Walking in Someone Else’s Shoes

Addressing Different Personalities During M&A Integration
Post-deal integration can be one of the most significant changes experienced by people over their entire professional lives. But do we all perceive, experience and make the journey in the same way? Why do some people tend to thrive during the time of upheaval, whilst some struggle to cope? As a business leader, how can you effectively bring on board all of your team despite these differences? Using the theory and practices behind the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), BTD explores the change curve experienced during M&A, and the need to consider individual approaches alongside larger stakeholder groups.

As integration change is inevitable yet challenging to an organisation, how business leaders effectively manage the process is without a doubt an art to master. Frequent, two-way communication and committed engagement among all stakeholders are key drivers of successful change.

Regardless of how well it is conducted, post-deal Integration is neither comfortable nor easy. The transition curve commonly used to describe the emotional journey through organisational change was originally developed to show the process of grieving; being acquired is in fact just another version of saying goodbye, letting go of the past and preparing for an uncertain future. However, constant change is necessary for organisations to grow and thrive in the market, and buying – or being bought – is increasingly something that most of us will experience many times throughout our professional careers. Therefore, as integration change is inevitable yet challenging to an organisation, how business leaders effectively manage the process is without a doubt an art to master.

Leading authors of change management such as Kotter and Bridges¹ have suggested that to successfully manage change, there are four crucial steps to start the process.

1. Propose a sense of urgency to encourage people to let go of the past;
2. Present a clear vision of the future;
3. Plan a roadmap to get to the vision;
4. Provide roles for everyone to participate in the transition – give them a part to play.

Once these are in place, frequent, two-way communication and committed engagement among all groups impacted by the change (the ‘stakeholders’) are key drivers of successful change.

But stakeholders are not uniform in their thinking and emotions: every individual perceives and reacts to change differently; this is just as true within the leadership community as elsewhere. We’ve all seen some managers eagerly embrace the new while others try to protect the old, or work hard to pretend that nothing’s actually happening at all. A ‘one size fits all’ approach to change management may do more harm than good.

The transition curve provides a generic emotional roadmap for individuals during the time of integration, however an individual’s attitude towards this process is likely to be influenced by their own individual cognitive pattern. For the sake of our broader readership, let’s make use of something many of us understand about ourselves and in many cases, each other: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) which has been widely used in businesses and across leadership teams to describe how people tend to perceive the world around them and make decisions². How would individuals with different MBTI personality types perceive the change brought on by M&A integration? Given these differences, what are the best ways to communicate and engage these individuals? Where options exist, what are the best roles for these individuals to take to support and accelerate themselves, and their leadership peers, through the transition? Rather than consider every MBTI type in turn, let’s consider each of four common groupings – do you recognise them within your team?

² MBTI describes cognitive patterns among different personality traits, not intelligence or ability. Further information can be found at the end of this paper.
Rationals share dominant functions of **Intuition** and **Thinking**. They prefer to approach issues with systematic and logical steps. Thanks to their **Intuition** character, they are usually big picture thinkers. Rationals can often be found in the R&D and IT departments or roles that allow them to use their analytical mindsets.

Don’t be intimidated when your rational colleague starts asking questions during deal announcement! Questioning and reasoning helps Rationals make sense of the event. It is a crucial cognitive process among this group if you want to get your rational colleagues to be on board with the integration. Rationals will value integration once the rationale is justified. Comparing to the other groups, they are also more willing to work towards a long-term goal with resilience as their **Intuition** trait will guide them with a big picture in mind.

Having a set of reasonable integration rationales and objectives on hand during deal announcement can surely help you win the Rationals over. Otherwise, they are likely to drop out from the transition at an early stage if the integration simply does not make sense or their questions are going unanswered. All in all, sensible vision, logical plan and responsive communication channels are the essentials when engaging your rational audience.

Rationals are good at connecting the dots and hence they make good integration roadmap planner. Through big picture intuition, Rationals can figure out how to get the organisation from its present to the visionary end state. However, sensible thinking among this group may also serve as a weakness during integration. As it is mentioned at the beginning of this article, transition is a highly emotional time. It is common to see organisational productivity drops during M&A because employees are overwhelmed with information and emotions. Therefore, it is worth noting the importance of communication and emotional factors to your integration planner.

Rationals can also get carried away when thinking about the big picture, whilst ignoring the fact that the details do not match up with their ideas. It is therefore helpful to have colleagues with **Sensing** and **Feeling** traits working alongside the Rationals. This can then ensure that the reality and organisational emotions are matching up with the master plan.
The Guardian group comprises personalities that share Sensing and Judging traits. Guardians bring stability into an organisation as they are good at ensuring things work in the usual order. Guardians are practical individuals who value rules and tradition. Your Guardian colleagues are likely to be found in the finance and administration departments in your organisation.

Good at establishing and following rules, Guardians sense the world through recalling memory in detail, then comparing past experience with the current state. Therefore, they are good at identifying the norm and what has deviated from it. As strong Judging traits, Guardians prefer to make plans and take control of their future. Leaving things with an open ending is difficult for them, so it's not difficult to understand why Guardians may experience the greatest difficulty during integration as it pushes them out from their comfort zone of order and stability.

When communicating your acquisition and integration plans with Guardians, ensure that they understand the compelling urgency of letting go of the past in order to face challenges in the near future. Change is fundamentally daunting for them as Guardians find it difficult to do things differently, especially if they have always worked in the past. It is therefore also worth announcing what is NOT going to change in the organisation from Day 1. Allowing people to keep a piece of the past aids in the process of letting go. Aside from the process of urging and helping Guardians make a leap of faith, a solid plan that states what integration activities and changes will take place can help ease their sense of losing control, providing the clarity and structure they need.

Even though they may find the idea of change difficult, Guardians can play a crucial role during transition, such as integration performance tracking. Furthermore, Guardians are excellent bringers of stability: the solid foundation that keeps the company focused on business as usual during the time of M&A transition. Give them roles that ensure the whole integration project is going in the right direction at the right pace, while minimising risk and disruption to ongoing operations. Once they are bought into the rationale and plan for integration, they can even become excellent advocates and change agents, bringing credibility to the message that “everything will be fine in the end, so don’t worry!”

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Guardian (SJ): Practical duty fulller

Strengths
- Ensure integration plan is on track and moving at the right pace

Weaknesses
- Find change and ambiguity fundamentally challenging

How to engage them
- Provoke a sense of urgency to let go of the past
- Provide a detailed integration plan for them to follow

Role in M&A integration
- Integration performance tracking & risk monitoring
- Change agent

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3 Chapter 3, Managing Transition(1991), Bridges.
Artisan (SP): Agile executor

Strengths
- Able to accept uncertainty and be flexible
- Are creative and spontaneous

Weaknesses
- Dislike restriction and structure
- Are demotivated easily if there is no short-term achievement

How to engage them
- Assign roles and tasks that initiate change
- Ensure short term wins

Role in M&A integration
- Operating Model design
- Additional benefit identification

Artisans mainly focus on the here and now. Thanks to their extroverted Sensing, they are good at perceiving the current situation and are the first to come up with a creative response. Artisans find joy by taking action, and their hands-on experience is solidly grounded in reality. Artisans usually thrive in functions that allow them to perform tasks and see immediate accomplishments, such as sales and operational environments.

As strong perceivers, Artisans are flexible and comfortable with open endings. They tend to find change less stressful compared to other groups due to their adaptability towards uncertainty and their ability to improvise.

When communicating integration to Artisans, ensure that they understand how they can take part in the whole project since practical experience motivates them. Artisans are helpful when made responsible for executing change actions through the transition as they are able to adapt to the new environment quickly and may in fact find the whole situation thrilling.

However, implementation of new rules and procedure during integration can make Artisans feel restricted and demotivated. This is especially true where integrations happen between start-ups and larger corporations as entrepreneurs (often Artisans themselves) find their spontaneity and creativity being weighed down by the bureaucracy within larger firms.

When working with Artisan colleagues during integration, CEOs and integration managers should always ensure they see that transitional actions being taken are aligned with the final objectives. Similarly, demonstrate where you have prevented unnecessary integration from happening where the synergy benefits can be achieved in a more agile way. For example, it is not worth slowing down the productivity of the R&D team that one has recently acquired through back office IT system integration – examples of such decisions will comfort Artisans. Furthermore, short-term wins and foreseeable integration milestones are also crucial to Artisans as they are motivated to work towards long-term objectives.

Artisans can be valuable during integration transition to provide that spark of creativity helpful to ensuring both organisations are moving to a better way of working and creating synergies. Involve them deeply in post-close Operating Model design activities and in seeking clever ways to deliver additional benefits from the deal as both groups come to know each other.
Idealists share common characteristics of *Intuition* and *Feeling*. The idea of continuous improvement and goal realisation drives them to accomplish in the workplace. With *Feeling* as one of their dominant traits, Idealists care deeply about their colleagues’ wellbeing. They strive to create a harmonious and supportive environment, in which they enjoy working. Idealist individuals can usually be found in the HR, marketing and customer services functions.

Since continuous improvement of their surroundings is a key driver among the Idealists, they are most likely to be the ones offering emotional support towards others through its challenging time provided the group is changing for the better. Therefore it is important to make sure that your Idealist colleagues find the deal rationale convincing when announcing the integration. Better yet, engage the Idealists to plan the integration vision from an early stage.

As *Feeling* being one of the Idealist traits, they care about what happens to the others during transition. They are likely to be discouraged when seeing colleagues having arguments, being overwhelmed by work or being made redundant during the process of integration. Idealists simply cannot stand working in a negative environment! It is therefore important to communicate any actions that may cause future organisational tension to avoid any surprise as early as possible. Educate your Idealist colleagues about the emotional journey of transition as this can further mitigate the risk of losing them during the inevitable dip in the transitional curve. They need to know that it is normal that things get worse before they get better in M&A.

Idealists are great messengers to deliver the integration news to the wider audience. It can also be beneficial to assign Idealists to track the emotions and reactions among the other employees during integration. Idealists are helpful in ensuring that ensures the M&A integration is not only done, but everyone gets through it together.

**Idealist (NF): Visionary influencers**

**Strengths**
- Value organisational improvement and wellbeing
- Great influencers and advocates

**Weaknesses**
- Are demotivated by negative working environments
- Dislike confrontation

**How to engage them**
- Provide a positive vision
- Ensure the negative and chaotic sides of transition are communicated

**Role in M&A integration**
- Integration vision planning
- Integration temperature checks
KEY TAKEAWAYS
HOW TO ENGAGE DIFFERENT PERSONALITIES THROUGH M&A INTEGRATION

1. Recognise different personality types within your team. Personality traits affect your colleagues’ responses to change.

2. Ensure suitable ways of communication and methods of engagement are used during the integration.

3. All personalities can contribute towards integration. Assign your colleagues with roles that complement their traits.

4. Involve Rationals to sense check your M&A rationale and plan Integration Roadmap.

5. Idealists are the best advocates of the integration programme. Get them on board with your vision and let them spread the news!

6. Artisans’ are good at coming up with creative ways to execute the integration. Ensure quick wins to keep them engaged!

7. Monitor the integration performance with your Guardian colleagues to ensure that integration objectives are delivered on time.

What is MBTI?

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a system that shows the psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and their decision-making process. There are four pairs of cognitive learning styles: extraversion/ introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling and judging/perceiving. Individuals would have one indicator from each pair to form their personality types. For further information, visit http://www.myersbriggs.org or contact your local BTD office.

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