ORACLE
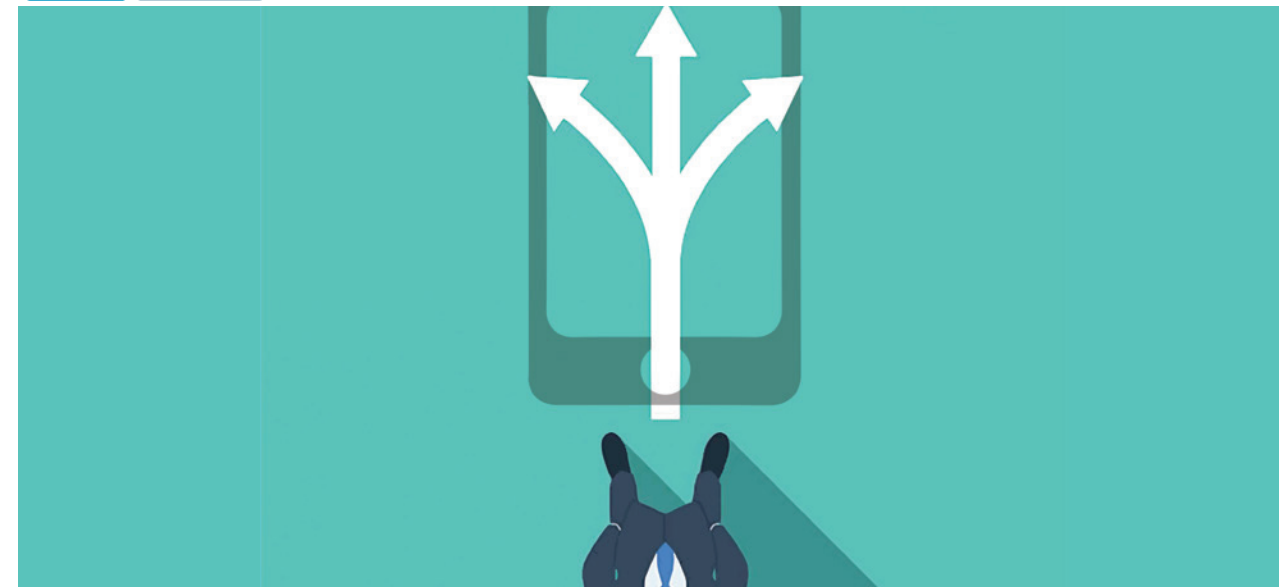## CLOUD COMPUTING'S NEW WORLD ORDER

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Rethinking Integrations to
Enable Data-Driven Decisions

By Matthew Brown, Director, Global Integration and API Consulting, Incorporated

The next time you sit in your vehicle, before you turn on the engine or even fasten your seatbelt, take a moment to close your eyes. Imagine what it would be like to drive without the real-time information provided by all the modern instrumentation we're accustomed to having.

Not only does the vehicle tell us how fast we're going, how many RPMs the engine is churning, fuel efficiency, and even turn-by-turn directions, but the driver is actively leveraging their senses to listen for hazards, watch where they're going, and make judgements to anticipate what other drivers may do (especially the ones texting at the wheel.)

The driver is fully integrated into the experience, which is the only way to safely—and intelligently—navigate a speeding automobile. However, if we apply this same analogy to operating a business, it quickly becomes evident that most business leaders are speeding down a dark highway with limited visibility into where they've come from and only an educated assumption on where they're going.

Now open your eyes and buckle your seatbelt.

Rearview Decision-Making
That may seem like a dramatic conclusion—after all—businesses generate terabytes and terabytes of data annually that can be leveraged to inform current and future performance. But that

data is actually a big part of the problem. Most of the time, this valuable data is trapped in silos, spread across disparate solutions that are unable or unwilling to play nice with the other disparate solutions the organization depends on.

These applications can be forced to get along; usually in the form of a clunky, complex, and costly integration that creates other issues for the business, like delays in data or worse, complete data blackouts. Complicated processes that break as environments are upgraded and at best, limited data views leaving much of the valuable data behind.

By the time the relevant data is compiled, analyzed, reported and ultimately shared, the business is forced to make judgements about where it is heading and what it should expect with data that is already outdated, at times, days outdated. You've heard of back seat driving. This is rear-view decision-making.

It's an approach that may have "worked" in the past when it was the only option, but with an increasing emphasis on managing in the moment, an entirely new approach to integration is required that gives businesses all relevant data needed to make decisions.Decisions in real-time.

The Starting Line: Workforce Management
According to a recent survey on enterprise cloud usage trends by Netskope, the average enterprise deploys 508 business applications. So, where to start?

The first thing organizations should do is identify apps and solutions that are central to their strategy and built specifically to facilitate quick and easy integration. With the next generation of workforce management solutions hitting the global marketplace, this area of the business is ideally suited to drive in the center lane. Workforce management has undergone a remarkable shift over the last decade, moving from a tactical function to a strategic operation. In fact, Brandon Hall Group says that

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"the integration of workforce and business data… is a critical goal for all organizations today," in their report "Four Keys to Realizing a Total Return on Your Workforce Technology Investment." As such, the need to easily push data out of and pull data into workforce management systems has clearly taken on new importance.

Key Stops along the Journey
Just like every road trip has must-see stops along the way, an organization's integration roadmap has several critical areas that should be addressed. Whether evaluating your existing solution or selecting an entirely new suite, here's what healthcare, manufacturing, public sector, and retail organizations should be considering at a minimum:

• Healthcare: Patient safety and confidentiality are best served and higher quality patient outcomes are realized when staffing schedules take into account both patient volume and staff skillsets/certifications. Workforce management systems should make it simple to export data for Press Ganey NDNQI reporting and to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services for Payroll-Based Journals.

• Manufacturing: Manufacturers track a lot of moving parts, both literally and figuratively. This ranges from warehouse orders, to the location of critical components in transit, to the actual assembly line process. Freely sharing data between the ERP and workforce management solution in real-time will ensure projects and orders are always up-to-date, preventing potential slowdowns or bottlenecks along the way. Factory of the future and digitalization initiatives are the wave of tomorrow, dependent on accuracy and availability of data today.

• Public Sector: Automation seems to have finally arrived in Public Sector as the public demands these agencies to "catch up to the market" in both products and services offered. Integration as an automation enabler is best understood in this segment, some examples: many state agencies and public universities track employee work hours against grants. For years, this has been a notoriously time-consuming, manual, and inaccurate process. With integrations that facilitate data sharing between workforce management and finance, this can now be done automatically, freeing up important staff time while also increasing the odds of securing future grants.

• Retail: Staffing is critical to retail success and often driven by knowing the budget and point-of-sale data to drive accurate scheduling forecasts. Integrating this data from the store's complementary systems is key to making this process automated, accurate, and efficient. This will also give managers access to key information in the moment they need it – not several hours or days later when it is too late. Oh, and don't worry: if your POS system is older than "The Goonies", we can still integrate to it.

Full Speed Ahead on Open APIs
For far too long, enterprise apps have been a challenge to integrate because many vendors want to keep their customer logged into their product—it's an outdated way of thinking. With the next-generation of workforce management solutions available, organizations should do their due diligence to ensure they're selecting a best-in-breed solution that has open APIs, making it easy to integrate with other apps that either already run or may soon be added to their business. This method allows the business to build a suite of capability while tailoring the components of the suite to specific industry needs.

Open APIs allow organizations to quickly (and cheaply) build powerful connections between solutions that share data, often in real-time. It shortens the length of deployment, accelerates time-to-value, and allows organization to maximize the investment that they're making—not just for their workforce management solution but all IT solutions that it touches.

By starting with a workforce management solution with open APIs, organizations can begin to build a more complete picture of their true performance, while also creating new opportunities to engage with employees and deliver an exceptional customer experience.