



IT Challenge: Back in the Game and Ready for the Future

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OUR CLIENTS SUCCEED

The Challenge

A new Chief Information Officer was called in to lead the IT organization of an international insurance provider. What they inherited was a hard-working staff with a strong desire to do well, but which also had a track record of often barely meeting—and rarely surpassing—objectives. The CIO saw technical, organizational, and cultural constraints that were in the way of the IT group performing the way it could and should. In the highly competitive insurance sector, there was pressure for the group to deliver far greater value for money.

Part of this pressure came from the fact that the company had decided to make a significant investment in IT systems, and a restructuring to create an agile team environment for the IT organization. The co-located, no-office environment designed to foster strong working relationships and faster, nimbler work habits would be a tremendous departure from the status quo. In the current reality, IT staff for various business units and sub-companies did not effectively talk with one another about what they were doing, often finding themselves entrenched in deliberation and debate, as opposed to action.

Some long-time IT staff decided to leave the company. The remaining employees, old and new, were still caught up in a risk-averse culture. The CIO needed them to shake off any resignation, pick up the pace, figure out how to work together, and elevate the organization. They needed to build a case for IT being a strategic partner in the business. But to earn the organization a voice at the executive level—versus simply carrying out executive orders—a dramatic change was required. The goal was to get the organization solidly on track for being “future ready.”

The Work

The first step in the work with JMW involved a performance readiness assessment, which provided useful insights into the history of the prior IT regime and related obstacles to effective action and collaboration. The assessment also helped explain a general sense of fear around making decisions—and fear of blame—as well as an absence of any shared sense of accountability. In addition to executive coaching for the CIO, for her eight direct reports, and partners in the United Kingdom and Ireland, the work included a customized *Shaping the Future™* leadership development program for this group of approximately 15 key leaders.

Over the course of a year, the four two-day leadership development sessions addressed how the organization could emerge as a vital, effective, and highly productive contributor to the broader business, and at the same time, provided a forum to discuss timely business issues. The program was designed to help leaders develop effective ways to work together across critical interfaces, both up and down the organization. The effort also served to identify obstacles and limitations to operating powerfully with the core leadership capabilities required, and to establish a baseline of current performance against what might be possible in the future with an effective intervention.

A key aspect of this work included the introduction of the Spectrum of Conversations™, and a new shared understanding of the distinct purposes for different types of conversations. This was widely viewed as a game-changer for many in the group.

Insights That Made a Difference

It was agreed that building the kind of leading IT organization envisaged, and convincingly demonstrating value for money, would require the following:

- Effectively addressing the technical and organizational performance constraints
- Identifying and intervening in the seen and unseen cultural constraints on performance that might have been effective work practices in the past but were no longer appropriate
- Elevating the individual and collective leadership of the CIO team
- Mobilizing and galvanizing the team around a shared commitment for the future direction of IT at the company
- Developing pathways for effective actions to alter the predictable direction of IT services for the business units and the entire corporation





The Results

No more walls. Within a year, all IT staff had migrated to their new agile team workspace. All team members are now co-located in an environment conducive to timely conversations, quickly organized meeting as needed, and transparent sharing of information. Staff are now co-mingled across business units and sub-companies, organized according to tasks and initiatives rather than corporate silos.

Commitment understood. The concept of making things happen by commitment is no longer foreign to the group. The senior team now regularly demonstrates an understanding of the source of performance, and what it means to be accountable for initiatives and actions.

Action orientation. A culture shift has begun to take hold, with strong and deliberate emphasis on delivery versus deliberation. There is a shared imperative of staying on course, and an understanding that intervention is required if an issue or obstacle potentially stands in the way of meeting an objective.

Conversations with purpose. Protracted discussions about potential actions no longer paralyze the group. People have broken free of this habit with an understanding of the Spectrum of Conversations™. This has also led to a new capability for addressing and resolving issues and conflicts as they arise.

IT at the executive table. The CIO is now actively engaged in regular conversations with key senior leaders, and has broken through previously established barriers to IT being seen as a strategic partner. The profile of IT continues to be elevated at the executive and Board level as IT performance metrics improve, shedding past perceptions of the organization's limitations.

From	To
IT viewed as functional service provider	CIO now at the executive table
Siloed, conventional working model	Agile team model organized around initiatives
An organization slow to meet objectives	An organization quick to act and deliver
Long periods of deliberation and debate	Conversations with purpose, resulting in action
Delivering what was predictable	Delivering what is possible

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