights. This information provides users with greater awareness and understanding of their working circumstances and the contexts in which they are working. As a result, employees will be able to make better decisions for their organisations and organisations, in turn, will better serve their customers and shareholders. The constant exchange between users and the systems hosted in the enterprise Cloud creates collective business intelligence that can be tracked, filtered, analysed, and turned into useful, actionable information.

The impact of this type of awareness - already powerful at an individual level - will be amplified when aggregated across an enterprise. When the many individual components in the organisation share a heightened awareness of business conditions, they can drive action on their business strategies more aggressively and influence global opportunities accordingly.

Business operational models will change

With the deployment of the enterprise Cloud, organisations will begin to develop new and innovative operational models.

One model that will profoundly change how corporations operate is the concept of 'dispersed expertise'. According to this new model, a company could establish remote teams of high-value professional experts. These individuals could provide customer care services, engineering expertise, radiological diagnostics, or other types of services using a mobile video-conferencing application. While this is just one operational model that might emerge, it illustrates the type of innovation that will be possible with the advancements in Cloud and mobile technology. It highlights the level of services that can be obtained, the conveniences that can be created for business partners and customers, and the cost-control that can be achieved - thus making great business sense in the near future and the long run.

Data storage and analysis will be easier

The amount of data accumulated by businesses and the industry will continue to increase, as remote metering and other various mobile and wireless enterprise applications push information to the Cloud. Whether a company uses a private

Cloud or adopts secure and encrypted public options that enable it to maintain control over its data, Cloud-based storage will be easier and cost-effective for business to install and maintain over traditional approaches.

This will make it easier for business analysis to gauge trends and report on them, and to draw from data and merge it from operational segments of a business in ways that were not previously contemplated. The analyses drawn from the robust and cross-referenced data sources will give companies new insights into the state of their businesses and better capability to anticipate future conditions that might affect their operations and competitiveness.

Business processing platforms that facilitate the exchange of Cloud-based data between trusted sources will be used to securely connect authorised companies, suppliers, vendors, and customers to business data and analytics. This access can improve the quality and pace of decision-making for the participants. When accomplished on an enterprise scale, this will help improve overall business functioning.

Driving IT change

All of these business benefits lead to an opportunity for IT departments to change their focus from deploying and supporting applications to managing the services that those applications provide. This allows the department to focus on high-value activities that align with and support the enterprise's business goals. The CIO can then truly function as a technology strategist, working with business units to understand their business needs and advising how best to use technology to accomplish their objectives.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Cloud computing is more than the driving force behind the next wave of technology innovation. The business will be transformed by a secure flow of information within and around the organisation, stimulated by enterprise Cloud applications and services that involve a broad range of information sources, access methods and end-points. It will impact operations, worker behaviour and the company's competitiveness. Recognising that transforming an organisation into a business that uses and delivers information in fundamentally new ways is an ongoing process. The process should become part of the overall continuum of business, part of an organisation's DNA, and should be pursued as a core competency. ●