

# Case Study: The New Division Manager, Too Much Change Too Fast?

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## THE SITUATION

A recently recruited new Division Manager for a major Life Science company was experiencing some difficulties integrating into the new company culture. Although he is a very bright and charming individual, after less than a year, somehow members of senior management have developed concerns he was not fitting into the company culture. The field sales force also had some issues that he was not listening to their concerns. He had concerns that after instituting some fairly dramatic but necessary changes in product direction in the division, that his new initiatives were not being accepted or embraced by employees. Some unhealthy conflicts between several of his direct reports were possibly behind the lack of communication and support for the desired changes. Had he moved too quickly with too much change, he questioned.

## THE SOLUTION

This assignment required a mix of coaching and rapid research. We conducted several discovery efforts in parallel to understand what the issues were. These included a thorough 360 feedback effort of his peers and senior management, with one on one interviews with his direct reports, and several focus groups with front line employees and key internal opinion leaders. It was important to understand the reasons for some of the disconnects that had taken place and to what degree the impressions that were held by the parties were accurate and what critical behaviors were causing him problems.

## THE RESULTS

Our client, the division manager, was suffering from a combination of misunderstandings that we were able to help him sort out and resolve. He had not shown enough sensitivity to company culture when instituting his changes, and had not appreciated the importance of building his relationship with the worldwide sales force. Other senior managers saw his efforts to institute change as a rejection of their strategy and prior decisions. We were able to help him put in place a plan to rebuild relationships and go back and “resell” his new changes. We helped coached him on the behaviors necessary to balance his desire to move this traditional company forward with proper respect to traditions and culture. He was able to reaffirm that his messaging had been getting down to employees, but realized he needed to start a formal program of “skip level” meetings to stay more in touch with employee concerns.

## SUMMARY AND LESSONS LEARNED

Many companies aspire to recruit bright new management talent who bring lots of new ideas, technology and knowledge. This is obviously a good idea. However, they should be aware of the potential for unintended conflicts with the existing company culture that this can introduce. Our observation is that company culture doesn't get the attention it

should. Special attention should be given to acclimating new managers to the existing political power bases. Failure to do this properly can cause high attrition of the very talented people that you need for future growth and expansion. There are many things you can do to prevent this. For example, a mentoring program where a new division manager is matched with an experienced division manager might have been a good idea here.