

# Continuing the Strategy Execution Journey at BTS's 2012 East Coast Client Conference



## Exploring Strategy Execution from a Multi-Year, Enterprise-Wide Perspective

At last year's client conference, we explored BTS's experience in driving effective [strategy execution](#) through three critical elements: Alignment, Mindset and Capability. This year, at the **2012 East Coast Client Conference**, we continued the learning journey and explored strategy execution from a multi-year, enterprise-wide perspective designing and deploying Strategy Execution and Learning Journeys.

A select group of senior professionals from leading organizations joined us at the Andaz in New York City on June 7th-8th. With an exciting line-up of presentations and an elite group of attendees, it was a unique opportunity to hear and share best practices, network with peers, and experience innovative methodologies that are reshaping the learning landscape.

## At the Start of a Journey, Focus on Where You Are Going and Then How to Get There

Per Stahle, BTS Senior Vice President, kicked-off the event with a warm welcome; review of the conference

agenda; and introduction to the BTS perspective on the drivers of strategy execution. Learning and Execution Journeys accelerate execution and deliver superior results by **Aligning** stakeholders to the differentiated strategy, building the **Mindset**, and developing the pivotal **Capabilities** to execute the strategy.

## Business Simulations Enable More Effective Leadership Development

Susan Burnett, the Senior Vice President of Talent and Organization Development at Yahoo!, further advanced this theme. In her presentation titled "*Business Simulations: A Leadership Development Opportunity*", Burnett confirmed the value of multi-phase, enterprise-wide learning journeys. Drawing on her past experiences at HP and Gap, as well as her current role at Yahoo!, she discussed the value of [business simulations](#) and experiential learning for developing and enabling leaders to succeed in today's volatile, uncertain and complex business environment. Illuminating fundamental [leadership development](#) skills and linking them directly to the business simulation, Burnett concluded with a quote from Bob Johansen, Distinguished Fellow

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Institute for the Future: "In today's world, immersive learning, experiential learning, is the pedagogy of choice, because it's not just a fixed body of knowledge that you want to transfer. It's a whole contextual set of lessons that you have to learn almost at the muscle memory level, to make them real."

## Practicing Strategy Execution Without Risking Real Customers and Shareholder Value

The conversation continued with a presentation by Aetna's Ted Fleming, the Head of Aetna University. Titled "A *Ten Year Strategy Execution Journey at Aetna*", Fleming led us through the company's main business strategies from 2002 through 2012. He discussed the evolving alignment, mindset and capabilities that contributed to effective strategy execution and the strategic role of BTS in helping Aetna execute their evolving strategy over the past 10 years. Fleming also shared his experience in overcoming critical challenges, including making HR a strategic lever of the business; building engagement before, during, and after program initiatives; driving change that is sustainable; and quantifying success.

## All Talent Development Should be Aligned to the Strategy

The discussion did not end there. BTS wrapped up the first day of the conference with presentations from Tim Blakesly, Managing Director of the Leadership and Management Practice, Rick Cheatham, Partner, BTS's Global Sales Practice and Dave Ackley, Senior Vice President & Managing Director of BTS Interactive.

The topics ranged from why leadership development now; the path to [sales transformation](#) and sales strategy execution; and how to create a strategy execution ecosystem with connected offerings.

That evening, the group relaxed and enjoyed BTS-themed cocktails and a gourmet private dinner, complete with Swedish traditions and toasts.

## The CLO as a CEO's Strategic Tool

Reconvening the following morning for the final day of the conference, Ray Vigil, Adjunct Professor at Colorado State University and former Humana CLO, kicked-off the day with a presentation titled "*Creating Intangible Value through Learning and Innovation*". Sharing his 10-year collaborative learning journey, he admitted that it is wickedly difficult to develop creative and innovative leadership. Nevertheless, Vigil stressed that learning can be a powerful lever to help CEOs achieve effective strategy execution; learning can transform organizations to realize innovation aspirations; and learning can create game-changing value for their organizations by focusing on execution. Based on his extensive experience, he identified experiential learning and business simulations as a powerful enabler to achieve this full potential.

## Creating Behavioral Change Requires a Sustained Journey

Eric Dingler, CLO and National Director for Learning and Talent Development at Deloitte Consulting, added to the

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discussion through his presentation titled, *"The Way to Client Centricity: Accelerating and Sustaining Lifts in Mindset, Action and Results"*. Dinger focused on the challenge of creating sustainable change in a complex organization and shared Deloitte's systems view and ecosystem approach. Leveraging multi-media content, integrated tools, and several platforms, he shared how the company is implementing and embedding a simple vision to transform the organization and institutionalize a new set of behaviors.

## Innovation Can Be Taught to Sustain Competitive Advantage and Create Value

To conclude the 2012 East Coast Client Conference, we explored the top challenge for today's CEOs globally—Innovation.<sup>1</sup> Peter Mulford, BTS's Executive Vice President and Head of the Strategy Alignment & Business Acumen Practice, led the conversation with a compelling presentation. He began by sharing BTS's distinct point of view: [Innovation](#) is not an issue of creativity or resource, but it is a skill like any other business capability. It can be taught, learned and mastered to sustain competitive advantage and create value. Mulford explored the traditional organizational challenges and obstacles to innovation; outlined the historical process of innovation in comparison to today's new approach; and introduced essential innovation capabilities, including expansionist skills and reductionist skills, and leadership behaviors that enable both skills. The group then engaged in a BTS-designed interactive, experiential learning exercise to understand how

these innovation capabilities can be developed within an organization. At the end of the discussion, one participant exclaimed, "That was amazing—the idea that innovation can be taught opens up new possibilities for my organization."

## **Every Journey was Different, But a Common Theme Was Shared: Learning and Execution Journeys Are Powerful**

While the presentations were focused on a unique learning and execution journey specific to each individual organization, three common themes emerged throughout the two-day conference.

1. Most conference attendees recognized that we are living in remarkable times, in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world. The global financial crisis exposed poor management skills and weak business models. Today, as we emerge from the crisis, the business environment remains challenging. Volatility is increasing. The future seems uncertain and ambiguous. The global business environment is complex than ever. No matter the industry, organizations can no longer be as confident that market leadership today will be sustained over the long-term.
2. In this business environment, innovation and human capital are recognized as pivotal drivers of strategic success, and creating a culture of innovation and improving leadership development are considered critical enablers of successful execution. For our

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conference attendees, these business issues are a focus of their strategic initiatives. To enable effective strategy execution, they strive to embed both innovation and leadership development in their organizations.

3. Learning and execution journeys are critical to effectively build new leadership and innovation capabilities. Business simulations and experiential-based learning that enable leaders to practice the right behaviors drive the greatest impact. Articulating the value of business simulations at their organizations, one CLO asked, "A simulation is a significant investment. Can we afford it?" A CEO responded, "Can we afford not to?"

## The End of One Journey Can Be the Beginning of the Next

Wrapping up the conference with a quick summary and gracious thank you, Per Stahle turned to the conference attendees and asked for their feedback and perception of the two-day client conference. One participant reflected, "This was extremely valuable. I was especially interested to learn how organizations are using several building blocks and evolving solutions to create continuity. That's what I am looking for." Another senior business leader agreed. "It was exciting to discover all of the different ways simulations can be built and leveraged to make learning initiatives more robust." Finally another individual commented, "This conference challenged my thinking and opened up what is

possible in terms of applying business simulations and experiential learning to drive behavior change."

To end the event, the group enjoyed the beautiful weather with a private cruise around the New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty before heading their separate ways.

For those of you who were able to attend the East Coast Client Conference, thank you. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we did! If you were unable to be there this year, we look forward to seeing you at one of our future events.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Conference Board CEO Challenge 2012: Risky Business - Focusing on Innovation and Talent in a Volatile World", The Conference Board, Inc., 2012, 5.

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BTS is a world leading strategy implementation firm that accelerates execution by building the alignment, mindset and capability needed to deliver superior business impact. The company leverages customized business simulations and experiential learning initiatives to help clients achieve better results, faster.

For more information, please visit [www.bts.com](http://www.bts.com).