

IMPROVING NEW LEADER ON-BOARDING

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Background

Good on-boarding significantly reduces the likelihood of new leader under-performance and failure, along with the related tensions and costs. Experts and research studies find that individuals integrate well, develop better networks and immerse themselves into their jobs more effectively.

But doing this is a difficult challenge says Dr Michael Watkins, management author and chairman of Genesis Advisers. "Transitions into new roles are the crucibles in which leaders get their toughest tests."

It takes time

On-boarding has to take time, according to IMD Professor of Leadership, Organisation and Corporate Learning, Shlomo Ben-Hur. "Organisations spending a year trying to find the right candidate assume the minute they walk through the door they should be able to run the shop. And, our western speed-oriented approach says that all this takes the first 90 days."

Ben-Hur argues that it takes much longer for people to feel at home and begin producing impacts. Some organisations use a formal integration process of up to 12-18 months. Such integration has to achieve a balance between the work context with its opportunities and pitfalls - and individuals with their strengths and vulnerabilities. (Watkins, 2003).

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Getting it right - HR support for new leaders

John DiBenedetto, formerly Walmart's VP, Learning and Development, recommends these seven actions to improve new leader integration and success.

- 1 Develop a written scorecard with dates, times and outcomes early in the process – set achievable goals.
- 2 Negotiate realistic timeframes - agree these for new leaders to learn and assimilate.
- 3 Provide information - along with open access to business leaders, stakeholders and key employees.
- 4 Help new leaders build internal networks - ensure they meet and mix with new colleagues and direct reports.
- 5 Provide a culture guide in person - assign mentors who can help them acclimatise.
- 6 Begin professional development on the start date - discuss with the individual the skills, knowledge and behaviours required for success.
- 7 Provide early, comprehensive feedback - appoint a mentor or coach and afford opportunities for the new leader to review key findings with their manager during orientation.

Source: DiBenedetto, *Leadership Excellence*, 22, 11, 2005.



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Getting it right - the individual angle

Key sources

Watkins believes that individuals - and, perhaps you, if you are considering your future - need to take account of ten important factors when starting a new job.

- See his book, *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Factors for New Leaders at All Levels*, HBSP, 2003 - and, more recently, *Your Next Move: The Leader's Guide to Navigating Major Career Transitions*, HBSP, 2009.
- See also the 2011 CRF report, *Assessing People for Senior Jobs* - especially Chapters 7 and 8.

The Watkins factors

Issues to consider when taking a new job

Factor	Description
1 Promote yourself	Make the mental break from your old job and prepare to take charge in the new one.
2 Accelerate your learning	Understand the new organisation's markets, products, technologies, systems and structures, as well as its culture and politics as quickly as possible.
3 Match strategy to situation	Diagnose the business situation accurately and clarify its challenges and opportunities.
4 Secure early wins	Identify opportunities to build early credibility, create value and improve business results.
5 Negotiate success	Figure out how to build a productive working relationship with your new boss and manage his or her expectations.
6 Achieve alignment	Work out whether the organisation's strategy is sound, bringing the structure into alignment with its strategy and developing the systems and skills base.
7 Build your team	Evaluate your team members and make tough, early personnel calls to select the right people for the right positions.
8 Create coalitions	Identify those people whose support is essential for your success and figure out how to line them up on your side.
9 Keep your balance	Work hard to maintain your equilibrium and preserve your ability to make good judgements.
10 Expedite everyone	Help everyone in your organisation to accelerate their own transitions as this will in turn help your own performance.

Source: Watkins, 2003

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Getting it right - an integration model

RHR International research has found that full integration for a new leader takes between 12-18 months - and that there are five integration stages they have to navigate in a new role. These are the basis for their model here.

The RHR model of successful executive integration



Source: RHR International, 2005

Stage descriptions

Each stage is described as follows.

- **Preparation:** getting ready for the new job and initial meetings, producing both excitement and apprehension.
- **Honeymoon:** an optimistic, confident phase despite a lack of in-depth understanding of the role, the organisation and its people.
- **Reality:** an increase in information is often accompanied by the flow of positive feedback drying up - and a decrease in confidence.
- **Adjustment:** expectations become more realistic and, while challenges are acknowledged, they may seem less daunting. This is often the point when people decide to stay or leave - or where new leader shortcomings are evident.
- **Integration:** people start to form relationships, make friends and, with success, feel a sense of accomplishment - commitment rises because of this.



Five success factors

RHR also found that successful integration occurs when a new leader focuses on these success factors.

- **Role clarity:** seeks clarity regarding business, scope of role, expectations and accountabilities.
- **Building relationships:** builds credibility, relationships and networks.
- **Learning and navigating culture:** understands organisation dynamics, how decisions are made, who the key decision-makers are and what it takes to be successful.
- **Early wins:** achieves quick wins in a high pressure, rapidly-changing, ambiguous and complex environment.
- **Accelerated learning:** focuses attention on the critical knowledge and skills required to be successful.

Two-way street

Both the organisation and the individual have key roles to play in on-boarding, though failure is often attributed to the individual. "The organisation clearly has to ensure that the integration process is a success," explains Orla Leonard (2011), a partner at RHR International. "Much derailment research focuses on the individual. More should be placed on the organisation and what needs to be in place for an individual to succeed."