Communication, collaboration key to hybrid work

And the rise of cloud-based tools

BY KATIE DEE

Over the last nearly three years, questions surrounding hybrid and remote work have circulated in the business world. People want to know if this new way of working is here to stay, if it causes productivity to suffer, how to combat the disconnection that it could bring, and really, just how to cope with all the changes.

In an attempt to answer these questions and solve the challenges that they bring, several companies have adopted cloud tools and technologies in order to fully transition their work into the cloud and make this new working world easier for employees to adjust to.

The influence of the pandemic on cloud adoption

David Williams, VP of product strategy at the cloud and DevOps automation company Quali, said that this push to move to the cloud has resulted in things that used to be on the back burner now taking center stage.

"The front-end, consumer-based applications that have come to fruition in regards to how we interoperate with the consumer world have always been out there," he said. "What

we have seen now is that the governance has come in that enables people to move things to the cloud with a little bit more security and less risk."

According to David Torgerson, VP of infrastructure and IT at the collaboration company Lucid Software, with the pandemic being the driving factor behind the transition into the cloud, a great deal of velocity was needed early on. This caused some companies to thrive while others did not.

"So many companies, if not all companies, had one day where they just decided that tomorrow they're not going to come back into the office so that digital transformation was really forced upon everybody," said Torgerson.

Williams also touched on the pandemic's influence on the rate of cloud adoption. He said, "The pandemic came in and was really what put an emphasis on leveraging the cloud… It had multiple impacts and one of them was the higher priority given to the legacy applications that were on the back burner until a year and a half ago."

Adam Preset, VP analyst at Gartner, emphasized this point. He explained that throughout 2020 and 2021, the volume of questions that organizations had surrounding cloud

cloud tools and technologies right at the start of the pandemic.

According to Ozdemir, companies that already had this cloud infrastructure in place were the ones who were really able to keep up with the pace demanded of them.

Torgerson also said that the main struggle that many companies faced with the initial transition to hybrid work was finding a way to maintain team collaboration and lose as little productivity as possible. This is where cloud tools really worked to pick up the slack.

"What we ran into was a full industry of people who didn't have much experience interacting with each other without that in-person piece," he said. "So, Zoom's stock skyrocketed and Teams and Slack and other communication tools just really took off because of that necessity to maintain some of that in-person experience even in a hybrid environment."

Now it's interpersonal

Ozdemir went on to explain that many organizations had to go through two transformations while adapting to the cloud.

The first took place as they tried to replicate the collaboration available in an office setting and the second was the technology transformation needed to enable that interpersonal collaboration.

"You can almost look at this as a human transformation vs. infrastructure and technology transformation. For the companies that already had those tools, it was really just scaling and training while others had to spend months to implement them first," he said.

Even so, Williams expressed that not all developers in an organization need access to the same collaborative cloud tools. He said that it is highly dependent on the type of development being done.

has facilitated this new WFH normal

collaboration tools increased exponentially.

Preset attributed this to companies realizing that on-premises collaboration tools came with several limitations around where employees had to work and how they can access the technology they need.

Implementing collaboration cloud technology

Cenk Ozdemir, cloud and digital lead at the consulting company PwC, spoke about how the companies that did well with this forced transition are the ones that proactively had some kind of investment in cloud technology and tools.

He said, "Many companies had to find new customers and channels during the pandemic, and what we've seen is that the companies that had been pre-invested in cloud architecture… have been able to innovate much faster than those that weren't on the cloud."

Lucid's Torgerson then explained that in order to adapt to remote and hybrid work well, companies had to move quickly and implement a new work from home strategy that utilized

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"DevOps, for example, is about smaller teams, and those smaller teams are using communication platforms like Slack and they use this sort of communication to update each other on a regular basis," Williams said. "I think that the methods of DevOps, and the ability for the cloud to support that type of application collaboration, has really been what's driven the cloud adoption."

He also said that since a hybrid environment means there is less accidental communication, cloud tools help to foster more intentional and meaningful interactions between team members, as long as everyone uses them to their fullest potential.

Cloud adoption and developer satisfaction

Despite these few pitfalls, though, Quali's Williams believes that the benefits outweigh the challenges. He said, "When it comes to building product… The cloud enables developers and remote workers to spin up instances very quickly without having to go to IT and waste all that time."

Overcoming cloud hurdles

While collaboration tools for software development are extremely helpful, they are not a magic bullet.

Lucid Software VP of Infrastructure and IT David Torgeson explained that once cloud tools are implemented, getting employees on board and using the tools correctly was another pain point early on.

He pointed out that one of the main issues was the employees' instinct to keep their cameras turned off during meetings. This severely limited the amount of non-verbal communication that teams can engage in and led to heightened amounts of miscommunication.

"Those short communication styles where you can use facial expressions to really convey a meaning just disappeared... and that's where visual communication really comes into play," Torgerson explained.

He also said that another way that cloud tools can fall short of their full potential is when organizations only look at them as purely technical, rather than as human-centric, communication tools.

Creating new tool silos

David Williams, VP of product strategy at the cloud and DevOps automation company Quali, pointed out that a downside to transitioning to the cloud when working remotely is the risk of creating silos in an organization.

"There is an awful lot of fragmentation that exists in the market today because most people will look at the benefits of productivity gains and the idea that you can offer much more visibility for developers as consumers use the product, giving them a greater ability to innovate... But the ying to the yang is that you need more skills if you're going to be starting to do that," he said.

He explained that communication needs to be mandated in a way that focuses on strengthening productivity rather than getting too caught up with too many different cloud tools.

With so many options on the market now, as well as new open-source tools being released everyday, Williams said that if a certain tool is not mandated in an organization, everyone may just end up using whatever they want. This ultimately hurts productivity and leads to that fragmentation he mentioned earlier.

"If you and I are developing something and we decided to use something different to provision infrastructure, then if I were to hand something to you, you wouldn't be able to take it very readily without having to reinvent the infrastructure using your tool. So the fragmentation is quite an inhibitor," he explained.

For Cenk Ozdemir, cloud and digital lead at the consulting company PwC, the biggest downside to transitioning into the cloud is the up front costs that a business has to toll out.

He explained that implementing and scaling these tools to house every employee at an organization was just one part of the overall cost.

"Plus the cost of enabling employees by sending them monitors and keyboards and cameras and lights and all other kinds of personal technology enablement," he said. "It's probably the smaller cost but you have to recognize that working from home is more than just putting a laptop in front of you for ten hours a day." ▮

—Katie Dee

Additionally, Torgerson said that the overall happiness and satisfaction level of remote and hybrid developers went up exponentially after implementing cloud technology.

"The experience of using these digital tools for things that we have done for decades prior is just better," he explained. "Now that we are in a hybrid environment... We have found that even when people are in the office they do not prefer to use a whiteboard anymore because these collaborative tools let you share ideas and they allow you to go back and create revisions and histories and create action items and link it directly to Jira or Asana so it does more than what the traditional whiteboard ever could... The world has just changed for the better."

On top of these benefits, PwC's Ozdemir credited the increase in developer satisfaction to the fact that it gives developers and engineers a lot of their personal time back.

"Engineers were enabled to remotely collaborate... and in other locations like India, it did cut down a significant amount of commute time in some of these countries," he said. "So our engineers, to a large extent, were probably one of the most satisfied in the move."

Williams also touched on the overall effect on developer satisfaction with cloud tools, but he had a different take.

He pointed out that adding cloud tools into an organization has the potential to increase complexity for developers and, therefore, make their jobs harder if they are not implemented properly.

"I think we're the only industry that when it comes to making things simpler and easier, we add something," he explained. "So I think developers are happier than they were, but they're still not fully happy."

Even with Williams' assessment, the developer response has been mostly positive. Because of this, Torgerson posits that even though the pandemic was the catalyst for hybrid work, its end does not mean that organizations will be going back into an office full time any time soon.

"If companies force their employees to go back into an office then they are ignoring the advancements that have been so great," he said. "I think that communication happens by accident in an office and I think in the coming years we will see a pivot from accidental communication to organizations recognizing that they need to help facilitate some intentional interactions [via cloud tools]." ▮