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Video Transcript: Implementing Cloud Solutions

An ROI Innovation Report

From the Cloud Computing Innovation
Series

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This document contains an edited transcription of a video roundtable session from December, 2009. Participants include Mark Kovarski, Senior Business Technology Consultant for Bank of Montreal; Rene Marquis, IT Director for the Laval School Board; and Doug Jones, Business Unit Executive, Cloud Computing for IBM Canada. The session was moderated by Michael O'Neil, Chief Content Officer for IT in Canada.

Michael O'Neil: Welcome to the fourth segment of the Benefits of Cloud Computing series. I'm Michael O'Neil, Chief Content Officer for IT in Canada.

In our previous segments, we've talked about the business triggers for cloud computing, sources of savings and new capability that come along with the cloud strategy, and about building the business case and an RFP for a cloud initiative. In this segment, we'll move on to discuss the keys around the successful implementation of cloud

Mark, Bank of Montreal has an ongoing cloud initiative. Have there been any real surprises, pro or con, in the implementation process that had a significant impact on the time required to implement your cloud solution, the way that it was rolled out to users and/or the IT or business management time required to work through the implementation process?

Mark Kovarski: Yes, I think that the challenges on that are also opportunities to speak to our balance of processes and people. While the [cloud] technology is there and it's maturing, and the vendors are providing their offerings, it's the processes that push the judgment as you go through the journey. And it truly is a journey of evolution and so those are the areas that we're on.

Michael: So in terms of processes and people, were there any people that you expected to be further behind or further ahead or any processes that are better or worse in line than where you expected them to be?

Mark: Well, it's a mix. Definitely, the people skills that need to come along as we roll, as part of our virtualization initiative, building out your own internal cloud and looking at external as well, down the road, is definitely an area that needs to be looked at. So people processes, I always say, are the key to performance.

Michael: Thanks. Rene, I know that likely resonates with you as well, since you have described cloud as an extension of your infrastructure and a longer journey that you've taken on. Have you found any real surprises as you roll out your cloud implementation, in terms of positive or negative impacts that you that you hadn't expected when you started into implementation?

Rene Marquis: I would say one critical issue is to really make sure the solution that you're going to be implementing will be truly benchmarked properly. Second, I would add that you prepare a plan B, just in case a plan A doesn't work properly. And plan for proper management of your deployment, and deployment by phase. I would say we went pretty fast in our deployment, but we had to stop for some time, just because of the different problems with the network. So actually, a thin client will actually highlight any weaknesses that you may have within your organization with your network. So I would say you must plan for a careful and perhaps phased deployment of your thin clients.

Michael: Were there any sections in your deployment in particular where plan B became really important?

Rene: Oh yes. You've got to make sure that you're going to be able to maintain two different environments for quite some time. And at the same time, if you have any unusual requests, vis-a-vis maintenance and things like that, you must have resource skills. One of the issues we faced is that we realized that the people that should work on this project have to have higher skills than regular people, so make sure that you have people [that are] topnotch. Because when you have problems or you must investigate to find them and try and properly and quickly solve them, find solutions. So you need properly skilled people, higher skilled people, and it's going to require a little bit larger number of people than you would have normally.

Michael: And are there natural break points? You talked about phased deployment. Are there natural sections that your cloud initiative fell into that you were able to say "This is phase one, this is phase two, that will be phase three when we get to it?"

Rene: Oh yes, we actually did it in five phases. We initially started with just about 800 thin clients within a computer lab type of situation. We moved this program eventually to all the classrooms in the school board. One of the issues that really came about in change management is user resistance to a new interface or a new system, and that's a big issue actually. Not too much of a technical issue now, these days, as it is to convince people to change the interface or the type of system they've been using for say five or 10 years.

Michael: Well, there's always a difficulty in changing the ways that people touch a computer. And everybody is nodding, so that must be true. Mark, does that phase resonate with you as well? In particular, "we'll start inside the IT department and then we'll start looking at particular departments outside the IT department?"

Mark: That's correct. Start out small. That's a very, very key point that we have to realize. And then build out from there. Pick a project. If you have a project that can give you a quick results, quick wins, and then evolve from there,

Michael: So Doug, you've seen a number of cloud implementations. What are some of the characteristics that stand out about the ones that were particularly successful?

Doug Jones: Right. Well, just as Rene mentioned, doing a phased approach, I think, is the right way to go. And typically that first phase is deploying a good concept. So you're really testing that to make sure that the business case and the numbers you've put in the business case are going to hold up. And some clients are having business people comprise the team, to make sure that we get the business value because

the cloud really involves delivering services back to the business. Including a non-technical business person on the team can be an important aspect as well.

Michael: How big a barrier are changed interfaces as you start to involve these business people outside the IT department?

Doug: Well as Mark mentioned, that when you're deploying a cloud environment, it's an office community and it's a streamline to fix-up business process. So by injecting a business person into it, it's not just about implementing some new technologies, it's about changing the process along the way, so it provides a much higher value and return on investment.

Michael: And do you find that the organizations that IBM works with are typically starting with this, as you said, picking a project and hooking the cloud initiative to a specific, discrete business objective? Or do you find that they do it more as an infrastructure enhancement to roll out?

Doug: Actually I've seen both. I've seen clients say, "You know what? Let's start with this small area and sort of kick the tires and play with it in a small environment," and it sort of naturally evolves from there. Or clients that do a fully blown-up business case and deploy it into a five phase project like Rene has done.

Michael: Thanks.

Rene: If I could add on the issue of change management? You also have issues with actually the people in IT as well. These people are coming in with a new technology, and maybe some of them may be a little bit afraid of what's coming up the road, so you also might have put the brakes on as well. Enough so we have to deal with the issue with the clients, but also with the employees themselves. Because they see this as a new technology, they see that their services might be less required eventually, and this is something that has to be heard.

Michael: Well you know it's interesting you should say that, because Doug and I, after our last session, were talking about the fact that cloud delivers real benefits but also puts pressure on CIOs to deliver to a consistently efficient benchmark.

Rene: That's right.

Doug: Well absolutely. Cloud computing is a great opportunity for IT in business, but it also can come with some challenges that have to be worked through as well. We talked a little bit about security and privacy earlier and how security and privacy issues can be handled in a special way in a cloud environment. But also just the fact that IT will sometimes be in a position where they have to defend their current cost structure against what can be purchased from a cloud environ.

Michael: Mark, do you find that the deal? The efficiencies of the cloud can put pressure on the IT department to live up to that level of delivery?

Mark: Absolutely, we definitely see that every day. It's an actual progression, and it's an evolution, and it's an opportunity. It's an opportunity, I believe, for everyone, the business and IT, to deliver greater value to the organization.

Michael: Thanks. Now let's jump straight to our wrap-up list. As in our other segments, I'd like each of you to contribute one or two or perhaps three items to a checklist that one of our readers or one of viewers could use to help them to identify best practices or at least factors that they need to consider as they go through the implementation around cloud. Mark, could we start with you? What is it that you would advise people to keep in mind as they start into a cloud implementation?

Mark: Definitely. Doug mentioned and I would agree, getting a POC is critical. Start out small. Start out with a smaller initiative that you think can provide value to the business and then go from there.

Michael: Thanks. So Rene we've heard proof of the concept, that it's important to start small and then roll out to business. What tips or tricks or gotchas would you add to that list for our readers or our viewers who are thinking about "What is it I need to do to make sure that my cloud deployment is as successful as Laval's?"

Rene: I agree with the first idea with benchmarking to the project area, to the students in our case, is extremely fundamental. And I must say that you must do an ongoing deployment, and you might be repeating yourself sometimes, I tell people they tend to forget. If you want a chance for the project to be successful, you must keep it alive, which means you must be doing your regular work plus also keeping everybody informed. I guess communication is one of the major issues in our case as well. My team is an organization and you got to make sure that people want to test what's coming out from IT.

Michael: I think that's a great point to remember is that communication is always critical. Doug, how would you add to our list? Start small, build through a concept, benchmark appropriately so that the savings are real and seen to be real, and communicate effectively.

Doug: And just really as mentioned before, add a business person to the project, so we keep that business focus and we make sure that we're building our cloud to really largest return on investment back to business, as we identify initial businesses.

Michael: As opposed to the "Field of Dreams, " you build it and they accept it.

Doug: Exactly. And it's not that difficult to get tied up into all the great new technologies and lose sight of why we're doing it in the first place.

Michael: And I think that's a great place for that. The business benefit of cloud is what it is that we're here to experience. Thank you. On behalf of our expert panelists (Mark Kovarski, Senior Business Technology Consultant from Bank of Montreal, Rene Marquis, IT director from the Laval School Board, and Doug Jones, Business Unit Executive, Cloud Computing IBM Canada) I'm Michael O'Neil. Thank you for attending this ROI Innovation.ca Cloud Computing video roundtable session.