

Meeting the Challenge of Leadership Transition

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One of the most common changes in all organizations—and one with impact that is woefully under-estimated—is the arrival of a new leader. If you recently began a role of managing others, if you're a member of a unit that has gained a new leader, or if you just finished the painstaking process of recruiting and hiring a new supervisor, 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 or her staff ask many questions:

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

Expressed or implicit, these questions stem 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 United States Navy developed the Transition Meeting design more than 30 years ago, after research documented the detrimental effects that leadership changes can have on crew effectiveness. The Navy found that a crew experiences a decrease in productivity from the time an existing officer gives notice all the way up to six months after a new officer comes on board. In response, the Navy began conducting what would become known as Transition Meetings as part of new leader arrivals. These meetings and the resulting follow-up actions have reduced typical downtime from six months to one month. The meetings have also defused stress, conflict, and disruption within the teams.

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 five 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.

A Better Beyond

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

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