ACCENTURE’S JOURNEY TO THE CLOUD
OVERVIEW

Accenture is in the process of transforming itself into a digital-first enterprise. Today, Accenture is 71 percent in a public cloud. As the journey continues, Accenture shares its key learnings and how its journey has evolved along the way. Read the latest update.

As part of Accenture’s ongoing digital transformation, its internal IT organization is aggressively undertaking a three-year cloud program that aims to deliver a more scalable, robust enterprise IT infrastructure in the public cloud. “Cloud technologies today offer new IT potential through faster, more flexible, more resilient capabilities that open the doors for operating and delivering value in new ways,” says Merim Becirovic, Managing Director – Technology Infrastructure and Cloud Computing Strategy Lead. “That made our decision, which we did in close collaboration with our go-to-market cloud offering teams such as Accenture Cloud Platform and Accenture Hybrid Cloud Services, to migrate and provision Accenture’s infrastructure to the cloud a logical conclusion.”

TODAY, ACCENTURE IS 71% IN THE CLOUD

The program’s vision is to provision and operate infrastructure, application, and service workloads anywhere and anytime in the cloud with resiliency and agility to empower Accenture’s digital enterprise. Taking advantage of cloud capabilities and scale efficiencies, this capability will enable Accenture digital services and experiences, and generate business value.

THE JOURNEY

THREE PHASES TO A SUCCESSFUL MIGRATION

Accenture’s internal IT leaders along with business stakeholders made the strategic decision in late 2014 to establish IT operations in the cloud. By January 2015, internal IT organized and mobilized a global Cloud team to spearhead a journey designed to lead to a transformed enterprise. They developed a comprehensive journey map to first establish the foundation through rapid cloud adoption, second, optimize new environments and services, and third, focus on transformation of IT processes, responsibilities, and capabilities.

ADOPTION

The focus of the first phase was to accelerate cloud adoption through 1) rapid migration of business applications out of on-premise data centers and into the cloud and 2) diligently adhering to a “cloud-first, cloud-only” strategy and principle for all new applications. “The first—and aggressive—target was to move from 9 to 50 percent operating in the cloud within one year,” recounts Matt Lagodzinski, Cloud Delivery Lead – Accenture Internal IT. “To achieve this, Accenture took an impactful approach by migrating its highest-cost data centers in North America first, even though the decision represented a greater risk due to the migrations involving production environments supporting business-critical applications.”

MOVE FROM 9 TO 50% OPERATING IN THE CLOUD WITHIN ONE YEAR

For the first data center migration, the team had to overcome the challenge of not having a full solution for migrating complex enterprise applications at the desired pace. To address this, the team partnered with Accenture Cloud Factory to test and execute new technical migration procedures managed by a migration management tool, Accelerate for Cloud. In addition, the team created, standardized, and trained people on the supporting processes required to execute successfully in a highly matrixed and varied business stakeholder and application environment. What resulted was a fully tested cloud migration solution with new methodology addressing these technical and non-technical enterprise complexities that is being offered to clients. It continues to be used for remaining internal IT on-premise data center migrations.
For the second data center migration, the team partnered with Accenture’s Internal IT Disaster Recovery team to migrate from a traditional capital-intensive collocation recovery data center to a cloud-based data center where recoveries can occur using a lower-cost solution. The migration was completed in eight months, and resulted in greatly reduced infrastructure cost, improved manageability, and improved recovery point objective (RPO).

With the third data center migration, under way in 2017, the team continues to mature its solution by growing expertise and refining processes.

The team expanded usage of the Accelerate for Cloud tool by fully leveraging its inventory and process management capabilities. Accelerate for Cloud centralizes inventory and workflow management for large, complex migrations, particularly in the use case where there are multiple different work streams assessing and taking actions against the same inventory in parallel. This enabled the program to create a “single source of truth” to reconcile and refresh against multiple legacy asset management systems, totaling about 3,000 instances for migration. Not only does this ensure quality in the tool for migration management, but timely tool-driven syncing and reconciliation actually pushes quality back into the legacy sources. Another critical aspect of the tool was that it enabled direct application of migration process and workflow templates, allowing management and inventory in a singular tool suite to accurately reflect real-time progress across activities and provide on-demand digital reporting.

Along with ongoing business application migrations, the second rung of the cloud adoption strategy, “cloud-first, cloud-only,” continues to increase cloud adoption in parallel. It requires all new applications to be architected and designed for the cloud, and 95 percent of all new infrastructure is provisioned directly in the cloud.

95% OF ALL NEW INFRASTRUCTURE IS PROVISIONED DIRECTLY IN THE CLOUD

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OPTIMIZATION

With the technical foundation set and cloud adoption well under way, internal IT’s focus shifted to optimizing what Accenture had adopted. Optimization opportunities were first being pursued in infrastructure hosting and tool automation, and progressed to further focus on process streamlining and governance simplification. All of these optimizations lead to business benefits that contribute to lasting transformation.

A key difference and opportunity in the cloud hosting model is that resources only need to pay for what they consume. The flexibility of cloud hosting allows applications to request more or less on demand. This means that instead of overestimating to create large contingencies, teams are enabled to react and adjust to real-life circumstances and to proactively and aggressively avoid unnecessary hosting costs.

For example, nonproduction cloud server schedules are standardized to reduce unused “uptime.” Understanding that every application and customer has different circumstances, teams are enabled to start and stop their nonproduction cloud machines on their own, without having to go through manual tickets and procedures—a step to self-service transformation. Similarly, teams have influence to actively manage the actual server size of their cloud machines. The Cloud team uses cloud reporting of historical data every month to recommend an optimal server size to create more efficiencies.

The cloud also offers creative solutions for hosting pricing and allocation. The Cloud team is taking advantage of different optimal hosting pricing models for scenarios where demand is known and consistent, as well as for demands that have a pattern of short-term spikes. Finally, the team even identified opportunities to save by moving to dedicated cloud-hosted hardware in order to leverage existing software licenses.

“These key shifts in cost visibility, infrastructure access, and process flexibility present a huge opportunity for hosting consumption optimization and aligned cost ownership and accountability that we previously did not have,” says Amy Woodson, Infrastructure Optimization Lead – Accenture Internal IT. “This model enables teams to influence hosting costs and make decisions that treat efficiency as a key value driver.”
TRANSFORMATION
To be better equipped for the pace of evolving cloud technology and capabilities, the Cloud team restructured into dedicated teams that adapted agile delivery methodology to deliver the transformation. This change allowed infrastructure teams to operate more like product or application teams with better stakeholder representation throughout delivery. Agile delivery is usually implemented by singular, co-located software product development teams that execute daily sync-ups, incremental development, and frequent delivery. In the Cloud team’s case, it committed to transforming toward agile principles, but needed to do so in an environment that is not traditionally agile—globally dispersed, infrastructure-focused, and with multiple technology functions and owners.

In addition to applying agile delivery principles, the team restructured into dedicated teams that focus on:

- Conducting research, proof of concept, innovation, and solution engineering activities
- Evaluating infrastructure requirements such as network, security, and environment support
- Developing and deploying cloud management tools according to the cloud tools road map
- Executing a flexible but controlled process for cloud service adoption prioritized by business needs
- Operational support once new solutions are adopted.

With agile delivery principles, a revised delivery model, and a thoughtful process for research, stakeholder collaboration, and enterprise standardization, the team has been able to implement infrastructure and platform cloud services in production for native cloud applications serving critical business needs across Marketing, Sales, and Human Resources. Building cloud-native applications and directly consuming cloud platform services are the keys to less maintenance, more agility, and keeping pace with the platform economy.

For example, Accenture’s critical Performance Achievement application was built natively in the cloud to serve a global customer base with complex needs. The flexible architecture and rapid deployment enabled by cloud better positions responsiveness and agility to the demanding business requirements. Architecting and implementing these cloud services enabled scalable and dynamic capabilities for load, availability, integrated monitoring, and performance reporting.

The Performance Achievement scope and journey continue as HR plans to enhance the experience to next focus on engaging teams and creating a flourishing organization. Accenture internal IT will continue to collaborate with HR on this journey, continuing to add and refine Performance Achievement elements in an agile manner as the program expands.

THE LONG-TERM VISION FOR OUR IT ORGANIZATION IS TO LEAD BY DEPLOYING AS-A-SERVICE CAPABILITIES MORE QUICKLY AS A RESULT OF BEING ABLE TO SHIFT WORK FROM INFRASTRUCTURE MANAGEMENT TO CAPABILITY DEVELOPMENT BY LEVERAGING CLOUD CAPABILITIES THAT ALLOW FOR AUTOMATION, MACHINE LEARNING, AND AI. WE WANT TO DO THIS SO THAT WE CAN FOCUS ON DELIVERING MORE VALUE BACK TO THE BUSINESS.

Merim Becirovic
Managing Director, Accenture Internal IT
RESULTS
The first two years of Accenture’s three-year journey saw its cloud footprint increase from 9 to 71 percent of all business applications, with its third data center migration under way. In the first year, the aggressive goal of growing from 9 to 50 percent was achieved. After that milestone, the team made a conscious decision to shift more capacity to optimization and transformation efforts while maintaining a steady rate of ongoing adoption. To further accelerate the adoption journey, 95 percent of all newly provisioned environments are being provisioned directly in the cloud, and new applications are being built directly in the cloud.

To ensure that new cloud infrastructure can be obtained quickly, the team successfully automated, consolidated, and integrated the provisioning process to maintain the integrity of the enterprise image while taking advantage of cloud technology speed. This provisioning process reengineering has resulted in a reduction of cloud provisioning lead times up to 50 percent for standard environment provisioning. This accomplishment means that a development team can test concepts faster, which means they can innovate and deliver faster for their customers within Accenture, ultimately supporting Accenture’s journey to becoming a digital business.

Capitalizing on cloud is not just about being in the cloud platform. It’s about optimizing utilization of services put into the cloud. Two years into the journey, with the input from various targeted optimizations—reduced nonproduction environment schedules, monthly server resizing, and dedicated hardware model—Accenture has realized $9.5 million with an expected benefit of $14 million after the third year.

In addition, the application of adaptive hosting pricing models demonstrates a maturity in recognizing how to leverage cloud solutions based on business scenarios. For applications that have a consistent and predictable demand, the team seized the opportunity to reserve cloud instances in advance that offer a discount of up to 40 percent over a one-year term, and has yielded $1 million in savings already. On the other hand, for an application such as the Performance Achievement application, the team leveraged opportunities to bid on unused spare cloud instances to react to short-term spikes and capacity needs without overburdening operating costs. This practice yields up to 80 percent savings per instance across an average of 150,000 instances per month.

“By maturing and transforming the way the Cloud team operates and delivers, it has positioned our internal IT organization to more quickly develop and implement changes and capabilities that help move the overall organization to an as-a-Service model more quickly,” Becirovic concludes.

ABOUT ACCENTURE
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