Business Operations Made Simple with Cloud-Based Collaboration Services
# TimeToDoBig

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Another work model that emphasises on the need for flexibility and is being used across industries is the ‘Results Only Work Environment’ (ROWE). Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson conceptualised and published it in the book ‘Why Work Sucks and How to Fix It’. According to ROWE, team members should be evaluated for their performance, productivity and results instead of the number of hours they spend working in the office.

To drive flexibility, some businesses also implement time-agnostic work patterns (instead of traditional nine-to-five culture) where workers can follow their own schedules to complete assignments. And it helps them to retain loyal teams that are productive and goal-oriented.

According to a report, around 58 per cent of office goers in India work remotely at least once a week. This agility is essential in an age when customers expect fast and efficient solutions even as the size and scope of projects continually grow. And the key to effectively working with such a remote and mobile workforce is seamless communication.
Collaboration has long been a trait of successful and high-performing organisations. With their customers, partners and stakeholders across the globe, organisations also communicate across geographies. They may have hired the services of talented contract/gig workers based in international locations. They need a suite of integrated digital collaboration services that is also secure and well-controlled to stay connected with such entities and accelerate everyday tasks. This is where cloud technology helps.

When teams shatter the glass walls, they are mobilised to build quality products and services to impress clients and perform well in the market. With more ideas about how to join forces and use each other’s skills positively, collaboration is becoming increasingly significant for workplaces around the world.

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**The Drawbacks of Not Deploying Flexible Collaboration Tools**

Without leveraging collaboration, an organisation can end up as a mere collection of competing silos and individuals. Ineffective collaboration can also inhibit a team’s efficiency and result in poor performance in more ways than one.

**Poor team management:** People feel disinterested in their jobs when they do not have clear goals and key performance indicators or are unaware of how their fellow workers are contributing to a project.

**Less transparency:** Where team members know that their work depends on others, they have to share their progress, concerns and challenges regularly. Teams cannot establish trust without transparency.

**Unhealthy competition:** A compelling benefit of collaboration is that workers, even with diverse skills, can support and mentor each other. An environment of competitive barriers restricts knowledge sharing.

**Low engagement:** The building of a collaborative group stems from within the team itself.

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Today, most humans are ‘digitally social’ animals. Clearly, digital collaboration is critical to the success of teamwork. Employee engagement can lead up to a 19 per cent increase in the operating income of businesses.

With globalisation increasing the geographical spread of enterprises, digital collaboration tools are vital to get the best out of diverse talent. Two decades ago, the common belief was that workers had to occupy the same space as the rest of their team to be productive. That is no longer the case.

Organisations today are redefining traditional ideas concerning work. They focus strongly on allowing employees to complete tasks wherever and whichever way it is suitable for them.

Someone may be working from a coffee house or their couch at home; they may organise a quick stand-up meeting with their colleagues or a virtual one from any part of the world – flexibility is shaping the future to create collaborative workplaces. The office cubicles are no more the only hubs of productivity.

**Digital Collaboration Is Reshaping the Way Businesses Operate:**

Enterprises can choose from a variety of platforms to connect such far-flung employees.

**Constraints of Traditional Communication Systems and the Benefits of Cloud Collaboration Strategy**

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It comprises the discussions on buy-in concerning the process, directions to move in and the expected results. Where teams are not engaged, it is difficult to identify problems and develop their solutions.
Traditional on-premise systems are expensive to maintain and difficult to scale and upgrade. Cloud-based collaboration systems have helped to bridge this gap. They bring in the benefits of seamless collaboration, anytime connectivity between workers, flexible mobility, round-the-clock availability of data and scalability of data centres.

With tools such as VoIP, Office 365, G Suite, Skype and a host of other web conferencing tools, organisations can move beyond the complex, on-premise apps that were used to support communication through the past decade.

Here are six factors that businesses should consider while deciding between on-premise and cloud-based VoIP systems for telephony:

**Availability**

Accessibility is the most common reason for migrating to cloud-based collaboration solutions. A cloud solution comes with multiple redundant systems that help to ensure seamless availability of service.

Most businesses cannot afford to pay for the development of an on-premise redundant system that matches the capabilities of the cloud. Cloud service providers can enable round-the-clock availability of their communication systems because these are hosted in geographically distant data centres designed for redundancy. The continuity of communication service is assured even if there is a catastrophic incident on the business premises.
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Ability to be integrated into Unified Communications

The cloud has made it possible for businesses to incorporate a host of communication apps on to a centrally managed pool. By bringing all their multimedia collaboration software into a single platform, they pave the way for even more efficiency, transparency and data security. Thanks to the cloud delivery model, the Unified Communications solution can be offered like any other Software as a Service (SaaS), and it is termed as Unified Communications as a Service (UCaaS).

Seamless access to evolving technologies

With a cloud-based collaboration service, businesses can access new technologies with advanced functionality and integrated capabilities. They need not worry about obsolescence when they have their applications in the cloud as the service provider makes the latest capabilities available to them.

Conversely, given the speed of communication technology changes in the past few years, each new upgrade in the case of any on-premise software would be expensive to pay for.

Scalability

While on-premise software systems can also be scaled, the process eats substantially into the budget. Also, once an organisation scales up, they get stuck with the investment. Buying the hardware, software and solutions to operate the scaled setup is uneconomical.

In comparison, cloud-based collaboration solutions can be scaled cost-effectively even by small and medium enterprises.

Unified Communications support smart decision-making by aggregating data from different cloud apps to a single location. They help businesses understand how their employees work and serve the customers so that improvements can be made accordingly.

With siloed on-premise communication systems, this level of transparency and agility is practically impossible to obtain.
Moreover, if an organisation needs to scale down due to seasonal demand changes, promotional offers or a sudden downturn in the business, it can adjust its requirements without wasting any investment. This flexibility comes from the OpEx-based model of the cloud. The service provider handles scaling without any reconfiguration issues for the business.

Service providers today offer some of the most effective security systems. By subscribing to cloud-based platforms for business communication, enterprises get encryption, network security, secure data transfer and regulatory compliance structures of their industry as a part of the service package.

The security aspects of on-premise software have to be guarded by the in-house IT team, and any laxity or error in encrypting/upgrading/patching software can lead to data breach and other business continuity problems.

Cloud-based communication and collaboration systems dramatically reduce the cost of ownership as the service provider bears the expenses in upgrading/maintaining hardware, peripheries and software. Businesses only pay a fixed amount each month as per their Service Level Agreement (SLA). By leveraging the cloud, they also save on the costs of IT staffing and support.

Cost of ownership

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Challenges and Concerns in Shifting Applications to the Cloud

While the shift to the cloud is often looked upon as a cure-all, it conversely – and typically – also leaves IT teams and CIOs overwhelmed by the scale of managing complex ecosystems. This is why most of them prefer managed service providers to support their internal team, transform the existing infrastructure and mitigate any security risk.

Privacy and data security are the two top concerns that businesses have while contemplating the deployment of cloud solutions for their collaboration systems. In addition, some applications have complex integration requirements to connect with other apps in the cloud platform as also with on-premise software. It is essential to connect cloud systems with the rest of the IT infrastructure in a simple and cost-effective way.

Some businesses cite that with cloud they can save money on hardware, equipment and on-premise software but have to spend more on bandwidth.

Understandably, organisations have to consider the significant costs associated with data-heavy apps, since delivering intensive data over the network will call for extra bandwidth. The dependency on the service provider and fear of vendor lock-in is another problem that prevents businesses from moving to the cloud.

The final consideration is among three major kinds of cloud platforms – public, private and hybrid. Businesses must adopt a set of applications that is most congruent with their specifications.

While large-scale enterprises can afford to save their data and communication systems in a private cloud, an SME may only be able to afford space in a public cloud. Many do not trust the security of this platform. Others look for a hybrid cloud that will be cost-effective and agile and will provide an optimal blend of public and private cloud features.

The Roadmap for Successful Migration

The challenges and concerns are well-founded. Nevertheless, they are not quite roadblocks in the deployment of cloud-based communication systems. The roadmap to successful migration would include:

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A significant effect of choosing the ‘X’aaS (which may be SaaS/FaaS/PaaS/IaaS) service model lies in the positioning of service responsibilities that describe the particular tasks of the cloud service provider and the business adopting the cloud solutions. By engaging the right people in the right processes, the migration becomes smoother.

Addressing compliance, security and privacy requirements

The key issues that prevent most businesses from adopting any cloud-based programs are those that concern compliance, security and privacy. It is crucial to outline and implement appropriate procedures, policies and systems to satisfy these requirements. The operations also need to be monitored for due adherence. Cloud vendors must facilitate a secure connection to the platform. A business subscribing to a cloud-based collaboration system must have a comprehensively documented SLA from its cloud vendor. The SLA must contain details on the demonstration of compliance, the regulatory requirements as are benchmarked in the industry, the duties of both parties in incidence management and the data retention period for the service provider.

Developing a business case

To build a business case for migration of applications and software to the cloud, the organisation needs a comprehensive cloud computing strategy that includes specific information describing the current state and the benefits that a cloud-based platform will bring. The case must emphasise not only on the cost benefits calculated but also the business value. In the context of business strategy for cloud migration, it is advisable to identify the specific challenges posed by the existing software and how the cloud can address them.

Following a technical approach

Generally, the possible target service models to migrate existing applications can be combinations of Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS), Container as a Service (CaaS) and Function as a Service (FaaS). Where the application concerned is a packaged one, it can be shifted to Software as a Service (SaaS).
In 2018, the unified communications (UC) market evolved rapidly, and there was a shift towards more consolidated workplace collaboration. Much of this has been attributed to cloud-based communication solutions. As per Nemertes’s ‘Unified Communications and Collaboration: 2019 Research Study’, 67 per cent of the organisations now have a part of their UCC apps in the cloud, and nearly one-third of them are all in the cloud.

The approaches to using cloud collaboration solutions also vary. While more prominent organisations lean more towards hosted and customised services, SMEs adopt the flexible and low-priced UCaaS. With further developments in UCaaS and their ability to support bigger organisations, there will be a shift towards the multi-tenant model as the preferred cloud approach for businesses.

Another noticeable trend is that while most of the companies have team collaboration apps today, their employees still use them largely for instant messaging. In times to come, analysts expect a stronger focus on team collaboration. Cloud and UCC vendors are working to integrate workflows and external software systems into team communication systems to make them a true hub of internal and external collaboration.

Manage the migration

Once the IT department has defined on paper the ‘what, why and how’ for the migration of cloud collaboration and associated apps, they can concur with the cloud vendor to execute the process. The migration can be a complicated task and should be entrusted to an experienced service provider and internal project manager. The organisation must closely monitor all tasks, resources, durations and costs.

Generally, it is good to start with a pilot for one or two of the chosen apps, test them thoroughly, document the resulting changes and gather user feedback so that improvements can be brought in before migrating other applications.

Collaboration in the Cloud: Future Trends
And that will come with the convergence of collaboration systems and other enterprise apps in the cloud.

At Tata Tele Business Services, we design innovative business tools that support an increasingly mobile workforce, BYOD culture and demands for flexibility while also leveraging opportunities offered by big data and the Internet of Things. With our cloud collaboration tools, we aim to remove all barriers to working together and create a seamless, dynamic collaboration environment for organisations and their teams.

If your existing telecommunications and conferencing setup are not contributing to the productivity of your business in ways you expect, get in touch with us to adopt an innovative, future-ready collaboration setup.

Security will also become more critical in this domain. The Nemertes study found that in 2018, little more than one-third of the organisations had a proactive security strategy for their communication systems. It combines mandated use of encryption, monitoring, penetration testing, patch-ups, firewalls and audits to check the traffic and safeguard the apps against cyber attacks. This focus on security will become stronger with cloud vendors continually working on the threats of attack, data exfiltration and denial of service as top-priority concerns.

Streaming videos services, which are available on the majority of business communication apps, will be leveraged for more than mere conferencing in the future. Businesses can use them to support their field workers and customer service reps for more efficient operations. In combination with Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality (AR-VR) technologies, remote engineers can use videos too to guide workers in plants and factories.

Conclusion

The last few decades in the communication and collaboration domain have proved a cliché to be an undeniable fact – change is the only constant. In an organisation, people always need to come together to work on projects and meet deadlines, but how they come together has been continually changing.

CEOs want to create a collaborative environment, and a host of communications apps have successfully bridged gaps. The aim, however, is to transform these connections into more productivity and growth for the organisation.
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