

Executive Transitions Market Study Summary Report: 2008

About the Survey

The Institute of Executive Development and global coaching and consulting alliance Alexcel Group conducted a year long market survey in 2007 and 2008 to examine the transitions that top executives make into and through organizations, and road blocks that can occur in the process along with the organizational roles and processes that may facilitate such transitions and change.

"This is important for leaders and organizations to understand," says leadership development expert and executive coach Patricia Wheeler, Managing Partner of The Levin Group (www.TheLevinGroup.com) and current Managing Director of Alexcel Group, "because they expect internal transfers to be seamless and require little help; our results show that, in fact, this is not the case. As 20% of senior executives are not successful when they change roles internally, companies need to take notice. Our results suggest that a relatively small amount of time, if invested correctly, will help senior executives assimilate in their new roles and may prevent the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars and work-hours."

Introduction

The rate at which executives transition from one organization to another is at an all time high, as is the frequency of executives inside of organizations who move from one role to another. While there are a variety of reasons why executives make transitions, one thing is certain: the cost to the organization in financial terms is very high. The costs of a transition that fails for whatever reason can range from a few hundred thousand to over a million dollars for the senior most leaders – inclusive of recruiting costs and investments in coaching and development. And most salient are the costs associated with time-to-productivity; even the most seasoned executive requires time to assimilate and show results in a new role.

Organizations recognize there are pivotal points in a leader's career that require extra support to ensure the leader is successful in his role. Among the most pivotal is when newly hired into an organization at an executive level, or moving into a challenging new executive assignment in one's current organization. However, many organizations today probably have unrealistic expectations about the seamless nature and speed of transitions. There are a variety of different ways to attempt to facilitate these transitions, and organizations very much desire to help ensure executives reach full productivity as quickly as possible.

The number of executive transitions and the complexity is expected to increase dramatically. According to a study by Booz Allen Hamilton in 2007, global CEO turnover is at roughly 15%, the highest it has been in the past decade. Other studies point to 40% of new leaders failing within the first 18 months. Aon Consulting reports there is a 50% chance an executive will quit or be fired within his first three years.

The cost of failure with executive transitions is quite significant. Along with direct costs of recruiting, sign on bonuses, and exit packages, come numerous indirect costs which can be even greater such as alienated employees, customers, suppliers, and tarnished brand image.

With executive transitions and onboarding such a high priority topic among executives as well as HR and talent professionals, a few key lessons learned have emerged for leaders: Focus on early wins while learning as much as you can about the culture, what your team needs, whose opinion counts, and with whom you need to create partnerships. While both business acumen and people acumen are essential, failure tends to happen when the latter is ignored, as we will see in this report.

Key Findings from the survey

Participants included approximately 150 executives and talent professionals across a variety of companies and industries who participated in an online survey consisting of 18 multiple choice questions. Here are the key findings along with important implications.

External Hires: What organizations do and what is effective

To help assimilate newly hired executives, organizations use a variety of resources and activities. Yet, what is most frequently used does not always correlate with what is most effective. Take pre-employment activities and orientation programs – while both are popular, they have low effectiveness ratings. This could be as much a reflection of the nature and quality of these activities as it is of their potential utility.

Other relatively popular activities are executive coaching and assimilation programs, with 29% of organizations reporting the use of coaches and 32% using assimilation plans to assist with transitions. A third or more of those users believe coaching and assimilation programs are effective. This trend could indicate a growing market niche for executive coaches and assimilation experts.

More than any other activity, mentoring seems to be the most effective with external hires, with almost half the organizations reporting the use of mentoring and about the same number indicating it is effective.

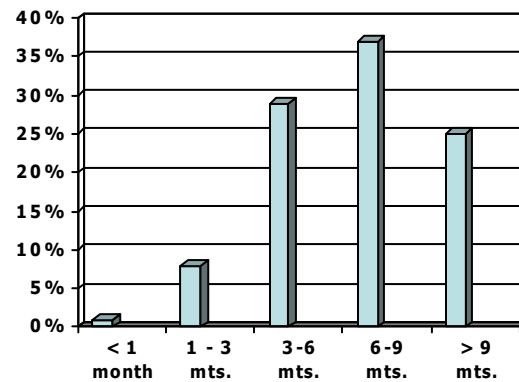
Resources organizations provide to <i>external executives</i>	Number of orgs. that provide resource	Number that say it is effective
Mentoring or informal "buddy" networks	49%	47%
Orientation programs with other new execs	45%	19%
Customized assimilation plans and programs	32%	38%
Executive coaching	29%	34%
Pre-employment activities	27%	8%

Note: Multiple answers can be chosen for this question and results may not total 100%.

An executive at a major life sciences company says that, "We're so decentralized, we try to give new hires a good sense of how decision-making is done especially in their business unit. That way they already have a leg up on an important aspect of their role."

External Hires: How long does it really take?

Although conventional wisdom says it takes 90 days for a new executive to reach productivity, in reality it is longer, and for many it may be at least twice that time. 92% of respondents said it takes more than 90 days and 62% said more than six months. And even after making it through the first 90 days and the first 180 days, a significant percentage are gone within two years – 34% according to this study.



External Executives: Time-to-Productivity

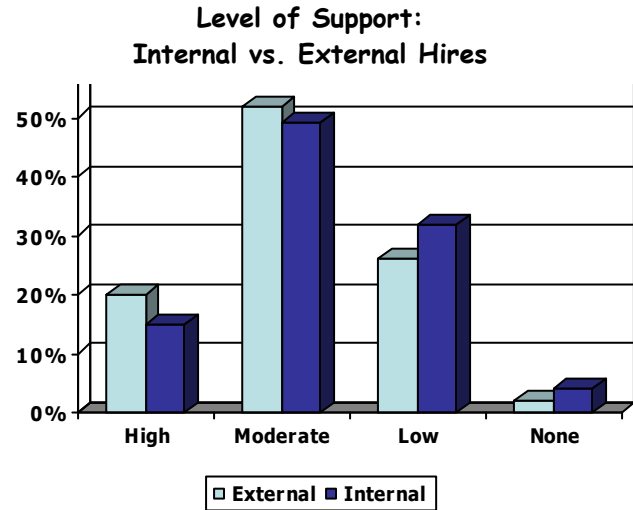
These departures are likely the result of unmet performance expectations and could also be in part due to the organization's inability to retain keepers. The implications here are significant. Executive management teams and Boards of Directors need to change their views regarding expectations for newly hired executives and get more serious about supporting them through those first critical months.

This study shows that almost 60% of organizations are utilizing the Board in some fashion to help internal executives. There is ample opportunity for even more involvement by Boards with both internal and external hires. For external hires in particular, consider individualized plans and more structured mentoring and coaching. Resources and services to support new executives must be viewed as an investment, not a cost.

Internal Transitions – What’s different?

There is an implicit assumption that internal transitions -- simply moving from one role to another in the same company -- are less challenging. If this is true, the next assumption would be that internal executives can easily make the transition on their own. Is that really accurate?

Internal executives have the advantage of knowing the company and the culture, they have established peer networks, and successful track records. Yet, they are still entering new territory with new expectations and demands for potentially new skills. The needs for internal transfers and external hires may in fact be quite similar; however, the level of organizational support is even lower for internal moves than it is for externals.



Internal Transitions: What organizations do and what is effective

For internal transitions, it also holds that what is most frequently used does not always correlate with what is most effective. Although almost a quarter of the organizations report the use of orientation programs with internals, they have a dismal 11% effectiveness rating.

As for mentoring, close to 50% of the organizations use mentoring with internals, but only 29% report it is effective. One of the benefits of a mentor is to help someone learn the ropes, both functionally and culturally. Such activity might be less necessary for internal moves where organizational familiarity could already be high. In contrast, coaching could be preferable for internals as it typically focuses on specific skills and behaviors that may need to be honed quickly. The survey results show that only a third of companies regularly use coaching to support internal transfers, yet it's rated as the most effective.

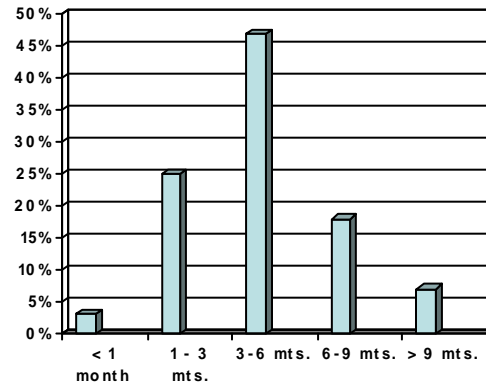
We did not even think to ask a question about pre-employment activities for internal transfers, but that might be something worth considering. Entering a new position is an excellent time for a leader to reassess his skills via a 360 or other tool, and identify blind spots that could impede success in the new role. The CEO of a large retail company indicated, even for internal transfers, they have a transition schedule and pretty detailed plan.

Resources organizations provide to <i>internal executives</i>	Number of orgs. that provide resource	Number that say it is effective
Mentoring or informal "buddy" networks	48%	29%
Customized assimilation plans and programs	32%	38%
Executive coaching	32%	42%
Orientation programs with other new executives	21%	11%
Pre-employment activities	n/a	n/a

Note: Multiple answers can be chosen for this question and results may not total 100%.

Internal Transitions: Time to reach full productivity

Surprisingly, it still takes quite a bit of runway for internal transitions to ramp up to full productivity. While not as long as with external hires, 72% of respondents reported that internal executives need more than the the "first 90 days" to get up to speed, and 25% said six months or longer is needed.



Internal Transfers: Time-to-Productivity

Comparing support for internal and external hires

Although the general trends in transition activities used for internal moves versus external hires are similar, it appears the effectiveness of those activities is slightly different. While mentoring appears to be most effective with external hires, coaching has the advantage with internal executives by a significant margin.

Despite what some executives may say about internal moves being easier, it's a myth to think that internals need any less support. They face a double-edged sword where on the one hand they are expected to know the culture and how to get things done, yet are under close scrutiny to see just how quickly they can get results in a new, more challenging role. The situation is actually quite similar to that of an external hire, especially in a decentralized environment.

Resources organizations provide	Internal		External	
	Number of orgs. that provide resource	Number that say it is effective	Number of orgs. that provide resource	Number that say it is effective
Mentoring or informal "buddy" networks	48%	29%	49%	47%
Customized assimilation plans and programs	32%	38%	32%	38%
Executive coaching	32%	42%	29%	34%
Orientation programs with other new executives	21%	11%	45%	19%
Pre-employment activities	n/a	n/a	27%	8%

Underperformance of new executives

Given the high costs associated with hiring and onboarding a new executive, or promoting and transitioning an internal executive, organizations have high hopes for top performance and long tenure. However, the reality is different than you think. 30% of external hires fail to meet expectations in two years, and as many as 21% of internal transfers fail. At the executive level, these mistakes represent millions of dollars which can be crippling to any business.

There are a multitude of reasons for underperformance but here's what really stands out. Among all respondents, 68% indicated it is the lack of interpersonal and leadership skills, and 45% of respondents indicated the lack of personal skills. These are non-technical skills and are the type that don't show up on resumes, yet are just as critical, if not more so, than technical or functional skills. It appears that current hiring practices are better at vetting technical qualifications a candidate brings to the table than they are at assessing leadership attributes and "soft skills."

Another major contributor to underperformance noted by 41% of respondents is goal conflicts between the executive and the organization. The Vice Chairman at one organization noted, "As much as anything, I think failures are the result of expectations not being set properly in the recruiting process, and the executive doesn't have quite the autonomy they thought they were going to have."

How do organizations respond? Even when action is taken to rescue a failing executive, the results are mixed. Many organizations resort to coaching which was reported by 37% of the companies, but another 40% of the time, the executive is left alone. Taking some action is better than doing nothing, and it appears that 40% do improve with action and development. However, 28% don't show any change and oddly enough 5% actually get worse. And if it's an external hire, some will not wait long to take action. "I'd have to say that we resolve things faster with underperforming

external hires, and would be more inclined to quickly conclude that it just isn't working out so let's deal with it immediately," so says the CEO of a large financial services firm.

The message is clear - focus on getting it right in the selection and hiring process and significantly improve the assimilation process for both internals and externals. This may be particularly important where hiring managers simply do not take accountability for successfully onboarding new leaders or do not have the resources to help a new leader navigate successfully.

Summary

Findings from this study give new insight into executive transitions. One fact that is quite surprising given the frequency of failure and the cost of executive transitions that are not successful, is that the vast majority of companies provide only low to moderate support for transitions. For those organizations who want to increase their support, the following recommendations should be considered.

1. Revisit the hiring process

If you are not using comprehensive hiring methods that assess soft skills as well as hard skills, there's a strong chance of hiring at-risk executives on day one. This goes for both internal and external hires. Even the best onboarding processes will not help a candidate reach performance expectations if they aren't truly qualified. Remember that underperformance is more likely to result from poor personal or interpersonal skills which can be assessed during the hiring process, but are often overlooked. Sound assessment data can be used to instantly help new hires leverage their strengths and channel energy into their weaker areas. If working with an executive search firm, it is imperative to revisit the process and ensure there are consistent messages and expectations set between the hiring organization and the outside candidate as to what the position really requires.

2. Set reasonable expectations

Give careful consideration to ramp time for new executives and which positions you can afford the time for a new executive to come up to speed, keeping in mind it can be as much as six or nine months for an external hire. It's just not realistic to believe a new executive will be up to speed in 90 days. New executives need to get a clear picture of the "real job," because sometimes what they hear from recruiters and others during the interview process does not quite match the picture they see when they walk into their new office.

3. Support both external hires and internal transfers

The key resource for either a new external hire or internal transfer is the executive who hired them. Once again however, reality comes into play and the demands of executives often don't allow them the time to adequately orient a new executive. HR and executive development have an opportunity to step up and help here by providing relevant onboarding plans with tools and resources that can be tailored to fit each new executive. Consider rebalancing the use of various onboarding activities to take advantage of those deemed most effective.

4. Invest properly in coaching and mentoring

Having a coach is an invaluable resource to an executive entering a new job. A coach can help outline key actions and deliverables to focus on first and help tune up leadership behaviors. Given so much internal movement in some organizations, it may be wise to build a pool of "onboarding

coaches” to ensure consistency and accountability. At the same time, don’t overlook the power of mentoring and the role that current executives, retired executives, and Board members can play in helping to assimilate an executive into a new role. Those who are not currently using mentoring should give it serious consideration, particularly for external hires, for which it’s reported to be very effective.

5. Find mistakes early and take decisive action

No one wants to face a PURE (previously undetected recruiting error), but when it does surface, get on top of the situation quickly. Review performance issues, bring in a coach or take other action to help the executive get back on track. The cost of having an underperforming executive in a critical role for too long is just too high.

Any executive who is in a new role or may soon be should also pay heed to the tips above. Start thinking about your “transition” during the hiring and interview process. If you have not done a 360 assessment in the past few years, this is an opportune time to look in the mirror at your capabilities and blind spots that might catch up with you now. Work with a coach to put together an action plan and look for a mentor to help guide you.

Case Examples

1. Senior Executive Onboarding: A Successful Outcome

A senior executive of a Fortune 100 division was moved from head of a division business line to a functional role within the corporate office. This move coincided with a reorganization which more closely aligned this executive’s division with the larger global entity. The need for this leader to rapidly form relationships with new stakeholders was crucial to driving business results.

This leader had worked for three different organizations in his twenty-plus year’s tenure in the industry. He had occupied twelve positions total in his career to date and until this transition, he had not participated in a formal program designed to assist him with assimilating into a new role. At the time of his transition, he was also working with an Executive Coach to assist in developing additional capabilities to prepare him to move up to the next level of leadership within the organization.

The Human Resources partner in his new role enacted a simple, transparent Onboarding process. The leader and his new team (comprising two levels of direct reports) initially met as a group, with everyone giving brief introductions; the leader briefly explained his leadership style, values and observations of the new business unit thus far, covering the following points from his perspective:

- Our vision
- Our competition
- Our customers
- First impressions
- My expectations of the team

He left the room while the HR partner asked the group to:

- Respond to the leader’s introduction
- Articulate what they already knew (or thought they knew) about their new leader
- Create a list of what they wanted to know
- Describe where, from their perspective, the unit needed to be six months down the road

The leader re-entered; the HR partner facilitated a dialogue focused on both questions and needs surfaced by the team and around actions the unit must take to achieve results which were linked to organizational strategy.

The Executive Coach's role in the process was to help the executive remain aware of his leadership style, strengths and challenges so that he achieved results effectively and efficiently. This leader was working on getting better at managing up and across the company, which was shifting from parallel "silos" to a matrix-based organization. He and his coach created a contact plan for reaching out to his new stakeholders and keeping this on his "front burner" so that he continued taking action on this important initiative despite the urgencies of day to day business.

Results and Lessons Learned

Two years later, this successful leader pronounces the process as a success. Onboarding took away much of his new reports' doubt and worry, which often result in "water cooler talk" and wasted time. In his experience, proactive discussion around strategy and results saved up to six months of wasted time. Additionally, the initial introductions with employees allowed him to broaden and deepen his working relationships quickly. The coach provided a parallel Onboarding process with the leader's manager and peers, creating an overall relationship building strategy within all crucial stakeholder groups.

This senior leader has seen many executives who were not offered a transitional process, struggle with and sometimes fail in new roles. He found that onboarding shortened his learning curve and helped him create strong positive relationships with stakeholders, both locally and within his broader organization, which poised him, and his unit, for success.

2. Onboarding New Leaders: An Integrated Model

A regional health insurance organization with 3,800 employees, serving over 3 million members recognized that with all the changes in the health care industry, they needed to continue to bring fresh talent into the organization and new leaders needed to become successful as soon as possible. Given its 70 year history, the organization has a very strong culture. Embedded in that culture is a widespread recognition of the importance of people development, which begins at the moment a new hire is brought into the organization or when a leader makes a lateral move in the organization.

The talent development professionals witnessed that once leaders made it to the two-year mark, they were much more likely to continue on and have longer tenures with the company, but the two-year mark was a critical point that too many of them were not achieving. Thus more formal activities and programs were put in place to help newly hired leaders due to the recognition that:

- Actions during the first few months in a new role can have a significant impact on a new leaders own success and the success of the company
- A very large percentage (up to 70% in some studies) of senior executives leave their positions within two years
- Many senior executives (upwards of 40%) fail within the first 18 months from date of hire, and the cost of replacement can be a multiple of the leader's salary

The talent development team knew it was critical to have the onboarding activities well aligned and integrated with other developmental activities. As a result, a development model emerged with onboarding explicitly broken out as one component within three key areas of development:

1) Onboarding & Assessment, 2) Development, including classroom based, coaching, etc. and 3) Internal Movement, including lateral movements, shadowing assignments, etc.

The onboarding process has two phases. In Phase 1, the first 100 days, the new leader, his or her team, and the HR business partner orchestrate a set of discussions to help level set expectations. An assimilation coach is assigned to each new leader, and an assimilation plan is created with input from all parties. Included in the plan is meeting with a peer coach, support for key stakeholder meetings, and a process for periodic check-in points. One of the key elements in Phase 1 is having a process by which the new leader's team has the opportunity to ask questions and dialogue about expectations they have for their new leader.

In Phase 2 of the onboarding process, the leader participates in performance management, which is crucial for feedback, continues meeting with peer coach and identifies additional developmental activities. A critical component of this phase is reviewing accomplishments at the 180 day mark.

Results & Lessons Learned

Many of the typical business metrics are examined as part of the organization's development practices, and onboarding plays a key role. In particular, metrics such as retention and promotion rates of leaders are tracked. Another metric worth calling out which is somewhat unique is the participation rate among new leaders who later provide coaching and mentoring to peers. This signifies the value they got during their own transitions and a willingness to keep the system intact for the benefit of the organization.

Leaders have observed first hand the importance of due diligence as it relates to onboarding. They see how it helps a new leader and his/her team build an understanding of each other's needs and capabilities, and helps manage expectations on both sides. In the words of the head of leadership development, "It is sometimes important to slow down a new leader who is all fired up and ready to make a splash and have them consider the context of their work and team so that you can speed them up down the road once a good foundation is in place."

3. Major Organizational Change: A Challenge for New Executives

One of the top five consumer products and pharmaceutical companies was undertaking a large operational initiative to centralize a significant segment of its business operations. Having operated for decades as a decentralized system, this was a formidable task. To take the business to the next level, senior leaders recognized the need to hire new leaders from the outside who could bring specific knowledge, technical expertise and experience.

Several new leaders were sourced and hired and were ready to go to work. They knew they were coming in to lead an initiative that would have substantial impact on the organization, and they could not clearly predict the reaction of the organization. They did know they had to immediately begin managing their own teams and direct reports and engage them in implementing the change effort. Executive onboarding is challenging under the best of circumstances, let alone during a time of significant change when additional issues exist:

- Must be quickly assimilated into the present culture
- Establish credibility and gain respect and trust
- Coming in as an outsider charged with catalyzing and leading the change
- Need to meet people where they are AND start leading them somewhere else
- How to quickly make connections across the organization and establish relationships with others who would be critical to making the change successful

The organization had minimal structured process or formal executive onboarding programs. However, they did provide a set of resources that new executives could choose to utilize if they so desired. At about the four-month mark, one of the new executives hired to lead this change realized he needed help and decided the best option was an executive coach and immediately got the support of the company.

The coach worked with the executive to quickly put an assimilation plan in place. She started with a 360 assessment which surfaced issues critical not only to his overall development as a leader, but also immediate challenges he was facing with the change effort. This included areas such as interpersonal skills, leadership presence and influencing – really no surprise, given this executive was hired specifically for his technical and operational strengths.

The coach worked directly with the new leader and also engaged his boss to identify a mentor who could assist him in navigating the entire organization and identify key players who were essential in championing the change effort. He needed to establish relationships within his own department, as well as strategic partners within other business units that would be greatly affected by the change. He continued meeting regularly with his coach for feedback and guidance, much of it focused on teambuilding, establishing sustainable relationships, influencing, and rapid execution. Not all executives who came on board during this time chose to work with a coach. However, it quickly became apparent that those who had coaches did better. They were able to more successfully balance assimilating into the culture with their charter to drive change.

Results and Lessons Learned

As part of the onboarding process, both mentoring and coaching proved to be of high value. Mentoring was especially helpful for new executives during this period of organizational change as it allowed them to be more resource ready. In a decentralized organization, which is very relationship-based, a mentor can provide context and background about specific people. Providing support when an executive says they need a coach and being willing to make that investment is crucial. In this situation, stronger partnerships were built and teams worked more effectively with consistent and sustained open communication. The organizational changes that needed to happen got underway and the executive was able to implement new operational approaches.

Additional Resources

- "Executive Transitions" Benchmark Survey, Alexcel Group and The Institute of Executive Development, 2007 www.execsight.com/benchmark
- "High Potential Management" Benchmark Survey, RHR International and The Institute of Executive Development, 2007 www.execsight.com/benchmark
- "Leaders in Transition: Stepping up, Not Off" Matt Paese and Richard Wellins, DDI, 2007 www.ddi.com
- "Transitions in Leadership Experience: How experiences shape leadership at every level" Anu Ramesh, PDI, June 2007 <http://www.personneldecisions.com/>
- *The Next Level: What Insiders Know About Executive Success* by Scott Eblin, Davies-Black Publishing, 2006.
- *The First 90 Days: Critical Success Strategies for New Leaders at All Levels* by Michael Watkins, Harvard Business School Press, 2003.
- The Institute of Executive Development case study on "*Successfully transitioning existing leaders and new executive hires into new roles*"

Questions for You and Your Organization

- First, please let us know: has this report on Executive Transitions been helpful to you?
- How much are unsuccessful executive transitions costing you and your organization?
- What strategies are you currently deploying to help executives new to your organization assimilate? Are the strategies working?
- How much consistent attention and assistance do you give existing executives as they transition into new roles and responsibilities?
- How (and how often) do you measure success and failure within your senior ranks, related to transitions?
- As you think about leaders within your organization, where are the gaps and opportunities for further success?

Executive Transition Assistance

We help organizations create cultures and processes that maximize the success of transitioning leaders and their teams. For further questions about the survey and information about Levin Group programs that help organizations and their leaders make successful transitions or to contact Patricia, send an E-mail to Patricia@TheLevinGroup.com.

About Patricia Wheeler

Dr. Patricia Wheeler is a leadership consultant and executive coach who helps smart people become better leaders. As Managing Partner for The Levin Group, she has spent over 15 years working with senior leaders and their teams. She currently serves as Managing Director of Alexcel, the global coaching and consulting alliance.

Contact Patricia Wheeler, Patricia@TheLevinGroup.com, 404 377-9408

About The Institute of Executive Development

The Institute of Executive Development provides custom services to help organizations advance their leader development, and is a leading exchange of unbiased information, best practices and innovative ideas in leadership and executive development.

Contact: Nancy Thomas, nancythomas@execsight.com