Re-imagining Pharma IT *Transition* in the New World

Transitioning from the old to the new, almost overnight

For businesses today, to be able to adapt quickly in a world prone to rapid and unforeseen changes—environmental, health, economic, societal, political, etc.—, *transition* (and how well it is carried out) is possibly one of the critical aspects and determinants of success. The current times, when the world is going through an unprecedented crisis, bear a testament to this fact. Anything that doesn't possess an inherent ability to instantly recognize change, and adapt and align accordingly is at risk. A core aspect and success criteria of this adapt-and-align imperative is *transition management*.

Traditionally, in context of businesses, transition was all about minimizing risk of disruption to services. Though this pretty much holds good even today, our experience with a recent large-scale transition for one of our customers in the Post CoVID-19 era has added a new dimension to what can and should be achieved for a transition to be successful even in the wake of imminent disruptions at a global scale.

Adapting while a crisis is unfolding

In January 2020, we commenced an engagement that required us to carry out and manage the transition of 500 applications supporting our customer's key business functions ranging from R&D to Sales and Marketing and Corporate Functions. After 2 weeks of rigorously planning and aligning a well-thought-out transition plan to our customer's plan, we encountered an unforeseen situation. Owing to the sudden outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic globally, most countries across the world went into a state of lockdown—it happened almost overnight. We were barely a few weeks into the transition at the time.

What we had in front of us was the stark reality of a new normal, not just for us but for our customer as well. Even in the midst of the rapidly evolving crisis, we assessed the impact to our plan and evaluated options and possibilities to ensure business continuity for our customer.

We were well aware of what was at stake here, given the engagement's impact to our customer's business objectives. Working on a Life Sciences engagement assumed a whole new meaning and significance. For us, it became a human impact engagement. And we related to the immediacy of it all, given the looming health crisis. After all, the engagement had a direct impact on each one of us, not just as professionals but also as common people expecting no less than a miracle from the Life Sciences industry.

The building blocks of managing *Transition* in a rapidly changing world

Until early this year, we were resilient so far as our mindsets and attitudes are concerned, but now, for the first time, we were faced with an ultimate challenge to demonstrate resilience in letter and spirit while in the midst of a humanitarian crisis of unimaginable proportions. Resilience, thus, became a categorical imperative.

Our customer depended on us to be able to accelerate their transition and transformation plans uninterruptedly. And one of the key beneficiaries of this was none less than the Pharma function—the very backbone of our customer's business.

The length and breadth of transition, in this case, spanned all possible aspects for transforming the operating model, post transition which included:

- Fixed Transition duration period – 4.5 month transition for 500+ applications, multiple domains/technology
- End-to-End ownership – all tasks from L2 services onwards till system custodian
- Vendor consolidation – moving from decentralized to centralized operations for ~75 local vendors
- HR Transfer – rebadging of ~110 customer associates
- Shift to a multi provider ecosystem – Collaboration and alignment across service desk, Infrastructure
- Customer IT organization design – Restructured from horizontal IT to vertical IT during ongoing transition
- Service integration – Redefining process framework through a new SI layer

- Setting up the foundation for transformation journey

Transition preparation and robust planning:

Getting off to an early start- The key domain and technical expert teams involved in developing the solution were also involved in preparing the solution and early planning at the very outset. Draft wave-based plans were created for the customer to be used for transition alignment with major stakeholders.

Planning across multiple dimensions involved:

- Right grouping of applications by domain/technology/size/criticality/risk of knowledge flight
- Defining methodology for Inflight project takeover
- Connecting and negotiating with the incumbent vendors
- Defining program governance, reporting, risks
- Service Integration – Process and Tool setup
- Timely Stakeholder Communication

Eliminating the need for physical co-location of stakeholders: From Physical to a Secured, Borderless Virtual

Historically, almost all transitions have had the dependence on the need for various stakeholders to be physically co-located at one place for workshops and knowledge acquisition sessions to happen effectively seamlessly. From a planning perspective, it was initially deemed to be carried out on-site for some months with teams moving towards steady state locations after approaching the service commencement date.

When we entered the Knowledge Acquisition phase of the engagement, almost all countries placed restrictions on national and international travel, thereby compelling us to *think and act* differently, and adapt very quickly to the evolving scenario. Considering the magnitude of the transition, both in terms of team size and locations, we activated and deployed an operating model in the shortest possible time so as not to derail the project's launch date of 1st June, which was non-negotiable. The model, christened Secured Borderless Work Spaces (SBWS), totally eliminated the need for our staff to be physically located in offices and

workplaces for transition-related activities to happen, while ensuring compliance to customer security and quality requirements.

The New Workplace – Secured, yet Borderless

Within 2-3 weeks, teams were enabled across all geographies including India to work remotely and in a secured manner on the planned activities. Nearly 250 associates were on-boarded during the nation-wide lockdown, and nearly 1000+ associates were enabled with the necessary hardware and software infrastructure to work remotely and securely.

Connectivity was established through a combination of TCS VDI environments and Client cloud VDI connectivity. A Task force was setup to not only to resolve all enablement and connectivity issues on a high priority but also to work on new security requirements set forth by our customer for secured connectivity from people's homes.

All this was to safeguard and ensure our compliance to the pre-set and non-negotiable delivery milestones of the Knowledge Acquisition phase, as we had to complete nearly 300 KA sessions every week through a period of 8 -10 weeks for us to be able to meet the overall transition timelines.

Collaborating using new Communication Models

MS-Teams, Skype and Webex and other such communications tools became the back bone for conducting remote transition sessions. Enables associates to takes transition meeting through MS-Teams through their mobile devices while the machines were being dispatched and access and remote connectivity enabled over a period of 2-3 weeks. Using these channels of communication we concluded our Knowledge Acquisition phase with successfully completing 3000 remote sessions over a period of 8-10 weeks, with no deviation from plan and expected quality level on the knowledge acquired.

While we started working remotely, what we realized was the communication and team connect was the only way to success. It was not just communication for remote sessions but a structured and documented way of communication so that we are able to pass the same message to each and every member of our transition team. We did the below to achieve the same:

- Mechanisms defined to work in a remote model for KA, Secondary Support and Primary Support.
- Written guidance on tasks to be executed by transition team
- Well defined templates and checklist
- Strong governance with metric based progress tracking
- Daily sync-up/guidance on process related topics which act as common enablers to execute transition like service management process , tools , milestones and obligations for transition
- Strong focus on documentation of knowledge being acquired

Transparent Governance & Reporting: Proactive, transparent and structured partnership with the customer for driving the transition.

We setup a mirror transition organization to map with the transition team, this ensured we were connected at levels and across.

What we ensured was to keep an open communication channel with customer to provide them with real time updates progress, risk, challenges or any roadblocks.

- Mechanisms defined to work in a remote model for KA, Secondary Support and Primary Support were aligned with customer
- Expectations from customer and incumbent teams called out upfront in joint meetings
- Alignment on transition deliverables and quality gates before the start of each phase
- Mutually agreed parameters measuring the quality of transition and sign offs

Accelerating Digital Transformation Journey

Transition phase sets out the foundation for accelerating transformation, thereby enabling both the Transition and Transformation teams to get better insights on the application landscape:

- Transformation teams simultaneously get application information while Transition is still going on without waiting for steady state to be reached

- Transition team gets more insights into the application, from the Incumbent support team, while capturing details from Transformation perspective
- Early alignment of Transition team onto the future state of the application landscape

This enables organizations to move faster towards their transformation journey and also provides opportunity to better optimize the Future support model with the expected future transformed state of the IT landscape.

Some of the key Transformation Trends in the Industry include:

Cloud Transformation:

Most of the enterprises are now looking towards moving to Cloud to optimizing the infra cost by and brings in new capabilities enabling the organization to move towards the next gen IT. First step towards Cloud Transformation is the **Discovery and Assessment**. This phase involves capturing and assessing application details related to below key areas:

- Technology
- Infrastructure
- Interfaces with other applications

Discovery and Assessment phase details can be captured during the Transition phase itself. While the transition is ongoing, the Cloud assessment of the applications can also be done with the initial assessment report out by the time transition ends which gives clear insights on the Cloud Migration move groups definition for cloud migration and strategy for DC exit.

DevOps:

DevOps is the new way of working where IT Operations are coupled and synergized along with the Development for an application. While the Transition is ongoing, the applications can be evaluated for their potential fitment and business benefit for enabling DevOps way of working. The key points considered for identifying the need for DevOps are:

- Stability of an application
- Future plans for the application (Expected Change Rate)

- Support effort

This coupled with the Cloud Migration, enabled enterprises to better utilize the capabilities provided by the Cloud. Once the initial DevOps pipelines are created, new application onboarding onto DevOps is smooth and faster

Application Portfolio Rationalization:

Another key opportunity which can be coupled along with the Transformation journey is the Application portfolio rationalization. With the applications moving to Cloud and adopting DevOps, they create opportunities for rationalization application landscape by merging Local and Regional applications into one Global instance. This brings in a lot of benefits:

- Reduced support cost for the application
- Reduced infrastructure footprint
- Synergy and consistency in the processes across regions / locations

New models of Service Integration and Management (SIAM):

In the new multi service provider environment, the service stream is no longer limited to process integration and standardization. It transforms the entire steady state operating model for a customer for supplier management and operations:

- Setting common Governance Frameworks for transition , transformation and operation
- Design and implementation of ITIL processes for standardization of service model
- Configuration and setup of tools for managing joint SLA's and vendor collaboration frameworks
- Setup of KPI's for monitoring and reporting

Ensuring Future-readiness

Historically, transition has always been a sensitive topic for organizations. It has always generated interesting debates on the topic of de-risking the impact of

change to operations versus using transition as an opportunity for business transformation.

However, with the changing nature of the world we live in now, the Pharma Industry particularly is at a pivotal point for adopting digital technologies to accelerate product development and rollouts, and it is imperative to start the transformation journey very early on to establish a solid foundation for the future.

Author :

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