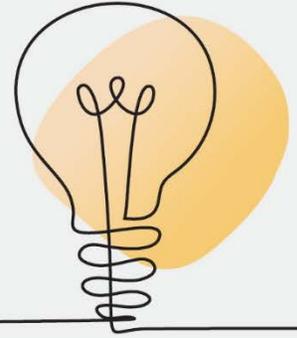


Podcast transcript

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



June 2020

Musical intro

Yvon Audette:

Welcome to part four and our final segment of our podcast, Institutional Readiness in the face of COVID-19: The Experience of National Defence. I will be your host today, Yvon Audette, and I am the Chief Operating Officer of KPMG's Management Consulting Practice in Canada. I'm here with my colleague, Maria McKay, a Senior Manager in our People and Change Practice. And over the course of this 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. Maybe we can start with you Len, just tell us a little bit about yourself and your role.

Len Bastien:

Thanks, Yvon. I hope everyone's well. My name is Len Bastien, I'm the Chief Information Officer for National Defence, and I've been with the defense team for many years and I cherish my job. I think I have the best job with the best team. And so happy to share with you some of our thoughts on how Defence has come through this pandemic crisis.

Yvon Audette:

And Sophie, can we hear a little bit about your role?

Sophie Martel:

Yes. Thanks, Yvon. I'm Sophie Martel and I'm a Director General working for Len Bastien. I've been with Defence for 31 years, and now my role is to lead the division that is responsible for IMIT transformation and to coordinate departmental information technology security, as well as performance engineering and integrations efforts for the Canadian Armed Forces.

Yvon Audette:

Thank you. And Major General Jayne.

Major General Andrew Jayne:

Yvon, thank you very much for having me. My name is Andrew Jayne. I've been in the military for 33 years now. I've been working in the CIO organization for the past two years as one of Len's Director Generals. I'm now fortunate to be changing roles within that same organization to become the Chief of Staff of the Information Management Group. And really that means running the business of the organization for Len. I'm also pleased and honored to become the Canadian Armed Forces Cyber Force Commander. Thanks for having me.

Yvon Audette:

Well, welcome to all of you and thank you for taking the time for this final series of our podcasts. In previous segments, we learned about the resilient core of National Defence and heard about your experience in the reaction phase. In the subsequent segment we learned about the National Defence's recovery story. And in this final segment, we'll explore the new reality phase with Len, Sophie, and Major General Jayne. Welcome back everyone.

Yvon Audette:

As a recap, we want to orient everyone around the KPMG four phases, or as we call the four R's. I'm just going to give an overview here to give context to the discussion with Len and his team on how they managed through these phases themselves. The first phase reaction, how to respond to the crisis, followed by resilience, manage through the uncertainty, recovery, identify the opportunities, and finally new reality, adapt to the new world. Maria.

Maria McKay:

Len, I'm wondering if you could share with us what conditions were set when COVID-19 occurred, that will guide

National Defence's approach to envisioning and building the new reality?

Len Bastien:

Thanks, Maria. The way Defence is reacting was somewhat predetermined by the way we were getting ready for other things. We moved our National Headquarters recently, we had mobilized almost 9,000 people to a new address. So we were dealing with an opportunity to look at the workforce and look at the way the workforce was employed.

Len Bastien:

So some of the fundamental that came to light during this crisis were the fact that we've been dealing with a significant change in our workforce and our workplace environment. That's key. What the pandemic made us realize from our people perspective was our ability to accommodate. It's one thing to work from home for a day on a snow day, or if there's a strike maybe as long as a week, but we spent (time) away from our offices and our chairs and our properly positioned keyboards and mics for several months, and so that has become a real significant and important issue for us.

Len Bastien:

So the more we lean into these events, and as long as this one has been happening and going on, we're starting to become a little bit more attuned to the physical wellbeing of our staff and our workforce, but also the mental health and making sure people have the opportunity to express themselves and ask for assistance if they need some.

Len Bastien:

It's interesting, I had a couple of individuals approach and while we've been working from home, it never crossed my mind, but it made perfect sense after they made the request. "Well, you know what, Len, I need a mental health day." And I'm like, "Yeah, take a day. That's what sick days are for." When you're not feeling well, you should. And I just realized that even in a remote work environment or a different way of working in this modern approach, perhaps to a workplace, there are stresses, there are pressures, there are events that lead to overwhelming times in your life that you need to deal with it.

Len Bastien:

And it's not because you're working from home, it's a free lunch or an easy ride. And so we need to be very conscious as we move forward into this new reality of how we manage our workforce, how we stay connected with them, and how do we keep a pulse on their mental and physical wellbeing? Very important.

Maria McKay:

It sounds like you've really got the employee experience front and center, and really thinking about the key aspects of the socio-cultural environmental and digital needs. Well done.

Maria McKay:

I've got another question for you, given the impacts of the pandemic on workforce and workplace expectations, the way people work, and as you plan for the new reality, can you share with us how the CIO organization will contribute to National Defence's approach to people strategy for both civilian and military so that you can continue to deliver on your mandate and achieve digital workplace transformation outcomes in COVID-19 times and beyond, so that no one is left behind?

Len Bastien:

Great question, Maria. And it's fundamental to why we really wanted to do this podcast with you. Interestingly enough, your four Rs are very relevant and I like your last one better than our own. Our last R is restoration. And restoration suggests some kind of legacy or what was normal before this event. Your last one is new reality. And what does that offer us? And it's been said, and I'll plagiarize it, never waste a good crisis.

Len Bastien:

So now that we're coming out of this, we're looking at what is the art of possible. I believe we have Defence teams several rungs up on the voyage towards a digital workplace, a more modern work environment, and a more modern way of working in general, that I don't want to lose because we're going back and we're trying to restore things. I don't necessarily want to restore everything the way it was before.

Len Bastien:

I like what I'm seeing. I'm seeing a digital workforce that is working in the cloud. I'm seeing an energized workforce that are collaborating and connecting virtually, sometimes even for just social purposes like coffee breaks or after work, there's shared beverages using the environment we've provided to them as a CIO organization. I warn my team when I dream of these things, you don't have to worry too much, but when I start to imagine them, they can become real. For Sophie, Andrew, and their teams and their colleagues and my leadership team, the conditions are right.

Len Bastien:

My effort is going to be to make sure we set all the conditions for success so they can continue what they've started and we come out of this with, not restoration, but a new reality for our workforce that lets them work from anywhere that they can access the corporate environment that they need to, because frankly, some of our legacy stuff is just a bridge too far to imagine, but the ability for them to work either from home or from a desktop inside of one of our buildings and have the same user experience, and that can only be enabled by the work that the teams have done to bring Office 365 to a reality and get the business onboarded and get the business processes transformed to embrace that new capability. So I'm very excited.

Len Bastien:

I've already heard departments and other CIO colleagues in town suggest that they're going to stay, to some level, very remote, very agile, and very capable. I've been more than impressed with the quality of work and the quantity of work that can be generated by my workforce, by my team. So I just want to help our HR leadership team and my boss take every opportunity to change and take advantage of the transformation and the evolved and more modern work environment that is available to us going forward. I'm very excited about it.

Maria McKay:

Thank you so much for that answer. Words that came to mind when you were speaking was re-invigoration, renewal, rebirth, a new take on a way of doing business. So it's very exciting that you're thinking about all those things. I'm going to ask Sophia a question now. You have shared stories and it's clear from the comments from Len, you've got a proven ability to lead and manage a very quick and successful move of your workforce to new digital capabilities. We'd really like to hear what lessons stand out to you related to leadership and teams.

Sophie Martel:

So first I strongly believe that building a cohesive leadership team is the first critical step that an organization must take if it's have the best chance of success. However, even with this cohesive leadership team, the team is working on the capabilities and the people who will be using them matters. In reality, the success of defense depends on our people. They are our most important assets and they are the core of Defence policy, Strong, Secure, Engaged.

Sophie Martel:

When employees are not properly engaged, it removes the compelling context for working together. In the case of Defence's Office 365, we were able to manage a very quick and successful move by creating a common sense of purpose and a context for interdependency between the various teams. We also had clear, common goals shared by the entire team, and a set of short term objectives. And we were also reporting progress to Mr. Bastien, to Len, on a daily basis.

Maria McKay:

Thank you, Sophie. Common goals and objectives, a focus on people, teams, and a cohesive leadership team, quite a combination. Major General Jayne, can you build on what Sophie shared?

Major General Andrew Jayne:

Maria, thank you very much. I would just say that all of our team members want to contribute. They're incredibly motivated no matter where they are. And I believe that the ability for all of our team members to connect remotely and securely from anywhere that they can establish a wifi connection has tremendous potential for enabling the CAF, or the Canadian Armed Forces, whether they're responding to a flood in the Canadian community, working part time as a

reservist anywhere across Canada, or undergoing training and education to become better in a chosen profession or career path, either here at home or abroad somewhere, mobilizing and digitizing this Defence team has huge potential and it's just a step in the right direction.

Yvon Audette:

Truly insightful. A real thank you to everyone. Len you were talking about really keeping in mind the mental health and physical wellbeing of your staff. I'm reminded of a couple of comments around the structure we set it set up to make sure that we had personal interaction with our staff across the country, what was brought to light because we wanted to make sure we had a sense of how our people were doing.

Yvon Audette:

I reflect on a call that I had last week, where one of our colleagues mentioned that she had a father that was quite ill and lived in France and was quite sad, frankly, because she's unable to visit her father in this time. We had another colleague that was planning to have a wedding at the end of May and unfortunately had to postpone that. So this new reality, really, it's important to stay connected to our people. And I'm glad you shared your experience and you definitely had me reflect on some of the experiences we had.

Len Bastien:

I just want to take the opportunity to thank you and Maria and the team behind you who helped produce this and our team behind us who helped get us already and the communications team and the event management team who are all over this and always on top of our game.

Len Bastien:

Thank you for the opportunity. CIO organizations typically don't have the spotlight on them because they're meant to be in the background, they're meant to make sure things are working. As long or things are working, they're often not a topic of conversation unless there's an opportunity for something like this, where there's been a crisis or a transformation.

Len Bastien:

That resonated with me from my time with Defence in that it used to be the way they look at ADM/IM and CIO organization at Defence. I can tell you honestly today that's not the filter they have in their eyes when they're looking across the boardroom table, because of the work team has done, what Sophie has done, and her team with Andrew has led in the cyber, and what other DGs on my team have done in operations, have put us at the table with the light on us saying, what are you going to do for me tomorrow, because what we're seeing is pretty good.

Len Bastien:

I look across the Public Service. There's a lot of great stories of how the Public Service has rallied and come to the table with great response during this crisis. And a lot of CIO organizations out there. And I want to tip my hat to them as

well. We've all put ourselves in a very unique position. So thank you for taking the time to let us talk about it. I hope all the best to you and the team as we resume, whatever new normal looks like. And we look forward to chatting with you again.

Yvon Audette:

Thank you, Len. And thank you to your team. It's very clear that the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces understands the need to be institutionally ready for anything. And I'm convinced more than ever that you will be the North Star for others to follow. We have appreciated you joining us in this four part series in institutional readiness and resilience at the heart of Defence.

Maria McKay:

Thanks to you all, and in case you're not hearing it enough right now, definitely remember your health, physical, mental, emotional, and wellbeing and that of your loved ones are the most important priorities right now. We're definitely all in this together. We have to work together so that no one is left behind. Thanks for listening.

Muical exit