

Perspective

Getting Started with Collaboration Services and the Cloud

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Avanade® Perspective

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Collaboration

We conduct business in an age of quick, effective and efficient communications. Collaboration can mean the difference between success and failure. For rank and file employees, it might mean simply having the tools to enable faster communication. For professionals, it might mean immediate access to essential people to manage a strategic project or client requirement. For companies, it might mean having business units, separated by continents, engaging in a planning session via video web conferencing without the need for travel.

Let's look at the benefits of collaboration technology. Communications and collaboration tools can improve the way companies collaborate and share information faster and more seamlessly. Such tools include email, shared documents and document management, person-to-person workflow processes, and unified communications.

Such capabilities become valuable because they enable companies to connect with partners, customers and employees. They also arrange interaction between teams in different locations and allow for them to work together on, and share, documents and data. They allow for live meetings that take place technologically rather than physically.

Collaboration technologies link people together in ways that changes the way people work. It also changes the way

they think about how they go about their work. It's not just about access to documents and voice communication. It also involves more efficient processes using routing and presence. Routing enables a communication connection by office phones, mobile devices, and computers. The idea of presence technologies enables people to see if someone is available and accessible for conversations across various channels.

Here's how the routing process and presence technology works and why it helps communication and connection improve. Think of it as a communication-enabled business process (CEBP).

CEBP reduces latency by using communication capabilities that are enabled by business technologies and applications. The use of CEBP increases the speed it takes to request and retrieve information. And that optimizes the process involved in communicating with colleagues, customers and partners. What might that look like?

Consider the following medical industry example. A doctor reviews a patient's medical records online. She decides she needs another interpretation of certain lab results quickly. The patient sits waiting in her examining room. The doctor checks her computer. A "presence" indicator in the application indicates a colleague she wants to confer with is present. She opens an application and contacts her colleague who has her communication channels set up to be

reached by mobile device, computer or phone. A response from her colleague arrives shortly afterwards. .

This approach ensures that she will know if the doctor is available. It also provides a routing process that will enable her to connect with the doctor if she is. This offers another tool for human communication that saves time. In the case of the doctor, it also contributed to improved patient care.

While privacy and data retention issues may arise, technology exists to manage these concerns

In the medical example, CEBP involved a doctor seeking a consult. But CEBP can be used by individuals in other organizations for other purposes that involve the need to communicate more quickly and effectively

Take the emergence of a pandemic. In that situation, employees might be directed to work from home versus the office. It is also likely that travel would be severely curtailed. Yet with communication and collaboration technologies in place, business can continue unhindered.

What examples exist in your business? How could you benefit from addressing the latency factor that might affect your workplace?

With collaboration technologies, a communications process now becomes more accessible and immediate.

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Collaboration tools provide more interesting and practical options, offering a different way of solving communications latency problems.

Reducing the delay involved in connecting and sharing information becomes increasingly important in today's fast-paced world. In the doctor's case study above, the amount of time it took to communicate and obtain information occurred faster because the technology provided presence status and quick access to colleagues through designated routing options. Other significant advantages are that it reduces the delay involved in implementation and it doesn't require IT to always be involved.

These types of solutions have traditionally been owned, implemented and managed on premise. But as cloud computing provides new options for utilizing technologies, accessing collaboration in the cloud offer other possible benefits as well.

Collaboration in the Cloud

The cloud is emerging as a vehicle to reap the benefits of collaboration tools in the form of a service. Cloud computing invites companies to re-evaluate their core business – what they do best – and how they can embrace new ways to conduct business.

Using the cloud offers another approach to achieving business objectives that are enabled by collaboration solutions. And utilizing collaboration tools in the cloud

has been demonstrated to be a relatively low-risk, high-return on investment approach to getting started in cloud. The fact is that some services available in the cloud already have a proven track record. They include web conferencing services such as Microsoft Live Meeting or WebEx. Most people have used these and other services and done so confidently for a long time – in the cloud.

Here are some examples of cloud-based collaboration solutions.

- Video and voice conferencing
- Presence and communication

Cost factors also make collaboration in the cloud a possible as well.

- Companies are under intense pressure to reduce IT costs while maintaining business operations.
- The trend in cloud computing is providing new ways for companies to procure and consume collaboration technologies.
- Since the economic downturn, 34 percent of the companies that responded to an Avanade global survey said that **after** the summer of 2008 they had increased their use of cloud computing.

As the reality of cloud computing begins to take hold for companies considering new IT opportunities, the benefits of

collaboration technologies utilized as a service through the cloud become readily apparent.

Collaboration in the cloud immediately opens options for access to new and cost-effective ways to address company goals and objectives. For example:

- Being able to get communications and collaboration services up and running quickly;
- Lower upfront deployment costs;
- Ease of access
- Pay for software solutions you need, when you need them;
- Access to automatically updated software and security.

If used effectively, collaboration in the cloud enables companies to capitalize on needed technology without the extensive, upfront capital expense that comes with the time-consuming installation and configuration of IT systems.

This raises the capital expense (CAPEX) vs. operational expense (OPEX) comparison.

Initially at least, the opportunity to forgo capital expenditures that cannot be deducted at the outset enables companies to engage in a pay-as-you-go system through operating expenses that are deductible during the period you use them.

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By doing so, it frees up organizations to focus more resources on technologies that truly differentiates them.

Adoption Considerations

While cloud computing offers distinct business benefits, it also raises questions about control. With cloud, companies need to determine which applications they must own and control and which ones are prime targets for the cloud because they require less control. In essence, companies must decide how much control over certain aspects of IT they truly need. Then they must compare how much economic value that control offers by being in-house compared to the economies of scale available in the cloud.

The cloud need not be an all or nothing proposition, either. Companies can find a place along the spectrum from control to economies of scale where they will feel most comfortable. Avanade addressed the issue of control in more detail in its [cloud point-of-view paper](#).

As with any technology, collaboration services bring with it other issues that need to be addressed as well, such as data, delivery, and security. Collaboration in the cloud is not risk free. But it has been proven to be a relatively low risk way to enter the cloud.

Questions about how such services are used, who has access to those services and how to protect individuals and, in certain situations, personal data need to be addressed. There are measures that

can be implemented that will mitigate those concerns, such as proper migration, effective integration and appropriate security policies.

But for most companies, these processes and mandates aren't anything new. The issues companies face when using collaboration technologies on premise become the same issues when hosted off-premise.

While there are varying opinions on cloud security, there are a growing number of voices suggesting that security in the cloud may in fact be better than the security most companies provide internally. Why?

For one, top tier cloud service providers, who focus on delivering a technology capability as a service over the Internet, place a high priority on security. They know the challenges associated with handling information in the cloud. They recognize what technologies, processes and policy management requirements offer the most protection. Plus, their own reputation and business survival demands high attention to security.

When considering cloud, companies need to know that the partners, or vendors, they work with are credible. They should have proven processes to support an organization's needs. It's equally important to identify companies with a track record of on-premise solutions. Those companies should also have a clear cloud vision, strategy and offerings that demonstrate stability and

long-term viability. If personal data is put into the cloud, legal requirements for transferring, storing and using data must be addressed carefully in advance. These requirements vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Context

A Roadmap for Collaboration and Communication in the Cloud

Companies interested in collaboration in the cloud need an understanding of the cloud-ready services available to them. Here are some steps to consider.

1. *Have a clearly defined strategy.* IT becomes a more effective partner to the organization if executives devise a clear strategy that improves the business process, relationships, services, etc. for the company. Then IT can seek out the collaboration services accessed in the cloud that will support the strategy.
2. *Build a roadmap.* With a clear strategy in place and an end goal determined, identify the direction your company needs to take to get there. Assess the products/platforms you need to support and build upon collaboration vision.
3. *Prepare a migration path.* Migration and integration of legacy systems may require additional resources. If outside support is required, consider

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partnering with a firm experienced in technology migration. Find repeatable best practices, methodologies, highly developed assessment and deployment resources, plus dedicated specialists. All this will help speed and simplify implementation at a lower cost.

Once a company decides that collaboration in the cloud is right for them, the next issue is determining how to make it happen. For many organizations, IT staff human resources and skills are limited. But partnering with a seasoned IT services provider could help fill in resource and skills gaps within organizations. Note also that processing and transferring personal data might need specific approval from local data privacy authorities or specific contractual obligations with the service providers.

When it comes to collaboration in the cloud, Avanade partners with companies in several ways. For one, Avanade has assets that allow us to assess and calculate the business case for migrating to the cloud. In this assessment, Avanade has to evaluate the impact of change and integration on existing models to minimize the impact of the transition. Avanade can work with customers on integration and configuration, intranet and SharePoint customization, security and organization governance.

Conclusion

Companies that effectively use collaboration services will find themselves accomplishing certain goals more quickly: establishing collaborative workspace for content management; sharing documents; and assembling teams that can connect quickly and more efficiently.

They also will be able to adapt to business opportunities more effectively. Using the collaboration tools available can also lower costs, especially compared to buying, installing, configuring, upgrading and maintaining these tools and services on premises by themselves.

The move to the cloud offers opportunities to extend the benefits of collaboration services. It has the potential to become a more cost effective option in the cloud. It provides an elastic scale, easy entry and lower per person access costs.

Collaboration technologies are changing the business landscape. Today's business realities force companies to radically change the way they operate on a global scale. Travelling to meet customers, expand markets and see staff becomes less economically viable. In addition, there are environmental factors. Good corporate citizens think more environmentally and use technology to conduct business.

Geographically dispersed organizations need to foster innovation while being efficient. They must move into markets faster than the competition. Systems that help people do their job make people more positive, more efficient and more productive. Historically, applications forced people to change the natural way they work in order to fit the needs of the application. But collaboration flips that around. It uses applications designed to fit the way people work and enables them to be more productive.

Collaboration technologies allow companies to achieve many of their business objectives. With the advent of cloud computing, collaboration technologies become tools that enable companies and their employees, to operate on a whole new plane.

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About Avanade

Avanade provides business technology services that connect insight, innovation and expertise in Microsoft technologies to help customers realize results. Avanade's services help improve performance, productivity and sales for organizations in all industries. The company provides unsurpassed Microsoft expertise through a global network of consultants, and applies the right mix of onshore, offshore and nearshore resources to deliver results faster, at lower cost and with less risk. Avanade, which is majority owned by Accenture, was founded in 2000 by Accenture and Microsoft Corporation and serves customers in more than 20 countries worldwide with more than 9,000 professionals. Additional information can be found at www.avanade.com.

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