

Meeting the Challenge of Leadership Transition

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New Leadership Creates A Period Of Change

One of the most common changes experienced in all organizations—and one with impact that is woefully under-appreciated—is the arrival of a new leader. If you have recently started in a new role managing others, or if you are a member of a team or business that has hired a new leader (or if you just finished the painstaking process of recruiting and hiring a new manager), you know well that this type of transition instills a range of uncertainties, hopes, and fears.

Questions to Resolve

When a new leader takes the helm, his/her staff has many questions:

- Who is this person and what makes him/her tick?
- Does s/he understand the current state of things?
- How will s/he lead?
- How will I be rewarded...or judged?

Expressed or implicit, these questions arise from an unsettling time for a team, which often exacerbates other conflicts and challenges that lie within an organization. Routinely during these transition periods, productivity decreases while stress levels and conflicts tend to rise. New leaders also face many of their own unknowns about their new role and those reporting to them. One way to improve the acclimation process is to conduct a Transition Meeting.

The U.S. Navy Solution

The U.S. Navy developed the Transition Meeting design more than 30 years ago, after research documented the detrimental effects that leadership changes can have on crews' effectiveness. The Navy found that crews experienced a decrease in productivity from the time an existing officer gave notice all the way up to six months after a new officer came on board. In response, the Navy began conducting what would become known as Transition Meetings when new leaders arrive. These meetings, and the follow-up actions that resulted from them, have reduced typical downtime from six months to one month. These meetings also defuse stress, conflict, and disruption to the team.

The Transition Meeting

The essence of the Transition Meeting is a direct, open, facilitated conversation between the new leader and his/her staff. This forum provides an opportunity for asking questions, discussing important issues, priorities and experiences, and developing a series of action steps for the team as a whole to commit to and follow up on. These meetings can help untangle miscommunication and misinformation, and set forth a shared understanding of the leader's and the team's priorities and expectations. Updates and feedback on progress are reviewed at a follow-up session scheduled within three to four weeks.

Benefits from the Transition Meeting

Skilled facilitation can enhance the success of the Transition Meeting in achieving outcomes that:

- reduce organizational downtime by up to 5 months;
- maintain continuity of operations and organizational effectiveness;
- establish role clarity and accountability;
- identify problem areas within organizational system; and
- provide both leader and team with critical information to make decisions and set priorities.

Benefits from the Transition Meeting

Changes in leadership present opportunities and challenges to organizations. Addressing the situation through Transition Meetings can significantly aid the adjustment for both leader and team, and help the organization move forward more swiftly and strongly.