

The background features abstract, layered shapes in shades of green and blue. A large green shape with concentric, rounded corners is in the top right. A large blue shape with similar concentric, rounded corners is in the bottom left. Several small circles in green and blue are scattered across the white background.

THE IT PARADOX:

BALANCING SUPPORT AND INNOVATION

FOUR STEPS TO RESOLVING THE IT PARADOX

We recently uncovered a significant challenge within businesses in our 'IT Paradox' research report. IT teams are struggling to balance the dual roles of providing everyday business support and simultaneously driving innovation. Any business in this situation will be wondering what steps it can take to find the right balance, reducing strain on the IT team and enabling it to help push the business forward.

Reconfiguring the IT team must be a carefully considered process. Innovation comes with constantly shifting goalposts and, just like everyday IT support, it's a continual effort.

It's important to instil this mindset within the IT team, ensuring everybody is on board, aligned and ready to support the business in its objectives, no matter how often they change.

Teams focused on innovation are often set up to work quickly, unencumbered by rules. The challenge is to operationalise and scale what has been learned across innovation and operational teams to leverage the whole IT team and align it with the business goals. So where should you start?

We recommend following the below four steps to successfully reconfigure your IT team to support innovation, transformation and everyday troubleshooting:

- 1. Align IT to business strategy and objectives**
- 2. Re-configure your team and skills needed**
- 3. Apply the right technology**
- 4. Keep learning and evolving**



ALIGN IT TO BUSINESS STRATEGY AND OBJECTIVES

- **Ensure the IT team is connected to the business strategy:** Your IT team must have a clear view of the organisation's objectives which can be anything from increasing revenue through new services to reducing operational costs. Ensure that stakeholders across all teams have clear roles and create cross functional stakeholder groups to break down any silos.
- **Take a customer-first approach:** This is key, even if many of the objectives revolve around saving or making the business money. Approach all transformation projects with an outside-in view, answering the question 'what is the value that we are adding for our customers?'. This will give all stakeholders a set of unified goals.
- **Ensure data is central:** Business data is essential to the success and measurement of innovation. But all data must be collected and managed with care as bad data or lost data will only create problems. Make sure stakeholders across the IT team can access and use data easily.

RE-CONFIGURE YOUR TEAM AND SKILLS NEEDED

- **Ensure IT drives innovation:** Your top-level IT decision-maker should lead the innovation strategy and establish governance over digital initiatives. During planning, the decision-maker should also consider how and when new projects are integrated into core systems, including cloud integration.
- **Structure the IT function to address operations and innovation:** If your IT team isn't already split into two sub-teams – one operational team focusing on support and the other focusing on innovation, this should be considered. Collaboration between the two teams will be important. The innovation team's learnings should be made available to the operational team. This will enable the operational team to innovate too and feel more connected to the transformation of the business.
- **Determine where new skills are required to support transformation initiatives:** New skills will be especially important for those whose role has been providing everyday support but are now spending time on transformation projects.
- **Master when to use traditional and agile methods:** Having the option to use elements of traditional and agile methods such as Waterfall and DevOps will provide greater flexibility for each innovation project. It's important to accept that these two different cultures must co-exist but there's an art to understanding how and when to use each model. Lean on management theory to help you understand how and when you should use each model.

APPLY THE RIGHT TECHNOLOGY

- **Where possible, use cloud technology:** Cloud provides a solid foundation for digital transformation because it provides speed, scalability and helps to break down the barriers to cross-silo collaboration.
- **Take a code-first approach:** A code-first approach will provide velocity, however, this can be time consuming to set up and operationalise while also requiring ongoing governance. It's important to invest in the right tools and skills or work with a partner who can provide these.
- **Embrace security by design:** Security by design will help to avoid system errors from the outset. This means ensuring security is a core focus for every stakeholder at every stage. Where necessary, provide cyber security training or work with a cyber security partner to ensure this is instilled across teams.

KEEP LEARNING AND EVOLVING

- **Watch your competitors closely:** Learn from the best work that your competitors are doing. Keep an eye on their websites for updates and information about what they're achieving – they'll want to be shouting about their successful innovation strategies in order to attract new business.
- **Utilise your IT partners:** Recognise that the IT service providers you're partnered with can support you in accelerating innovation efforts. If they're worth their fee, they'll be invested in understanding your organisation's goals and helping you achieve them. Ideally these conversations should be had at an executive level.
- **Provide feedback channels for your customers:** If your customers aren't giving feedback through these channels, start a dialogue with them to understand their experiences working with your organisation. The feedback will be key to setting goals for a customer-first approach.

CAN OUTSOURCING HELP?

There may be new responsibilities your IT team struggles with as your business scales. Identify areas where necessary skills or resources are lacking and consider outsourcing them to a managed service provider to free up the IT team's time to focus on innovation.

COMMONLY OUTSOURCED SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Managed storage, server and desktop services
- Managed network services
- Cloud migration
- Security and compliance
- Technical support or help desk
- Disaster recovery

Outsourcing your IT operations can bring many advantages, from improved technology to increased cost savings, but knowing when and what to outsource can be a challenge. Consider the following questions:

- What do you want to achieve from your IT team?
- Where are skills lacking within the team?
- Are there any critical areas that you cannot staff appropriately?
- Is the team overloaded, and if so, in what areas?
- What can you not afford to lose control of?
- Have internal processes been streamlined enough to pass to a third party?
- Where can you enhance the business with minimal disruption to operations?
- What do you need to keep in-house to ensure security and reliability?

SPEAK TO THE EXPERTS

Whether you're looking for advice, support, or a someone to guide you on your journey, contact our team today. We understand the IT challenges you face and can recommend the right solution that fits your business.

Visit us at pulsant.com or call 0345 119 9911
