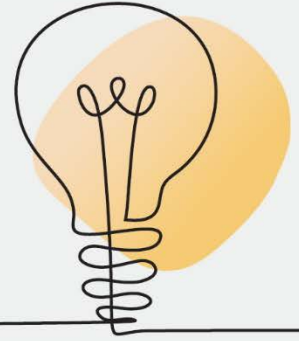




Podcast transcript

Institutional readiness in the face of COVID-19: The experience of National Defence | Resilience



June 2020

Musical intro

Yvon Audette:

Welcome to part two of our podcast on institutional Readiness in the face of COVID-19. I'm your host today, Yvon Audette, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of KPMG's Management Consulting practice in Canada. And over the course of the series, we'll be speaking with Len Bastien, Assistant Deputy Minister and Chief Information Officer, Sophie Martel, Director General of Information Management Technology and Strategic Planning, and Major General Andrew Jayne, Chief of Staff, Information Management, and incoming Cyber Force commander for the Canadian Armed Forces. Len, maybe you can tell us a little bit about yourself and your role at DND.

Len Bastien:

Yeah. Thanks, Yvon. Great to be with you again. Yeah, as you said, I'm the Chief Information Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister for Information Management for National Defense and the Defense team. We have an organization that is mostly located in the national capital region and we have just over 3,000 individuals. We're integrated with our military colleagues and we run the digital fabric of the Department of National Defence.

Yvon Audette:

Thanks Len. And Sophie, maybe you can describe your role.

Sophie Martel:

So I'm a DG working for Len. And in summary, my division leads IMIT transformation efforts, also coordinates departmental information technology security, and performs some engineering and integration work for the Canadian Armed Forces infrastructure.

Yvon Audette:

Merci, Sophie. And last but not least, Major General Jayne. Maybe a little bit about your role.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

Thank you very much, Yvon my name is Andrew Jayne. I'm originally from Nova Scotia and I've been in the military for 33 years. I've been working in Len's organization for the past two years as one of his Director Generals. Now, I'm changing roles to become the Chief of Staff of the Information Management Group. And that really is about running the day-to-day-business of the group as it's been described to you.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

So I'm excited about that, but I'm also excited about becoming the cyber force commander for the Canadian Armed Forces. So thank you for having me.

Yvon Audette:

Well, thank you. Major General Jayne. So just as a quick recap, in part one, we learned about the resilient core of National Defence and heard about their experience and their reaction phase, which we'll hear more about today from Len Bastien, CIO of the National Defence and Sophie Martel Director general of Information Management, Technology, and Strategic Planning.

Yvon Audette:

As a recap, I want to orient everyone around the four phases of KPMG's framework. Just a quick overview to give you some context for the discussion we're about to have with his team members and Len Bastien. Reaction, how to respond to the crisis. Resilience, manage through the uncertainty. Recovery, identify the opportunities. And finally, the new reality, adapt to the new world.

Yvon Audette:

In this installment, as I mentioned, we're going to hear a little bit more about the reaction phase of National Defence and how technology has helped them through those efforts. So, Len, given this context, let's move to the review of what

specific conditions were set before COVID-19 occurred that guided National Defence.

Len Bastien:

Thanks, Yvon. And glad to be back. It's interesting because we've been trying, like many departments in the federal government, to embrace the new digital world that was available to us, but like many departments, our budgets are frugal. And so, we were making progress, but it was incremental and it was finding its way through best effort and off the corner of people's desks.

Len Bastien:

So we had invested quite a bit in cloud over the last few years, where we've evolved or are developed our laboratory capabilities to embrace cloud, but we weren't making significant changes in our legacy environment. And we had dabbled a little bit with the opportunity that Microsoft Office 365 presented, as we had a pilot with a small organization within Defence called the Naval Reserve, which is outside the corporate fabric, if you will. And they were ideal to play with. Low risk, great opportunity, a community that we've worked with before with the Navy.

Len Bastien:

And so, we've been dabbling with some of the technology that was available to us leading up to, ideally what would have been the perfect response to a pandemic crisis and a full business continuity challenge, but we hadn't embraced it to its fullest by the time this pandemic hit us in mid-March.

Yvon Audette:

Major General Jayne, maybe I can get your perspective on the conditions that were set pre COVID-19 to prepare your response.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

Certainly. Thank you very much. I guess, from my perspective, we had an early, I guess, fortunate taste of what it's like to have an abrupt shift from a centralized office way of working to a more dispersed remote model of work. And you may remember this. Some people say that there's some things you learn best in calm and some in a storm. And in our case, it's literally true.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

On the 27th of February, Ottawa had a massive snow storm, some people dubbed the Snowmageddon, and the day before the city of Ottawa was recommending everyone to stay home, if possible. And this caused many people in the capital region to work from home, not just the department and the Canadian Armed Forces. And so, I believe that many organizations on that day, including ourselves, discovered some areas for improvement.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

It was fortunate because it allowed us to satisfy this larger remote working model, but larger than we had experienced in the past. We had strong business continuity plans in place,

but it was clear early on that they were not designed to handle an event of this magnitude or nature.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

And so, we quickly established an operation center based within our information operations division. We manned that 24/7 to ensure that all our critical comms services were functioning and available to support Canadian Armed Forces operations and the departmental business. And as was mentioned, the majority of the workforce stayed at home and only people that were needed to absolutely be at work to support those critical services came in.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

Early on, the reaction, a bit of a lesson that we had, and it's caused us to start looking at it at the end of February to say, as we ramped up to COVID-19 responses, "What do we need to do here? How do we need to respond to be better?" Thank you.

Yvon Audette:

Thank you very much, Major General. Back to Len. You spoke in the previous segment around the reaction phase in mid-March. What happened at Defence overall, both from a civilian and military perspective?

Len Bastien:

In mid-March, leading up to the infamous Friday, the 13th of March, we'd become very aware that this pandemic was going to affect us. It was going to affect the business of Defence. It was going to catch us a little off guard. We had several people deployed. We had international operations going on, on the other side of the world. We had a lot of our members on vacation. It was the Quebec March break. The Ontario March break was looming, and decisions had to be made as to, how are we going to manage the risk?

Len Bastien:

And as I said on the first part of the podcast, primordial to us was to maintain the integrity and the fidelity of the force. If the Canadian Armed Forces were to be called upon to do anything, they had to be healthy and ready to go. And that's expected. Canadians have come to just expect that, when all else fails, the Canadian Armed Forces will come in.

Len Bastien:

And I thought the Ontario government did a great job appreciating the Canadian Armed Forces in an interview I saw where they said, "We finally had to give up pride and call in the Canadian Armed Forces to help us with our long term residential homes." And the response of the Canadian Armed Forces and General Vance was, "Send us to the worst, most challenging, most difficult environment you have, because we're here to help."

Len Bastien:

And that's the response that people expect when you call in for assistance. And to be able to make sure that people were

healthy enough, ready, and not at risk was everything the department was about in the middle of March.

Len Bastien:

You have to admire the fact that, yes, as a department, we were obviously the first maybe to get the BCP mode and send people home, but we had a good reason and it paid dividends in the weeks to follow. So leading up, into, and including the week around where the decisions were being made by the federal government to shut down public service and shut down businesses, and go into full pandemic, almost quarantine-like mode, we had already gotten there and we'd already planned for it.

Len Bastien:

And now, we were already thinking one step ahead, which was, "Okay, what's next? When we get called to action, are we going to have the supply chain ready? Are we going to have the men and women in uniform in a good healthy state to be able to add value or provide assistance?"

Len Bastien:

And so, while everyone else was thinking about, how are they going to get home safely and stay home for a few months, we were thinking about, how are we coming back to work? And so, this became our opportunity, as a CIO organization, when we had to realize, to Andrew's example, that day in February, we were used to connecting anywhere between seven and 8,000 individuals on a snow storm-like day or a typical BCP event that we would manage and have been managing for years.

Len Bastien:

So our legacy equipment, our legacy environment, was able to do that. That day in February told us that's not enough. It's more than that. You need to get connected. We're in trouble. So we had begun managing this early, but we actually engaged our partners.

Len Bastien:

And I got to give a shout out to Shared Services Canada because they recognize, being a badges and bullets department, as they like to label us, being an operational department, that the business of this end was important. And so, we started before we even went into BCP mode, to work with them to increase the bandwidth, to increase the technology available and the capabilities for remote connectivity.

Len Bastien:

And I can tell you, that first day, that Monday after the Friday, the 13th, we had 8,000 people trying to connect. And today, this morning, as a matter of fact, we have 14,500 people connected successfully, working from home in a remote environment. That's more than double than what we could have delivered in February.

Len Bastien:

And to be honest, we can handle even more. As we get ready for whatever happens in the next phase, we're getting ready and trying to stay in front of the curve. So I know I've gone a bit over answering your question of what it felt like in the middle of March, but it's an interesting anecdote when you put it all together.

Yvon Audette:

That's terrific. Thank you, Len, such a great story. Maybe we'll pivot over to Sophie. Sophie, how did the move to Microsoft 365 start? What was the reason, and how's it going?

Sophie Martel:

Well, as Len and Andrew mentioned, a large portion of the DND population are working from home so, and due to limited remote access capacity to the enterprise network, only selected individuals are able to connect remotely. Now, we've got way more than in February, but it's still far from all the people we have in DND/CAF.

Sophie Martel:

So, as such, this means that a large portion of DND to find other means to work and collaborate. So we've been successful in increasing connection to the enterprise network, but Office 365 is also being deployed in order to distribute DND-issued mobile and portable device. So we want people to stay home. We want people to stay safe. And so, we're trying to think outside of the box to give them means to work and collaborate.

Len Bastien:

Sophie's being very humble because really the story is incredible because what she's missing is the benefit of having another option. So our corporate access remotely is very secure. It's through VPN. We wouldn't let anybody and anything connect through that because you're connected to our corporate backbone at that point and you can access our corporate system. It's actually probably more secure than working at a desktop inside our buildings.

Len Bastien:

So we are privileged that, and although we've increased the volume and been able to handle more connections, there was still a large community out there who didn't need to be connected to the corporate backbone, but would benefit from being connected to each other, and could share data, and share information, and generate product that would benefit their work and their business.

Len Bastien:

And so, the pilot we had going with the Naval Reserve and said, "If we took a couple of risks, we could probably deploy that to a more broad community inside Defence, as long as they could work in an unclassified way to start, and don't mind onboarding, and logging in, and putting a password and that's a little different than their corporate password."

Len Bastien:

And we said, "Yeah, see what happens, go for it." And she really took the reins from there. And like I said, that was early days, mid-March, where she said, "Do you want us to do this?" I would have said, in normal time, that may be in 18 months, I would have seen a couple of thousand people using a cloud Office 365 offering. Sophie, why don't you tell us how many accounts and on-boarded individuals you've got as of today?

Sophie Martel:

Yeah. So today we're close to 80,000 accounts provisioned. So I have to say that we're really proud about that. The second division, which is a part of the Army, is currently using Office 365 as their op laser, which is the COVID operations principal network tool. So they're using Office 365 to do their work. And that was not available a few weeks ago. So yeah, we're quite proud of that.

Len Bastien:

10,000 on-boarded individuals, any given time, six to 7,000 individuals using that environment right now. And we haven't

even begun business resumption. So I just wanted to throw in on that a little bit. I thought Sophie was understating how much her and her team leaned into getting us access to that environment, even if it was meant to be interim or in response to a crisis, it speaks volumes to when the conditions are lifted and we can be as agile as we need to be, things in the government can actually happen very quickly. So I'm very proud of the team, as you might be able to tell.

Yvon Audette:

Thank you for sharing your rollout experience with Microsoft 365. It reminds me a little bit of the experience we had where KPMG Canada decided to roll out Microsoft 365, including Teams to over 9,000 users. We had a small pilot before then and we rapidly deployed. What we found were fundamental enabling technologies to make sure our business did not miss a beat through these challenging times. And we believe strongly that you'll be the north stars for other to follow. Thank you.

Muical exit