CHAPTER 1 (Prepare Yourself)

Emphasizes that successful transitions into new roles require new leaders to make a mental break from their old jobs and embrace the imperatives of the new situation. The chapter highlights that people often fail by continuing to rely on what made them successful in the past, without recognizing that new roles may demand different competencies and approaches.

The chapter focuses on two frequently experienced types of transitions: promotions and onboarding into new companies.

Challenges of Getting Promoted:

• Balance Breadth and Depth: Leaders must shift from a functional focus to a wider range of issues, maintaining a high-level perspective while knowing when to delve into details.

• Rethink What You Delegate: As complexity increases with promotion, leaders need to adjust what they delegate, shifting from specific tasks to projects or even entire business units depending on the organizational size.

• Influence Differently: Positional authority becomes less important at higher levels; decision-making becomes more political, requiring greater skill in building and sustaining alliances.

• Communicate More Formally: Leaders need to establish new communication channels to stay connected with frontline information and to broadcast strategic intent and vision across the organization.

• Exhibit the Right Presence: Increased scrutiny means leaders must understand and project the appropriate leadership presence for their new level, defining their personal leadership brand. Julia Gould's failure to adapt her micromanaging style from a functional role to a cross-functional project leadership position serves as an example of not making this leap.

Challenges of Onboarding into a New Company:

• Leaders joining new companies often make lateral moves, bringing proven skills but facing difficulties in adjusting to new organizational contexts, political structures, and cultures.

• Senior HR practitioners highlight high failure rates for outside hires due to unfamiliarity with informal networks, corporate culture, lack of existing credibility, and resistance in organizations with a strong "hire from within" tradition.

• Four Pillars of Effective Onboarding:

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◦ Business Orientation: Understanding the company's markets, products, technologies, systems,
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◦ Stakeholder Connection: Identifying key stakeholders and proactively building productive ve
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◦ Expectations Alignment: Continually clarifying and rechecking expectations with the new bos
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◦ Cultural Adaptation: Adapting to unfamiliar cultures, which involves understanding the "cul

Basic Principles for Preparing Yourself:

• Establish a Clear Breakpoint: Make a conscious mental break from the old job to embrace the new one, even if the transition in responsibilities is fuzzy.

• Assess Your Vulnerabilities: Identify your "problem preferences"—the types of business problems (technical, political, cultural, or functional areas) you naturally gravitate towards or avoid. Low scores in certain areas can indicate potential blind spots [86-90, Table 1-2, Table 1-3]. Leaders must compensate for these vulnerabilities through self-discipline, team building, and seeking advice.

• Watch Out for Your Strengths: Qualities that led to past success can become liabilities in a new role; for example, Julia Gould's attention to detail became micromanagement.

• Relearn How to Learn: Be prepared for a steep learning curve and the potential feelings of incompetence or vulnerability. Avoid denial and defensiveness, and be open to learning new things quickly.

• Rework Your Network: Proactively restructure your advice-and-counsel network to include political counsel and personal advice, not just technical advisers, as you move to higher levels.

• Watch Out for People Who Want to Hold You Back: Negotiate clear expectations with your old boss about closing out responsibilities. Be firm and fair with former colleagues who are now subordinates, especially if they were disappointed competitors.

• Get Some Help: Utilize company programs, HR support, or engage your new boss to create a 90-day transition plan and identify cultural interpreters.

The chapter concludes by advising leaders to continuously assess their vulnerabilities, develop personal disciplines, and ensure they are engaging with the real challenges of their new position rather than retreating to their comfort zone.

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CHAPTER 2 (Accelerate Your Learning)

Chapter 2, "Accelerate Your Learning," emphasizes that the first task in a successful transition is to accelerate your learning to gain foundational insights for your 90-day plan.

Efficient and effective learning helps new leaders quickly close their "window of vulnerability," identify potential problems, and make good business decisions sooner.

Common Learning Roadblocks and Their Consequences: New leaders often encounter several issues that hinder effective learning:

• Feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of information, making it hard to focus.

• Focusing too much on technical aspects (products, customers, strategies) and neglecting crucial cultural and political learning.

• Lack of training in systematically diagnosing organizations, which is common outside of HR or consulting.

• Failure to plan to learn, meaning not explicitly creating a learning agenda or plan.

• Learning roadblocks, such as neglecting to understand the organization's history, which can lead to tearing down existing structures without understanding their purpose.

• The "action imperative," a compulsive need to take action too early, which prevents learning, leads to bad decisions, undermines credibility, and can alienate supporters.

• Coming in with "the" answer, prematurely deciding on problems and solutions, which alienates people and risks serious mistakes. This is particularly dangerous for leaders onboarding into new organizations, as it can trigger "organ rejection syndrome" if they fail to adapt to the new culture.

Managing Learning as an Investment Process: Leaders should approach learning as an investment process, managing their time and energy to realize returns in the form of "actionable insights".

Actionable insights enable better decisions sooner, helping leaders reach the break-even point in value creation more quickly. To maximize this return, effective learning requires defining a focused learning agenda, and efficient learning means identifying the best sources of insight and extracting maximum information with minimal time.

Defining Your Learning Agenda: An ideal learning agenda consists of a focused set of questions or hypotheses to guide inquiry, which evolves from questions to fleshing out and testing hypotheses as more is learned.

Key areas of inquiry include:

• Questions About the Past: Performance, root causes of good/poor performance, and history of change.

• Questions About the Present: Vision and strategy, key people (capable, trustworthy, influential), processes (quality, reliability, timeliness), potential "land mines," and opportunities for early wins.

• Questions About the Future: Challenges and opportunities, barriers and resources, and cultural elements to preserve or change.

• Learning Domains: A balance of technical (markets, technologies, processes), interpersonal (boss, peers, direct reports), cultural (norms, values, expectations), and political (informal processes and alliances) learning.

Identifying the Best Sources of Insight: Leaders need both "hard data" (reports, financial statements) and "soft information" (strategy, culture, politics).

Valuable sources of knowledge include:

• External Sources: Customers, suppliers, distributors, and outside analysts.

• Internal Sources: Frontline R&D and operations, sales and procurement, staff (finance, legal, HR), integrators (project, plant, product managers), and "natural historians" (long-time employees).

• Pre-entry resources: Online information, biographies, and reaching out to current/former employees.

Adopting Structured Learning Methods: Instead of merely diving in and talking to people, structured learning methods are more efficient and reduce bias. Examples include:

• One-on-one meetings with direct reports: Asking the same set of five questions (biggest challenges, reasons for challenges, unexploited opportunities, needs to exploit opportunities, and personal priorities) to identify prevalent and divergent views.

• New Leader Assimilation Process (GE): A facilitator helps the new leader and direct reports share information, addressing questions like "What would you like to know about the new leader?" and "What would you like him to know about you?".

• Frameworks like SWOT analysis (or "TOWS," starting with Threats/Opportunities) to guide diagnostic work and communicate with stakeholders.

Creating a Learning Plan: A learning plan translates learning goals into specific actions, identifying sources and methods to accelerate learning.

It's a critical part of the overall 90-day plan, often being the primary focus for the first 30 days. The plan is cyclical, involving information collection, analysis, hypothesis development, and testing.

Getting Help: While leaders are primarily responsible for their learning, support from bosses, peers, and direct reports can significantly ease the process.

It's crucial for leaders to be clear about their learning objectives and ask for help.

This support is especially important for leaders joining new organizations, where understanding new cultures and building political connections are key.

The chapter concludes with a checklist for accelerating learning, encouraging self-reflection on learning effectiveness, agenda creation, source identification, efficiency methods, and leveraging available support.

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CHAPTER 3 (Match Strategy to Situation)

Chapter 3, "Match Strategy to Situation," emphasizes that successful leaders must have a clear understanding of the situation they are facing and the implications for what they need to do and how to do it.

This involves answering two fundamental questions: "What kind of change am I being called upon to lead?" and "What kind of change leader am I?".

A careful diagnosis of the business situation clarifies challenges, opportunities, and available resources.

The chapter introduces the STARS model (Start-up, Turnaround, Accelerated Growth, Realignment, and Sustaining Success) to categorize five common business situations leaders may encounter. The eventual goal in all five is a successful and growing business, but the challenges and opportunities vary predictably.

The Five STARS Situations and Their Characteristics:

• Start-up: You are tasked with assembling capabilities (people, funding, technology) to launch a new business, product, project, or relationship. Leaders can shape the organization from the outset, defining the agenda and architecture. The prevailing mood is often excited confusion, and the job is to channel this energy productively.

• Turnaround: You take on a unit in deep trouble and work to get it back on track. This is a "burning platform" demanding rapid, decisive action. Most people recognize the need for change, though they may disagree on what to do. It's a "ready-fire-aim" situation, requiring tough calls with incomplete knowledge and adjustment as you learn. The prevailing mood may be despair, and the leader's job is to provide a concrete plan and confidence.

• Accelerated Growth: The organization is gaining momentum, and the challenge is to scale up. This involves implementing structures, processes, and systems for rapid expansion, as well as hiring and onboarding many people while preserving the culture. Risks include expanding too much too fast. Leaders need to instill discipline and get people to work within defined processes.

• Realignment: You revitalize a unit, product, process, or project that has been drifting into danger due to internal complacency, eroded capabilities, or external challenges. There is no immediate crisis, and the biggest challenge is often creating a sense of urgency and piercing through denial. This is a "ready-aim-fire" situation.

• Sustaining Success: You are responsible for preserving the vitality of a successful organization and taking it to the next level. This requires understanding what made the business successful and positioning it for future challenges, often by continuously starting up, accelerating, and realigning parts of the business. Leaders must combat complacency and invent new challenges for growth.

Diagnosing Your STARS Portfolio: Leaders are unlikely to encounter a pure STARS situation; they will most likely be managing a portfolio—a mix of start-up, turnaround, accelerated-growth, realignment, or sustaining-success situations within their responsibilities. Diagnosing this mix is crucial for systematically understanding challenges and opportunities and developing a common language for discussing them with stakeholders.

Leading Change Based on STARS Situations: There is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to leading change.

• In turnarounds, radical surgery is often required, involving rapid changes to strategy and organizational structure (e.g., closing plants, shifting production, cutting workforce). Learning focuses on technical dimensions.

• In realignments, a more measured approach is needed due to potential resistance, especially from an outsider. Learning emphasizes cultural and political understanding, as internal social dynamics often cause drift into trouble. Priorities focus on systems, skills, and culture rather than immediate strategy or structure overhaul. Early wins might involve raising awareness of the need for change through facts, revamped metrics, and external benchmarks.

Managing Yourself and Leadership Style: The STARS situation also dictates the appropriate leadership style.

• Turnarounds often require a heroic style, demanding rapid diagnosis and aggressive, decisive action based on incomplete information. People are hungry for hope and direction.

• Realignments and sustaining success situations often demand stewardship or servant leadership, which is more diplomatic and less ego-driven. This involves building consensus for change, using subtle influence skills, and deeply understanding the culture and politics. Stewards are more patient and systematic.

Leaders must assess which of their skills and inclinations (heroic or stewardship) will serve them well in their particular situation and adapt accordingly, rather than relying on what has worked in the past. Self-management involves enhancing self-awareness, exercising personal discipline, and building complementary teams.

Rewarding Success: The STARS framework also has implications for evaluating and rewarding performance.

• Start-ups and turnarounds are perceived as more challenging but are also the most preferred and get more recognition because success is visible and easily measurable.

• Realignments and sustaining-success situations are often assessed as most challenging but least preferred. Success in a realignment might mean avoiding disaster, which is hard to measure and reward. Evaluating success in these situations is more problematic and requires a deep understanding of challenges and actions. This creates a paradox where companies reward turnarounds, which might inadvertently encourage businesses to end in crisis rather than be realigned earlier.

The chapter concludes by stating that understanding the STARS mix deepens as one learns more about the new organization, and encourages periodic reassessment of the diagnosis to guide actions.

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CHAPTER 4 (Negotiate Success)

Chapter 4, "Negotiate Success," emphasizes that negotiating success with a new boss is critical for leaders transitioning into new roles.

This relationship significantly impacts a leader's ability to reach the break-even point and achieve overall success, as the boss sets benchmarks, interprets actions for others, and controls access to necessary resources.

The nature of this relationship and the support needed from a boss will vary depending on the leader's level in the organization and the specific business situation, as identified by the STARS model.

To build a productive working relationship with a new boss, leaders should be aware of several "do's and don'ts":

• Don'ts:

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◦ Don't stay away or create communication gaps.

◦ Don't surprise your boss with emerging problems, report them early.

◦ Don't approach your boss only with problems; bring plans for how to address them.

◦ Don't run down your checklist in meetings; focus on the most important things and how the b

◦ Don't expect your boss to change; adapt your approach to their style.
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• Do's:

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◦ Clarify expectations early and often, starting from the interview process.

◦ Take 100 percent responsibility for making the relationship work.

◦ Negotiate time lines for diagnosis and action planning to avoid being pressured into premat

◦ Aim for early wins in areas important to your boss to build credibility and ensure their ow

◦ Pursue good marks from those whose opinions your boss respects.
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The chapter introduces a framework of "Five Conversations" to guide the ongoing dialogue with a new boss:

1.
   The Situational Diagnosis Conversation: Aims to reach a shared understanding of the STARS portfolio

(start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, or sustaining success) and the associated challenges and opportunities. The boss's role in providing support will depend on this shared diagnosis.

2. The Expectations Conversation: Focuses on understanding and negotiating short- and medium-term goals, timing, and how performance will be measured. It's crucial to identify "untouchables" (areas the boss is proprietary about), educate the boss if expectations are unrealistic, underpromise and overdeliver, and continuously clarify expectations.
3. The Resource Conversation: Involves negotiating for critical resources (e.g., funding, personnel, political support) needed to meet agreed-upon expectations. The type of resources needed varies with the STARS situation. Leaders should use a "menu approach" to lay out costs and benefits of different resource levels, focus on underlying interests, seek mutually beneficial exchanges, and link resources to results.
4. The Style Conversation: Aims to determine how the leader and boss can best interact on an ongoing basis. This includes diagnosing the boss's communication preferences, decision-making involvement, and comfort zone ("decision-making box"). The leader is responsible for adapting to the boss's style and directly addressing serious style differences after building some credibility.
5. The Personal Development Conversation: Should occur once the relationship has matured (around the 90-day mark) to discuss the leader's performance, developmental priorities, and necessary skill improvements, including crucial soft skills like cultural and political diagnosis.

For leaders with multiple bosses, the principles remain, but the emphasis shifts to balancing wins and losses among them and forcing collective discussion when views diverge. For those working at a distance from their boss, increased discipline in communication, clear metrics, and early in-person meetings are essential.

A key tool is the 90-day plan, a written "contract" with the boss outlining priorities, goals, and milestones. It is typically divided into three 30-day blocks, with the first 30 days usually devoted to learning and building personal credibility.

Finally, the chapter stresses the "Golden Rule of Transitions": leaders should transition others—especially their new direct reports—as they would wish to be transitioned themselves, applying the same five-conversation framework to their teams to accelerate their development and performance.

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CHAPTER 5 (Secure Early Wins)

Chapter 5, "Secure Early Wins," emphasizes the crucial role of initial successes in building momentum and personal credibility during a leadership transition, enabling new leaders to create value faster and reach the break-even point more quickly.

The chapter introduces the concept of waves of change, noting that successful executives implement change in distinct phases: an early wave of changes following focused learning, a period of consolidation, deeper learning, and then subsequent, deeper waves of change. The goal of the first wave is to secure early wins that advance longer-term goals.

A key caution highlighted is the "low-hanging fruit trap," where leaders expend energy on easily achievable wins that do not contribute to their long-term business objectives. Therefore, early wins must "do double duty": build short-term momentum and lay the groundwork for long-term business goals, aligning with agreed-upon objectives and fostering desired new behaviors.

Identifying Your Early Wins involves two main phases:

1. Building Personal Credibility (roughly the first 30 days):

   ◦ Understand Your Reputation: Leaders start with a reputation, and early actions disproportionately influence perceptions. It's crucial to decide whether to reinforce or challenge existing expectations.

   ◦ Leading Former Peers: A special challenge for promoted leaders, requiring them to accept that relationships must change, focus on "rites of passage," judiciously establish authority, and prioritize what's good for the business.

   ◦ Build Credibility through Behaviors: New leaders are perceived as more credible when they are:

   - Demanding but able to be satisfied.
   - Accessible but not too familiar.
   - Decisive but judicious.
   - Focused but flexible.
   - Active without causing commotion.
   - Willing to make tough calls but humane.

   ◦ Plan to Engage: Strategically connect with the new organization, convey clear messages about values and style, and remove minor irritants quickly. Demonstrating a genuine commitment to learning also builds credibility.

   ◦ Write Your Own Story: Early actions become stories that define a leader as a hero or villain. Leveraging "teachable moments" can positively shape this mythology.

2. Launch Early-Win Projects (beyond the first few weeks):

   ◦ Identify opportunities for quick, tangible performance improvements that require modest expenditures and yield visible operational and financial gains.

   ◦ Use an early wins evaluation tool (table 5-2) to gauge potential.

◦ Project Guidelines:

- Keep long-term goals in mind.
- Identify a few promising focal points for concentrated effort.
- Launch projects to achieve these wins.
- Elevate change agents by promoting or assigning them to lead key projects.
- Leverage projects to introduce new behaviors that model desired future organizational f

◦ The FOGLAMP project checklist (table 5-3) can help plan these critical projects.

Leading Change also requires careful consideration:

• Planning Versus Learning:

◦ The "plan-then-implement" approach works when there is clear awareness, diagnosis, a compel

◦ Collective learning is needed when these conditions are not met, particularly in realignmen

◦ A diagnostic framework for managing change (figure 5-2) helps determine the appropriate app

• Getting Started on Behavior Change: The means used to achieve early wins are as important as the ends. Initiatives should establish new standards of behavior. Leaders should identify and praise good elements of the existing culture while working to change the bad ones, providing a "bridge" for people from past to future.

Behavior change techniques should match the STARS situation.

Finally, leaders must focus on Avoiding Predictable Surprises:

• This involves identifying "ticking time bombs" that could derail efforts and lead to continuous firefighting.

• Predictable surprises often occur due to leaders' blind spots (not looking in uncomfortable areas) or information silos within the organization.

• Leaders should ask questions about the external environment, customers/markets/competitors/strategy, internal capabilities, and organizational politics to identify potential problems.

The overarching goal is to create a virtuous cycle that reinforces desired behaviors and helps achieve organizational goals through modest but significant early improvements.

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CHAPTER 6 (Achieve Alignment)

Chapter 6, "Achieve Alignment," emphasizes the leader's role as an organizational architect. This involves creating and aligning the strategic direction, structure, core processes, and skill bases that form the foundation for superior performance.

Without proper alignment, a leader will find it difficult to make progress, feeling as if they are "pushing a boulder uphill every day". Even without the authority to unilaterally change the organization's architecture, leaders should focus on assessing alignment within their part of the organization and building credibility with higher-level individuals.

The chapter highlights several common traps to avoid when trying to achieve alignment:

• Making changes for change's sake: Leaders may feel pressure to make rapid, visible changes to strategies or structures without truly understanding the business, leading to a "ready, shoot, aim" approach.

• Not adjusting for the STARS situation: The approach to leading change must vary depending on the business situation (start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, sustaining success).

• Trying to restructure your way out of deeper problems: Overhauling structure when the real issues lie in processes, skills, or culture can be ineffective and disrupt the organization.

• Creating structures that are too complex: While matrix structures can be beneficial, leaders must avoid diffusing decision-making or introducing "sclerotic complexity," aiming for clear lines of accountability and simplification.

• Overestimating your organization’s capacity to absorb change: Organizations have limits on how much change they can handle at once. Leaders should proceed incrementally in situations like realignments or sustaining success, but quickly in turnarounds.

To design or redesign an organization, leaders should view it as an open system. This system comprises:

• Strategic direction: The organization's mission, vision, and strategy.

• Structure: How people are organized, coordinated, measured, and incentivized.

• Core processes: Systems for transforming information and materials into value.

• Skill bases: The capabilities of the people within the organization. All four elements must be aligned to work together effectively, as strategic direction drives and is influenced by the other elements.

Diagnosing misalignments is a key step, as organizations can be misaligned in various ways, such as between strategic direction and skill bases, strategic direction and core processes, structure and processes, or structure and skills.

The process of getting started with alignment involves a logical sequence:

1. Begin with strategic direction: Ensure the unit's mission, vision, and strategy are well-defined and logically integrated.
2. Look at supporting structure, processes, and skills: Assess if these elements support the strategic direction and understand their interrelationships.
3. Decide how and when to introduce the new strategic direction: Chart a path for shifting direction and plan for changes in capabilities over a realistic timeframe.
4. Think through the correct sequencing: Different situations require different approaches; for example, turnarounds often start with strategy and structure, while realignments might focus on processes and skills.
5. Close the loop: Continually refine understanding of capabilities and capacity for change based on new insights.

Defining strategic direction involves focusing on customers, capital, capabilities, and commitments. Leaders must assess the coherence (logical fit of choices), adequacy (sufficiency for future goals), and implementation (actual actions vs. stated plans) of the strategic direction. The TOWS framework (Threats, Opportunities, Weaknesses, Strengths) is recommended for strategic analysis, starting with the external environment. If flaws are found, modification of strategic direction should be considered, either through modest tweaks early on or more fundamental changes once more information is gathered and support is built.

Shaping your group's structure means assessing how units, reporting relationships, decision rights, and performance/incentive systems are configured to support the mission. Leaders must grapple with trade-offs, addressing problems like silos of excellence, inappropriate decision-making scope, misaligned incentives, and compartmentalized or diffused accountability. The best predictor of what people will do is what they are incentivized to do.

Aligning core processes (systems) involves ensuring they efficiently transform information, materials, and knowledge into value. Leaders should make trade-offs between driving flawless execution and stimulating innovation. Analyzing processes means examining their productivity, timeliness, reliability, and quality. Process (or workflow) maps are useful tools to diagram tasks, identify bottlenecks, and make high-leverage improvements, stimulating collective learning.

Developing your group's skill bases requires identifying critical gaps between needed and existing skills, as well as underutilized resources. This includes individual expertise, relational knowledge, embedded knowledge, and metaknowledge.

Finally, the chapter notes that culture is not something that can be changed directly, but is powerfully influenced by organizational architecture and leadership behaviors. Changing metrics and aligning incentives are examples of how architectural changes can drive cultural shifts. The overall goal is to continuously ensure that organizational elements are aligned to prevent frustration and enable productivity.

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CHAPTER 7 (Build Your Team)

Chapter 7 emphasizes that **the most important decisions a new leader makes in the first 90 days are about people**. Building a high-performance team provides tremendous leverage, while failing to do so will lead to severe difficulties, as no leader can succeed alone. The process involves assessing your inherited team, planning its evolution, aligning it with your goals, and establishing new team processes.

Common Traps to Avoid

New leaders often stumble when building their teams by falling into several common traps:

- Criticizing previous leadership: This gains nothing and is counterproductive. Instead, focus on assessing current performance and making necessary changes.
- Keeping the existing team too long: Leaders often hesitate to make tough personnel calls, hoping they can improve B-players. This is a more common mistake than making changes too quickly. You should set deadlines within your 90-day plan for making team decisions.
- Not balancing stability and change: Building a team is like "repairing a leaky ship in mid-ocean." Focus only on high-priority personnel changes early to avoid sinking the ship.
- Not working on organizational alignment and team development in parallel: You cannot build the right team without knowing your strategic direction, structure, and processes. These efforts must happen concurrently.
- Not holding on to good people: Uncertainty can cause your best people to leave. It's crucial to find ways to reassure your top performers that you value their capabilities.
- Undertaking team-building activities too early: Avoid explicit team-building exercises until the core of

your desired team is in place, as it can strengthen bonds among people who may soon be leaving.

- Making implementation-dependent decisions too early: Defer major decisions that require buy-in from your team until the key members are in place, so new people are not committed to actions they had no part in defining.

Assessing Your Team

A rigorous and systematic evaluation of your inherited team is essential. This should be a priority in your first 30 to 60 days.

Establish Evaluative Criteria: Be conscious of the criteria you use. The chapter suggests six key areas:

- competence
- judgment
- energy
- focus
- relationships
- trust

You should also identify your "threshold issue"—a criterion that, if not met, makes all others irrelevant.

- Factor in Context: Your evaluation should adapt to the situation:
- Functional Expertise: Get a handle on the competence of team members in their respective functions, especially if you are a first-time enterprise leader.
- Teamwork Requirements: The importance of collaboration varies. A geographically scattered sales team may operate as a high-performing group of individuals, while a product development team requires true teamwork.
- STARS Mix: The needs of the business situation (turnaround, realignment, etc.) dictate the kind of players you need.

A turnaround requires A-players immediately, whereas a sustaining-success situation may allow time to develop B-players.

- Criticality of Positions: Assess which roles are most critical to your success. A B-player in a non-critical role may be acceptable, but not in a vital one.
- Gather Information: Meet one-on-one with each team member using a standard set of questions to compare responses. Look for verbal and nonverbal clues, assess their business judgment, and observe the team's overall dynamics.

Evolving Your Team

After your initial assessment, you should provisionally categorize each team member and plan the team's evolution. By the end of the first 30 days, you should assign each person to one of these categories:

- Keep in place
- Keep and develop
- Move to another position
- Replace (low priority)
- Replace (high priority)
- Observe for a while

Before letting someone go, consider alternatives like shifting their role or moving them elsewhere in the organization. **Begin looking for successors as soon as you are reasonably sure someone will not make it**, and always treat people with respect throughout the process, as your reputation will be shaped by how you handle these changes.

Aligning and Leading Your Team

Once you have the right people, you must align and motivate them.

- Use Push and Pull Tools: To motivate your team, use a blend of "push" tools (goals, metrics, incentives) and "pull" tools (a compelling vision). The right mix depends on your team members and the STARS situation.
- Define Goals and Align Incentives: Set clear, quantifiable goals. Align incentives with the type of work being done. If success depends on cooperation, use group incentives; if it relies on individual achievement, reward individual performance.
- Articulate an Inspiring Vision: A powerful vision taps into intrinsic motivators, makes people part of a larger story, and uses evocative language. Involve your team in crafting the vision to gain their commitment.
- Establish New Team Processes: Assess your team's existing processes for meetings, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Preserve what works and change what doesn't. A key area for improvement is often the decision-making process. The chapter outlines two main approaches:
- Consult-and-decide (the leader makes the final call after gathering input)
- Build-consensus (the leader seeks buy-in from a critical mass of the group).

The right approach depends on the nature of the decision, the team's experience, and the STARS situation. To avoid confusion, explain which process you are using and why.

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CHAPTER 8 (Create Alliances)

Chapter 8 emphasizes that to succeed in a new role, you must gain the support of people over whom you have no direct authority.

Thinking that your formal authority is enough to implement change is a common trap.

Building supportive alliances is essential, especially if you are new to an organization and have little "relationship capital".

This process involves identifying whose support is critical, understanding influence networks, and persuading key individuals to back your initiatives.

1. Define Your Influence Objectives

Before building alliances, you must be clear about why you need support.

- Link Alliances to Early Wins: Your primary goal should be to build the alliances necessary to secure your early wins. For each early-win project, you should create a specific alliance-building plan.
- Identify Winning and Blocking Alliances: A winning alliance is the group of people who collectively have the power to approve your agenda. A blocking alliance is composed of those who could band together to prevent it. Identifying potential opposition early allows you to work to neutralize it.

2. Understand the Influence Landscape

Success requires mapping the political terrain to understand how decisions are really made.

- Map Influence Networks: Organizations have informal "shadow organizations" or influence networks that operate alongside the formal structure. You must understand who influences whom on key issues. To map these networks, identify key points of contact, ask your boss to connect you with stakeholders, and observe who defers to whom in meetings.
- Identify Sources of Power: Influence comes from various sources, including expertise, control of information, connections, access to resources, and personal loyalty. Identifying these sources helps you pinpoint "opinion leaders" who hold disproportionate influence.
- Identify Supporters, Opponents, and Persuadables:
    - Supporters: Look for people who share your vision, have been working for similar changes, or are new to the company. Solidify their support and ask them to help influence others.
    - Opponents: Understand why people resist your agenda. Reasons can include comfort with the status quo, fear of looking incompetent, or threats to their values or power. Probe their motives before labeling them as adversaries, as you may be able to address their concerns.
    - Persuadables: These are individuals who are undecided or indifferent. Your goal is to figure out why they are uncommitted and convince them to support you.

3. Craft Your Influence Strategy

Once you identify the pivotal people, you can develop a strategy to win their support.

- Analyze Pivotal People: Understand what motivates key individuals (e.g., recognition, power, control) and the situational pressures acting on them (driving and restraining forces). Assess how they perceive their alternatives; if they believe the status quo is a viable option, you may need to convince them it is not.

* Use Classic Influence Techniques:

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- Consultation and Framing: Engage in active listening to promote buy-in and frame your argum

- Choice-Shaping: Influence how people perceive their options to make it harder for them to s

- Social Influence: Leverage the power of respected opinion leaders and social norms like rec

-Incrementalism: Move people toward your goal step-by-step, such as by first getting agreemen

- Sequencing: Be strategic about the order in which you approach people to build momentum. Ga

- Action-Forcing Events: Use meetings, deadlines, and review sessions to compel people to mak
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By systematically identifying goals, mapping the influence landscape, and crafting targeted influence strategies, you can build the critical alliances needed to drive your agenda and achieve success in your new role.

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CHAPTER 9 (Manage Yourself)

Chapter 9, "Manage Yourself," addresses the critical challenge of maintaining equilibrium and perspective during a leadership transition, emphasizing that transitions amplify personal weaknesses.

Challenges of Transitions and Vicious Cycles

The life of a leader is a balancing act, particularly during a transition, where uncertainty and ambiguity can be crippling due to a lack of established relationships and understanding of the new role. If a transition involves relocation, the leader's family is also in transition, which can disrupt stability and amplify the leader's emotional load. Leaders often enter an inevitable emotional "valley" three to six months after taking a new role.

Transitions tend to amplify potential dysfunctional behaviors, which can lead to vicious cycles and chronic underperformance, as seen in the case of Stephen Erikson:

- **Undefended boundaries** occur when leaders fail to set limits, allowing others (bosses, peers, direct reports) to constantly increase demands, leading to anger and resentment.
- **Brittleness** is rigidity and defensiveness caused by uncertainty, resulting in overcommitment to failing actions or disempowering others.
- **Isolation** can creep up if leaders fail to make the right connections or rely too heavily on official information, which breeds uninformed decision-making and further damages credibility.
- **Work avoidance** is the tendency to delay making tough calls (like major personnel or business direction decisions based on incomplete information) by burying oneself in less critical work.

The pressure experienced during a transition can cause performance to decline once a leader goes past the peak of their individual Yerkes-Dodson stress curve, potentially leading to chronic underperformance.

The Three Pillars of Self-Management

Vigorously engaging in self-management is built upon three foundational pillars that help leaders maintain self-efficacy and combat these challenges:

Pillar 1: Adopt 90-Day Strategies

This pillar involves applying the transition strategies outlined in previous chapters to build momentum and confidence in the new role. Leaders should reflect on core challenges such as matching strategy to situation, negotiating success, securing early wins, achieving alignment, building the team, and creating alliances.

Pillar 2: Develop Personal Disciplines

Personal disciplines are regular routines ruthlessly enforced by the leader to guide daily choices. Key disciplines include:

- **Plan to Plan:** Allocating time daily and weekly to reflect on performance and plan for the immediate future (plan-work-evaluate cycle).
- **Focus on the Important:** Setting aside a specific time each day (even half an hour) to focus exclusively on important work, shutting out urgent transactions like phone calls or emails.
- **Judiciously Defer Commitment:** Never agreeing immediately to a request; instead, saying, "Let me think about it and get back to you," which avoids damaging one's reputation by later having to change one's mind.
- **Go to the Balcony:** Disciplining oneself to step back and take a high-level view during emotional situations to make productive interventions.
- **Check In with Yourself:** Engaging in structured reflection (e.g., jotting down thoughts daily or assessing weekly) to assess one’s reactions to events.
- **Recognize When to Quit:** Knowing when to stop working to avoid diminishing returns, especially under high stress, as transitions are marathons, not sprints.

Pillar 3: Build Your Support Systems

This pillar focuses on stabilizing the leader's environment and external relationships:

- **Assert Control Locally:** Quickly setting up the basic infrastructure, clarifying routines, and establishing expectations with support staff.
- **Stabilize the Home Front:** If relocating, accelerating the family transition is critical, as failure here (as Stephen experienced) can destroy value at home. This involves acknowledging family unhappiness, finding replacement support systems (doctors, etc.), supporting a spouse's job search, and potentially delaying the family move until the end of a school year.
- **Build Your Advice-and-Counsel Network:** A network of trusted advisers helps avoid isolation and maintain perspective. Leaders need three types of advisers:
    - **Technical advisers**.
    - **Cultural interpreters**.
    - **Political counselors**. The network should contain a mix of internal advisers (who know the organization's culture and politics) and external advisers (who are loyal to the individual and offer a dispassionate perspective).

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CHAPTER 10 (Accelerate Everyone)

Chapter 10, "Accelerate Everyone," shifts the focus from accelerating individual transitions to implementing **systematic, companywide transition acceleration systems**.

The premise is that accelerating transitions across the organization is crucial for enterprise risk management, competitive advantage, and speeding up change implementation.

The Impact of Transitions

Individual leaders benefit immensely from acceleration frameworks, with independent research showing a reduction in time to the break-even point by as much as 40 percent. However, organizations also bear significant costs when transitions fail or result in underperformance.

- **Financial Costs and Risk:** A single senior executive failure can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars in direct costs, lead to millions in lost growth or delayed product launches, and result in damage to the business. An independent study assessed a **1,400 percent ROI** for transition programs and coaching based on conservative salary assumptions.
- **Widespread Impact:** Approximately a quarter of all leaders in typical Fortune 500 companies change jobs each year. In the top three tiers of leadership, the annual transition rate is even higher, at 35 percent. Crucially, each leader transition materially impacts the performance of roughly **a dozen other people** —including bosses, peers, and direct reports.
- **Organizational Change:** An acceleration system is an essential part of the organizational change management toolkit. Major change events like restructurings, rapid growth, or acquisitions generate a cascade of individual transitions. Using the acceleration framework (often called "Rapid Rewire" implementations) helps clarify roles, responsibilities, and decision rights, enabling organizations to achieve planned objectives, such as acquisition synergy targets.

Ten Design Principles for Acceleration Systems

The chapter outlines ten design principles for building a state-of-the-art acceleration system to manage transition acceleration as a critical business process.

1. **Identify the Critical Transitions:** Organizations need data on the frequency of transitions (e.g., hiring, promotion, lateral moves) to efficiently allocate resources. It is vital to focus acceleration efforts first on the most important transitions, using tools like the **Transition Heat Map** to summarize organizational priorities.
2. **Identify Set-Up-to-Fail Dynamics:** Acceleration systems must address systematic organizational mistakes that often cause new leaders to fail, such as poor clarity on expectations or improperly sized leaps in responsibility. Addressing these issues may require culture change and systematic use of tools like the transition risk assessment or the five conversations framework.
3. **Diagnose Existing Transition Support:** Companies often have a patchwork quilt of existing systems; a thorough assessment is needed to evaluate current frameworks, tools, delivery approaches, and the coherence of support across different transition types (onboarding, promotion, etc.).
4. **Adopt a Common Core Model:** Using a **unified, companywide framework, language, and toolkit** is the single most important step for efficient support. This shared language allows conversation about key elements, including the STARS portfolio (start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment, sustaining success), learning plans (technical, cultural, political), the five conversations, early wins, and necessary alliances.
5. **Deliver Support Just in Time:** Support should be offered in "digestible blocks" because new leaders are immersed in urgent demands and have limited time for reflection. Support needs shift throughout the process, moving from learning support early on to defining strategic direction and securing early wins later. Leveraging the pre-entry period (before the leader formally starts the job) is crucial.
6. **Use Structured Processes:** To combat the paradox that busy leaders feel too busy to plan, acceleration processes need **action-forcing events**. These include scheduled coaching meetings or cohort sessions that take leaders away from the daily demands to reflect and create or refine their 90-day plans.
7. **Match Support to Transition Type:** While the 90-day framework is universal, resources should be customized for specific transition types.
    - **Promotion:** Focus resources on developing new competencies, roles, behaviors, and creation of a personal development plan required at the new level.

- **Onboarding:** Provide assistance with expectation alignment, cultural adaptation, and building relationships, including help connecting with key stakeholders.

8. **Match Transition Support to Leader Level:** Due to the high impact of senior roles, intensive support like **transition coaching** often makes sense for executives. For lower levels, support can be delivered via cost-effective modes like virtual workshops and self-guided materials to maximize ROI. Transition coaching, which requires business acumen and knowledge of the organization’s culture, is distinct from developmental coaching.
9. **Clarify Roles and Align Incentives:** Transition support is a "team sport" requiring the involvement of bosses, peers, direct reports, and HR staff. Key players need focused tools and incentives to effectively support new leaders.
10. **Integrate with Other Talent Management Systems:** Acceleration systems should be linked with recruiting and leadership development. Recruiting must incorporate transition risk assessment (e.g., evaluating cultural fit). Furthermore, leadership development programs should incorporate the core transition acceleration model and use the **STARS model** to map leaders' experience, identifying gaps and charting their professional progression.