i-Realise

Bridging the Gap: Transforming IT
Simon Thomas, Associate IT Transformation Consultant

So many business transformations involve IT. Whether that's IT being asked to enable a new business strategy, or a new technology emerging that in itself becomes your new product or service, your IT team are vital to its success.

In this Expert Series we share the top tips for transforming IT teams, systems or architecture - and why building trust is the critical factor in successful IT transformation.

The issue is never quite what you expected at the start

The catalyst to transform your IT department, architecture or even just one critical system, usually comes in the form of a problem statement. "The system won't allow us to do X" or "My IT team don't seem to know how to do Y".

Whilst a good starting point, nine times out of ten the problem you're presented with is actually a symptom. The first stage of any IT transformation is understanding what's really important about how the business functions and what about your IT helps or hinders that. And that often takes a mixture of observation, conversations and curiosity.

The success of a system is usually not about what it can do, but rather what people do with it. And whether the system is being asked to solve the right problem in the first place.

Breaking the co-dependency between people and technology

There's rarely a silver bullet. Transforming IT is usually an accumulation of lots of things you can do incrementally better. It's easy to think that what you need is a sparkly new system or that a new platform or cloud-based architecture will magically fix your legacy issues. But legacy issues are created by years of co-dependency between the people and the technology that you need to break before you can re-assemble them.

It starts with lots of 121 conversations – with people in business roles and with your IT team – to understand the level of trust they have in each other. How often have you seen situations where the business feels IT don't deliver what they asked for, and IT wonder why the business can't just be crystal clear about what they want?

People often talk about building a bridge between IT and the business. In our experience you need to build multiple connection points to build shared understanding. I'm a big fan of seconding business people into IT project roles. They quickly build understanding of how things actually get done and of what's possible. They in turn create more specific briefs and requests of IT when they return to the business. You get to the point where they can find joint solutions much quicker.

Give your IT people the authority to do things

Businesses often complain about how much IT people cost. Why pay for these specialist skills and then refuse to trust or nurture them?!

Transforming an IT department means building better processes, transparency and empathy with the wider business. If your IT team has poor service or relationship management processes, they're probably focused on servicing tickets not listening to people. IT managers need to work hard to make their work and their progress visible. Ticker-boards, RAG status reports and newsletters that the whole business can see and understand will start to make your IT team less of a black box and more of a business support function.

You also need to remove barriers and blockers that stop the IT employees from using their skills and give them the authority to do things that are well within their competency. To eliminate shadow IT departments - that have only sprung up across your business because you're seen as blockers not problem solvers – you need a genuine "come to us first" policy.

IT should not stop a department from using a new piece of technology that adds genuine value. But rather you must know about it, be certain that it's secure and compatible, able to be integrated where required, work with procurement to ensure the right 'deal' – both in purchase and service terms, and be able to flag an opportunity for two different departments to solve an identical problem with the same solution .

The process change, not the IT, will usually drive the benefits

Without technology you can't change much, and most changes need IT. Today, investment in tech for tech's sake is actually necessary, to keep your business viable and grow.

Yet it's the people who use a new system that will make it a success. Once a new system has been through technical and user testing, and is ready to go live, it's important to let it embed and not change it immediately. Once again you need to observe and communicate to understand which issues are related to the system, or which are about allowing the people a little time to catch up with a new way of working.

Equally, most new technology will fail if you haven't changed any processes. Too often organsations move their architecture to the cloud yet keep all their existing processes the same – including those that haven't been working for years. Any significant IT transformation these days is actually a business transformation and this will only work if your IT team can hitch the IT investment to business metrics and you have bridged the gap between the business and your IT team.

Making change happen, together

Delivering change and transformation success through people, process and technology.

Call us now on **+44 (0)20 3008 6358** or email **info@i-realise.co.uk** to find out more about how we can support all elements of your transformation programme.

.ıl **i-Realise**