WHAT EVERY DECISION MAKER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT CLOUD COMPUTING

Cloud computing has helped create a dramatic shift in how business is conducted. Consider how information is received, shared and stored; how processes are managed and how businesses operate. In this Criticaleye checklist, IBM's John Easton (Cloud Computing Technical Leader), offers his insight on what business leaders should know when considering taking their companies into the cloud.

Cloud is ready for business. Many organisations are now running entire functions on clouds very successfully and finding the business benefits in doing so. Others are either currently running cloud projects or planning such a move in the near future.

Is cloud for you? Few organisations are looking at cloud to completely replace their internal IT systems as to do so could be a costly and risky proposition. There is still very much a place for internal IT systems, but there is just as likely at least one function which could benefit from being run within a cloud.

Public, private or hybrid cloud? There are many different models for cloud computing. Most organisations look at private clouds because they feel more comfortable with this approach. Organisations are using public clouds for areas with less stringent service levels or security needs. There is place for both types of cloud within organisations and over time the hybrid between internal and external systems will become commonplace.

How does the cost compare? Cost savings are often given as the reason to move to cloud. Only paying for the services you use

rather than the complete infrastructure allows you to more easily link IT costs to business results. However, many organisations are finding that in the long-term, the greatest value doesn't come from the cost savings, attractive as they are, but rather from the increased business agility.

Will my users accept it? They are probably more ready for cloud than you think. Any user with a smartphone is used to the self-service provisioning of services today. Indeed they are likely to be wondering why they can do this on their phone but can't on their organisation's IT systems.

Is my organisation ready for cloud? The business agility that a cloud can offer can be undone or undermined if existing organisational processes are not adapted to reflect the more dynamic nature of the IT systems. Implementing a cloud is likely to need some organisational and process changes to realise the full benefits.

Who has control? If you are running your own cloud then you do. If you are buying cloud services from another organisation then you are ceding some control to that organisation. You will need to assess

how much of an issue this might be and how best to handle that relationship.

What about security? Security is frequently raised as a reason for not moving to the cloud. But for a private cloud, there is no reason to expect the security to be any less than on any other IT system you run. When moving to a cloud run outside of your organisation you will need to ensure that the security it provides is suitable to meet your needs.

Where do I start? You first need to understand how a cloud solution would support your organisation's objectives and what benefits would result. Having done this you need to look at whether your current IT infrastructure can support cloud delivery and then develop a road map to achieve your cloud objectives.

© Criticaleye 2010

John Easton
Cloud Computing Technical Leader, IBM UK & Ireland

Contact the John through www.criticaleye.net