

Fast Start: New Manager Assimilation Process

On-boarding' a new executive, poses specific organisational challenges. A particularly useful technique to help senior employees settle into a role is Fast Start, an assimilation process for new managers. Appropriate timing for this is normally 1-4 weeks after the manager has joined the organisation.

What is the Aim of this Process?

The **Fast Start** manager assimilation process facilitates the rapid development of a working relationship between an executive and his/her direct reports. A relationship which can take up to 9 months to develop normally, can be achieved in about 9 hours. The effectiveness of this relationship will be based on the degree of shared understanding between the manager and the group, developed through solid communication.

This process is aimed at promoting immediate, open communication which is relevant to the manager/ employee relationship, speeding up the 'getting to know you' process for both sides. **Fast Start** reduces the fears and anxieties produced by a new relationship and accelerates the development of mutual trust.

How it Works?

An outside facilitator meets with the new manager's direct reports. The agenda for this meeting (which typically lasts 3 hours) is as follows:

1. The facilitator explains the purpose of the Fast Start (New Manager Assimilation) Process and how it works.
2. The facilitator then leads the group in developing responses to the following questions:
 - What do we really know about (new manager)?
 - What don't we know but would like to know about
 - What are our concerns about.....becoming our manager?



- What do we want most from.....?
- What does.....need to know about us as a group?
- What are the major obstacles.....and ourselves will encounter in trying to achieve our objectives?
- What suggestions do we have for overcoming the points raised above?

After the First Meeting

After the first meeting, the facilitator consolidates the responses (usually recorded on flip charts) into a written document which is then reviewed with the new manager. This meeting usually takes 2-3 hours. A copy of the document can be sent to the direct reports once the issues have been reviewed by the manager.

Within a few days of receiving the responses, the new manager (along with the facilitator) meets with the direct reports. The agenda for this (3 hour) meeting is:

- The new manager presents the data from the first meeting and seeks clarification of points.

- The manager adds any information that helps to explain his/her style of managing.
- An open discussion is held between the manager and direct reports.
- If appropriate some action planning is done around the points covered during the discussion.

General Communication

The 'questions and answers' (or elements of these) can be used for general communications to a wider group. For example, these can be captured in a Q&A document and inserted into newsletters, staff emails etc. While the process is complete at this point, some organisations take it on another step.

Follow-up Phase: 6 Months Later

3-6 months after the first meeting, the facilitator again meets with the new manager's direct reports. The purpose of this follow-up is to provide non-threatening, anonymous feedback to the new manager about his/her assimilation into the organisation. It provides the new manager with feedback early enough in the assignment to allow appropriate adjustments in style. The agenda for this meeting is usually:

1. Review responses to questions raised during the first meeting and discuss what actually happened since then.
2. Through group discussion, develop three lists of information about the new manager's style of management.
 - What is the manager doing that we like and should continue or increase?
 - What is the manager doing that we dislike and would like to see discontinued or modified?
 - What is the manager not doing that we want him/her to start doing?

After the meeting, the facilitator summarises the information and reviews this with the new manager. Within a few days, the new manager meets with the direct reports. The agenda for this follow-up meeting is:

- The new manager seeks any needed information or clarification.
- The new manager explains that actions will be taken as a result of the information provided.
- The new manager presents his/her list of the things that direct reports can do more of, less of, or start doing to help the unit perform better. Obviously, items on these lists apply to the entire group (items relevant to specific people are discussed directly with the individuals concerned).
- Follow-up actions and dates can be agreed, if appropriate.

Summary

This is an example of using speed as a competitive weapon. Ensuring that the manager/employee relationship is productive right from the start is a critical success factor in the attainment of business goals. In a rapidly changing environment, the Fast Start assimilation process provides a simple but extremely useful tool to ensure that the relationship with the new group gets off to a positive start.

- Paul Mooney Ph.D

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