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“Quick Start”
Leadership Transition

Brian Ludera

Abstract

This is a description of a leadership transition process created by USF (United States Freightways), Holland. The program builds on the program the U.S. Army uses to insure the rapid and smooth command transition. The "Quick Start" program enhances the basic program by adding OE technology to provide definitive guidance to both the leader and the team members.

“QUICK START” LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

By: Brian Ludera

INTRODUCTION

The existence of our nation depends on the ability of the Army to answer any potential threat from hostile powers. The capacity of the Army to respond to these threats depends heavily on leadership being in place and fully effective when that threat arises. Since the timing of the threat is unpredictable, it is essential that leadership be constantly situationally aware.

As in any large organization, military people are promoted, retire and move. Every time this happens anywhere in the command structure, new relationships must be established, expectations aligned and informal conventions created. During this period the operational capability of the force declines. In many firms, this is just a "normal" organizational cost. For the Army, this is a point of vulnerability that has to be minimized. The stakes are too large to accept anything but excellence.

USF Holland faces the same kind of leadership mobility as experienced in the Army. While the stakes are not as high, the costs are just as real. Productive efficiency is lost, personal lives are affected and strategic direction can be confounded. Leadership transition is an important subject for everyone, whether it is recognized or not.

USF HOLLAND

USF Holland is a less-than-truck-load (LTL) transportation subsidiary of US Freightways Corporation. The subsidiary generates about \$1 billion in revenues and has over 9,000 employees.

USF Holland has 59 terminals. The firm maintains a fleet of over 4,200 tractors and 7,100 trailers. It has reached the premier position in the LTL industry by pursuing excellence in all phases of its business. Excellence is a business norm.

Like the Army, USF has a need to insure that, at any given moment, its leadership is at peak levels. One of the most critical elements in the LTL industry is the terminal. It is here that loads are transferred between trucks to get a cost-effective method of moving goods. It is here that damage of the customers' goods can occur as pallets are moved and repositioned. It is here that delivery times can be compromised. All parts of the USF network are important. However, the terminal is a pivot point where any missteps directly affect our customers.

LEADERSHIP

Terminals come in various sizes and are lead by a terminal manager. On

average about 15 people in each terminal directly report to the terminal manager. In total, there are less than 1,000 people directly involved in terminal operations. This is a small portion of USF Holland's total employment. However, in terms of "bang for buck," it is an obvious target for Training and Development (T&D) attention.

Assessing terminal operations vulnerability revealed that there is a turnover of about 20% in any given year. This is due to promotions, retirements and voluntary separations. This means that in any given year, about 12 terminals will experience leadership turnover.

Further investigation revealed that if left unattended, the leadership transition can require 4 to 6 months to be fully effective. During this time no one is quite sure of what is expected or what is acceptable. This means that at any given time, 4 of our terminals were operating at less than peak effectiveness

CALCULATIONS

Total Terminals	59
Leadership Turnover	20%
Annual Transitions	12
Months per Transition	4
Total Months	48
Divide by 12 months	
Effective Inefficiency	4

This "thumbnail" assessment made clear that leadership transition was both a vulnerability and an opportunity. The vulnerability is inherent. Any change in leadership requires relationships to be reestablished. During this

time, things will not operate at peak efficiency and effectiveness. This is no ones' "fault." It is simply a natural outcome of human organization.

An opportunity is also visible. Costs are likely to rise during transitions. It takes time for people to align their expectations and settle on new informal practices. Cutting transition time is bound to reduce these costs.

However, there is an even more important matter. USF's experience is not unique. Our competitors face the same issue. If we could find a way of reducing the transition time, we would gain a competitive advantage. This would ultimately translate into higher customer satisfaction and increased revenues.

Finally, this is an area where T&D could make a direct contribution. The relatively small number of transition sites per year meant that T&D could address this problem without over-extending its limited resources. It was doable.

The combination of reduced cost, higher customer satisfaction, increased revenue potential and a confined level of T&D commitment made the area of leadership transition a natural target.

THE ARMY'S PROGRAM

The basic template for the program was taken from the U.S. Army. The transition program was born in the 1970s as a "lesson learned" in the post-Vietnam era. It is still used today. It helps insure the combat readiness of field units as well as the operational integrity of staff and command chains. It is a well-tested and extremely effective

tool of organizational management.

The Army's approach to leadership transition is simple. The group that is being lead is assembled. A structured process is then used to isolate issues that the staff has with current operations. Observations are distilled and data is collected. The result is a report on the current condition of the group.

The next step in the Army process is to review the report with the new leader. The objective is to develop a preliminary approach to the issues that have been identified.

The third step in the program is to bring the leader and the group together. The report acts as the agenda to keep the meeting from becoming a free-ranging "gripe" session. Having been exposed to the report prior to the meeting, the leader has a basis for guiding his or her behavior. During this session the leader can ask questions, make a decision or do nothing. The leader is always the leader.

At the end of the joint session, much has been accomplished. The group has arrived at a general understanding of the issues that they commonly confront. In this process many of the "issues" disappeared as they were exposed to the light of day.

The leader has been given a preview of concerns that might have not been visible from a command level. In addition, the leader is counseled on their meaning and is helped to prepare a reasonable initial position.

The result is that the leader is able to establish a favorable opening position with the group. The leader's posi-

tion is solidified sooner and the group integrates itself into a cohesive unit faster. It is a "win-win" for all involved.

Lying at the core of this success is the assurance of confidentiality. The consultant will not disclose who said what. This applies to the leader as well as the staff. Everyone is able to talk freely.

THE "I OPT" ENHANCEMENT

The foundation of the Army's program rests totally on the skill of the individual consultant. The structured approach lends some consistency but it still falls far short of ideal. What is missing is an objective point of reference.

"I Opt" technology improves the basic Army process in several dimensions. First, it introduces a level of objective consistency that is unavailable using language-based structured approaches. "I Opt" reports a precise degree of inclination toward each strategic style. These styles have behavioral consequences. They can tell a leader "why" a person acts as they do. Even more important, they inform the leader as to what is likely to happen in response to a particular policy or initiative.

For example, a person with a high level of LP (Logical Processor) is unlikely to undertake personal initiatives that seem natural to a RS leader. It does not matter the form of the directive or the penalties that are attached to non-compliance. The result will always be unsatisfactory. The outcome is predictable and virtually certain.

Leaders who know this can arrange the world to get what they want without going "head to head" with their subordinate. They would know that the LP needs a track to run on. Once they have it, they become unstoppable. The leader only needs to supply the track. The T&D consultant can show them how to lay the track in a way that gets them what they want.

"I Opt" is not confined to individual, person-to-person relationships. It also treats groups as groups. In other words, it gives the leader a definitive insight into the kinds of strategies that will work across the group as a whole.

For example, many leadership initiatives affect all group members simultaneously. Things like policy, strategy and certain types of rules do not differentiate by individual group member. Groups will typically have members who hold different levels of all four styles. Looking at dominant styles alone would not reveal the likely outcome of any particular directive. This requires the whole group to be considered—everyone at the same time. "I Opt" technology is the only tool that has this capacity "built in."

Next, the Army's issue identification session gives group members a chance to voice their concerns about current operations. However, it does not enlighten them as to why they feel as they do. It also does not tell them why others might not share their view. In other words, it makes people feel better but does not give a systematic method for helping to resolve the issue.

The "I Opt" Individual Analysis is an ideal tool for helping people understand themselves and their co-workers

better. But it goes far beyond "feel good." Since "I Opt" frames things in actionable terms, resolution methods that may not have been visible suddenly come into focus. This means that things can get better under the new leader even without intervention.

Finally, "I Opt" technology helps the T&D consultant to arrive at the correct diagnosis and prescription. The consultant typically does not know the people with whom they are dealing with in the leadership transition process. More importantly, the people do not know the consultant. This has major implications for diagnostic accuracy.

Any large organization, military or civilian, is a political as well as operational entity. Just because someone shows up saying "I'm here to help" does not mean that they will be believed. Almost everyone has the ability to mask their true opinions, behaviors or judgements for a period of time. This means that the skill and the accuracy of the assessment will be based solely on the quick rapport building skills of the consultant. In any large organization, the skill of the average consultant will be average. And this average is likely to fall far short of ideal.

While "I Opt" does not fully correct the masking issue, it certainly moves the "average" to a higher level. Knowing the strategic style of a person alerts the consultant to that person's tendencies. This means that the consultant can actively explore likely areas of concern.

For example, a person who is a strong RS will likely have concerns cen-

tering around "doing" things. Further, it is likely that the speed at which this "doing" occurs will be the central issue. If situated in a typical group, issues involving over-bureaucratization, inability to make local decisions and over-confining rules are likely to arise.

A consultant armed with the knowledge of a person's "I Opt" preferences can probe more effectively. The process of unmasking the true concerns within a group increases exponentially. Further, any consultant with knowledge of OE can get this benefit. If applied on a large-scale basis the improvement in the overall accuracy of assessments and recommendations can create results that are visible on a corporate wide basis.

The enhancements to the basic military process by "I Opt" technology are substantial. They can be summarized as:

BENEFITS OF "I OPT" IN LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

- Behavioral insights and motivation strategies improve leader/subordinate outcomes on an individual level.
- Accurate assessment of group tendencies tells the leader of the likely compliance with policies, strategies and other initiatives that affect the entire group.
- The accuracy of the consultant's assessment improves. The advice given to the new leader is better.
- The use of "I Opt" in group sessions improves the probability that the group will self-discover ways of resolving issues. This lessens the

leader's initial burden.

- The leader gets operational, "how to" tools that help him or her align the group with their intentions and objectives.
- The entire process creates a bias towards success. Even if the leader does nothing, the process will yield an improvement.

The net result of combining the Army's leadership transition method and "I Opt" is that the group runs at peak efficiency earlier than it otherwise would.

In most organizations, the impact of this improvement goes beyond the gains realized in the specific group. The axiom "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link" applies. During the transition, the chain is weakened. The entire network suffers an exposure. This applies whether the network consists of terminals in a shipping company or combat companies in a military division.

"QUICK START"

Quick Start is USF Holland's name for the combination of the military Leadership Transition program and "I Opt" technology. The civilian application required a minor modification to the military approach.

The major difference is that the new leader must be "sold" on the use of the system. The value of the process is well recognized in military circles. Its use is literally a matter of course. Military leaders know they will get value and will demand it if it is not offered.

Civilian leaders have less exposure to the results oriented program. They tend to relate it to the "feel good" approach of most traditional leadership programs. "Feel good" generally does not sit well with the hardheaded, results oriented leaders who typically populate terminal management. Civilian management must be "sold."

The "sale" is usually done on a personal basis. This usually involves outlining the process, citing evidence of past success and making the benefits they will enjoy explicit. Overall, about 90% of the people approached "buy" the process for their new group.

The next step is to have the leader announce the program to the group. It is important that the program be seen as the new leader's initiative. Typically, we will give the draft announcements to the leader at the time of the "sale." In addition, we will ordinarily ask the leader to complete an "I Opt" survey at the same meeting.

Soon after announcements are circulated, T&D distributes "I Opt" survey forms to the group. The group is asked to return the completed surveys by a specified date. Since the group sees the request as an initiative of the new leader (and it is), getting the completed surveys is typically not a problem.

When the surveys have been returned, T&D makes a preliminary assessment. The distribution of styles can reveal certain structural conditions of the group. These can be useful in structuring the intervention.

For example, one instance at a Midwestern terminal revealed that

there were two probable coalitions within the staff. One coalition was centered in the Changer quadrant—"I got an idea, let's try it." The other was focused in the Conservator quadrant—"Get it right the first time and every time." Tension was inherent in the group. No one was at "fault" but the new leader was going to walk into a firestorm.

This type of "intel" informs the consultant before substantive conversations even start. At this point the consultant knows more about the group than they do about themselves. Using this kind of knowledge allows the consultant to plan the intervention with far more precision than would be available from a "one size fits all" structured session template.

The next step is to convene the session with the group being lead. The group is given a brief orientation to the "I Opt" technology. The individual results of the "I Opt" survey they took are circulated. The TeamAnalysis of the group is distributed and briefly reviewed. This report defines the structural strengths and vulnerabilities of the group.

The Individual and TeamAnalysis quickly become a common perspective. They also furnish a neutral vocabulary with which to discuss group issues. The consultant then leads the group toward reaching agreement on the issues that are being faced by the group as a whole.

The process then returns to the consultant who prepares a report to be used in consultation with the new leader. Since the leader's profile is also known, the report can be framed in a way that will resonate with the leader's

own way of navigating life.

The next step is for the consultant to meet with the leader and review the findings. The session usually begins with an overview of the Leader-Analysis. This gives the new leader an overall idea of the general points of ease or difficulty that they will face with this particular group.

The session quickly evolves with the leader defining some initial strategies for dealing with the group issues. Recommendations are made and informal plans are laid. The "I Opt" graphics provide a consistent framework. They are used later with the group who has already been similarly oriented.

The last step is bringing the leader and the group together. A common vocabulary has been established. "I Opt" has provided objective evaluations and options. The issues have been identified in a way agreeable to all. At this point, the job of the consultant is merely to facilitate a goal directed discussion. The people involved typically lead themselves toward the resolution of issues. The leader is positioned to contribute with informed direction. The natural result is that the leader is established as the authority within the group.

"QUICK START" SUMMARY

- Sell the leader on the benefits of "Quick Start."
- Collect "I Opt" surveys on all participants.
- Conduct a meeting with the group being lead to identify common issues. TeamAnalysis is used as a neutral catalyst to guide discussion.

Even more importantly, the quality of the final outcome has raised levels above what would occur if the "normal" process was relied upon.

Further evidence of success is provided by the extension of the service. Originally, T&D had only targeted terminal management. As a result of the success of the effort, corporate and executive management teams have asked to be involved. Success at this level has further spread the word.

Perhaps the most telling evidence of the value of "Quick Start" is provided by the recent economic downturn. Like everyone else, T&D had to suffer budget cuts and a restriction of activity. However, the "Quick Start" program was spared. The reason is that it produced results that were central to the mission of the firm as a whole.

"Quick Start" points the way toward a new direction for T&D. "Seats in seats" will always be a central component. However, results oriented programs targeted at specific corporate interests will take an increasingly prominent role. Quick Start is the first in T&D's arsenal of precision guided weaponry.

- Coach the leader on organizational conditions and initiative options. Use the LeaderAnalysis to provide a general context that can be used on a continuing basis into the future.
- Convene a session with the leader and the group to resolve the issues identified. Conduct this in a manner that causes the new leader to be seen as the natural authority.

The Quick Start program has been laid out for expository clarity. In actual practice, the entire process takes only a single day. The preparation time is next to nothing. On many occasions the reports are sent to the location directly. The consultant reads them at the same time as the group. The accuracy of TeamAnalysis and LeaderAnalysis is so high and the recommendations so definitive that there is no need for interpretive forays. The attention of all involved can immediately center on the purpose of the program rather than how it was developed.

CONCLUSION

The "Quick Start" program has been an outstanding success. The responses of participants have been uniformly favorable. For example, a leader of one of our Southern terminals is typical. He said "the workshop replaced weeks of discovery and helped start a positive relationship between the staff and myself."

The time taken to become a fully operational entity has been reduced. What had typically taken 4 to 6 months is now happening in less than 4 weeks.

AUTHOR

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