The cloud - a key enabler of business innovation

Consequently, the role of the CIO has become that of executioner of the corporate strategy, which requires that they have an IT strategy that is aligned with business innovation.

According to a report by the PwC, increasingly, CIOs will hold the key to unlocking competitive advantage, business benefits and relevant customer engagement, and with this shift comes growing pressure on, and higher expectations of, the IT function.

Andre Schwan, deal solutions manager at T-Systems South Africa, says the role of the CIO has been changing gradually over the past 15 years.

"From as early as 2007, the ability of the CIO to increase the organisation's revenue opportunities was already recognised in management studies, with this shift picking up momentum over the last few years. This has snowballed in the past decade and the role has become one taxed with a seemingly inhuman combination of requirements," he says.

Sonja Webber, lead delivery solutions manager at T-Systems South Africa, notes that there are three phases in a CIO's strategy that can assist to support the business.

Sonja Weber

"Firstly, during the design phase, it is very important that the CIO understands the strategic imperatives of an organisation because they are no longer designing just technology, but also business processes," she says.

The second phase is defining an organisation's core strategy where the CIO needs to understand the business impact of changes, not just on the technology and process layer, but also on the organisational change layer.

"The third stage is to establish how IT can enable the company's strategy through the appropriate technology. The CIO needs to understand that a strategy is a living component, so there is a reiterative review that needs to be done. A strategy cannot be defined once and remain dormant. This is where cloud comes into play," says Webber.

Schwan adds that the cloud plays a central role in the CIO's strategy as an enabler of innovation, as cloud platforms can underpin an organisation's ability to innovate at speed and drive the business strategy.

"The cloud enables greater business agility as it offers a platform well suited to rapid development, distribution, deployment and experimentation with new technologies, in such a way that the company does not have to go through long investment decision cycles," he says.

"The cloud platform is built to support modular design, creating the smallest and simplest ways to deliver business processes and reusing and combining them to create the capability for the company."

Furthermore, he points out that the cloud environment assists rapid scaling and increased interoperability, as well as allowing the initiatives to either succeed or fail quickly and cheaply.

"The cloud allows you to have a practical testbed for the execution of your strategy, so you have a very quick, but visible, result of whether the strategy is working from a technology perspective," he says.

Andre Schwan

Webber explains that an outsourced aggregator of cloud services can assist the CIO's quest to deliver on the business strategy with additional innovation, greater access to skills and broader R&D spend.

"An outsourcer has a lot of experience in managing multiple facets of IT, not just from a technology perspective, but also understanding business and how IT fits into it. They will bring a lot of experience when it comes to cloud complexity in general. Instead of you having to build skills, pricing models, ask for a budget, do the planning, build a strategy for multiple platforms and multiple technologies, a cloud aggregator can build it and manage it on your behalf," she concludes.

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