Digital Transformation… by any other name? Learning from other industries

I was reading an article at CIO Dive about the CIO at cosmetics conglomerate Estée Lauder Companies Inc. and it resonated with a transformation we are undertaking in the pharmaceutical industry. The thing I love about these types of situations is the broad applicability of good thinking, but also the value of "stream jumping", a term I picked up from an agency I worked with in a past role focused on innovation. The key idea of this stream jumping is taking lessons from adjacent spaces and applying them to your challenges, not being constrained to "my industry".

> In the article, the author Mitch Betts says: Michael Smith joined the New York-based "prestige beauty" company as senior vice president and chief information officer, information technology last year, with a mandate for pushing IT innovation to help the company stay abreast of the fast-moving beauty industry, where an Instagram photo of celebrity's new lip gloss can drive sales.

While the drug industry is not reactive to that degree, our engagement is around delivering life saving medicines as quickly and effectively as possible. As a part of that journey, the patient connection is taking an ever more prominent role, whether it be in the trial compliance or reporting, medical routine compliance, or health monitoring, or any of a number of other scenarios.

Mr. Betts lists the year one accomplishments for the CIO and his team.

1. Reorganizing IT to align with business units, instead of technologies, so IT stays can stay close to business needs.
2. Hiring IT talent, globally, with new skill sets.
3. Fostering greater IT agility and speed, such as moving from waterfall to agile software development processes, and breaking down walls between applications and infrastructure groups to adopt DevOps.
4. Moving from a buy-and-integrate IT strategy to building systems in-house when they provide a competitive advantage

It is interesting to see the pendulum swing on these principles, as over time I have seen a few of these move in and out of favor. What is particularly encouraging is the **recognition of the value of Agile software development and DevOps.** This helps de-risk some of the moves to build vs buy and business unit alignment of IT functions.

The classic waterfall model tends to drive a centralized service mindset, and long lead to value cycle times, which creates a host of challenges in meeting expectations, both customer facing and internal delivery team focused. When coupled with decentralized business alignment, it creates a continuous conflict for service time, and generally leads to infighting in my past experience. It is possible to make it work, but the effort expended is not commensurate with the value returned.

An agile approach, coupled with decentralized IT staffing can potentially yield optimum results, however there is opportunity to drive efficiencies into the model through replication of core services. The ideal match for this approach would be a scalable, SLA driven managed service provider approach to the commodity centralized services – “classic IT”, while devoting the employee headcount and leadership to the business facing roles and the intersection roles.

Every managed service has an inward facing employee accountable for performance. These leaders are measured by each business facing lead, as well as the internal metrics. This will help ensure a balance of efficiency vs. effectiveness in delivery of value, while taking the complexity of scaling and growth off the plate of the business facing teams.

The article does not go into any detail about the specifics of the alignment, but this is yet another in the trend I am seeing around the recognition of the value in taking an agile approach, and adopting agile development practices. This concept scales beyond the software development, to collaboration, organization and most other value streams.

This transformation for Estée Lauder, as well as the others in flight, will be interesting to watch over the next year. This is especially true as we are in the beginning stages of our own internal changes!

Link to the original article

Business Relationship Management – the role of IT as a strategic partner

Business Relationship Management is a name for what is generally referred to as the “IT business partner”. This is a role that sits between the more traditional IT organization and the broader general population in an organization, and helps translate opportunity and need to IT solutions in the most general sense.

I have held this role in various forms for a significant number of years, and over that time, heard many opinions on what it means, and how to represent value. I met Vaughan Merlyn while working at my current role, and took the Business Relationship Management training, from the BRM Institute, from him. I enjoyed the course and was aligned with the approach enough to become a trainer for my company, though we have yet to fully realize that further expansion.

The salient point in this short post is the value of the role as a strategic partner, and how that is differentiating. I have had a number of conversations with peers in what we call our business partner roles, but that represent the BRM role. I hear a lot of complaints about how they don't want to be order takers, and how they struggle with relevance in a world where most business leaders are increasingly IT savvy. My argument back is that this is the time to truly embrace the definition of the BRM as described by the BRM institute, and seek to be defined as a strategic partner as opposed to "yet another IT gal / guy" who wants to add friction to my life.

I love the intro on this in the BRM institute:

> Designed to **bring value to an organization through the convergence of different business functions**, the business relationship manager (BRM) role is a **senior-level, strategic business partner** who shares ownership for **both business strategy and business value** results.
>
> HTTPS://BRM.INSTITUTE/THE-ROLE-OF-THE-BUSINESS-RELATIONSHIP-MANAGER/

My position is that we now have a great opportunity to capitalize on the growing appreciation for the contributions of technology to our business processes and by taking the time to truly understand our business domain as well as the technologies relevant to not only that field, but adjacent spaces, we can become that trusted advisor that helps shape business strategy to take advantage of both current technology and by understanding risk tolerances, also bring in emerging technology where relevant to the business outcomes!

We need to have the courage to see ourselves in the BRM role as those trusted partners, but that only comes through real investment in the business goals and strategies. The ability to "work on the surface" of the relationship is gone if a BRM leader wants to be relevant. What used to be differentiating is now table stakes, as technology is often not a mystery and leaders are increasingly aware that they can gain advantages through well thought out approaches and tools. A real BRM, functioning as a strategic partner, will collaborate closely with the business teams, understand where they (Collectively) are trying to go, and in parallel, actively engage in industry research to better understand how to guide that business through the landscape of current and emerging technology options.

The strong and relevant BRM will be immersed in the business they support, and working regularly to be relevant and upgrade their technical skills, as well as building a broad and deep network of thought leaders to partner with.

This role is tougher than ever, but the opportunities are correspondingly growing at a feverish pace. I had conversations with one of our young innovators this past month, working with serverless solutions on AWS bringing data together into a Spotfire visualization, and came away so energized around opportunities across our portfolio I had trouble narrowing down on approaches to focus on – but that is the subject of another post though.

For now – as a BRM, please focus on continuous skill building and domain understanding to remain relevant, and help own a seat at the table, not sit at the edges hoping to be included.