

# Paradigm Shift

*One company's exceptional journey to creating a successful, long-term outsourcing relationship to support growth.*

By Mary McKeown-Christie

As the founding partner of Polaris Management Partners, a U.S.-based management and technology consulting firm for the life sciences industry, Andy Bender knew his company was at a crossroads and needed help to grow. Polaris offers a suite of technology products and services for the Life Sciences industry that focus on automating healthcare law compliance. Software products provided as “Software as a Service” (SaaS) solutions require ongoing development and customization, which began to deplete internal resources and take time away from product development and customer service.

Realizing this, Bender initiated a growth strategy designed to balance the dual forces of growth that allowed for scalability and cost control, which led him to finding a long-term technology partner in India. For help, Bender turned to Annet Technologies, an IT solutions consulting firm focused on providing services to the healthcare and real-estate industries, based in Mumbai, India.

Polaris carefully selected Annet Technologies from a list of possible strategic partners through a diligent interview process that left no rock unturned. Several key issues were considered before selecting a long-term partner:

- 1) Would Annet Technologies be willing to make an investment in understanding the needs of the Polaris user?
- 2) Would Annet Technologies dedicate the appropriate amount of time and effort needed for planning, managing, and testing Polaris software to get exactly what they wanted?
- 3) Would Annet Technologies be willing to make an investment to properly scope each project?
- 4) Would Annet Technologies be able to learn Polaris’ “vision” with regard to implementation and future product development?

Polaris reviewed and visited several companies. Annet was one of the few that was willing to make

the investment to understand Polaris’ vision. Once Annet was selected, Polaris and Annet Technologies laid the groundwork for a solid foundational relationship. They did this by allocating internal resources to spend as much time as needed with their counterparts on developing processes and procedures to enhance communications and obtain feedback until comfort levels on both sides were high.

In the beginning, like in most relationships, things progressed slowly, and did not progress without hiccups. Processes and procedures were established to make the relationships effective; single points of contact (“project coordinators”) were established on both sides with frequent communication; documentation processes and service-level expectations were set. Annet was tasked with small jobs to learn the Polaris systems and understand best practices for implementation, and the foundation began to take shape.

Several visits were made by both companies to meet the respective teams and get to know the people within the organizations personally—a deep knowledge was built over time. A strong commitment to face-to-face relations was essential and helped overcome the “I never knew what they go through...” syndrome plaguing many U.S. companies that outsource technical work. Noon in New York is 10:30 p.m. in Mumbai, India, but oftentimes this is overlooked or disregarded. Somehow, the person behind the voice is lost in the way business is conducted in the United States.

As the depth and mutual respect of their relationship grew, both Polaris and Annet realized they were “like minded” and the “vision” for the relationship emerged. Because of the trusted relationship they developed with Annet, Polaris client managers were allowed to focus on clients and project management, setting standards and agreeing to hold each other accountable, which resulted in fewer bugs and less rework, increased customer satisfaction, and reduced cycle times and costs.

Within two years, Annet moved from primarily supporting implementation, to running production for 40-plus applications designed to run as an SaaS Healthcare Compliance “suite.” Annet became a strategic partner to Polaris. This is a dramatic shift for any organization and required a tremendous level of commitment.

What made it possible? Not just commitment, but communication with context to grow domain expertise made it possible. Meaning, Polaris people made great efforts to explain business cases for requested changes in context to ensure Annet people understood business reasoning within the healthcare marketplace. This paid off in spades.

The shift of Annet Technologies’ position as a tactical vs. strategic development partner was huge for Polaris in terms of customer service and growth. It allowed their staff to focus on customer development and service, which dramatically improved their bottom line, estimated to be 15 percent on most projects and up to 20 to 25 percent for some.

So what is the secret to making offshore partnerships work so well? Not unlike personal relationships, a commitment to invest in and go through the learning process is key. Having insight and accepting that things will not go perfectly, but will work out the end, is imperative. Being open to accept continuous feedback in a respectful manner for improvement with 360-degree feedback cycles is crucial—application development, testing, accountability, hours being logged, and all facets of the relationship should be reviewed for efficiency. Without this feedback, there is no growth and no basis for developing a mutual understanding of each other’s position. And above all, the more time spent with each other developing the relationship, the more will be learned about one another as partners, not only in business, but in life.

Thomas J. Watson, a business leader and author of the book *A Business and Its Beliefs: The Ideas that*

*Helped Build IBM*, once said: “...the basic philosophy, spirit, and drive of an organization have far more to do with its relative achievements than do technological or economic resources, organizational structure, innovation, and timing. All of these things weigh heavily in success. But they are, I think, transcended by how strongly the people in the organization believe in its basic precepts and how faithfully they carry them out.”

As true as this is for the success of a corporation, it is even more so for the individual. The most important single factor in individual success is commitment. Commitment ignites action. To commit is to pledge oneself to a certain purpose or line of conduct. It also means practicing one’s beliefs consistently.

There are, therefore, two fundamental conditions for commitment. The first is having a sound set of beliefs. There is an old saying that goes, “Stand for something or you’ll fall for anything.” The second is faithful adherence to those beliefs with one’s behavior. Possibly the best description of commitment is “persistence with a purpose.”

Few companies are willing to make this commitment, but those like Polaris Management and Annet Technologies who make the effort are paving the way for truly successful long-term international business partnerships and significant developments for the healthcare industry.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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