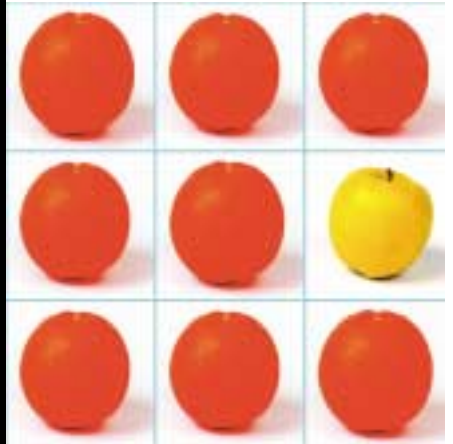


the critical importance of **executive** integration



The new finance executive seemed perfect for the job. His resume was impeccable. Soon after his hiring, however, there were signs that things would not play out as planned.

The executive's straight-laced approach clashed with the laid-back attitude of most of the rest of management. Rarely did he stop to chat with others.

Some in senior management felt that this polished outsider suddenly had the inside edge to the chairman's office. Some questioned aloud the prudence of his hiring.

It was becoming apparent to everyone that this was not working.

Some situations involving mismatched executives cannot be resolved — more care should have been taken to find the right person during the search process. But major problems can be avoided by attending to important aspects of executive integration. This requires attention by both the newly hired executive and the organisation as a whole.

Outside Hiring is a Necessity

When organisations discover a lack of qualified internal candidates to fill key executive positions, it is necessary to look outside the company.

When hiring from outside, the wise organisation engineers a process that maximises the chances of successfully integrating a new executive. Proper management of an integration process can greatly enhance the chances of a smooth and productive relationship between the new executive and the organisation.

Key Parts of the Integration Process: Examine earlier successes and failures

One of the first steps to ensure the effective integration of an outside executive is to examine the company's pre-

vious successes and failures. This can reveal much about organisational proclivities that enhance or detract from integration. The organisation must guard against overlooking the role that an individual plays in engineering his or her own successful integration.

Identify position specifications

Successful integration requires a realistic articulation of the needs of the position. There are many more complicating factors when an outsider fills a position. In addition to having the job-related skills and abilities, the new executive must know how to handle additional factors.

For example, some may feel they should have gotten the position instead so a key specification will be the ability to deal with and overcome jealousy. If the current executive group is insular, will they reject an outsider? If so, the ability to integrate oneself into a group becomes an important part of the position specifications.

Sometimes companies create unrealistic specifications. An organisation that is accustomed to functioning in a resource-poor environment must avoid leading candidates to believe that the position is resource rich. The key is to identify aspects of the position that might not be ►

a problem for inside executives but might require additional adjustment for an outsider.

Recruit realistically

When recruiting an executive from outside, portray the situation as accurately as possible. Candidates should know what they are getting into and be aware of the risks associated with the demands of the position. Otherwise these difficulties will quickly become apparent and the resulting disappointment can doom the relationship.

Assess candidates

The assessment of candidates is especially vital. To what extent do the candidates possess the vital characteristics associated with both job-specific and integration-related requirements?

Has the candidate made previous transitions from one environment to another? Is there evidence the candidate has dealt successfully with jealous or sandbagging colleagues? Can he or she read different cultures and adapt behaviour appropriately? Special and unique skills are necessary for executives to integrate themselves into a new company and it is vital that the assessment process be designed to capture the degree to which the candidate has these special skills.

Involving current executives in the assessment process can help pave the way for a smooth integration. Those who might fight with or be jealous of the individual will find it difficult to express displeasure after the fact if they were involved in the assessment process.

Announce the Hiring with some Fanfare

Before the new person starts, a number of symbolic steps can be taken to set a foundation for successful integration. Press announcements and articles in the company newsletter about the individual can highlight how his or her background fits with corporate strategic direction. Properly done, these can generate enthusiasm and excitement about the new recruit.

The New Executive's First Steps

When the new executive comes on board, he or she may understandably be anxious to quickly demonstrate competence. This can lead to too much talking and not enough listening. But now is the time to listen and grasp the complexities of a new environment. It is vital for the

new executive to overcome the understandable inclination to appear especially knowledgeable.

One common error by new executives is frequent referral to how things were done in their previous organisations. This can be a great irritant to a new executive's peers. It's important to bring the content of what was done in other places without identifying the source.

Another set of interesting dynamics typically involves the boss/new hire relationship. The individual's boss does not want to be seen as lacking confidence in the executive so often manages in a hands-off fashion. Likewise, the new executive wants to demonstrate competence and seeks little supervision. Unfortunately, the first few months are the very time when the new hire most needs help and guidance from the boss.

In the beginning, it is important for both to work towards spending more time with each other. The boss can help the new executive interpret the culture and its implications and collect data about other people's reactions to the new executive and discuss any needed fine-tuning.

The Orientation Period

Psychologically, orientation to the new company begins once the individual has accepted the position. There is much to learn in a short period of time. How the organisation handles initial difficulties has both real and symbolic value in helping the individual feel supported.

The new executive is also likely to experience disappointment over such things as available resources or the calibre of the staff. It is vital for the hiring executive to help process these circumstances in order to get past any disappointments and move forward with plans for addressing the issues.

In addition, the newcomer also needs to learn whose help or support will be vital to success. Again, the boss can be especially helpful.

Organisational Socialisation

Too often, companies stop thinking about the integration after a month or two of orientation. For ultimate success, a longer-term process known as organisational socialisation must take place. This phase of executive integration is the longest, most complex and most critical. During this phase, the new executive begins to ►



deeply understand the organisation's culture and learns how to fit in without being co-opted by it. The individual must be observant, read situations carefully and make conscious observations about many social phenomena.

Frequently, executives are brought in from outside to engineer changes in an organisation's cultural fabric. But many incoming executives make the mistake of trying to change the unchangeable. Walking the tight-rope between changing cultural norms and becoming part of the culture itself can be tricky. Finding the balance is a vital part of the art of integration.

Integration is a Shared Responsibility

The success of a new executive hinges on many factors. The acceptance of the individual, as well as his or her



“DON'T TRY TO CHANGE THE UNCHANGEABLE”

acceptance of the organisation and those within it should not be left to chance. Both the individual and the organisation share the responsibility for planning and effecting a successful integration effort.

A strategic approach to integration increases the likelihood for success. The process should begin even before recruitment and continue for a lengthy period after the executive comes on board. This helps to eliminate expensive hiring mistakes and false starts, ultimately ensuring that business momentum is maintained.

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