Boosting Team Commitment and Accountability
With Measurable Team Goals

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The Problem

Beware, assuming a new leadership position is risky business! Research shows there is a 40% or greater risk of disappointing performance, voluntary transfer, or termination for poor performance within 18 months of assuming a new leadership role.[1] To avoid such a fate, what concrete steps can you take to ensure a successful transition? Those steps are likely to be well-worth the effort. One study by McKinsey found that a successful leadership transition improves a team's odds of meeting its three-year performance goals by 90%.[2]

Before we jump into some concrete steps you can take, what creates such a high risk? There has been substantial research into this question. Three common failures that repeatedly surface in the turbulent seas of leadership transition are:

1. Insufficient people management skills

2. Inability to lead *team* achievement in addition to individual achievement

3. Inability to establish accountability and manage performance effectively

For example, one study[3] found that:

1. 59% of new leaders identified people management as one of their top three challenges

2. 43% of new leaders listed "leading team achievement" in their top three biggest challenges

3. 24% of the leaders identified performance management/establishing accountability as a major stumbling block

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[1] Betof, E. & Betof, N., Just Promoted! A 12-Month Road Map for Success in Your New Leadership Role, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2010, p. 3.

[2] https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Business%20Functions/Organization/Our%20Insights/Successfully%20transitioning%20to%20new%20leadership%20roles/Successfully-transitioning-to-new-leadership-roles-web-final.ashx

[3] Gentry, W.A., Paige, L, & Scott Tonidandel, Understanding the Leadership Challenges of First-Time Managers: Strengthening Your Leadership Pipeline, White Paper, Center for Creative Leadership.

The Prescription

How can these frequently cited challenges be overcome, while simultaneously building teamwork and member commitment? Again, research helps spotlight the answer. Study after study suggests that having clear, measurable goals is crucial to team success.

For example, a study by Hoek, Groeneveld and Kuipers[4] found that group effectiveness and efficiency were significantly enhanced by goal clarity. Furthermore, this strong relationship was robust and appeared undiminished by the elaboration of information or by a group's history of self-management.

Lingle and Schiemann[5] looked more specifically at the power of measurement in goal setting by comparing groups who had measures for their goals vs. those that did not. The table below summarizing the study's findings, shows the strong impact of having measure-defined goals that are reviewed regularly:

Table 1: Percent of Team Members Reporting Each Behavior

Reported Group Behavior	Type of Group	
	Goals Measured	Goals Not Measured
Clear agreement on strategy	93%	37%
Open sharing of information	71%	30%
Group possesses a high level of teamwork	85%	38%
Individuals self-monitor their performance	42%	16%
Willingness of members to take risks	52%	22%

So, it would appear simply verbalizing goals is insufficient. To be truly effective, goals need to be measured and tracked. Looking at the table above, which of the two teams would you rather bet your reputation on as a transitioning leader?

If your answer is a "Goals Measured" group, what's the best way to establish the group goals, define measures and track performance? After more than 20 years working with teams to do just this, the authors have identified several crucial factors that appear to determine success:

1. The effort to develop and deploy metrics needs to be strongly led and supported by the team leader(s). If not, the effort will almost certainly wither on the vine.

2. Strong team accountability requires that the goals and measures be developed by the team itself, not imposed from above. If imposed from above, more time will

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[4] https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0734371X16682815
[5] Lingle, J.H., and. Schiemann, W.A. Is Measurement Worth It?, Management Review, March 1996, pp. 56-61.

be spent defending the measures than acting on the problems the measures highlight.

3. Goals need to be supported by a limited set of top-priority actions that identify the tactics the team will use to achieve the goals. Goals are seldom achieved without well-defined tactics.

4. Goals and metrics must be 'balanced' to reflect both achievement and method. Relying on only one or two metrics, or on a poorly balanced set of metrics, invariably prompts the team to engage in behavior that achieves one goal at the expense of another.

5. Performance on the metrics must be reviewed by the team and communicated to key stakeholders regularly. Being a high-performance team means everyone knows where things stand and are willing to take accountability for addressing any problems that arise.

6. Goals, priority actions and their measures cannot be overly complex - a dozen is generally enough. And the metrics cannot be so costly to collect (in time or money) that the process grinds to a halt!

In summary, transition leadership creates serious risks for individuals, as well as companies as failure is costly for everyone. The transitioning leader's impact and reputation can take a hit; the company risks losing time and money from having to find a replacement as well as from project delays and missed opportunities. Given the risks and potential costs of leadership transition failure, it is critically important to minimize that risk by ensuring clear, agreed upon team goals and an effective means for measuring, reviewing, and maintaining team progress on those goals.

In summary, establishing clear, measurable goals and priority actions can significantly improve the odds for successful team performance. Doing so addresses three of the most common reasons for failure: poor people management, poor team leadership, and inadequate performance management and accountability.

Concrete Steps to Take

Over the years, helping hundreds of teams to become measurement-driven, the authors have developed and refined a six-step process for rapidly identifying team goals, tactics and measures while at the same time maximizing team member buy-in and commitment. These steps are:

1. Gather input up-front on team mandates as well as what individual team members view as appropriate goals and action priorities. Gathering input -- up

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front -- informs the leader as to what team members are thinking and ensures everyone's input is heard and considered.

2. Agree on two-to-four high-level goals that will define the ultimate success of the team. These represent celebratory headlines for the future once the team has been wildly successful.

3. Agree on a limited and achievable set of six-to-twelve priority actions. These represent the tactical steps that must be successfully executed if the two-to-four longer-term goals are to be achieved.

4. Identify a cost-effective measure for each goal and priority action to track progress. Baseline data and targets should be set for each. Properly established targets serve to motivate as well as to reflect where stretch targets, as opposed to linear improvement targets, provide the greatest leverage.

5. Agree on and initiate a regular review process. This represents the heart of what Lingle and Schiemann refer to as the measurement-management process. The review session must focus first on raising a red flag early if appropriate progress is not being made; then, the team needs to decide how to best get back on track.

6. Finally, a decision should be made on what rewards to link to team achievement. To be highly motivated and team focused, everyone needs to understand what the rewards will be for team achievement, as opposed to simply individual performance.

These six steps capture the essence of creating measurement-managed, high-performing teams that are aligned and poised for success.