# A JOB FOR THE I-TEAM

SOMETIMES YOU DO EVERYTHING RIGHT AND IT'S STILL NOT ENOUGH.
AT A MANUFACTURER OF HOUSEHOLD APPLIANCES, A STRONG DEVELOPMENT
TEAM HAD ACHIEVED SOLID SUCCESSES.
But now customers want to network kitchen machines, refrigerators and mixers in the
"Smart Home" and control them with Alexa. ROI established an "I-Team" with the fresh
look of "Digital Natives" and accompanied the internal change.
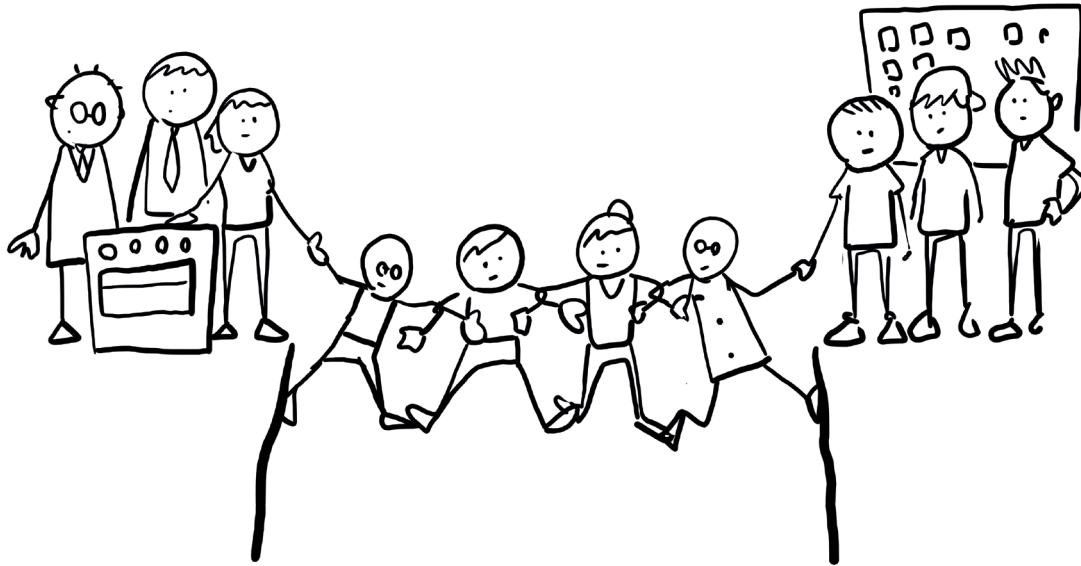
The company had actually opted for a good, proven strategy in order to defend its competitive position with new product ideas: constant availability of development resources - secured by the bundling of all development teams at one location. High quality standards in development for series production of large quantities - ensured by experienced teams and established processes.

But: Routines do not manage disruption. Especially not when digitization is creating a completely new market around the networked "smart home" at enormously short intervals, where imagination and agility are the leitmotifs. If the customer wants a stove that sends pictures and cooking times of his next Christmas roast to his smartphone, a three-year cycle from the first idea to the finished product is simply too long.

In this case, the developers were well aware of this. But as experienced series developers they are more "digital immigrants": they are open to new technologies, but at the same time they know that the scope for new ideas must always be brought into line with the clearly timed cycles of production. So why not combine this many years of experience with the joy of experimenting and the working methods of "digital natives"? That was exactly the starting point of ROI's solution approach. A generation of developers who always play with the latest iPhone thinks and works short-cyclically and iteratively. It follows a maker mentality, i.e. it constantly wants to look beyond the existing system boundaries and does not shy away from the risk that a project can go wrong. Especially in the context of the "Smart Home", these are important success criteria because a large number of different

product groups are networked with software tools and thus reinvented.

TEAMWORK FOR SMART PROTOTYPES

However, a German group is not a Californian start-up either. And of course nobody can and should misunderstand the digital transformation to the extent that the current production can be improved with garage experiments in development. Therefore, the project pursued a "bridge approach": In addition to the first group, the core team of electronics developers, the so-called I-Team (Ideation Team) of newly hired "Digital Natives" works in parallel. As a "bridge", we established a third group in pre-development, in which members of both teams concentrate on creating new prototypes.

QUALITY AND COSTS AT A GLANCE

The most important "clash" in the working cultures of all team members was to integrate their different work cycles: While the "Natives" act short-cyclically and fabricate and discard tons of new ideas in 30 minutes with methods like Design Thinking, the development professionals of serial production know that every change, every quality defect and every standstill in the two to three year production cycle means enormous time and therefore financial losses. The principle of "two-handed leadership" was therefore important when establishing the „I-Team" in the development team: the younger team members also had to learn to appreciate the value of a structure in the line in terms of quality and costs.

COMBINING DEVELOPMENT COMPETENCIES

The ROI approach was now to bring the competencies together in the pre-development group in such a way that valid prototypes for series production are created in two to three months. Once the prototype has been developed and approved, the "combi-team" dissolves again - and is reassembled according to competencies and product groups during the next prototype development. A procedure that at first glance does not fit in with the classic line management at all, but makes a significant contribution to keeping the flow of ideas, motivation and quality of results at a constantly high level. This anchors step-by-step changes in working methods without jeopardising business stability.

CULTURE EATS STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST

In this way, however, not only "smart" products are created, but also smart organizations. The ROI approach for digital transformation in this case also aims to lead employees and teams more consensually and to dissolve silo mentalities between departments by networking know-how. In addition, external partners in the project proved to be an important success factor: on the one hand, in order to obtain the specialist knowledge needed at short notice. And on the other hand, to have an impartial advisor as a process companion, who permanently reminds of a relapse into old behavior patterns and demands a clear commitment from the executive board to the team member for the fulfillment of once defined goals.

SUCCESSES AS CONFLICT SOLVERS

This project for digital transformation with smart products differs from other change projects in that the networking skills, flexibility and knowledge of the employees in the development department of the company are now weighted much higher than the length of service with the company. At the beginning, the project team was confronted with an absolute change-typical conflict: Some employees reacted to the new colleagues and the approach of the "I-Team" with the attitude "Let the young savages run into a brick wall - something like this won't work for us".

ROI follows the principle of "culture eats strategy for breakfast" in order to resolve such a pattern in the long term. This means that we identify and strengthen the most willing to change in both groups in order to quickly demonstrate with pilot projects that it does work after all. With every successful project, the motivation of those involved increases to prove that "there is no such thing as no such thing". In addition, after some successful - and also failed - projects, the curiosity and motivation of the skeptics to become an active part of change increased.

SUCCESS MADE BY ROI

Our change approach is aimed at precisely this overall dynamic. In order to integrate old views and new ideas, tangible results have to emerge that take skeptics and observers with them. This can be ideally achieved, for example, by "splitting" development and production into two tracks, so that the new world can compete against the old.

So now quickly start a few Google Sprints and Design Thinking workshops in development and form an „I-Team" with the most dedicated employees? Well, it's not that simple, of course. Above all, a fixation on methods can turn out to be a killer for transformation projects: new as well as old change methods create freedom and creation in certain areas. However, they do not solve the basic challenge of "switching" a large organization to a new way of working. This requires long-term support and consistent implementation, in which the choice and design of methods are based on the corporate culture.

No matter whether the goal is a talking stove or ergonomic workstations in the line: **IT IS FIRST NECESSARY TO UNDERSTAND THE CULTURE, THEN TO BUILD THE METHOD(S), THEN TO ADAPT THEM CONTINUOUSLY.**