



EXECUTIVE INSIGHT

A DISCUSSION OF KEY MANAGEMENT ISSUES | VOLUME 27 NUMBER 4 |

TO BOLDLY GO...

Ever dream about making a presentation to the board for which you are totally unprepared? You stare at the empty page knowing you don't have a clue where to begin. Well, creating a new executive position from square one might make you feel the same way. What would you do if you were the one chosen to boldly go where no one had gone before?

To answer pressing strategic or tactical challenges, organizations often find it necessary to **create a new executive position based on that specific need**. For example, a Senior Vice President – Business Development might be asked to head a major client expansion effort. To overcome major support problems, a Vice President, Customer Service might be named. Okay, these titles kind of tell you what they will be doing. But what if you were introduced to the new Executive Vice President of Customer Engagement? Would you know why he/she is there, what this new position was exactly responsible for executing and how it fits into the existing organization chart?

This issue of *Executive Insight* presents an overview of the challenges involved in undertaking a role that has no **past**. Part two ("Who is This Person and Why Do I Care?") will provide practical action steps that should be taken in the **present** to ensure the **future** of the position, the new executive and the organization.

WARNING: Integrating an executive into a new position takes time and effort! The point is, most people have some idea what the Chief Financial Officer does and what his/her role is in the organization so only a certain amount of education may be required to introduce a new CFO. With a position that is totally unknown and

undefined, special attention must be paid to the fundamentals of executive integration: **role clarity, relationships, culture, early wins and learning** (as shown in our research summary "*Beyond the First 90 Days*") **in addition to the new position's challenges**. This means a lot of extra work for the new executive, the hiring executive and the organization as a whole.

PIONEER PITFALLS Executives coming into, or promoted to, positions with newly coined titles and vague job descriptions experience more difficulties in the transition process than those who follow in the footsteps of another executive. The stress on these "job pioneers" to fulfill their mandate (with instructions that are often ambiguous) can be enormous. They not only have to sell **themselves** (as every new leader does), but also **the very roles** they fill. Leaving this process entirely up to the incoming executive is not a recipe for success. The new senior team member's peer group, and the organization as a whole, play important roles in his/her success and will also go through a period of adjustment as the newcomer settles in.

DYSFUNCTIONAL DYNAMICS Hopefully, you would never throw any new executive into his/her position without an extensive executive integration program for new hires, or a similar transition program

EXECUTIVE INSIGHT



TO BOLDLY GO...
PAGE 2

for promoted executives. **Starting any new job without internal or outside professional assistance greatly reduces the chance of success.** Introducing a previously unknown position into the mix can throw everyone and everything into confusion. Think of a musical duo that is informed it is now going to be a quartet. Their musical arrangements immediately become obsolete. All the performers must adapt if the ensemble is going to be successful, not just the new members. Unless they rewrite their compositions for the new grouping, chaos is likely to follow.

In a similar way, an executive in a new position will interact with other roles above, below and to the side. These multiple layers must be clued into the game plan if their recently appointed colleague is going to be effective. The odds are that **most of the senior team will have to operate and communicate differently than they did before.** Until the lines of communication (out and in) are rewired correctly, not only on paper, but in the minds of the team, people will not know how they are supposed to behave differently.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS Executives in newly created roles face unique transition challenges in addition to the normal integration hurdles. These include **taking on direct reports** who used to answer to the CEO or President (you'd better have a darned good reason ready for them), **taking assignments and planning** from other executives (same thing), and being ready **to demonstrate immediate progress** towards the expected results of the position. Skeptical peers (and potential rivals) will require hard evidence that the new position will affect the company's bottom line before cooperation can be expected.

THE BOTTOM LINE Still not convinced? Here is a recap of the negative outcomes for new position leaders who are welcomed with an integration approach that consists of "a wish and a hope for success."

- Without adequate direction, new position leaders may flounder and not know where to focus their efforts, causing a slow start towards achievement of objectives.
- Left to their own devices, new leaders may establish priorities that do not align with the CEO's, causing time wasted in "course corrections."
- Stakeholders not attuned to the new position leader's objectives don't include him/her in important conversations, creating a knowledge gap.
- Since boundaries are unclear, peers hold on to work that now fits in the newcomer's domain, causing duplication of effort.
- Stakeholders create their own definitions of success, making the new executive seem ineffective when measured against inappropriate benchmarks.
- Uncertainty and confusion cause inefficiency, leaving potential revenue or cost savings on the table.

Our next issue of *Executive Insight* will offer suggestions on how to build a transition program that gives pioneer executives the tools they need to succeed.

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