

Community Cloud: an Infrastructure Solution for a Logistics Project

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Abstract: - Cloud computing is becoming more and more adopted as infrastructure for providing service oriented solutions. Such a solution is especially critical when software and hardware resources are remotely distributed. In this paper we illustrate our experience in designing the architecture of a community cloud infrastructure in an industrial project related to integrated logistics (LOGIN) for made in Italy brand products. The cloud infrastructure has been designed with particular attention towards aspects such as virtualization, server consolidation and business continuity.

Key-Words: - cloud computing, private cloud, SaaS, integrated logistics.

1 Introduction

Cloud computing is rapidly becoming a common model adopted for delivery and utilization of services over the internet in the sense that it provides computer infrastructure and services on an on-demand and on-need basis, without organizations or users having to sustain large hardware and software investments. Rather, the services provided are accessed on a pay-per-use modality, i.e. users pay for what they use of the computer infrastructure and services provided [17, 21]. Another benefit of this model is the fact that services are available over the web from any site, without the user needing to know details concerning the software, interface or services [12, 26]. In spite the several definitions of cloud computing in literature [1, 4, 19, 23, 27] the software engineering research and industrial community has conformed to adopt the definition provided by the US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) according to which: "Cloud computing is a model for enabling convenient on-demand network access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources (e.g. Networks, servers, storage, applications and services) that can be rapidly provisioned and released with minimal management effort or service provider interaction. This cloud model is composed of five essential

characteristics, three service models and four deployment models" [23].

The aim of this paper is to present our specific experience in designing and developing a community cloud infrastructure [3, 6] within a research project on integrated logistics called LOGIN. The aim of the project was to build an extended Digital Network Enterprise (DBE) able to provide digital services for logistics. The DNE is based on a software platform through which all enterprises that require logistic services request the services they need and the platform then combines the services available to meet the demand.

The design and implementation of an IT platform for managing real-time logistic flows with respect to both tangible and intangible assets converges towards the need of a digital business ecosystem between logistic suppliers and users. The support to such technologies requires a highly flexible cloud infrastructure that meets the requirements and specifications of all the partners involved in the project. Moreover, the cloud infrastructure must be able to provide access to remotely distributed hardware and software resources. These resources must be scalable entities that provide a service and are available over the web.

This paper presents the details of the cloud infrastructure developed to orchestrate and manage all the services related to a logistics project. In the next section the architecture of the cloud infrastructure is defined with details on the quality characteristics addressed and the three layers of the architecture (hardware, software, virtualization). A short description of the application of the cloud solution to the logistics project is then provided. Finally conclusions are drawn.

2 Cloud Solution for Logistics

As first step, we analyzed the deployment models among the available ones: private, public, community, and hybrid cloud [3, 4, 6, 15], and decided upon a community cloud. This was the most appropriate since the LOGIN project involved several industrial partners and research organizations having in common a set of software systems to share in the infrastructure. The choice of a community cloud turned out to be the most cost effective and able to assure security and privacy at the same time as the services are available to the all members of the community. The service model chosen was SaaS as it consisted of offering the services to users on a pay-per-use basis, according to a specific econometric model shared by all the partners involved. Second, we identified the components of the cloud infrastructure:

- hardware components (Hardware Layer);
- technologies for virtualization based on the hardware layer (Virtualization Layer);
- platforms and tools for managing the cloud environment (Software Layer).

The cloud computing solution had to enable access to hardware and software resources remotely accessible via web. Furthermore, the service was to assure provision of virtual machines (VM) suitable to host the software components required for the realization of the LOGIN platform. Users were to access to a:

- Portal: access point to the cloud infrastructure from where it is possible to access and manage VM (create, delete, power-on, reset, power-off, ...) functionalities.
- Services Catalogue: a catalogue of services (virtual machines/ software) preconfigured with an operating system and applications (db server, web server, etc.). From this catalogue users are able to choose resources

and services based on their needs in real time.

2.1 Quality Characteristics

The cloud computing infrastructure was developed pursuing the following quality characteristics [9, 11]:

- high usage percentages of resources: implemented with technical workloads designed to reallocate resources automatically and dynamically in accordance with the priorities set;
- support to virtualization;
- scalability of resources both upwards (adding resources) and downwards (reducing the resources assigned to a service);
- dynamic allocation: on-demand for resources based on a self-service concept. The user can autonomously access the portal and create or eliminate a VM or change its characteristics in terms of resource allocation;
- reliability of the systems that should be able to support a failover;
- security. A network firewall is assigned to every VM. Protection policies can be personalized;
- reduction of management costs for what concerns energy consumption, network and physical space occupied.

As of today, to the best of our knowledge, there is no common adopted standard for securing the information of a cloud infrastructure [2, 23, 25]. Moreover, literature provides various reference models for cloud, each proposed by different organizations and related to different perspectives [5, 13]. Solutions can be based on the service model used (IaaS, PaaS, SaaS) or the deployment model adopted (Public, Private, Community, Hybrid) as well as on the technology adopted or take into account other criteria such as physical location of the data, ownership of the resources, architecture of the IT solution, management of the services provided, just to name a few. Consequently, depending on the characteristics one refers to, different security needs should be considered [8, 14, 16, 18]. In Humberg [16] for example, authors propose a methodology that supports users in examining models of their systems and processes for potential risks.

In defining the cloud infrastructure of the LOGIN project we have taken into account the requirements of the ISO 27000 series standards (ISO 27001:2005, ISO27002:2007) with focus on IT-security risks (ISO27005:2008). The ISO27001 standard details the requirements for defining and information security management system taking into account the best practices listed in the ISO27002 document, whereas the risk management process phases are detailed in ISO27005 [2]. When evaluating the risk level of the LOGIN cloud infrastructure we integrated the process illustrated by the ISO27005 standard with the European Union Agency for Network and Information Security risk assessment process (ENISA 2009). Further details of the analysis and results are reported in [20].

2.2 Architecture

From an implementation perspective, the cloud computing approach involves definition of three layers: hardware, software and virtualization, along

with a set of guidelines for designing the applications to bind to the cloud infrastructure.

Relevant importance is assigned to the virtualization layer which, although physically an integrated part of the software layer, it is positioned between the latter and the hardware level. Figure1 shows the description of the architecture designed and then implemented where one can see the main instruments for developing the sub-components: “Hypervisor” for the VTL layer and “Cloud Manager” for the SWL layer. Furthermore, the network model (Fig.1) points out two communication zones: one for managing the entire cloud infrastructure (management network) and one for providing the services (customer network).

In the next paragraphs the three layers of the architecture implemented are described. The representation of the layers is shown in Fig.2.

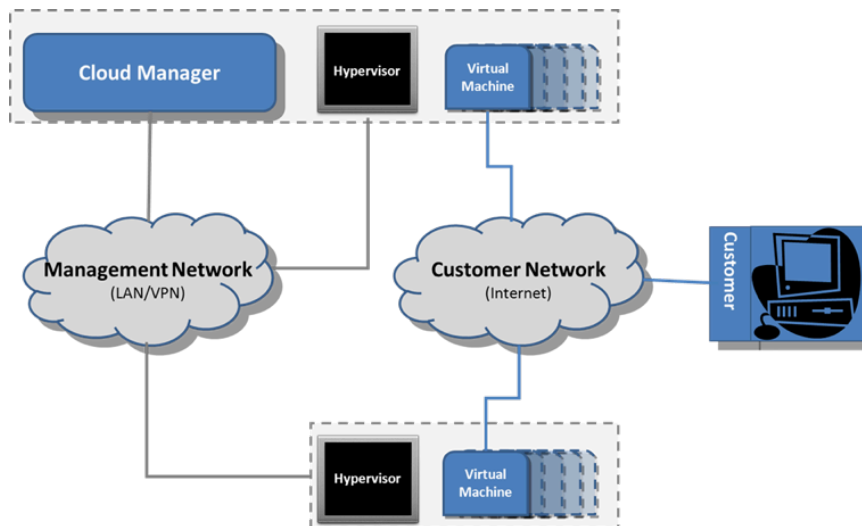


Fig.1. Network model

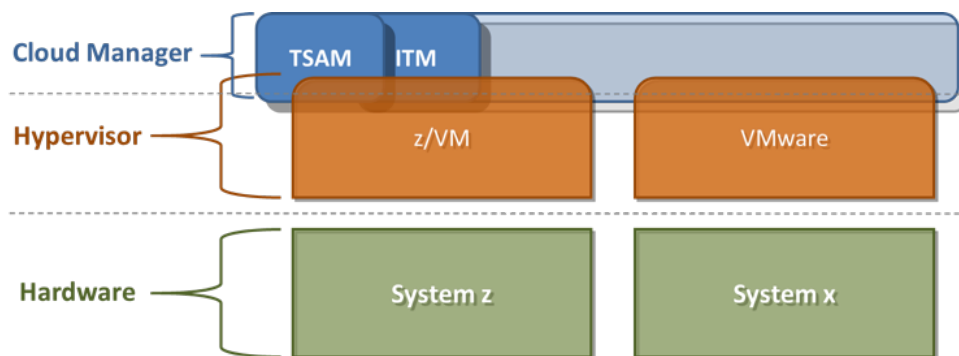


Fig.2. Implementation of the Architecture Layers

2.2.1 Hardware Layer (HWL)

This layer is responsible for defining the physical resources, such as: servers, routers, switch, electric power systems, air conditioning and UPS. The cloud infrastructure implemented follows a hybrid approach with both central and distributed systems. In particular we have used an IBM Mainframe System z9 Business Class (BC) and server Intel x86.

2.2.2 Virtualization Layer (VTL)

The main focus of the virtualization layer is its ability to abstract both software and hardware components of machines and make them available to other components as virtual resources. This layer creates a pool of storage and computational resources partitioning the physical resources through the use of virtualization technologies. This layer is an essential component and provides many of the key features including dynamic resource allocation.

The VTL, as for HWL, has been implemented with a hybrid solution made up by different hypervisors that rely on different hardware architectures. More precisely it is made up of a z/VM for the System z architecture and a VMware for the System x architecture.

The main functionalities of the solution for this layer are:

- multitasking, as it supports the contemporary execution of multiple operating systems (guest OS);
- isolation, assures that a malfunction in a VM and of the operating system connected to it does not spread to other virtual machines;
- resources and workload management, prevents an operative system from absorbing all the computing power of a CPU slowing down all the other virtual machines;
- administration: the system administrator can start, stop, reconfigure or clone the VM without having to stop those not involved in the transaction.

2.2.3 Software Layer (SWL)

This layer is made up of cloud management systems on one hand and operative systems and application frameworks on the other. The main objective of this layer is to assure that the characteristics of cloud

computing are respected and adequate service levels are assured. This is possible through configuration, management, monitoring and measurement resources allocated and used to minimize the workload deriving from the deployment of the operating system and applications.

Significant features are represented by the automation of IT environments, such as allowing users to request new resources (provisioning) in a self-service manner and being able to fulfil them rapidly. The cloud computing infrastructure is completed by a set of tools that support users, the system administrator and the cloud administrator. The software solution involves using the IBM Tivoli Service Automation Manager (TSAM) suite as backend application, and IBM Tivoli Monitoring (ITM) as monitoring platform.

Two software applications complete the software layer: Maximo and Simple Service Request Manager. The Maximo platform controls the underlying hardware infrastructure on which the virtualization of the virtual machines (VM) is built.

The cloud administrator who defines the rules needed to deploy each service uses it. Maximo also manages authorizations assigned to users in the role of TSAM Administrator. More precisely, users that are assigned to this role can carry out administrative tasks relating to the back-end component such as: publish images, view reports on the service use and on user activities; configure, enable, or cancel the registration of software packages. On the other hand SimpleSRM offers final users (system administrators) functionalities for creating, modifying, managing and monitoring each IT context in terms of VM, resources assigned to each VM and middleware/applications to install on each VM. All the previous operations are carried out in a self-service mode. A VM can be provisioned using Service Request Manager. Also, with Service Request Manager it's possible to access to basic tasks on VM like: power-on, power-off, restart, reset password and so on.

The main interface is presented in fig.3. It is possible to access all the operations, while on the right side a summary view of requests and projects is shown. An example of provisioning is depicted in fig.4. On the bottom part of the form it is possible to specify the amount of resources to reserve for VM or for various instances of VM such as: how many CPUs, how much memory, or disk space.

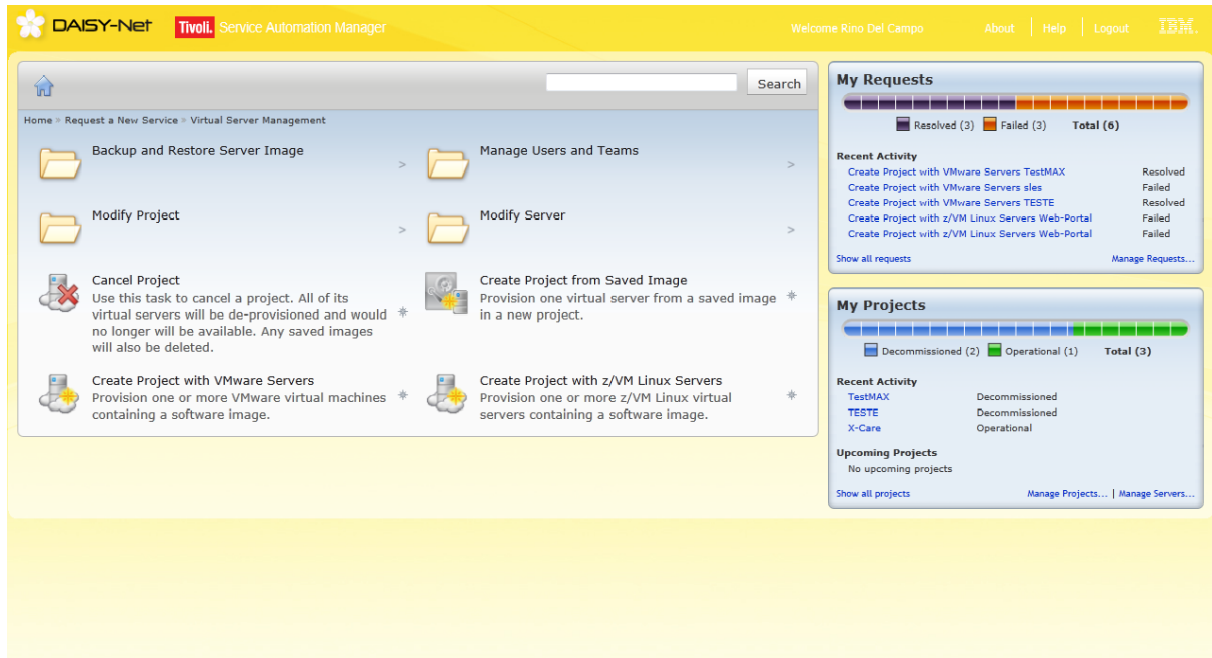


Fig.3. Simple SRM access interface

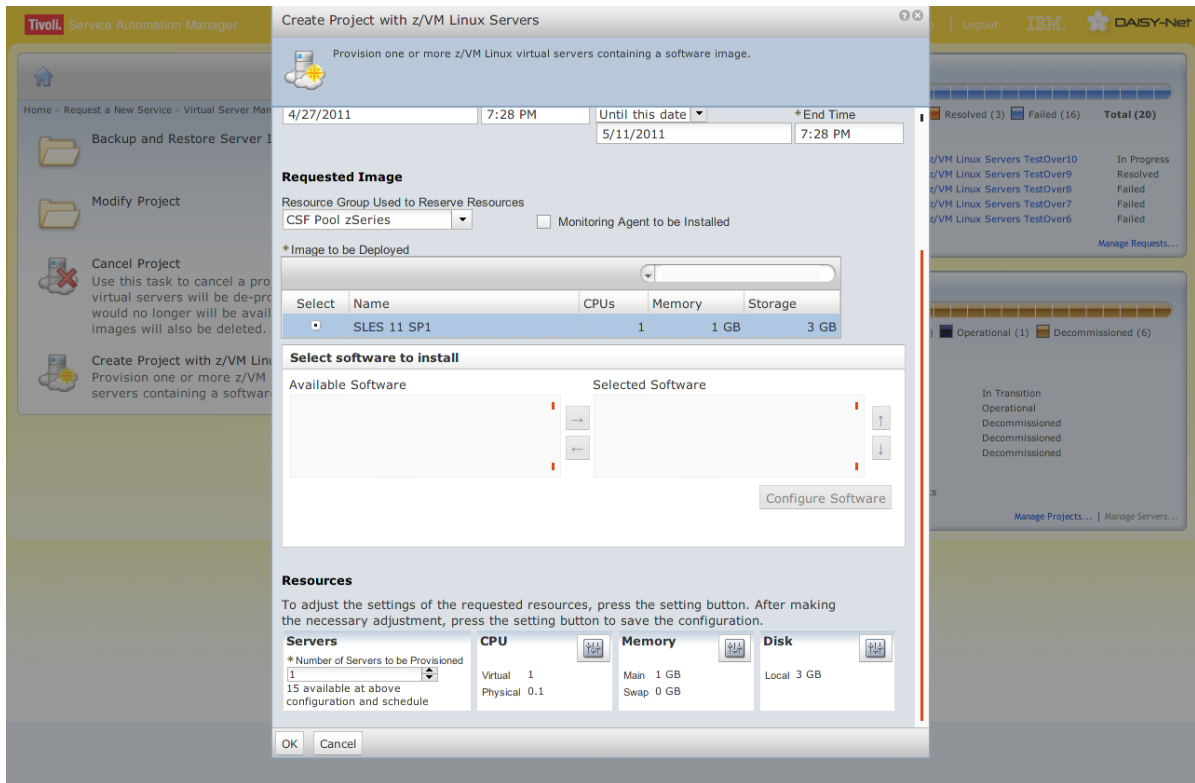


Fig.4. Example of Provisioning

2.3 Services and Applications

A set of services and applications have been developed and installed on the cloud infrastructure as integrated part of the LOGIN-ICT platform (Fig.5). In the following a brief description is provided for each sub-system.

- SAPS: system for automated management of planning and scheduling. It uses advanced methods for process management and modelling as well as techniques for transforming a process model into a project plan;
- SGQ: quality management system. It includes editing tools as well as instruments for verifying, validating and executing a quality model for process or product goals;
- EDI: electronic data interchange. Manages logistic, commercial and financial document flows;
- SICOR: system for creating and composing organisms of a digital business ecosystem (DBE). More precisely: stakeholders make a request (e.g. an order, specific competences, supply of goods, etc.), and the SICOR component processes the request by identifying possible suppliers and composing a contract between users and suppliers;
- GESCA: freight management. This service integrates algorithms for optimizing freights based on criteria such as packaging of goods and containers used to transport them;
- FDBMS: federated database management system. Federates the databases, either exogenous or endogenous, that the system needs in a virtual database that users or applications may access;
- POD: process oriented development. Allows to formally describe a process and transform it into an executable workflow;
- SRADIF: system for warehouse and transport management. It organizes transportation of goods based on RFID technology and monitors warehouse environments where the goods are stored;
- BI&RB: business intelligence and report building. This service guides users among the data collected related to the business processes and products monitored in the quality management system (SGQ) and the information extracted through business intelligence features;
- COLLAB-WEB: collaborative web is a set of packages for enhancing collaboration among stakeholders. They include features such as: FAQ, forums, CRM and e-mail. The system guides the user in choosing the package that best suits his communication needs.

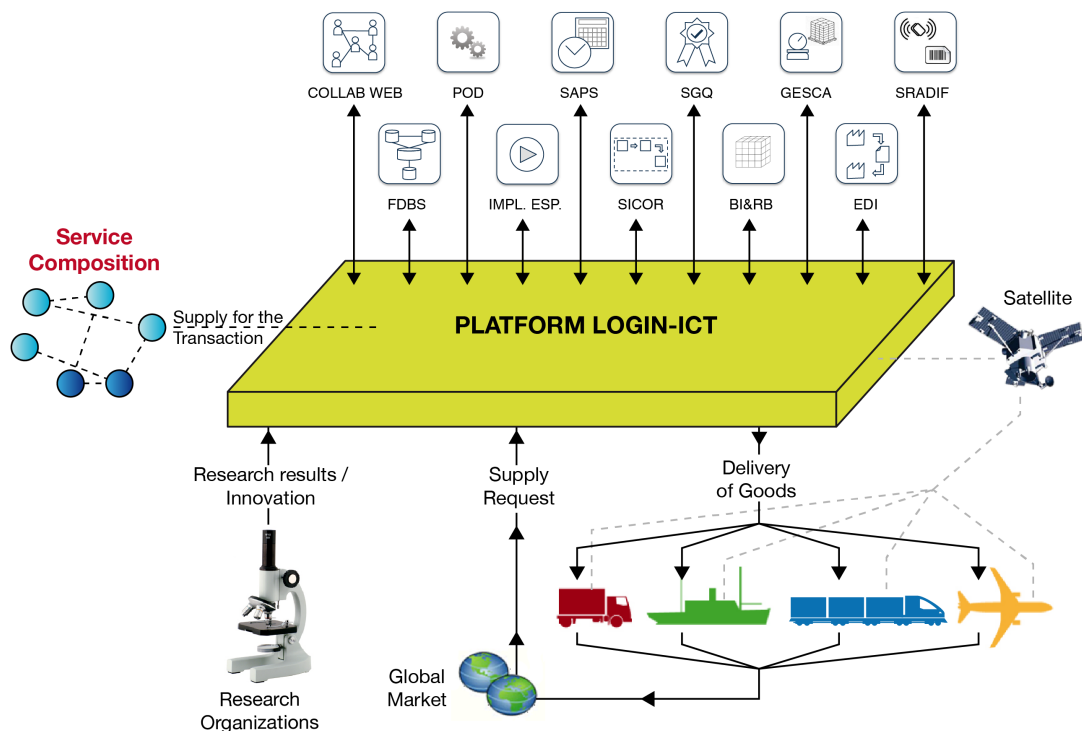


Fig.5. LOGIN-ICT Platform Services and Applications

3 Application to a Logistics Project

The community cloud infrastructure has been developed and applied within a research project involving thirty small to medium enterprise partners and three research organizations.

The focus of the project was to develop an integrated platform for the provision of advanced integrated logistics services (LOGIN). In detail, the aim is to optimize the entire value chain, from production of materials to their sale on international markets through multimodal transport systems such as sea, rails, tires, etc. (Fig.7). The goods the project refers to are made in Italy brands such as DOP wines, cheeses, clothes, local goods.

A user accesses the LOGIN HUB where the services are listed and selects what is needed for ordering and managing the goods. The services are all provided through the community cloud infrastructure described in the previous section and are provided in SaaS mode. Services are distinguished in services for logistics operators and logistics users. The first category include services such as: planning, monitoring and tracking of goods; prevention and intervention in critical situations; secure transportation of goods; coordination of requests; interaction with public administrations; coordination of goods plan and information. Whereas services for logistic users include: coordination of demand and supply; booking of goods; supply chain management just to name a few.

Currently the research project is at the experimental phase where case studies have been designed for testing the platform and the community cloud infrastructure in its whole. More precisely, case studies have been designed for coordinating logistics concerning domains such as fish market, wineries, oil mills, agro-industry partners (local vegetable and cheese producers). In the next section we will describe the case study currently being carried out in a fish market domain.

3.1 Case Study Scenario: Fish Market

The case study [7, 10] consists in the development of features for tracking the catch within a commercial fishing industry. The chain involves the following stakeholders: fishermen, buyers (wholesale, supermarkets), chain operators (carriers), final seller, consumer. The fish marketing chain is made up of the following phases:

- fishermen communicate their catch (COLLAB-WEB component);

- wholesales/supermarkets make a purchase order of the fish caught (SICOD component) to the fishermen;
- order is confirmed; traceability labels, QR-Code, are printed and affixed on the catch cases. This is done through an e-commerce portal built with Joomla CMS OSS;
- the catch is submitted to the carrier on the port;
- catch is sold at retail price. Each product is identified and tracked by QR-code placed on the merchandise either it is the entire case, a package or single piece (components involved are EDI, POD, FBMS, SRADIF);

In this scenario each product can be tracked by their QR-Code. Once modeled, the above phases were enhanced and carried out through a solution made up of the following parts:

- A mobile application installed on a tabled used by fishermen to register their catch in a centralized database; confirm the purchase order of buyers; print the QR-code labels for tracking the catch sold;

The application can be used directly on the fishing boat or the pier as long as there is a WiFi or cell phone network connection.

- An e-commerce web portal where authorized buyers can make purchase orders of the catch previously registered by the fishermen;
- A web portal where chain operators (carriers, retail sellers) can register the traceability information, print the QR-Code labels and show all the tracking information to a client;
- A web and mobile portal that shows all the tracking data of a sold product associated to a specific QR-Code.

The integration of all the data managed during the various phases of the commercial fish market chain on behalf of all the stakeholders is supported by the process oriented logic (SAPS and POD components) that allow to model the process flows and automate as many steps as possible through the available services of the LOGIN HUB platform components.

3.2 Benefits of the solution

The community cloud infrastructure has proven to be a beneficial solution in terms of scalability, flexibility and also server consolidation. More details are presented in the next paragraphs.

3.2.1 Scalability & Flexibility

For what concerns scalability, it is the case to distinguish between vertical and horizontal. Vertical scalability requires adding resources to an existing one (a VM in our case) that hosts a single instance of the application in order to better manage the workload; Horizontal scalability refers to the capability of an entity (application/service in our case) of incrementing its resources adding servers (VM) on which to distribute the workload.

In general SaaS applications should assure scalability and sharing of resources, whenever necessary, according to a multi-tenant perspective. This requires that applications use appropriate languages, primitives, techniques and technologies.

The LOGIN platform includes both SaaS applications (designed and oriented towards cloud) and traditional ones (e.g. web applications) that use the resources made available by the underlying layer of the cloud architecture. In this context, scalability was addressed differently according to the software.

For SaaS applications horizontal scaling was adopted by provisioning new VM where the application itself could distribute the workload. In this case the underlying cloud infrastructure provided the necessary flexibility for producing an appropriate execution environment (VM) quickly. The distribution of the workload wouldn't have been possible if the application had not been designed to work in the cloud. The tracking and monitoring component of the infrastructure, which must manage large amounts of data, represents an example.

For traditional applications (e.g. web portals that users use to interact with the system) vertical scaling was carried out. This implied increasing the resources made available by the VMs hosting the applications. In some cases, by exploiting advanced features of the underlying middleware, (DBMS, HTTP servers, etc.) ad hoc solutions were implemented which achieved horizontal scalability through clustering techniques. The underlying cloud infrastructure also in this case provided the necessary flexibility for quickly producing an appropriate execution environment (VM).

3.2.2 Server Consolidation

Data Centre Infrastructure Management (DCIM) are software tools used for managing a data center. A modern DCIM should include strategies and functionalities for consolidating the workload on a minimum number of physical servers, allowing

saving between 30% and 60% of energy consumption and obtaining similar results for what concerns CO2 emissions. In order to achieve server consolidation we have assigned VM to physical servers so that none of them ended up being neither under-utilized (wasting energy since a server with low workload still consumes 70% of the energy consumed at full load), nor over-utilized. Nonetheless, the consolidation problem of VMs is an NP-Hard problem and as so, there are currently, to the best of our knowledge, no efficient solutions for this problem with respect to nontrivial sized data centers [22]. In the consolidation carried out tools have been integrated with the common virtual platforms of z/VM and VMWare and support management of heterogeneous data centers. This has been guaranteed by using a uniform dashboard integrated with (API) libraries of the underlying virtualization platforms in order to retrieve information from the servers and govern the assignment and migration operations of the VM so that efficiency is maximized and energy consumption is minimized. Fig.6 shows an example of the consolidation.

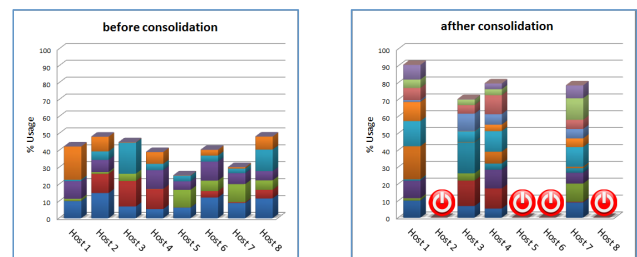


Fig.6. Evaluation of Server Consolidation

Before the consolidation (left part) the VM were distributed on 8 physical servers and the resource consumption was between 20-50%. At the end of the consolidation process (right part) the same VM were redistributed so that the workload was distributed across four servers with a resource consumption ranging between 70-90%. The other servers were shut off or put in low consumption mode to save energy.

In short, the scalable strategy adopted for consolidation consisted in distributing the intelligence instead of centralizing it in a single point and migrating from deterministic algorithms to solutions able to distribute the workload on the VM based on their usage.

4 Discussion

Given the general characteristics of the LOGIN project and cloud infrastructure developed to pursue the aims of the project, the clue contributions and novelties of the solution proposed are twofold: Advanced Planning and Scheduling models (APS) on one side, and development and management of a Digital Business Ecosystem (DBE) on the other.

For what concerns the APS model, thanks to the cloud infrastructure, the process orchestrates instruments, people, materials and other resources that must be coordinated to satisfy order requests in behalf of stakeholders. As so, this component of the HUB must be able to mediate and combine stakeholder preferences before placing the order. Planning involves reacting to induced or spontaneous changes of a process component and identify the best actions to assure process performances and customer satisfaction of delivered goods. In this context, quality assurance is crucial [11] in terms of understanding and managing the quality trends of ordered and delivered goods.

The DBE is made up of enterprises, essentially micro, small and medium related to various sectors related to supply chain logistics. Each enterprise becomes part of the HUB and is characterized for its capabilities, production and storage equipment, instrumental and human resources, produced goods and so on. They are combined together in an overall virtual logistic infrastructure (the HUB) that relates them one to another each time a stakeholder places an order through the HUB.

The overall community cloud solution illustrated in the paper involves advanced technological solutions that assure timely, predictable, economic, and secure responses on behalf of the logistics supply chain. Timeliness is guaranteed by the fact that only one organism all the way from order to delivery manages merchandise. This characteristic is sure to improve customer satisfaction as they receive their products quicker than through other competitor distribution channels. Predictability is assured by the advanced use of scheduling and

planning techniques that the cloud infrastructure relies on. Higher economy is represented by contractual capability of the HUB, given its nature, compared to competitor channels. As so, price economy leads to higher competitiveness and allows for better price policy. Finally, quality is guaranteed by traceability of the production process or goods from their origin, growth, harvest, packaging and shipping.

5 Conclusions

We have shown how a cloud computing infrastructure has been developed for providing services within a logistics project to all the users. In particular we have chosen a community cloud as deployment model and SaaS as service model for providing the services to users. The fish market case study scenario has illustrated how the components (services and applications) built on the cloud infrastructure communicate and interact in a real context. The solution identified has assured scalability and flexibility, as well as energy saving.

The community cloud infrastructure has allowed users of the LOGIN project to access services on a pay per use basis without having to purchase software products and install them on their computers or company servers as all applications are accessed remotely. The project is in still in execution as further case studies are being carried out in other contexts such as wine distribution and furniture market.

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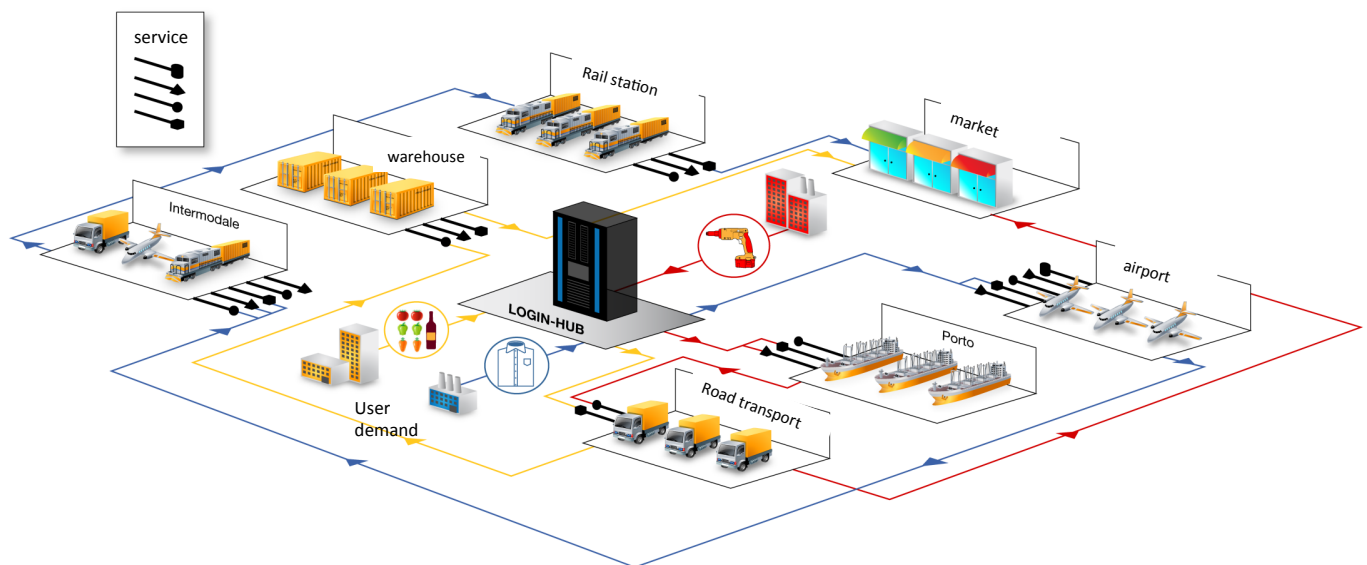


Fig.7. LOGIN platform: services are managed by the LOGIN HUB and then coordinated among the distributors (market, airport, port, road transport, intermodal, warehouse, rail station) to respond to a specific demand.

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