



Business challenge

For one of its upcoming events, the Conference Board Inc. wanted to create an on-demand learning platform that would provide attendees with instant visibility into a decade's worth of existing research.

Transformation

The Conference Board, working with a solution developed by IBM Business Partner CBA Strategic IT Ltd. and supported by IBM® Watson® technology, empowered conference attendees to search for and identify relevant studies and findings without interrupting their current conversations.

Results

Answers complex questions in seconds

along with additional relevant findings, leading to more effective policy recommendations

~50% increase in member engagement

during the conference by expanding the scope of conversation topics

Enables on-demand learning

yielding richer insight into research discussions

The Conference Board Inc.

Accelerating learning with on demand insight delivered by AI

Since its founding in 1916, the [Conference Board Inc.](#) has coordinated with senior executives across industries and geographies to foster a global community of business leadership. The organization, a non-profit, member-driven think tank, engages in constant research and develops comprehensive policy statements that are targeted to help business leaders drive innovation and navigate current market challenges. The association is headquartered in New York City and also maintains offices in Belgium, China and Singapore.

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—Nick Sutcliffe, Managing Director for Asia Pacific, The Conference Board Inc.

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The disrupted workplace

The Conference Board is focused on the future—particularly the future of global business in the digital age. And in this pursuit, this not-for-profit think tank coordinates with experts and companies across several continents to develop fact-based research and consensus-driven policy statements aimed at helping businesses to better serve society.

“From our research, we’ve come to the assumption that a series of new digital technologies are going to disrupt the structure of work,” explains Nick Sutcliffe, Managing Director at the Conference Board for the Asia-Pacific region. “And that, in turn, is going to disrupt the structure of business and leadership profiles.”

To better understand this disruption and how best to navigate it, the Conference Board launched its “Future of Work” research project. The organization enlisted a group of several hundred executives from its member organizations, bringing these leaders together to discuss important topics regarding the cultural drivers of a digital organization.

“One of the biggest challenges about the future workplace is that we don’t know what the culture is going to look like or what it should like,” adds Sutcliffe. “So we’ve done quite a lot of research around the impact of digitization, artificial intelligence and analytics on corporate leadership.”

To help participants plan for the next group discussion, the Conference Board had put together a LinkedIn group that gave future attendees access to a wealth of research targeted on these topics. However, there was a concern.

“We used this format in a previous research event,” recalls Sutcliffe. “And we found that people weren’t prepared. If we give people one report to read, they’ll do it. But we had over 5,000 research pieces uploaded to this LinkedIn group, and it was no value to anybody.”

“We realized that people need to learn ‘on demand,’” continues Sutcliffe. “So we asked ourselves, ‘How do we give our members access to our content and knowledge in a format that they want?’”

The wisdom of the crowd

In November of 2018, the Conference Board held its most recent discussion series for its Future of Work research effort. The organization brought together roughly 300 senior executives from the human resources, finance, communications and legal departments of over 100 member organizations, gathering these leaders into two conference locations in Singapore and Shanghai, China.

“We call them ‘unconferences,’” interjects Sutcliffe, “since the event was designed to specifically limit speakers as we want to capture

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the collective wisdom of the over 300 executives, so attendees were organized into 16 working groups that focused on how to respond to and take advantage of the disruptive changes happening today. We would ask them questions about their strategic intent on these topics, and then we polled them in real time regarding the strategies that they defined.”

And to help participants be adequately prepared during these discussions, the Conference Board employed the Cognitive Artificial Intelligence Technology for Organizations (CAITO) solution provided by CBA.

The CAITO Knowledge Platform can sift through large volumes of unstructured data, such as more than a decade’s worth of research reports, unifying this information into a centralized framework of knowledge repositories. Users, in turn, can then search through these repositories with natural language questions that yield new insights.

For the Future of Work research project, these repositories included more than 5,000 studies from the Conference Board, its research partner Korn Ferry and several other organizations whose studies were available in the public domain.

“We partnered with CBA to create a CAITO model to provide our on-demand learning platform,” adds Sutcliffe. “So attendees might be discussing how best to manage Millennials in the workforce, and they’ll ask CAITO what research was available on that topic. But the beautiful thing about CAITO was that it could understand the question and not only answer it but also say, ‘Hey, what you really should be focusing on is how to deal with a multigenerational workforce. And here are some studies on that as well.’”

Working under an IBM Embedded Solutions Agreement (ESA), CBA expanded the cognitive capabilities that it built into its CAITO platform to incorporate IBM Watson Discovery technology, which provides additional search and analytics capabilities for the tool. And each CAITO model is hosted within a local cloud framework that is monitored using the IBM Cloud™ Foundry offering, which supports the deployment and scalability of applications without manually configuring and managing servers. Further, the IBM Cloud Kubernetes Service solution enables the rapid delivery of applications, which can bind to advanced services like Watson™ technology.

The future of work

With the 2018 Future of Work discussion completed, the Conference Board was pleased with its choice of working with CBA and IBM. “For us it was very successful,” explains Sutcliffe, “because it gave our members access to the research and content that they needed. And it gave it to them on demand.”

Unlike previous sessions, the CAITO platform, powered by Watson technology thanks to the ESA, allowed conference participants to quickly access key studies and relevant research in a matter of moments—even in the middle of a conversation—facilitating more fruitful discussions and yielding richer insight into best practices and strategies.

“We’re published in the global press hundreds of thousands of times each year,” adds Sutcliffe. “I’ll look at studies that we’ve done two or three years ago that I’ve forgotten that we did. There’s no way that our members will read or see all of this. But CAITO can capture all of that intellectual

capacity that our organization has and better deliver it. It drove engagement with our members and expanded the range of conversations we were having by 50 percent. They’re saying, ‘CAITO suggested this. We never knew you did research on this. Can you talk to us about it?’”

And these member discussions can be better targeted by role and industry. “With CAITO we were able to create a unique experience for everyone,” comments Sutcliffe. “If a CEO asked a question, they didn’t want to see HR information, but if an HRO asked the same question, they did. CAITO could deliver a unique experience to all of them.”

“We’ll be publishing our findings in April this year,” concludes Sutcliffe. “And the valuable research that we gained from these discussions will help us to continue to support our members, providing them key insights and strategic direction to address the challenges of transformation and disruption that is part of the ‘Future of Work.’”

Solution components

- IBM® Cloud™ Foundry
- IBM Cloud Kubernetes Service
- IBM Watson® Discovery

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM solutions featured in this story, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner.

To learn more about its specialized AI and cognitive solutions and what CBA can do for you, please visit: [CBA Strategic IT Ltd.](#)

About CBA Strategic IT Ltd.

Founded in 1992, IBM Business Partner [CBA](#) originally provided business strategy execution and software implementation services for customers around the world. But in 2011, the business spun off the CBA Strategic IT organization, focusing this company on developing and implementing specialized cognitive AI solutions. The company, with its corporate headquarters in Auckland, New Zealand and now establishing a presence in Singapore, operates globally, catering to a diverse set of large enterprise customers, including commercial businesses and government agencies.

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