The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels

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Preview: Transitions are critical times when small differences in your actions can have disproportionate impacts on results. This book is your road map for taking charge in your first 90 days in a new job.

I wanted to create a more flexible framework for transition acceleration that would help leaders at every level. At the same time, I wanted to address some important topics in more depth, such as:

- working with the new boss,
- building the team, and
- aligning the organization's strategy, structure, systems, and skills
- different types of transitions to help new leaders better tailor their strategies to the details of their situations. (69)

If you are reading this, you likely are transitioning into a new role. This book will equip you with:

- Strategies and tools to get up to speed faster and to achieve more, sooner.
- Learning how to diagnose your situation and gain clarity about its challenges and opportunities.
- You will assess your strengths and weaknesses and identify your greatest personal vulnerabilities in your new situation.
- Gaining insight into how to learn about a new organization and establish your priorities more quickly.
- Learning how to diagnose and align the strategy, structure, systems, and skills of your new organization.
- solid advice about how to manage key relationships to leverage yourself—by building teams, creating coalitions, and recruiting a supportive network of advisers and counselors. (81)

Introduction: From observing new leaders and experimenting with methods of accelerating transitions, I have developed strong beliefs about the challenges of transitions and what it takes to succeed in meeting them. These beliefs, summarized in **five propositions**, form the foundation of my approach to transition acceleration—and to this book. (149)

1. The first proposition is that the root causes of transition failure always lie in a pernicious interaction between the situation, with its opportunities and pitfalls, and the individual, with his or her strengths and vulnerabilities. Failure is never just about the flaws of the new leader. Transition failures happen when new leaders either misunderstand the essential demands of the situation or lack the skill and flexibility to adapt to them.

2. The second proposition is that there are systematic methods that leaders can employ to both lessen the likelihood of failure and reach the breakeven point faster.

3. The third proposition is that the overriding goal in a transition is to build momentum by creating virtuous cycles that build credibility and by avoiding getting caught in vicious cycles that damage credibility. Leadership is about leverage. The new leader is, after all, just one person. To be successful, she will have to mobilize the energy of many others in her organization.

4. The fourth proposition is that transitions are a crucible for leadership development and should be managed accordingly. Precisely because they strengthen diagnostic skills, demand growth and adaptation, and test personal stamina, transitions are an indispensable development experience for every company's high-potential leaders. A survey conducted as part of McKinsey' "War for Talent" study asked a sample of 200 senior executives to identify their five most important developmental experiences. 4 The top overall responses all involved significant transitions into new roles. Like swimming, transitioning is a teachable skill. Transition acceleration skills should be taught to people who are in transition, so that talented people do not drown unnecessarily.

5. My fifth and final proposition is that adoption of a standard framework for accelerating transitions can yield big returns for organizations. (183) these talented people had to develop their own models for how to make transitions. This is hard-won knowledge, and the failure to share it represents a big loss for the organization. This valuable cache of experience is seldom converted into organizational learning. (224)

All these talented people had to develop their own models for how to make transitions. This is hard-won knowledge, and the failure to share it represents a big loss for the organization. This valuable cache of experience is seldom converted into organizational learning. (227-229)

The fundamental goal of this book: to provide new leaders with practical frameworks for diagnosing their situations and developing customized transition acceleration plans. (251)

A diagnostic tool, called the STARS model (for Start-up, Turnaround, Realignment, and Sustaining Success),

- It powerfully accelerates the new leader's diagnosis of his new organization and his development of effective action plans.
- It also helps the new leader to more rapidly reach a shared understanding of the situation with other key players, including his boss and direct reports. Whether taking over an entire organization or managing a group, or a short-term project, he can use this tool to accelerate his transition. (261-265)

Plan of the Book:

Ten key transition challenges

1. **Promote yourself.** This doesn't mean hiring your own publicist. It means making the mental break from your old job and preparing to take charge in new one.

2. **Accelerate your learning.** You need to climb the learning curve as fast as you can in your new organization. This means understanding its markets, products, technologies, systems, and structures, as well as its culture and politics. (274-276)

3. **Match strategy to situation.** There are no universal rules for success in transitions. You need to diagnose the business situation accurately and clarify its challenges and opportunities.

4. **Secure early wins.** Early wins build your credibility and create momentum. They create virtuous cycles that leverage the energy you are putting into the organization to create a pervasive sense that good things are happening. In the first few weeks, you need to identify opportunities to build personal credibility. (282-284)

5. **Negotiating success.** Because no other single relationship is more important, you need to figure out how to build a productive working relationship with your new boss and manage his or her expectations. This means carefully planning for a series of critical conversations about the situation, expectations, style, resources, and your personal development. Crucially, it means developing and gaining consensus on your 90-day plan.

6. **Achieve alignment.** The higher you rise in an organization, the more you have to play the role of organizational architect. This means figuring out whether the organization's strategy is sound, bringing its structure into alignment with its strategy, and developing the systems and skill bases necessary to realize strategic intent.

7. **Build your team.** If you are inheriting a team, you will need to evaluate its members and perhaps restructure it to better meet the demands of the situation. Your willingness to make tough early personnel calls and your capacity to select the right people for the right positions are among the most important drivers of success during your transition. You will need to be both systematic and strategic in approaching the team-building challenge.

8. **Create coalitions.** Your success will depend on your ability to influence people outside your direct line of control. Supportive alliances, both internal and external, will be necessary to achieve your goals. You should therefore start right away to identify those whose support is essential for your success, and to figure out how to line them up on your side.

9. **Keep your balance.** In the personal and professional tumult of a transition, you will have to work hard to maintain your equilibrium and preserve your ability to make good judgments. The risks of losing perspective, getting isolated, and making bad calls are ever present during transitions.

10. **Expedite everyone.** Finally, you need to help everyone in your organization—direct reports, bosses, and peers—accelerate their own transitions. The quicker you can get your new direct reports up to speed, the more you will help your own performance. Beyond that, the benefits to the organization of systematically accelerating everyone's transitions are potentially vast.

If you succeed in meeting these core challenges, you will have a successful transition.

Detailed Notes on Each Chapter:

1. **Promote yourself.** This section provides some basic principles for mentally getting ready for your new position.
   a. Establish a Clear Breakpoint
   b. Hit the Ground Running: Your transition begins the moment you learn you are being considered for a new job. It ends roughly 90 days after you begin the job. By this point, key people in the organization—your bosses, peers, and direct reports—expect you to be getting some traction.
   c. Assess Your Vulnerabilities: has an urge to work at one level below where they are. You need to work where you are, not where you were."
   d. Assessment of Problem Preferences. Assess your intrinsic interest in solving problems in each domain on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means very little interest and 10 means great interest.
   e. You can do a lot to compensate for your vulnerabilities. Three basic tools are self-discipline, team building, and advice and counsel. You will need to discipline yourself to devote time to critical activities that you do not enjoy and may not come naturally.
   f. Watch Out for Your Strengths Your weaknesses can make you vulnerable, but so can your strengths. Every strength has its attendant pitfalls. The qualities that have made you successful so far can prove to be weaknesses in your new role.
   g. Relearn how to learn: Chris Argyris noted in "Teaching Smart People How to Learn" in the Harvard Business Review: Because many professionals are almost always successful at what they do, they rarely experience failure. And because they have rarely failed, they have never learned how to learn from failure. So whenever their . . . learning strategies go wrong, they become defensive, screen out criticism, and put the "blame" on anyone and everyone but themselves. In short, their ability to learn shuts down precisely at the moment they need it the most.
   h. Rework Your Network: As you advance in your career, the advice and counsel you need changes. Promoting yourself calls for working proactively to restructure your advice-and-counsel network.
   i. Watch Out for People Who Want to Hold You Back. Consciously or not, some individuals may not want you to advance.
      i. Your old boss may not want to let you go. So you have to negotiate clear expectations, as soon as you know when you will be transitioning, about what you will do to close things out.
         1. This means being specific about what issues or projects will be dealt with and to what extent and, critically, what is not going to be done.
         2. Take notes and circulate them back to the boss, so that everyone is on the same page.

3. Then hold your boss, and yourself, to the agreement. Be realistic about what you can accomplish. There is always more that you could do, so keep in mind that time to learn and plan before you enter a new job is a very precious commodity.

ii. Friends may not want their relationships with you to change. But change they must, and the sooner you accept that (and help others to accept it too), the better.

iii. Others in your organization will be looking for signs of favoritism and will judge you accordingly. If you have been promoted to supervise people who were once your peers, some may be jealous.

2. **Accelerate your learning.**   It is essential to figure out what you need to know about your new organization and then to learn it as rapidly as you can and avoid assumptions.

   a. **Overcoming Learning Disabilities:**
   - When a new leader derails, failure to learn is almost always a factor. Information overload can obscure the most telling issues. There is so much to absorb that it is difficult to know where to focus. Amid the torrent of information coming your way, it is easy to miss important signals.
   - Or you might focus too much on the technical side of the business—products, customers, technologies, and strategies—and shortchange the critical learning about culture and politics. To compound this problem, surprisingly, few managers have received any training in systematically diagnosing an organization. (532)
   - A related problem is failure to plan to learn. Planning to learn means figuring out the important questions and how you can best answer them. Few new leaders take the time to think systematically about learning priorities. Fewer still explicitly create a learning plan when entering a new role.
   - Other new leaders suffer from the action imperative, a learning disability whose primary symptom is a near-compulsive need to take action. You may suffer from this malady if you habitually find yourself too anxious or too busy to devote time to systematic learning. (545)
   - Perhaps most destructive of all, some new leaders arrive with "the answer." They have already made up their minds about how to solve the organization's problems. Having matured in an organization where "things were done the right way," they fail to realize that what works well in one organizational culture may fail miserably in another. (551)

   b. **Defining Your Learning Agenda:** A learning agenda crystallizes your learning priorities: What do you most need to learn? Start by generating questions about the past, questions about the present, and questions about the future. Why are things done the way they are? Are the reasons something was done (for example, to meet a competitive threat) still valid today? Are conditions changing such that something different should be done in the future? (570)

   c. **Identifying the Best Sources of Insight**: You will learn from various types of hard data, such as financial and operating reports, strategic and functional plans, employee surveys, press accounts, and industry reports. But to make effective decisions, you also need "soft" information about the organization's strategy, technical capabilities, culture, and politics. The only way to gain this intelligence is to talk to people who have critical knowledge about your situation. (582-585)

   When diagnosing a new organization, start by meeting with your direct reports one-on-one. Ask them essentially the same five questions:

   1. What are the biggest challenges the organization is facing (or will face) in the near future?
   2. Why is the organization facing (or going to face) these challenges?

3. What are the most promising unexploited opportunities for growth?
4. What would need to happen for the organization to exploit the potential of these opportunities? (674)
5. If you were me, what would you focus attention on?

These five questions, coupled with careful listening and thoughtful follow-up, are certain to elicit many insights. By asking everyone the same set of questions, you can identify prevalent and divergent views, and thus avoid being swayed by the first or most forceful or articulate person you talk to. How people answer can also tell you a lot about your new team and its politics. Who answers directly and who is evasive or prone to going on tangents? Who takes responsibility and who points fingers? Who has a broad view of the business and who seems stuck in a silo?

d. Creating a Learning Plan: Your learning agenda defines what you want to learn. Your learning plan defines how you will go about learning it. It translates learning goals into specific sets of actions—identifying promising sources of insight and using systematic methods—that accelerate your learning.

e. Learning about Culture: Your most vexing business problems likely will have a cultural dimension. In some cases, you will find that aspects of the existing culture are key impediments to realizing high performance. You will thus have to work hard to change them. Other aspects of the culture will turn out to be functional and thus worthy of preservation. (751)

You can't hope to change your organization's work culture if you don't understand it. One useful framework for analyzing an organization's work culture approaches it at three levels:

1. Symbols are signs, including logos and styles of dress; they distinguish one culture from another and promote solidarity. Are there distinctive symbols that signify your unit and help members recognize one another?
2. Norms are shared social rules that guide "right behavior." What behaviors get encouraged or rewarded in your unit? What elicits scorn or disapproval?
3. Assumptions are the often-unarticulated beliefs that pervade and underpin social systems. These beliefs are the air that everyone breathes. What truths does everyone take for granted?

You can also think about culture from three perspectives: organizational, professional, and geographic. Start by zooming in to see organizational culture, then gradually widen your focus to see professional culture, and then focus broadly on geographic culture.

If you're moving to a new company within the same industry, or to a new you'll confront organizational cultural changes.

3. **Diagnose the situation.** What are the defining features of each of the four STARS situations?

- In start-ups, you are tasked with assembling the capabilities (people, funding, and technology) to get a new business, product, or project off the ground.
- In a turnaround, you take on a unit or group recognized as in trouble and work to get it back on track. Both start-ups and turnarounds involve much resource-intensive construction work— there isn't much- existing infrastructure and capacity for you to build on. To a significant degree, you get to start fresh. But both require that you start making tough calls early.

- Realignments and sustaining-success situations, by contrast, are situations in which you enter organizations that have significant strengths, but also serious constraints on what you can and cannot do. In realignment, your challenge is to revitalize a unit, product, process, or project that is drifting into trouble.
- In a sustaining-success situation, you are shouldering responsibility for preserving the vitality of a successful organization and taking it to the next level. Put another way, in realignments you have to reinvent the business; in sustaining-success situations, you have to invent the challenge.

Leading with the Right Skills: The management skills necessary for success vary among the four STARS situations. Start-ups and turnarounds call for "hunters" who can move quickly and take chances. In turnarounds, for example, the premium is on rapid diagnosis of the business situation (markets, technologies, products, strategies) and then aggressive moves to cut back the organization to a defendable core. You will need to act quickly and decisively, often on the basis of incomplete information. By contrast, the skills that contribute to success in realignment and sustaining-success situations are more akin to farming than hunting. More subtle influence skills come into play: Skilled farmers focus on understanding the culture and politics of the organization. They also painstakingly cultivate awareness of the need for change by promoting shared diagnosis, influencing opinion leaders, and encouraging benchmarking. To put it another way, in turnarounds, the problems teach the people about the need for major changes. In realignments, by contrast, you must teach people about the problems. Turnarounds are also ready-fire-aim situations: You make the tough calls with less than full knowledge and then adjust as you learn more. Realignments (and sustaining-success assignments) are ready-aim-fire situations. Time urgency is less extreme,

Learning Versus Doing The correct balance of learning and doing differs strikingly in the four STARS situations.
- In turnarounds and start-ups, the premium is on doing. You have to make some early calls without full information. If you spend too much time learning, events will overtake you and create a vicious cycle. You will have to fire before you are certain of your aim and then adjust accordingly. (962)

- In realignments and sustaining-success situations, a different emphasis on learning is warranted early on, because you are dealing with people who are, or think they are, successful. They may not be hungry for change or for direction from you. Early mistakes, especially if they are interpreted as risking the traditional strengths of the business, will cost you dearly. The good news is that you will have time to learn. There is no need for urgent early action in or sustaining-success situations. You can afford to aim carefully before you fire your first critical shots. You must delve deeply into organizational culture and politics in realignments and sustaining-success situations.

Securing Early Wins: To build momentum in your new job, you have to get some early wins. But what a "win" consists of differs dramatically among the four situations. Getting the right team in place and achieving strategic focus are key wins in a start-up. Critically, you have to decide what you are not going to do—and then you have to discipline your organization not to do it. In turnarounds, getting the right team in place is also a key potential early win, as is identifying the defendable core of the business and making major progress in paring the organization back to it. In realignments, gaining acceptance of the need for change and instilling a sense of urgency are often big early wins. Finally, in sustaining-success situations, gaining and displaying an understanding of what has made the organization successful is a key early win because it helps you win the right to make decisions about the organization's future. (996)

Take some time to assign the pieces in your new portfolio (products, processes, projects, plants, and people) to the four categories using figure 3-3. Given this arrangement, how will you manage the various pieces differently? What do you need from them? What do they need from you?

4. Secure Early Wins

By the end of your transition, you want your boss, your peers, and your subordinates to feel that something new, something good, is happening. Early wins excite and energize people and build your personal credibility. Done well, early wins help you create value for your new organization earlier and reach the breakeven point much more quickly. (1099)

Avoiding Common Traps

It is crucial to get early wins, but it is also important to secure them in the right way. Above all, of course, you want to avoid early losses because it is tough to recover once the tide is running against you. These are the most common traps that afflict unwary new leaders:

- Failing to focus. It is all too easy to take on too much during a transition, and the results can be ruinous. You can end like Steven Leacock's befuddled horseman, who "flung himself on his horse and rode off madly in all directions." You cannot hope to achieve results in more than a couple of areas during your transition. Thus, it is essential to identify promising opportunities and then focus relentlessly on translating them into wins.
- Not taking the business situation into account. What constitutes an early win will differ dramatically from one business situation to another.
- Not adjusting for the culture.
- Failing to get wins that matter to your boss. Getting early wins that energize your direct reports and other employees is essential. But your boss's opinion about your accomplishments is critically important too.
- Letting your means undermine your ends. Process matters. If you achieve impressive results in a manner that is seen as manipulative or inconsistent with the culture, you are setting yourself up for trouble. An early win that is accomplished in a way that exemplifies the behavior you hope to instill in your new organization is a double win.

Planning Your Waves: In planning for your transition and beyond, planning to make successive waves of change can be clarifying. Each wave ought to consist of distinct phases: learning, designing the changes, building support, implementing the changes, and observing results. Thinking this way can release you to spend time upfront to learn and prepare and afterward to consolidate and get ready for the next wave. If you keep changing things, figuring out what is working and what is not is impossible. Unending change is also a surefire recipe for burning out your people. The goal of the first wave of change is to secure early wins. The new leader tailors early initiatives to build personal credibility, establish key relationships, and identify and harvest low-hanging fruit—the highest-potential opportunities for short-term improvements in organizational performance. Done well, this helps the new leader build momentum and deepen his or her learning. The second wave of change addresses more fundamental issues of strategy, structure, systems, and skills to reshape the organization. This is when the real gains in organizational performance are achieved. But you will not get there if you do not secure early wins in the first wave. (1141-1151)

Your long-term goals should consist of A-item business priorities and desired changes in the behavior of people in your organization. A-item priorities constitute the destination you strive to reach regarding measurable business objectives. Think about your legacy here. What do you want it to be? What do you want the letter announcing your promotion to your next job to say about what you did in this one? (It is a useful exercise to write this letter. What would you want people to say about your achievements in this job at the end of two to three years?)

Define A-Item Priorities

- A-Item priorities should follow naturally from core problems. Establishing A-item priorities calls for pinpointing the critical areas in your organization that demand attention, as well as those that offer the greatest opportunities to contribute to a dramatic improvement in performance.

- A-Item priorities should be neither too general nor too specific. They should address several levels of specificity so you can establish measures and milestones along the way.

Leverage Teachable moments

Look for and leverage teachable moments to nudge mythology in a positive direction. These actions—such as the way that Elena Lee dealt with recalcitrant supervisors—clearly display what you are about; they also model the behavior you want to encourage. They need not be dramatic statements or confrontations. It can be as simple and as hard as asking the penetrating question that crystallizes your group's understanding of some key problem they are confronting.

Building personal credibility and developing key relationships helps you get immediate wins.

To translate your goals into specific initiatives to secure early wins, work through the following guidelines:

- Keep your long-term goals in mind. The actions you take to secure early wins should, to the greatest extent possible, serve your A-item priorities and long-term goals for behavior change.
- Identify a few promising focal points. Focal points are areas or processes (such as the customer service processes for Elena Lee) where improvement can dramatically strengthen the organization's overall operational or financial performance.
- Launch pilot projects. Design promising pilot initiatives targeted at your chosen focal points that you can undertake right away. Successful early projects set your overall plan in motion, energize your people, and yield real improvements.
- Elevate change agents. Identify the people in your new unit at all levels who have the insight, drive, and incentives to advance your agenda. Promote them to positions of increasing responsibility. Then send a message to everyone else by rewarding them lavishly for success.
- Leverage the pilot projects to introduce new behaviors. Your early pilot projects, like Elena Lee's, should serve as models of how you want your organization, unit, or group to function in the future.

Leading Change
As you work out where to get your early wins, think about how you are going to make change happen in your organization.
Planned Change Versus Collective Learning. Once you have identified the most important problems or issues you need to address, the next step is to decide whether to engage, as my colleague Amy Edmondson has noted, in plan-then-implement change or promotion of collective learning.
The straightforward plan-then-implement approach to change works well when you are sure that you have the following key supporting planks in place:
- Awareness: A critical mass of people are aware of the need for change.
- Diagnosis: You know what needs to be changed and why.
- Vision: You have a compelling vision and a solid strategy.
- Plan: You have the expertise to put together a detailed plan.
- Support: You have a sufficiently powerful coalition to support implementation.

The plan-then-implement approach to change might work well in turnaround situations, for example, where people accept there is a problem, the fixes are more technical than cultural or political, and people are hungry for a solution.

However, if any of these five conditions are not met, the pure plan-then-implement approach to change can get you in trouble. If you are in a realignment, for example, and people are in denial about the need for change, they are likely to greet your plan with stony silence. You may therefore need to build awareness of the need for change, sharpen the diagnosis of the problem, create a compelling vision and strategy, develop a solid cross-functional implementation plan, or create a coalition in support of change. To accomplish any of these goals, you would be well advised to focus on setting up a collective learning process and not on developing and imposing change plans. If many people in the organization are willfully blind to emerging problems, for example, you have to put in place a process to pierce through this veil.

To change your organization, you will likely have to change its culture. This is a difficult undertaking. Your organization may have well-ingrained bad habits that you want to break. But we know how difficult it is for one person to change habitual patterns in any significant way, never mind a mutually reinforcing collection of people. Simply blowing up the existing culture and starting over is rarely the right answer. People—and organizations— have limits on the change they can absorb all at once.

5. Negotiate Success

Negotiating success means proactively engaging with your new boss to shape the game so you can achieve desired goals. Too many new leaders play the game, reactively taking their situation as given, failing as a result. The alternative is to shape the game by negotiating with your boss to establish realistic expectations, reach a consensus on the situation, and secure enough resources. By

What you need from a boss also varies among the various STARS business situations. If you are in a realignment, you need your boss to help you make the case for change. In a sustaining-success situation, you will need help to learn about the business and avoid early mistakes that threaten the core assets. In startups, you need resources and protection from too much higher-level interference. In turnarounds, you may need to be pushed to quickly cut back the business to the defendable core. You can do much to build a productive working relationship with your new boss. This chapter will show you how to engage in the right kinds of dialogue and how to create a 90-day plan. Read it even if you will be reporting to the same boss in your new role. Your relationship won't necessarily stay the same in a changed situation. (1418)

Focusing on the Fundamentals: When experienced managers are quizzed about how to build a productive relationship with a new boss, their observations typically emerge in the form of do's and don'ts. Let's start with the don'ts:

- Don't trash the past. There is nothing to be gained and much to be lost by criticizing the people who led the organization before you arrived.
- Don't approach your boss only with problems. You don't want to be perceived as bringing nothing but problems for your boss to solve.
- Don't run down your checklist. There is a tendency, even for senior managers, to use meetings with a boss as an opportunity to run through your checklist of what you have been doing. 1444
- Don't try to change the boss.1448

There are some fundamental dos as well. If you follow them, life with your new boss will be easier:

- Take 100 percent responsibility for making the relationship work. 1453
- Clarify mutual expectations early and often. Begin managing expectations right away. You are in trouble if your boss expects you to fix things fast when you know the business has serious structural problems. 1457

- Negotiate timelines for diagnosis and action planning. Don't let yourself get caught just putting out fires of crisis and pressured to make decisions before you are ready.
- Aim for early wins in areas important to the boss

Five Conversations with the Boss

1. Situation diagnosis evaluation
    a. Which ST$_A$RS situation is it?
    b. How did we reach this point?
    c. What factors make this a challenging situation?
    d. What resources do we have?

2. Expectations Conversation
    a. What does the boss want in the short term and medium term?
    b. What does success look like?
    c. How will my performance be measured?
    d. Aim for early wins in areas important to the boss,
    e. Identify the untouchables.
    f. Educate the boss-upward alignment
    g. Under promise and over deliver
    h. Clarify, clarify, clarify
    i. Working at a distance requires more initiative on my part

3. Style Conversation: how we will interact and work together
    a. What kind of communication: email, face to face, etc.?
    b. What does he want to be consulted on, informed about, etc.?

4. Resources Negotiation: what I need to be successful; what I need from the boss

5. Personal development conversation: discuss how my tenure in the job will contribute to my development
    a. Course that would strengthen my capabilities?
    b. Areas I need improvement

6. **Achieve alignment.** The higher you rise in an organization, the more you have to play the role of organizational architect. No matter how charismatic you are, you cannot hope to do much if the key elements in your unit are fundamentally out of alignment. You will feel like you are pushing a boulder uphill every day. If strategy, structure, systems, and skills are within your purview in your new position, you need to begin to analyze the architecture of your organization and assess alignment among these key elements. This means figuring out whether the organization's strategy is sound, bringing its structure into alignment with its strategy, and developing the systems and skill bases necessary to realize strategic intent.

Armed with the resulting insights, you can begin to take action during your transition to align strategy, structure, systems, and skills, thus making superior performance possible. Naturally, this is not something that you can complete in a few months. But it is essential that you get started on fixing the worst realignments. pp. 130-131

To equip your group to achieve its goals, five elements of organizational architecture all need to work together:

- Strategy: The core approach the organization will use to accomplish its goals
- Structure: How people are situated in units and how their work is coordinated
- Systems: The processes used to add value

- Skills: The capabilities of the various groups of people in the organization
- Culture: The values, norms, and assumptions that shape behavior

Initiating Cultural Change. You can't hope to do more than diagnose the culture and begin to work on changing some behaviors in the first 90 days. The following list sets forth five ways to begin cultural change. p 152

- Change performance measures and incentives. Change the metrics by which you judge success. Then align employees' objectives with those new measures.
- Set up pilot projects. Give employees opportunities to experiment with new tools and behaviors.
- Bring in new people. Judiciously bring in people from the outside to stimulate creative thinking and discipline among group members. A new person could be a substance expert in a key area.
- Promote collective learning. Expose group members to new ways of operating and thinking about the business—for instance, new perspectives on customers and competitors. One idea is to engage in some benchmarking of best-in-class organizations.
- Engage in collective visioning. Find ways to bring people together in creative ways, specifically to envision new approaches to doing things. For example, schedule an off-site meeting to brainstorm ideas for improving existing processes.

7. **Build your team.** Your most important decisions in the first 90 days will be about your team. Get the right people in the right positions, establish processes for healthy teamwork, etc. Evaluate how the team worked before and how effective its processes were. Preserve what was good and change what did not work.

Finding the right people is essential, but more is needed. Begin by assessing existing team members to decide who will stay and who will have to go. Then devise a plan for getting new people and moving the people you retain into the right positions—without doing too much damage to short-term performance in the process. Even this is not enough: You still need to put in place goals, incentives, and performance measures that will propel your team in the desired direction. Finally, you must establish new processes to promote teamwork.

Avoiding Common Traps:

- Keeping the existing team too long.
- Not working on organizational alignment and team restructuring issues in parallel. A ship's captain cannot make the right choices about his crew without knowing the destination, the route, and the ship. Likewise, you can't build your team before reaching clarity about changes in strategy, structure, systems, and skills.
- Not holding onto the good people. One experienced manager shared some hard-won lessons about the dangers of losing good people. "When you shake the tree," she said, "good people can fall out too." Her point is that uncertainty about who will and will not be on the team can lead your best people to make moves elsewhere. Although there are constraints on what you can say about who will stay and who will go, you should look for ways to signal to the top performers that you recognize their capabilities. A little reassurance goes a long way.
- Trying to do it all yourself. Finally, keep in mind that the process of restructuring a team is fraught with emotional, legal, and company policy complications. Do not try to undertake this on your own.

Assessing Your Existing Team

Meet one-on-one with each member of your new team as soon as possible.

- Prepare for each meeting. Review available personnel history, performance data, and other appraisals. Familiarize yourself with each person's technical or professional skills so you can assess how he or she functions on the team.
- Ask probing questions.

Assess the Team as a Whole – look at team dynamics.

Restructure if necessary. Treat People Respectfully During every phase of the team-restructuring process, take pains to treat everyone with respect.

Aligning Goals, Incentives, and Measures Having the right people on the team is essential, but it's not enough. To achieve your A-item priorities and secure early wins, you will need to define how each team member can best support those key goals.

Establishing New Team Processes Once the team and its goals and incentives have been established, the next step is to think through how you want the team to work. What processes will shape how the team gets its collective job done?

8. **Create coalitions.** Your success will depend on your ability to influence people outside your direct line of control. Supportive alliances, both internal and external, will be necessary to achieve your goals. You should therefore start immediately to identify those whose support is essential for your success and figure out how to line them up on your side. (295-298). Secure some early wins here as a group.

There is a need to exert influence without authority. If your success depends on the support of people outside your direct line of command, it is imperative to create coalitions to get things done. More than direct authority is needed to win the day. Influence networks—informal bonds among colleagues—can help you marshal backing for your ideas and goals.

Mapping the Influence Landscape One common mistake of new leaders is to devote too much of their transition time to the vertical dimension of influence— upward to bosses and downward to direct reports—and not enough to the horizontal dimension, namely, peers and external constituencies. This error is understandable: You naturally gravitate toward the people to whom you report and who report to you.

Identify Key Players:

- Start by identifying the key interfaces between your unit or group and others.
- Another strategy is to get your boss to connect you. Request a list of ten key people outside your group whom he or she thinks you should get to know. Then set up early meetings with them.
- diagnose informal networks of influence
- It might be helpful to draw an influence map. It can be instructive to summarize what you learn about patterns of influence by drawing an influence map

Identify Supporters, Opponents, and Convincibles The point of doing influence mapping is to help you identify supporters, opponents, and "convincibles"—people who can be persuaded with the right influence strategy.

Coalition building entails consolidating existing sources of support while developing relationships with those whose resources or connections you need to succeed. The sequence in which you consolidate and build support is key. You will also need to persuade convincibles to become supporters rather than opponents. Call on established social and political relationships to consolidate existing support and strengthen them through regular conversations. Make sure you keep your allies up to date. Pay attention to how they react to changing conditions. You can even provide them

with advice for how to counter opponents' arguments. You want to affirm the importance of existing relationships and leverage them into support for your new effort.

Some helpful questions:

- Whose support do you most need to succeed? What existing coalitions seem most powerful?
- What influence networks are most important to you? Who defers to whom on key issues?
- Who are your potential supporters? Potential opponents? Convincibles? How will you test your hypotheses about support and opposition?
- What tools of influence will you employ to convince the convincibles? How will you shape potential supporters' perceptions of their interests? Of their options?
- How can you sequence interactions to build momentum for your initiatives? Are there patterns of deference that you can exploit? Can your supporters help you to recruit other key people?

9. **Keep your balance.** The life of a leader is always a balancing act, but never more so than during a transition. The uncertainty and ambiguity can be crippling. You don't even know what you don't know. You haven't had a chance to build a support network. If you have moved, you're also in transition personally. If you have a family, they, too, are in transition. Amid all this turmoil, you are expected to get acclimated quickly and begin to effect positive change in your new organization. For all these reasons, keeping your balance is a key transition challenge. p. 205

In the personal and professional tumult of a transition, you will have to work hard to maintain your equilibrium and preserve your ability to make good judgments. The risks of losing perspective, getting isolated, and making bad calls are ever present during transitions.

Avoiding Vicious Cycles

1. Riding off in all directions. You can't hope to focus others if you can't focus yourself. You can be busy and still fail every single day. Why? Because there is an infinite number of tasks you could do during your transition, but only a few that are vital. p 207
2. Undefended boundaries. If you fail to establish solid boundaries defining what you are willing and not willing to do, the people around you—bosses, peers, and direct reports—will take whatever you have to give.
3. Brittleness. The uncertainty inherent in transitions breeds rigidity and defensiveness, especially in new leaders with a high need for control. The likely result: over-commitment to a failing course of action. You make a call prematurely and then feel unable to back away from it without losing credibility. The longer you wait, the harder it is to admit you were wrong and the more calamitous the consequences. Or perhaps you decide that your way of accomplishing a particular goal is the only way. As a result your rigidity disempowers people who have equally valid ideas about how to achieve the same goal.
4. Isolation. To be effective, you have to be connected to the people who make action happen and to the subterranean flow of information. It is surprisingly easy for new leaders to end up isolated, and isolation can creep up on you.
5. Work avoidance. You will have to make tough calls early in your new job. Ron Heifetz uses the term work avoidance to characterize this tendency to avoid taking the bull by the horns, which results in tough problems becoming even tougher.

Three Pillars of Self-Efficacy

Pillar 1: Adopting Success Strategies The strategies spelled out in the previous eight chapters represent a template for how to learn, set priorities, create plans, and direct action to build momentum. When you see these strategies work and when you get some early successes under your belt, you will feel more confident and energized by what you are accomplishing. As you progress through your transition, think about the challenges you are facing in light of the core challenges summarized in table 9-2 and identify chapters to which you want to return. P. 211

Table 9-2 Assessment of Core Challenges

Core Challenge	Diagnostic Question
Promote Yourself	Are you adopting the right mindset for your job and letting go of the past?
Accelerate Your Learning	Are you figuring out what you need to learn, from whom you need to learn it, and how to speed up the learning process?
Match Strategy to Situation	Are you diagnosing the type of transition you are facing and the implications of what to do and what not to do?
Secure Early Wins	Are you focusing on the vital priorities that advance long-term goals and build short-term momentum?
Negotiate Success	Are you building your relationship with your new boss, managing expectations, and marshaling the resources you need?
Achieve Alignment	Are you identifying and fixing frustrating misalignments of strategy, structure, systems, and skills?
Build Your Team	Are you assessing, restructuring, and aligning your team to leverage what you are trying to accomplish?
Create Coalitions	Are you building a base of internal and external support for your initiatives so you are not pushing rocks uphill?

Pillar 2: Enforce Personal Disciplines: Knowing what you should be doing is not the same as doing it. Ultimately, success or failure emerges from the accumulation of daily choices that propel you in productive directions or push you off a cliff.

Plan to Plan. Do you devote time daily and weekly to a plan-work-evaluate cycle? If not, or if you do so irregularly, you need to be more disciplined about planning. At the end of each day, spend ten minutes evaluating how well you met the goals you set the previous day and planning for the next day. Do the same at the end of each week. Get into the habit of doing this. Even if you fall behind, you will be more in control.

Judiciously Defer Commitment. Learn to defer commitment. Anytime anybody asks you to do something, say, "Sounds interesting. Let me think about it and get back to you." Never say yes on the spot. If you are being pressed (perhaps by someone who knows your vulnerability to such pressure), say, "Well, if you need an answer now, I'll have to say no. But if you can wait, I will give it more thought." Begin with no; it is easy to say yes later.

Schedule in Structured Reflection:

What do you feel so far? On a scale of high to low, do you feel:

- Excited? If not, why not? What can you do about it?

- Confident? If not, why not? What can you do about it?
- In control of your success? If not, why not? What can you do about it?

What has bothered you so far?

- With whom have you failed to connect? Why?
- Of the meetings you have attended, which has been the most troubling? Why?
- Of all that you have seen or heard, what has disturbed you most? Why?

What has gone well or poorly?

- Which interactions would you handle differently if you could? Which exceeded your expectations? Why?
- Which of your decisions have turned out particularly well? Not so well? Why?
- What missed opportunities do you regret most?
- Was a better result blocked primarily by you or by something beyond your control?

Good questions to ask yourself:

1. What are your greatest vulnerabilities in your new job? How do you plan to compensate for them?
2. What personal disciplines do you most need to develop or enhance? How will you do that?
3. What will success look like? What can you do to gain more control over your local environment?
4. What can you do to ease your family's transition? What support relationships will you have to build?
5. What are your highest priorities? What are your priorities for strengthening your advice-and-counsel network? To what extent do you need to focus on your internal network? Your external network? Which domain do you most need additional technical, political, or personal support? pp. 222-224

Pillar 3: Building Your Support Systems

Assert Control Locally. It is easier to focus on work if the basic infrastructure that supports you is in place. Even if you have more pressing worries, move quickly to set up your new office, develop routines, clarify expectations with your assistant, and so on.

Stabilize the Home Front. Refraining from fighting on too many fronts is a fundamental rule of warfare. You cannot hope to create value at work if you are destroying value at home.

Build your Advice-and-Counsel Network. No leader can do it all, no matter how capable and energetic. You need a network of trusted advisers within and outside the organization with whom to talk through what you are experiencing.

10. **Expedite everyone.** Finally, you need to help everyone in your organization—direct reports, bosses, and peers—accelerate their own transitions. The quicker you can get your new direct reports up to speed, the more you will help your own performance. Beyond that, the benefits to the organization of systematically accelerating everyone's transitions are potentially vast. (302-304)

- Create a Common Language and Vocabulary around the First 90 Days' strategies. Press new leaders to create their own 90-day learning plan.
- Work with a Team.
- Develop High Potential Leaders. An executive-development program based on the transition acceleration model can be a central component of a more ambitious strategy for developing high-potential leaders. In such programs, which typically last days, cohorts of high-potential leaders who are transitioning into new roles are introduced to the transition acceleration model, work through new-leader simulations and case studies, and do some first-90-days planning for their own transitions.
- Strengthen Succession Planning. Effective succession-planning systems call for (1) rigorous evaluation of leadership potential and (2) thoughtful design of developmental pathways for high-potential leaders. Good systems foster cross-functional expertise and help to groom the company's future general managers. In global companies, they expose up-and-coming managers to international experience early in their careers. p. 231

THE GOAL OF THIS BOOK is to move you— and your organization—beyond the sink-or-swim approach to managing transitions. If you systematically apply the strategies laid out in the previous ten chapters, you will dramatically accelerate your ability to move into new roles.

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