



For Cloud Professionals, part of the On Cloud Podcast

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Title: Achieve business continuity in times of crisis: how cloud can help

Description: It goes without saying that, in this COVID-19 pandemic, the most critical thing is to keep yourself and your employees safe. However, business must go on. Organizations that have migrated to cloud are able to benefit from its elasticity, which enables them to scale to use only those resources they need now and scale up later, when the economy ramps up. In this episode, David Linthicum and guest, Dana Gardner—President and Principal Analyst at Interarbor Solutions—discuss how the cloud can help organizations maintain business continuity and why now is a good time to consider a rapid vs. a panic move to cloud.

Duration: 00:19:00

Operator:

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David Linthicum:

Welcome back to the On Cloud podcast, your one place to find out how to make cloud computing work for your enterprise. This is an objective discussion with industry through leaders who provide their own unique perspective around the pragmatic use of cloud-based technology. Today on the show, we're welcoming back Dana Gardner, and Dana is the President and Principal Analyst at Interarbor Solutions. Today on the show, Dana and I are going to discuss the current state of the COVID-19 pandemic and how it relates to cloud computing. So how you doing, Dana? Why don't you update the audience on what you do, folks that may have just joined the podcast in the last few months.

Dana Gardner:

Sure. It's great to be back with you, Dave, and I appreciate you having me on your podcast. I'm quite a podcaster myself, as you know, many times talking about enterprise IT subjects with people who are leading the development of technologies but also those who are consuming them, so we like to talk to cutting edge adopters and find out what's working in the field, so still doing that.

David Linthicum:

So what kind of research have you been doing lately that's kind of something that you like to talk about?

Dana Gardner:

Well I've been focused on, oddly enough, business continuity subjects and digital transformation subjects up until five weeks ago, but now business continuity with the COVID-19 pandemic has taken on an even broader, more critical importance. And so I guess I'm focusing on making organizations extremely agile, but even under the worst circumstances is where we're finding ourselves.

David Linthicum:

So what would be the advice? I'm a CIO of a global 2000 company, and I'm going through this crisis right now. There's things I can do now and there are things I can do ultimately in the future. What are some of the things I could do now to minimize my exposure to make sure I'm leveraging the resiliency as much as I can and not messing up the other parts of the business?

Dana Gardner:

Right. Well, it's super important to focus on letting all of your users continue to be functional, and so we've talked about user experience, and now it's really as much about employee experience, business partner, supply chain, finding new people to work with and trying to make your organization accessible and friendly to them. So it's really all about enabling people who are themselves in a crisis mode, doing things differently than they perhaps had been doing up until very recently. How can you make them feel as productive as they can be, keep them functioning, keep your business functioning even as there were so many different stresses and challenges that they're facing? So my first order is, one, be safe yourself, make sure your company is safe, your people are cared for. Thank all the first responders around you. Keep a safe distance, but also try to enable functionally the people that are all throughout your organization that are finding themselves in a whole new world.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, it is a whole new world. It's very much something that's going to change the way we perceive the use of technology going forward. So do you think it's going to be ultimately a cultural change that's going to be an output of this? It seems like we're good at enabling and adapting the technology around how things are changing, but would you consider kind of an instant cultural change being what we're going through right now within companies?

Dana Gardner:

Well Dave, I think up until recently, we had the luxury of trying to change our culture, and we were doing it thoughtfully, and perhaps proactively. I think we're past cultural change. We're now into keeping your head above water. So it's a forced cultural change. I don't think cultural is actually the right word. I think this is a fire drill and survival for many companies. There are going to be companies that are going to be looking at whether or not they can be a going concern. So the culture is going to change but I think we have to look at survival, keeping your business function, keeping your people safe, and so that really, I think, changes the tone. It makes this into a bit more of a crisis management, a business continuity focus. It's really much more about extreme agility than just wouldn't it be nice if we were a more agile company. So I'm actually looking forward to the days when we can get back to talking about cultural change.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, I think it is going to be. I think it's going to be a change in culture and also a change in how we're dealing with technology. So what are the enabling technologies do you think that CIOs should be looking at in light of COVID-19 and really looking at what's going to happen afterwards?

Dana Gardner:

So one of the keys right now is elasticity, being able to scale down, but also knowing very well that you're going to have to scale back up, and that you're going to have to keep people functioning, but without losing the opportunity to be innovative. So, wow, that almost sounds like a definition of what public cloud services are about. Never has the cloud model—looked so attractive and been so fully almost tailored to the situation and circumstances and requirements that we're finding. So I imagine that people are racing to find ways that they can be remote. That includes the IT organization, remote administration, lights out types of thinking when it comes to keeping systems going.

And if you're moving to the cloud and if you need to start new applications, you're going to be doing it in a cloud native, cloud first way, and you're going to be looking to integrate and find new partners, whether that's to enable your employees, or to reach out to your customers who are now going to be mostly all remote and in their homes or using mobile devices. So the agility that cloud brings has never been more attractive. And, of course, you pay as you go, and you get that elasticity of scaling down and scaling up as your requirements determine.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, and you don't have to have humans walk into a data center and take care of physical hardware and software. That seems where the limitations are coming right now. Some of the data centers are shut down. Ultimately the cloud companies are able to do that a bit better they're able to share resources in different ways and able to maintain resiliency, elasticity, things like that so you can leverage what you need. So moving forward, ultimately my big fear, and from talking to a few people this week, is that people are going to make what I call panic migrations. And so they're already looking at moving, lifting and shifting data and workloads into the cloud and typically doing so where there's not a lot of planning wrapped around it, there's not a lot of forethought, not a lot of understanding of strategy, not a lot of changing and changing the skill levels that kind of need to come along with this even development and DevOps, things like that. Do you think that's going to be a problem? Do you think a lot of failures are going to be due to these panic migrations that everybody's spinning up right now?

Dana Gardner:

Yeah, I think there's going to be problems, and it certainly hearkens back to what folks like you and I have been saying for the past five to ten years, which is have a thoughtful, strategic approach to cloud. Now you're in a fire drill, now you don't have that luxury. On the other hand, you might not be able to get

the job done with the fairly brittle legacy systems that you're still managing. So I'd think you have to almost accept short-term pain of adoption, in order to keep the lights on in terms of your systems, your data flowing, your services, your employees being able to be productive, and then you'll have to go back and then refactor and figure out how to make cloud work best. I don't know that we can think strategically right now. It's very tactical. And, yes, there'll be some mistakes made, but it's better than being out of business.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, I think it's possible to do a rapid migration but not a good idea to do a panic migration. A rapid migration's a bit different where we think thoughtfully in terms of what we're moving – what workloads are moving into the cloud, how we're going to do it and ultimately our ability to live up to the objectives of the business, and at the same time, creating something that's going to be more resilient, and so if there's another pandemic or even COVID-19 comes back in the fall, then ultimately we're able to deal with that eventuality as well.

But the thing is, you think about this disaster recovery systems, we're typically dealing with a loss of physical assets. So BCDR planning, even though you did hear pandemics in them, it was normally hurricanes, and tornadoes, and things like that. And this seems to be something that kind of popped up out of nowhere for the BCDR crowd. And are we just kind of underestimating the impact of these pandemics, or we just had no way of expecting this was going to occur?

Dana Gardner:

Well, I think – I don't think people had the idea that the whole world would have this issue at once. A hurricane means you might have to mirror your data center. You want to have redundancy across different geographies, maybe for economic, political, and jurisdictional reasons, regulatory reasons. It was hard to fathom, just more than four weeks ago, how the whole world would be reducing their economic models and engines by 20 to 30 percent in a matter of a week or two. So I guess we can't really blame people in the business continuity business for not being prepared for this. However, if you were thinking prudently and conservatively about how to maintain your systems in something that threatened your physical environment, then you were able to then switch off.

And it's the ability to switch into something else to be agile that ultimately will help people in this circumstance even though there's no safe haven. Everybody's having the same problem. It's been actually kind of impressive to me, and I hope this doesn't come back to bite me, that the cloud systems and most of the major apps have been functioning quite well. You even look at certain of the conferencing technologies that have had to scale up dramatically. They have been able to largely do that, and that's because they're running on a public cloud, or two. So business continuity didn't really forecast this, but the basic principles of good business continuity still put you in a much better position than if you hadn't thought about having to be able to find new ways of doing things very, very quickly.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, that was a concern of mine as well when I saw the cloud usage go up with the larger public cloud providers, and I said, uh-oh, are we going to hit an upper limit, and is this going to be something that breaks those clouds? And that hasn't happened. And I'm kind of delighted about that, because ultimately we need to move someplace that's going to be better than we are now, and cloud computing has that potential. It doesn't mean you have to move to a cloud, but you're looking to move to something that's going to serve the needs of the business better. That's the way in which we leverage any technology. There should be no emotional bonds to this stuff, and so that's good news.

Dana Gardner:

I just want to maybe follow up on that. The elasticity that works for you as a consumer of cloud technology also works for the cloud providers, because just as many apps of theirs are going up, there are many others that are going down, and you simply need to move those workloads out of one set of servers, or virtual machines, into another. So their elasticity is working for them as well.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, it's really good news. If there's one silver lining that has come out of this around the IT stuff is their ability to kind of keep up with the additional loads that are putting upon it, and I guess that comes with an investment and billions and billions of dollars of infrastructure that these cloud providers have been building over the years. I think the big lesson learned out of this is that we need to deal with security automation. I think many of the security management systems are really manually driven, and so human beings are looking at these IP addresses that are attacking their systems and shutting those things down. And, suddenly, we have an issue where the human beings may not be in the office building. They may not have the ability to do this remotely or they may be sick, or they may be in quarantine someplace. And I think that's something that we really need to realize that we need to automate the human beings not to mean that human beings aren't going and setting these things up and making these things automated, but the ability to, in essence, have these things take care of themselves, and have them have a self-defensive kind of an action so we're able to, in essence, move things into play without necessarily a human being having to push them into production.

Dana Gardner:

This kind of hearkens back to the cultural topic you brought up. We've been talking, people like us, for a long time about, do your security, put in your operating systems that are modern, and that take advantage of automation and orchestration, that use the best and brightest technologies that are available, and we often say that and people say, "If it's not broken, don't fix it," and, "That's a nice to have, and oh, by the way, we're going to cut our budget next quarter and we want you to do more with less IT people." And now if your culture was do more with less, you're going to be in a situation where you don't have automation and you don't have the ability to be secure when you need to ramp up new systems rapidly and new services.

So this is going back to maybe it wasn't a luxury to have good architectural principles and seek automation. Maybe it turns out it was a necessity, and so there are going to be some companies that are going to come out of this on the other end. I hope it's in three months, and not six or eighteen months, but if they fail, they should find the next generation of technology in a new green field approach. And so it's all about architecting properly, using the best cloud and other automation services, and being much more thoughtful about the basic principles of computing and learning how to let the systems do what the systems do best.

David Linthicum:

I think we're facing kind of another issue as well. In essence, everything we're talking about here is going to take funding, the ability to kind of put it forth and make sure people are going to pay for it. And so we're moving out of the let's pay for cloud with whatever our cloud savings is into really the need to make strategic investments to kind of take the company to a level where it's going to be able to survive the next crisis like this. That's going to cost money, that's going to cost time, and in many instances, the organizations may find there's a downturn in revenue where they just can't allocate the budgets to pay for it. What advice would you give them then?

Dana Gardner:

Well, I think if we were to do an evaluation a year from now over what worked and what didn't work, I think we'll see that having a sustainable business and being a going concern is your number one responsibility, and your operating costs over time are much larger than the costs of implementing, especially now in a green field environment where you can do so much with services and you pay as you go, you pay as you consume. I don't think there's any going back. I think once we've gotten through this system, people realize that saving money on how to properly set up your IT organization is folly and that, by having a good organization that's modern and it's complete and holistic and strategic, is going to save you much more money and, one, but you're also going to be looking at the larger function of your economics, which is your operating costs.

And your operating costs, you're going to have a much better control over and manage if you spend that money up front. What I would tell IT professionals is you're going to be in great demand for quite some time, as far as the eye can see, and if you're working for an organization that says we want you to perform miracles but we're not going to fund them, get your resume out there on the internet because there are other organizations that are going to want you, and you're going to find a job, hopefully with somebody that's got a budget, that can pay to get the job done right the first time and then enjoy the long tail benefits of a solid organization with lower operating costs over time.

David Linthicum:

Yeah. Unfortunately I think that people just need to come around that there has to be a funding aspect to this and even though there's some economic efficiencies with cloud computing, it's not instantaneous, and you can't fund a project based on your savings of cloud and certainly not your ability to make the company agile. So it needs to have a strategic purpose that even needs to go up to the board of directors that need to understand why we're doing this, why we're spending the money, why the investment is good, even to the investors, and to really kind of understand that the company's moving in the right directions and making investments in the future and the ability to deal with resiliency issues. And it may be a much stronger angle for that. So let's say we're in July timeframe and the crisis is gone, we're back eating in restaurants and working in buildings and stuff like that. What do you think the conversations the CEOs should have with their CIOs?

Dana Gardner:

I think the idea of extreme agility is one that shouldn't be left for crisis, that the more agile you are as a company in the best of times is going to be a huge benefit and that it's going to save you in the worst of times. I think you need to be thinking seriously about businesses that are going to have to start anew. So we're going to start to see companies rebuild manufacturing, and services, and logistics, and raw materials types of vertical industries in more places. We don't have the luxury of building everything in other countries, and so we're going to be restarting companies, and that means you're going to want to build them with a very smart, lean, agile IT-focused, digitally transformed green field approach.

And so the conversation I expect people to have is we need to refactor the parts of our business that are legacy or incumbent, but those aren't the real important things. What's important is how do we enter the new types of businesses and build them as digitally transformed businesses from the ground up, and how can we improve our overall risk when it comes to supply chain and accessibility and human resources, skills and people. So the idea is to rethink businesses, rethink businesses as digitally transformed, and then put the IT in place to accomplish that. That's the conversation I think we'll have once we get through this very difficult time.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, which we will. That's great advice, Dana. So if you enjoyed this podcast, make sure to like and subscribe on iTunes or wherever you get your podcasts. Also check out our past podcasts, including the On Cloud podcast hosted by my good friend, Mike Kavis, and his show "Architecting the Cloud." If you'd like to learn more about Deloitte's cloud capabilities, check out deloittecloudpodcast.com. If you'd like to contact me directly, I'm at dlinthicum, L-I-N-T-H-I, [@deloitte.com](https://twitter.com/dlinthicum). And, Dana, how can they get ahold of you?

Dana Gardner:

Sure. Follow me on Twitter [@dana_gardner](https://twitter.com/dana_gardner), as well as briefingsdirect.com and on iTunes.

David Linthicum:

Yeah, check it out. He has some great insights and some great guests on his show. So until next time, best of luck with your cloud projects. We'll talk to you real soon. You guys take good care, be safe.

Operator:

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