# Interpersonal Steering

The new App prototype looked fantastic. Stylish and professional, this was something you could proudly show to your business clients and not look like you were stuck in the 20th century. And the features were exactly what the insurance sales team needed – the App would be able to calculate the monthly premium that a client firm would need to pay for an insurance package precisely tailored to their needs. Putting this App in the hands of the insurance company's business-to-business sales people just might help them to reach their goal of achieving 10% sales growth in the coming year. No wonder that Ralph, the commercial director, had led the development of the App prototype and was now pushing for the App to be built in the coming months, using an external IT company to get the work done quickly.

Awkwardly, Belinda, the head of IT, had only recently heard about an App being developed by the commercial department and now finally got to take a look at the prototype. As she suspected, the App would not be as stand-alone as Ralph was suggesting. There would need to be significant integration between the App and back office systems to constantly upload the necessary information into the App and keep it up-to-date. To the question where he saw the App in two years time, Ralph enthusiastically sketched a picture of the App moving beyond premium calculation, to real-time credit checks, quotations and deal-closing. Calmly listening to Ralph's vision, it was clear to Belinda that integration with the rest of the IT infrastructure was going to be inevitable.

As head of IT, Belinda realized that formally the App was in her domain and that practically she would need to do a lot to ensure its success. Therefore, her first instinct was to take control of the App project. Clearly, Ralph had little understanding of IT architecture and limited experience in running IT development processes, so the whole project was a disaster waiting to happen. Moreover, when eventually things would go wrong, Belinda knew who would get the blame – more than once naïve business people in the company had eagerly started revolutions that got bogged down in IT reality, for which the IT department was then held responsible. By taking hands-on control of the App project, Belinda would be able to steer it in the right direction, keeping constant tabs on implementation progress and being able to troubleshoot where necessary. It would still be Ralph's project, but Belinda would head the Steering Committee, allowing her to closely supervise all necessary activities.

Yet, the more Belinda thought about it, the more she started to doubt whether tight control was the best way to get Ralph moving in the right direction. Ralph was passionate about the project and had a strong sense of ownership, so he would not be keen to give up control, especially because the IT department didn't have the reputation for getting things done quickly. Moreover, in many ways Ralph knew much better what needed to be done from a commercial perspective, making it difficult for Belinda to competently call the shots. Not to mention that it was a priority for Ralph, who was willing to make the time available, while Belinda already had her plate full and had little appetite for micro-managing yet another project.

Maybe Belinda needed to 'nudge' instead of 'shove' Ralph in the right direction. By creating the right conditions, maybe Ralph could make the App project a success on his own after all. Belinda would need to facilitate, ensuring that Ralph got the right support, had access to the necessary resources, was better informed about the overall IT strategy and was given timely feedback about IT issues. If all of these circumstances could be created, Ralph would be empowered to drive the App development process himself, with Belinda indirectly controlling direction in the background.

As she thought about it again, reflecting on whether she should take more direct control over the project, it struck her that the issue wasn't the project, it was Ralph. She shouldn't be thinking how much guidance the project required, but how much guidance Ralph could use. How could she best help him to succeed? This insight helped her to get the issue straight, but as she drove home she still wondered whether Ralph was best served by hands-on supervision or hands-off facilitation.