

ACT starts Cloud Computing initiatives - ACT

Written by ACT PAO

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Current commercial developments in 'cloud computing', including service oriented architectures and virtualisation, are being widely promoted as a means of making more efficient use of computing resources.

The main gains are cost savings and increased interoperability: 'cloud computing' offers opportunities to reduce operating costs for information systems, together with increased efficiency and flexibility in the way information is stored, managed and used. This is achieved through shared network-delivered services, both public and private, in which each user sees only the service, as the implementation or infrastructure is managed elsewhere.

HQ Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) staff involved in planning and developing future information systems can benefit from greater awareness of the prospects and risks associated with investing in 'cloud computing' solutions, in order to develop sound advice to NATO and national authorities.

To this end, HQ SACT from Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) Division, with the ACT Office of Security and Capability Engineering Division, have recently initiated several related projects that will greatly improve the staff's depth of current knowledge about the prospects for benefitting from 'cloud computing' techniques in the NATO environment. The projects involve information exchange with industry and experimentation that will identify pros and cons of 'cloud computing' in the NATO environment. The results should also be beneficial to NATO as a whole.

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The NATO Industrial Advisory Group (NIAG) has begun a high level advisory study for HQ SACT on "Implications of 'cloud computing' developments for NATO operational structures. More than 20 companies involved in the development and implementation of 'cloud' technologies are participating in this multinational study. The results will represent the combined views of industry across many of the NATO nations.

Through ACT's Framework For Collaborative Interaction (FFCI), several non-procurement collaborative projects have been launched with companies to obtain a range of industry perspectives on 'cloud computing' and learn from industry knowledge and experience in applying 'cloud' solutions.

IBM held a series of information exchange workshops with HQ SACT staff during 2010 and has additional projects planned in 2011 that will focus on "*on-premise*" 'cloud computing' challenges.

Microsoft Corporation has agreed to conduct technical workshops on 'cloud computing' in early 2011 and has also been exploring some specific applications for 'cloud' solutions to solve capability shortfalls. The current focus for Microsoft collaboration on 'cloud computing' is "*off-premise*" scenarios.

Several other companies, including Hewlett Packard, Dell, Orange Business Service and others, are initiating similar collaborative projects to help HQ SACT address 'cloud computing' issues through the FFCI initiative.

In addition to the collaborative projects, there are also some related projects within the C4ISR Division, funded as a part of the ACT Program of Work, that are contributing to the overall 'cloud computing' investigations.

Experimentation and development projects are addressing a number of identified challenges related to 'cloud computing.' ACT is experimenting with practical 'cloud' solutions for the consolidation of the former ACT C4I San Diego data centre and the Norfolk-based reference

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facility located in the C4ISR Technology & Human Factors Branch. The combined data centre will be used to support several activities, including: the Coalition Warrior Interoperability eXercise, eXamination, eXperimentation and eXploration event (CWIX); Maritime Situational Awareness (MSA); Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR) and architecture experimentation.

Industry was also invited to participate in the most recent "Tidesprint" meeting in November 2010. Among several workshops run during the event, the one on 'cloud computing' was particularly supported, and results of the discussions have been published on a collaborative website that is accessible to the participants.