

New Joiner: Fitting in and Getting on Checklist 202



Introduction

The first weeks and months in a new job play a vital role in laying the foundations for personal achievement and success in a new organisation. However, starting a new job as a manager can be a challenging time - there are new people to meet, new skills to learn, new tasks to tackle and urgent issues to address. Your skills and abilities will be stretched as you face new challenges and opportunities. This checklist is intended to help managers starting a job in a new organisation to be aware of the issues they need to consider and to develop a strategy for success. It looks at how to fit into the organisation, develop relationships and demonstrate that you can fulfil the responsibilities you have been given.

Definition

Fitting in is about learning to function well within the social and cultural norms of the organisation, finding your place, being accepted and gaining the respect of colleagues. It involves building personal relationships and networks, and adapting to the culture and working environment of the organisation.

Getting on is about carrying out your job role effectively, meeting your objectives and making a positive contribution to the purpose and goals of the organisation.

Action checklist

1. Consider your approach

When starting out in a new job, it is important to find the right balance between confidence in your own abilities and your need to learn. Over-confidence can be seen as arrogance and cause you to forfeit the goodwill and cooperation of your colleagues. Excessive humility, on the other hand, may lead people to doubt your abilities. Try to strike a balance between the two, presenting yourself as confident, experienced and knowledgeable but willing to listen and learn.

2. Get to grips with your job role

One of your first priorities should be to understand the job you have been appointed to do and what is expected of you. Recognise from the outset specifically why it is that you have been appointed as a manager, e.g. for your technical skills, your market knowledge, as a team builder or a change implementer etc. This will have a significant impact on how you fit into the organisation and subsequently succeed. Make sure you are clear about your responsibilities, reporting lines and the extent and boundaries of your authority. Find out what systems, structures, processes and procedures are in place. Discuss and, if necessary, renegotiate objectives and performance measures for your work with your line manager. Take full advantage of any induction programmes which are arranged for you and don't be afraid to ask questions if you need clarification or further information. Start by familiarising yourself with the work of your team or department and how it operates on a day to day basis.

3. Use your new role for change

Your new role gives you the opportunity to introduce change and improvements – to some extent this will be expected. Don't rush into making changes without understanding the situation fully, but from the outset start to think about the vision you have for your role and to develop goals for yourself and your team. Prioritise the changes you want to make and decide who you need to consult with. Discuss your ideas with all those concerned before going ahead. Engaging people in change from the outset reduces the likelihood of resistance later on.

4. Build relationships

The relationships you build are vital to your success in the organisation. You need to balance your concern for 'getting the job done' with building relationships with your colleagues. Don't become so engrossed in your personal tasks that you neglect people and become insensitive to your colleagues. Focus on getting to know your team and your boss, but don't neglect wider organisational contacts and networks. Remember that relationships take time and patience. Be prepared to join in with any social events – this will give you a wider feel for the organisation and help you to get to know others and others to know you. For further advice on building good working relationships see Related Checklists below.

5. Look out for key contacts

Start early on to identify key people - those you will need to influence if you are to achieve your objectives and reap benefits for the organisation and yourself. This will include your team, peers, management, customers and suppliers.

It is helpful to have an initial informal one-to-one meeting with such people. This will allow you to introduce yourself properly and find out about their job roles, their priorities and any issues they have. This information is essential for building working relationships and gaining the support of colleagues for any changes and new initiatives you wish to introduce. Consider also finding a suitable mentor within the organisation. It is often more beneficial if the mentor is outside your management reporting line. A mentoring relationship can be extremely helpful at any stage, but newly appointed managers may find it especially useful in helping them gain insight into organisational norms – management styles, culture and networks.

6. Consider organisational culture

Different organisations have different ways of doing things. Carrying on in your usual manner may not sit well with colleagues in your new organisation and in some cases may cause offence. Be aware of this and keep your eyes open for clues about 'how things are done around here'. It's also important to realise that official organisational culture and values may not reflect how things actually work in practice. If you are not sure about how to proceed, ask your immediate colleagues or your mentor for advice.

Be flexible and think through which aspects of your personal style or working practices you need to adjust. This will help you to gain acceptance and become integrated. However, don't feel that you have to put on an act or compromise the real you. The key is to find a balance between adapting to the organisation and maintaining enough of your personal identity to be able to make a difference. For further guidance on understanding organisational culture see Related Checklists below.

7. Be aware of informal organisational structures

Every organisation has informal power structures which operate independently from, and bypass official structures and communication channels. Keep your eyes open for evidence of how both formal and informal structures are operating within your new organisation and use your developing network of contacts and allies to help you understand how and when to make best use of formal and informal channels.

8. Think about values

As you have accepted the job, you will most likely be broadly in sympathy with the aims and purpose of the organisation. Nonetheless it is helpful to consider the fit between organisational values and your own personal values. Many organisations have a statement of values, but these may or may not reflect reality. Careful observation of how people behave and what they do or don't do will help you to assess the actual as opposed to the stated values. Decide what you stand for personally and consider the extent to which you can

align yourself with organisational values without compromising your personal beliefs. Think too about how you can demonstrate these values in your personal behaviour and relationships.

9. Challenge appropriately

While it is important to do what you can to fit in with your new colleagues, you have been appointed for the skills, knowledge and expertise you can offer, so don't feel that you have to become an 'organisational clone'. You bring a fresh eye to the business and will have a valid contribution to make. The key thing is to do this appropriately. Make sure you understand the reasons why things are done as they are, before challenging them – there may be valid legal, financial or operational reasons. On the other hand, there may be a more effective way of getting the job done and a newcomer may be in a position to ask questions. An attitude of curiosity can help here. Always try to take a constructive approach, rather than being negative and critical.

10. Demonstrate credibility

Look out for early opportunities to reassure those who appointed you that they have picked the right person for the job. Try to identify a simple task or improvement which can be achieved within your first few weeks and give you an 'early win'. This will help to build your confidence that of your colleagues in your abilities, and give you time to tackle more complex tasks and issues in the future.

11. Ask for feedback and reflect on progress

Feedback may be provided through an organisational appraisal or performance management system, but more frequent feedback from your line manager and colleagues will help you to adapt to a new situation. Ask them how you are doing and consider requesting regular meetings to discuss progress. Take time to reflect on what you have achieved and what your next priorities should be. Don't write yourself off if you make mistakes, but accept this as part of the learning curve. Do what you can to put things right, resolve to learn from the experience and move on. Bear in mind, however, that while mistakes may be accepted in the early days, they may be viewed less favourably as time goes on and you will be expected to have found your feet and have become effective in your job role.

12. Make the most of learning and development opportunities

As you settle into your new role assess your strengths and weaknesses and consider whether there are any specific areas where personal development is needed. Find out how learning and development are handled in the organisation. Is there an annual review process for identifying development needs? Are coaching and/or mentoring relationships available? Take advantage of formal and informal learning opportunities – these need not necessarily be expensive or time consuming but can be invaluable.

13. Keep an eye on the bigger picture

Take an organisation-wide view of your work, and find out how your department or project fits within the overall aims and purpose of the organisation. Arrange meetings with colleagues to find out what they do and how they operate. Explore the environment within which the organisation operates as well, especially if you are working in an industry sector which is unfamiliar to you. Who are the organisation's major stakeholders – customers and suppliers, for example? Who are the major competitors? What local, national and international factors affect the organisation? Talking to people inside and outside the organisation, reading the trade press, visiting key industry web portals, subscribing to an online newsfeed or joining relevant online communities are all ways to develop your knowledge.

14. Take care of yourself

Starting a new job is a stressful experience. Meeting people and adapting to new situations can be very tiring. Realise that you may need to make adjustments to your schedule to maintain your physical and mental health while you adapt to your new role. While you will be keen to work hard and make a good impression, resist the temptation to work excessive hours and wear yourself out. Consider whether you need to manage expectations in this area and start as you mean to go on. Make sure you eat well and make time for rest and relaxation.

Managers should avoid

- riding rough shod over established practices and norms
- failing to listen to others
- being distant and unapproachable
- comparing the new organisation to one where they worked previously
- adopting a know-it-all approach
- compromising personal integrity in order to fit in
- getting bogged down in everyday routine tasks
- losing sight of the bigger picture
- failing to learn from mistakes or from negative feedback.

National Occupational Standards for Management and Leadership

This checklist has relevance for the following standard:
Unit DD1: Develop and sustain working relationships with colleagues

Additional resources

Books

The first 90 days: proven strategies for getting up to speed faster and smarter, Michael D Watkins
Boston Mass.: Harvard Business Review, 2013

The new leaders 100 day action plan: how to take charge, build your team and get immediate results
2nd ed by George B Bradt ; Jayme A Check and Jorge E Pedraza
Hoboken NJ: John Wiley, 2009

Sink or swim: new job, new boss, 12 weeks to get it right
Milo Sindell and Thuy Sindell
Avon Mass: Adams Media, 2006

Right from the start: taking charge in a new leadership role,
Dan Ciampa and Michael Watkins
Boston Mass. Harvard Business School Press, 2005

This is a selection of books available for loan to members from CMI's library. More information at:
www.managers.org.uk/library

Journal article

Established in your role?, Jo Cook
Training Journal, May 2012, pp55-58

This article is available for members to download from CMI's library. More information at
www.managers.org.uk.

Related checklists

New joiner: developing your network (209)
Handling the politics (208)
New joiner: making an impact (210)
New joiner: handling workplace relationships (205)
Understanding organisational culture (232)

This is one of many checklists available to all CMI members. For more information please contact

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