Back to the future?

2020 saw IT disruption like never before. The big question is - what comes next? A return to the pre-pandemic world, or a new, hybrid normal, combining the best of the old with the best of the new?
OVER THE NEXT DECADE, most of the world’s IT infrastructure will migrate to the cloud. Most organisations are no longer interested in owning and running their own equipment and infrastructure, given that the cloud has emerged as a cheaper and more reliable option.

In addition, the cloud has allowed companies to change what would be a hefty one-off capital expenditure for their infrastructure into a series of installments as operational expenditure. This has tremendous economic and logistical implications, alongside also enhancing the accounting ease of IT infrastructure.

One of the most important ramifications of the cloud model is that it upends the traditional way organisations go about scaling up their infrastructure - rather than being a complex internal project that will tie down a team for weeks or months, the cloud turns scaling up into a simple matter of upping your budget to your provider. Compared to the traditional corporate data centre, the cloud is infinitely easier to scale than on-premise infrastructure, especially when it comes to storage.

In addition, new technologies are making the scalable storage capacity of the cloud more desirable than ever. Applications of artificial intelligence and machine learning - such as natural language processing, facial recognition, and complex modelling - all need to draw on large data lakes. This is both to train an AI to spot patterns before being deployed and to provide it with sufficient volumes of data to analyse.

AI is having two notable effects on the use of cloud: it’s accelerating the adoption of the cloud in the first place, while also encouraging companies that have embraced the cloud to markedly scale up the amount of data that they choose to store within it.

As mentioned, the first trend - greater cloud adoption - is due to the fact that it’s not financially or logistically viable for more organisations to build or scale up an on-premise datacentre when the cloud can offer them the same with far less hassle and with the benefits of economies of scale.

The second trend - the scaling up of cloud use - is due to both the aforementioned ease of scaling the cloud, along with the fact that the cost per unit of storage continues to drop as cloud storage providers benefit from tremendous economies of scale, combined with the fact that the data-intensive requirements of AI encourage organisations to store anything and everything for future examination.

Every bit of data across every business area could potentially yield insights which generate new innovations, processes, and productivity boosts in the future - the value of which would far outweigh the trivial cost of storing such data at the present. This is why we’re entering a “data age” when it comes to the cloud: an era of ubiquitous storage of information, across every business area.

This data age is going to serve as an essential foundation for delivering on the revolutionary potential that data-intensive applications like AI offer, and will allow them to scale up so as to meet the complex tasks that are being placed on them.

Whereas once organisations were more discriminate about what they’d saved to the cloud, for reasons of economy and security, the data age is going to see them fully leverage the cloud to store as much data as is humanly possible.