

# Is cloud-first the next step for businesses?

While there are many advantages to adopting a cloud-first approach, such a strategy is also littered with potential pitfalls that can easily trip up a business that fails to consider all angles first.

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☁️ **According** to Gartner, 75% of companies today have adopted a 'cloud-first' strategy, whereby they commit to considering cloud-based solutions first before even looking at other alternatives.

Derrick Chikanga, senior analyst at Africa Analysis, points out that businesses are increasingly considering cloud-first strategies as a way to capitalise on the benefits that such an approach offers.

"Among the advantages are cost savings, scalability, security and efficiency. Remember that on-premise solutions can be expensive to maintain and require human intervention to constantly update and repair. A cloud-first strategy enables you to avoid these problems, while still reaping the aforementioned benefits," he says.

However, not everyone views cloud-first as the next logical strategy for businesses to adopt. Rudie Raath, CDO at Datacentrix, suggests that in the real world – as opposed to the world that salespeople like to talk up – organisations won't be able to adopt a 100% cloud approach.

"Achieving a total cloud strategy is effectively impossible, because the balance struck between cost and benefit won't allow this. In fact, I believe that 'cloud-first' as a concept is being pushed by the hyperscalers; it's certainly not something most systems integrators are driving," he says.

"While it's true the cloud offers the promise of more agility and scalability, the challenge is that once you're consuming a workload 24/7 and have many users on a database-driven platform, the cost to host



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this in the cloud is no longer that attractive.”

He adds that most companies have critical apps that aren't cloud-native, and he has yet to see a 'lift and shift' use case that is truly cost-effective – in fact, this approach, far from reducing costs, usually ends up costing more. Moreover, developing a cloud-native version of these apps will have a price that will mitigate the cost efficiencies gained by the cloud.

## Explore, but be realistic

“While I don't think it's wrong for businesses to state that they 'want to explore a cloud-first strategy', I believe this will ultimately become a hybrid strategy, which is really more realistic. There are also numerous challenges to adopting a cloud-first approach, including the failure to properly understand the company's workloads and an underestimation of the importance of cleaning these up.”

Another issue, he adds, is that of application rationalisation. Many of an organisation's existing apps will have overlapping features. Thus when adopting a cloud-first strategy, the decision must be taken to either take all of these into the cloud, or to understand where these overlaps occur and decide which of these can be eliminated.

“Then there is the question of monitoring. There seems to be a prevailing mindset that simply moving everything to the cloud will address all of an enterprise's challenges. However, unless you're properly monitoring and understanding what is happening, you will end up basing your strategy on a bunch of assumptions, and we all know that never really ends well.

“Ultimately, any cloud-first approach comes back to your cloud readiness – are you ready from a people, process and technology perspective? And, of course, your understanding of the network and its security. You need to understand where your data resides, how to retain its integrity and how to connect to it securely. Remember that with the cloud, the latest legislation demands accurate reporting around where your data is, who is accessing it and why.”

Chikanga feels the key challenge with a cloud-first strategy is drawing the line between this and what could be termed a 'cloud-only' strategy. The latter is the

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mandatory implementation of cloud solutions by organisations. As such, some organisations prematurely disregard other solutions and are becoming increasingly biased towards cloud-based solutions. In such situations, they unknowingly adopt a cloud-only strategy rather than one that is cloud-first.

“There are numerous benefits to adopting a cloud-first strategy, and although they vary, they generally include: cost savings from using third party facilities and solutions; the ability to easily scale the available services, based on the organisational requirements; use of a centralised data location for ease of access; and increased security through backup services available in the cloud,” he says.

“The cloud-first strategy should address the business requirements of an organisation, such as cost optimisation and the ability to scale operations at short notice. Furthermore, it should enable functionalities such as automatic software updates and data analytics to optimise business operations. As such, companies should realise significant economies of scale through the adoption of a cloud-first strategy.”

## Hybrid is the future

Like Raath, Chikanga believes that companies considering the adoption of a cloud-first strategy must also take cognisance of other, non-cloud solutions.

“Organisations shouldn't attempt a lift and shift approach to cloud migration without fully understanding their business requirements first. This is because some work files will function optimally when located on-premise, while other work files will function best when located in the cloud,” he says.

Raath believes that a hybrid approach is the only functional real-world solution for South Africa over at least the next decade.

“While there is definitely new blood joining the industry and a new generation of skills coming into the market – think of the new thought processes around using DevOps, for example, to solve real-world problems in innovative new ways – it will take time for these new skills to truly make an impact.

“Currently, I don't believe that we have enough application, network and security skills available to genuinely support large-scale cloud-first strategies, and this is a global challenge, not a local one. Therefore, it's worth noting that, for me, education will be the golden key that may finally unlock the value of cloud-first, but it will only be in quite a few years' time,” he concludes. ☺

## CLOUD-FIRST: KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Africa Analysis' Derrick Chikanga suggests there are certain considerations that a cloud-first strategy demands. These include:

- Establishing the company's business objectives and how these align with the available cloud solutions;
- Determining which stakeholders within the organisation should be involved in the cloud strategy process;
- Determining which cloud migration process will best suit the organisational requirements;
- Determining how performance will be measured; and
- Ensuring you invest in skills that include cloud architecture and deployment, cloud security, and data and analytics.

