



Architecting the Cloud
with Mike Kavis

Architecting the Cloud, part of the On Cloud Podcast

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Title:	A catalyst for cloud: the flexibility to weather the COVID-19-related downturn
Description:	The COVID-19 pandemic, and the business challenges caused by it, might be a catalyst for many companies to accelerate their move to cloud. But there are other critical things that companies can focus on now as well. In this episode of the podcast, Mike Kavis and guest, CIO strategist Tim Crawford, discuss how the pandemic plus an economic downturn has prompted some companies to accelerate their move to cloud. Tim discusses how cloud enables the flexibility and scalability needed to help companies meet the challenges of today's downturn. He also underscores that the critical thing for companies right now is to make sure that that the business stays viable and that employees are healthy and positioned for success both now in times of disruption, and in the future.
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Operator:

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Hey, everyone. Welcome back to the Architecting the Cloud podcast, where we get real about cloud technology. We discuss what's new in the cloud, what's hot, and why we should use it with people in the field who do the work every day. I'm your host, Mike Kavis, Chief Cloud Architect over at Deloitte. Today I am joined by Tim Crawford. Tim is ranked as one of the topmost influential CIOs, and you're probably ranked in the top 20. And he also has his own podcast, host of CIO in the Know podcast. So, Tim, welcome to the show, and tell us a little bit about your background and what you're up to these days.

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, Mike, thanks for having me on the program. It's great to be chatting with you again and looking forward to this conversation. So as you mentioned, my background is I'm a CIO. Spent 30 years in IT, much of that leading different IT organizations. So love to jump into it and share what I'm starting to see from other CIOs.

Mike Kavis:

Great, great, good to have you. So we're going to start with a blog post you recently wrote talking about the three hurdles of 2020 and beyond, and in that, the hurdles you mentioned is this kind of collision of three things going on right now: the economic downturn, the pandemic, and then everyone working from home and the social impact of that. So what are your thoughts about that? As a CIO, having to deal with all that, wrap that up for us.

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, you know, they come in waves, and so of course the pandemic is what everyone is really focused on today, but we have a social impact that we have...how do we think about not just working from home but in terms of how we do work. How do we change who we work with, how we bring in other folks? So of course this is interrelated with the pandemic, but it's something that I don't think a lot of folks have really kind of thought through aside from just simply working from home. A good example of this is, as a leader, you might have regular one-on-ones, or you might have team meetings. How do you ensure that you're keeping your people feeling connected, feeling engaged with whatever it is that they might be doing? That's not a trivial thing to us, and so it's just one of many examples, but there's a social impact that comes into this.

The second wave is the pandemic, and you know, a lot of folks talk about business continuity, and I think we'll talk a little more about this too, but when you think about business continuity, if you have an issue, if you have a core issue, you might be able to shift that work to other places, other locations, other ways of doing things. The problem with pandemics is that they affect everybody around the globe, and so we have to think about what happens if Mike or Tim actually gets sick and they can't actually work? And what happens if the entire team gets sick and can't actually work? How do you bring other people into the mix and how do you ensure that your business continues? And so we're starting to see some of the ramifications of that, just in small business alone, but it happens with corporations too. Look at some of the largest entities on the planet, and they're suffering as well, not just in the manufacturing or transportation or hospitality spaces, but other industries too. So pandemics are the second of the waves.

And then the third piece to this is the economic downturn. And we saw inklings of this happening last year, but people, I don't think, were really kind of thinking through what that meant. You know, I often say that they were kind of high on wealth, and we were looking at up, up, up, not thinking about, okay, downturns are cyclic. We need to be prepared for the next one and what did we learn from the last one? And so this is the next wave that folks are going to be experiencing in spades come probably Q2 through Q3 of this year.

Mike Kavis:

Yeah, and it went from, you know, we're not thinking about it to, wham, it's here, right. Because a lot of industries are getting beaten up because they're closed, or people aren't traveling or whatever's going on. It's just like instantly there's a downturn. It wasn't like we could prepare for this over time. So how do you deal with that when things are looking good and then tomorrow you wake up and things are, like, shut down?

Tim Crawford:

Well, if you're going from zero to sixty, or in this particular case, sixty to zero, that's really hard to deal with. I mean, either extreme is hard to deal with. Going from zero to sixty is hard and so is going from sixty to zero. The reality is that we have to think about what levers we can pull and when we can pull them to give us the greatest flexibility, and this is why organizations that are actually using this time right now to think about how they can accelerate some of those new projects, not experiments. Experiments have been tabled to a large degree at this point, but those efforts that might catapult them to bring AI into the mix or ML or cloud so that when they do hit that dry period of the downturn, they have different options that they can pull. If they wait until it actually comes about, they won't have the funding to move those projects forward. It'll just be simply a square and clear focus on operational efficiency, how do I cut, cut, cut and cut your costs.

And they won't – unfortunately, those levers will not have developed, or be in a mature state that they can pull it. So good example of this. If you're moving a particular workload or application from a traditional data center to cloud, I mean, this is a very crude example, but it's one that many are actually looking through right now. How do I accelerate that to move that into cloud as quickly as possible so that – and I don't just mean lift and shift, just so we're clear here. But what I'm talking about is refactoring or moving to a cloud-native type of approach or architecture such that when you hit that downturn, now I can start to scale resources back, I can start to think differently about how I'm going to run that application or that particular workload. And then, consequently, when we come out of that lull, when we get to the other side of it, I can ramp that back up again just as easily. But we have to think about how to deal with that now, not wait until it's upon us.

Mike Kavis:

Yeah, one question I wanted to ask, you know, moving to the cloud and all that, but there are many people now who have on-premise systems, and if something goes wrong, they have to call in people who are being quarantined right now. And we had a case here in Florida where we finally closed down the area and the troopers are stopping people on the highway, asking them where they're going. So it creates complexities for having to support physical things. I'm just wondering if you hear any chatter from your CIO colleagues, if people are starting to think about the impacts of that and thinking more about moving stuff to the cloud because of this.

Tim Crawford:

Absolutely. Without a doubt. Absolutely. I mean, if there ever was a hurdle that stood in front of cloud, it probably got knocked down in the last 60 days. Now, that's a very broad statement. There are exceptions to that, of course, but that movement to cloud and some of the challenges that we're facing with the pandemic, whether it's stay at home, being locked down, having to prove that you are essential, depending on what state you happen to be in. I mean, California's been in lockdown now for – and I use the word lockdown loosely. It's not truly a lockdown, but one requirement of staying at home unless you have an essential trip outside the home. And that gets to be really hard for IT folks, especially those specifically that have to go to a data center or have to physically make a change or can't physically work remotely. That's a problem.

When you move to cloud, one of the great things that comes from that is really kind of forcing you to think about how to run in a lights-out operation. Now, arguably this is something that I know my organizations have done in the past, and I know a lot of organizations really strive to, which is running lights-out.

And what that means is that you're running your data center lights-out, such that someone doesn't physically need to go to the data center, and it's more of a psychological shift. There are physical components that have to be put in place and logical components that have to be put in place, but once you get over those hurdles, then that move to cloud and understanding that you're already kind of in that lights-out mentality, that you won't be able to go, and that's a good thing. There are other folks that could help you out if need be, but it is one of the things that is shifting, and a hurdle that's getting knocked down pretty quickly, when you start thinking about why you would or wouldn't move to public cloud.

Mike Kavis:

Two of the reasons I see customers having success, one is really good leadership. The other one's usually a compelling event. Those events may be, hey, we need to go from ten data centers to two, or we need to build this green field AI application to leapfrog our competition. Well, this is a compelling event, so this could drive a lot more success because a lot of times people just – they don't know why they're going to cloud; they're just doing it and the urgency's not there and the need to change processes in organizations isn't as high. Those are some of the blockers, right, but now there's this compelling event. So I'm hopeful that some of the companies that were already leaning that way, or moving that way, will get a little more sense of urgency and purpose and will have more success doing that in the future.

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, I agree with you, Mike. I mean, this is a huge shift, and the move to cloud is not cheap. Regardless of the mantra and the narrative that started in the very early days of cloud, of cloud is cheaper, cloud is cheaper; cloud is not cheap. But there are those reasons that really kind of afford us an opportunity with cloud that we really should have been taking advantage of. There's a saying, and I've heard it used in different IT organizations just in the last 30 to 60 days, but no good crisis should go unused. And the whole point to that is, when you have an issue, when you have a problem, that becomes – right or wrong, that becomes your catalyst, your opportunity to effect change. And usually it's dramatic change. So we often have seen this happen when there's a security breach, right, there's a breach of data.

All of a sudden, the purse strings open up and you can spend oodles of money on cybersecurity processes, and teams, and products, and solutions that you were really struggling to get justified just a week earlier. The same thing is holding true now. I think the difference, though, is we have to be really careful because there is that economic downturn that's right on the heels. So what you want to be careful about is that you don't just arbitrarily assume that, okay, let's open the coffers and let's just spend and make this move. You have to do it smartly. You have to figure out what aspects will put you in a better position, not just during that pandemic part of the cycle, but also during the economic downturn part of the cycle and once you get on the other side of the economic downturn part of the cycle.

So you have to think about this over time, and I think this is where a lot of folks get tripped up is they think about the here and now, and they don't think about this over time. And we see this, like for example, the reality is you are spending money for that resource over time, and so we have to think about this operational impact over time, whether it's how we react to the pandemic input, how we react to the economic downturn input and how we are going to prepare ourselves once we get on the other side of it.

Mike Kavis:

It might be too early to answer this one, but I'm going to put you on the spot anyway. But what are the boards telling the CIOs these days? I don't know if anyone's had the board meeting. Not too many have had their board meetings since this all started, but I'm just wondering what would be some of the mandates coming down from the board to the CIO.

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, it's a mixed bag. These are folks that grew up in business, that have a financial background, and so, first and foremost, they want to make sure that the different stakeholders are safe and that everything is being done that can be done to protect the stakeholders. Now, the stakeholders are not just employees, but it's also customers, it's also your partners, it's your ecosystem, and making sure that you're keeping a healthy balance there. And then, of course, there's the political fallout.

You want to be careful that you aren't seen as taking advantage of these terms or the pandemic situation. But the other piece is there's a lot of conversation around just do what's right, right now, and if that means getting people home and getting them healthy, it doesn't matter. Just go do it. So a good example of how this has played out is CIOs that have told their staff go buy every laptop, keyboard, mouse, webcam, external monitor that you can find.. We need those resources to be able to get people to work from home and get them home as quickly as possible.

Not everybody is set up to work from home. In some cases, you know, some of the support that's being done by IT organizations right now is home networking support. Who would have thought that your IT staff would have to get smart about the myriad of different ways that your configuration is set up at home? Oh, and by the way, you might have a spouse or a partner that's also working from home, and you might have kids that are doing online classes. And so now, all of a sudden, that network that carried one person working from home at a time is now carrying four full-tilt.

So getting back to your question about what boards are doing, at least of the ones that I've been privy to, the conversations I've been privy to, it's been let's make sure that the business stays healthy as best as possible, but first and foremost, we need to make sure that our stakeholders are enabled for success as best we can, as quickly as possible. So I think the very next thing, though, that will be on the conversation docket, and it's already starting, is (A) how do we start to change our business operations to be more flexible, especially if you're someone that has a lot of exposure in someplace like China. And that doesn't mean, hey, let's move everything out of China.

I want to be clear about that. What it means is how do we become more flexible in our supply chain, in our value chain to accommodate shifts to other countries or spreading it across different countries so that we don't have all of our eggs in one basket? And then the second thing is how do we prepare ourselves for financial health and company health and make sure that our customers are in a good position as we head into that economic downturn? And you're starting to see some of that with some of the big companies when they're pulling down large lines of credit ahead of time and whatnot. But I would expect to see more of that starting to take place here now that we're kind of seeing how the pandemic is playing out. There's still a lot of uncertainty. I don't want to say for a minute that there isn't, but we also have to think about that economic downturn, and that's going to be a nasty kind of one-two punch for us.

Mike Kavis:

Yeah, one of the things I learned early on in this was the supply chain for most of our medicines come from China and, you know, we have people that are diabetic and all those types of health issues and, the risk of the supply of those medicines drying up would be pretty substantial. Luckily it seems we've so far skirted that one, but that one, to your point, might be one area where we think about how can we get a more redundant supply chain for those types of lifesaving things.

Tim Crawford:

Well, you could even go further than that, Mike. You know, it's not just the supply chain for medicines and different drugs coming from China, and they are manufactured around the world, it's not just China. China's gotten kind of quite a big spotlight on itself right now, but what would happen if, let's say we go into a distributed model where our supply chain is now more diverse, and let's say we are still focused on Southeast Asia. And we have another pandemic that comes about that actually starts to infiltrate itself into the supply chain. So we haven't seen that in this case. So just imagine if coronaviruses started to make their way into supply chains, and that started to be another vector of the virus starting to make its rounds.

I think there are some things that we need to learn from, but I think we also need to be very careful about where we point fingers. I'm also seeing a lot of negativity pointed toward China and other countries, and that's just – that's not a good thing and it's not healthy, and it's not reality. And so we're going to be coming into a very different world once we get beyond this that won't look like the one that we left in 2019. And we have to think about all of the different changes that that will have an impact on.

Mike Kavis:

I agree. I agree. So with just a couple minutes left, I'm going to have you plug us with two or three quality work-from-home tips. Some may be something you stumbled upon because you weren't ready for it. Some just may be, like myself, we've been working at home for a long time and we've kind of figured it out along the way.

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, you know, I wrote a blog post about twelve different tips, and the ones that I would say are most critical are actually the ones that are probably less discussed. It's one thing to say make sure you've got all the right equipment, make sure that you're connected, you've got good connectivity. Those kinds of things are important, but I think the things that you have to be thinking about when people are working from home, especially en-masse, is think about your workspace. Think about where you go to work and try and create separation so that psychologically you can create separation between home and work. Otherwise you're just going to start to devolve into this negative space, potentially, where there is no separation between work and life. And those of us that have worked from home pretty extensively understand this in spades, but for those of us that are relatively new to it, especially folks that are maybe more extroverted, or even folks that are introverted, there are different social bounds that we have to think about too.

And so think about your workspace, think about how you can make it comfortable for you to work, both mentally as well as physically. And then, of course, the tools help. And then stay connected. I'm a huge proponent of video conferencing with the camera on. And the reason for that is you can see facial expressions, you can see how people are reacting. When you're on a conference call that's just audio, you don't get that, and it's really easy for people to tune out and do other things, you know, check their e-mail, take a look at something else, maybe go and grab a bite to eat while they're on a call. When you're on a video call, you are dedicated to that video call, and so these are just a couple of things that aren't talked about as much, but I think it's important to think about just mental issues and the psychological issues that come from working from home, and just be conscious of it. Just be aware and conscious of it.

Mike Kavis:

Yeah, thanks for those tips. That's it for today's episode of Architecting the Cloud with Tim Crawford. Tim, where can we find you on Twitter and wherever your blogs may be?

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, thanks, Mike. So on Twitter, I'm @tcrawford, T-C-R-A-W-F-O-R-D, and you can always find me on the blog at Avoa.com, A-V-O-A-dot-C-O-M.

Mike Kavis:

And what about your CIO chat you guys are always in?

Tim Crawford:

Yeah, absolutely. So there's a number of chats that I take part in on Twitter, but then the last thing that I'll just plug if I could is my own podcast, The CIO in the Know.

Mike Kavis:

Yeah, make sure you subscribe to that, and you can learn more about Deloitte or read today's show notes. Head over at www.deloittecloudpodcast.com or you can find more podcasts by me and my colleague, Dave Linthicum, just by searching for Deloitte On Cloud podcast on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. I'm your host, Mike Kavis. You can contact me directly, mkavis@deloitte.com. Can always find me on Twitter @madgreek65. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on Architecting the Cloud.

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