Transforming Information Technology at a Large State Agency

The office of information technology that serves agencies across a state government system set a goal of becoming a high-performing and customer-centric service provider. The CIO sought to build a self-sustaining cultural dynamic that would enable the organization to become a preferred provider of IT services to its agency partners, one of the top IT employers in the state, and a recognized expert in the field.

Working with technology organization leadership, Brimstone designed a comprehensive, integrated approach to create context-specific solutions for the organization. The solutions were tailored to incorporate Agile principles, methods, and tools. Because Agile takes different forms in different organizations, Brimstone worked with the client to ensure the solutions reflected their unique application of Agile.

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Deliverables

Phase 1:
Assess Current Operating Model and Build Change Roadmap

The first phase of the transformation process involved gaining a deeper understanding of the technology organization's unique market and organizational realities; the CIO's vision and direction; the organization's business strategy, enablers, and obstacles; and progress on in-flight organizational change efforts. Working in collaboration with the CIO, Brimstone used this deeper understanding to develop and refine a change roadmap and tailor additional solutions for accelerating the transformation. The roadmap incorporated progress already made, change efforts currently in flight, and additional solutions for accelerating the change. The roadmap helped articulate why change was needed, where the organization was going, and how the organization would get there. As the change progressed, Brimstone continued to work with the leadership team on a regular basis to adjust and extend the roadmap as necessary.

Phase 2:
Operationalize and Align Around Future Operating Model

In the second phase of the transformation process, Brimstone worked with the CIO and the technology leadership team to further operationalize the business strategy (the "what") and desired organizational culture (the "how") that would accelerate the organization's transition into a high-performing, customer-centric organization. This included further work on "bringing to life" core behaviors identified as critical to the transformation and new way of operating. Brimstone also helped ensure the technology leadership team continued to be aligned around the journey and the future state, then engaged the rest of the organization in the work required.

Brimstone's Senior Team Alignment Process (STAP) helped the leadership team achieve (and sustain) alignment around the organization's strategy and desired culture. The STAP also helped to create an improved operating discipline, increased trust, and improved both communication and decision-making.

The STAP involved a series of off-site workshops for the technology leadership team. These workshops were designed in conjunction with the leader and were facilitated by Brimstone. Outputs of the process included a Case for Change, a Strategic Business Framework, key measures for assessing progress and impact, and operationalizing the desired culture. Between workshops, technology leaders engaged their teams around the organization's strategy and culture expectations, soliciting input and feedback for refining both. Subsequent workshops focused on planning next steps in the change process, including how to drive communication, alignment, and culture deeper into the organization.

Technology leaders further communicated strategy and culture expectations through organizational alignment workshops, engaging a broad cohort of leaders in accelerating organizational transformation and business results. Leaders from across the organization interacted with the technology leadership team to learn about the new direction and begin engaging in the change effort. These workshops were led by the leadership team and facilitated by Brimstone, giving senior leaders the opportunity to demonstrate alignment and commitment to the new direction, teach others the implications of the new direction, and enlist the help of other leaders in the organization to drive change.

Phase 3:
Accelerate Progress on Critical Change Initiatives

The third phase of the transformation process involved accelerating progress on critical change initiatives that were identified prior to the engagement and those that surfaced during the initial two phases of work.

The Business Acceleration Teams (BAT) process helped the technology organization accelerate dialogue, alignment, leader development, and progress on critical business issues. Cross-functional project teams, each composed of six to eight of the organization's "best and brightest" leaders, were tasked with delivering practical, actionable, measurable recommendations and implementation plans for making progress on the critical business issues. This effort involved three workshops attended by leadership team and project team members, with interim work between workshops. Leadership team members served as sponsors of project teams. Brimstone consultants designed, facilitated, and supported all aspects of the process, including coaching of sponsors, project teams, and individual participants. Brimstone also facilitated the transition of recommendations to implementation teams, helping to ensure solutions became reality.

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Foundational Services

Brimstone also delivered critical foundational services that helped to ensure the overall success of the transformation effort. They included:

Executive Coaching and Stakeholder Management

- Building deep relationships with the CIO, other key leaders, and support staff throughout the enterprise, providing them with advice, counsel, and the ability to "look around corners" as the change progressed.

- Helping the CIO explicitly identify where his personal goals and leadership agenda aligned with the organization's needs.

- Developing an understanding of the system's structure and politics—and engaged with numerous actors in the system. This meant developing multiple relationships through constant inquiry and enrolling key stakeholders in the change effort.

- Building trusting relationships with key leaders across the organization—not just the primary client.

- Pulling staff (admin assistants, chiefs of staff, functions such as HR and Finance) into the team to support the change leaders, building a true partnership between us and them.

- Offering counsel and assistance to key actors across the system (including, but not limited to, the technology leadership team); we listened, asked great questions, sought to understand.

Change Leadership Consulting

Partnering with the CIO to devise and constantly adjust the change strategy, enabling him and his leadership team to lead the change. Brimstone:

- Worked with the CIO to define what success looks like—and then guided him through a process of developing an explicit step-by-step strategy that identified the changes that would deliver those outcomes.

- Developed a change strategy (a series of interventions, leveraged opportunities, and communication efforts) that drove the organization toward the desired outcomes.

- Iterated the change strategy with the CIO—to improve it, create a sense of co-ownership, and develop internal capability.

- Published the strategy and Change Map in a format that works for the CIO and his audiences.

- Identified high-value leverage points that created movement and built momentum for change.

- Remained vigilant about monitoring the action/ reaction cycle of change efforts and constantly adjusted the change strategy as appropriate.

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Change Management Consulting

Partnering with the CIO to manage the change, which entailed designing and delivering interventions and processes; providing and customizing tools and models; and creating operating mechanisms that established structure and consistency. Brimstone collaborated with the CIO and other key leaders to actively manage the change process:

- Established a transformation team that jointly owned the change process.

- Enrolled the technology leadership team in the change effort and built them into the Guiding Coalition.

- Allocated the necessary time and focus to the change effort and served as a force multiplier for the CIO.

- Engaged in a regular cadence of status reporting, progress updates, and other appropriate operating mechanisms to ensure issues were resolved and progress was maintained.

- Monitored progress against the various streams of work and adjusted as needed. We were independent eyes and ears to provide a unique and broad perspective on what was happening across the organization.

- Identified areas of the organization that wanted or needed assistance in driving change.

Transfer of Learning

To build a self-sustaining cultural dynamic as desired by the CIO, transferring the knowledge, processes, methods, and tools that Brimstone used to drive change was a critical foundational element of the work. By partnering closely with the client, Brimstone transferred its skills and knowledge along the way so that leaders at all levels learned to drive change on their own.

Impact and Results

Even before the end of the engagement, the organization has realized significant progress toward their goals of becoming a high-performance, customer-centric organization. To date, the CIO reports the following results:

- The technology leadership team is aligned on the need for transformation and the Case for Change

- The technology leadership team has aligned around a Strategic Business Framework and has cascaded it through the organization

- The Business Acceleration Teams process has driven rapid progress on four critical initiatives related to the organization's workforce, service management approach, innovation practices, and customer experience

- The CIO has reorganized the leadership team and built a leadership council that includes members from the agencies served

- The customer agencies are experiencing the technology organization in new ways, more as true business partners, much more proactive, and much more forward thinking.

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