How SA companies can use the cloud to drive employee enablement

By Ryan Jamieson

Even though local organisations are starting to take employee enablement more seriously, there is still much work to be done to truly transform how staff work.

Companies understand the need to better communicate with their employees beyond relying on email or a laptop. This is especially critical in industries such as medical, manufacturing, and mining where people do not sit in front of their computers most of the day.

Fortunately, instant messaging platforms such as WhatsApp have grown in popularity to become a standard mechanism of communication. In fact, the smartphone has become the platform of choice for employee outreach. And thanks to its increased affordability, more South Africans than ever can afford to own one and remain in touch with the organisation.

Engaging differently

But what is the difference between enablement and engagement?

Simply put, enablement takes engagement to the next level where it revolves around empowering employees with training,

development, and the skills needed to make more informed decisions. In other words, email as a delivery mechanism is no longer good enough.

This is where platforms, like Microsoft's Kaizala, start coming into their own. Email will always fulfil a purpose, but employees and organisations require a more instant way of reaching out to one another. Fundamentally, email has become less targeted. Just consider how much unnecessary communication arrives through this.

The push content on mobile messaging groups are more targeted to people. For example, there are office groups, home security groups, neighbourhood watch groups, and school groups covering a myriad of sports and other activities. This makes communication easier to file and prioritise where needed.

Although WhatsApp has set the benchmark for South Africans when it comes to engagement, it still needs to address its inherent security, privacy, and broadcast challenges. On the other hand, a messaging platform for business use is highly secure and controlled by the organisation. However, neither solution's potential has yet been fully explored in the local market.

For example, in India, messaging is not just used for communication, but also to purchase things, order food, check bus times, and so on. An entire ecosystem is built around messaging platforms.

Evolving workplace

While some local organisations are pushing for the digital enablement of their employees, the country is still far behind what First World markets are doing. However, many of the features needed for a digital workplace only started coming out in the past two years. So, the adoption rate is expected to increase significantly.

Questions around connectivity and data sovereignty used to hold local companies back. However, the arrival of Microsoft Azure data centres recently, addresses these concerns. Education will still remain important, especially around the benefits of the solutions organisations are currently using.

An example of this is Office 365. Organisations are still only scratching the surface of its potential. They need to fully understand all the aspects around the suite that can deliver employee enablement. Some staff might demand the use of Dropbox to share documents not knowing that OneDrive forms part of the Office environment. It is a case of not realising the broader ecosystem and what is possible.

This will also spill over to messaging platforms. Obviously, WhatsApp is widely adopted in the country, but it does not provide a secure and curated environment such as mobile messaging applications for business. These platforms can reach out to a million people and provide a robust offering that extends beyond messaging.

Mobile market

Although the cloud will help drive employee enablement, companies must be aware of how best to use the technology. In Azure, for example, there are more than two thousand different combinations of options geared towards this enablement.

In this context, an organisation must purchase a license set that brings with it the most capabilities. By going the full Office 365 route as opposed to a limited license, more value can be driven over a longer term. It is all about choosing the right licence for the business workload.

This process must start with an audit to assess existing and future company needs. It is especially the enterprise that can benefit from such an exercise given the complexity of its environment. Smaller organisations typically know what they want and focus on a more niche approach.

Enablement will be a business priority for the digital workplace. Using mobile platforms to drive this change by equipping

employees with the tools and skills needed to do their work more efficiently, will result in more agile organisations capable of adapting to the dynamic market conditions of the connected world.

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