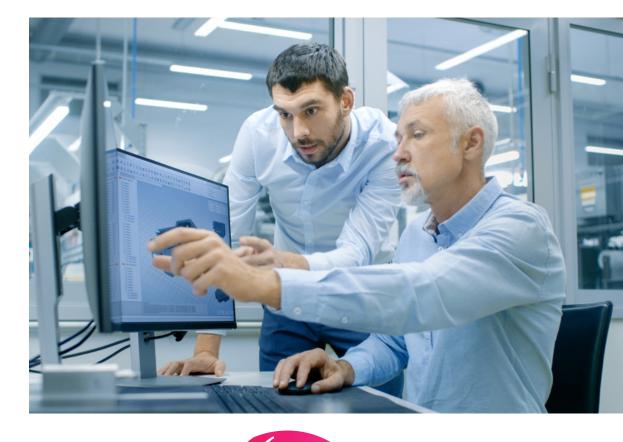# Shifting IT Culture in Service of Transformation

Summary of key topics discussed in this case study:

Culture change is hard in any organization. But many factors can make it easier:

- Active engagement by the company's leaders – not just as communicators, but as coaches and co-learners

- Translation of culture concepts into specific, observable behavioral moments that leaders can recognize, improve and coach

- Peer and leader coaching in a safe environment designed for support and learning

- Quarterly organization-wide "sprints" to reinforce specific behaviors simultaneously, thereby flooding the organization with concentrated focus

The Challenge

> *I know my technology roadmap and all that supports it – cloud, analytics, agile, automated testing – but I'm really not sure about my talent roadmap."*

> *The company's entire operating model is changing, and the IT group is more important than ever to achieve business results."*

> *What is good enough today won't work for tomorrow – we need more urgency, more pro-active business partnerships, less top-down guidance, and greater clarity to our desired business outcomes – basically, our culture really needs to change."*

These were the comments being made by the CIO's team at a leading financial services company as they grappled with a changing industry and shifting business. To help better understand and address these challenges, the organization partnered with BTS, which proposed the following four-part approach:

1. Assess the current situation to accurately identify culture obstacles and pain points
2. Align the top team and identify a few key points of leverage to provide a rallying cry to enable the desired culture

3. Create an experience to allow people to let go of the past, get excited about the future and
4. Experiment with the path forward to sustain and reinforce the learning to create lasting, effective and accelerated culture change

Part One: Assessing the Current Situation

In a situation fraught with change, the CIO's team initially faced a decision about where to focus their energies: should they assess talent for selection purposes (e.g., determine who is capable of making required pivots to stay on the team), or should they invest in talent growth?

Given that the company's leadership team felt most people could shift to new mindsets and ways of working, the CIO's team decided to take BTS' recommendation of a hybrid approach of assessment and development for two levels of leaders: IT officers and IT directors. The hybrid approach included:

- Define what the future "great" behaviors of IT officers and directors look like in the context of the company's unique business and culture
- Let the leaders experience those new and changed behaviors
- Assess leaders to identify individual development priorities as a part of the process
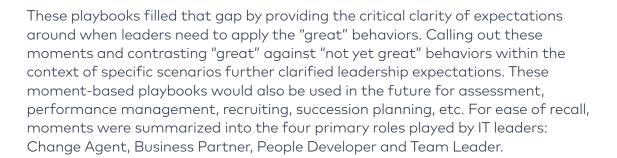- Sustain the gains with coaching and cohort support pods

> "If you don't know a pivotal moment is happening, what are the odds that you'll behave in a great way in that moment?"

To define "great" and create ownership for the resulting profiles among the IT officers, BTS interviewed all officers, many directors and several people managers in the IT organization. Additionally, business partners in key functions and business units that interface with IT teams were consulted.

The outcome of this analysis was a set of profiles for what "great" and what "not yet great" look like. These profiles honored what worked in their existing operating environment, while highlighting what behaviors would be needed to sustain future success. This contrast between "great" and "not yet great" would also prove important when making behaviors come alive during the critical moments that leaders face.

Through interviews, the team uncovered the top 13 critical moments IT leaders face on the job – from the customer, business partner and employee lenses – and captured them in playbooks. As is often the case during the research phase, most leaders could not identify many critical moments themselves. This raised the question, "If you don't know a pivotal moment is happening, what are the odds that you'll behave in a great way in that moment?"

These playbooks filled that gap by providing the critical clarity of expectations around when leaders need to apply the "great" behaviors. Calling out these moments and contrasting "great" against "not yet great" behaviors within the context of specific scenarios further clarified leadership expectations. These moment-based playbooks would also be used in the future for assessment, performance management, recruiting, succession planning, etc. For ease of recall, moments were summarized into the four primary roles played by IT leaders: Change Agent, Business Partner, People Developer and Team Leader.

Part Two: Top Team Alignment Session

Their prior competency framework had been comparably vague and long, and it was not as rooted in real behaviors within the business cadence.

After gathering this data, BTS and the top leadership team met to discuss the findings. Leadership was delighted – this was the first time they had a clear articulation of the behaviors that they, their officers and their directors would need to be successful. Their prior competency framework had been comparably vague and long, and it was not as rooted in real behaviors within the business cadence.

With the passion to change along with a much clearer articulation of what, how and when to change, the next step was to build a developmental experience to bring the culture alive for all IT officers and directors.

Part Three: Creating a Powerful Experience

To accelerate the culture transformation and get leaders to "great" behaviors faster, BTS constructed separate "Leadership Experience Labs" for both the officers and the directors. These workshops leveraged scenarios designed to bring to life the critical moments identified in the interviews and endorsed by the leaders.
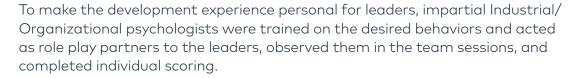
When called for, stress was introduced into the scenario – via role plays, moments of tension or discussion – so that leaders' behaviors could be observed, analyzed and rated. An element of competition was introduced at the team level to make the whole experience fun. The content at both experiences was similar, with the key difference being that officers acted as coaches in the director experience to both show their commitment and solidify their own learning.

The attention to why the "great" behaviors marked the path forward – and why old behaviors needed to be abandoned – crystalized the transformation in leaders' minds. Presenting pivotal moments in the four primary roles played by IT leaders resonated with them and allowed focused practice of the "great" behaviors.

To make the development experience personal for leaders, impartial Industrial/ Organizational psychologists were trained on the desired behaviors and acted as role play partners to the leaders, observed them in the team sessions, and completed individual scoring.

The learning extended after the workshop through two meetings between the I/O psychologist and the leader: one meeting to share the personal feedback on their performance at the workshop, and another meeting to share feedback on a 360-degree assessment instrument that was tied to the "great" behaviors. In both cases, the coach focused on identifying the actions the leader would take to change their behavior and impact.

All the individual performance feedback was consolidated into "heat maps" showing areas of relative strength and weakness demonstrated by the leaders and reviewed with the top team. While some of the workshop performance data was predicted by the officers, both positive and negative surprises were revealed when the top team compared the data to traditional performance management data and their personal experiences with individual leaders.

The conclusions from the workshop data formed the basis of further development. New challenges were raised around a culture of cyber-security, requirements to understand the business better, and even the need to develop high potential talent differently within this critical business function.

The success of the officer and director workshops generated enough excitement that the CIO and his directs decided that all people managers would also attend a version of the director program, with the directors playing the role of coach this time to help drive culture alignment. Further, the creation of profiles and playbooks for the people manager audience was deemed necessary to round out this talent approach.

Part Four: Sustaining Learning and Culture Change

Leveraging the language of the IT organization, BTS recommended a series of "behavioral sprints." For each fiscal quarter, all the officers and directors would focus on developing the same few behaviors tied to one of their roles. For example, all leaders would focus on the "Change Agent" role behaviors for the first quarter. Rather than introduce new meetings and complexity, BTS leveraged the existing business cadence of quarterly CIO meetings for the launch of each "sprint."

As further reinforcement, directors were organized into peer teams with an officer as their coach. Each month during that quarter, officers led calls of the peer teams to monitor progress made during the prior 30 days. Importantly, the cohort expectation was to be support-group-like in nature: a safe place to review experiments that worked and those that failed to varying degrees. There were no direct reports on any of the teams. Each participant brought questions to the peer

Importantly, the cohort expectation was to be support-group-like in nature: a safe place to review experiments that worked and those that failed to varying degrees.

group for each call to assure relevancy of the conversations. The coaching for each leader on the call came from the VP as well as their peers.

Not only did these meetings directly benefit leaders, but they also gave the CIO's direct reports an improved perspective of the talent outside their own groups.

Summary

While culture change is hard in any organization, certain steps can make that transformation easier. Defining desired behaviors is a powerful starting line. But leaders will not really enter the race if they don't truly believe in the necessity for change – they need a rallying point.

Powerful leader-led experiences can be the spark to challenge IT legacy behaviors, help mold belief systems and encourage first steps. Executive leaders need to cultivate, encourage and invest in the cultural journey themselves – creating a supportive, ongoing environment in which everyone is making the transformation together.