

CASE STUDY: Executive Change Support through a Digital Transformation

Summary of our work with the leadership of a niche global business, transforming itself via an ambitious acquisition and digital strategy

Consultant: Nick Mayhew **Keywords:** CEO coaching; digital transformation, post-acquisition integration, executive team coaching, performance improvement, change diagnostic and strategic advice; change leadership capability-building

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Client: CEO, FTSE 250 niche global retail business

Client issue: CEO needing change advice and support to help the business implement an ambitious growth and digital transformation strategy and overcome a) under-performance in a particular Division; ii) executive team dysfunction and iii) sub-optimal change leadership capability.

Client context: The company has increased in value by many multiples since the CEO was appointed 10+ years ago, largely through visionary shifts in customer offering and a series of bold acquisitions. However, 'the centre cannot hold' as legacy aspects from this rapid transition rear their head and the pace of its 'digitalisation' increases, posing fundamental challenges to the business. The CEO realises that he can no longer rely on the leadership gifts that have got him and his business thus far; he needs both advisory support and an expanded leadership skill-set.

Duration/Scope: Three phases of work, each lasting approximately 2-3 months, over two years.

Value-add & Key aspects of the work:

Phase 1: Improving Divisional Under-performance

The CEO and a faction within the Executive team were concerned about this Division's under-delivery against plan and the performance of the Division's Director – particularly as this Division's success was a crucial enabler of the digital strategy. We were asked to get to the bottom of what was going on, propose good ways forward and to advise re. the Division Director's suitability for the job.

Value-add

- i) shared executive clarity re. underlying causes of under-performance and strategic ways forward, which included the wider executive team owning their part of the underlying problem.
- ii) Division Director supported to face critical issues, including his leadership blind-spots – instead of being scapegoated.
- iii) improved staff engagement & issue-resolution across the Division.
- iv) healthier, more productive relationship dynamics between the CEO and Division Director.

Key aspects of the work

- a) trusted 1:1 interview process across the Division, resulting in astute diagnostic report *and* openness/engagement in relation to the findings.
- b) sensitive presentation of findings, first to CEO, then to both CEO & Division Director together – enabling searching and productive consideration of insights and recommendations.
- c) bold facilitation of 'Next Steps' conversation between CEO & Division Director – supporting high-quality action-outcomes, shifts in their working relationship, and high-impact learning/reflection re. their different leadership styles.
- d) Division Director is left feeling focused and supported following our intervention.

Phase 2: Tackling Executive Team dysfunction

The previous piece of work had highlighted a lack of alignment and mutual supportiveness across the Executive Team – which was being exacerbated by the radicalism, speed and funding requirements of the digital strategy. Fragmentation was also resulting from incomplete post-acquisition integration (PAI) work. We were asked to explore what could be done about this – using the period around and during the team’s annual strategy meeting to develop insights and offer some good ways forward.

Value-add

- i) Team members able to voice their concerns and experiences – such that these could be registered and contribute to improved ways of working.
- ii) 2-day strategy meeting runs differently – involving the whole team more in various discussions and naming underlying obstacles to high-performance; this includes overt reflection on leadership dynamics & capabilities around the table.
- iii) Advice & support for break-through executive team restructure, so empowering the digital transformation and better integrating or otherwise managing recently acquired businesses.

Key aspects of the work

- a) a trusted 1:1 interview and engagement process.
- b) succinct but bold feedback and advice to CEO.
- c) witnessing and offering live coaching feedback during the 2-day strategy meeting.
- d) remaining highly available to the CEO, such that he was easily able to access on-going advice and support as he took bold next steps over the following months.

Phase 3: Developing Strategic Change Leadership Capability

The above work led to the realisation that the Executive team was lacking key forms of change leadership awareness and skill, given the ambition and complexity of the transformation they were attempting to lead. This led to both a request for some ‘live’ capability-building at the above-mentioned strategy meeting – and thence the CEO commissioning some more focused 1:1 work for himself to enhance his own change leadership skills.

Value-add

- i) Executive team better understand shift in leadership styles/behaviours/capabilities required across senior leadership population to lead digital transformation well.
- ii) CEO gains considerable insight into his underlying motivations and strengths/weaknesses as a change-leader.
- iii) CEO begins to experiment with more sophisticated forms of team and change-leadership – gradually internalising our simple ‘Five Leadership Qualities’ framework.
- iv) Leadership team and executive colleagues begin to notice some positive differences in CEO style, skill and outcomes.

Key aspects of the work

- a) highly robust but warm/trusting relationship established between CEO and consultant/coach, supported in part by a high-quality relationship with HR Director.
- b) CEO opens to our path-breaking ‘Dominant Needs & Motivations’ psychometric – enabling clear naming and rigorous focus on certain leadership blind-spots, which were inhibiting his successful leadership of change.
- c) CEO responds positively to our ‘Five Leadership Qualities’ framework, enabling him to experiment safely with new approaches and behaviours across the spectrum of his leadership.

Keys to success:

** consultant-client relationship built on meeting well the speed, energy and intelligence of the CEO – with well-calibrated combinations of challenge and support, combining both strategic change advice and personal forms of feedback and coaching;*

** care taken not to grow dependency in the client-consultant relationship, but to encourage responsibility-taking, active leadership and mutual trust throughout the system;*

** our systemic ways of working, which provide deep insight – regarding both the most productive ways to advise/intervene, and the wisest ways forward;*

** leadership psychometric and frameworks which elegantly get to the point, while also offering sophisticated but practical guidance re. specific leadership approaches to experiment with and develop.*

Testimonies:

“Integral Change successfully shared and applied best change leadership theory and practice in our complex business environment. I have found working with Nick an enlightening experience – developing much greater self-awareness of my leadership style, strengths and weaknesses. More importantly, I am now utilizing specific change leadership techniques to deliver on our transformation agenda and achieve much improved results.”

Chief Executive

“I found your Division diagnostic interesting, refreshing and thought-provoking (though in some ways, what a bloody mess!). I’ve also appreciated the way you’ve negotiated our change dynamics and executive politics with such care and skill.” **Division Director**

Contact: For more information about this work, contact Nick Mayhew, Director, via nick@integralchange.co.uk or +44 (0)7753 620811. Conversations with the clients quoted above can be arranged, as appropriate.