

## STRONG STARTS AND TRANSITION SUCCESS

There are critical turning points in a career that require extra support to ensure success. Despite what some may say about internal moves being easier, it's risky to think that insiders need any less support. Insiders face the dilemma of knowing the culture and how to get things done, yet are under intense scrutiny to quickly get results. It is expected that they will exceed 'break-even' by contributing more value than the corporate investment in their career. Operating at a higher level challenges their identity, way of thinking and how they achieve results. Taking a more strategic and integrated approach to their transition ensures greater effectiveness.

## TRANSITION ROADMAP AND SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS

**Insight:** New hires or on-ramping, promotions including Partner and Managing Director appointments all require deliberate practices to manage the real business and personal impact of these changes.

**Solution:** The right transitional roadmap can avoid relying on a 'sink or swim' approach. Providing a holistic framework can accelerate the transition process while producing better results for both the individual and the organisation. Focus should be on the specific business challenges, providing organisational insight, the executive's own situation, building quality coalitions and connecting with key individuals. It may go without saying but prepare for client introductions by giving consideration to whether they are seen one-on-one or with other key people - either way you need to take account of the signals it sends.

**Insight:** The speed and competitiveness of business places great anxiety on transition managers to make immediate contributions.

**Solution:** Often the new leader is expected to complete a diagnosis of the business and the organisation at a systemic level; have broad and frank dialogues to reach agreement on the business situation, understand communication styles, clarify expectations, negotiate for resources; assess the team; build relationships and identify when and how to achieve momentum through early wins. The transition roadmap and coaching plans must clarify where a new leader should be and in what time frame.

**Insight:** Women face compounding risks as their leadership and authority is in the spotlight when taking on an executive role, particularly if women are not represented widely in senior ranks.

**Solution:** Group dynamics may be the most significant transition issue for women in these roles. Those who bring difference to the executive group are often labelled and it becomes harder for them to be heard and accepted for their divergent viewpoint. Assimilation, on the other hand, can lead to group think. Rather than self-editing their comments or giving in, these women need to be highly resilient as they forge their place in the group. This is easier with open support by the CEO or Chair.

**Insight:** Transitions also disrupt the organisation. Every mid-level managerial transition negatively affects more than twelve others.

**Solution:** Leadership transitions require strong change management skills and an astute view into the organisation at a systemic level, not just the business. Connecting to information-rich networks that exist within the organisation is important to help the executive get things done and understand the people dynamic.



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**Insight:** While a major role is an important development experience, it is one of personal vulnerability due to unfamiliar situations; interacting with new people, including a new boss; and the testing of their self-efficacy. Recovering from a bad start is a hard task.

**Solution:** Help the executive avoid the typical communication, cultural, political traps and blind spots of new leaders. These include attempting to do too much, avoiding conflict, not acting quickly on underperformers; not being tapped into the formal and informal information flows; coming in with 'the answer' or a lack of regard for how things happen; and alienating key, needed people. Poor cultural adaptation is the most common new hire failure.

**Insight:** Being pulled in many directions during the early weeks and months of a new role is common. Perspective and context are important in achieving quick wins and deciding what matters most.

**Solution:** Focus is about what really matters, where time is spent and sticking to a 'not-to-do' list. A 2x2 strategic matrix can prioritise actions and high impact outcomes. It also helps to ask: "What are 'wins' in this culture and how are they achieved?" 'How' is as important as 'what'. Then consider timing. Connecting well may be a win, but over time this win must then become a concrete, focused initiative that generates business value.

**Insight:** Transitions require the executive to rethink their identity and how they take up the authority and influence in their new role.

**Solution:** Help them rethink their presence, the impressions they make, what others say about them when they are not in the room, how they find their own voice and what new behaviours and new thinking are needed. It is often helpful to consider the question: "What type of leader do you want to be and how will you make it happen." A consult-and-decide style establishes authority while listening and learning. Rethinking who to delegate to, what to communicate and who to connect with are critical decisions.

## FROM INSIGHTS TO ACTION

An effective transition plan will:

1. Maximise business knowledge; align expectations, focus on culture and build political connections
2. Clearly articulate the real business situation and agreed solutions
3. Schedule regular feedback sessions to help the executive know what they should keep doing, start doing or stop doing
4. Ensure early, meaningful exposure to CEO and C-Suite
5. Assign clear ownership for transition success
6. Agree to change management program and a team 'jump start'
7. Build social capital, connecting to new networks or peers, while mapping who in the network are enablers, influencers or blockers
8. Provide mentoring and coaching to assist the executive design a personal transition checklist; let go of the past; work at a more strategic level; explore tactics to deliver results and develop strategic capability in unknown settings.
9. Help the executive think through their presence, find their own voice and take up new behaviours and new thinking.
10. Support women in dealing with the changed group dynamic of their appointment.