



WWJMRD 2018; 4(6): 106-108
www.wwjmr.com
International Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal
Refereed Journal
Indexed Journal
Impact Factor MJIF: 4.25
E-ISSN: 2454-6615

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Transitional Leadership – A Competitive Edge

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Abstract

The paper discusses about the concept of transitional leadership and its importance in the current situation. It discusses on the issues like how the leadership expectations have changed from the old three styles to a dynamic orientation. This dynamic orientation stresses on the qualities of updating in the information technology, a newer approach towards people (workers), accepting change in the organization structures, being ready for the unexpected changes which may not be compatible to the Zen X leaders. Earlier we resisted all these changes and it has become an integral part of leadership due to the globalization. The skill requirement of leaders is quiet challenging and goes into wide changes. So based on this framing a strategic approach and fixing a competitive advantage becomes very much difficult.

Keywords: Transitional leadership, Zen X, Leaders, leadership.

1. Introduction

A **transitional leader** is a board- or executive-level individual brought in to tackle a corporate challenge with a defined purpose and direction. They are typically hired to lead a major transformation, such as a company restructuring, sale or turnaround, integration of an acquisition or the start-up of a new division.

2. Need for a Transitional Leadership in Business

For many reasons, transitional leadership is an important factor at both the micro, or individual level, and macro, or organizational, societal level.

At a time when it has never been tougher to run large organizations, businesses must transform if they are to survive. Struck by global megatrends ranging from demographic upheaval to climate change to the breakneck pace of technological breakthroughs, today's leaders are operating in an environment of unprecedented complexity – and their organizations are no longer fit for purpose. As the digital revolution continues to shift power from producer to consumer, CEOs must build much more diverse networks of partners able to help them grapple with the challenges posed by new markets and new technologies. At the same time, trust in leaders is at an all-time low.

Organizational transformation is not easy; research suggests as many as 54% of transformation exercises fail to be adopted and sustained. And while strong leadership is a pre-requisite for success, PwC's own work suggests many CEOs do not know where to begin. The 2015 CEO survey reveals that just 27% of CEOs have started on the changes required to make their businesses more innovative.

In order to transform their organizations, leaders require a very particular set of skills, which few currently possess – less than 10% according to Harthill Consulting in 2015 analysis. Successful operational leaders are expected to prove equally adept at organizational change, but the attributes needed for these very different challenges are not the same.

3. The Problems Faced By The Transitional Leader

It is very much challenging just as a new leader is entering into an organization. There is too much of uncertainty about his caliber and the mutual acceptance as a leader. Again it is a kind of parent-child relationship, where encompassing that becomes a major task because of the interpersonal relationships during transition. So to be right transitional leader he has to be answering the following:

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- Will I still have a job I value?
- Will I have a place in the organization the new leader wants to create?
- Will I lose power? Will I lose status?
- Will the new leader fulfill all my expectations?
- Will I have the skills that are required in the future? Will I find I am no longer competent?
- Will we finally be able to turn the corner and realize our objectives?
- Will the new leader bring in his “own people” who will carve out powerful roles for themselves, at my expense?

Always transition creates uncertainty and anxiety when the people in organization are unskilled at handling the arrival of new leader. They can choose to facilitate the new leader's entry, to impede it, or take a neutral approach to promote their own position or to support their group or level. How the leader acts will have a bearing on the choices people make, and vice versa. The new leader cannot instruct people how to react. Probably the best he can do is to communicate the respect he feels for the situation they are in.

4. The Strategies of a Transitional Leader

Here is a range of areas where leaders can choose to act to create such a context, mindful that the balance they strike must be appropriate to the context they are in.

1. They can create bonds with their people while maintaining appropriate distance. Being themselves from the start, while respecting the demands of their position, helps leaders to engage.
2. By openly recognizing the limits of their knowledge, leaders are usually seen as being strong. By “winging it,” leaders usually lose credibility.
3. Leaders communicate this information unconsciously in any event—are it not preferable to have a worked-out and explicit position? Yes.
4. Slow down or speed up the change of their organization, in line with their growing competence as the leader.
5. Remove or keep people, balancing the need for change with the opportunities to develop people. How a new leader deals with people at the start is never forgotten, and sometimes never forgiven.
6. Leaders are inevitably in an “in-between” position. Letting go of one end of the rope is a quick recipe for a short tenure as a leader.

It's not that transition isn't thought about. It is like poor health, which has to be treated but many people prefer to spend their time and energy worrying instead of changing habits.

Lucy Kellaway, a journalist with the Financial Times, spelled out five proven strategies that people use to help themselves through the transition period with her trademark no-holds-barred style (“Play your cards right while a new leader reshuffles his pack,” Financial Times, Monday 21 November 2005). These were:

- “Monster brown-nosing”
- “Playing the wise old owl”
- “Planning your exit route”
- “Becoming a full-time gossip”
- “Keeping your head down and getting on with your job”

Of course, by employing these strategies, people reinforce and perpetuate the usual way of carrying on during organizational transitions: survive as best you can, and mind your back. This is the very same strategy that leaders often employ to get through the turbulent first months of their tenure.

5. The Challenges Of Transitional Leadership

There are various challenges a transitional leader has to face with the advantage of his saga of experience and expertise. They are

Buyer's Market

It's a demographic problem. There are more Baby Boomers than there are Generation Xers. Many Baby Boomers needed to compete, climb the ladder, dog-eat-dog it up to their positions in leadership.

Self-Identity

If the transition wants to be effective, we need to re-create who we are and who we want to become. This shifts the transition process from, “What am I leaving?” to “I'm excited about where I'm going!”

Not Prepared Financially

Not being prepared financially is a very common reason for delaying transition. It might be embarrassing for some – so it isn't often talked about.

No Bench

Everything is not within our control. The unexpected happens. We'll leave our positions prepared or not. Often we've selected or hired people to be implementers and put limited effort into helping them develop their executive capacities.

Trust

Many leaders find it difficult to let go and trust others to carry on, particularly those in a Founder or Legend type role. Trust as a relationship dynamic they helped build, but it is a deep and important issue for leaders. Our level of trust determines our ability to rise.

Environment changes

Sometimes, leaders do not recognize environmental changes. At each transition, a leader must be prepared to adopt new and different behaviors to succeed. This ability (or failure) to recognize, navigate, and make personal changes influences the effectiveness of leaders over time.

Transitions: Potentially turbulent waters

If they are to demonstrate and retain their value, leaders must steer their organizations through various transitions. Successful navigation, on the other hand, results in vital lessons learned, greater flexibility and adaptability, and stronger leadership skills.

Change in job/role

The most common transition for which a leader will need to change is taking on a new role or job. At each passage, the person must acquire new skills and competencies to make major transitions. The skills that made a leader successful in a previous role are typically not sufficient for the new role.

Change in the marketplace. Markets change in many ways and leaders who are effective in transitions pay attention to these market changes. Leaders who are not successfully transitioning may also become “passive resistors” or privately refuse to support the change

Change in strategy/products. Often in response to the competitive environment, firms will look at changing their strategy and/or their product mix. Leaders who successfully embrace this type of change become the enablers.

6. How Transitions Impact A Leader's Performance

As these and other transition points come up during a leader's tenure, he or she needs to be prepared to advance through them. Over time, this failure to transition affects the performance of the leader in the following ways:

1. Staying ahead – these leaders have the ability to recognize transition points; this type of leader generally navigates all changes and transition points with ease while maintaining high levels of performance
2. Keeping up – these leaders have the ability to recognize the transition points; performance may dip for a slight period as the leader adjusts to the new situation.
3. Falling behind – these leaders may or may not recognize the transition points; they generally do not know how to respond or choose to not respond; over time.

7. Company Responses To Leadership Transitions

It is extremely expensive and disruptive for an organization to see leaders fail or to have leaders who are ill equipped for their positions. For example, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway offers an executive education class for new leaders. This class focuses exclusively on what changes the new leaders need to make in their new roles, how to handle these changes, and what challenges they may face.

In 2003, The Economist estimated that organizations were already spending more than \$1 billion providing coaches for their employees; it projected that this expenditure would double in two years.

Individual transition skills needed

While organizations may try to facilitate transitions, navigating transitions is a skill that leaders need to acquire if they do not already possess it. Successful leaders focus on their ability to navigate changes in the environment and their ability to reinvent themselves to adapt to those changes. Generally, successful navigation and personal reinvention require three things:

- 1) A change in attitude and thinking;
- 2) A change in competencies and skills;
- 3) A change in behaviors.

Changing one area is not usually sufficient to navigate transitions successfully. You can ask yourself several questions to determine if you will navigate transitions easily. If you answer is “No” to any of these questions, you can take several developmental actions to help reinvent yourself and navigate difficult transitions.

Specific steps to transition

Navigating transitions is not something you do only for the

organization. It is something you do for yourself. As such, you need to take charge of developing the skills you need to periodically reinvent and realign yourself with environmental changes.

One key is to dedicate yourself to becoming a student of leadership throughout your career. Study effective leadership practices.

A second key is to look in the mirror. Your leadership effectiveness begins with you. You need to answer important questions such as how does your leadership style need to change, what roles and responsibilities do others expect you to give them.

A third key is being open to feedback and coaching—really open to feedback and coaching. You should understand that sometimes this feedback is unpleasant, challenges our egos, and simply stings a bit.

A fourth key is recognizing that effective leadership takes lots of practice and reflection. As part of the transition, try doing things differently, but be reflective. If something goes well, reflect on why it went well.

The fifth key is observing and learning from other successful leaders. Observe people who seem to flourish in their leadership roles. It is equally important, though, to learn from people who are not succeeding in their leadership roles.

Finally, make sure that you understand the business, industry, and community in which you operate. Stay current about industry and company trends. Attend conferences and classes, listen to and participate in business conversations.

Outstanding leaders recognize the need to modify their skills, attitudes, and behaviors frequently to smoothly maneuver through their careers and leadership challenges. They also recognize that while they may need assistance along the way, no one else can make the changes for them. They are the only ones who can successfully navigate their own leadership river.

Conclusion

Transition is a key to success and for that the preparation is important. For this the individual's self-actualization should be high. Based on this you have to set your team and your organization up for the best possible success. Engage ideal successors while they are available. (If they are good enough to be “ideal” they have options and don't need to wait for you.) Prepare for what's next. Preserve the legacy of what you've built by performing a flawless handover. Agility and adaptability are mandatory these days, as leaders prepare, manage, and sometimes reinvent themselves in order to navigate the twists, turns, and transitions they must make. Otherwise, making the wrong move could eventually scuttle a once-promising leadership career.

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