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TECH & INNOVATION

Get your company in shape by redefining how people work

Bringing together business, technology, and experience can help you outlast and outperform the competition.

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Moving at digital speed, thin margins, nonstop competition, disruption…and a pandemic? It's not easy to run a business these days. Many leaders are eager to adopt ways of working that will help them become elastic, adaptable, and able to weather bigger storms.

The annals of management offer various approaches — theories that have long thrived on the changing needs of leading a business. In the past, executives turned to concepts such as total quality management to identify efficiencies. Then came enterprise resource planning software. Practices like Six Sigma led to process improvement. But none of these strategies were holistic. Given the all-encompassing nature of today's challenges, executives need speed-to-market and value — and they need to achieve them in weeks or months, not quarters or years. To get there, they should pursue the best ideas faster. That's not the job of one department, or a single executive.

Enter BXT, a new way of working, through which *business, experience, and technology* blend seamlessly to deliver results. BXT redefines how people engage with one another and with clients, allowing them to focus on better outcomes. This is significant, because research by PwC found that 84 percent of companies that get the most payback from their digital investments (including 17 percent higher profit margin growth) mandate change in how their people work.

Of course, you don't start out by attempting to run a marathon. Think of the BXT approach as like getting in shape. You hone skills, build better experiences, and adopt smarter, more effective business strategies. The payback is increased flexibility, discipline, clarity, and stamina.

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Get moving by reframing the problem. Any new fitness routine starts with putting one foot in front of the other. You identify what's holding you back and then set clear goals. Similarly, with BXT, you first pinpoint the problem. If people listen closely, challenge assumptions, and engage creatively, they can uncover what they need to focus on.

Next, it's helpful to confront what makes people uncomfortable, by asking probing questions and working as a team to address thorny issues. Set aside status, title, and tenure in favor of the best ideas and perspectives. Focus on reframing how the team works and collaborates effectively, using real-time feedback to make swift adjustments, and build on the creative ideas that result. With a little practice, you'll begin to view problems from different angles and prioritize what's most important. You'll develop the strength to push past temporary setbacks and put the wants and needs of the end-user at the heart of every decision.

Increase your pace by exploring bold ideas. Once you get comfortable moving, you should try to push yourself to add time, speed, or resistance. If you stay at a basic walk, you likely won't get far. To continue improving, many turn to trainers or classes to keep themselves motivated to reach fitness goals.

With BXT, the team serves as the trainer or get-fit community. People strengthen their ability to push harder by using proven techniques to capture bold thinking, spark curiosity, and build connections among those who might not work together in a typical structure. It's done purposefully, with activities and techniques designed to foster these behaviors.

And it goes beyond focusing on output, because the journey is just as

important. Train haphazardly and you can forget that marathon; poor form can quickly lead to setbacks or injury. How the job is done, who's involved, and how different perspectives are unified (virtually or in person) are critical elements. And the true power of this approach is revealed when you can tap into your people's hidden talents. Maybe the guy in development with coding expertise has a brilliant idea about user experience or strategy. Perhaps the new intern has experience with the product you're working on.

This ethos came into play at AXS Lab, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people living with mobility impairments. The company wanted to overhaul the user experience of AXS Map, a platform tapping into crowdsourcing to rate the accessibility of venues such as restaurants, coffee shops, and grocery stores. Technology experts, creative designers, and people with mobility issues collaborated to better understand the challenges and make using the map an intuitive, engaging experience — resulting in a digital product that people could easily navigate and benefit from.

Smash your plateau by leading with curiosity. Fitness plateaus get a bad rap, but they mean you've adjusted to the demands of your initial routine. That said, if you want to build momentum, you have to keep pushing. Elite athletes know the power of questioning the status quo, leading teams with curiosity and empathy, and listening to their coaches. And they certainly don't go it alone. Trainers, fellow athletes, and family all contribute to any individual's progress.

You adopt the same attitude with BXT, which encourages you to challenge those around you for the greater good, sparking curiosity and new ideas. This helps companies focus on creating something that stands out and tells their story, and then adopt the best strategy to get results.

This practice came into play when Chipotle's loyalty program needed reimagining. In most companies, loyalty programs are a customer service or marketing department responsibility. But when the team asked deeper questions, it became clear this wasn't a one-department issue. Executives and teams in customer service, finance, human resources, store operations, technology, and elsewhere got to work finding (and owning) the solution.

Chipotle dug into what change meant for everyone, whether customers or cashiers, got the right technology connected behind the scenes, worked to

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understand the customer and employee experience through hours of inquiry, and helped build a connected strategy. The result: The reimagined loyalty program helped increase digital sales by a whopping 99 percent in the second quarter of 2019, year-over-year. The company's investment also made it easier to pivot to remote ordering, delivery, and curbside pickup as the pandemic took hold.

Find your stride by telling your story. Anyone on a fitness journey has probably looked longingly at a magazine ad, an Instagram photo, or even another 6 a.m. jogger and tried to mold him- or herself after that "perfect" image. But part of getting results is figuring out what you love, and you're more likely to hit your stride by sticking to your goal. Not a fan of weightlifting? Hate yoga? Can't stand running? That's OK. This is your story, not anyone else's.

In BXT, transformation hinges on having the courage to stay curious and find ways to drive business forward — in your own way. The key is to break through perceived barriers to see the big picture and understand the real story, rather than the expected one. Using narratives can tap into imagination and ignite curiosity and action through co-creation and iterating. It's also critical to be able to give up what isn't working and focus on what's essential for the business now.

Take Wyndham Destinations, whose timeshare sales process hadn't changed since the 1980s. It wasn't digitized, although potential customers were more connected than ever. The time it took for people to fill out tour paperwork was cumbersome, and data was stored in multiple places, often on paper that subsequently had to be shredded. The entire sales process was siloed, requiring multiple handoffs.

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Wyndham knew it had to find its own stride, not mimic competitors or other resort chains. The company started by bringing internal stakeholders together, placing customers and salespeople at the center. It completely redesigned the sales process — an undertaking that would typically take a year or two — in less than a year, with 14 different rollouts at 115 locations. What's more, it shortened booking time by 70 percent.

Keep up the momentum by placing the growth mindset at center stage. The thing about getting in shape is that there's no end. You'll never say, "I'm finished. I don't need to exercise anymore." When your routine gets too comfortable, you shake it up and challenge yourself to leave your comfort zone, because you believe you're capable of significant change.

The same goes for BXT, where you're challenged to reach higher, trek farther, and keep improving, grounded in the belief that you and your team are prepared to tackle any obstacle. You are constantly reassessing and taking stock: Is your business strategy still solid? Have you considered all users? Why are you feeling stuck? Correcting issues as they arise, not at next week's status meeting, helps you stop the grind, recalibrate, and get to the finish line faster.

Here, we can use our own company as an example. When COVID-19 ushered in sweeping quarantines and office closures, PwC organized an internal virtual hackathon, similar to what might be done for a client. Business strategists teamed with developers, salespeople, user experience designers, wordsmiths, legal staff, and others — more than 200 participants in all. It was a stretch, even for us, to invite so many people to the table from so many functional areas. But that

was the point. We needed more perspectives to expand our thinking and see the problem in a broader way — free from our own individual teams or mentalities.

The result: a product called Check-In that gives businesses the data needed to plan, precisely trace contacts, and react confidently amid COVID-19 and other unforeseen disruptions. And we released a beta version to clients in just eight weeks — our fastest product launch yet.

Celebrate success by focusing forward. It's good to reward yourself when you achieve your goal, whether it's reaching a health milestone or beating your personal record. But then it's time to move on to another goal, and then another after that.

Similarly, the end of a project isn't the end of BXT. The goal is to continuously improve. What you learn today helps you tomorrow, but you can (and should) revel in a job well done. In business, that often includes celebrating increased revenue, productivity, confidence, and the ability to get to market faster. It's the proverbial popping of the bubbly.

As you practice BXT and learn to work in ways that may feel foreign at first, the approach will become second nature. You'll find you're not as reactive or panicked as you used to be. You'll be feeling strong and confident, and ready for your next challenge. +

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