

Birn+Partners
Executive Search & Consulting

Getting a head start
in your new job...



The first 100 days

Moving to a new position within an organization is a huge challenge, especially when it is a senior appointment. Within the first three months, the new manager must assimilate a new job, influence a new team and the right culture. The manager must make an impact both upwards and downwards and review their relevant business strategy.

Senior executives get top positions, because they are bright, decisive, talented, and experienced. It should be possible for the executive to achieve a clear idea of what they are expected to deliver. But the first 100 days are a surprisingly short time to make a mark and build vital new relationships.

The importance of your first 100 days is the difference between success and failure in the new role – and could have consequences for your entire career.

Executives can find it difficult to regulate the emotions during the beginning stage of the first 100 days. Some feel overwhelmed by a feeling of panic and fear of failure. Others are overconfident and underestimate the challenges ahead.

There is a list of common challenges that can derail good intentions and get in the way of successfully achieving primary goals. Some of the key transition challenges are:

Time pressure and intense learning curve

It takes time to get up to speed on the content of your new position, and yet business and markets can not slow down and wait for you to catch up. Decisions still need to be made. Consequently, the pressure can build up and will need to be managed to ensure the manager stays operationally effective.

Being overwhelmed with immediate “fire-fighting” and task-driven priorities

It can be tempting to “get busy” and dive into the immediate business tasks and issues. But you need to have the strength of character to step back and take time out to look at the big picture: What tasks should continue? Which should you stop? Where should you start? Delegation?

Need to invest energy in building new networks and making new stakeholder relationships

There is no point in having the right vision and strategy in isolation. The culture may be dense and slow moving and people may be resistant to the changes you bring. Invest early in the influencer and stakeholder networks and bring people with you.

Dealing with legacy issues from the predecessor

Depending on the quality of your predecessor, your department may or may not have a good reputation, and your team may have developed poor habits, behaviors and disciplines, which will take time to adjust.

You may have to endure the scenario of filling the shoes of a much-loved predecessor and being resented as the new guy, whose mandate is to change how things have always been.

Challenges of inheriting a team and having to make tough personnel decisions

Don't expect underperformers to have been weeded out prior to your arrival. A key task in your first 100 days will be to assess the quality of your team: Who stays, who goes and who is needed onboard.

Worst case scenario, your best performer could now be demotivated and resentful – because he applied unsuccessfully for your job.

Everything you do is being judged as indicative of your character. You will need to be alert to consciously pick up clues on the acceptable norms and behaviors.

Getting the balance right between moving too fast and moving too slow

New executives sometimes panic, which can result in either doing too much or too little. At the preparing stage you should take time to understand the transition challenges you face. The sooner you start to equip yourself with observations, insights and ideas on how to overcome or deal with them, the faster you can make and revise your personal 100-day plan.

You should share your 100-day plan with your superior and maybe, depending on the situation, even choose to be tactical and invite other stakeholders to view parts of it. You should show up the first day being a leader – not a manager. A leader sets a clear direction, brings people with him/her and delivers results. A manager dictates the direction for others.

Being fit for purpose on emotional intelligence is a very important aspect of the “how” in your first 100 days. You need to figure out how to motivate and engage your team, to deliver as planned. To do this, you need to be aware of how you are coming across with your communication, and how the team is responding to your approach and plans.



Critical success factors for the first 30 days

Bring forward a clear vision. Example: Imagine leaving the role, and what you want to have left behind of achievements. From this you can set out your vision.

⊕ **Be confident**

It is normal to lose confidence during the first 30 days – after all you have not had this role before/you could be nervous. Confidence is very important, because you need to be able to make good decisions.

⊕ **Exercise patience**

A leader in a new role is expected to perform and make changes as fast as possible. Unfortunately, resistance to changes appears to be current in even the best organizations. Accept that resistance to change is the more likely situation and devise strategies for overcoming these resistances and try not to get frustrated by the potential slow pace of others.

⊕ **Be a fast learner**

The industry, market and organization will keep on moving, and there is no pause whilst you get up to speed in the first month. You must be committed and able to learn fast.

⊕ **Don't be afraid of your mistakes**

We all make mistakes. Mistakes are a rich source of learning and the sum of our total experience and wisdom. The important thing about mistakes is how you handle them – very often a mistake can be an opportunity to build a deeper relationship with someone we work with.

Critical success factors for day 30 - 60

After 30 days, the novelty of your arrival is passing, but you have not yet been there long enough to show any results. As such, you are “stuck in the middle”.

Everyone has expectations to you within the first 100 days, but your first month can fly by without anyone noticing you doing much at all. In the middle phase of your first 100 days you need to get others to work for you. Middle is about staying on the course and putting extra energy and effort into achieving your initiatives and having your employees guided in the chosen direction.

Culture and politics are an integral part of organizational life. Skilled political behavior involves understanding how organizations work and how to mobilize resources to achieve the purposes. High-achieving leaders often realize that there are two dimensions in every relationship, every meeting, every department, every organization; what is happening above and below the surface. The ability to read the organizational world is a very important skill.

You can't be a successful leader unless you have followers. Today, corporations are so highly matrixed that it is unlikely you have direct authority over most of the people you rely on to get things done. It is vital how you navigate your network and secure followers in this matrix. Visit all relevant desks/work areas and get acquainted.

Critical success factors for day 60-90

Re-focus. Get the team working for you -effectively as individuals and as a team. Perhaps your team needs its own first 100 days, focusing on what they want to achieve. This is an opportunity for a common mission, for more team-bonding and more team focus.

Even if you had a difficult transition, you will have made progress, and you should now take time to appreciate and record all your positive achievements. Remember, the whole point of having an accelerated start is laying the right foundations for a successful first 12 months and beyond.

The next 10 days are an opportunity to gather feedback formally and informally. People **will** be impressed with you if you are open enough to ask them for feedback – and it will also remind people that you have only been there for three months.

Your team will respect you if they believe that you are adding value, and trust that you make them perform better under your leadership.



Planning for perfection

Planning and coaching your way through a successful first 100 days begins before you as the executive manager start and often involves:

⊕ **Gather intel: What needs to be addressed?**

Go on a fact-finding mission. At this point, do not look to change anything – just ask, listen and observe. As you do this, consider the next five action steps. Fold in what you're learning and adapt it, to include it in changes, you plan to make further down the road.

⊕ **Set the tone with your superior**

You may think, this is backwards – “doesn't the boss set the tone with me?” Well, yes and no. It is up to you to establish the relationship you want with your manager. Let him/her know your preferences – what type of communication works best for you and so on. If it is done diplomatically and with the intent to facilitate communication, many superiors will be receptive.

⊕ **Bring your direct reports on board – fast**

Set up one-to-one meetings as soon as possible after you assume your new role. Find out how the previous manager implemented processes and communication strategies – did the systems work, or could they use some optimization?

⊕ **Lay out your communication strategies**

Think of a wheel – there is a center point (the “hub”) and spokes that radiate out from the hub. Now, think of yourself as that communication hub and the spokes as the people with whom you and your team must communicate. What communication strategies will you implement to be sure you are communicating properly with each spoke on the wheel?

⊕ **Assess your department's brand**

This is something many new managers overlook. The reputation of your department can be a key asset or liability, depending on how others see it. Ask around – what is the level of credibility your department has? Do colleagues in other departments know what your team does? Can key executives connect what you do with the company's mission?

⊕ **Grab the low-hanging fruit**

Executive coaches advocate for an “invest in early wins” approach for newly hired executives. This is true for any leader, regardless of their scope of authority. Whenever you meet with someone, ask: “What's one simple, inexpensive thing we could do to improve customer service, make your job easier, improve efficiency, etc.?”

Meeting expectations

The generalities may be found in the day-to-day aspects of the role, which are typically a part of the job description. However, it is essential that you establish the real focus of the role. What is said or inferred in an interview, along with the expectation that is created by the participants, can actually result in a lack of congruence when discussed in detail.

Expectations need to be defined so you have a clear picture of what lies before you and what needs to be achieved. The key player in this will be your immediate manager. However, establishing SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timebound) requires an indepth knowledge for you and your manager, and this may take both time and a number of meetings.



Your first 100 days in a new position – ten principal guidelines

- 1. Do not assume that your interpretation of what is expected of you is correct**
Immediately after starting, clarify your purpose with the stakeholders and business owners by making a succinct list of objectives and an action plan. Remain in close contact with the stakeholders to ensure clarity about goals and expectations.
- 2. The most important thing (from an executive point of view) is to assess what needs to be done to achieve the corporate objectives for which you have been hired**
- 3. Connect officially or unofficially with your predecessor to gain insight**
- 4. Meet the management team, both as a group and individually to notice any common themes**
- 5. Ask for “state of the nation” presentations from your management team**
Ask them to list their top five business issues and to propose solutions.
Synchronize objectives in terms of short-term goals, i.e. 30, 60, and 100 days.
- 6. Stop the practices that are not working and carry on with those that do**
Initiate new practices to fill any gaps
- 7. Look for quick wins with maximum business impact**
Start considering what major changes could have a transformative effect but be careful not to jump to conclusions too soon on big issues. Consider the McKinsey Way: A deep root-cause analysis underpins the approach to projects and re-engineering. Make sure you are addressing the right issues.
- 8. Synergize the team, also together with the team**
Build a culture of cooperation and develop lines of communication. Take plenty of time to listen and connect with your team and staff. Empower your team and create opportunities for others to lead; distributed leadership can be a rewarding thing. At executive management level, the decisions that you make, affect people around you, so it is important that you let them know that you care. Do not alienate yourself risking getting fired because you have failed to fit in.
- 9. Meet your top five customers or business partners**
- 10. Mind the gap**
It is not unusual for people changing their environment to bring with them perceptions which are incorrect or outdated. There is a difference between similar and same. Ask the people who hired you, including HR, what perceptions you may need to change and what knowledge gaps you need to bridge.

Birn+Partners

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Birn+Partners is a consultancy company with daughter companies in 8 countries and 12 offices around Europe with more than 400 years of combined experience in giving advice to senior executives.

8000 European executives have conducted our surveys, resulting in 3 unique concepts. These executives participated in developing and adjusting our service portfolio based on their own experience and need as a leader.

Executive Search – your access to talent.

Our search processes being national or crossborder, include a tailor-made concept with a 100-day onboarding program. Onboarding accelerates the performance and ROI of a new leader.

Interim Management secures leadership, specialist or project management for assignments vital to your business during periods such as turnarounds, mergers or acquisitions, implementation processes with specific and aligned skills – or when needing to fill a vacancy gap.

Consulting – your trusted advisor.

Our consulting services address improvement of leadership to individuals and teams towards achieving a strategic organizational goal. Example of services: Assessment of individuals and leadership teams, Organize and facilitate implementation of changes in strategy and competencies, Coaching and Career Advisory.

Board Services – optimize your governance.

Together with top executives, private equity companies, lawyers, and auditors we provide our own state-of-the-art Executive Board Education. More than 200 executives have already successfully completed the master program. Board Services also include own CV database and board recruiting.