Rabobank speeds up flexibility with Infrastructure as Code

Economies, markets and consumer behavior are rapidly changing. Demand for faster digitization and more digital financial services make that financial institutions like Rabobank need to change quickly. Management has decided that a transition to cloud computing will speed up flexibility and time to market for products and services. But how can this transition be done in an efficient and structured way? Rabobank's IT department found the answer in "Infrastructure as Code".

Rabobank is a cooperative bank active in the Netherlands with over 90 local banks. Besides they are active in 40 more countries. Rabobank is a socially-responsible bank. They are committed to making a substantial contribution towards achieving wealth and prosperity in the Netherlands and to resolving the food issue worldwide. They focus on strengthening their customers and their communities in order to achieve these objectives.

Rabobank business has a demand for a faster time to market for financial products, but at the same time they experience shorter product lifecycles and a global ask for more and more flexible financial services. To be able to meet new market requirements, a renewed virtual workplace was designed within the project "Citrix2Cloud". Amerik van Rijn, Delivery Manager Client Computing at Rabobank: "As Rabobank we wanted to renew our virtual desktop environment and migrate to Microsoft Azure as the platform to deliver. Very early in the design we discovered that the new virtual workplace demands a drastic other method of building and servicing. It requires a different approach which at itself requires a different skillset. We realized that we were looking far beyond technology, but needed to address process and people as well."

In classic infrastructures IT staff are used to click to deploy technical solutions; 'Next, next, finish'. All within a graphical user interface. Copy and paste and 'drag-and-drop' within windows are common for deployment and maintenance within today's IT Infrastructures. However, with Rabobank's over 4,000 global concurrent virtual desktops, this would be too complex and too time consuming.

Summary

To be able to meet new market requirements, Rabobank needed to change quickly. Therefore a renewed virtual workplace was designed. Very early in the design they discovered that the new virtual workplace required a different approach which at itself requires a different skillset, far beyond technology. Rabobank turned to Insight to help them migrate to the new virtual desktop environment.

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Ask

Rabobank turned to Insight Enterprises and asked if Insight could help with the migration to the new virtual desktop environment, based on Microsoft Azure Virtual Desktop technology with a Citrix Cloud Management layer. Because of the Windows 10 multi-session technology, users can experience their Windows desktop the same way as they would experience it when Windows 10 was locally installed on a desktop or laptop computer. Depending on user profiles, a custom virtual desktop is serviced to the user. Tailor made for their work, automatically deployed, flexible and scalable.

Code

Instead of 'clicking', 'coding' is the way forward for IT Infrastructures. It is known as Infrastructure as Code, built around Azure Resource Manager (ARM), CLI scripts and tasks, orchestrated from within Azure DevOps (development and operations). The 'code' approach isn't only for deployment or maintenance of the virtual desktops. Infrastructure as Code is the foundation for managing the entire infrastructure in the cloud. From configuring firewalls to building storage networks and everything in between.

Skills

When Rabobank staff embraced this new approach for setting up their new virtualized desktop, they realized that the 'people part' would be the most critical, not process or technology. IT specialists had to learn new skills, they had to learn how to code. "For us, the route to the cloud was the enabler to embrace AzureDevOps", Amerik continues. "But the 'how-to' was a big question mark. We realized we couldn't transition on our own power and needed help from specialists. But I didn't want an outsourcing company to do our project. We strongly wanted our people to learn new skills, to be able to adopt the new way of work." Michiel van der Geest, project manager at Rabobank: "The new requirements changed the 'go to the cloud' project for the virtual desktop. We were able to take the project into a broader perspective. From a technical-only approach to offering IT employees a chance to learn new skills and innovate their job roles."

Educate

Rabobank was already in contact with Insight and asked Insight if they could help with this new project approach. Ed de Heer, Enterprise Account Manager at Insight Enterprises: "Even for us it was a change of mind. The initial ask from Rabobank was technology driven, but together we discovered that the new virtual desktop required a radical new approach in deploying and managing IT Infrastructures. At Insight Enterprises we do have the expertise on Citrix, Azure, Infra as Code, Pipelines and many more topics. The interesting part is not doing the job for the customer, but to learn the customer how to do their job in a totally different, new way."

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"We found out that Insight does not only have very skilled people themselves, but those specialists do have the patience to explain new things, over and over again", Michiel van der Geest continues. Educational skills proved to be very important in the project. Amerik van Rijn: "Of course there was a small percentage of the IT team who weren't that happy with the changed way of work. But in general most people were curious enough and wanted to learn. Today, we have people in the team who literally dream about code, so that proves that the new method now has solid ground." According to Amerik there is still a long way to go, but the skills level and enthusiasm today is large enough to thrive Infrastructure as Code.

Truly together

Amerik van Rijn: "Attaching the Insight Enterprise consultants to our operational teams has proven to be the best approach to transfer knowledge. We started in January 2021 and by the end of June 2021 we were able to handle our own business and deploy this method of deploying and managing cloud resources over other IT departments. It was a true collaboration which has brought us into fast forward."

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Project Manager at Rabobank
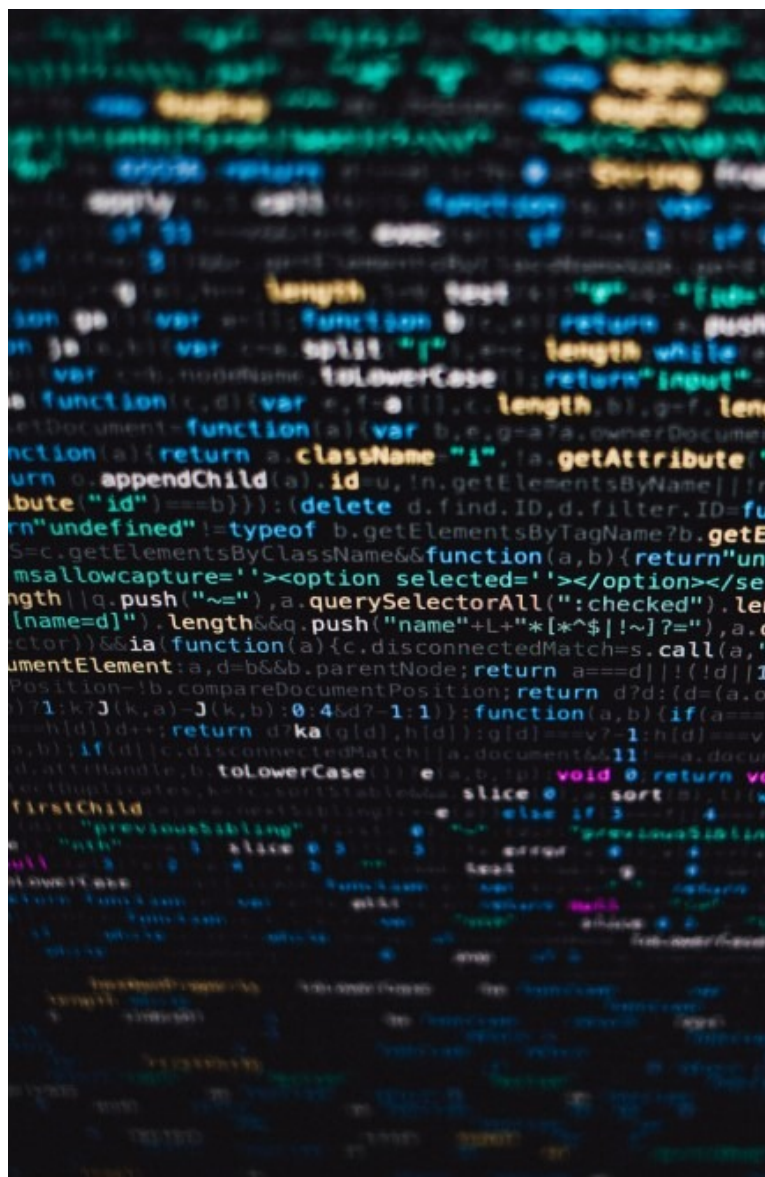
Highlights

Renewal of the virtual desktop environment and migration to Microsoft Azure	Instead of 'clicking', 'coding' is the new way forward, known as Infrastructure as Code	IT employees got the chance to learn new skills and innovate their job roles	Cooperation with Insight consultants has proven to be the best approach to transfer knowledge

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