

## Managing Corporate Transition

There are many reasons a company decides it wishes to implement change, from changes in market conditions, to competitive actions, to a new management team, or perhaps a new partnership. All of these new starts also mean that many aspects of the “old way” of operating is set to cease. These changes, if not managed properly, can lead not to the intended and desired positive results, but rather to setbacks brought on by difficulties in implementation.

To avoid poorly executed transitions and the consequences they bring, Tudog presents herein an overview of the transition process, the challenges that are faced during each phase, and ways these difficulties can be addressed and overcome.

One of the most important things to keep in mind is that transitions mark for some people involved the end of the way they are used to doing business, and this is difficult because they may see it as an end to the comfort level they have acquired by doing things the old way. They do not see the transition as a beginning, but rather an end, and reassuring them and allowing them to view the transition as a new start is an essential component of the successful transition.

Any desire to force the transition through without thought or care to what people think and feel is a recipe for disaster. When you initiate a transition you are changing the way people interact with one another and with your enterprise. The process requires management or it will get out of hand and you will find that you are not only unable to start your new processes, but also incapable of operating according to the old ones.

Most transitions have 3 processes you need to manage. They are:

1. The Transition from the Old to the New
2. The Adjustment to the New
3. The Implementation of the New

Let's review each stage, its challenges and remedies to the challenges:

### **The Transition from the Old to the New**

This initial phase is often characterized by a sense of loss by many involved. This can also lead to a resistance to change as the people involved seek to preserve what they have and oppose what they see as changes that have an ill effect on them. The loss they feel can depend on the people involved, their functions in the company, and the extent to which they identify personally with their work and the company. Some loss elements may include:

- Loss of Sense of Belonging - the transition can make people feel less connected to the company and their colleagues because they are uncertain about the future and do not feel that they are stakeholders in the changes being introduced.
- Loss of Responsibility – the transition can make people feel as though the responsibilities they have (and by extension perhaps the authority or power) is at risk because the changes being implemented may curtail their activities or change their job descriptions.

- Loss of Sense of Security – in many instances people feel a sense of security from the known, and conversely, a sense of insecurity and apprehension from the unknown. The changes brought to policies, schedules, processes, and systems of operations by a transition can lead many people to feel insecure.
- Loss of Hope – many people equate the way things are with the way their future will be and gain a comfort in being able to forecast their situation. A transition can take away that perceived certainty and with it a sense of hope for the future.
- Loss of Control – a transition could lead people to feel they have no control over the process they are engaging. The resulting discomfort leads to indecision as people are uncertain of the circumstances and feel they lack the basic information upon which to make a decision.

### *Remedies*

The solution to the problems presented by the transition from the old to the new includes:

- Communication – make certain you have channels to communicate with your employees and make sure they know not only what is being decided, but also why. The more you are able to include them in your thinking, the less insecure and alienated they will feel.
- Engagement – there are many decisions you can leave up to your employees that will allow them to gain a sense of ownership in the process and allow them to feel that some of the changes being made are of their own making, giving them a sense of empowerment and security. You can even let them know what needs to be changed and achieved and leave it up to them to figure out how.
- Vision – people cannot get on board with changes if they have no idea where it is leading them. You need to make sure you share your vision with your staff and make sure they understand how the new vision will affect them. Then, when you introduce change, connect it back to the new vision and let them know how this specific change advances the company toward the new vision.

### **The Adjustment to the New**

As the changes begin to become apparent you will find your employees often switch between being excited with the prospect of the new and apprehension about leaving behind the old. They may at times feel disoriented and uncertain of procedure, and at other times may resort to older processes as a way of regaining a sense of control.

Many transitions fail because they do not manage this phase of the process properly and instead try to force through the changes by being more committed to timetables than the long term stability of their transition.

### *Remedies*

- It is important to encourage cohesion during this phase so that your staff senses that they are together in the process and will bear the initial burdens together so that they can collectively succeed.
- Do not try to suppress dissent as it will look like you are trying to strong arm your way to the changes. Rather, make an effort to discuss the issues with those demonstrating resistance and, wherever possible, acknowledge their feelings.

- Continue to communicate regularly and explain why the changes being introduced are necessary. Also, by communicating you are providing the answers to many questions that might otherwise be answered incorrectly or fall victim to rumor. Any vacuum of information (and good will) may be filled by opinions that are less than productive.
- Monitor the changes carefully and keep asking the people affected by the changes how they are coping and adjusting. Not only will be showing concern, but you may learn where some of your changes need adjusting.

### **The Implementation of the New**

This is the final stage in the process after the initial feelings of confusion and loss have given way to a greater interest in the transition. This can manifest itself both with intense energy and commitment to the changes, and also more passionate sentiments by those against the changes. The reaction to the transition is, at this stage, a function of the personalities of the people involved. There are some people who were able to share the vision of the transition early on because they are comfortable with new ideas and new processes. There are also those people who are slower to adapt and need more information in order to find their comfort zone.

Both the quick and the slow to adapt bring something of value to the process. The energy and creativity of the early adapters will help your company execute the transition with innovation. The questions and challenges presented by the late adapters will make certain the company addresses all issues of importance as the transition is implemented.

#### *Remedies*

- Continued communication remains the key as the different kinds of people in your organization will have different kinds of questions that require answers. Make sure you address the questions that are posed, as well as try to pre-empt some questions by providing information on a regular basis.
- Make sure you continue to share the vision and the ideas behind your actions and plans.
- Make sure you also speak not only of the changes being made but of the better future the changes will bring to the company.
- Make sure you are training your employees for all their new tasks and in all the new processes. Nothing diminishes loyalty more than employees feeling they are not being given the tools and knowledge they need to succeed. Add this to an environment of change, and the results could be harmful to your transition effort. By training your staff you are letting them know you want them to stay and you want them to succeed.
- Initiate a policy that will serve as an incentive for people to comply with new processes and procedures. This can include giving people new responsibilities, publicly acknowledging jobs well done, and granting of new training to those showing special interest.
- Maintain the community of your company. One of the biggest fears employees have is that the sense of community they feel at work will be eroded through the changes. If you can demonstrate through office events, company sponsored meals, and other community-like actions that the same positive environment will prevail, you can neutralize a good deal of the potential resistance.

Transitions are necessary for company growth and often they are undertaken to bring a company to the next stage of its development. Transitions only work, however, if they are implemented properly and are able to take and build upon the existing strengths of the company. The secret is in recognizing the dangers and acting to remedy them before they can have a troubling impact.