MENA Cloud Alliance launches GCC Cloud Competitiveness Index 2017

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June – July 2017

The Middle East & North Africa Cloud Alliance, or "MENACA", is an industry association that seeks to identify and resolve issues around cloud adoption in the Middle East & North Africa. As an organisation set up to help the cloud industry develop, it is vendor-agnostic (not tied to the products of a specific manufacturer) and has diverse members ranging from global technology giants to local data centre operators, academic institutions, and thought leaders. Al Tamimi & Company is a member of MENACA and provided input on MENACA's Cloud Competitiveness Index 2017 for the GCC region, launched recently in Dubai. The aim of the Index is to turn publicly available data into insightful knowledge that might help advance cloud computing in the region.

The Index provides a general overview of core issues relating to cloud computing in the region, including issues relating to the licensing of cloud-related operations, information security, data protection, data sovereignty, and lawful access issues. These issues, and a variety of other issues fundamental to the development of the cloud industry (and therefore fundamental to the move towards digitalization in commerce, industry, and society), were discussed by speakers and attendees at the launch event.

Governments in the region are keen to innovate and a key aspect of this is the move towards greater use of data in developing policy, allocating resources, delivering services within government entities and to the public. Despite this, lack of clarity around the use of the cloud, inconsistency between approaches taken by different entities, and concerns around data residency and security are hindering uptake.

The roles of various players involved in delivery of cloud services are developing. Telecommunications service providers are able to leverage their technical skills, networks, and infrastructure to position themselves as fundamental to the cloud ecosystem. Data centre providers are moving away from simply providing data warehouses that dedicate a set of resources to particular computing technology, application, or line of business, to providing converged infrastructure, that pools and shares information technology resources, enhancing data centre efficiency. Managed service providers, who manage information technology infrastructure and end-user systems remotely, are becoming increasingly well placed to perform a brokering-type role for cloud services. Cloud service providers are enhancing their competence in interoperability and integration technologies, and systems integrators are having to move from simply providing hardware, software, and integration services, to providing long-term business solution integration.

In this context, the Index identified the important role that universities and training establishments have in trying to ensure that there are enough skilled workers to support the ongoing development of cloud infrastructure and cloud-based services in the region. Failure to address education in this area, both in terms of making the sector appeal as a career choice and in terms of ensuring high quality technical competence amongst trainees, has potential to be a major impediment to development.

In its conclusion, the Index highlights the role that cloud technology plays in enabling the likes of Smart Cities, Internet of Things, Big Data, and summarises three key take-away points on which the GCC needs to focus in order to ensure that the benefits of cloud technology are harnessed for these types of purposes.

These can be summarized as Regulation, Price, and Talent.

- **Regulation**: The Index highlights that clarity is required in areas such as cloud-specific regulations, data protection, data breach notification obligations, and law enforcement access to data. The Index asks whether the GCC might be able to learn from the mistakes of other countries and regions and take a consistent, collective approach to regulating these issues.
- **Price**: The Index notes that cloud uptake requires access to reliable, high-speed infrastructure at a reasonable price so as to be competitive but many of the countries in the region score poorly on affordability when it comes to connectivity. The Index asks whether policy makers in the GCC might be able to incorporate adequate network access policies into their ICT visions.
- **Talent**: The Index highlights an increasingly widening talent gap as a major challenge and suggests that local labour markets will have to improve to attract and retain global talent. It suggests that the effort that has successfully helped the rankings of various GCC centres as desirable places to do business could also be harnessed to providing an environment that helps to develop, attract, and retain skilled workers.

Cloud-based infrastructure and solutions will continue to provide the backbone for the rapid innovation that is swiftly becoming ubiquitous. The cloud needs to be embraced rather than viewed with suspicion. There is a lot of work to be done in the region to ensure that the benefits of cloud can be leveraged to the greatest extent possible.

For further information on MENACA and the Cloud Competitiveness Index 2017, please visit: www.menacloud.org .

For further information on issues relating to cloud computing, be it from a vendor or customer perspective, please contact Nick O'Connell (n.oconnell@tamimi.com) or Andrew Fawcett (a.fawcett@tamimi.com).