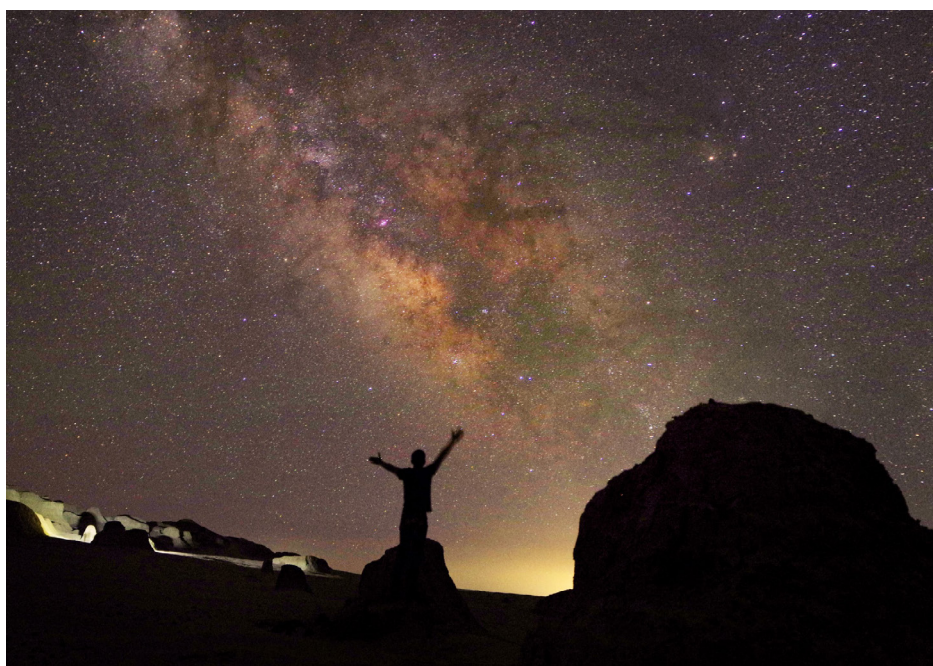


# CIO Silobreakers – How successful leaders are transforming OSS/BSS across legacy boundaries

An interview with Ida La Spisa, CIO of Telia Sweden

Ida La Spisa, the CIO of Telia Sweden, describes how Telia is approaching the IT transformation in all six of the countries in which it operates, putting in place a common, new architecture across the group and keeping tightly focused on simplicity, whatever the macroeconomic climate brings.



At the core of Telia's transformation is the strategy of including and integrating transformation of all six group operating companies in-step with each other. Traditional transformations would have seen a head office innovate and create new architectures and systems and then, later, roll those out to other countries. This approach of imposing transformation reinforces traditional silos, limits flexibility and causes delay.

Telia has revolutionized this transformation by involving all six countries and apportioning transformation roles and responsibilities across the group. "The first silo we have broken is the six different IT organizations we had until three years ago," she confirms. "We've created one organization so we can avoid having to implement the same thing repeatedly for all six countries. There is a target architecture for all six countries following the Open Digital Architecture from TMF."

## The power of six

In addition to eliminating repetition and avoiding the ongoing complexity of operating six different IT organizations, the new approach means countries can work simultaneously on different transformation projects, covering multiple areas at the same time to deliver solutions more rapidly. These are then adopted across the group, radically accelerating the pace of transformation at the same time as keeping all the IT teams engaged and involved in the transformation.

"We chose to drive this from an end-customer product perspective," explains La Spisa. "We decided a certain country would be a leader for consumer mobile and another for B2B products, for example. We could then create a model product in a specific country in a way that can

be re-used, taking inputs from common product managers. We can create systems in a way that is as configurable as possible."

La Spisa adds that Telia has so far achieved 94% re-usability of products in the mobile area and processes are copied between countries. "We knew where we wanted to go and identified a few strategic partners and started a large transformation project with them. We had the idea of creating common platforms so we could avoid having six separate solutions for each country and so we could implement common products and processes," she says. "We didn't want to approach transformation by delivering a cadence of releases across the six countries but to take the concept of a leading country developing the transformative solution and then that being taken to other countries using the same architecture."



## Transformed priorities

Every communications service provider has its own specific business needs and has reached its own stage of transformation. For Telia, the priority is to address the new service arena and to support services that generate revenue. Although the operational and cost efficiencies transformation can generate are appealing, these savings in themselves do not transform a company or set it up for future decades of profit driven from new offerings.

“The priority depends on each country’s individual parameters but, in Sweden specifically, it is B2B products,” says La Spisa. “In Sweden, we have transformed the entire structure for B2B from lead to order, from order to activation, and for usage and payments. We have transformed all three in parallel.”

Having transformation that is clearly linked to the future of the business is an essential driver of support from non-technical parts of an organization. La Spisa cites the committed support she has received from Telia’s management as a vital enabler of silo-breaking success. “One doesn’t even start a transformation without top management support,” she confirms. “Only when I got it did I see the difference that could be made to a transformation. I have never seen such management commitment to transformation anywhere. I can go to the COO for anything.”

Having said that, La Spisa acknowledges that the lofty goals of cross-domain transformation seldom fully survive contact with reality. “We’re no different from anyone else and things change along the way,” she says. “No one expected the pandemic or the war so you have to adjust the money you can spend. We’re ready to slow down when the economy doesn’t allow us to invest and to accelerate when it does.”

## Committed to flexibility

Keeping transformations on track is a moving target that requires senior management and IT teams to maintain commitment to see projects through to fruition. “It’s about keeping the planets aligned,” explains La Spisa. “My first job was to bring everyone together around the architecture but, of course, you always face resistance from single domains. People will be protective about what they have been doing for years but high-level support means you can enforce transformation.”

“Continuous explanation and communication across the organization is needed to ensure success,” she adds. “For us, working across six countries has been a journey because the team wasn’t used to thinking in a six-country perspective. It takes some change management to embrace a bigger picture such how to adopt software and make it accessible in six countries. There are also challenges that face all of us, such as how to work in an agile way.”

The history of the telecoms industry is littered with transformation projects that never delivered on their goals, that failed due to cost over-runs, the market moving in a different direction to that envisaged or simply because of lack of ambition. Transformation has been at the top of agendas for almost two decades and substantial lessons have been learnt. These are fuelling the successful silo-breaking transformations of today’s CIOs, as La Spisa attests:

“Technology is just a means to get to where you want to go. In Telia, the OSS part of our IT was horizontalized five years ago and it is the most mature consolidated area within our IT. The BSS is part of a new transformation and that’s where we’re really breaking the silos.”

## Simplification at the center

This is completely different to previous transformation efforts. “The architecture needs to be continuously reviewed to address new innovations and shifts we haven’t previously faced,” she explains. “I rely on the excellent architecture team we have in Telia to know how to evolve the target architecture and our approach has been to select out-of-the-box solutions from software vendors, avoiding any customization. This is in complete contrast to our history of having some home-made solutions, which has resulted in 25 years of stratification of capabilities.”

“We really want to avoid that in today’s transformations so we have partnered with Ericsson and others to do as much as possible out-of-the-box,” La Spisa concludes. “We are working with vendors who have a vision and can help us avoid having to add lots of additional customization and systems to make our vision reality. You never stop transforming, next is network slicing or 6G, but the aim must be to never forget about simplification. If you forget that, you start building something new but in a legacy way and then, ten years later, that means someone else has to come along to try and transform that. This is what we’re avoiding by breaking down the silos today and putting in place cross-domain, re-usable systems that position our business for delivering future services.”