

Assimilation coaching: Ensuring that recruitment is successful

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Four out of ten newly recruited or promoted managers fail within the first 18 months of appointment, according to research by Manchester Inc, a US leadership development firm. “Failing” includes being terminated, performing significantly below expectation, or voluntarily resigning from the new position.

Assimilation coaching is a planned program, designed to minimise the risks associated with the appointment of senior managers in an organisation and accelerate their progression to full contribution sooner than would otherwise be the case.

New managers face a number of challenges, particularly if they are new to the organisation as well as to the role. Very quickly, they need to establish their credibility with employees and other managers, and come to grips with the business issues facing the organisation. New appointees may be given the benefit of the doubt, resulting in a honeymoon period, but unless they actively use this period to develop relationships and business credibility, they will quickly face the loss of this goodwill and suffer damage to their reputation and their chances of longer-term effectiveness.

An assimilation plan is a road map for the new leader to follow to enable him or her to avoid the pitfalls of the new culture. It supports them to observe and analyse significant people across the organisation – both formal and informal leaders.

Before the new manager arrives, the assimilation coach would work with the organisation to:

- establish an induction plan for the new manager, encompassing briefings from the executive to whom the manager will report, and from colleagues and key members of the manager’s team
- appoint a “sponsor” from among the new appointee’s colleagues, to act as a “buddy” in that all-important first 100 days.

The assimilation coach would then work with the new appointee to assist them to:

- build a strong first impression
- develop a plan for meeting and discussing workplace issues
- design a vision, strategy and tactics for the first 100 days and deliver on this effectively
- gain commitment from members of their team
- understand the existing culture, and identify how they wish to change this culture

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- build strategic alliances
- prioritise initial projects to achieve positive impact
- learn and practise basic coaching skills to establish a strong foundation on which to ground their major goals for the role.

The assimilation coach sometimes works in collaboration with the recruitment agency as well as the organisation and the new appointee. All of these parties have an investment in the successful and seamless induction of the new manager.

The assimilation coaching process may last three to six months. The coach needs to have knowledge of the appointee's managerial and personal style in order to be of most assistance. The coach works in a finite time frame to achieve tangible outcomes. The aim is for the new appointee to avoid the risks associated with entering a position of responsibility in an organisation with which they are not familiar.

The outcome should be that the manager avoids mistakes and inappropriate actions that would hinder their credibility, either in terms of the organisational culture or its business activities. Having an outside person with whom they can discuss their perceptions and experiences is the key to success without anxiety. The coach assists the manager to reflect on their experiences by providing another point of view. The coach brings an understanding of people and their motivations, and the dynamics of organisations.

With the support of assimilation coaching, new managers can settle into their role and after 3-6 months be in a position to embark on longer-term planning. Organisations which are aware of the importance of the psychological and relationship aspects of taking on a new management role should also consider the benefits of developing coaching skills in-house over the longer term. It makes for organisations to have managers with coaching skills who can take on the role of "buddy" to a new appointee.

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