PERSONAL NETWORKS

Rapid Transition Success

Five Powerful Network Strategies to Speed Success in New Roles

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Introduction

A role transition – whether a promotion, a move to a new organization, or a fresh challenge in your existing job – can be a huge boost to your career, a chance for you to blossom and thrive. If you're facing such a change, chances are you feel confident of your ability to handle it, since you were thoroughly vetted and deemed worthy. Heading into the new role, you know the drill: Apply your knowledge and talents to the new situation, make sure you are known and accepted by the new hierarchy (including your own direct reports), and clinch a few big wins in the first couple of months to demonstrate what you can do.

But the workplace landscape is shifting rapidly, and the accepted wisdom on transitions has become outdated. With companies requiring managers and employees to frequently adapt in hyper-collaborative workplaces, our research reveals that there are substantial new risks in transitions, and the result is that business is littered with transition failures. Too often, transitioning managers and employees are unable to meet their organizations' expectations, and don't know why.

When failures happen, companies seem shocked that promising employees, whom they perceive as self-contained bundles of skills and experiences, were unable to break into new roles. They invariably blame the individuals, claiming that they didn't follow the rules of the new hierarchies or weren't a "good fit." As a result, companies not only experience repeated and expensive staffing setbacks, but the individuals' reputations are damaged and their careers are delayed or derailed. People who wash out may not get another chance. It's easy to see why transition failures pose huge risks for people's careers as well as their health and well-being.

But people *aren't* self-contained bundles of skills and experiences. Traditional approaches to transitions overemphasize the individual. They overlook network drivers of performance, and fail to see the extent to which success today comes from a transitioner's ability to engage others who don't work for him or her and don't operate under the same mandate.

The good news is that our analysis shows how individuals can overcome the new risks, accelerate transitions, and quickly achieve outstanding performance in unfamiliar roles. We have found that a transitioning manager or employee's hard-earned past knowledge won't help as much as might be assumed – nor will seeking acceptance by the people in the formal hierarchy or notching those classic stand-alone big wins.

Networks function according to different rules than hierarchies. It's critical for people making transitions to follow five practices:

❶ **Surge rapidly into a broad network:** Ask a lot of questions and discover the hidden org chart of boundary-spanning, energizing, innovative people in all walks of the organization – not by taking a scattershot, unfocused approach but by targeting people who are able and willing to help get things done. It's important to know what kinds of people matter and when those connections should be cultivated.

❷ **Generate pull**: Make use of this broad network to get drawn into new roles and projects and to ensure that talented people gravitate into the transitioner's orbit.

❸ **Identify unique value-add and supplement skill gaps:** The transitioner understands what's valuable about his or her talents in this new context, acknowledges shortcomings, and finds people in the broad network whose knowledge and skills fill the gaps.

❹ **Create scale:** Use the network to expand scope and impact of projects undertaken and deliver outsized results more efficiently by engaging key opinion leaders.

❺ **Shape the role and the network for maximum thriving:** Shape expectations, acquire desired capabilities, and live authentic values. People are too quick to cede control of their lives to the organization. A transition is an ideal time to question activities and connections and shape the work context in a way that enables the individual to thrive over time.

Some of these ideas may be hard to accept: *How do I identify people in all walks of the organization who are able to help get things done? What is "pull" and how is it achieved? Aren't people promoted in order to apply their existing skills? How can networks help people achieve outsized impact? And what does work have to do with well-being?*

These are understandable questions. Our findings on the network drivers of successful transitions are counterintuitive, which is why many companies, managers, and employees don't see what's really going on in transition failures. They don't realize that network drivers are at least as important in a transition as any of an individual's strengths or shortcomings.

In this paper we will show why network factors matter and how people can learn to make better and faster transitions.

Role Transitions Are Increasing in Frequency and Magnitude of Impact

It used to be that, in organizations, making a transition meant onboarding – an event that happened once in a blue moon when people got hired. After being brought on board, managers and employees leveled off into their everyday work, which they did until the next big move.

In today's organizations, transitions come all the time and take a much wider range of forms. Managers and employees are doing far more transitioning than previous generations ever did. In the U.S., HR managers tell of large numbers of people being onboarded, a narrative supported by government labor statistics showing a flood of unfilled job openings since the Great Recession and high rates of employee-initiated separations. Up until the pandemic, there were more unfilled jobs in the U.S. than unemployed workers — for example, in late 2019 there were approximately 7 million unfilled jobs versus about 5.75 million unemployed Americans – and since May 2018, the monthly U.S. quit rate has held steady at 2.4 percent, the highest level since April 2001.

Numerous studies have focused on millennials' and Gen Z employees' willingness to jump from job to job. Millennials' dissatisfaction with career and skill-growth opportunities in 2019 was the highest that Deloitte had ever measured. But the reality is that virtually all workers today put a premium on gaining experiences that allow them to learn and remain relevant. Lack of development opportunities is one of the top drivers of attrition – in the 2018 Gartner Global Labor Market Survey it was cited as a motivation by 31 percent of people who left their jobs. Social comparisons intensify the restlessness: Gartner found that employee job-search activity increases 16 percent after major gatherings of peers, friends, or classmates, and many younger professionals we spoke to reported getting the itch to leave after hearing about peers' transitions.

This turmoil is one of the contributing factors in the high rate of transitions in organizations. Another is the pervasiveness of corporate culture-change efforts. Research from the Institute for Corporate Productivity, known as i4cp, shows that 64 percent of organizations have recently undergone or are currently undergoing some form of deliberate culture change, and to support such efforts, nearly half of these companies moved leaders (at all levels) around or out of the organizations.

According to Gartner, one in three leaders are in transition at any point in time.

While many companies pride themselves on onboarding people from outside, the vast majority of people undergoing internal transitions get no attention – they're on their own.

Only about 12 percent of respondents to an i4cp survey said their companies' corporate onboarding efforts target current employees who are promoted or moved into new jobs.

Gartner figures show that lack of preparation for new responsibilities is a common problem among people who are brought into new roles, and that 46 percent of promoted employees are still underperforming up to 18 months after their transitions, relative to the expectations of the role. Results from i4cp are similarly bleak: only 44 percent of survey respondents said their companies' onboarding processes achieved desired outcomes.

The ripple effects are significant. The direct reports of a struggling transitioning leader perform, on average, 15 percent worse than those who report to a high-performing manager; and those direct reports are 20 percent more likely to leave the organization or be disengaged, according to Gartner. The productivity of executive colleagues also suffers because they depend on the struggling transitioning leader.

The New Hypercollaborative Environment

Just as important as the frequency of transitions is what's going on in day-to-day work. More and more companies have identified collaboration across disciplines and units as a way to serve the new business goal of ever-greater agility.

In a 2017 Gartner survey, 67 percent of organizations said they were using collaborative business models to focus on digital transformation, and the companies ranked collaboration as the second-most-important workforce skill, after innovation, to digital-business success. Other Gartner research shows that work interdependence is very high. In one study, 82 percent of organizations reported that their employees must work closely with colleagues to achieve their objectives. In another, 50 percent of employees said that in the past three years they had experienced increases in the need to coordinate and collaborate in order to complete their work (only 16 percent said that such demands had shrunk).

As a result, today's transitions happen amid intensifying pressure to collaborate. Our own research shows that the collaborative intensity of work in even the most transactional roles has risen markedly, with most leaders and knowledge workers now spending 85 percent or more of their time in collaborative activities – on the phone, on email, and in meetings.

The hypercollaborative environment has changed companies' thinking about what's most valuable in their managers' and

employees' contributions. Gartner research shows that over a 10-year span, companies have taken an increasingly favorable view of the importance of "network performance," defined as employees' effectiveness at improving others' performance and using others' contributions to improve their own performance, versus "individual task performance" – ability to handle tasks individually. Companies told the researchers, on average, that the importance of network performance was now *about equal* to the importance of individual performance, a big change from a decade earlier, when individual performance was seen as more than three times as important as network performance.

Yet only 20 percent of companies surveyed by i4cp indicated that helping new hires establish critical organizational networks is an objective of their onboarding processes.

The pervasiveness of transitions, the new importance that companies give to network performance, and high failure rates in transitions demand new ways of thinking about transitions.

Meet the Fast Movers

A breakthrough in our own understanding of today's transitions came when, in the course of more than a decade of organizational network analysis involving more than 100 companies and interviews with 160 men and women across 20 diverse organizations, we began to notice a small number of people who rapidly and successfully adapted to new roles. These fast movers – their proportion among transitioners is around 10 percent to 15 percent – integrated into organizations and became well-connected in a quarter to a third of the usual time, even if they started with few or no contacts. They became productive and innovative quickly. They reported higher engagement scores, and they were far less likely to leave their jobs and companies.

Fast movers understand that given the network-intensive nature of work, it's critical to let go of the idea that you are a lone hero when you make a transition. Instead you must see yourself as part of an invisible, informal network that has a mind and a will of its own. For example, it is important to recognize that given higher levels of collaboration and with information being disseminated more widely, certain people in networks play key roles in influencing the acceptance or rejection of an idea – or of a new person. Often, for example, we heard of failures that occurred when an outside executive was put in place over influential employees who thought they should have gotten the job. No amount of individual effort can overcome the resistance these people put up to a new person's success. If you miss these key players by over-focusing on the hierarchy, you are in immediate trouble.

It was the fast movers who showed us that people making transitions today don't have the luxury of allowing their network connections to form serendipitously. To be successful, it's critical to be intentional in your strategies. It was also the fast movers who taught us the five fundamental lessons about how to transition in today's business environment. We will look at each of those lessons in turn, but first, to understand some of the pitfalls, let's look at a transition that *didn't* work.

A Missed Opportunity

A successful investment banker whom we'll call Marcus was offered an attractive position doing similar work at a much larger firm. He was ready for a change, so he made the leap.

Following the usual playbook, he went out of his way to be visible to other managers, introduced himself to new colleagues and key individuals in the hierarchy, and attended company events. In meetings, he worked on building his personal brand and showing his value by explaining his expertise and experience. Eager to make his mark, he moved quickly to start taking big actions. At one point he achieved what seemed like a very obvious and profitable client win and began to orchestrate various parts of the bank to respond. When people did not respond to his needs as rapidly as he wanted, he elevated the request to their bosses, creating friction and resentment. He felt this was justified in the context of the magnitude of the possible revenue win. But his approach to orchestrating the network served only to reduce people's desire to bring him into their opportunities.

Quarter after quarter, no matter how many hours he worked, he continued to fall short of his performance goals. He was shocked at his inability to replicate the success he had enjoyed at his previous firm. Eventually his manager, disappointed that her superstar hire couldn't deliver, decided Marcus wasn't cut out for the role and had him moved to another division.

Marcus asked himself what happened. Why did he struggle to get uptake? Why did he miss critical information? Why did he fail to grasp the internal obstacles and challenges?

It wasn't until much later, when he was working with a coach to try to regain his status, that he arrived at a few critical realizations. He had been so confident in his knowledge, skills, and ability to work hard that he assumed the transition would be quick and simple. He was so focused on proving himself through a big, early win that he never stopped to consider the objectives of the people around him, much less work with them to see that those objectives were met. And he never tried to suss out the larger organization's rich cast of characters – those with know-how, those with influence, those with the willingness to help and the ability to get things done – or ask for assistance or feedback. So he never heard cues that he needed to adjust.

In the end he had only himself – his own knowledge and skills, his own limited bandwidth, his own limited influence. He wasn't able to supplement his skills or get others to help him launch his initiatives. He was buried in work and wasn't able to engage in renewal activities inside and outside of work that would have helped him reduce his stress and keep his life in balance. He was never able to achieve scale and create larger impact.

Contrast Marcus with an executive we'll call Holly, who took on the challenge of improving workforce planning in her global professional-services firm. It wasn't a formal promotion, but it was an important transition. To really move the needle on workforce planning, she knew she needed better solutions than she could come up with herself, so she sought helpful and passionate experts who had been thinking about the subject for a long time, weren't afraid to float unusual ideas, and could cut to the core of the issues. "My own instinct was to just buckle down and do the work," she admits, "so I had to work against that impulse and instead reach out to others." She asked many questions and was open about what she did not know. She shared her knowledge and expertise only when she understood other peoples' contexts and needs, rather than over-selling her past experience.

"It was both exhilarating and exhausting," she remembers. Reaching out "made me feel a little vulnerable and not so in control."

Very quickly she felt connected to a sizable network of knowledgeable people. At her six-month check-in, her boss saw that Holly's connections were so extensive and helpful that they rivaled veteran managers' networks. He was impressed with how quickly she had become plugged-in and effective, with people inside and outside her team vying for her time.
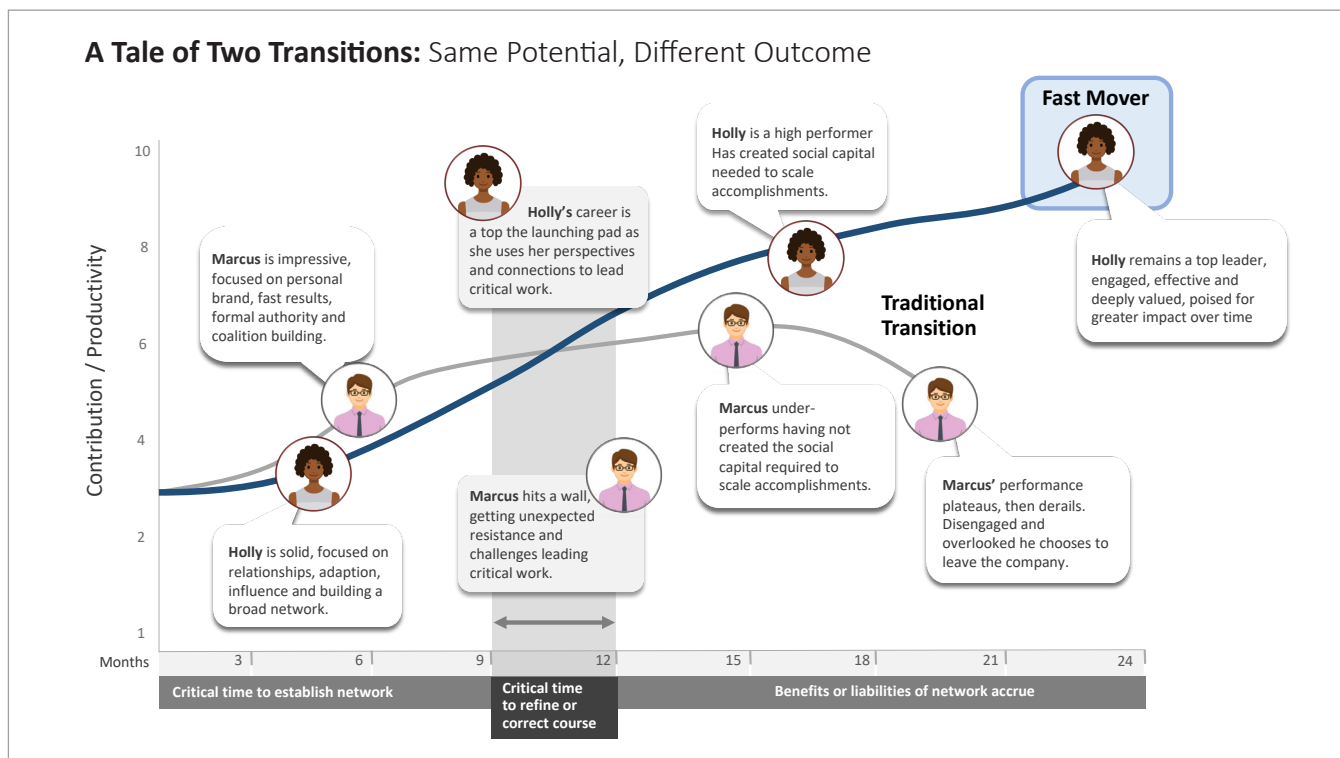
At the one-year mark, Holly had aligned her team and a cross-functional group around the workforce-planning process, which streamlined efforts and reduced gaps in staffing. She was highly effective and remained in her role for several years.

Understanding Fast Movers' Strategies

The conventional wisdom about transitions comes from several sources. One of these is intuition. That's the source of the common assumption that a person taking on a new role should continue to rely on hard-won past knowledge, plus the assumption that it's critically important to cultivate allies in the official hierarchy. Another source of beliefs is the existing body of books and articles on transitions, which generally advocate quickly getting up to speed on such things as the relevant markets, technologies, and products and securing early wins, as well as defining strategic intent, engaging with the culture, and building a great team.

The problem with the conventional wisdom is that it's heavily centered on the transitioning individual, treating him or her almost as a lone hero, and it ignores a growing body of research on the network drivers of success. What we've found is that the rise in the collaborative nature of work has diminished the value of the lone-hero approach and amplified the importance of network factors.

So while we wouldn't tell anyone to forget his or her past knowledge, ignore the formal hierarchy, disregard the importance of acceptance by his or her direct reports, or ignore strategy, it is also critical today that people take a network-centric view of transitions. This can be an uncomfortable experience, as Holly's comment about feeling "vulnerable" suggests. It entails behaviors that are sure to make a transitioning manager or employee feel exposed at the start of a new role. But our research consistently shows that the network-centric approach is the only approach that really works.

A Tale of Two Transitions: Same Potential, Different Outcome

Fast Mover

Holly is a high performer Has created social capital needed to scale accomplishments.

Holly's career is a top launching pad as she uses her perspectives and connections to lead critical work.

Marcus is impressive, focused on personal brand, fast results, formal authority and coalition building.

Holly remains a top leader, engaged, effective and deeply valued, poised for greater impact over time

Traditional Transition

Marcus under-performs having not created the social capital required to scale accomplishments.

Marcus' performance plateaus, then derails. Disengaged and overlooked he chooses to leave the company.

Marcus hits a wall, getting unexpected resistance and challenges leading critical work.

Holly is solid, focused on relationships, adaption, influence and building a broad network.

Contribution / Productivity

Months: 3 6 9 12 15 18 21 24

Critical time to establish network | Critical time to refine or correct course | Benefits or liabilities of network accrue

Five Powerful Strategies

Taking a network-centric approach to transitions is vital to successfully moving into a new role. The data repeatedly shows us that it is imperative that people understand the importance of network factors in their success. Time and again, we have seen that transitioning employees who implement these five strategies achieve faster, greater, and more sustained success in their new roles.

❶ Surge rapidly into a broad network

❷ Generate pull

❸ Identify unique value-add and supplement skill gaps

❹ Create scale

❺ Shape the role and the network for maximum thriving

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❶ Surge Rapidly into a Broad Network

Fast movers act as quickly as possible to discover the informal org chart that consists of key opinion leaders who are boundary-spanning and energizing. But not only that. Fast movers look for people who are able and willing to help them get things done, and who are not prone to burdening others with collaborative overload.

Who are these people and where can they be found? Holly's story provides clues. She had long prided herself on being a networker – she not only had good relationships with everyone in the formal hierarchy, she also had a tight network of 15 confidants and mentors she turned to for advice. But when she transitioned to leading the workforce-planning initiative, she immediately realized that those networks weren't adequate. She needed people who were willing and able to sit with her and talk things out about the new initiative's details. Some of her acquaintances in the formal hierarchy had that kind of knowledge, but couldn't spare much time; her close confidants had plenty of time, but lacked the expertise.

Holly's boss, Max, developed a list of key people for Holly to meet. With that starting point, she held introductory meetings with more than 50 people in her first six weeks on the initiative. Some were business leaders and formal influencers,

but many were internal clients and functional managers whose teams she would need to rely on. In these initial meetings, she sought to understand the business environment, how the groups operated, and each person's most pressing concerns.

But in addition to gathering specific information, she built relationships. She displayed her genuine curiosity about others' professional and personal interests, looking for points of commonality or ways they might collaborate for a mutual win. Knowing that in many cases she would need to wield influence without authority, Holly wanted to establish relationships and understand others' needs and interests before she had to come to them for support.

To take full advantage of people's hidden knowledge of relationships, Holly always ended a conversation by asking who else she should meet or work with. By doing this, she quickly began to build a broad network within her group, the larger HR function, and people in other business units, corporate functions, levels, and locations.

She convened members of the HR function, including internal recruiters, so that she could understand current processes. She asked each to name one or two people in the business units who were well connected or were frequently asked for

help or seemed to make a real impact in meetings. She met with each of these influencers to understand their perspective of workforce needs and planning processes.

Holly became a paradigm of the fast mover. She realized she needed to identify a network of people who were not her close advisers and were not part of the formal hierarchy, but who were knowledgeable, innovative, boundary-spanning, able and willing to help and to get things done, energizing, and not prone to overloading others with work.

A great example was an HR professional we'll call Ed. No one really knew what to do with Ed. While he was easy to work with and had a million far-reaching ideas on demographics and candidate pools, his frequent changes of focus had left him with few achievements. Holly loved that he was an outside-the-box, boundary-spanning thinker with a broad knowledge base – he knew more than most people about predictive analytics, for example – so she made him an important part of her network, and his perspective on many topics turned out to be highly valuable.

Holly also went out of her way to understand and engage two *negative* opinion leaders – one on her team who was critical of practically every idea that came up, and one long-time operational leader who was resistant to changing his processes.

This network, which can be thought of as "latent," in that it was invisible until Holly pulled it together, wasn't bounded by conventional pictures we have of organizations. A network like this can be hard to identify and locate, but Holly crowdsourced the effort through her questions about who else she should meet.

Then she surged early to this broad network, mindfully and intentionally asking a lot of questions and doing a lot of listening. Ultimately her network became more important to Holly's success than any of her individual skills.

After the workforce-planning initiative was in place, the managers and employees in this amorphous, informal network continued to be valuable to her. She didn't expect them to necessarily be there for her in times of crisis, nor did she even expect them always to return her emails. By the same token, they were (blessedly) low-maintenance – they didn't require time-consuming cultivation, and they didn't need to be "pruned" from her network over time. Yet she found that she was able to call on certain members of this group for help – Ed in particular – when she needed it. And she was able to refer them to other managers who were struggling to get initiatives up and running.

Holly illustrates what our scientific approach to networks has rigorously shown: that certain kinds of connections matter most to a successful transition. These connection types include some of what you would expect – *key stakeholders* and customers or clients; the organization's *formal leaders*; the transitioner's own *team and direct reports* – but they also encompass groups that might not at first be viewed as important.

These include the *deputies of formal leaders*. These chiefs of staff, go-to managers, and administrators can help a transitioner learn the leaders' goals, motivations, and interests. They also help the transitioning individual understand the leaders' schedules and workloads so that it becomes easier to make the most efficient use of the leaders' time.

The important connections also include *colleagues in functional and support roles*. These are key people who could potentially support the transitioner's work. But before they are asked for anything, it's important for the transitioning individual to set up meetings to generate good will. It's key to understand their responsibilities and expertise and how they operate. They should be asked how best to engage them and what they need.

And don't forget *peers*. These people are highly valuable as sounding boards, and they can serve as information sources, telling the transitioner what they're hearing about opportunities and about others' views of what's going on. They help with insights from multiple perspectives. A transitioner should go out of his or her way to build rapport with them and learn about their backgrounds, roles, and networks. A person in transition should constantly re-evaluate and consider where he or she needs to initiate, revitalize, or strengthen these relationships.

[See activity on following page]

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ACTIVITY: Who to Connect with EARLY ON

Make network development a priority in the first months in a new organization, function or team. **Review the five categories below and consider where you need to initiate, revitalize or strengthen relationships. List names of people you need to meet.** If you don't know a specific person, write down the group or function. Use this list to set meetings or ask for introductions.

CATEGORY	NAME, GROUP OR EXPERTISE
Key stakeholders and customers/clients. Seek to understand their context, projects and current needs to gain a broad view of challenges and opportunities. Ask how you can make their work easier. Co-create potential solutions for buy in and look to execute an early, mutual win.	
Formal leaders—and their trusted deputies. Get up to speed on key leaders' goals, motivations and interests to understand the business and political context. Ask how your team can help. Then, find out who they rely on (i.e., chief of staff, go-to manager, administrator). This allows you to gain insight and execute work while respecting the leader's time.	
Colleagues in functional and support roles. Set up meetings with key people who will support your work before you have a need—this smooths execution and generates good will. Focus on their range of responsibility/expertise and how they operate. Ask how best to engage them when needed and what they need from you.	
Teams and direct reports. Take time to get to know people personally, including their interests, capabilities and aspirations, as a starting point for building trust. Focus on better understanding what people currently do, what they want to do and who they are connected to within the team and in other parts of the business.	
Peers. Build rapport and learn about peers' background, roles and networks. Rely on them as sounding boards (What do you think? What am I missing?) and sensors into the organization (What are you hearing?) to gain early insights from multiple perspectives.	

❷ Generate Pull

Most of us assume that making a good impression in a new role means putting ourselves onto others' radar screens, making ourselves and our talents known as quickly and widely as possible. Fast movers, paradoxically, see it differently. They make use of their informal networks to generate *pull* – they get drawn into new roles and groundbreaking projects, and talented, influential people pull them gravitationally into their orbits.

The idea of pull, as opposed to push, has been around for a while, cropping up in marketing, communications and other areas. John Hagel III and John Seely Brown addressed "the power of pull" in a 2010 book of that name, declaring that in helping people attract like-minded colleagues and "shape serendipity" to generate good luck, pull can help individuals and organizations achieve greater impact.

The idea of generating pull is intuitively appealing, but the tricky part is figuring out what it really is and how it works.

An executive at an industrial company who was among our interviewees – we'll call her Meredith – is a paradigm of pull. She has transitioned frequently within the company, seemingly always because others want her, rather than because she demanded transfers or promotions. What does she do that's so special?

If you watch closely, you can see that she does six specific things to create pull.

1. She is intentional and efficient in creating pull. We've already said that asking questions is essential to surging to a broad network, but it's in creating pull that the skillful use of questions can have its greatest impact. Questions allow Meredith to understand what others are thinking and to perceive their objectives and needs.

2. She morphs what she knows to those goals and needs. For example, in one new role she saw that her colleagues were much more consensus-oriented than she was. They stubbornly resisted moving forward on a plan to begin sourcing materials from Brazil until there was full consensus behind the move. But rather than try to cut off debate in meetings, she morphed her view of process to adapt to the new setting.

3. She understands the value of *not* saying certain kinds of things – she avoids telling stories about her achievements and refrains from making statements that would make her seem like a know-it-all, even though many people over the years have advised her to "sell" herself more aggressively when she meets new people. Contrary to that advice, before relating a favorite story or factoid, she asks herself whether the purpose would be mainly to help the person she's speaking to, or just to cast herself in a better light. If the latter, she keeps it to herself.

4. She envisions and co-creates mutual wins. "Mutual" is the operative word here. As she sees it, every achievement must benefit others as much as it benefits her. For example, she was once approached about doing regular television spots to comment on a cutting-edge technology that she was involved with. She was tempted, because she had discovered that a small but persistent pain point in her unit was that people were having trouble staying current on what their colleagues were doing; the TV spots could have helped with that. But she ultimately declined and decided that a better way to address the pain point would be to coordinate a series of lunchtime webinars in which people involved in the technology could explain their work to the rest of the company – a program that was a huge success.

Taken together, those four behaviors constitute what we call *discovering and fitting into other people's objectives*. That's an important part of generating pull. But there's still more to it:

5. She consistently generates energy in her interactions. Others come away from meetings feeling that she has given them a new boost of motivation, excitement, or insight. How does she do this? In a thousand ways, large and small. When she addresses a group, she shows that she recognizes the status and value of the people she's talking to, for example mentioning their past contributions. She'll often send friendly messages to colleagues on non-work topics such as books she's read, which signals that she cares about others, has time for her colleagues, and would be good to work with.

   Her signaling rests on a solid underpinning of patience. She's not passive – she is active, but patient, willing to wait until others come forward to request her participation in a project or to ask to join her in her work. Rather than setting herself apart from the system, she is making the system better and building a reputation and a network that will pull her into future work.

6. She makes sure, while serving others' needs, that she looks out for her own interests. That's because her goal is to get engaged in projects that she *wants*. Pull is useless if it gets you drawn into time-wasters or into groups that give you headaches. So she constantly evaluates and prioritizes others' projects, showing greater interest in those that seem the most worthwhile and being politely cool about others.

The big picture is that the person co-creates his or her story, so to speak, with colleagues and others. We use the word "story" intentionally here. There are many leadership programs that focus on stories – in particular, they focus on how people who have transitioned to new roles should tell their stories and define themselves in others' eyes. We found that fast movers do it differently: They co-create a narrative of success.

That's the way to create pull.

❸ Identify Unique Value-Add and Supplement Skill Gaps

This is a two-part lesson. The first part is that you need to recognize the real value you provide in the new role; the second is that you need to use your informal network to supplement your skills gaps.

Recognizing The Real Value You Provide in the New Role

This is not always easy, especially in work environments where technical expertise is revered above all else. Remember that whatever the organizational culture says, your primary value-add is almost always intangible. Even if you are brought into a new project or promoted or hired because you alone know how to manage some arcane technical function, your long-term success in that role will depend more on your intangibles – your ability to set an example or inspire others, for example – than on your specific knowledge. Identify these value-adds and don't let them take a back seat to your technical expertise.

You can use your connections to help you understand your most important value-adds. One executive we interviewed, after being moved into a C-suite role, panicked at her lack of relevant knowledge, and her panic only increased when a meeting delved into a highly technical topic. She felt completely out of her depth. "I had no idea what to say," she said. "I didn't think I'd ever be able to speak in those technical terms." It was only when she turned to the CEO that she felt reassured, because he said, "You don't have to know all of this. You have teams that can handle different aspects of this. You will have to rely on your networks. The reason I picked you for this role was your ability to build momentum and communicate success, which you've shown you can do very well." The CEO helped her define the essence of her role and not get overwhelmed or distracted.

Using The Network to Supplement Gaps

A full understanding of your value-add can also help you with using your informal network to supplement your skills gaps. Transitions invariably create such gaps. Most of us either fail to see those gaps and persist in working as we always have, or we recognize the gaps and try to bluff our way through. Fast movers, by contrast, readily admit their shortcomings and *find people whose knowledge and skills fill the gaps.*

[See activity on following page]

Once you have clarity about the role and your value-add, you can precisely identify which skills you need to improve, and which you need to supplement through others' knowledge.

A manager in an industrial firm – we'll call him Gary – was promoted to an executive role for his knowledge of a particular product line. On paper at least, the transition shouldn't have been difficult, because he was a 20-year veteran of the organization and remained largely within his area of expertise. Yet as soon as he started, he began hearing terms he didn't understand. The terminology flew by quickly, and he didn't want to interrupt the high-pressure conversations for vocabulary lessons during the first-impressions phase. As the days passed, his colleagues and employees seemed to get the sense that he knew what was being talked about. He could have encouraged this misimpression by keeping his mouth shut, but he saw the situation as an opportunity to recognize and supplement his deficiencies, which were much greater than he had supposed they would be.

Gary got himself a notebook and began jotting down every unfamiliar word. At the end of the first month, he met with his team, took out the notebook, and said: "There are 33 terms I've heard that I don't understand. Can you help me fill in these gaps?" Many of the terms turned out to be critical to his ability to make good decisions in the new role and the team was quick to help find experts for Gary to rely on.

Nuance also mattered a great deal. One phrase in particular – "But is it A and K?" – opened his eyes to a different way of thinking about the work environment. It meant "But is it awesome and kewl (cool)?" and it was often spoken by his team members when they were talking about production line technology and physical work layout. It was said half in jest, but it reflected the very real sense that the company needed to somehow make the workplace more appealing to young workers, who were avoiding factory jobs like the plague. Gary had never once thought about the coolness factor of manufacturing, but he quickly realized the team was right, because only with a steady stream of top-notch young job applicants could the company hope to survive. It was an eye-opening moment for Gary, and it showed us how tapping into the network's knowledge can help a transitioner learn new ways of thinking for new situations.

We tend to underestimate the knowledge and expertise gaps that get created by transitions. When we do recognize the gaps, for most of us the impulse is to cover them up as well as to maintain our old ways of working, even if they don't fit well with the new role. Learning to become a fast mover means learning to use connections to supplement gaps in skill, expertise, and capability.

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ACTIVITY: Use Networks to Learn What You Don't Know

Your network is invaluable for navigating a role transition. Use this activity to find people who may help you identify knowledge, skill or perspective that you are missing and help you acquire it or fill the gap through access to others in the network.

First, **think about your work in the next three to six months**. What are your goals and deliverables? What are your known challenges? What are your primary concerns or fears?

Next, **identify the network.** Who could help you address skill gaps and blind spots during this time of transition? Consider each of the three categories and write down names of people (or groups) you should initiate contact with. Talk to your manager and check in with colleagues to expand your list.

Then, for each person you listed, **write down a question you could ask or a topic you want to discuss.** Set up a time to meet, or ask someone you know for an introduction to someone you need to know.

POSSIBLE CONNECTION	GAP TO FILL

Technical/Functional Expertise

Consider people within your function and in related domains who have specific knowledge and skills.

Name	Ask
Name	Ask
Name	Ask

Cultural/Political Awareness

Consider a person who held the role previously as well as your current manager and peers.

Name	Ask
Name	Ask
Name	Ask

Collaborative/Leadership Practices

Consider people who have done similar work in a different group, function, geography, organization or industry. Also, ask your team for thoughts.

Name	Ask
Name	Ask
Name	Ask

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❹ Create Scale

Fast movers are not only able to quickly integrate into their new roles and get things done, they are able to move mountains, and they do this by harnessing the power of who they know. They tap the network for *ideation* as they search for innovative solutions, then they tap it in a different way for *implementation*, drawing on network influencers to help spread and sell their ideas.

Ideation

In surging early to broad networks and connecting with people in other parts of the organization, fast movers are able to identify capabilities that can be brought to bear on problems. A fast mover might typically say, "I know an AI specialist, an engineering whiz, and a marketing pro who can really make things happen." This awareness of capabilities available in the network prompts fast movers to think expansively about problems. They tend to ideate beyond the narrow confines of their immediate jobs.

A medical doctor we'll call Calvin, who led a palliative-care group in a teaching hospital, shows the ideation aspect of how informal networks can help a transitioner achieve scale.

Calvin's transition wasn't a promotion or a transfer, it was a merger. The hospital where he worked was integrated into a larger health system that had little understanding of his field of palliative care, the emerging discipline of providing relief, rather than aggressive treatment, for seriously ill patients. Calvin, sensing that his group might be disbanded and dispersed, surged quickly to meet influential people in the larger health system. One contact led to another, and soon he was connected with doctors from specialties such as oncology and geriatrics who were intrigued to learn how the palliative-care perspective on improving patients' quality of life could be helpful in their own practices.

But Calvin's surge also put him into contact with people from the larger health system's information and publications department, and his conversations with them sparked an idea: He realized he could use internal publications, speeches, news-media interviews, and other tools of the PR trade to make more people in the merged institution aware of palliative care and what it could offer. He did just that, setting himself a goal of spreading awareness of palliative care to everyone in the organization by the end of the year. From there, he established

his group as go-to consultants for doctors throughout the hospital system.

Calvin's original goal was ensuring survival of his group, but his contacts with people in his informal network led him to ideate more expansively – and to achieve far greater scale than he had originally envisioned.

Implementation

Calvin's campaign to spread awareness of his field was dependent on assistance from influential people in his informal network – in particular, people in the information and publications department, who enthusiastically took up his cause and lent their time and talents, writing articles, editing his blog posts, helping him set up interviews with media outlets, even coaching him on public speaking.

Although Calvin wasn't conversant with network-science terms, his informal network included four types of classic influencers: *central connectors*, who have many informal connections of their own and can thus socialize ideas and garner support for initiatives within specific groups; *boundary spanners*, aka brokers, who have ties across groups or geographies and can therefore bridge silos, spreading the fast mover's ideas and boosting his reputation; *energizers*, who create passion and enthusiasm in their interactions, thereby amplifying ideas and engaging the broader organization; and *resisters*, the contrarians and naysayers whose viewpoints must always be taken into consideration.

When it came to the resisters, such as physicians opposed to what they called the "do-nothing" philosophy of palliative care, Curtis was unfailingly respectful, listening to their concerns and helping them understand that while his area of knowledge might not be beneficial in all medical specialties, there were certain areas where it could have an enormous impact on both patients and their families.

All these influencers, in their own ways, contributed to helping Calvin make a significant change in perceptions within the merged organization. The result was not only a new perspective on his specialty but also a long-lasting improvement in patient care, which benefited the hospital's regional reputation and its ability to attract patients. Calvin never could have moved this mountain on his own. Achieving this kind of scale depended on the contributions of his informal network.

❺ Shape the Role and the Network for Maximum Thriving

There are two aspects of well-being that apply to transitioners: *Workplace thriving*, and *work/life balance.* We will look at both of those.

Workplace thriving

Fast movers understand that a crucial part of moving successfully into a new role is maintaining their physical and mental wellness, and they start working on this right away, as soon as they begin in a new position.

Well-being has become a critical workplace issue. More than half of workers say they're stressed on the job, and many say the stress hurts their physical or emotional health. Research has shown that people experiencing stress are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and overeating and are more vulnerable to chronic illness and mental health problems.

Many companies are aware of this workplace issue, as are managers and employees, yet again and again, people allow the system – the job, the company, and the expectations that are expressed or assumed – to dictate what they do and who they do it with and for how many hours a day and week. This despite the fact that in many ways today's technological tools allow people, in theory at least, to shape their contexts as never before.

Transitions can be a time of particularly intense expectations. As a result, people often completely give up trying to emphasize wellness during transitions. For example, one C-level executive, whom we'll call Amina, told us: "When I start a job, my health tends to go in the worst direction."

She immediately tries to jump in to show her value and capability. She gets so deeply involved in the work – "being available for that new customer or that new group" – that she loses sight of her health. "I know it's going to be stressful for the first year, year and a half, whatever it takes for me to get comfortable and for my business partners to get comfortable." As a consequence, she says, during that time her weight balloons. "I know that every time I go to a new job, this is going to happen."

She trusts that after a transition, she'll regain her health and bring her weight down. But as her age advances, will she always be able to bounce back?

The fast movers' reaction to stories like this is: "Been there, done that." They have been through one too many stressful transitions that hurt their health and well-being. They understand that taking on an overly expansive role can easily drown a transitioner later on. Fast movers understand how frequently transitioners end up allowing the organization to place enormous expectations on them – and how frequently they place huge expectations on themselves. Often, the specific duties of a role aren't prescribed by anyone except the person actually in the role. Once you have defined your value-add, as discussed above, you can shape the expectations so as to enhance the value you provide and de-emphasize the duties that will drown you.

Work/Life Balance

Beginning with the very first steps of their transitions, fast movers focus on their well-being by relying on their informal networks.

That may seem contradictory. *Isn't the informal network part of the problem? What about the intense pressure from colleagues, peers, and others to get things done and do things right?*

Yes, the pressure from certain people can be intense, but you can mitigate it if you construct your informal network well and make good use of it.

Research has shown that health and well-being at work have both a physical and a non-physical aspect. The physical aspect includes such elements as adopting good eating habits, getting exercise, and taking time away from work. Organizations make it hard for transitioners to take care of these physical needs because of the imperative, as Amina put it, to constantly be available "for that new customer or that new group." But in another comment Amina made, there's an important clue to a solution. The reason her stress was at unhealthy levels for so long after her transitions was that she and the people she worked with weren't yet "comfortable" with each other.

Fast movers make sure their coworkers get comfortable with them right away, and they do this through authentic interactions. One fast mover told us she is a firm believer in bringing her whole self to work, which means being "open and genuine and not wearing a fake, corporate mask." She is not afraid to poke fun at herself or say things that may sound ridiculous. Once you have built an informal network of people you feel comfortable with, those relationships can insulate you from some of the pressures of a new role, allowing you to be yourself and not feel awkward taking time for your own needs, such as going for walks or eating the quinoa salad you brought for lunch rather than joining your peers for barbecue.

Fast movers use their informal networks to bolster the non-physical aspects of well-being, too. According to research, workplace well-being is a function of numerous dimensions that may include experiencing positive-energy interactions, learning on the job, facing exciting challenges, feeling a sense of purpose or meaning in work, and having opportunities for creativity. Fast movers develop these dimensions of their work lives by carefully choosing the members of their informal networks and then being "approachable and open" with them.

These interactions are not left to chance but strategically calendared in each week.

Consider Jerome, a consumer-products marketing-analytics expert. Jerome got plenty of energy, education, challenges, and opportunities for creativity from his informal network after he transitioned to the role of building a new initiative to identify hidden patterns in complex data. He went to his network to discover new ways to approach problems and to learn new skills. "If I get stuck," he said, "I have six or seven people I can talk to … If the problem is more cerebral, more strategic, there are other people I reach out to."

He said he is no longer the "arrogant little toad" that he was when he was younger. "There are so many interesting, smart people. If I talk to them, I will get something out of it." He particularly enjoys interacting with colleagues who are fresh out of university. "Their ideas are exciting," he said. "Their whole framework is different … I get such a kick out of that!" His network and his work are so invigorating that he feels he is working at his "spiritual home. I've never had so much fun."

Another fast mover told us his network consisted of people "who know me, who I have shared my story with." He said, "It is OK to pick up the phone and talk to somebody … it's almost an advisory board related to my personal life." These interactions add immeasurably to his sense of thriving at work.

Work/life balance. We have found that many of the most effective fast movers make use of transitions to renew themselves and create a solid work/life balance.

An engineer and project manager we'll call Barry took advantage of a transition to a different function within his company to change the way he balanced work and his outside life. Although not an extrovert or natural networker, he made a big effort to connect with as many people as possible in his new role. These boundary-spanning collaborations put him in touch with people who successfully balanced work performance and family. It was an eye-opening experience. "When I see that, it gives me a clear understanding I can have that too, if I take actions to make it happen," he said.

Barry's network connections were also a constant reminder that he had many other job options within the company, an insight that gave him enough security to structure his schedule and say no to projects he didn't want. He made a point of leaving work early to avoid a traffic-clogged commute. He stayed offline on weekends. He escalated his commitment to a local charter school and became a member of the board. "I've had people say, 'I can't believe you have the time! Why are you so involved?'" he said. "It's like people are surprised that you have a willingness to focus on something more than work."

People's well-being is intimately intertwined with managing work/life integration through connections. Effectively managing connections within and outside of work promotes thriving and increases the likelihood of long-term success during and after a transition.

CONCLUSION

In traditional thinking about how corporations work, job transitions are seen as something akin to sitting in a new saddle or standing in front of a new podium. But more than ever, a job is a social construct within a social ecosystem, and a transition is a process of coming to fully understand the ecosystem and getting it to understand and accept you. A transition is a conversation with a living, breathing network. There are risks and challenges, but thoughtfully engaging in this conversation allows you to move quickly toward a level of acceptance and understanding that opens up the network's greatest resources of knowledge and ideas.

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