Launching a Global Technology Transformation in a PE-Backed Group

Interim Chief Information Officer | Global Technology Leadership & Transformation
(Introduced by Holdsway)

CLIENT AT A GLANCE
Sector: Automotive services | **Revenue:** £multi-billion | **Model:** Franchised, c.45 countries | **Technology team:** c.500 | **Platforms:** c.350 in use | **Ownership:** Private equity backed

The Situation

The client, a global, multi-billion-pound automotive services group, has partnered with Holdsway for over a decade. They value interim executives and regularly engage them for projects in finance and information and communications technology.

For decades, the company empowered its leaders, allowing about 45 country leaders to operate independently under a franchise model. However, this independence led to problems in finance, HR, and technology, and the drawbacks soon outweighed the benefits. An interim technology executive reviewed technology across the top ten countries and recommended major changes to the board. When the CIO resigned suddenly, unable to support the plan, the CEO quickly appointed an interim leader from Holdsway's network to fill the gap.

> *"The business had about 350 platforms in use, and it probably needed only about 25. I saw that a new, co-ordinated approach to these key functions would be beneficial."* **— Group Technology & Business Transformation Officer, the client**

The Challenge

The timing was difficult. North America, which accounts for half the group's business, wanted to adopt the new approach straight away. That needed the reviewing executive's full-time focus there, which left a leadership gap everywhere else:

- Approximately 500 technology staff outside North America, plus a small head-office team, lacked leadership.
- Most national technology leads had never met and did not know how other countries' systems were set up or operated.
- Countries continued spending locally on systems that group-wide platforms would soon replace.
- Working cultures differed across countries, creating a real risk that some might resist a coordinated approach.

Holdsway proposed three candidates. The client chose a seasoned executive with experience as CIO at several large public- and private-sector organisations. Because hiring a permanent CIO proved harder than expected, the interim role lasted 18 months in two distinct phases.

> *"I felt he was a safe and steady character. He had the big-company track record we needed to lend credibility, as well as a measured, reflective and collegiate style."* **— Group Technology & Business Transformation Officer, the client**

The Intervention

Phase one: build a collaborative culture. For the first nine months, the interim CIO reported to the head of global operations. During this period, he kept technology projects on track and provided strong leadership. He introduced national technology leads to each other, starting with the UK, France, and Germany, which make up 35% of the group. Next, he included Spain, Italy, Australia, Belgium, and the Netherlands—another 10%. He also stopped unnecessary local spending and demonstrated the benefits of group-wide change to win support.

He created forums for change. First, he arranged a joint presentation to the European board, giving the UK, French, and German technology leads valuable exposure and encouraging Europe-wide collaboration. Afterwards, the company formed a European technology governance forum. Then, a worldwide conference helped establish collaboration as the norm.

Phase two focused on supporting transformation. The reviewing executive joined the board permanently as Global Technology & Transformation Officer. The interim CIO smoothly transitioned to report to him, continued leading the central technology team, and led group-wide projects such as benchmarking technology spending and building a new app for technicians.

> *"You can't drive change with appeals to logic; you have to win hearts as well as minds. People had to believe that the desired change would be good for them – not only for the group, but for them individually as well."* **— Interim Chief Information Officer placed by Holdsway**

Key Outcomes

Results Panel	
Financial	Technology spend benchmarking is on track to save about 6% of the annual IT budget, and local spending on systems due for replacement has stopped.
Operational	A new technician app covers more than a million parts and automates workflows, ensuring the right part is supplied and fitted the first time.
Strategic	The groundwork is in place for a business-wide transformation, with a European technology governance forum and cross-country collaboration.
People & Stakeholders	National technology leads now work together and have gained exposure to the board. No country broke away, and joint projects across countries began that would not have happened otherwise.

Legacy

A large team suddenly lost its leader. The interim CIO brought calm and order and ensured a smooth handover. Like many interims, he remained neutral, maintained an outsider's perspective, and stayed out of company politics, which helped him complete difficult tasks quickly. Most importantly, the company shifted technology governance from a top risk to an actively managed function, giving the group a solid base for global transformation.

> *"Before his arrival, technology governance appeared in big capital letters on the company risk radar. When he left us, it was under better management. For me, that sums up his most important contribution in a nutshell."* **— Group Technology & Business Transformation Officer, the client**