



léargas

# Leading Transformational Change Australian Government Department

**CASE STUDY**

## Challenge

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This Australian Federal Department in this case study represented a significant portion of the Federal Government budget. The Department was mandated to find efficiencies while still providing the Australian taxpayers with high-quality and accessible services. A key pillar in its reform program was to shift towards digitalisation and implement shared services of common corporate systems. The IT Division within the Department played a critical role in supporting the delivering of the reform program. Many challenges existed within the IT Division and there was an urgent need to transform to better support the Department's direction. The challenges included:

- IT was seen as the biggest inhibitor to productivity in the Department
- The Division operated in siloes and did not have an integrated approach to servicing the Department. With clients 'doing their own thing', there were many bespoke ICT solutions, creating inefficiency and increased costs
- The Division focused on fixing basic IT problems, rather than offering innovative ways of working
- A culture of compliance and mediocrity prevailed, when the future called for collaboration and accountability
- Leadership instability was present, with four CIO's in the chair in one year

We were called in to support the IT Executive Team in transforming the IT Division to deal with the above challenges.

## Solution

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- **Clarified the Change Strategy:** We engaged the IT Executive Team and Directors in a series of workshops to discuss at a strategic level about how to lead changes across the Division. This resulted in a shared understanding by leaders on the case for change, desired outcomes, change governance, values and guiding principles and conditions for success. The Change Leaders developed a shared vision of achieving ONE IT that provided reliable ICT Services and was a trusted thought leader.
- **Identified key change initiatives:** We identified initiatives to help achieve ONE IT. A change plan was developed for each initiative spelling out clearly its desired outcomes, its contribution to ONE IT, measures of success and included a high-level change roadmap.
- **Communication and Engagement:** Kick off communication occurred at all Staff Forum, followed by regular CIO and Change Team updates. The Change Team launched a Change Intranet site with discussion forums. Regular engagement workshops were held with the Directors to seek their input into shaping the future and on how best to get there. This helped to deepen stakeholders understanding of the change and enhance their commitment.
- **Developed Change Leadership Capability:** We used a combination of group work and individual strategic change coaching to strengthen change leaders' capability. Here we attended to *skills, knowledge and change methodology* required to lead the change. The Change Leaders' Roadmap (Being First) was the change process methodology used to guide this change. Change teams were given an adequate understanding of the model to help drive their change.
- **Developed Conscious Change Leadership:** Leaders engaged in their own development as a core part of the transformation. We approached this work with a conviction that if you want to create different results, then you must build leadership scale and capacity in your organisation. Because transformation requires a shift in mindset and behaviour, leaders must first look at themselves and engage in personal development. The Executive Team participated in a series of facilitated development workshops to:



- Align as executive team to lead the change. To build a shared understanding of their challenges, and what each member brought to leading the change
- Develop their conscious awareness, mindset and emotional intelligence and to wake leaders up to limitations of old mindsets and ways of leading and introduce them to new ways of seeing themselves and approaches to leading
- To optimise this development, members of the executive team also participated in individual coaching to help progress their personal change
- Motivated by the results of this experience, the executives rolled out a leadership development program to the next layer of leaders in the division

## Results

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The change effort unleashed several improvements in the Division.

1. Business performance improved; the number of IT incidents dropped, along with reduced outages and disruption to IT services.
2. The Sponsor (CIO) and the Leadership Team were committed to the new direction and their role in leading the transformation. They recognise their personal responsibility to change themselves, and to overtly model the new behaviours they expected from their staff. This had set the ground for culture change, and a readiness for staff to look ‘inwards’ and address their own mindset and behaviour. This was evidenced by the Divisional Directors willingly participating in a Leadership Breakthrough Program to learn how to consciously show up and address changes in mindset and behaviour that the transformation required.
3. Recent APS Climate Survey showed that employee job satisfaction has improved with higher staff commitment to the workplace
4. Customers were more satisfied especially with communication on ICT Services, the service desk, corporate directory and intranet services
5. The number of successful integrated projects delivered had increased

## Lessons learned

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1. **Engage staff early on the change process.** We realised during the process that there were low levels of understanding and engagement to the change. This was not a symptom of any resistance, in fact there was a healthy appetite and energy for change. Rather, it was a reflection of insufficient dialogue with staff about the change. There was a tendency to hold off engaging with stakeholders until there was sufficient clarity about the change effort. This was a mistake as we missed out on collecting valuable ideas that might have helped progress the change effort in the early stages. High participation and engagement are essential for creating commitment. It deepens stakeholder’s understanding of the change and it gives them an opportunity to provide their input into the design and implementation of the content of the change. This in turn motivates them to support the change. *A key lesson is to engage your stakeholders early on in your change process. Don’t wait until you have all the answers.*
2. **Provide capacity:** A common theme echoed was the lack of time, resources and energy to perform the change work. Leaders wrestled between focusing on their ‘day job’ versus working on the change effort. Operational work took precedence, leaving limited time to lead the change effort. A simple



message is that *adequate capacity needs to be made for the entire life of the change project*. Think about how much time and resources will be required to drive the change? And where will this capacity come from? The change will struggle to succeed if no additional capacity is provided or it is against reducing resources overall.

3. **Clarify the specifics of the change initiatives:** There was a time when the initiatives stalled and lacked progress, due to capacity levels but also in part to them being too amorphous and conceptual. Once we clarified exactly what the initiative was seeking to achieve and its plan to get there, this then created momentum and focus for the Change Leads. *Specify clearly the 'what' and the 'how' of your initiatives, and how they all link together to deliver on the transformation*. This will save significant time and resources. The golden rule is that "if you can't picture it, it is not clear enough".
4. **Align the business and change strategy.** Clearly showing how the change effort supports the business vision and strategy minimises confusion and waste of resources. If the change effort is seen as separate from the business strategy, leaders will wander off to focus on their BAU work, leaving the initiatives to fall short of expectations. *We recommend unifying the initiatives into one overarching theme and showing how it directly supports the business strategy*.
5. **Keep the Change Strategy alive:** how many times have you developed a strategy that is placed in a folder and becomes a 'dead strategy'? For a very brief period, we lost our way, and meandered from the Change Vision. A Change Strategy is developed to guide everyone working on the change in how to lead and carry it out. *Keep the strategy front and centre as you lead the change*. The strategy is a living document that evolves and is course corrected as new information surfaces on the change journey.

## About the Author

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Dr Pauline Lee is the founder of Léargas Pty Ltd, is an Organisational Psychologist, Executive Coach and is a practicing Team Coach. She has more than twenty years of experience providing executive coaching and developing senior leadership teams in the Australian Federal Government sector, private sector and large non-profit organizations. Pauline has published on teams and was a former lecturer on teams at University of Melbourne and University College Dublin. Pauline's understanding of vertical leadership development and the process of transforming mindset and behavior supports her to help leaders achieve breakthroughs in themselves and their organizations.

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