





# Tangible business value from cloud transformation remains elusive

Top five secrets to mastering cloud for business

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### **Executive summary**

Cloud transformation is among the top three critical investments across the enterprise for 60% of enterprises. Only 3% do not consider cloud an essential investment. However, only 1 in 4 enterprises can demonstrate a hard ROI on business benefits from cloud transformation. Cloud is no longer just a technology discussion, but tangible business value remains elusive. We must reset the cloud narrative: Cloud transformation must become a business discussion.

To better understand how organizations can capture business value from their cloud investments, HFS Research, in partnership with IBM, in 2023, surveyed 510 senior executives of Global 2000 enterprises. The focus was to recognize where they are on their transformation journey and learn from their experiences and challenges.

#### Key findings of our research



Cloud transformation continues to be a critical enterprise initiative, but it is no longer just a technology discussion

Cloud transformation is funded by the board, CEO, or non-IT stakeholders for most enterprises, implying that cloud is a part of the broader enterprise transformation rather than just IT transformation. Only 32% of cloud transformations are funded by IT stakeholders. Thus, the term "cloud transformation" provides the wrong context and aspiration when looked at purely as an IT transformation. The discussions should be about business transformation.



#### Most cloud transformations are stuck in the middle

Only 10% of enterprises are in a mature "post-implementation innovation" state for cloud transformation. Nearly 95% have some level of buyer remorse from a primary hyperscaler contract. Cost and lock-in remain vital concerns; less than a third of all cloud transformations meet budget and timeline constraints. While there is no end-state for transformation, organizations need to justify costs with clear business objectives that have been achieved; the disconnect in cloud discussions is the strongest here.



#### Driving tangible business value from cloud remains elusive

Only one in four enterprises can demonstrate a hard ROI on business benefits from cloud transformation. They rely on soft or deferred ROI to make the case. A lack of business and IT collaboration is the most significant barrier to cloud transformation, supported by the fact that only 17% have a well-articulated future state. Less than a third have well-defined customer journeys, value streams, and business-to-IT blueprints.



#### Mastering cloud for business and enterprise top-line growth are correlated

Only around 5% of enterprises get significant ROI from cloud in business growth or new business models. We call these enterprises "business cloud masters." These business cloud masters witnessed a stronger top-line growth compared to other enterprises. The research unravels what sets these organizations apart and what needs to be done to master cloud for business:

- 1. While IT is always a critical stakeholder, cloud transformation is completely funded by non-IT stakeholders for 70% of business cloud masters.
- 2. More than 30% of business cloud masters have articulated and communicated a shared future state for the entire organization, compared to 15% for other organizations.
- 3. Significantly more business cloud masters have defined their organization's most critical customer journeys, value streams, and business-to-IT blueprints.
- 4. Business cloud masters have mastered cloud architectural principles, including containerization, microservices, site reliability, infrastructure, applications, and data modernization. They've also mastered cloud business principles, including value stream mapping, product engineering, teams-based operating model, business model innovation, cloud-native culture, learning and upskilling, and servant leadership.
- 5. Business cloud masters are more forward-leaning by including the latest technologies in their cloud transformation initiatives. Fifty-five percent (55%) of business cloud masters include generative AI (GenAI) within the scope of cloud transformation, compared to 35% for other enterprises. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of business cloud masters deploy quantum-safe cloud architectures, compared to 24% for other enterprises.

The bottom line is equally clear: Hybrid cloud is not just about leveraging a hybrid of public and private cloud; it must driven by a hybrid of IT and business stakeholders.

Cloud for the business of IT is different than cloud for the business of the business. Consequently, organizations must move beyond technology transformation because non-technical factors drive the best outcomes from cloud investments. To become a business cloud master, IT-business alignment is not optional but the very foundation of becoming a cloud-native organization. Your cloud transformation will fail if it is not grounded in business objectives.

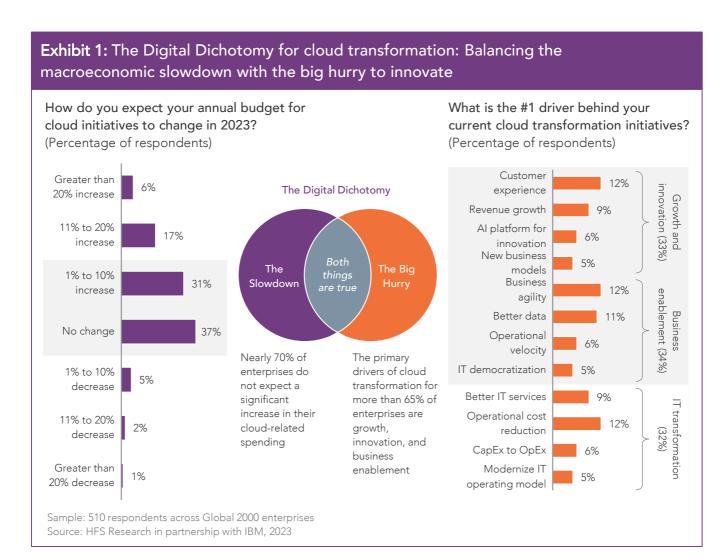
# Mastering cloud for business is crucial for solving the Digital Dichotomy of balancing the macroeconomic slowdown with the big hurry to innovate

Organizations worldwide continue facing a slowdown through multiple macroeconomic headwinds and challenges such as inflation, recession fears, global conflicts, and supply chain disruptions assaulting their strategic goals. Simultaneously, they are in a big hurry to drive innovation to respond to those challenges and stay relevant (see Exhibit 1).

Cloud transformation is among the top three critical investments across the enterprise for 60% of enterprises. Only 3% do not think the cloud is an essential investment. And while less than 10% of organizations expect to decrease their annual budget for cloud-related spending, we expect flat to moderate growth in cloud spending given the macro headwinds. However, organizations

continue to have bold expectations for investing in cloud technologies beyond basic IT transformation and operational cost reduction.

Two-thirds of organizations expect their cloud initiatives to drive overall growth and innovation by improving customer experience, growing revenues, providing a foundation for applying Al, or launching new business models like platforms, ecosystems, and subscriptions. They also expect cloud initiatives to enable their businesses to succeed in the tough environment by improving business unit agility and responsiveness, data availability, data sharing, data analytics, and the velocity of business unit product and service delivery or by providing a platform for "citizen developers" outside enterprise IT.



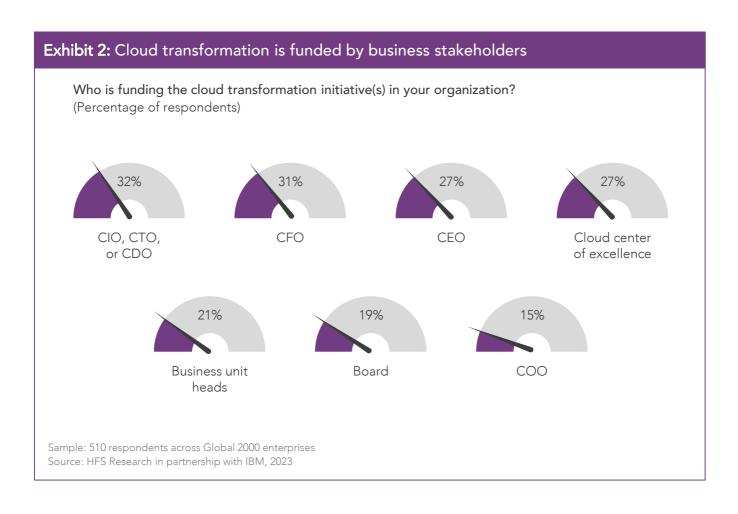
Yet, there is a fundamental disconnect in how the industry discusses organizations moving toward the cloud. The supply side evangelizes technology and capabilities with containerization and Kubernetes as the focal points for that marketing noise. Conversely, the buy side struggles to capture the value of their cloud investments, as very few clients have a welldefined cloud transformation strategy at an organizational level, which can lead to siloed transformations. Only by aligning technology transformation to business objectives will organizations get closer to capturing value from their investments. Thus, we need to reset the discussions on cloud native transformation: Cloud must become a business discussion.

# Cloud is no longer just a technology discussion

While nearly all cloud implementations are owned by enterprise IT, as Exhibit 2 shows, cloud transformation sponsorship is exactly the reverse. Cloud transformation is funded by the board, CEO, or non-IT stakeholders for most enterprises, implying that cloud is a part of the broader enterprise transformation, not just IT transformation.

Only 32% of cloud initiatives are funded by IT stakeholders.

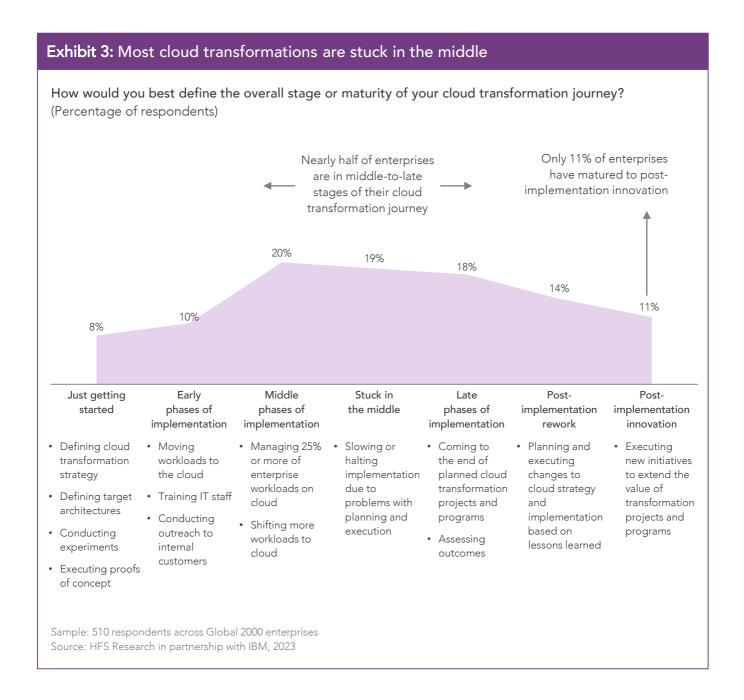
Thus, the term "cloud transformation" provides the wrong context and aspiration. The discussions should be about business transformation. At the same time, this data points to a critical success factor of transformation, as effective stakeholder management is essential.



# Most cloud transformations are stuck in the middle, given the lack of IT and business alignment

Almost all organizations have embarked on a cloud transformation journey; only 8% say they are just starting (see Exhibit 3). However, only 11% have achieved what they desired, where they can execute new initiatives to extend the value of

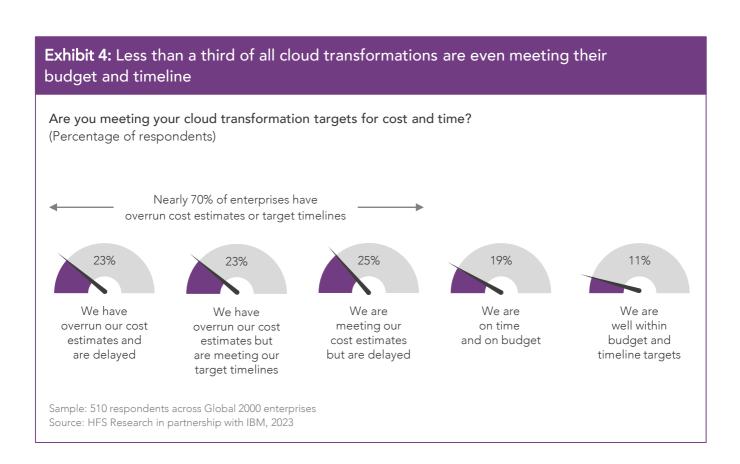
their transformation. One in five organizations is slowing or pausing implementation due to planning and execution problems, and 14% are doing rework after changing their cloud strategy post-implementation!



# Budget and timeline overruns are common

The even more sobering news is that 70% of organizations have overrun their cost estimates or target timelines (see Exhibit 4). Here, the fundamental problems of cloud transformation are coming to the fore. Transformation costs can only be justified if the transformation is tied to clearly defined business outcomes. Given the strengthening macro headwinds enterprises are grappling with in the Digital Dichotomy, focusing only on cost and efficiency gains is unlikely to deliver enough ROI to justify the cost challenges.

Only one in four enterprises can demonstrate a hard ROI on business benefits from cloud transformation. They rely on soft or deferred ROI to make the case. All too often, this obsession with cost focuses on transforming the technology but not on transforming the business. As a result, organizations frequently find themselves in a parallel universe where they are trying to measure the wrong objectives. It is crucial for enterprises to identify the right objectives and tie them to the business outcomes the operating model should deliver rather than just jumping on the FinOps bandwagon. To succeed in this state of fluidity, the building blocks of business assurance and operational checks and balances must be consumable—just like the cloud.



#### Hyperscalers must take some blame

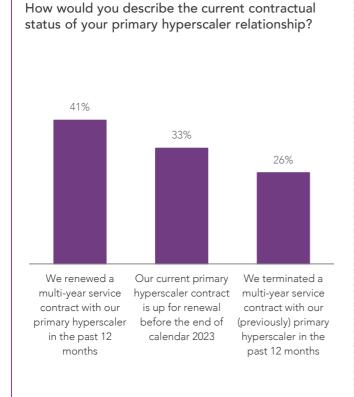
The magnitude of these problems became even more apparent when we asked the respondents to what extent they have experienced buyer's remorse from their primary hyperscaler contract. As Exhibit 5 shows, nearly 95% have some buyer's remorse from their primary hyperscaler contract.

One in four organizations have terminated their multi-service hyperscaler contracts in the last 12 months.

The data also demonstrates that while cost considerations are critical, the biggest concern is the inability to switch providers.

The wake-up call for hyperscalers is as loud as it is clear. They must shift their focus from largely encouraging only consumption. Vendor lock-in is slowing, sometimes blocking an organization's progress on its transformational journey. Rather, the hyperscalers should pivot to a customercentric approach that ties them to business objectives and outcomes. Industry cloud could catalyze such a change, provided it focuses on value creation and not just providing capabilities with an industry flavor. Therefore, the oftenmyopic focus on consumption and cost could be mitigated by offering new engagement models and fostering an ecosystem mindset.





If your organization HAS experienced buyer's remorse, what has the primary cause of that remorse been? (Percentage of respondents) The hyperscaler contract imposes high switching costs for using other providers or 34% for moving data and workloads off the their platform (vendor lock-in) Cloud costs have been much higher than anticipated The hyperscaler's guidance was consistently self-serving (more focused on the 15% hyperscaler's success than our success) The hyperscaler created conflict with other tech 11% service providers or GSIs The hyperscaler was difficult to work with (poor customer 7% experience) The hyperscaler had ample product expertise but offered few 4% business/industry insights or expertise

Sample: 510 respondents across Global 2000 enterprises Source: HFS Research in partnership with IBM, 2023

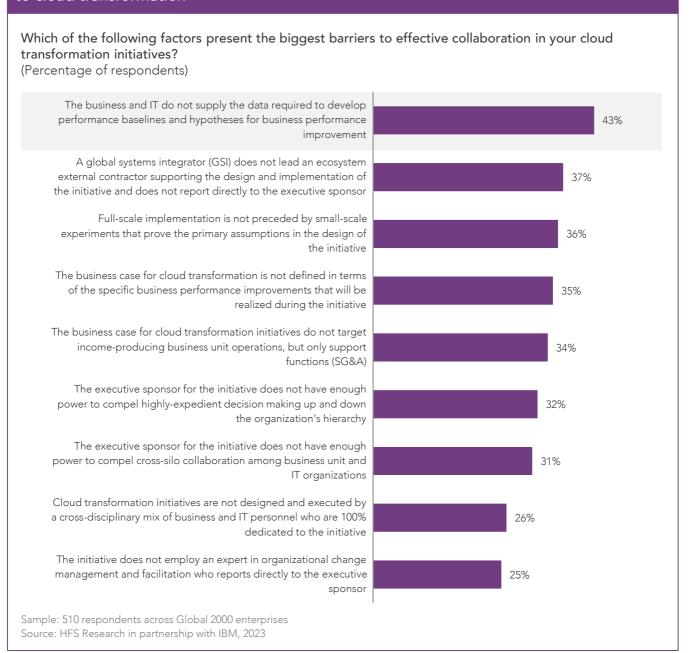
# IT and business continue to work in silos

These data points and insights reiterate that we have to reset the cloud discussions. Investment levels remain solid (albeit somewhat muted), but capturing value from these investments remains elusive for most organizations. Yet, enterprises will progress their transformational journey only by aligning technology and business objectives (see Exhibit 6). Unfortunately, IT and business continue to work in silos.

Only 17% of organizations have a wellarticulated future state. Less than a third have well-defined customer journeys, value streams, and business-to-IT blueprints.

There are many ways to interpret this data. At the top of our mind is that most cloud transformations are stuck in the middle. They are largely driven by technology objectives. Yet, this is not enough to mitigate the challenges of the Digital Dichotomy. While the technology objectives might manage to improve the efficiency and agility of operations, the misalignment with business objectives is leading to an inability to capture business value.

**Exhibit 6:** A lack of business and IT collaboration is the single most significant barrier to cloud transformation



### Top five secrets to mastering cloud for business

To accelerate their transformational journey and get closer to capturing business value, organizations should seek to learn from enterprises that have embraced the ideals of cloud-native transformation and created business value from their investments. They should look in less obvious places.

Only 5% enterprises are getting a high ROI for revenue growth or new business models. We call these enterprises "The Business Cloud Masters."

These goals of business growth and new business models are central to achieving cloud-native transformation; other goals point to technology transformation with decentralized work, efficiency, and agility top of mind. Crucially, these

business cloud masters who achieved a higher ROI with business growth and new business models witnessed stronger top-line growth than other enterprises. Simply put, this group's modest size could be disarming. As Exhibit 7 demonstrates, its members' ROI and top-line results are remarkable.

Compellingly, the cloud business masters witnessed nearly 2X top-line growth than other enterprises.

What can we learn from those organizations that will help others accelerate their transformation journey and finally capture business value? The research unravels their five secrets to mastering cloud for business.



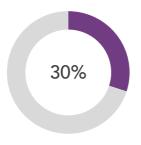
#### Define and communicate the future state for the entire organization

Ultimately, cloud-native transformation is about how we create and deliver value. Therefore, we need to steer the discussions back to data-driven outcomes and link those outcomes to business objectives. Without envisioning new models, the cloud will remain a horizontal and largely infrastructure-centric play.

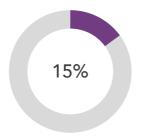
Nearly 85% of organizations undertaking cloud transformation do not have an updated, well-articulated, shared future state for their organizations. Exhibit 8 shows that only 16% have articulated and communicated a future state across the entire organization, compared to 31% of the business cloud masters. As we have argued, your cloud transformation will fail if it is not grounded in business objectives. Therefore, focus on business objectives and a clear articulation of cloud target operating models to capture value in your transformation efforts.

#### Exhibit 8: Driving tangible business value from cloud remains elusive

Have you articulated and updated a desired, shared future state for your organization, i.e., establishing the organization's mission, vision, values, objectives, and key performance indicators? (Percentage of respondents)



Business cloud masters



All others

Sample: 510 respondents across Global 2000 enterprises Source: HFS Research in partnership with IBM, 2023

# 2. Drive effective IT + business stakeholder management

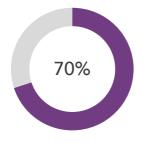
If more proof is needed that cloud has to become a business discussion, Exhibit 9 provides ample food for thought. Twenty percent (20%) more business cloud masters are being funded by non-IT stakeholders than other organizations; the direct link between business funding, focusing on new business models, and higher top-line growth is compelling. At the same time, this points to the fact that transformation is more about people, processes, and culture than technology.

Effective stakeholder management begins by identifying all relevant stakeholders, from IT and business to customers, partners, and technology providers. The very foundation of this process is

articulating the benefits, goals, and processes of the cloud-native transformation. This helps stakeholders understand the value proposition and reduces resistance to change. While there is a broad array of success factors for stakeholder management, three stand out. First is cultural change management, especially where organizations scale DevSecOps, continuous integration/continuous delivery (CI/CD), and agile methodologies. Second is risk management, to minimize the risk of joining the flock of stalled transformations and dealing with issues such as resistance to change, knowledge gaps, and technical challenges. Last is benefits realization, tracking and sharing the benefits realized from the transformation. But those benefits have to be tied to business objectives, not just issues such as improved scalability, agility, or cost savings.

# **Exhibit 9:** Cloud transformation is completely funded by non-IT stakeholders for 70% of business cloud masters

Who is funding the cloud transformation initiative(s) in your organization? (Percentage of respondents choosing non-IT stakeholders)



Business cloud masters



All others

Sample: 510 respondents across Global 2000 enterprises Source: HFS Research in partnership with IBM, 2023

# 3. Beyond cloud's technical architecture, master cloud's business principles

As Exhibit 10 shows, business cloud masters have mastered both cloud architecture and cloud business principles. What stands out is their focus on building a cloud-native culture and on continuous learning. It is here where the success or failure of transformation is often decided. Traditional approaches and mindsets need to be

adjusted to embrace cloud-native principles such as agility, continuous integration and deployment, and cross-functional collaboration. This cultural shift often involves promoting a DevOps culture and scaling site reliability engineering (SRE) practices, where development and operations teams work closely together. To make this point even more poignant, cloud-native transformation is more about people and culture than technology capabilities.

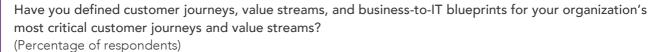


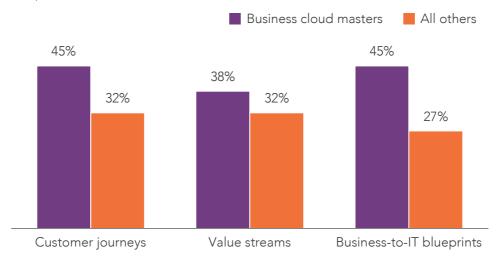
# 4. Anchor cloud transformation on business metrics

While less than a third of organizations have well-defined customer journeys, value streams, and business-to-IT blueprints, reiterating the lack of alignment between technology and business objectives, business cloud masters have significantly better blueprints and customer journeys. Both are metrics intrinsically focused on business objectives (see Exhibit 11).

Suffice it to say the effectiveness of those metrics hinges on what they measure. Successful blueprints should entail setting the business objectives and strategy and aligning them. Enterprises can do that by assessing cultural readiness and encouraging a culture of continuous learning, agility, and collaboration. Defining a roadmap and phasing it provides a clear plan outlining the stages of the transformation and prioritizing milestones based on business needs, complexity, and potential benefits.

**Exhibit 11:** Significantly more business cloud masters have defined their organization's most critical customer journeys, value streams, and business-to-IT blueprints





Sample: 510 respondents across Global 2000 enterprises Source: HFS Research in partnership with IBM, 2023

# 5. Invest in innovation ahead of the broader market

While many organizations still struggle to get their heads around cloud, even more disruptive innovation cycles in the form of GenAl and quantum computing are upon us. It's telling that the business cloud masters, as Exhibit 12 outlines, have mastered quantum-safe cybersecurity architecture more effectively and are including GenAI in the scope of cloud transformation much more deeply. In the case of GenAI, the delta to the average companies is a comprehensive 19%.

The points to take away from this are twofold. First, business cloud masters are embracing innovation much earlier and are willing to carry the risks of that. Second, this willingness is a reminder that cloud is not a strategy. The strategy is to achieve business outcomes enabled by the intersection of data, cloud, and AI.

# **Exhibit 12:** Business cloud masters are much more forward-leaning by including the latest technologies in their cloud transformation initiatives

Is generative AI included in the scope of your cloud transformation?
(Percentage of respondents)



Business cloud masters



All others

Have you mastered the cybersecurity (e.g., quantum-safe architecture) for cloud transformation?

(Percentage of respondents)



Business cloud masters



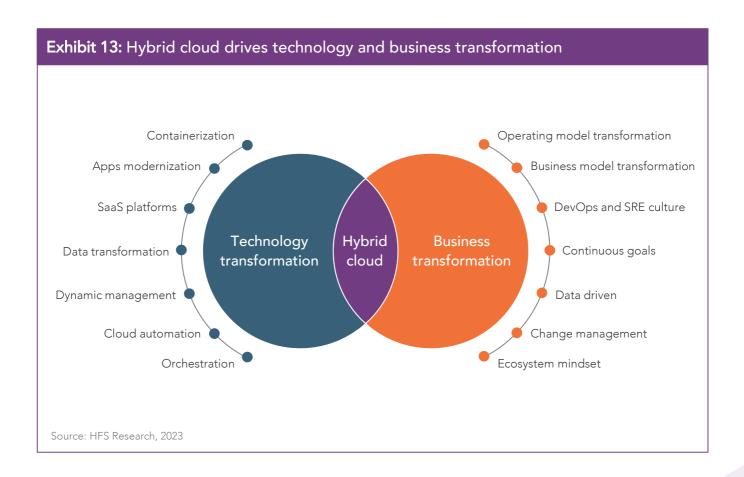
All others

Sample: 510 respondents across Global 2000 enterprises Source: HFS Research in partnership with IBM, 2023

# The Bottom Line: Hybrid cloud is not just about leveraging a hybrid of public and private cloud; it must be driven by a hybrid of IT and business stakeholders.

The research shows that most cloud transformations do not live up to the promise. While organizations have made significant progress in mastering the technological architectural principles of cloud, they continue to struggle to align technology and business objectives. Without a clear articulation and communication of the future state, capturing value from transformation will remain elusive for many.

The business cloud masters that have achieved nearly double the top-line growth of the average company have demonstrated how value capture can be realized. They have accomplished that by succinctly articulating the future state, effectively driving stakeholder management, and investing in innovation ahead of the market. Yet, we have to recognize that the ultimate success of transformation is about aligning technology and business objectives while driving deep cultural change. Therefore, we should stop talking about cloud only as technology. Rather, cloud must become a business discussion.



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To master cloud for business enterprises, you should act on the secrets we have uncovered:



#### Change your cloud investment portfolio for the business of business

Cloud for the business of IT is different than cloud for the business of the business. Therefore, pivot to an outcome-centric strategy. Fundamentally, becoming cloud native is about public and private cloud, but it is also about IT and business. Organizations must define and communicate effectively the future state and the cloud target operating model. The critical point here is that this model is unique for every organization. Resist the temptation to hope for a template.



#### Redesign your cloud adoption programs beyond technology transformation

Business transformation is more complex than just moving workloads to the cloud or modernizing your applications. You must acknowledge that non-technical factors drive the best outcomes from cloud investments. As we have mentioned, critically, the main reason for the failure of transformations is the misalignment of technology and business objectives. There is no sequence of defining the future state and new business model and then designing the cloud target operating model to migrate workloads. Only startups and digital twins of traditional organizations might have that luxury.

Hence, many organizations are first following a phased approach of re-architecting for the cloud. Some create a parallel cloud-native organization next to traditional and heritage operations. Fundamentally, cloud-native transformation is about fusing technology with business transformation.



#### Take action to deal with the moose on the table: getting business and IT on the same page

Clarity of the goals and more effective stakeholder management are levers to drive more effective change management. With the focus on business transformation and objectives, the commitment of the CEO and the board is essential. Where transformations are run as CIO programs, they are bound to fail. We are seeing progressive CIOs becoming executive coaches for the board, guiding them around the business value of IT and the implications of resiliency. This evolution of the role is critical for snapping out the cost focus of IT programs. As we stated at the outset, cloud-native transformation is about how we create and deliver, not where. To be successful, organizations need clarity of vision and effective change management. To become a business cloud master, IT-business alignment is not optional; it's the foundation of becoming a cloud-native organization.

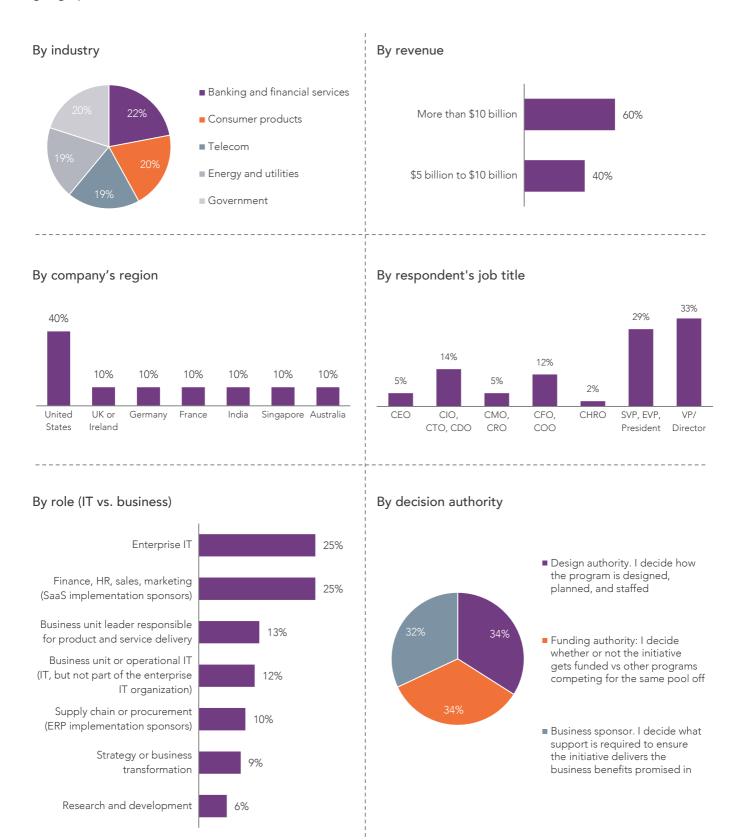
This data has shown that the reward for following these calls can be significant. Business cloud masters are getting significantly high ROI from cloud for business growth and new business models. Compellingly, they have witnessed a stronger top-line growth than other enterprises. Once cloud becomes a business discussion focused on clearly articulated business objectives, cost considerations become secondary. There is much more to learn from cloud business masters and organizations that have struggled on their transformation journey.

What's clear is that cloud is no longer just a technology discussion!

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## Survey demographics

HFS, in partnership with IBM, surveyed 510 senior IT and business executives across key industries and geographies.



Sample: 510 respondents across Global 2000 enterprises Source: HFS Research in partnership with IBM, 2023

### Research authors



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Executive Research Leader

Tom Reuner is an Executive Research Leader at HFS. Tom is responsible for managing the HFS IT Services practice with coverage areas including cloud native, application modernization, and quality assurance. Furthermore, Tom covers the emerging ecosystems of ServiceNow, Salesforce, and Pega. Leveraging his long entrenchment in the automation community, Tom drives HFS' thought leadership on automation. A central theme of his research is the orchestration and increasing interdependency of approaches such as RPA, AlOps, Observability, and Al. He also manages the Top 10 program to ascertain consistency and thought leadership.

Before HFS, Tom worked as Head of Strategy at Arago. His deep understanding of the market dynamics comes from having held senior positions at analyst firms, including Gartner, IDC, and Ovum, where his responsibilities ranged from research and consulting to business development.



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Saurabh Gupta is President, Research and Advisory Services at HFS. He sets the strategic research focus and agenda for HFS Research, understanding and predicting the needs of the industry and ensuring that HFS maintains its position as the strongest impact thought leader for business operations and services research. He oversees HFS' global research function, managing the global team of analysts and operations across the US, Europe, and Asia.

He is a recognized thought leader, and he's passionate about solving business problems and bringing big ideas to life. With more than two decades of experience across client, provider, advisory, and analyst roles, he brings a uniquely realistic and wide-ranging perspective to our industry's challenges and opportunities. He has authored more than 200 research reports; he is a frequent speaker and regularly quoted in industry publications. He is well-known for spotting disruptive technology trends like blockchain, Web3, metaverse, cloud, AI, and automation and predicting their implications for different stakeholders through frameworks like the OneOffice™ and OneEcosystem™.

#### Research authors



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Varun is responsible for strategy, offering development, ecosystem partnerships, go-to-market initiatives, sales and delivery excellence, skills strategy, and talent management.

He is part of IBM's global senior leadership team and also fulfills the role of partnership executive for several key clients, supporting them on their digital transformation.

Prior to this position, Varun was Global Managing Partner for the Hybrid Cloud Transformation business.

Varun combines domain knowledge and global program management expertise with strategic and operational leadership within both consulting and industry. He has led many large, complex global programs and has experience of both mature and emerging markets.

What gets him excited is working closely with clients to define and execute on their transformation—he is particularly passionate about helping clients embed change to extract sustainable value.



Richard Warrick
Global Research Lead, IBM Institute for
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Richard Warrick is a Global Research lead with the IBM Institute for Business Value. Richard's 25-year career in consulting and research has focused on better ways to convert investments in information technology to better business performance. He has served large organizations around the world and in a variety of industries, including banking, industrial products, pharmaceuticals, aerospace, and defense.

We would like to sincerely acknowledge the contributions of the IBM Consulting practitioners, especially Varun Bijlani, Global Managing Partner, Hybrid Cloud Services, IBM Consulting, and Richard Warrick, Global Research Leader, Cloud Transformation, IBM Institute for Business Value, for collaborating with us throughout the research initiative.



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