New Manager Assimilation Process
- A Tactic for Accelerating Team Formation
Success Advisory Group LLC • Bring Out the Best! • August 2004 Newsletter

Background:
Work groups operate in varying stages of development and various models have been proposed to describe these stages as well as to serve to diagnose work group situations and select the appropriate leadership strategy for stimulating high performance. Francis and Young have described a four-stage model that progresses from (1) Testing to (2) Infighting to (3) Getting Organized and then ultimately to (4) Mature Closeness.¹ This aligns with Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, i.e., (1) Security Needs, (2) Belonging Needs, (3) Esteem Needs, (4) Self-Actualization Needs.² Hersey and Blanchard’s Situational Leadership Model builds on the motivational drivers suggested by Maslow by describing follower readiness levels that are related to followers’ willingness/commitment levels as well as task competence/capability.³ Since they are in alignment, these three models can be looked at in combination when assessing team situations. For instance, a team that has security needs (Maslow’s model), will be very guarded and be testing (Francis and Young model) and thus they will be unwilling (R1 in Hersey and Blanchard’s Model). The R1 readiness level also suggests that they are “not able” and this contributes to their insecurity which lines up with them having “security needs” as described by Maslow’s model.

When a new leader enters an existing team, typically what happens is the team which previously operated at higher stages of development, will regress to lower levels even perhaps to stage 1, Testing, especially if the new leader is someone totally unfamiliar. The team will typically have security needs because of their lack of ability to predict the new leader’s behavior and expectations. This “insecurity” can be intensified as team members try to “fill in the blanks” concerning characteristics of the new leader not familiar to them.

The challenge for the new leader is to help the team rapidly return to high levels of performance and move out of Stage 1. The New Manager Assimilation Process described herein is designed to accelerate gaining familiarity with the new leader and quickly giving team members detailed information about the new leader’s background and vision. This process can also serve as a method for the leader to listen carefully to needs expressed by team members as well as provide a launching pad for communicating where the group is headed.

Objectives:
The overall aim of the process is to “jump start” the team and help them move out or get started moving out of Stage 1 – Testing. The specific objectives for the New Manager Assimilation process are:
1. Identify team members’ current perceptions of the new leader’s background for the purpose of verifying these perceptions.
2. Develop a list of information team members perceive they need to know about their new leader.
3. Share with the new leader items of information that team members believe the leader needs to know about them.
4. Communicate to the new leader items that team members would like the new leader’s help with.

Process:
This process is designed to include a “third party” facilitator, that is, a person who is not a member of the work group. This feature as well as discussion steps with the leader absent, are included as mechanisms for providing a “safe” and relatively uninhibited atmosphere for sharing information. It is important that the facilitator at various stages respect the anonymity expectations of team members.

© 2004 Success Advisory Group LLC, William B. Bispeck. All rights reserved.
The process consists of the following steps:

1. **Chartering:** The new manager meets with the facilitator and reviews the process steps, the underlying principles and goals, and “buys in” to going forward.

2. **First Group Meeting:** The new manager gets the work group together with the facilitator, introduces the facilitator, and explains his/her desire to utilize the New Manager Assimilation Process and what his/her expected outcomes are. The facilitator explains the process steps. The new manager then leaves the meeting and the facilitator begins collecting information on easel sheets in answer to the following questions:
   - What do we know about _____?
   - What don’t we know about _____ that we would like to know?
   - What does _____ need to know about us?
   - What do we need _____’s help with?

3. **Manager Debrief:** The facilitator adjourns the group meeting and then takes the easel sheets unedited to the new manager and goes through them line by line, helping clarify the information. The facilitator takes care to protect the anonymity of the participants. The facilitator leaves this material with the new manager for him/her to study and reflect. The new manager prepares his/her thoughts on how to respond to all of the items on the easel sheet.

4. **Second Group Meeting:** The manager and facilitator call the group together. The facilitator recaps the process steps up to this point and turns the meeting over to the manager. The new manager, referring to the easel sheets, goes through each of the scribed items. As the new manager speaks, team members can ask questions if they wish to for purposes of clarifying what is on the easel sheets or get clarification of what the leader is saying.

It is important for the new manager to:
- avoid being defensive
- be honest and open with responses

- speak with clarity so that information is not misinterpreted or reinterpreted later
- be sincere in taking an interest in listening to team members input
- take advantage of this occasion to begin building an inspiring vision for the team

When thoughtfully planned and executed the New Manager Assimilation Process can get a new team up and running quickly and head off misunderstandings early on in the life of the new team. Many times a new leader may have a reputation preceding him/her that may not be totally accurate and team members can behave and act based on incorrect assumptions. This process allows a work group to take care of this type of problem early and get synchronized up front to operate at high levels of performance.

This process can be adapted for use with a new team member entering an existing in-tact team. The purposes and goals are much the same. In this case the manager can act as the facilitator, since the group likely does not in this situation have security needs. As a convenience a “third party” facilitator can still be utilized if this is preferred.

---