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Step 1

Develop the Workforce Integration Project Plan

The project plan is critical throughout the entire transition process and will be a working document that is continually updated. It will guide you and your team through the days and weeks ahead, ensuring that you are on track with the requirements of the overall transaction.

Chapter Goal

The purpose of this chapter is to help you organize the actions required during the employee transition process. The tool you will use is a standard project plan; it will help you map the multiple elements of the transition project. You will identify and document the major steps and tasks associated with each step that are required to transition employees into the new organization. You will then determine the person who will own each of the tasks and the date by which each must be accomplished. The project plan is critical throughout the entire transition process and will be a working document that is continually updated. It will guide you and your team through the days and weeks

ahead, ensuring that you are on track with the requirements of the overall transaction.

Getting Started

The coordination of efforts to transfer employees from one company to another is obviously most effective and efficient when done in collaboration between human resource (HR) representatives from both the sending and receiving companies. As early in the planning process as possible, you will want to meet with your counterpart to develop mutually agreed-upon targets. However, because of the sensitive nature of many organization transactions, it is possible that the HR team on the receiving side of the transaction will be notified before the team on the sending side is, or vice versa. I have worked on transitions from both positions and will reiterate that it is ideal to work together as early as possible in the process. However, The Deal negotiators and attorneys will usually dictate when the intercompany communications can begin in the HR planning process.

Whether or not you are working in conjunction with your HR counterpart, it is critical that you establish deadlines for actions that correspond with and support the transaction date. As stated in the Introduction, you must prepare for the project plan first by seeking applicable information regarding anticipated dates discussed in negotiations. Your project plan will require you to determine intermediate short-term target dates that will culminate in HR activities that support the overall transaction.

What Is a Project Plan?

A project plan is an organizational tool used to schedule all actions that must be completed and to set deadlines that must be met in any given project. The most basic plan would have five columns of information:

Figure 1.1   Sample Section: Project Plan

Steps	Tasks	Who Owns	By Date	Status/ Comments
1. Develop workforce integration project plan.	a. Customize project plan provided.	V. York	8/17	Done 8/20
	b. Assign accountabilities to individuals.	V. York	8/17	Done 8/20
	c. Assign deadline dates.	V. York	8/17	Done 8/20
	d. Obtain disclosure approvals, if necessary.	V. York	8/22	Done 8/23
	e. Communicate with integration team individuals.	V. York	8/25	Done 8/25

one for the major steps, another for the breakdown of tasks, a third for ownership of the accountabilities, a fourth with the date by which each task must be completed, and a fifth for comments or status of progress. See Figure 1.1 for a sample project plan. Enhancements with additional information can be helpful; these might include data or resources needed, start date and finish date, and predecessor tasks.

A number of software tools are available to assist with the project management process. Anything from a simple spreadsheet to more elaborate packages with built-in Gantt charts can make the job easier. One of the popular project management tools is Microsoft Project, but there are dozens of others. For those who are not professional project managers, a simple Excel spreadsheet works fine. Although it may not have all the features of true project planning software, it is accessible by the majority of computer users. As your project team expands to more individuals, each will typically have Excel software and will have a basic understanding of how to navigate through the document. Whichever method is used, the project plan will become the master document for tracking tasks to ensure that they are completed on time, so it is essential to select an application that all members of the team can use.

Overall, the project plan will provide a systematic documentation process whereby you can identify and prioritize the tasks, assign the tasks to individual owners, and monitor their progress against assigned deadlines. This documentation will also provide an excellent method for communicating expectations to team members, as well as for

reporting progress to your counterparts who are working on the other operational, legal, financial, and technical steps of the transition.

Who Should Own the Plan?

The owner of the project plan must be organized, empowered, and assertive. By *owner,* I mean the person who will manage the plan to ensure that all required actions are completed and completed on time. Depending on the size of the project and the availability of resources, you may need to own and manage the plan yourself. If the transition is large and resources allow it, you may engage the services of a project manager who will keep the document updated and will ensure that the accountability owners adhere to the deadlines required. If you have difficulty becoming organized, you will definitely need a project manager to ensure the success of the transition. Either way, you or your designated project manager will need to be tenacious in the following areas:

- Documenting necessary actions as they surface

- Assigning them to a reliable owner

- Determining appropriate deadline dates that are compatible with other deliverables

- Communicating with applicable parties

- Following up to ensure that progress is on track

- Escalating problems

- Closing actions as they are completed

Plan the Action

To develop the project plan, you must know and understand the depth and breadth of the objectives to be accomplished and be able to define

how to move from the current state to the desired state. You must list the major milestones as well as the intermediate stepping stones. The project plan template follows Chapters 1 through 10 of this book.

These steps must be broken into assignable, manageable tasks that someone can own and deliver on a specific date. To fill in the tasks, you can begin by referring to the checklist at the end of each chapter. See Template 1.1, on which the steps and associated tasks have been listed for easy reference.

Your project plan will expand as you progress; additional tasks will inevitably be identified. What I've provided is the basic shell with which to begin. As we progress in future chapters, you will fill in additional task groups in your plan as they are applicable to your situation. Each time there is a conference call or a meeting, new action items will surface. Add them to your project plan to make sure they're incorporated with the ongoing tasks.

See Appendix A for sample sections of integration project plans. These sections illustrate how specific tasks are added and maintained in a working plan. Included are examples for leadership selection and a reduction in force.

Assign Accountabilities

When assigning accountabilities, consider the scope and authority that will be required of each individual, and communicate with those people involved. Make sure they have the resources necessary for the transition project. Time is probably the most critical resource. If someone has a full plate and this project will require three quarters of his or her time, it won't get done. Find out what jobs can be reassigned to someone else, and make sure the priorities of the transition are well understood. Meeting deadlines will be absolutely critical, so it is best to know up front what other priorities will require the time of your key accountability holders.

Disclosure limitations must be considered when selecting the core transition team. Whether due to Securities and Exhange Commission

(SEC) regulations if a publicly traded company is involved in the merger or acquisition, or due to customer request for sensitivity to an outsourcing engagement, the accountability owners of the transition team will need to be discreet in handling the duties assigned. Select your team accordingly.

For each designated task, select subject-matter experts who can be trusted both to know the best practices of that particular topic and to have the decision-making capabilities to provide recommendations that may have long-lasting effects on a large number of employees. When, for example, you select someone to create the benefits strategy, you can't afford to have a person who doesn't understand the requirements of the vendors, the regulations of the federal government, the financial implications to the company, and the preferences of the employee population.

And, finally, the obvious requirement: Those people selected should respect deadlines and require little or no hand-holding. Remember that your success—the success of the transition—will rely on the people you select to join the transition team.

Prioritize the Actions and Set Deadlines

I have provided an orderly process flow with 10 major steps and have defined manageable tasks in the Workforce Integration Project Plan (Template 1.1). Ideally, you will have time to follow these steps as outlined, in sequential order from beginning to end, or you may rearrange some steps based on the situational needs. In reality, you may have very little time to complete all the steps, and you will require more resources to work on steps simultaneously. Unanticipated events and problems will occur; emergencies will arise. Expect the unexpected.

So, how can you properly prioritize the actions without knowing what crises will befall the project? Allow time for emergencies, and be flexible in seeking solutions. When Plan A won't work, know when to move to Plan B. And sometimes Plan C. If the benefits booklets won't arrive in time, what summary information can be provided? If the re-

ceiving company can't provide health care coverage on the first day after the transaction, will the sending company extend coverage? If neither appears possible, then consider Consolidated Omnibus Reconciliation Act (COBRA) extensions. One of your most important responsibilities will be to find solutions when things don't go as planned.

Given the above precautions, you will want to pad in extra time wherever possible. If something takes a day and half, allow two. Ideally, from a project manager's perspective, you will step through each action, assigning dates based on how many days each task requires. But let me bring reality back into the picture again. You'll be given a deadline and told to meet it, no matter what. You will then back into the date, working from final deliverables to predecessor tasks. You may end up squeezing things into a time frame that is less than ideal.

In an outsourcing engagement I once developed an initial integration plan resulting in an eight-week deliverable. Others on the team said it looked good—the plan would work well. The customer, however, came back and said, "We need it done in five weeks." So, as you would imagine, we reworked the plan, added more resources, and got it done in five weeks.

Just keep in mind that those who are negotiating The Deal will most likely drive the deliverable dates. You may be able to influence them, and occasionally you may have to demand more time because of legal or federal compliance issues, but more often you will need to figure out how to get everything done in the required time frame.

Communicate Constantly and Manage to the Plan

Nothing can defeat a project more quickly than miscommunication or lack of communication. Starting with the task assignments, you will want to discuss deliverables with selected team members individually to make sure that expectations can be met, that time and resources are available as required, and that all tasks are understood. Ongoing

communication meetings will be needed to ensure that everyone is on track. Depending on the sense of urgency in completing the transition, daily meetings or conference calls or both may be required. Establish a specific time for meetings when all team members know their presence is required.

Identify who the main liaisons between companies will be. Rather than having numerous HR contacts, it is better to funnel communications through one person to ensure full knowledge of what's been communicated and delivered. Having one gatekeeper on each side will eliminate confusion and finger pointing. It is critical to select a person who will be able to remain assigned to the transition throughout the length of the project.

The project plan is only a tool. It's not a miracle. Creating it and distributing it won't make things happen. Managing to the plan is what makes it all come together. Check progress, or the lack thereof, and check frequently. If a deadline date is missed, find out why, what barriers got in the way, and how they can be removed. Then set a new deadline date. Setting new deadlines without removing the barriers will only result in another missed deadline.

The entire transition project will consist of a series of communications and checkpoints working from the project plan. By maintaining a closed-loop process of checking deadlines, communicating progress, and documenting upcoming tasks and completed actions, you will be able to achieve each of the transition deliverables in the time frame required.

Summary

Formally establishing a project plan for the integration steps on which you are about to embark is not just a *good* thing to do; it is an *essential* thing to do. As you progress through this process, you will address literally hundreds of tasks that need to be accomplished and decisions that must be made. To attempt such a feat without a project plan would

be to set yourself and your team up for failure. The time to initiate a plan is now. If resources are available, assign a project manager immediately. Begin your plan with Template 1.1. (See www.hr-integration-tools.com for access to soft copy template.)

Step 1: Develop Workforce Integration Project Plan

Task Checklist

_____ Customize project plan provided.

_____ Assign accountabilities to individuals.

_____ Assign deadline dates.

_____ Obtain disclosure approvals, if necessary.

_____ Communicate with integration team individuals.

Template 1.1   Workforce Integration Project Plan

Steps	Tasks	Who Owns	By Date	Status/ Comments
1. Develop workforce integration project plan.	a. Customize project plan provided.			
	b. Assign accountabilities to individuals.			
	c. Assign deadline dates.			
	d. Obtain disclosure approvals, if necessary.			
	e. Communicate with integration team individuals.			
2. Conduct HR due diligence review.	a. Complete Due Diligence Checklist; collect and review data.			
	b. Evaluate potential liabilities.			
	c. Communicate concerns to those negotiating The Deal.			
	d. Determine adjustments or actions necessary.			
3. Compare benefits and analyze differences in value.	a. Complete Benefits Comparison Chart for sending company.			
	b. Complete Benefits Comparison Chart for receiving company.			
	c. Compare and assess differences or concerns under Discussion Points.			
	d. Summarize differences.			
4. Compare compensation and analyze differences in value.	a. Complete Compensation Comparison Chart for sending organization.			
	b. Complete Compensation Comparison Chart for receiving organization.			
	c. Compare and assess differences or concerns under Discussion Points.			
	d. Summarize differences.			
5. Develop compensation and benefits strategy for workforce integration.	a. Complete Compensation and Benefits Strategy Worksheet.			
	b. Review with appropriate parties.			
	c. Revise as necessary.			
6. Determine leadership assignments.	a. Review vision and business strategy.			
	b. Review the combined organizational structure.			
	c. Review the core competencies that support the business strategy.			
	d. Determine leadership needs by position.			

Template 1.1   (continued)

Steps	Tasks	Who Owns	By Date	Status/ Comments
	e. Assess individual candidates.			
	f. Select leadership for the new combined organization.			
7. Address duplicate functions.	a. Review department functions and determine staffing requirements.			
	b. Identify individuals who will be reduced.			
	c. Review for adverse impact.			
	d. Determine if the WARN Act applies.			
	e. Determine level of severance pay and outplacement, if any.			
	f. Create reduction communication documents.			
	g. Assign and prepare facilitators.			
8. Prepare employee communications strategy.	a. Determine methodologies and logistics for initial announcement.			
	b. Develop message content/ presentation materials/Q&As/ welcome package.			
	c. Assign and prepare facilitators.			
	d. Hold announcement meetings.			
	e. Hold HR meetings.			
	f. Hold one-on-one management/ employee meetings.			
	g. Hold town hall meetings.			
	h. Prepare and distribute weekly transition newsletter.			
9. Define transition data requirements.	a. Assess data requirements and availability.			
	b. Prepare test data for transfer.			
	c. Prepare final data for transfer.			
10. Develop employee retention strategy.	a. Help employees manage through the change.			
	b. Set and keep focus on business goals.			
	c. Explore best practices and process changes.			
	d. Provide multiple training and learning opportunities.			
	e. Provide ongoing newsletters.			
	f. Conduct employee surveys.			
	g. Hold employee roundtable discussions.			
	h. Consider retention bonuses.			