cprime + **ATLASSIAN**

How one person's risky decision paved the way for digital transformation

WATLOW
Powered by Possibility

INDUSTRY
Manufacturing

LOCATION
St. Louis, MO

COMPANY
2,000–2,500
Employees

PRODUCTS
Jira Software
Bitbucket

As Watlow's leadership implemented hypergrowth strategies for the company, the disconnect between these goals and their work management processes became evident. With the help of a tenacious project engineer and Atlassian partner Cprime, Watlow was able to implement a comprehensive overhaul of their project management process.

In 2014, Dale Wolfe was the technical lead on a software development project for Watlow Electric Manufacturing Company, and he ran into a problem. The touch controller his team was developing (the F4T, one of Watlow's flagship products) required more complicated coding, on a larger scale, than anything the company had previously developed. Dale's team needed new tools to meet the demands of this project.

The F4T project was a microcosm of the larger changes happening within the company. The leadership team at St Louis–based Watlow – a global leader in heating systems, sensors, and thermal controllers – had determined there was a need to scale and incorporate mergers and acquisitions into their long-term business strategy. As a result, new company values emerged that centered around transparency and collaboration. These principles reinforced the business

need to deliver systems, rather than components. This "system thinking" drove demand for tools that could help engineers collaborate across Watlow facilities.

"The executive team put our values together, but the usage of Atlassian inside of the company was really the first big test of whether or not it was an open culture," remembers Dale, now the Atlassian administrator for Watlow. In a truly open company culture, employees are trusted to find innovative solutions to the problems they face, even if those solutions push against established company norms.

The technical growing pains for Dale's team went beyond the complexity of coding. The version control system they were using, Microsoft's Team Foundation Server (TFS), wasn't able to store critical coding data for the project. While Dale's team searched for alternatives, one developer, Jeremy Quandt, decided to spin up a Git server for the team locally. This approach took hold with the team, but they still needed a solution for tracking bugs within the code that didn't require the logistical headache of an in-person code review. As these technical challenges compounded, the F4T project became a valuable test case for the emerging company culture at Watlow, and the potential benefits of team autonomy in a modern corporate context.

OPEN CULTURE EXEMPLIFIED BY TEAM AUTONOMY

"I'd always dreamed of something digital, and then I saw Jira. I saw that it had the linkages between the work items. I saw the linkage from that to Bitbucket, and I was sold right away," says Dale. He bought Jira and Bitbucket, both on the cloud, with his Watlow credit card. "I [knew] that either this was the smartest thing I'd ever done, or I was going to get fired for doing it."

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>
> **DALE WOLFE**
> **Watlow Electric Manufacturing Company**

Over a weekend in September 2014, Dale migrated 50 issues from TFS into Jira. "I didn't even try to do any fancy import. I just literally opened up TFS on one monitor and Jira in another and I copy-pasted with permission from the project team."

Jeremy, who had helped set up these tools, was pulled onto another project team that used Hipchat. Because Watlow is geographically divided – primarily across Missouri, Illinois, and Minnesota – there were considerable benefits to using Hipchat to communicate between project teams.

With Bitbucket connected to Jira, and Hipchat facilitating people-to-people communication, a new workflow was emerging among Watlow's project teams. The user base was growing, and not just across technical teams. "By December we were already at about 300 users, and the trajectory was almost vertical," says Dale.

Watlow then entered into a more serious evaluation process of the Atlassian tools that Dale and his team had been championing, and the leadership team decided to embrace the Atlassian toolset across the enterprise.

Overall, this process was yet another important stepping stone for the company's culture shift. Managers had been given the freedom to find the tools and solutions that best met the needs of their teams. When Watlow's executive team decided to purchase the Atlassian toolset, it was clear that they trusted the solutions their managers had found – an essential quality of a truly open culture.

COMPLEMENTARY CULTURES STRENGTHENED A PARTNERSHIP

As Watlow scaled its Atlassian toolset, leadership decided to transition to a server and turned to Cprime, an Atlassian Solution Partner, for help.

> By developing trust and offering valuable experience, Cprime has helped scale the natural growth of Atlassian in Watlow, and guide Dale as he scales his career.

The relationship started with an assessment of Watlow's needs through in-person and phone meetings with Kyle Blakely and Amir Keric, Cprime consultants with more than 20 years of Atlassian experience combined. From there, Cprime designed the functionality of a solution that would scale with Watlow's growing Atlassian user count, from workflows to custom fields, and consulted on deployment, which resulted in a hosted server on AWS.

Since then, Cprime has become an extension of Watlows teams, providing ongoing support, customization, and training for admins and users. They've developed a consistent routine with Dale and his team, connecting through meetings every few weeks, with more frequent communication during assessment and feasibility stages. Now, they're helping Dale and his team set up metrics and reporting that will help the company make multimillion-dollar business decisions.

Cprime's hands-on approach has been a great culture fit. "A personal touch is really important in terms of our relationship. We spent a number of hours on the phone with leadership, with users, with everybody. Their culture is very similar," says Kyle.

GREAT PARTNERSHIP MEANS EVERYBODY WINS

By instilling trust with their expertise in ecosystem architecture, roadmapping, and in-person consulting, Cprime has helped scale the natural growth of Atlassian in Watlow, and has guided Dale as he scales his career.

"Dale had been able to successfully complete a proof of concept with great traction that it moved its way up the chain at Watlow to the point where Watlow Leadership said, 'Hey, wow, would you invest some money to get an enterprise-grade type of deployment for us?'" notes Amir.

Watlow's adoption of Atlassian across the enterprise has resulted in faster delivery of their products as well as improved metrics. Their customers collaborate, ask questions, and provide feedback to Watlow engineers directly on Jira Software, which results in quick turnaround and a shared source of truth. Additionally, Jira Software provides analytics on product lead and cycle times, so Watlow's management can make better informed business decisions.

> Watlow is preparing to make multi-million dollar decisions based on what they are learning through the Atlassian toolset.

In 2014, Dale bought Jira and Bitbucket on the cloud using his credit card. In 2018, Watlow is preparing to make multi-million dollar decisions based on what they are learning thanks to the Atlassian toolset. Watlow, Dale, and Cprime have all benefited from this collaborative dynamic. As a result of their mutual learning, growth, and support, each walks away with trajectory-altering experiences. Their accomplishments embody what is great about partnership: when it's done well, everyone wins.

Have questions?
Contact us at learn@cprime.com

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