

Draft Whitepaper

# COVID - Comprehensive TECH Lessons Learned

May 2020

Who were the winners and losers during the tech scramble to get the world working remotely during the pandemic?

How do you scale back your Tech Costs during Covid-19?

**Author:**

Jonathan Collins

Enterprise Architect, 3Gi Technology

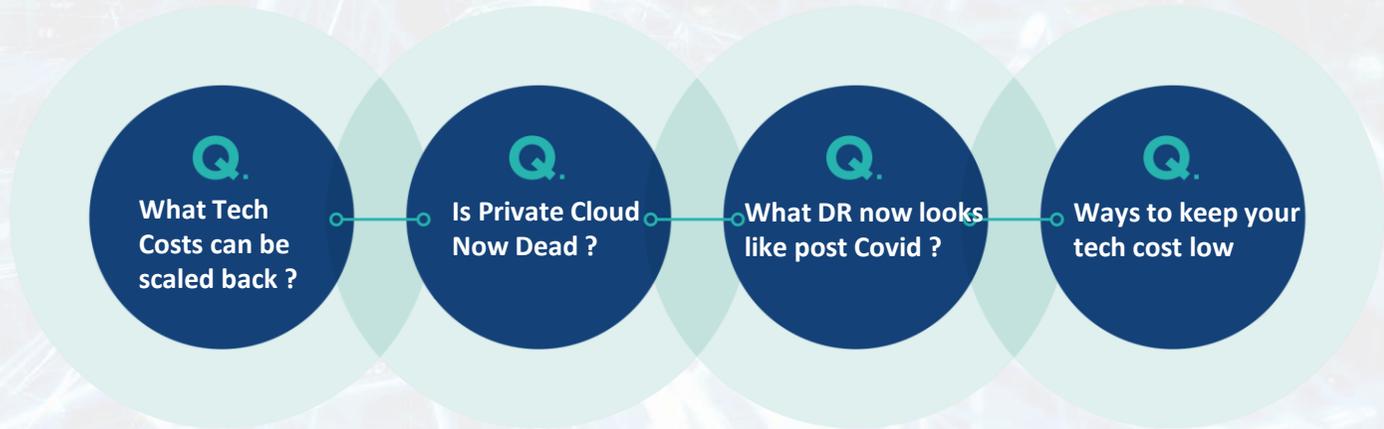


## Introduction

# COVID - Comprehensive Tech Lessons Learned

We take a walk through the critical elements of the tech challenges arising from the pandemic and understand what life hacks and cost reduction options people used to get ahead.

Here are some of the questions we asked as part of our research to find out why the great exodus to working from home was smooth for some but a rough ride for others.



Was this the obituary for Private Cloud? With only a few minor hiccups among the top cloud vendors and the lack of scaling options within Private Cloud strategies, surely means we have been given the answer on where to place our cloud dollars in the future?



## 1 Scale up, Scale Down

**Businesses engineered to scale up seem to scale down just as well. We found the winners were masters of agile scaling.**

The start-up culture we seem to enjoy more and more these days tries to engineer a modular approach to scaling and growth. However, one of the surprising outcomes of our research was that these more modular organisations built to scale up, found it easier to scale down. Those that have subscription billing on key tech spend (Cloud / VOIP / Licensing) seemed to scale back quite well. Not only did these types of winning businesses work smart to turn down the power on a sizable chunk of their architecture, they were also able to scale back outsourced services also.

## 2 Mastering Furlough

**An entirely new concept to most businesses. Engineering the correct tech furlough strategy was a new challenge for us all.**

In a time where both employees and employers are unsure of the best route to take, we spoke with several businesses to better understand the rules set out by HMRC and their interpretation on how to best proceed. From our research a common theme that both employees and employers agreed on, was the HMRC rule allowing staff to maintain system access to conduct training and still feel useful. This then allows both the Employee and the Employer to have a competitive edge when we all come out the other side.

## 3 Support Tsunami

**With 300% - 500% support volume increase, it was no surprise that most MSP's struggled to cope.**

From speaking with our clients, we found that many were shocked at how quickly everything happened. Although we were lucky with our clients already having well-rehearsed "Fly Away" strategies, we still experienced a 500% support volume increase. In researching this white paper the overall experience was that many people struggled to get any IT support help for over a week. This sentiment has also been echoed by IT recruitment firms, who were on an instant drive to hire an army of contract resources to fill the short-term skills gap. Although supporting people working from home in theory is easy, the reality is that there were a lot of hours consumed supporting untested solutions and poorly prepared BYOD equipment.



## 4 Private Cloud Obituary

**Private Clouds wobbled while Azure and Amazon reigned supreme.**

There has been a long debate in terms of Public vs Private Cloud computing services. The fact that businesses using "On-Prem" or "Private Cloud" infrastructure were simply not able to scale out a multitude of remote desktop options, caused problems for many. The demand increased almost instantly and with no laptops available even from the largest suppliers. We even found some teams had to move to working shift rotations to limit who could be on the system at any one time in order to lighten the load for the limited Private Cloud platforms. This did not reflect in businesses with Hybrid Setups – those who had at least dipped a toe into either Azure or AWS found that they were able to phoenix company-wide desktops, all relatively quickly.

## 5 Video Chat Works

**Being able to see the whites of people's eyes certainly bridges the gap to "in person" meetings.**

It has always been hard to get to people to opt for video chat, as many will find more comfort in the standard audio-only option. Anthropologists will tell you that we evolved the whites of our eyes as a method of non-verbal communication to express where our attention is. This has the added benefit of helping draw others towards it – potentially why video calls seem to be a whole lot more engaging. The explosion of people using Video Conferencing will no doubt change the way we conduct business forever.

## 6 Not Just Toilet Roll

**From Laptops to POE injectors, how did we all get caught short on the procurement front?**

We don't think it was a surprise to anyone that laptops went out of stock super fast. We also found that national distributors were out of servers by the end of the first week. Apart from advisory information on limited availability of on demand compute from Microsoft, the Public Cloud "Juggernaut" seemed to handle the situation well. We were able to use our LinkedIn contacts to get Web Cams and Eye Protection to local hospitals as we observed many businesses were also trying to help where they could. The item that did catch us all by surprise was the simple POE injector (a device to power peoples VOIP phones away from the office), leaving those who thought they could rely on taking their desk phone home scrambling for a soft phone alternative.



## 7 Clouds are Lined with Gold

**Big tech companies shares held fast; we learned that Cloud Stocks could mirror that of gold in times of crisis.**

Where usually the world flecks to buy gold, it was interesting to see that despite some initial correlation with the rest of the global markets, holding big cloud stocks during a global pandemic seems to be a viable alternative. Analysts have never been able to price the theoretically infinite potential of Public Cloud into their valuation, but now the limitless factor has been proven. It's no surprise that Cloud stocks are even more dominant in times of need. Microsoft, in our opinion the more generous of the two Cloud giants, very quickly started giving away lots of free access to tech. Teams & O365 were both offered, which although a fantastic marketing technique, would have no doubt made some troubled companies lives a lot easier during a challenging time.

## 8 Productivity can happen at home

**Many businesses have found that home working conditions boosted productivity.**

A lot of our clients reported that they felt people have made the switch to home working very well and some have even observed an uptick in terms of efficiency and general morale. However, what we are tracking now is when business workloads begin to increase out of the current lull, along with the honeymoon period of home working ending, how will productivity be affected? We wonder, when does the novelty of home working turn into more procrastination and people falling foul of having to face the distractions in their home life?

## 9 Responsible capitalism does exist

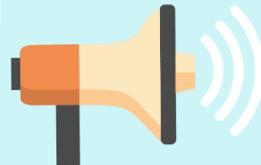
**The general trend was for businesses to add value in communities and industries and inspire others.**

Capitalism is often criticised, yet it has been an excellent time for humankind to be reminded that businesses are not all evil institutions and will club together in a time of need. Generally, the amount of UK businesses that were putting their resources into helping with the Coronavirus war effort was phenomenal. We would expect examples like Formula 1 teams building respirators as they have large resource pools of very high-quality tech in house, but what both surprised and impressed us was how many businesses, regardless of size, pitched in to help in whatever way they could. We ourselves helped by pitching in to find much-needed supplies for our local NHS hospitals.

# Core Stats – Our survey data

A high-level overview of some of the core stats we tracked throughout the pandemic.

Our subscription consumption for all clients dropped **28%** in April



Up to **500%** increase in support volumes to IT support companies making the WFH transition



**60%** of teams with public cloud compute either scaled up or down during the pandemic



**30%** average reduction in Opex tech costs



Cloud platforms scaled back up to **40%** to save costs



**80%** of teams waited to the last minute to act



# Top 5 – Cost Save Survival Tips

Here are our Top 5 checklist items to ensure you can lower TCO throughout the pandemic period.

1

## Extend Credit Lines 60 Days Without Issue

**We are finding for long-standing well-paying clients, that the big tech firms seem to be comfortable with extending credit terms.**

Although there were no big government-style handouts from the big tech firms, they do appear to be allowing slightly extended payment terms for long-standing clients. There is no blanket agreement in place, but we have found they seem to be receptive to individual conversations on this topic.



2

## Take Advantage of Free Services

**From Video Conferencing to complete Cloud Platforms it's all "up for grabs" during Covid.**

Microsoft came out fairly early offering the world Microsoft Teams without charge, and soon after providing the entire Office365 Suite for free for six months. Not only does this show what faith they had in their infrastructure to cope, but it forced many other companies to follow suit. There are free offers on tech just about everywhere. It is also worth noting that Amazon seems exceptionally keen to offer "Proof of Concept" budget (Free cloud) to people serious about migrating to AWS, which any AWS Partner should be able to execute for you.



3

## Switch Off 365 / G-Suite for Furloughed Users

**Scale Back Office365 / G-Suite for Furloughed Staff**

For furloughed staff, it is entirely feasible to stop paying for your subscription cloud accounts for them. Many offer to keep data for up to 90 days, effectively enacting a payment holiday on your subscription services. There are also many options provided to scale back individual services for the furloughed staff in general.



4

## Scale back On Demand Servers

**Many servers can be scaled back or even shut down at night to save budget.**

A common tech tip used for a while amongst the more cunning technology teams was scaling back its on-demand services by up to 30% - significant savings for overall tech budgets. With the general load on "back end services" being significantly reduced, many servers can be scaled back just by "turning down the power". What is also really popular is the engineering of "shut down" schedules, allowing failover pairs and non-critical services to be shut down at night when they are not being used.



5

## Scale Back SPLA Monthly

**A lot of user and desktop licensing is now conducted on SPLA licensing; this can also be scaled back.**

It is very commonplace to pay for user and desktop licenses under the Microsoft SPLA agreement. This is a largely trust based agreement where usage is reported monthly by the end client. These SPLA agreements can be scaled right back on everything from Windows Desktop and Server Licensing to per user access licenses. Your vendor / IT team should be able to give you a SPLA report for the business.



# Top 5 – Things to have in place next time

Companies that can scale up seemed to be able scale back quite well, Below are our picks for “no brainer” items to have in place next time

1

## Fly Away to Virtual Desktops

**Ability to give everyone a Remote Desktop at the touch of the button could cost very little to have in place.**

On-demand compute opens up many options for low cost, fast deployment remote working environments. Keeping a scaled-back model tested and available under the 'pay as you consume' model allows small Opex investment to become a high return solution in times of need. Scaling up on-demand compute for remote/virtual desktops could keep your users in business through a multitude of 'business continuity' scenarios.

2

## Keep Cloud Telephony in your back pocket

**Having “Cloud Phones” on standby allows flexibility for all in a crisis.**

Keeping calls flowing and users accessible ranked highly in the challenges of the pandemic. Taking a similar approach to on demand scalable compute, there are many cloud telephony platforms with softphone options to provide a scalable telephony solution. Just having the base call flow set up, and a handful of test users gives options for a fast scale up and failover with zero Capex and very little Opex investment. These solutions should all but render reverting to mobile forwarding redundant.

3

## Secure Agile Video Conferencing

**Having a corporate account and internal VC security policy ensures business is conducted securely.**

Even social apps, where video meet up apps are already popular saw a massive up turn in innovation to make socialising as close to the real thing as possible. From a business perspective, some form of remote team-based communication tool became a must have. Many options exist for low cost, accessible, secure, video conferencing and team collaboration solutions. Microsoft offering Teams for free led to a 70% increase globally. We suspect that now this has fallen into the category of 'the norm' overnight, its going to be a very effective core business tech tool – pandemic or not.

4

## Home Working Rotation

**Ensuring teams are rotated to do some home working boosts DR Capability and morale.**

Even just starting with a handful of people using the systems from home on a Friday could help iron out the niggly issues of remote access. With this already pre-tested, there is a lot less to worry about when having to roll out to everyone in a short space of time. We have always found these trials to deliver great feedback on tech access improvements.

5

## Lean BYOD Strategy

**By securely allowing peoples devices to be used is great for DR and Work / Life balance.**

This is often a sticky point for companies asking employees to use their own devices for work purposes. Getting a balanced approach between security and ability for users to get easy access from their devices is key. If you can strike the happy balance, users get more flexibility, and the business gets an agile DR strategy with a pool of compute resources ready to go. Creating and practising a solid and secure BYOD strategy made all the different to a lot of businesses during the pandemic. Tools such as Microsoft Intune and other MDM platforms are now making it easier to combine personal devices with business workloads.

# Conclusion

In a world where people are not too sure what the new “Normal” will be, it certainly seems that those who invested in Digital Transformation were able to weather the storm better than those who did not.



**Learn More** about how to better prepare your organisation for pandemic style risk using Digital Transformation disciplines.

We offer business leaders complimentary IT consultancy services with a full business and technical requirements review to understand the business’s vision. This initial exploratory process concludes with strategic recommendations.



**Jonathan Collins**  
Enterprise Architect

**Jonathan has over ten years in the enterprise IT Infrastructure & Security Industry experience; he has assisted C-level executives globally to maximise their technology investment and reduce their total cost of ownership (TCO).**

As one of the founders of 3Gi Technology, Jonathan understands the challenges, risks and rewards a company could go through when changing technology service providers & strategy.

t: +44 (0) 203 588 2580  
e: jonathan.collins@3gi.co.uk

## Contact us:

Jonathan Collins  
Enterprise Architect 3Gi Technology

**t: +44 (0) 203 588 2580**

**e: [jonathan.collins@3gi.co.uk](mailto:jonathan.collins@3gi.co.uk)**



## About 3Gi

At 3Gi, we spend a vast amount of our time working with executive leadership teams to deliver a “Top Tier” consultancy approach without the price tag. Our internal team of Cloud Architects, Application Developers and expert Service Engineers allow us to deliver everything from CIO as a service through to end user service desk functions. Our general sales ethos is that if we provide prospective clients a completely free of charge and truly enterprise up-front consultancy experience.

**[www.3gi.co.uk](http://www.3gi.co.uk)**

© Copyright 2019 3Gi Technology Ltd. All rights reserved 2020. This content is for general information purposes only and does not purport to constitute professional advice. We do not make any representation or give any warranty and shall not be liable for any losses or damages whatsoever, arising from reliance on information contained in this document.