

CI&T: Building an entrepreneurial management model

Cesar Gon and Bruno Guicardi, cofounders of digital innovation firm CI&T, headquartered in the Brazilian city of Campinas, were pondering their next move. It was August 2019 and the founders were reflecting on their annual Hoshin strategy meeting¹, where the top 80 executives spent an entire week together, formulating the plans for the years ahead.

The company was doing well, with growth of 25% per year for the last five years. To help build agility, it had recently carried out a massive restructuring, creating 12 'executive squads' running growth units with full P&L responsibility and retaining only a light-touch set of central functions. This shift had been well received and growth was looking promising for coming years.

But the Hoshin strategy process had raised challenges and concerns. Was the new growth-unit structure creating too much complexity and confusion? Was the emphasis on customer responsiveness detracting from the coherence of CI&T's position in the market? Was enough attention being paid to employee development and career progression? Gon reflected:

Building a successful company is always about balance. Over the last few years we have shifted from a fairly bureaucratic structure to one built on agility, fluidity and entrepreneurship. But what if we have taken it too far? Do we need to start imposing more guardrails, to make sure we don't lose our focus and coherence?

Origins of CI&T

CI&T was started in 1995, in the early years of the internet revolution. The three founders, Cesar Gon, Bruno Guicardi and Fernando Matt, were classmates at the University of Campinas, a town 100km north of São Paulo, Brazil. Their first client recommendation came from a professor at the University and, with the internet taking off, they rapidly found their services in demand. CI&T started as a consulting firm for software development. What was supposed to be a one-year, temporary venture before one of the founders started his PhD turned out to be a more exciting opportunity.

While CI&T began by providing consulting services, Guicardi recalled, "We evolved into building things." The founders sought partnerships with leading tech companies in the US; including, for example, IBM and software company Rational. This gave CI&T a strong competitive position in its home market and also gave it inroads into working with US companies.

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