**Consumerization of Technology at IFG[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Teaching Note**

**Synopsis**

Every mature organization faces data issues and IFG is no exception. They have multiple systems that produce individualized reports. Common data definitions are wanting. Their bureaucratic processes, as important as they are for protecting valuable corporate assets, work against innovation. While it is a significant challenge to tackle all of these issues, it is a fact that they are closely related so IFG needs to take steps to address most if not all the issues. For instance, building capabilities to handle new types of data (e.g., unstructured, email, voice) on top of the data mess (e.g., different/conflicting data definitions) is a recipe for disaster. Similarly, allowing employees to “bring your own device” (BYOD) regarding personal/mobile technology in the absence of policies and standards is also folly. Perhaps most importantly, the IT organization runs the risk of being seen as the “barrier to innovation” if it establishes itself as the “naysayer”. So the challenge is to put policies and procedures in place that protect the information assets of the firm while allowing innovation to occur. Striking such a balance is not an easy task.

**Key Issues**

The key issues are listed below. Effective analysis would first highlight each of these issues and then propose a plan for how IFG might proceed to address them. Rather than addressing them randomly, students should look for the logical order among these issues. The best solutions would reflect a natural order.

1. IFG needs to expand its social media presence with mobile apps and other ways to reach its customers and develop a direct relationship with them in order to compete with GPL.
2. It needs to find ways to be faster to market with innovative apps while still protecting core company data.
3. IFG has a data mess with different and often conflicting definitions of data embedded in its core systems. Core data needs to be better defined and streamlined so it can be more effectively used.
4. Information management has to be improved at IFG to prepare for the data tsunami. This needs to involve both business and IT and the many different new types of data that are out there – traditional, social, unstructured and external data.
5. IFG needs practices and policies about what its employees are allowed to do with their own technology – especially relating to privacy and security.
6. IFG’s architecture group needs to establish information, connectivity and contractual processes and standards for any and all user-purchased applications. These must be flexible but address the key concerns of legal and security advisors, while enabling the data produced to be more broadly used in the organization.
7. IT needs to introduce collaborative business-IT practices in each business unit to address business needs for flexibility and the enterprise needs for control and protection.
8. Then, IT needs to develop proactive practices to integrate individual business unit demands and experiences into a coherent visionary technical and information strategy that can be continuously adapted as needs and technologies change.
9. The data warehouse and the tools for using it need to be revisited and possibly redesigned in light of new data management practices and data needs.
10. IT needs to identify the new information management and presentation skills and new development skills and IT must develop a plan for acquiring them.

**Teaching Approach**

**Setting the Scene**

This case takes a “horizontal” slice through a number of coexistent issues. As a result, the challenge is “knowing where to start” – just as it is in real organizations – and this requires detective work. I usually pre-board the organization chart on the side of the classroom (see Appendix A).

The first task is therefore to highlight the issues. To do this, simply ask the class to identify all the issues presented within the case. This typically fills up the white boards at the front of the classroom.

With the front boards as ammunition, I like to divide the class down the middle and ask those on the left to be IFG business managers and those on the right to be IFG’s IT organization. Then I ask both sides to blame to other side as vociferously as possible. I set two conditions: first, you can’t blame the other side of the class without citing evidence directly from the case; and second, both sides of the class have to take turns. The reasons for doing this are to encourage the students to think through 1) the ramifications of letting the business “do their own thing” regarding technology and 2) the ramifications of preventing the business from responding to the market.

At this point, the class should have an understanding of the key issue at IFG … from both sides. They also will have an understanding of all the issues. At this point, they are ready to propose a possible way forward for IFG that balances (i.e., respects and appreciates) the need for the business to “seize the market” and for the IT organization to protect IFG’s information assets.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Describe the problem at IFG as succinctly as you can. Use this description to identify the main stakeholders.

* The business units at IFG want (and need) to move fast in order to be responsive to the market and their customers. As a result, they have proceeded on their own (i.e., without the IT organization) to acquire software, platforms, data and capabilities that the IT organization does not know about … even if it is just Excel spreadsheets. In addition, they have access to social media and data generated from their web sites that they are analyzing. The difficulty is that IFG lacks data definitions and policies to govern data. This means that the data the business captures (e.g., sales orders) may not follow the same definition of “sales orders” used in other parts of the business so this data can not be integrated. Also, they may be legal requirements for retention, protection, privacy and security of such data that the business may not be aware of … or may simply not be complying with. So, as described in the case, IT is charged with protecting the information assets of the business but it can’t do this if it doesn’t know about all these assets … or if the business does not allow the IT organization to “manage” their data.

1. IFG can’t afford the resources to identify, define, cleanse and validate all of its data. On the other hand, building yet another data mart to address a specific problem worsens the data situation. Propose a solution that will enable IFG to leverage a key business problem/opportunity using their BI tools that does not aggravate their existing data predicament.

* The question leads the students towards a “middle-ground” solution. That is, IFG cannot afford to rebuild all their data nor can they afford to ignore the market trends. In some real sense, it is a trade-off between short term benefits (build standalone data applications to take advantage of a business opportunity) and long term costs (multiple data applications that do not integrate and are not manageable). So, students must think of a possible way to leverage the business without burying it further in the data quagmire. This means that they have to select an area of the business that addresses both the short and long term aspects of the data situation. One idea might be to focus on the “Nature’s Glow” brand. With careful planning, IFG (meaning Josh and Mark plus select IT personnel) could build a capability to capture data from the web, social media, etc., define the data carefully to be compliant with architectural guidelines, create policies and procedures to manage (i.e., storage, access, protection, privacy, reporting, integration, and retention) the data in compliance with the best standards. With careful planning and execution, this brand (Nature’s Glow) could provide a model for how other businesses within IFG could proceed with their data initiatives. Students could provide some details of how this might work or they might just provide a general high-level approach. Regardless, it is important that students attain an understanding of what kinds of problems are created when business units “go their own way” with technology.

Appendix A

Organization Chart



1. IFG (International Food Group) is presented in the mini case “Innovation at International Foods”. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)