A Day in the Life of John Holland

By Trevor Clarke, Lead Analyst Asia Pacific

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Overview

This Tech Research Asia case study reviews the end user computing and workplace strategy, A Day in the Life of John Holland, adopted by one of Australia's largest engineering, contracting and services organisations. It investigates the reasons why John Holland adopted a key technology in virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI), the goals it was striving to achieve, and the outcomes it has realised from the viewpoints of the CIO and the Executive General Manager Operational Support. This case study also provides advice to technology leaders considering their own workplace strategy and/or evaluating VDI.

Key Findings

- John Holland's cost management was boosted through the centralisation of infrastructure (servers and storage) which eliminated the need for IT equipment to be located at multiple project sites.

- Productivity and employee engagement also benefited from the eradication of inefficient, manual and often duplicated tasks through the mobilisation of more than 20 processes delivered to any device via VDI. These processes are expected to continue to increase in number and value to the people at John Holland.

- A workplace strategy should be approached as an evolving and iterative relationship between people, places, processes and technology. An important first step, however, is ensuring the organisation has a vision for how it wants employees to work.

Recommendations

For Technology and Service Buyers:

- Ask your organisation the question, "how do all the components of our organisation help us achieve our primary goal?" Feedback from a variety of stakeholders ranging from the executive down to front line workers will help you establish an inclusive workplace vision in a logical fashion.

- Evaluate enabling technologies through the IT *and* Business results they are able to generate through a pilot and talking to peers that have already gone down a similar path. The process of piloting VDI will create an opportunity to understand your environment in great detail. Use this to generate ongoing business and IT metrics.

The Dashboard

Company Information:
Name: John Holland Group

Size: 4500+

Industry: Engineering, contracting and services

Countries: Australia, New Zealand, South East Asia

Project snapshot: Adoption of virtual desktop infrastructure

Results:

9 out of 10

John Holland's CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support both rated the contribution of a VDI-enabled workplace strategy to the company's risk management capabilities as very high.

Cost management was boosted through the elimination of project site infrastructure and the eradication of inefficient and sometimes duplication of process steps.

Future: John Holland Group is now upgrading its Citrix VDI infrastructure to the latest version and is exploring how to move many of its workloads to a cloud computing model.

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The When, Who and What

John Holland is one of Australia's most prominent engineering, contracting and services providers. Operating across Australia and in New Zealand, South East Asia John Holland's business involves multiple projects of a varying nature at any given time in multiple locations. Projects span the infrastructure, energy and resources and transport services sectors. The company has over 4500 employees and numerous sub-contracting partners. In April 2013 John Holland established a new end user computing strategy called "A day in the life of John Holland" that involved, among other things, the implementation of a virtual desktop infrastructure (VDI) to support the wide-ranging enterprise mobility strategy.

The Why

John Holland is a project-based organisation and can have up to 100 projects running at any one time right across Australia in varying spaces (office work and remote locations). The mobility of information and being able to do things instantly at a location is therefore critical to the running of these projects in terms of staff engagement and productivity. In the first quarter of 2013 the company undertook a review of how they could provision applications and support the quick ramp up of technology for projects. This review, which involved both CFO and CIO roles, looked at the nature of the business. It determined there was a strong desire to be agile and allow employees to access systems at any time on any type of device while eradicating the duplication of tasks to let them focus on their core objectives. Effectively, John Holland wanted to place people at the centre of everything they did and as a result to attract and retain the best contracting talent in Australia.

"Mobility is allowing us to focus on the issues that matter."

John Holland Executive General Manager Operational Support, Russell Cuttler

In the past, John Holland would often have technology infrastructure (servers and storage) located on project sites. This infrastructure needed to be set up for each project with backup systems. In addition to the cost and time involved in setting up each project, the infrastructure and the information it supported was at risk due to the remote and sometimes harsh locations of projects, along with natural weather occurrences, and occasional vandalism or theft. Moreover, employees weren't always able to complete tasks on site in real time. Instead they would have to travel back to the office to complete paperwork or access systems via their desktop. The number of devices employees used – smartphones, tablets, notebooks – also meant challenges with delivering apps and information securely and timely.

In order to reduce the time taken to have the technology ready to support its multiple projects and to allow employees to use the device of their choice on the project site to complete tasks (such as auditing or incident reports), John Holland centralised its infrastructure and implemented VDI.

The How

In order to pursue its strategy, John Holland invested in a wide variety of technologies and services. These included:

- QoS across the network prioritising VDI, video, and voice
- Citrix v7.5 (upgrading to v7.6)
- Thin client hardware
- Microsoft Lync
- Microsoft SharePoint
- A range of tablet and smartphone devices that allow VDI
- iAnnotate Pro
- iAuditor

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The Outcomes

The results in chart 1 [to be created by TRA] shows the level of contribution John Holland stakeholders, including the CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support believe the strategy has made to a common set of business goals. Each executive was asked to provide a rating on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 10 is an outstanding contribution, and 1 is a very low contribution) across several sub-categories for eight common goals. Each business goal is listed below along with the average score for the top level goal and reasons for the ratings:

Chart 1: John Holland's CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support percieved outcomes from the end user strategy

Legend: ━━ Exec. GM Operational Support   ━━ CIO

- **Cost Management – Executive General Manager Operational Support 7.5, CIO 8.25**: The strong rating is attributed to the centralisation of IT assets and the elimination of duplicated infrastructure at multiple project sites. The strongest contribution was deemed to be toward managing overall organisational operational expenditure as employees can spend more time at sites on critical items and interacting with staff rather than having to travel between sites and the office to complete paperwork.

- **Growth – Executive General Manager Operational Support 3.8, CIO 4.1:** The average rating here is low when all types of growth are considered collectively – as a result of minimal contribution to the company's growth in product lines, number of services, and vertical markets. However, both the CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support noted the contribution of the strategy was high (e.g. rated between 7 and 8) for growth in profits and geographies. Revenue growth was also considered good (rated 5 or 6).

- **Risk Management – Executive General Manager Operational Support 8.6, CIO 9:** The highest rated contribution of the strategy for both the CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support was to Risk Management. This was due to, in the Executive General Manager Operational Support Russell Cuttler's words, being "Able to gather data and communicate it directly from site and recall records directly with minimal or no delay in dealing with issues". Other reasons offered were the quality of data collection and improved visibility on project progress.

- **Talent Management – Executive General Manager Operational Support 7.5, CIO 7.5:** This strong rating was attributed to a higher "value proposition" for employees at John Holland in that they have a better, and more consumer-like, experience that has made many tasks easier (cascading into higher job satisfaction).

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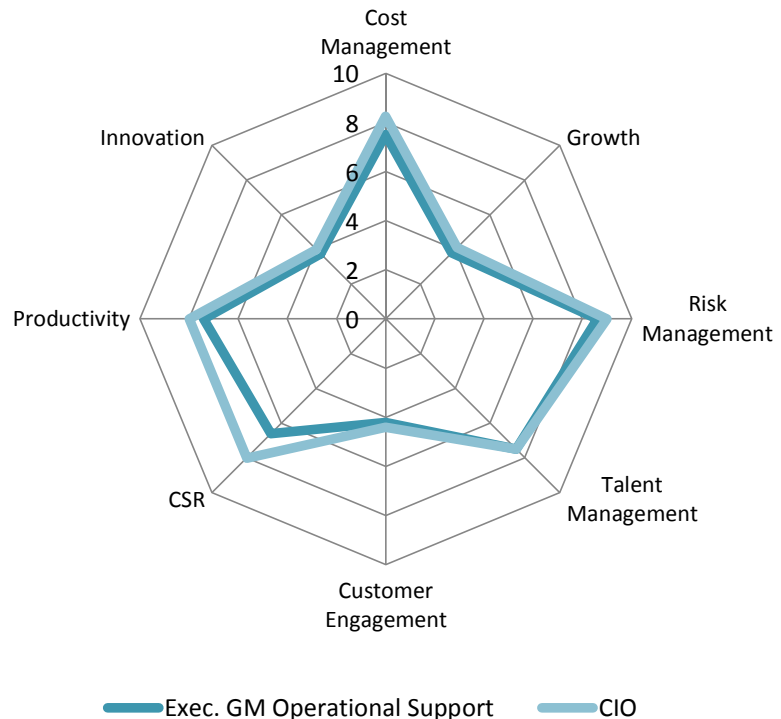
- **Customer Engagement – Executive General Manager Operational Support 4.2, CIO 4.4:** John Holland's CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support believe the strategy will help improve customer satisfaction and brand preference as employees are able to spend more time on site and contribute more time to improving the quality of results reported back to customers. However, in contrast and diluting the average rating, both individuals did not perceive any impact on improving customer churn rates or the company's brand equity due to purchasing decisions being influenced by factors that outweigh the impact of this initiative.

- **CSR – Executive General Manager Operational Support 6.6, CIO 8:** CIO, David Banger, attributed this strong rating to the environmentally sensible solution which resulted in the eradication of multiple site servers along with an improved ability to access accurate data for any legal requirements.

"Servers cost between $10K to $50K per project site, depending on the size and scale of the project. There is additional effort on project sites with servers to back up data and manage the server. These costs have been avoided; typically we have 100 project sites."

John Holland CIO, David Banger

- **Productivity – Executive General Manager Operational Support 7.4, CIO 8:** John Holland has mobilised more than 20 processes which means employees can now complete tasks on any device and on project sites, significantly reducing the time investments made to produce outcomes.

- **Innovation – Executive General Manager Operational Support 3.75, CIO 4:** Both the CIO and Executive General Manager Operational Support believe the strategy has contributed strongly (rating of between 6 and 8) to the creation of new processes and ideas generation. However, less impact has been felt on innovation in new products and services bringing the average rating down.

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The Next Steps for John Holland Group

John Holland is now in the final stages of the technology roll out to support the workplace strategy and will embark on the next stage of the strategy in August 2014. It is upgrading to the latest version of Citrix (v7.5) and expects this to provide a better touch interface for users on mobile devices like tablets. It is also piloting an application to capture and rate new ideas. Further, the company is exploring moving many of its workloads into a cloud-based service. Importantly, John Holland wants to leverage the work done to date to attract and retain the best contracting talent in Australia.

Recommendations

For Technology and Service Buyers looking to adopt a flexible working strategy:

- **Define your vision for your ideal environment and culture through multi-party collaboration**: Understanding the needs of your users and the variety of roles, tasks, and styles that come with each person will help. As too will asking the question "how do all the components of our organisation help us achieve our primary goal?" Bringing decisions back to this question will help keep things on track in a logical path. Make sure you are able to generate a compelling narrative around this vision that both internal and external parties can buy into.

- **Make sure your workplace strategy harmonises and optimises the physical spaces you use, the processes and practices in place, the supporting technology, and the broader culture of the organisation.** In TRA's research a greater level of success is evident with organisations that take a holistic view of the workplace and manage the strategy implementation in a way that breaks down traditional siloes.

- **Evaluate enabling technologies through the IT *and* Business results they are able to generate.** The process of piloting VDI will create an opportunity to understand your environment in great detail. Use this to generate ongoing business and IT metrics. Tech Research Asia believes any big change to the end user computing environment should be used to create long-term data capture around the interplay between employees, technologies and efforts to achieve goals. This will alleviate some of the guess work around employee needs/best practice and reduce time used in proof of concepts for any future end user computing projects.

Additional Resources

We encourage you to read extensively to better inform your decisions and maintain an open knowledge policy to support this recommendation. To receive any of the below research please contact Tech Research Asia.

- *"Guangdong Nanyue Bank Next Generation Business System Case Study",* Trevor Clarke, 2014
- *"Hassell Studio Virtual Desktop Case Study"* TRA 2014
- *"Fulton Hogan End User Computing Case Study",* By Trevor Clarke 2014
- *"Vision Australia VDI Case Study".* By Trevor Clarke, 2014
- *"Towards Customer Centricity – Is the Insurance Industry Ready?".* TRA 2014
- *"Wearables @ Work: A guide for business and IT leaders",* By Trevor Clarke 2014.
- *"Who owns your customers' experience?"* TRA 2014
- *"The Customer Communication and Engagement Imperative – AGL Case Study".* TRA
- *"The CIO Strategy Summit Benchmarking Report".* TRA 2014
- *"Onsite Rental Group Case Study",* Tim Dillon 2014
- *"Intelligent Foundations: Containerised Data Centres in the Asia Pacific."* By Trevor Clarke. 2013.
- *"The Australian Data Centre and Cloud Computing Strategy Summit Report",* By Trevor Clarke 2014
- *"Allianz Infrastructure Optimisation Case Study",* Tim Dillon 2014.
- *"The activity based working checklist for CxOs and IT leaders."* By Trevor Clarke. 2014.
- *"How to build a business case for flexible working and your ABW office."* By Trevor Clarke. 2014.
- *"10 innovative ideas for your flexible working office."* By Trevor Clarke. 2014.
- *"Activity Based Working: The New World of Work."* By TRA. 2014.
- *"Activity Based Working: The Future of Work in Australia".* By Trevor Clarke. 2013.
- *"Work 3.0: Strategies for a High Performance Workplace."* By TRA. 2014.
- *"Work 3.0: High Performance Customer Engagement."* By TRA. 2014.
- *"BlueWork: The American Express Workplace Strategy".* By Trevor Clarke. 2014.
- *"The Corrs Chambers Westgarth Workplace and Technology Strategy".* Trevor Clarke 2014.
- *"The New Zealand Smart Home Opportunity",* Trevor Clarke 2014.
- *"The Smarter Connected NZ Town",* Trevor Clarke 2014
- *"Co-working New Zealand".* Trevor Clarke 2014.
- *"Japan: The ANA Workplace and Technology Strategy,"* Trevor Clarke 2014 (forthcoming)
- *"ASB North Wharf Activity Based Working Case Study".* By Trevor Clarke. 2014.
- *"Japan: One of Them Activity Based Working Case Study."* By Trevor Clarke. 2014.
- *"Making the most of the flexible work movement."* By TRA. 2014.
- *"Bankwest Activity Based Working Case Study".* By Trevor Clarke. 2013.
- *"Aon Australia Virtual Desktop Infrastructure Case Study".* By Trevor Clarke. 2013.
- *"Fortescue Metals Group Virtual Desktop Infrastructure Case Study".* By Trevor Clarke. 2013
- *"LINZ end user computing case study".* By Trevor Clarke. 2014
- *"The Australian Future of Work CxO, IT and Sales Survey".* By Trevor Clarke. 2013
- *"Mobility in 2015: Australia".* By Trevor Clarke. 2013

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