Connected Experience: Atos and Google Cloud roundtable transcription

Speaker 1: Welcome, everybody. Thanks for joining us. My name is Speaker 1. I'm from Atos. And I'm delighted to be joined today by Speaker 2, from Google Cloud.

Speaker 2: Good morning everyone.

Speaker 1: And also, Speaker 3, who is from Google Cloud.

Speaker 3: Hi, everyone. Thank you, Speaker 1. Welcome.

Speaker 1: For those of you who might not be aware, back in, I think it was 2018, Atos and Google Cloud formed a global partnership to deliver secure hybrid cloud, machine learning, and collaboration solutions for our customers. Since then, we've created three R&D centers and innovation labs in Europe and North America, with a focus on machine learning and artificial intelligence. Together, we're looking forward to sharing our insights today, and also hearing about your own. There's certainly a lot to talk about at the moment.

No roundtable would be complete without mention of COVID-19. It has impacted us all in a way nobody could have planned for. I always say, we're making history. And I always imagine that the children of the future will look back and learn about what we've experienced in this pandemic. It's forced the public sector in particular to adapt at pace, and with a scale of transformation that's never been seen before. I know some of my customers have said to me that, "We've done more in the last two months than we would normally do in two years."

Whole government departments pivoting to working remotely overnight. Disruption is fast becoming the new normal for us, and being innovative, agile, and resilient to meet the demands of our changing world need new approaches. We need the technology infrastructure to be able to adapt and collaborate at speed, securely, and efficiently.

So, we're going to explore today, three topics. The first one is about sustaining innovation of pace. The second, how do we guarantee cost efficiency? And the third, how do we harness the power of both open and secure cloud? So please do be ready to share your thoughts, to ask questions, to make observations. We're running the session under Chatham House Rules. We're trying to be as open as we can.

The other thing I would ask is that, (as we haven't done a round of intros), every time you want to interject, until we get to know each other a little bit, it would

be great if you could just remind us of your name. And on your first hello, also, what was the last thing you googled? Just as a little bit of an icebreaker.

So, the first topic then, sustaining innovation at pace. So, if COVID has taught us anything, it's that we need to be ready to embrace rapid change. All of that means greater agility, greater flexibility to change to the demand in skills, tool sets, and technology, and to transform the services that we're delivering to citizens. Speaker 2, I wanted to kick off the session with a question to you. What does this change, do you think, really mean to a department's transformation goals? Especially with regards to day-to-day user experience, whether that is citizens the department serves, whether it's their own internal staff, or maybe a wider workforce, such as HR. How do we ensure access to vital resources through remote and virtual contact centers and automated services?

Speaker 2: Okay, thank you, Speaker 1. Good morning, everyone. The last thing I googled was 'when do the ski resorts open'. Wishful thinking on my part, but I think I could wish for something to keep me buoyant and upbeat. Actually, it said the 18th of December, but I'm not booking a flight! Yes, to answer your question, Speaker 1, I've been in the IT industry over 35 years serving public sector customers, and I have never, ever in my entire career seen speed of digital transformation like we have over the past several months.

There're four things I really think about when embracing rapid change. They're not rocket science, they are quite obvious, really, when you think about them. But the first is very much to net down on the digital priorities for transformation. I'm sure many of us have worked in organizations which have long lists of things which are fairly bland and non-specific. But a crisis like this has really forced organizations to net down on one or two, maybe three, real priorities that are very, very specific for transformation.

And so that's the first thing: be very, very clear. And as part of that, focus on the business, and less on the technology. Of course, technologies should be just the enabler, but it is about their business outcome. And to do that, you've got to address key issues like data security, privacy, and sovereignty, to be able to really address those digital priorities, in most cases, when it's public sector. So, that's the first thing.

The second is to create really exciting services and experiences in new use cases around AI, which will hopefully help police forces one day significantly be more efficient, more effective, more responsive. But that might also be into workflows that affect citizens that you're serving, like automating, or streamlining, or personalizing. For example, citizen services like requests for social welfare benefits, which have been critical for citizens around the world at the moment. We've just done one in Spain, which gets 20,000 queries a minute when it was launched. And so you can't handle that number of queries without

some level of AI in your workflows and your contact centers. So, that's the second area, really think about how you can create exciting services.

The third is a little bit more inward-looking around navigating the pitfalls of modern application modernization, which is about selecting the right tools for the job using things like open API's and a uniform development environment. But that enables organizations to respond quickly. It's about the build around the 'managing' of applications in the cloud, as you would expect someone leading a cloud business to say. But it's more than that.

It also includes something that we call Site Reliability Engineering. And this is something that Google has used since it was born, really, over 20 years ago. How do we keep these systems running day in day out, 24 by seven, entirely reliably, used by billions of users? And so thinking about that, a reliability engineering approach is key. Then the final point, it is about people, I'm afraid, thank goodness, because as we all know, it is about people and culture. I'll say a bit more about this later on. But in all of this, we're all being forced to work from home, or remotely, or very little face-to-face access. So, it is about how people collaborate and how you can set the culture for that teamwork. So that's my thinking on that.

Speaker 1: Okay. Thank you very much. So, I'd like to invite the audience now to share with us any... perhaps your experiences or any observations you would make on what Speaker 2's just said? Attendee 1, how have you experienced this new pace of innovation over this COVID period?

Attendee 1: So, our relationship with Atos certainly is more at the high-end. We do work with a lot of the cloud providers, including Google, particularly in our work with SMEs. And the reason for that really, has largely been up till now, that SMEs are not as digitally ready. It's much easier to work with SMEs in a smaller way if they have the data organized. We're using off-the-shelf tools.

So, I think one of the things that we've seen, as Speaker 2 has said, has been a big drive towards digital readiness in companies of all sizes. So, I think it is opening up new opportunities. I think the gap is narrowing. And I think organizations like ourselves, have to be much more ready to bridge the entire spectrum of different sizes and types of companies and government organizations and projects.

I think this is just accelerating a trend that we'd already seen. But I think a link-up between companies like Atos and Google is exactly the sort of partnership that we need to be working with to cover the full spectrum.

Speaker 1: Thanks, Attendee 1. I'm just going to share another example. This one is a bit more about the impact on services. So, a global provider of aftermarket services and solutions for the civil aerospace industry offer everything from parts and

tools, plus other solutions, such as logistics and inventory and battery maintenance. We've done some work with them. They get 450K of quotes or price requests coming in. And they've got 250 employees responding to all of those requests. That's quite a sizable operation.

Working with Google Cloud, we've built an intelligent agent that effectively uses machine learning and natural language processing to take away some of those manual steps and move to automated quotes. The business impact has been quite significant. So, we've managed to automate at least 20 to 30% of their requests. And the other key thing about this, the other benefit, which I think often gets missed, is that that automation can run 24 by seven. So, the other thing that's happened here is that we've taken the lead debt time down, in terms of people receiving their quotes.

So just a very small example, but very practical, of how we can help. So Speaker 3, I'm interested to hear what your Google fact is.

Speaker 3: So, my Google fact was actually, two days ago. I was making brownies. It was one of those days where it needed chocolate at the end of the day. I'm vegetarian, but I also have an allergy to eggs. So I was using Google to find recipes. And I actually, I think, in the space of about two minutes, ended up with about 20 different variations of how to make an eggless brownie. So yeah, of course, I had to go make three different types of brownies at the end of the day, so that worked for me!

In terms of the conversation today, I mean, I think my view is this, this has been the year of the user, it's been the year of the consumer, I think, from the way that we have been impacted by COVID, by the pandemic. And public sector has really shone, I think, this year as an industry which typically is known as not changing very quickly. We do things slowly; we like to take our time in terms of adopting new changes. And that all literally went out the window this year. Health care, and Cabinet Office, Home Office, local government - I've seen innovation at speeds that I would never ever have imagined was possible for public sector. And I've spent sort of 20-odd years working in this industry.

I think we've broken all those barriers. And I think a lot of them perhaps have been typically, just, people are used to doing things in a certain way. That's been great. The level of transformation that we've seen around sort of workplace transformation, digital mobility, enabling the end user on how to do things, right? Whether you work from your car when you're dropping your kids off, whether you need to access workflow and approve things, whether you need to be able to connect remotely to different meetings in different ways. All of that digital mobility piece has been sort of instrumental, I think, this year in equipping people with the right technology.

I think that we're probably going to get to a point, because sustaining innovation at pace is something that typically will sort of launch and it will go off in a really quick succession, as we've seen. But then, when you start to put so much new technology out to the end user, you also have to be careful that there needs to be a balance there. So, we're talking about civil servants, we're talking about people who have been in public sector, they're used to going into the office to work. And all of a sudden, they've been completely overwhelmed with lots of different technology, different ways of doing things, how they access things, how they update things, how they approve things.

I think, in my personal view, the innovation piece will continue. I think we will see pace for a while still, but it will balance out because we need to also be cognizant of the fact that those people need to be trained. You get to a saturation point where too much change is probably going to tip it. And I think that within the next sort of six to 12 months, people will start to sort of take a breather, take a stop, start to make sure that the right training and enough time is being given to people to consume that tech before we continue.

But I think that the start that we've made around proving that things can be done quickly, and at scale, will continue now. I mean, I don't see this industry going backwards.

Speaker 1: Yeah, agree. It's a new era now. A very different one. Right. Now, audience, you got a little taster of the question, because I got it wrong. So really, over to the departments, how are you going about developing the agility and the insight needed to respond to the changing demand that you're seeing as departments? Thinking about that both at a capacity level and also in terms of your staff. So, Attendee 2, do you have any observations on that?

Attendee 2: Hi, it's Attendee 2, here. I can't remember the last thing I googled. I was trying to think, and then Speaker 3 reminded me, because it was a scone recipe last night, Jamie Oliver. Yeah, I just whipped up some something to eat last night, mainly because I'm missing being able to go to my favorite garden center and eat my brunch scone on a Saturday! Okay, I'm going to mention the elephant in the room, I think, which is one of the reasons, I think, that we've been able to sustain the pace that we're working at.

And pace is one of my key areas of work, and making sure that we can get through the governance. The government governance. That will be where we've always maintained a high level of governance and auditability. That has been quite significantly changed over the last several months, and that's how we've been able to keep pace with things. Certain areas have been able to drop the level of governance that they've had previously, so that we can get through those approvals faster, and make things happen. That may not be able to be sustained long term, because of the way that we need to audit.

But certainly, I make it my priority to be able to find my way through the governance, learn it, and maneuver through it as fast as I possibly can in order to get approvals for any changes that we're making. Whether they be on programs and portfolios or whether they be to contract extensions, or anything that needs governance. So, governance is everywhere. And I think if we're going to maintain that pace, we're going to have to tackle what we're doing on governance. Yep.

Speaker 1: Thank you very much. Yes, governance, we can never escape it. Never escape it. Any other observations or are we comfortable to move on to the second topic?

Attendee 1: I was just going to say that I think one of the interesting things for me has been sort of the age divide. I mean, our department has a lot of very young people, they're much more used to using instant messaging, other communication tools. They're much less likely to use email. And I think most of us have had to catch up with that way of working, which is a different way. So, I'd agree with the previous speaker, that does perhaps provide some challenges for governance and for the recording of decision making if a lot of it's done in a more informal way. But it's a much more efficient and quick way of working.

Speaker 1: Yeah, and that is an interesting point, because certainly, we've had different... If I take our graduates coming into the business, for example, and we worried because we haven't been able to see them, and we haven't been able to embed them into the business. And they say, "Well, don't worry about it. Yes, we'd like a bit more of a social network, but actually this is business as usual for us. We don't know any different, this is how we operate." We've certainly had that feedback.

Speaker 3: And, just to add to that comment. What I would say, as well as what I've seen over the last sort of six months bringing up a lot is reverse mentoring programs. This sort of ties back to what I was saying around finding that balance between introducing new technology and new ways of working and actually doing some training. And I think in public sector, typically, there are very traditional cycles around how we do things, and that includes bringing new people on board, how you train them. But actually, this gender divide and the age difference around bringing people in, who are already tech savvy, they do things in different ways, that reverse mentoring program really, really works. And it can be informal, but I've seen it reap a lot of benefits. So, I would hugely recommend that.

Speaker 1: Yeah, risk is the other thing for me. Somebody asked me recently, what do I think is the biggest thing that's changed? And I think it's everybody's appetite to risk. And the example I give is, we work with a large government department and we've been talking about rolling out Teams, for example, or rolling out Google Hangouts, or rolling out anything. It would always have come with weeks and weeks of training, giving staff lots of communication, lots of opportunity to challenge the way that they're going to implement.

Suddenly, they weren't going to be able to function unless we turned things on, so things just got turned on overnight. And then the access was given so that they could get help and support as and when they needed it. And you know what? What departments have found is that their staff actually get on with it. That's the risk appetite change. In the past, we just wouldn't have done it because we would have had to have had this big program of preparing for it. What we find is when needs must, staff do get on, and are actually really, really grateful. We've had some of our best customer feedback during this period, when actually things have been much harder. So yeah, it's definitely true.

Okay, I'm going to move us on to topic two, before somebody tells me off. So, topic two is all about cost efficiency. We are all faced with pressure on budgets and therefore any investment that any of us makes needs to be on business-critical digital solutions, and it must deliver a good return and also continue to add value. There's been lots of cloud investment during the pandemic, often without, - we were just talking about governance - without the normal levels of due diligence. We need to make sure that it continues to deliver the returns needed, long after that initial migration.

I just wanted to give you another little example of something that Atos and Google Cloud have done together for a client. It's all to do with communication tools, so, Google Hangouts, and actually implementing that and integrating it with various other video conferencing technologies. And, essentially, what they needed was a way to integrate everything together, and to be able to do that quickly. And in a way that users could get on with it, so it would all be very familiar. That's exactly what's been implemented, has worked really well, and the end users are really, really comfortable.

So, we need to continue to make sure that as things evolve, and as the usage evolves, we continue to make sure that's the case. Speaker 2, any observations you would like to make on this topic?

Speaker 2: I think there's two aspects to this. If I divide it into thinking about the cloud itself, and then this point about remote working. And so, on cloud itself, first thing, of course, it goes without saying, but I'll restate it, that when people move from on-premise technology to the cloud, you move from a capital to a revenue budget. That has, quite often, severe implications for public sector bodies to think that through. And then there's the upside and the downside to the movement of the cloud. The upside is you don't have all this capital spend of all this hardware and software anymore, but you just pay for it when you consume it.

So, the problem with pay-as-you-go then for public sector is while that might, in the short term, save a lot of cost, it's the unpredictability of it, because your technical teams will be spinning up instances and using the cloud out of control unless you manage it. So, a key point from us when we deploy cloud to

customers is that you've got to set this up properly, and you have to manage it properly. We give a lot of training, and we give all the tools within Google Cloud to do this. So, you can configure out the cloud from an operational perspective to assign projects, billing, budgets, and full transparency in cloud.

We also have different commercial mechanisms so you can actually fix the spend and cap it over a period of time; years, if you so wish. So, there are mechanisms for managing costs. But it's something that I think in the earlier rush to cloud some while ago now in the UK, but I'm seeing this in other countries, which are later adopters of cloud. There's a lot of focus on the architecture, and where the data is, and security, and then as cost, it’s almost an afterthought.

But cost is clearly very, very important, and bearing that in mind in the way you operationalize cloud is critical to that. You can also save a lot of costs by doing things like optimizing, turning applications off, consolidating your architecture and applications, and so on. So that is a process that we encourage, and we have teams who work with customers on that. So that's one side of the house.

The other side is, like you mentioned on the remote working products around that, you're probably familiar with G Suites, now we call Workspace. We've completely rebranded it and launched all kinds of new features and functions in it, because it is about collaboration for us. Email is point-to-point, we avoid email wherever you possibly can. Because to get teams collaborating and energized and working together as they set up at the beginning, you need different ways of working. Partly video conferencing, but it's also about how you collaborate on building maybe a presentation, or a document, or some financial analysis using a spreadsheet.

It is a very different way of working; using our tech sending attachments around and doing a bit of work and then sending it on to someone else. You can all work in the cloud at the same time on something and see it evolve and change and communicate in real time. But that does have other implications, which I'll come on to later. So perhaps I should pause at that point.

Speaker 1: Okay, thank you. Any observations from the audience?

Attendee 3: Hello, there. Yeah, so I suppose from our perspective with customers, we've seen a lot of demand for our professional services where you've got organizations that recognize the need to digitize; to move off prem onto the cloud, but don't know how to do it, don't really understand the costing models, have heard horror stories about bill shock, and things like that. So yeah, we've definitely seen an increase in the demand for professional services to go in and not just deploy a patch-over service, but look at the long-term challenges that they have, what the desired outcomes are, and build architecture around that, and not necessarily on architecture. In some instances, we've recommended

that they go with Google Cloud or another provider, such as AWS; it's got to be right for the customer. So yes, definitely that consideration around the commercials is key to some of the decision making that we're seeing.

Speaker 1: Thank you. I'm just going to make an observation now. Data, there's no doubt that data is helping public sector make better decisions and make them at pace. Speaker 3, can we leverage data even more in our decision making, do you think? And in particular, to help us to respond to demand and scaling responses.

Speaker 3: Absolutely, data is king. And I think public sector is probably one of the few industries in the world where we have so much of it, whether it's patient data, citizen data. I think that what we struggled with in the past is actually accessing that data. So sometimes being able to get hold of it, extract it, actually configure it so that you can actually see it has been quite time consuming, and quite costly. I think those barriers have been broken this year, and more and more data is being accessed. I think the next challenge for us as an industry really is, how do we consume it?

Having access to all of that data is amazing, it's brilliant, but we need to simplify the process in terms of what is the format that it arrives in, whether it's healthcare data, whether it's citizen data. Because the last thing you want is to be given a huge long Excel spreadsheet of a report that's just got rows and rows of data on it; that's meaningless. This is where we can use things like AI, ML. We can use all of those emerging technologies together, to actually start to look for patterns, start to analyze that data, actually apply some intelligence to it so that when it comes to us, it's already in a format that allows us to digest it in an easier way.

And then I think the power of being able to use that to make more decisions quickly, is actually going to change the way that we operate. That if you can use healthcare data to actually treat patients faster, or if you can create vaccines more quickly, research is possible to be done in a faster way. Absolutely. We're talking about a vaccine release that could go from seven to 10 years, which is what it currently takes to get out on the market, to reducing that time to market down to potentially one or two years. The number of lives you save just with that on its own is phenomenal. So why wouldn't we do it, I think is the point.

Speaker 1: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. I completely agree with you. There is so much data that government has.

Attendee 1: I think so. I agree with that, but I think the biggest challenge, certainly, that we face in our projects is, it's not the volume of data, it's the quality of the data. So particularly if you're collecting data in from different sources, you need it to be in the same format, you need to be measuring the same things. And I think there's a big education piece to say it's not just volume, it's quality. What can we do to ensure that we understand how data is going to be used when we set

about collecting it, so that we get the most out of it and not miss the opportunity?

Speaker 3: Attendee 1, what are your thoughts in terms of... across public sector, we love creating the same data sets, right? Repeatedly, depending on which sub vertical you're in, whether it's local government health, or central government, etc. Do you think that we will get to a point where we trust each other enough across those sub verticals to create a master set of data, which of course would be clean data, rather than the dirty data that we currently have? Do you think we can get there?

Attendee 1: I think we have to. I mean, that's maybe not quite the answer you're looking for, but I think we have to do more to establish trust, to store data securely. I think a bit of work has to be done on data governance, data organization. And then we need somewhere to store it so we can all work on it. But, yeah, I think the potential is there, and I think the sorts of use cases and projects that particularly we've been doing as departments during COVID-19 have led us to understand what the benefits are. And I think that should make it easier to overcome some of the challenges.

Speaker 3: Yeah, agreed.

Speaker 1: I'm going to move us onto topic three now, which is, just as a reminder, harnessing the power of both open and secure cloud technology. So, security, another really, really big focus area. And I know very important in government as one of the top priorities. It can't be an afterthought. So, integration and interoperability between your legacy infrastructure and your existing cloud providers and whatever you choose to do next, is really important. And security has got to be designed in from the start. Speaker 2, what's your view on how that level of integration can be achieved without increasing the risks?

Speaker 2: Yeah, thank you. So, the beauty of cloud is that you've got the choice of being completely open and highly secure, so getting the balance is right. You can actually achieve both. So, choosing the right cloud is important. With many clouds, you can actually decide exactly where to locate your data, for example, with us. You control not only the location, but what happens to your data, you can see who accesses it, it's all encrypted at rest, or in motion, even in Compute or in Google Cloud, if you want that. And you can even have your own security encryption keys. So obviously, no one could get hold of it, if you really want to go to that extreme.

We take security of data extremely seriously, as you would expect. But there's, of course, you got to get a balance. Because if you hold a security key and you only give access to everything to one person, you're not really leveraging the power of the cloud, because you've got to be able to manage that. And so, the beauty of the cloud is that it does enable you to control all of that.

I think there's a number of aspects that are worth raising here. First of all, the use of API's, which helps to give open access to cloud and all the data that we've been touching on. It's also worth thinking about how you segment the data. Many agencies have highly secure data, and it will always be on-prem and locked away. Others have complete open datasets, particularly in areas like research or science where the sharing of data for research purposes is critical. And so, actually analyzing those data sets and deciding what kind of categories they sit in is important to co-manage control access.

There are many tools to enable anonymization that we have automatically anonymizing kinds of things; credit cards, names, addresses, and so on and so forth. And you can control and manage that. And we have tools like exFAT, talking about how Google Search uses a product called BigQuery. When you actually do that search, that product takes a snapshot of the entire world's internet 30 times a day, which is how Google Search works. And with Google Cloud, you get that product and it can ingest data for you to then do your own analysis with.

But of course, you've got to set up those, what we call, 'pipelines' of data, feeding that large data warehouse. So, managing the openness and security of cloud is something you've got the tools to do when you move to a cloud like Google, but you need to obviously put those practices and those procedures in place. Because otherwise, it's one thing having the tool and the capabilities, but if you don't enforce your own procedures and practices for update and controls you want, it doesn't matter what tools you've got, it needs to be done thoughtfully and with the right controls and processes around it. So, I think, let's see what the audience have to say, but that would be my view on this.

Speaker 1: Yeah, and I just got another example in the security space. This time it's around sovereignty of the G Suite data. So essentially, the client needed to overcome sovereignty issues when they were sharing sensitive documents between their staff using G Suite. And what was that able to achieve with the use of Google Cloud? Strong authentication, but really easy to use. Identity management integrated into the solution, Gmail with end-to-end encryption, file sharing features with the encryption keys that you're talking about Speaker 2, and then collaboration with all the other Google tools set.

Again, really enabling that secure cloud solution. Over to the audience then. Any thoughts on the security and any concerns, I guess, as well, around the move to cloud in terms of security?

Attendee 3: We're seeing an increased demand, I suppose, for elevated sensitive instances, be that private or multi-tenant. But certainly, since we stood up our tier two official secret capability that has inherently been on-premise, we are seeing increased demand, certainly for national security customers and partners that

want to stand up environments for a suite of national security, and customers around that tier two capability, utilizing our infrastructure.

But obviously, at that level you have challenges around collaboration tools, and how you manage secure gateways, the communities of interest, the applications that some of the end customers might want to use as well. So, it's certainly quite an embryonic state at the moment. So, it will be interesting to see how it plays after that official secret level and above, in terms of what sorts of collaboration tools will work well in that environment, how they can be deployed, and also the accreditation process as well.

Each customer is very different and each kind of architecture for these individual instances is very different. We have a couple that are accredited at the moment, but some in flight as well. So, it's a really early journey for us at that level, but it's quite an interesting one.

Speaker 1: Thank you.

Attendee 2: Yeah, I think I'd echo what's just been said, actually. I think we're always going to have multiple environments. We're very risk-averse, of course still, even though we think that our risk approach may have changed in some directions over the last several months. I think we are still risk-averse. And we will be looking at different tiers and levels of movement across environments. We're currently running in quite a few environments, and as we move into slightly more technically advanced environments, I think, that risk aversion will remain.

Again, I think what was said about the accreditation process, it's absolutely critical that we get that right. And the way that the departments are structured and the approvals that will be required, will be key to making things move forward in that direction.

Speaker 1: Okay, thanks. Speaker 2, Speaker 3, any comments on what we've just heard?

Speaker 2: Yeah, accreditation is critical. You can manage multiple cloud environments on-prem and different cloud vendors as well with technology like ours. We fully understand that and recognize it. Of course, the public cloud is a bit like a high tide in some ways. If you, for example, and if not security, data privacy, but if you comply with GDPR in Europe, you comply with GDPR everywhere in the world. If you comply with what the Americans call FedRAMP High, which we do, then everyone complies to it whether it's relevant here or not.

So, we are very, very conscious of a lot of these standards and accreditations globally. We got a lot of them in place, there's always more to do. But managing on-prem and disconnected cloud is something we launched, actually yesterday, with a big announcement in France, to enable those kind of agencies to manage that with a disconnected, if you want to call it that, version of Google Cloud

which is in place now. So, there's different mechanisms, but clearly in public sector more than anywhere else, the data levels are absolutely essential to manage those effectively.

Speaker 1: Okay, so I'm going to move us on a little bit. So, we've talked a lot about remote working, on and off today. We've got lots of teams continuing to work remotely and supporting a virtual process is going to become an essential part of our strategies going forward. People refer to the 'new normal', especially in the context of case management. So, Speaker 2, what's your view on how you would go about that, for example, through fit-for-purpose remote working software, virtual desktop infrastructure, and so on?

Speaker 2: Well, everyone's had to adapt to that this year, of course. Actually, I think the key now is how organizations manage employees' mental health and well-being. Being on these endless video calls, whatever technology you're using of course, does affect us as human beings. So, I think organizations really need to think about that, rather than us all being on back-to-back video calls. My point from a little earlier, I think the concept of true collaboration is key. To try and get away from just point-to-point sending each other emails and being on video calls, that's the basics, if you like, but it's not collaboration really. Apart from the conversation you can have on a video call, but it's still not working collaboratively.

So, trying to move that step further. Someone earlier talked about the younger generation using chat and group access to technology; that is the way to move and it gets that team spirit. Because I think people feel better as human beings when they're working together closely on something rather than its point-to-point communication. So, for me, I think now organizations need to turn their attention generally to mental health and well-being.

I'd like to be optimistic that this is all going to be over and done with, with a vaccine, but I think if we assume it's not, which is probably a better position... and I've seen various reports from people like Gartner and others saying that working from home is going to be at least 50% of all employees in the future in any event, then, that is something that, I think, organizations really need to think about.

Speaker 1: Yeah, no, I completely agree. I know that inside Atos we talk a lot about keeping everybody safe and well so that we can deliver services. I mean, that's the key thing, it starts with the people. And actually, keeping the services running remotely in comparison to keeping the people in good health and good mental health and good well-being. That's the part where we've had to think very differently and invest a lot. I completely agree with that. Any observations from the audience?

Attendee 1: Yeah. I think what we're finding we're missing the most is what I call sort of the 'water cooler' moments, the casual interactions. And I think that's the most difficult thing to put back into any kind of remote scenario, because you're just not bumping into people in the corridors. And even when we do go back to work, they'll probably not be bumping into people in corridors, because it'll all be one way. While collaboration tools, with the best will in the world, really do require more organization, you don't just contact somebody and start up a conversation and hope that something new and interesting will come out of it.

While I think there's been big progress, I think there's still more to do, because often, it's these little interactions that make people feel better, isn't it? It's not the organized meetings, it's the chance encounters.

Speaker 1: Yeah, absolutely. I used to share my train journey with a colleague. And for the first months of lockdown, obviously, we stopped gossiping on the train. And we have recently... we also used to meet at a statue at Woking station, so we now have the statue meeting two mornings a week at the time we used to have met. We generally go for a walk in our respective areas and just catch up. As you say, it's really hard to create that. We still have to do it via technology, but it's really hard to create that kind of informal collaboration, isn't it? Yeah, completely agree.

Speaker 3: Just add to that, my view is that it's been a shock for a lot of people. I've worked remotely for about 15 years now. But even for somebody like me, who's used to having that time at home and being in a commute somewhere, this year has been tough. I think that, as leaders, we have to lead by example as well, and that for me comes down to, if we think about an employee's well-being and their general health, we have to think about the way that tolerance levels are measured and where we set them. That for me sort of translates into, "I don't expect everybody to be on a video call."

If there are set meetings in the diary, I'm perfectly happy for people to use the phone and just pick the phone up and actually call somebody, instead. Team meetings can be, yes, you go out and you have your walk, you're out, you're doing whatever you need to do, as long as you are participating in that forum and you're there. I think this year has been all about "Everyone just get on video!" and it's had a huge drain on people. But, also the timing of that, there are small things that we can do to help.

I've said to my team that from 9 o'clock till 10 o'clock in the morning, I see that as a commute hour. So, I don't expect that meetings will start at 8 o'clock, or 8:30, or at 9 o'clock. I'm perfectly happy for people to have that hour to do what they need to do, whether it's go out and have a walk, because we're getting into sort of the days get shorter and darker, they need to drop their kids off. And I think we need to have that level of tolerance. So those expectations that people have built up this year, I think some of those need to be addressed as well, just

to make it a bit more flexible and a bit more easy for people to work from home. So, for me, I think those go hand in hand. So that's my thought, really.

Speaker 1: Attendee 2?

Attendee 2: Yeah. Just a comment about the tools really, because I feel like we haven't necessarily, with the tooling, reflected the user requirements of now. The tools, whether they be Google, Skype, or anything else that was built, was built for probably a more restricted use. I imagine companies are already working to make them more user-centric. I personally would like some more human things on the bottom options that I can choose, because if I was in a meeting previously and I wanted to excuse myself to go to the toilet during the meeting, I could.

At the moment, I can't, I need something to help me with that. I think there's lots of functions and lots of little tweaks that can be made to the products going forward to assist us in having to use them for longer periods of time than we were previously.

Speaker 1: That's a really good idea. Things like, if you've got a really urgent call, everybody would see you put the phone to your ear and then step away from the meeting. But when you're on a call, people don't see that as they would if you were in a room. I hadn't thought about that before, but yes, some different icons down the bottom that can signal different things. Yeah, entirely right.

Speaker 3: I love that, the ‘excuse me’ function. I think we'll name that after you, Attendee 2!

Attendee 2: Thanks! And body language, people have made a living out of reading body language. Far more difficult to do that now. And we're having to rely on a different set of skills within our own brain to help us with that.

If there's artificial intelligence that can help with that, great.

Speaker 1: Is that something that you're aware of is being looked at in the industry at all?

Speaker 2: Well, artificial intelligence is something we're very careful about, understandably, because AI and ethics, and so on. So, there's a kind of double-edged sword to that. But certainly, with Google Workspace, there's all kinds of icons now, almost too many. Where you can actually, if someone else is speaking, you can click on an icon and it goes past the screen. And it'd be very easy for us to add on one that says, "Excuse me", or something like that. And there's also a chat function, and so on. So, there are various things, but that is an interesting thought. But we are very, very cautious about inserting AI into video, because we just don't do anything that involves facial recognition.

Speaker 1: Okay. So, I guess one thing that's become very clear this morning is that we're all facing many challenges. A lot of which a year ago we would never have imagined. But I think what we've also seen today is that that brings new opportunities. And we've reflected a little bit on how we've all become more agile, more adaptable, more resilient, focused on the citizen and their experience. I've jotted down, as we've been going through, some of the key phrases I picked out. So, I'm just going to whiz through those.

I heard 'year of the user', which I loved. And 'a focus on the business not on the IT that helps deliver it'. 'Pace of transformation' - pace has come across a lot. I thought the comments around governance were interesting and I hadn't thought about. 'We'd lost some of that audit trail in the governance process'. Good conversation around the generational divide, and how that's brought positive things but also challenged some of us to work differently. 'Quality of data'. I heard Speaker 2, I wrote this down, 'cloud is beautiful'. I thought that was lovely. It can be completely open or at the same time, highly secure.

We talked about security and an increased demand for secure solutions, but also the criticality of the accreditation process when you've got this mixed economy. And then quite a lot this morning as well around collaboration and looking after our people. So, if you just reflect on all of that, a really, really rounded conversation. So, thank you to everybody for joining this call this morning for the debate and the input. And especially to Speaker 2 and Speaker 3, for your insight.

We will share, there have been people in the background taking notes just for us because of the Chatham House Rules, and we will share the summary in case you just want to reflect on anything later on. So, any last observations before we close? No? Well then, I wish you all a good rest of the day. And thank you very much.

Questions asked during the session via chat:

- Q1: There's a great example in a government agency of doing all of the training online for their delivery.
  I have 2 members of my team I have never met except on Skype, but they said they feel fully integrated into the team - agreed - was trying to model something recently for cab off but was challenging with cloud
- Q1 A: Speaker 3 - I would recommend making use of the online cloud calculators when modelling. There are plenty out there, and it's often interesting to use a variety before you develop your business case/proposal. Also, the metering and config of your cloud environment is really important. Actually, putting some of those flags in place to cap

usage, or alert at either a usage tipping point, or a spend point is REALLY useful ... most of these can be merged into your monitoring and metering mgt tools.

- Q1 extended: We are seeing pockets of customers with bill shock regarding data egress costs, something that often isn't factored in to the commercial models and can result in bill shock further down the line when the customer is locked in....it can be very detrimental to their overall perception of the cloud journey as part of wider digitisation.