m, broad-based
be able to leverage
fic objectives?

ation? Who defers

Who is likely to

ple, the situational
eptions of their

luence strategy?
Might influence
, and action-

CHAPTER 9

Manage Yourself

After six great years in the New York office of a large media company, Stephen Erikson was promoted to a senior position at the firm's Canadian unit. He expected the move from New York to Toronto to be a breeze. After all, Canadians and Americans are pretty much alike. And the city was safe and reputed to have good restaurants and cultural events.

Stephen moved right away, rented a short-term apartment in downtown Toronto, and dove into the new job with his usual energy. His wife, Irene, an accomplished freelance interior designer, put up their co-op apartment for sale and started preparing their two children—Katherine, twelve, and Elizabeth, nine—for a move in the middle of the school year. Stephen and Irene had talked about postponing moving the children until the end of the school year, four months away, but decided it was too long to have the family separated.

The first hints of trouble in the new job were subtle. Every time he tried to get something done, Stephen felt as if he was wading through molasses. As a lifelong New Yorker accustomed to

bluntness in talking about business, he found his new colleagues irritatingly polite and "nice." Stephen complained to Irene that his colleagues refused to engage in hardheaded discussions about the tough issues. And he couldn't find the kind of go-to people he had relied on to get things done in New York.

Four weeks after Stephen started the job, Irene joined him in Toronto to look for a new house and school and to scope out prospects for continuing her freelance design work. Stephen was frustrated with the job and irritable. Irene's unhappiness quickly mounted when she couldn't find schools to her liking. The children had been happily enrolled in a top-tier private school in New York. They were displeased about moving and had been making Irene's life miserable. She had calmed them with stories about the adventure of moving to a new country and promises to find them a great new school. Dispirited, she told Stephen she thought they should leave the kids where they were until the end of the year; he agreed.

With Stephen commuting between Toronto and New York, and Irene under pressure as a working single parent, events quickly took their toll. Although Irene visited Toronto for a couple of weekends and continued looking into schools, it became clear that her heart was not in the move. Weekends often were stressful, with the children happy to see Stephen but unhappy about the move. Stephen often arrived back in the office on Mondays tired and found it hard to concentrate, aggravating his difficulties in getting traction and connecting with his colleagues and team. He knew his work performance was suffering, and that further increased his stress.

Eventually he decided to force the issue. Through connections at the company, he found a good school and identified some promising housing prospects. But when he pressed Irene to get going on selling their apartment, the result was the worst fight of their marriage. When it became clear their relationship was being jeopardized, Stephen told the firm he needed either to return to New York or quit.

The life of a leader is always a balancing act, but never more so than during a transition. The uncertainty and ambiguity can be crippling. You don't know what you don't know. You haven't had a chance to build a support network. If you've moved, as Stephen did, you're also in transition personally. If you have a family, they, too, are in transition. Amid all this turmoil, you're expected to get acclimated quickly and begin to effect positive change in your new organization. For all these reasons, managing yourself is a key transition challenge.

Are you focusing on the right things in the right way? Are you maintaining your energy and keeping your perspective? Are you and your family getting the support you need? Don't try to go it alone.

Taking Stock

A good place to start is to take stock of how you're feeling about how things are going in your transition right now. So take a few minutes to look at the "Guidelines for Structured Reflection" (see box) to assess how you're doing.

Guidelines for Structured Reflection

How Do You Feel So Far?

On a scale of high to low, do you feel:

- Excited? If not, why not? What can you do about it?
- Confident? If not, why not? What can you do about it?
- In control of your success? If not, why not? What can you do about it?

What Has Bothered You So Far?

- With whom have you failed to connect? Why?
- Of the meetings you've attended, which has been the most troubling? Why?
- Of all that you've seen or heard, what has disturbed you most? Why?

What Has Gone Well or Poorly?

- Which interactions would you handle differently if you could? Which exceeded your expectations? Why?
- Which of your decisions have turned out particularly well? Not so well? Why?
- What missed opportunities do you regret most? Was a better result blocked primarily by you, or by something beyond your control?

Now focus on the biggest challenges or difficulties you face. Be honest with yourself. Are your difficulties situational, or do their sources lie within you? Even experienced and skilled people may blame problems on the situation rather than on their own actions. The net effect is that they are less proactive than they could be.

Now take a step back. If things are not going completely the way you want, why is that? Is it only the inevitable emotional roller coaster you will experience when taking a new role? It's inevitable that your initial enthusiasm will wane as the excitement of taking on a new challenge wears off and the reality sets in of the challenges you face. It's common for leaders to go into a valley three to six months after taking a new role. The good news

is that you're virtually certain to come out the other side—as long as you're applying your 90-day plan, of course.

It's also possible, however, that the difficulties you face are the result of deeper personal vulnerabilities that could take you off-track. That's because transitions tend to amplify your weaknesses. So look at the following list of potentially dysfunctional behaviors, and ask yourself (and, if it's safe to do so, others who know you well and will give you honest feedback) whether you potentially are suffering from any of these syndromes.

- **Undefended boundaries.** If you fail to establish solid boundaries defining what you are willing and not willing to do, the people around you—bosses, peers, and direct reports—will take whatever you have to give. The more you give, the less they will respect you and the more they will ask of you—another vicious cycle. Eventually you will feel angry and resentful that you're being nibbled to death, but you will have no one to blame but yourself. If you cannot establish boundaries for yourself, you cannot expect others to do it for you.
- **Brittleness.** The uncertainty inherent in transitions can exacerbate rigidity and defensiveness, especially in new leaders with a high need for control. Often the result is overcommitment to failing courses of action. You make a call prematurely and then feel unable to back away from it without losing credibility. The longer you wait, the harder it is to admit you were wrong, and the more calamitous the consequences. Or perhaps you decide that your way of accomplishing a particular goal is the only way. As a result, your rigidity disempowers people who have equally valid ideas about how to achieve the same goal.

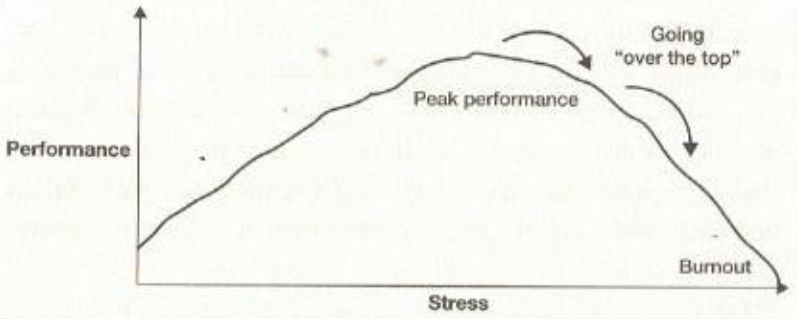
- **Isolation.** To be effective, you must be connected to the people who make action happen and to the subterranean flow of information. It's surprisingly easy for new leaders to end up isolated, and isolation can creep up on you. It happens because you don't take the time to make the right connections, perhaps by relying overmuch on a few people or on official information. It also happens if you unintentionally discourage people from sharing critical information with you. Perhaps they fear your reaction to bad news, or they see you as having been captured by competing interests. Whatever the reason, isolation breeds uninformed decision making, which damages your credibility and further reinforces your isolation.

- **Work avoidance.** You will have to make tough calls early in your new job. Perhaps you must make major decisions about the direction of the business based on incomplete information. Or perhaps your personnel decisions will have a profound impact on people's lives. Consciously or unconsciously, you may choose to delay by burying yourself in other work or fool yourself into believing that the time isn't ripe to make the call. The result is what leadership thinkers have termed *work avoidance*: the tendency to avoid taking the bull by the horns, which results in tough problems becoming even tougher.[1]

All these syndromes can contribute to dangerous levels of stress. Not all stress is bad. In fact, there is a well-documented relationship between stress and performance known as the Yerkes-Dodson curve, illustrated in figure 9-1.[2] Whether stress is self-generated or externally imposed, you need some stress (often in the form of positive incentives or consequences from inaction) to be productive. Without it, not much happens—you stay in bed munching chocolates.

FIGURE 9-1

Yerkes-Dodson human performance curve



As you begin to experience pressure, your performance improves, at least at first. Eventually you reach a point (which varies from person to person) at which further demands, in the form of too many balls to juggle or too heavy an emotional load, start to undermine your performance. This dynamic creates more stress, further reducing your performance and creating a vicious cycle as you go over the top of your stress curve. Rarely, exhaustion sets in and you burn out. Much more common is chronic underperformance: you work harder and achieve less. This is what happened to Stephen.

Understanding the Three Pillars of Self-Management

If you have these sorts of weaknesses, what can you do about it? You must vigorously engage in self-management, a personal practice that is built on a foundation with three pillars. The first pillar is adoption of the success strategies presented in the previous eight chapters. The second pillar is creation and enforcement of some personal disciplines. The third pillar is formation of support systems, at work and at home, that help you maintain your balance.

Pillar 1: Adopt 90-Day Strategies

The strategies spelled out in the previous eight chapters represent a template for how to prepare, learn, set priorities, create plans, and direct action to build momentum. When you see these strategies work and when you get some early successes under your belt, you will feel more confident and energized by what you're accomplishing. As you progress through your transition, think about the challenges you're facing in light of the core challenges summarized in table 9-1, and identify the chapters to which you want to return.

TABLE 9-1

Assessment of core challenges

Core challenge	Diagnostic questions
Prepare yourself.	Are you adopting the right mind-set for your new job and letting go of the past?
Accelerate your learning.	Are you figuring out what you need to learn, whom to learn it from, and how to speed up the learning process?
Match your strategy to the situation.	Are you diagnosing the type of transition you face and the implications for what to do and what not to do?
Negotiate success.	Are you building your relationship with your new boss, managing expectations, and marshaling the resources you need?
Secure early wins.	Are you focusing on the vital priorities that will advance your long-term goals and build your short-term momentum?
Achieve alignment.	Are you identifying and fixing frustrating misalignments of strategy, structure, systems, and skills?
Build your team.	Are you assessing, restructuring, and aligning your team to leverage what you're trying to accomplish?
Create alliances.	Are you building a base of internal and external support for your initiatives so that you're not pushing rocks uphill?

Pillar 2: Develop Personal Disciplines

Knowing what you should be doing is not the same thing as doing it. Ultimately, success or failure emerges from the accumulation of daily choices that propel you in productive directions or push you off a cliff. This is the territory of the second pillar of personal efficacy: personal disciplines.

Personal disciplines are the regular routines you enforce on yourself ruthlessly. What specific disciplines are the highest priorities for you? It depends on what your strengths and weaknesses are. You may have a great deal of insight into yourself, but you should also consult others who know you well and whom you trust. (Some 360-degree feedback can be useful here.) What do they see as your strengths and, crucially, your potential weak spots?

Use the following list of personal disciplines to stimulate your thinking about routines you need to develop.

Plan to Plan. Do you devote time daily and weekly to a plan-work-evaluate cycle? If not, or if you do so irregularly, you need to be more disciplined about planning. At the end of each day, spend ten minutes evaluating how well you met your goals and then planning for the next day. Do the same thing at the end of each week. Get into the habit of doing this. Even if you fall behind, you will be more in control.

Focus on the Important. Do you devote time each day to the most important work that needs to be done? It's easy for the urgent to crowd out the important. You get caught up in the flow of transactions—phone calls, meetings, e-mail—and never find time to focus on the medium term, let alone the long term. If you're having trouble getting the real work done, discipline yourself to set aside a particular time each day, even as little as

half an hour, when you will close the door, turn off your phone, ignore e-mail, and focus, focus, focus.

Judiciously Defer Commitment. Do you make commitments on the spur of the moment and later regret them? Do you blithely agree to do things in the seemingly remote future, only to kick yourself when the day arrives and your schedule is full? If you do, you must learn to defer commitment. Whenever anybody asks you to do something, say, "Sounds interesting. Let me think about it and get back to you." Never say yes on the spot. If you're being pressed (perhaps by someone who knows your vulnerability to such pressure), say, "Well, if you need an answer now, I'll have to say no. But if you can wait, I will give it more thought." Begin with no; it's easy to say yes later. It's difficult (and damaging to your reputation) to say yes and then change your mind. Keep in mind that people will ask you to make commitments far in advance, knowing that your schedule will look deceptively open.

Go to the Balcony. Do you find yourself getting too caught up in emotional escalation in difficult situations? If you do, discipline yourself to stand back, take stock from fifty thousand feet, and then make productive interventions. Leading authorities in the fields of leadership and negotiation have long praised the value of "going to the balcony" in this way.[3] It can be tough to do this, especially when the stakes are high and you're emotionally involved. But with discipline and practice, it is a skill that can be cultivated.

Check In with Yourself. Are you as aware as you need to be of your reactions to events during your transition? If not, discipline yourself to engage in structured reflection about your situation. For some new leaders, structured self-assessment means jotting

down a few thoughts, impressions, and questions at the end of each day. For others, it means setting aside time each week to assess how things are going. Find an approach that suits your style, and discipline yourself to use it regularly. Work to translate the resulting insights into action.

Recognize When to Quit. To adapt an old saw, transitions are marathons and not sprints. If you find yourself going over the top of your stress curve more than occasionally, you must discipline yourself to know when to quit. This is easy to say and hard to do, of course, especially when you're up against a deadline and think one more hour might make all the difference. It may, in the short term, but the long-term cost could be steep. Work hard at recognizing when you're at the point of diminishing returns, and take a break of whatever sort refreshes you.

Pillar 3: Build Your Support Systems

The third pillar of self-management is solidifying your personal support systems. This means asserting control in your local environment, stabilizing the home front, and building a solid advice-and-counsel network.

Assert Control Locally. It's hard to focus on work if the basic infrastructure that supports you is not in place. Even if you have more pressing worries, move quickly to get your new office set up, develop routines, clarify expectations with your assistant, and so on. If necessary, assemble a set of temporary resources to tide you over until the permanent systems are operational.

Stabilize the Home Front. It's a fundamental rule of warfare to avoid fighting on too many fronts. For new leaders, this means

stabilizing the home front so that you can devote the necessary attention to work. You cannot hope to create value at work if you're destroying value at home. This is the fundamental mistake that Stephen made.

If your new position involves relocation, your family is also in transition. Like Irene, your spouse may be making a job transition, too, and your children may have to leave their friends and change schools. In other words, the fabric of your family's life may be disrupted just when you most need support and stability. The stresses of your professional transition can amplify the strain of your family's transition. Also, family members' difficulties can add to your already heavy emotional load, undermining your ability to create value and lengthening the time it takes for you to reach the break-even point.

So focus on accelerating the family transition, too. The starting point is to acknowledge that your family may be unhappy, even resentful, about the transition. There is no avoiding disruption, but it can be helpful to talk about it and work through the sense of loss together.

Beyond that, here are some guidelines that can help smooth your family's transition:

- **Analyze your family's existing support system.** Moving severs your ties with the people who provide essential services for your family: doctors, lawyers, dentists, babysitters, tutors, coaches, and more. Do a support-system inventory, identify priorities, and invest in finding replacements quickly.

- **Get your spouse back on track.** Your spouse may quit his old job with the intention of finding a new one after relocating. Unhappiness can fester if the search is slow. To accelerate it, negotiate up front with your company for job-search support, or find such support shortly after moving. Above all, don't let your spouse defer getting going.

- **Time the family move carefully.** For children, it is substantially more difficult to move in the middle of a school year. Consider waiting until the end of the school year to move your family. The price, of course, is separation from your loved ones and the wear and tear of commuting. If you do this, however, be sure that your spouse has extra support to help ease the burden. Being a single parent is hard work.

- **Preserve the familiar.** Reestablish familiar family rituals as quickly as possible, and maintain them throughout the transition. Help from favorite relatives, such as grandparents, also makes a difference.

- **Invest in cultural familiarization.** If you move internationally, get professional advice about the cross-cultural transition. Isolation is a far greater risk for your family if there are language and cultural barriers.

- **Tap into your company's relocation service, if it has one, as soon as possible.** Corporate relocation services are typically limited to helping you find a new home, move belongings, and locate schools, but such help can make a big difference.

There is no avoiding pain if you decide to move your family. But there is much you can do to minimize it and to accelerate everyone's transitions.

Build Your Advice-and-Counsel Network. No leader, no matter how capable and energetic, can do it all. You need a network of trusted advisers within and outside the organization with whom to talk through what you're experiencing. Your network is an indispensable resource that can help you avoid becoming isolated and losing perspective. As a starting point, you need to cultivate three types of advisers: technical advisers, cultural interpreters, and political counselors (see table 9-2).

You also need to think hard about the mix of internal and external advisers you want to cultivate. Insiders know the organization, its culture and politics. Seek out people who are well connected and whom you can trust to help you grasp what is really going on. They are a priceless resource.

TABLE 9-2

Types of advisers

Type	Role	How they help you
Technical advisers	Provide expert analysis of technologies, markets, and strategy	They suggest applications for new technologies. They interpret technical data and provide analysis. They provide timely and accurate information.
Cultural interpreters	Help you understand the new culture and (if that is your objective) adapt to it	They provide you with insight into cultural norms, mental models, and guiding assumptions. They help you learn to speak the language of the new organization.
Political counselors	Help you deal with political relationships within your new organization	They help you implement the advice of your technical advisers. They serve as a sounding board as you think through options for implementing your agenda. They challenge you with what-if questions.

At the same time, insiders cannot be expected to give you dispassionate or disinterested views of events. Thus, you should augment your internal network with outside advisers and counselors who will help you work through the issues and decisions you face. They should be skilled at listening and asking questions, have good insight into the way organizations work, and have your best interests at heart.

Use table 9-3 to assess your advice-and-counsel network. Analyze each person in terms of the domains in which she assists you—technical adviser, cultural interpreter, political counselor—as well as whether each is an insider or an outsider.

Now take a step back. Will your existing network provide the support you need in your new role? Don't assume that people who have been helpful in the past will continue to be helpful in your new situation. You will encounter different problems, and former advisers may not be able to help you in your new role. As you attain higher levels of responsibility, for example, the need for good political counsel typically increases dramatically.

TABLE 9-3

Assessment of your advice-and-counsel network

	Technical advisers	Cultural interpreters	Political counselors
Internal advisers and counselors (inside your new organization)			
External advisers and counselors (outside your new organization)			

You should also be thinking ahead. Because it takes time to develop an effective network, it's not too early to focus on what sort of network you will need in your *next* job. How will your needs for advice change?

To develop an effective support network, you need to make sure you have the right help and your support network is there when you need it. Does your support network have the following qualities?

- The right mix of technical advisers, cultural interpreters, and political counselors.
- The right mix of internal and external advisers. You want honest feedback from insiders *and* the dispassionate perspective of outside observers.
- External supporters who are loyal to you as an individual, not to your new organization or unit. Typically, these are long-standing colleagues and friends.
- Internal advisers who are trustworthy, whose personal agendas don't conflict with yours, and who offer straight and accurate advice.
- Representatives of key constituencies who can help you understand their perspectives. You do not want to restrict yourself to one or two points of view.

Staying on Track

You will have to fight to manage yourself every single day. Ultimately, your success or failure will flow from all the small choices you make along the way. These choices can create

momentum—for the organization and for you—or they can result in vicious cycles that undermine your effectiveness. Your day-to-day actions during your transition establish the pattern for all that follows, not only for the organization but also for your personal efficacy and ultimately your well-being.

MANAGE YOURSELF—CHECKLIST

1. What are your greatest vulnerabilities in your new role? How do you plan to compensate for them?
2. What personal disciplines do you most need to develop or enhance? How will you do that? What will success look like?
3. What can you do to gain more control over your local environment?
4. What can you do to ease your family's transition? What support relationships will you have to build? Which are your highest priorities?
5. What are your priorities for strengthening your advice-and-counsel network? To what extent do you need to focus on your internal network? Your external network? In which domain do you most need additional support—technical, cultural, political, or personal?

CHAPTER 10

Accelerate Everyone

The First 90 Days was conceived as a book for individual leaders in transition. It was written to help them diagnose their situations, define the core challenges, and design plans to create momentum. Hundreds of thousands of leaders have benefited from the approach, which independent research has shown reduces time to break-even by as much as 40 percent.[1]

When a new leader fails to thrive, it's a severe, perhaps career-ending, blow to the individual. But what about the impact of transitions on companies? Every failed transition—whether outright derailment or less dramatic underperformance—exacts costs from the organization as well. The magnitude of these costs is such that a state-of-the-art transition acceleration system (hereafter "acceleration system") can reduce enterprise risk, create competitive advantage, and speed up change implementation.

Think first about the risks posed by senior executive transitions, both onboarding of new hires and internal promotions. A single failure at the senior executive level can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in direct costs, never mind lost opportunities

or damage to businesses. The independent study of the Genesis Advisers program and coaching processes mentioned previously yielded an assessed 1,400 percent ROI based on conservative salary assumptions. But beyond that, the following verbatim quotations from the study highlight the scope and dimensions of the potential impact of derailment or underperformance.[2]

- "In one business, under a struggling new leader, growth slowed by half in one region. When you look at the after-tax impact, that amounted to $7 to 8 M U.S."
- "Initiatives were not undertaken, and results were not met. A new product launch was delayed. When new product development problems arise, the impact of a poor transition could be $100 M U.S."
- "A key cost is loss of talent. There is a huge cost that goes beyond direct dollars. Hi-potentials are a scarce resource, and we're tough on them. If they don't make it, you've washed out a hi-potential."

Companies typically have systems in place to assess and manage other risks of comparable magnitude, and they should manage executive transition risk with equal rigor. An acceleration system is therefore an element of overall enterprise risk management.

Now consider the cumulative impact on performance of the many ongoing transitions occurring at all levels. Recall that about a quarter of all the leaders in typical *Fortune* 500 companies change jobs each year. Executives have even higher annual rates of transition—35 percent in the top three tiers of leadership in one study, with 22 percent moving internally and 13 percent being hired from the outside. And each transition materially impacts the performance of about a dozen people surrounding the leader—peers, direct reports, and bosses.

Imagine the value of accelerating all those transitions by only 10 percent, never mind 40 percent. Success in accelerating everyone contributes directly to improving company performance. It's even a potential source of competitive advantage; if you can help everyone get up to speed faster, the business will be more nimble and responsive. An acceleration system is therefore a key element of a high-performance organization.

Finally, think about what happens when your business goes through a significant change event—a restructuring, a phase of rapid growth, or integration of an acquisition. Every major change creates a ripple of individual transitions that cascades through the organization. The important "hard side" work of getting in place the right structure and systems and staffing the key positions is only the first phase of change implementation. To achieve planned objectives, such as acquisition synergy targets, strategic direction must be driven down through the organization; clarity about roles, responsibilities, and decision rights must be established; and relationship building must be accelerated.

The 90-day framework described in this book has been applied very successfully to accelerate the second phase of organizational change in Rapid Rewire implementations. The focus typically is on team acceleration, and it begins with the top team and flows down through the organization. Teams at every level use the same methodology, language, and tools to create 90-day plans and build relationships and teamwork. Success in applying this approach can make the difference between achieving targets and failing miserably. That's because, as many companies have learned painfully, the soft side of change is the hard side. An acceleration system is therefore an essential element of the organizational change management toolkit.

Whether the focus is on risk management, performance improvement, change implementation, or all three, companies have a big

stake in accelerating transitions at every level—internally and externally, individually and organizationally. This means that they should manage leadership-transition acceleration as they would any critical business process—by putting in place the right framework, tools, and systems to accelerate everyone.

Given this, how should companies approach the design of acceleration systems? Following are ten design principles—guidelines you can apply to build the right solution for your business.

Identify the Critical Transitions

The starting point is to understand how many transitions are occurring in your organization and to focus first on accelerating the most important of them. It's surprising how many companies are unable to answer basic questions about the number of people who are being hired, getting promoted, moving between units, and making lateral moves. Without good data on the frequency of transitions—and, critically, without awareness of when they are occurring—it's difficult to design acceleration systems.

You need to understand transition frequencies in order to assess the costs and benefits of providing support at different levels and to efficiently allocate resources. Suppose, for example, that you anticipate a relatively high frequency of movement (greater than 30 percent) at the frontline leader level, perhaps because the business is growing rapidly. It's a good rule of thumb that leaders at this level should participate in transition workshops (in person or virtually) within their first 60 days on the job (in addition, as described later, to getting immediate launch resources at the time they move into their new roles). These workshops tend to work best with fifteen to twenty participants. You can use this information to plan where and when transition support will be offered.

Beyond knowing transition frequencies, it's valuable to know what the mix is of onboarding, inboarding (moves between units), promotion, and lateral moves. Knowing this allows you to tailor the support you're providing. That's because, as described later, support should be customized somewhat to the types of transitions leaders are experiencing.

Then you need to focus on critical transitions. Which are the most important transitions going on in your company? Suppose you're a small, rapidly growing pharmaceutical company. You have just received approval for a promising new drug; you're hiring a new sales force and need to get up to speed faster than a competitor. Your success in onboarding new salespeople may make the difference between great success and so-so performance. Your initial efforts therefore should focus on helping all those salespeople get up to speed as quickly as possible, as well as helping the sales organization as a whole to gel. Use the Transition Heat Map tool in figure 10-1 to summarize your assessments of which transitions are most critical in your organization.

FIGURE 10-1

Transition Heat Map

The Transition Heat Map is a tool for summarizing the most important transition acceleration priorities in your organization, as shown in the example below. Start by listing the key organizational units or groups or projects in the left-hand column. Then identify any major change events that are occurring in each of these units, groups, projects. Finally assess the relative intensity of key types of transitions—onboarding, promotion, geographic moves, and lateral moves—that are occurring in each organization. The result is a summary that you can use to communicate about priorities.

		Transition intensity			
Organizational unit	**Major change events**	**Onboarding**	**Promotion**	**Geographic moves**	**Lateral moves**
Unit A	Rapid growth	High	Low	High	Medium
Unit B	Turnaround	Medium	Low	Low	High
Unit C	Acquisition	None	Low	Medium	High

Identify Set-Up-to-Fail Dynamics

As discussed in the introduction, there are common traps new leaders fall into. Examples include staying in your comfort zone or trying to do too much too fast. These can largely be avoided through implementation of acceleration systems based on the principles discussed in this book.

However, there also are systematic mistakes that organizations make when putting leaders into new roles that need to be addressed in the design of acceleration systems.[3] Respondents to the HBR/IMD study highlighted classic ways that companies set up their leaders to fail. Reasons for unnecessary derailment or underperformance are summarized in table 10-1.

There is not much point in putting in place acceleration systems if your company is setting up leaders to fail in these ways. The implication is that you may need to address culture change as part of your broader effort to put a system in place. Suppose your company does a poor job of sizing the leaps that leaders are being asked to make. If it is, you may want to push for systematic use of the transition risk assessment discussed in the introduction. Likewise, if there are widespread problems with providing clarity about expectations, they can be addressed through disciplined use of the five conversations discussed in chapter 4.

Diagnose Existing Transition Support

Companies often have a patchwork quilt of existing systems for supporting transitions. One unit may do a good job of promoting lower-level leaders, another has an effective executive onboarding system, and yet another does a good job of supporting international moves. Because the benefits of having a companywide

TABLE 10-1

Reasons for transition failures

Reasons that apply to all transitions

- Insufficient clarity about expectations and mandates. Leaders are not given enough information, or conflicting information, about what they need to do to be successful.
- Not taking the STARS situation into account in hiring and promotion. Leaders are selected without enough attention being given to whether they're best suited for the challenges of the situation—for example, putting a person who is great at turnarounds in a sustaining-success or realignment situation.
- Pushing leaders to make leaps that are too big. Leaders are placed in new roles with very high levels of transition risk; they take on too much, and fail.
- Having a Darwinian leadership culture. Leaders are not provided with adequate support during transitions, perhaps because the culture misguidedly reinforces a sink-or-swim approach to leadership development.

Promotion-specific reasons	Onboarding-specific reasons (also applies to moves between units)
• People are promoted only because they're good at their current jobs. Leaders are not evaluated adequately on their ability to be effective at higher levels. • Training is provided too late or not at all. Leaders do not receive training (or receive it many months later) in the skills they need to be effective and so lose the opportunity to build credibility during their transitions. • Leaders are required to do their old jobs *and* their new ones. The company does a poor job of succession planning, causing newly promoted leaders to expend energy on their old roles at the most critical period in their new ones.	• Cultural fit is not taken into account in recruiting. Leaders are hired because they have certain capabilities, whether or not they're a good fit for the culture. • Support for cultural adaptation is not provided. Newly hired leaders are expected to figure out the culture on their own and make unnecessary early mistakes. • Support is not provided for identifying and connecting with key stakeholders. Newly hired leaders are expected to figure out on their own who will have influence over their success, and they don't make the right connections early enough.

acceleration system based on a common core framework are great, however, this mosaic of existing systems usually needs to be modified substantially or even replaced.

Before designing a companywide acceleration system, you must first make a thorough assessment of existing systems, as well

as identify areas where no support is currently provided. To do this assessment, follow these guidelines:

- Identify and assess the status of your company's existing acceleration support frameworks and tools. What approaches have been used, and why? To what degree do they represent best practice?
- Examine the approaches (coaching programs, virtual workshops, self-guided materials) your organization currently uses to deliver transition support at all levels of the leadership pipeline. Evaluate the associated costs and benefits.
- Assess the overall coherence of your organization's approach to supporting different types of transitions—onboarding, promotion, and lateral and international moves. Is there a common core model for accelerating all transitions?
- Identify the key stakeholders (bosses, peers, direct reports, HR generalists, learning and development personnel) who do or could provide support during transitions.
- Assess the adequacy of your company's HR information systems (for example, websites) in directly supporting transitions and in providing the data about where and when transitions are occurring, so that you can provide support on a just-in-time basis.

Adopt a Common Core Model

Given the frequency with which people take on new jobs and the impact of each transition on others, it makes sense to have

everyone—bosses, direct reports, and peers—employ the same common core model to support transition.

The foundation of an acceleration system is a unified, companywide framework, language, and toolkit for talking about and planning transitions. This probably is the single most important step your organization can take to build an acceleration system. Imagine that every leader in transition were able to converse with bosses, peers, and direct reports about the following:

- The STARS portfolio of challenges they had inherited—the mix of start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, or sustaining success—and the associated challenges and opportunities
- Their technical, cultural, and political learning and the key elements of their learning plan
- Their progress in the five conversations—situation, expectations, style, resources, and progress—with their boss and direct reports
- Their agreed-upon priorities and plans for where they will secure early wins
- The alliances they need to build

A common core model makes discussions of these issues dramatically more efficient. Perhaps more importantly, it means that conversations will happen that wouldn't have happened otherwise. It also makes people more forthcoming, more likely to share confidences and information, and more tolerant of others' transition struggles. This kind of systematic support helps move the organization beyond sink or swim.

Deliver Support Just in Time

Transitions evolve through a series of predictable stages. New leaders begin their transitions with intensive diagnostic work. As they learn and gain increasing clarity about the situation, they shift to defining strategic direction (mission, goals, strategy, and vision) for their organizations. As the intended direction becomes clearer, they are better able to make decisions about key organizational issues—structure, processes, talent, and team. In tandem, they can identify opportunities to secure early wins and begin to drive the process of change.

The type of support that new leaders need, therefore, shifts in predictable ways as the transition process unfolds. Early on, support for accelerating learning—technical, cultural, and political—is key. As the leader's understanding grows, the focus of support should shift to helping him define strategic direction, lay the foundation for success, secure early wins, and so on.

Critically, leaders need to be offered transition support in digestible blocks. Once they are in their new roles, they are rapidly immersed in the flow of events and can devote only very limited time to learning, reflecting, and planning. If support is not delivered just in time, the new leader is not likely to use it.

A corollary is to leverage the time before entry to the maximum extent possible. Transitions begin with recruiting or selection, and not when leaders formally enter their new positions. This is a priceless period when new leaders can begin to learn about their organizations and plan their early days on the job.

Acceleration systems should therefore be designed to help new leaders get the maximum possible benefit from whatever preentry time is available to them. This means supporting new leaders' learning processes by providing them with key documents and tools that help them plan their early diagnostic activities, as well as helping them connect with key stakeholders as early as possible. For executives, it may be beneficial to have transition coaches engage in preentry diagnosis, including interviews with key stakeholders, and distill this knowledge into an actionable assessment that provides the basis for early discussions.

Use Structured Processes

The paradox of transition acceleration is that leaders in transition often feel too busy to learn and plan their transitions. They know they should be tapping into available resources and devoting time to planning their transitions, but the urgent demands of their new roles tend to crowd out this important work.

Although it helps to leverage the time before entry and to provide just-in-time support, transition processes also need to have action-forcing events. These include preset coaching meetings at each stage of the process or scheduled cohort events that take leaders out of the fray to engage in reflection and create or refine their 90-day plans.

The implication is that transition support should not be designed as a free-flowing process in which the leader sets the pace. It's better to create a series of focused events—coach meetings or cohort sessions—at critical stages. After undertaking preentry diagnosis of the situation and helping the leader engage in self-assessment, for example, the coach and client are well positioned to have a highly productive launch meeting to jump-start the process.

When transition coaching is provided, it's critical that the new leader and the coach connect early on in a focused and engaged way. One reason it can be beneficial for coaches to engage in intensive preentry diagnosis is that they have a precious resource—knowledge about the situation—that they can convey to the new leader. Their insight, offered in the critical early phases of the transition, can help cement the coach-client relationship.

Match Support to Transition Type

The 90-day framework and toolkit can be applied in all types of transition situations. However, the importance of different activities—for example, focusing more or less attention on learning about the culture—varies significantly, depending on the types of transitions leaders are experiencing. Therefore, it's often helpful to identify the most important types of transitions the company needs to support and to develop specific, targeted supplemental resources to support them.

In particular, there often are good reasons to provide new leaders with additional resources for dealing with two common types of transitions:

- **Promotion.** As discussed in chapter 1, when leaders are promoted they face a predictable set of challenges. The competencies required to be successful at the new level may be quite different from the skills that made them successful at their previous level. They also may be expected to play different roles, exhibit different behaviors, and engage with direct reports in different ways. So focused sets of resources should be provided that help newly promoted leaders understand what success looks like at the new level, assess themselves, and create a personal development plan.
- **Onboarding.** Likewise, when leaders join new organizations or move between units with distinct subcultures, they face major challenges in aligning expectations, adapting to new cultures, and building the right sorts of relationships. Focused, accessible resources for helping them understand what it takes to get things done and

assistance in identifying and connecting with key stakeholders can help reduce derailment and can speed time to high performance.

Match Transition Support to Leader Level

If cost were not an issue, every transitioning leader would get intensive, highly personalized support. In an ideal world, a new leader would be assigned a transition coach who would undertake an independent diagnosis and brief the person on the results before entry. The coach would help the leader engage in self-assessment and identify key transition risk factors. The coach also would help support diagnostic planning and goal setting, assist with team assessment and alignment, gather feedback on how the leader was doing, and, of course, be available to the new leader as needed to talk through specific issues.

Because the impact of executives on the business is great, it often makes sense to provide them with transition coaching. (If you do, be sure to understand that transition coaching is very different from development coaching. See the box, "Transition Coaching and Developmental Coaching.") But it typically doesn't make economic sense to provide it to leaders at lower levels. The solution is threefold. First, identify alternative modes for delivering transition support (for example, coaching versus cohort sessions versus virtual workshops and self-guided materials). Second, assess the relative costs and benefits of the support, and third, match its delivery mode and extent to key levels in the company's leadership pipeline in order to maximize the return on investment.

Transition Coaching and Developmental Coaching

Transition coaching is very different from developmental coaching. It's essential that transition coaches have the business acumen necessary to act as trusted advisers to leaders in transition. In addition, a thorough knowledge of the organization and its culture is a prerequisite for effectiveness. For this reason, it can be dangerous for newly hired leaders to bring in their own coaches, as they may lack experience with transitions as well as an understanding of the culture and political system the leader is entering.

TABLE 10-2

Transition versus developmental coaching

Transition coaching	Developmental coaching
• Coach helps leader to – Assess both the business situation and himself in his new role – Create a strategy to build momentum – Create a strategy for managing himself – Develop an action plan • Coach's business acumen ensures right mix of advice and behavioral coaching	• Coach helps leader to – Assess existing competencies and behaviors – Identify gaps in competencies as well as dysfunctional behaviors – Correct these challenges and build key competencies

Clarify Roles and Align Incentives

Transition support is a team sport. For any given new leader, typically there are many people who potentially can impact the success of the transition. Key players may include bosses, peers, direct reports, HR generalists, coaches, and mentors. Although primary responsibility for supporting a transition

may be vested with one individual—typically a coach or HR generalist—it is important to think through the supportive roles that others could play and to identify ways to encourage them to do so.

A boss, for example, has an obvious stake in getting the new leader up to speed quickly but also may be dealing with other pressing demands. Careful thought must be given to providing bosses and other key players with guidelines and tools that allow them to be highly focused and efficient in supporting their new direct reports. HR generalists likewise can provide invaluable support to leaders who are onboarding by helping them navigate the new culture. But once again, they both need to know what to do and have incentives to do it.

Integrate with Other Talent Management Systems

Acceleration systems work best when they're linked with the company's recruiting and leadership development systems. This need for integration seems obvious on the face of it, because the best onboarding systems can't compensate for the sins of poor recruiting. If the company hires people who aren't likely to fit with the culture, then little can be done to reduce the risk of derailment through onboarding.

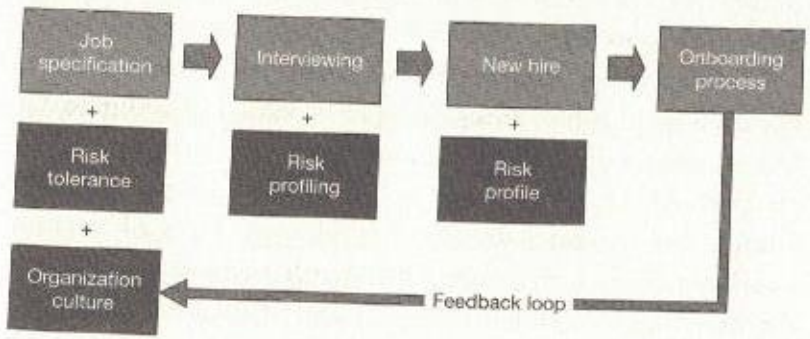
It's surprising, therefore, that many companies still do not do a good job of integrating recruiting and onboarding. Often, people in these functions report up through different parts of the organization and are led by people with different, perhaps even divergent, goals, measures of success, and incentives. A necessary first step is to have them under the same organizational umbrella and align their goals and incentives.

Beyond that, the company should think about transition risk when it engages in recruiting. Doing so means, as illustrated in figure 10-2, making transition risk tolerance part of the process of setting up searches. Often, businesses practice "best athlete" recruiting—hiring people because they have a needed set of capabilities and not paying enough attention to fit. It's fine to take a significant risk in bringing in someone from a very different culture, as long as you have been thoughtful about the trade-offs between individual capabilities and cultural fit, and as long as transition risk is explicitly evaluated during recruiting. Of course, doing this requires the company to have a good understanding of its culture and the reasons people might struggle to assimilate. This understanding can be refined, as illustrated in the figure, by feedback from successes and failures in onboarding.

There also is great value in feeding information about potential risks from recruiting to the onboarding process. Recruiting typically involves multiple forms of assessment, including psychometric instruments and in-depth interviews. The instruments

FIGURE 10-2

Linking recruiting and onboarding



can provide transition coaches and workshop facilitators with valuable insight into leaders' styles and ways they might struggle in adapting to the culture. Interviews likewise can provide rich information about likely transition risks, as long as interviewers are explicitly asked to make assessments and develop a transition risk profile for new hires.

Then there is the relationship between leadership development systems and transition acceleration systems. Leadership development systems prepare talent to go to the next level. Transition acceleration systems should help them make the leap. Although this description makes the two seem distinct, in reality there are opportunities for connecting development and acceleration.

One example is including familiarization with the organization's core transition acceleration model in development programs. Doing so helps leaders take on a transition state of mind and think about how they will enter their next roles when the time comes. It also provides a foundation on which to build during the transition, a foundation that is valuable given the high demands that new leaders typically experience.

A second example is strengthening leadership development by assessing leaders' experience with different types of transitions using the STARS model. This model provides a basis for charting the progression of high-potential leaders through a series of positions that build their capability to manage a broad range of business situations. It also identifies potential development gaps—for example, that a leader has mostly managed turnarounds and needs to be channeled into experiences that provide exposure to a broader range of business situations.

To illustrate, think of your own job history. Take time to fill out the development grid, a tool for charting professional development shown in table 10-3.

TABLE 10-3

The development grid

The rows represent functions in which you have worked, and the columns represent types of business situations you have experienced. Chart every position you have held, plus any major project or task force assignments. For example, if your first job was in marketing in an organization (or unit) in the midst of a turnaround, place a circled 1 (indicating your first management position) in the corresponding cell of the matrix. If your next position was in sales in a new unit (or dealing with a new product or project)—a start-up situation—enter a circled 2 in that cell. If at the same time you were on a task force dealing with operations issues for the start-up, enter a 2 inside a triangle (indicating a project assignment) in the appropriate cell. Record all your jobs, and then connect the dots to illuminate your professional trajectory. Are there any blank columns or rows? What do they signify about your readiness for new positions? About your potential blind spots?

	Start-up	Turn-around	Accelerated growth	Realign-ment	Sustaining success
Marketing					
Sales					
Finance					
Human resources					
Operations					
R&D					
Information management					
Other					

Putting It All Together

Given the many transitions that occur in organizations and the substantial impact they have, it makes sense to evaluate the costs and benefits of designing and deploying companywide acceleration systems. Best-in-class systems are founded on a core transition acceleration framework and toolkit, provide support just in time, are customized to some degree for types of transitions, and are deployed in cost-effective ways throughout the organization. They also take the organizational context into account by aligning and incentivizing key stakeholders and by linking to recruiting and leadership development systems.

ACCELERATE EVERYONE—CHECKLIST

1. What are the most important transitions in your organization, and how often do they occur?
2. Is the organization able to identify where and when transitions are occurring?
3. Is there a common core transition acceleration framework, language, and toolkit?
4. Do leaders have the support they need, when they need it, and throughout their transitions? What could be done to provide focused resources for onboarding and promotion transitions?
5. Are the company's systems for recruiting and accelerating transitions linked in appropriate ways?
6. Should transition acceleration be part of your organization's curriculum for developing high-potential leaders?
7. How might the 90-day framework be used to accelerate organizational change—for example, restructuring or post-acquisition integration?