



Amrop India

**Leadership
& Performance**

Leadership in Transition

“To be, or not to be - that is the question.”

- William Shakespeare

Actively Create a Shared Purpose for the Board

Ensure Board Agendas are Consistent with

Business Priorities

Speak Up and Build Alliances

Seize Opportunities

Meet the Breadth and Depth of Management

Review Strategy – Not Just Results

Encourage Offsite Meets

Do not be a Solitary Soldier

Business history is peppered with examples of people in leadership roles who fall short of achieving their goals. Very often, the reasons lie in their conduct and actions within the first few months of moving into a new role, as they get embroiled in issues, which compromise their credibility and squander precious energy. These initial six to nine months are times of transition when you probably are the most vulnerable. Your knowledge of the organisation is low, your relationships are weak, and the momentum of performance is not yet rolling. It is, therefore, imperative that you plan, prepare for, and manage your transition methodically.

The Amrop Partners in India and worldwide have extensive experience in hiring numerous leaders into new roles and assisting them through these transition periods. We are delighted to share some of these insights with you.

Prepare for the Transition

Before you are in the thick of things, dealing with the imperatives of the business, it is a good idea to develop a detailed understanding of the challenges that you may face. No two transitions are the same and experience of having managed a transition in the past, does not necessarily mean you would be able to manage this one as well. It would, therefore, be critical to identify the specifics of this transition even before you begin working in the new role. Certainly, you would have received a fair amount of information while making the decision around the new role. However, identifying specific opportunities and even threats goes well beyond the initial information provided. While you may wish to build or enhance your knowledge of the business through internal and external sources, assimilation of the cultural aspects of the role will also be critical.

Indeed, you may be buffeted by the diversity of cultural challenges that may be geographical, sectoral, simply functional, or organisation specific. Also, just because you were offered the job does not automatically mean that you fit the role perfectly.

Arguably, almost every person is vulnerable in a new role in some fashion, whether he has been with the organisation earlier or is hired from the outside. For this role, you must understand what your vulnerabilities are and you may also wish to do a SWOT analysis of what you would face as you go forward.

Learn, learn and then learn some more

While learning in the new role is critical, understanding, areas of focus and planning the learning process is even more so. Areas like technology and finance – generally pointing to specific skills – are relatively easier to identify and plan for. Consider learning goals like: “how are decisions made and communicated?”; “what is accepted personal behaviour?”; What and who are organizational influencers? Etc. In other words, look for patterns. As you absorb some of this new learning it may be a good idea to test out your consequent actions in small ways so that as you go forward the big pieces are in sync. The question, who you will learn from, is never simple to answer. The top management and your team are viable answers but you have to think of going beyond. You may wish to include analysts, suppliers, allies and even old timers who may provide a good history of the organisation. Focus not only on learning but on “balanced” learning. Try and get a 360-degree view of the organisation and avoid opinion hijacking. The issues can be even more complex should you have moved into this role internally.

In such situations, while past learnings will greatly help, a level of myopia may also set in. Without focusing on this learning & setting a strong pace for it, your actions will probably be flawed, or even worse, may be perceived to be flawed.

Develop your “Help” network

No person, however strong he or she may be, can do all things right at all times. Chances are, that you will need help to prepare yourself for not only taking the right decisions, but those which are effective and acceptable to the broader organisation. Consider building a “help” network consisting of people:

- Who provide expert knowledge and analysis of technologies, markets, strategy etc.
- Who provide support in areas like culture, politics etc.
- Who provide personal help to you.

Your help network should be differentiated from your learning sources. It can be a good idea to develop sounding boards – people who you trust for advice both internal and external to the organisation. But make sure

that you are clear on whom to approach for what. You can choose almost anybody, employees, peers, superiors, friends and colleagues in previous organisations. More important, ensure that this network is there when you need it, is effective, and has the ability to provide the right advice. But, watch out for potential conflict. Also, be careful of people who may have an axe to grind, or those who simply may not be competent to provide advice on the issues involved. Above all, work towards a strong chemistry fit between yourself and your help network.

Bite off only as much as you can chew

Valuable achievements do not happen overnight. And yet, the stakeholders of the business - management, employees, analysts, customers and suppliers - are rapidly building their opinions about you. During this transition period, prioritize your work and choose actions to succeed which build credibility and comfort with the stakeholders. It is this credibility, which will be your greatest asset in getting the big things done.

While you choose opportunities that are relatively smaller, ensure they are widely seen as important and have a high impact on the financial performance of the company. The quality of initial achievements, however small, greatly impact your network of relationships and your credibility, which inspire people to work for you.

Try and secure these early wins not by yourself alone but by involving people, setting deadlines, and rewarding success. While you pursue this goal, do not underestimate the pressure of immediate business concerns, stakeholder expectations, and probably your own desire to make a big impact. Deal with these pressures effectively.

Work with and build your new team

The two most critical aspects of working with your team involve working with your new boss, and your direct reports. In diversified businesses, working with peers of group companies may be an additional complexity. In these early days of the transition you may wish to focus on three primary areas with your boss.

Provide him comfort that you understand what needs to get done, set

expectations for the short and the long-term around deliverables, and negotiate and obtain buy-in around the resources that you will need. As you set out to achieve these goals, be sensitive to pointers around personal styles and the boss' evaluation of the situation.

A significant amount of energy will be used up in assessing and building your team. As you build opinions around team members, consider and evaluate broader data like climate surveys, but at the same time obtain specific and detailed feedback around individuals through past evaluations. It may be worthwhile to opt for a more structured assessment input for your key team members through third party external assessors. Rigorous and methodical assessments will ensure that you choose the right people and then deploy them in roles that are appropriate to their skills. At the same time you need to begin the delicate task of aligning the team to your goals. As you seek this buy-in, your early learning, and success stories will be your greatest assets. But beware, you will be faced with non-believers and non-performers at the same time. You will also need to delicately manage their re-deployment or exit from the business.

Build sustaining partnerships, early

There is little chance that you will accomplish much on your own. At different times you will need the support of different stakeholders and interest groups to accomplish the required tasks, but above all you will need these groups to support you, with belief in your actions. Think about developing an Influencing Strategy and while doing that, it becomes vital to understand that you are not the only one going through a transition.

Your group of stakeholders, both internal and external, will also be readjusting themselves to work with you and some may well be apprehensive of the situation. As you go out to build and influence these complex relationships, you will need to understand who the influencers are. For example, who carries expertise, who has access to information and so on. Different people will react to your overtures differently. Some will prefer status quo, some may oppose you, as they fear change, some may even perceive you as a threat to their power. Your challenge will be to understand this powerful interplay of emotions and be flexible in your approach to different people.

Even if people support you, it will be vital to remember that this support can

evaporate quickly unless cemented. So, help people fit in by helping them learn how you prefer to work.

Make “Alignment of Business” a continuous goal

No leader can hope to achieve goals with the different elements of the organisation not supporting each other. These elements, amongst others, include strategy, processes, skills and culture. While over the longer term, strategy will be a key focus area, beware of an early singular focus on it. While strategy drives other elements, it is also influenced by the same elements. The danger of mis-alignment between these elements greatly exceeds the chance of alignment. As an illustration consider the following: Your strategy may dictate product marketing to lead revenue building, but if your team’s knowledge of product marketing is not adequate, you would have mis-alignment, leading to a gap in achievement of different elements.

It is, therefore, imperative that you develop a sense for the existing mis-alignments and outline a corrective plan.

And above all, do not get carried away by the furious pace of this endeavour. Periodically, take a step back and compare the intended strategy to the actual strategy in order to successfully effect course correction.

In conclusion, the process of transition is complex and its effectiveness is not visible till much later. It is similar to walking a tightrope in the dark. You can realise how bad your fall is, only after the fall. Your confidence, sensitivity and ability to manage the diverse elements of this transition will therefore be the most vital part of your ultimate performance. During this delicate and difficult period, it is therefore critical that you focus your energies on its inherent challenges and keep distractions at bay as you prepare for the long road ahead.

After all, what is the point of losing the race even before it has really started?

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