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Bringing Work to Life

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Welcome

Welcome to the latest issue of Bringing Work to Life. In recent issues (www.elsdon.com/newsletters.htm) we explored the topics of:

- Workforce leadership (February 2005)
- Searching for success (January 2005)
- Ethics and leadership (Year End 2004)
- Linking workforce development to value creation (November December 2004)
- How to decide if an organization will be a good fit for you (October November 2004)
- Confronting one of our fears as leaders - the fear of public speaking (September October 2004)
- Bringing meaning to our work lives (August September 2004)
- Seven key aspects of the organizational and business drivers for workforce development (July 2004)

This month we look at our own development, in particular the opportunities and challenges of joining a new organization or team, with “Accelerating into Your New Position.”

Accelerating into Your New Position

I remember my first job out of college working in a research lab in the Mid-West. Separate buildings were connected by tunnels to make it easier to get around in those cold winters. One day, soon after joining the organization in January, I discovered a chart on the wall near the coffee pot. This was a social gathering point and the chart was the subject of much scrutiny. So I asked what the chart was for. Given its prominence surely it must speak to a key strategic measure for the organization. Someone took me aside and patiently explained that the chart showed

Organizational Renewal, which focuses on supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations. Ron is also co-founder of New Beginnings Career and College Guidance, which provides caring and personalized help to individuals and families in career guidance, coaching and college planning.

Ron is author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (2003), a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Chemical Engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in Career Development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in Chemical Engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

how many days it had been since the division director last visited the building. So when I became director of a research division a number of years later I made a point to visit that building often, but I never found the chart again. Not surprisingly personal presence and relationship are central to becoming part of a new team. Let's explore these and other aspects.

It can be daunting walking into a new organization or just transferring to a new team in the same organization. Memories of those first days at school, or joining a new school can surface, where we feel a blend of excitement and anxiety. "I am worried about how this will work out. It seemed like such a good fit and now I am wondering about the signals I am picking up." These are words from one client recently just before starting a new position. Indeed in today's demanding work world we have little time to adapt.

This is true regardless of position. One HR colleague told me about one of their new executive hires, who was struggling after three months. The organization was letting him go, even though he had moved his family, been given a \$50,000 signing bonus and would need to be compensated for a return move. A costly exercise for the organization and a traumatic one for the person and his family. What steps can we take to quickly assimilate into the new team and avoid this kind of problem? Here are some suggestions drawing on my own experience and ideas from a 2001 Harvard Business School note (Michael Watkins, *Seven Rules for New Leaders*) and *Right from the Start* by Watkins and Ciampa.

- **Be clear about your own aspirations and the kind of organization you are seeking, before accepting an offer.** This means knowing yourself well, your personality preferences, interests, the skills you would like to use and your values. For example if one of your primary values is collaboration then joining an organization that focuses on internal Darwinian competition won't work. In the October/November issue of this newsletter we explored how to ask probing questions that take you below the surface of the organization to what is really going on. They examine aspects of leadership style, workforce relationships, strategic focus and pace and organizational flexibility. Learning about yourself and a prospective organization will help you sort out, for example, whether you are more comfortable in an early stage operation where much is ambiguous, or whether focusing on efficiency in a mature organization is more appealing. It can help you clarify whether you are more attracted to a hard-driving sales environment, a more introspective research setting or a non-profit setting at this point in your life.
- **Recognize common traps that can derail your entry.**
 - Being isolated and focusing only on the quantitative to the exclusion of the relational. I coached one senior executive recently who had an effective though hard-driving style that generated bottom line results. His focus was not on relationships. He was joining a family owned enterprise and we talked about the critical importance of building relationships with the family in the early stages. He called soon after joining, observing that the patriarch of the family asked him to tour some of the operating facilities. My client said he would previously have done this in as short a time as possible, but this time took the opportunity to speak at length with the senior family member, exploring his perspectives in depth. He continued these

conversations over time also engaging others in the family, and as a result he built excellent rapport, is well liked and has been able to implement several key strategic and tactical steps that have ensured his early success.

- Coming in with “The Answer.” I recall a recent incident where a senior manager assumed responsibility for a new area, did not listen, promptly made incorrect assumptions about the critical issues, alienated the staff, made poor hiring decisions and as a result was rapidly demoted.
 - Attempting too much. The challenge is to prioritize so the organization or team is clear about direction.
 - Being captured by the wrong people. In joining a new organization or team it can be difficult understanding the social and political dynamics and important to keep many lines of communication open.
 - Setting unrealistic expectations. On entering the organization or team it is important to assess whether the initial mandate is realistic or whether changes are needed to set realistic targets.
- **Focus much of the initial time both before and after entry on listening as broadly as possible within and outside the organization.** This involves both individual listening skills as Robert Bolton outlines in *People Skills* and organizational listening skills as I describe in *Affiliation the Workplace*. It means targeting your learning to address the strategic, interpersonal, technical, cultural and political aspects of your new position.
 - **Build a protocol for working with those key constituencies and individuals with whom you need to interact.** Understand their needs and goals and how you can best contribute. In his book *Soul Survivor*, Philip Yancey explores the life of Everett Coop, who was a surprisingly successful surgeon general in the 1980s. Coop waited nine months for his position to be confirmed, at the time feeling frustrated by his inactivity after a hectic schedule as a surgeon. But then reflecting back on this time he recognized that this enabled him to “hear diverse voices from across the country.” He goes on to say: “During that nine months I developed a detailed agenda. In the end that period of acute frustration made possible every single thing I was able to accomplish in office.” This was built on exploring and learning from many people and organizations he did not know well previously.
 - **Manage your time portfolio, balancing the important and the urgent,** the short and the long term, securing early wins while building a foundation for long term success.
 - **Build clarity about, and communicate the purpose and direction you seek for the organization or team.** Our studies have shown a direct relationship between the ability of leaders to create a sense of inspiring purpose and the strength of affiliation that people feel with the organization. This in turn is directly linked to productivity.
 - **Establish a personal action plan for the first 30, 60, 90 and 180 days defining objectives and activities.** Review this with your boss, peers and direct reports to gather their input, build consensus and communicate your progress and learning. For example in the first month objectives may focus on meeting people with whom you will interact both internally and externally, visiting key locations, while building understanding of key

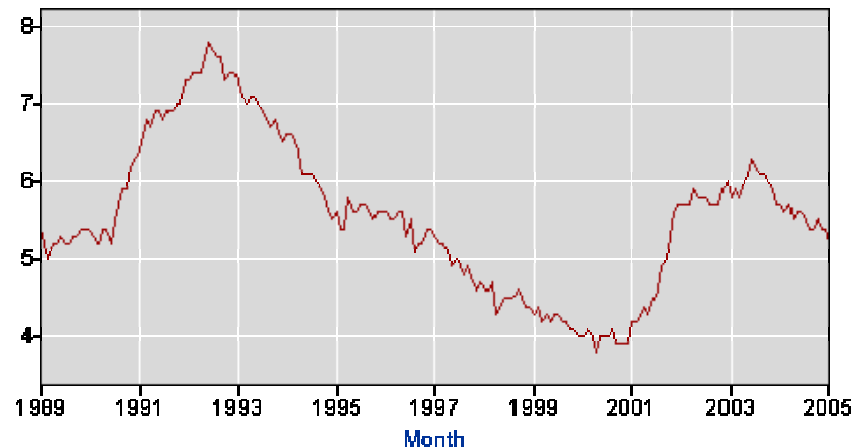
challenges and opportunities. Over time this will shift to identifying focus areas for change, implementing key strategic paths, defining and monitoring key performance metrics and developing needed workforce capabilities. Be ready to adjust your focus over time balancing learning, guiding direction, contributing to operational success and building coalitions.

Throughout this process manage yourself to include those people who are important in your life, and time for reflection. One study of effective leaders identified their ability to set aside reflective time as central to their success. Identify people who can offer counsel as you explore emerging complexities and opportunities. By taking these steps you will accelerate your transition into your new role, helping ensure your fulfillment and success and the success of those around you.

The Employment Scene

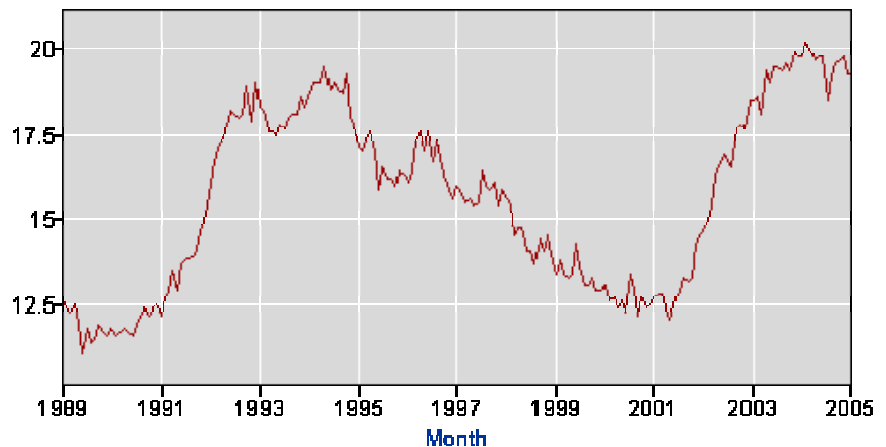
The unemployment rate in the U.S. continued to drop in January 2005 falling to 5.2% from 5.4% in December 2004. The longer term trend is shown in the following figure:

U.S. unemployment rate (%), Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



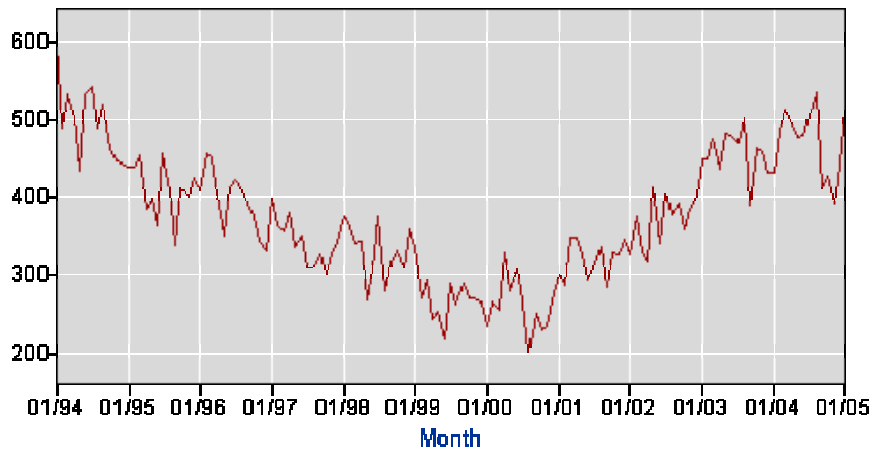
The unemployment rate has declined steadily from its recent peak in mid-2003. However, in January 2005 average number of weeks unemployed remained at the December level and continues to be disturbingly high, well above the peak during the slowdown in the early 1990s. The longer term trend is as follows:

Average weeks unemployed. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



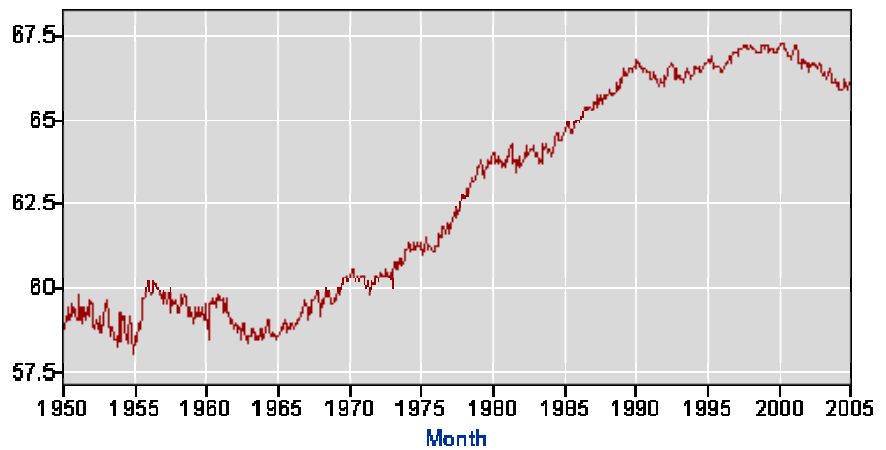
Not surprisingly given this latter information, many people continue to see limited prospects of finding work. The number who believe no job is available jumped substantially in January 2005 as shown in the following figure:

Persons who believe no job is available in the U.S. (in thousands). Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



In addition to these immediate shifts, there are important, long-term, structural changes unfolding. Projections for the future show significant slowing in the growth rate of the U.S. workforce (see the October/November issue of “Bringing Work to Life”). Organizations will find it increasingly difficult to recruit people with needed skills. Initial signs are already evident as reflected in lowered participation in the workforce. The following figure shows a continued sustained decline in labor force participation rates that began in early 2001 in part due to population aging.

U.S. civilian labor force participation rate (%). Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics.



In January 2005 the participation rate dropped to 65.8%, a level not seen since the late 1980s. This recent decline likely reflects the withdrawal of the first baby-boomers (born in the mid-1940s) from the workforce, a trend that will accelerate in the coming years. Successful organizations are preparing for these demographic changes by implementing workforce planning processes, creating mechanisms to listen to their employees and building interventions that strengthen employee affiliation.

Quote

“The only time a human being experiences real joy or a sense of fulfillment or satisfaction is when the person is using or giving away what he or she has been given to give.”

Arthur Miller.

Upcoming Elsdon Organizational Renewal (EOR) Events and Recent Mentions

- “Career Fitness in Turbulent Times: Maintaining Job Search Readiness.” Presentation for UC Berkeley, Haas School of Business Alumni. Berkeley
 - Saturday, March 19, 2005
- “Careers in Turbulent Times: Accelerating to Opportunities.” Presentation for UC Berkeley, Haas School of Business, East Bay Alumni Association.” Berkeley
 - Tuesday, March 29, 2005
- Workshops for UC Berkeley, Haas School of Business. Berkeley
 - “Making a Successful Career Transition Through Networking.”
 - Monday and Tuesday, March 14 and 15

- “Developing Your Interviewing Techniques.”
 - Monday and Tuesday, April 11 and 12
- “Building Employee Affiliation in a Growing Economy.” Presentation for Foreword Financial Bank Human Resources Conference, Memphis
 - http://www.fwfinancial.org/promotion_bankhr.html
 - Wednesday, May 11, 2005
- “Create a Business Case for Workforce Development.” NCHRA workshop, San Francisco
 - [NCHRA Meetings & Events : Event Registration](#)
 - Thursday, May 26, 2005
- “Becoming Career Fit in Turbulent Times” for PMI-ISSIG PDS’05 Symposium, San Francisco
 - <http://www.pmi-issig.org/pds05/agenda.asp>
 - Tuesday, June 14, 2005
- “Building the Organizational Bridge for Career Development” Professional Development Institute for NCDA Global Conference, Orlando
 - [NCDA: National Career Development Association](#)
 - Wednesday, June 22, 2005
- Recent interview in the education field “Affiliation as a Unifying Principle in Education”
 - The Bridge
 - <http://community.bridges.com/content/resources/feature/aupe.html>
- Review of recent ICDC Global Issues Forum
 - CCDA, January 2005
 - California Career Development Association - Articles
- Reviews of “Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization.”
 - Harvard Business School
 - [HBS Working Knowledge: Organizations](#)
 - Global Diversity Institute
 - [Global Diversity Institute - The Journal of Diversity Praxis](#)

About EOR: Our Value Contribution

We enhance your workforce, leadership and organization by:

- Using proprietary approaches to understand workforce and leadership challenges

- Creating tailored action plans and solutions to strengthen workforce and leadership practices
- Building individual capabilities and contributions

We enable you to focus on external results and building value, confident that your organization and leadership are operating at peak effectiveness.

Our Mission

To support your organization by enhancing performance, productivity and effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices.

Our Approach and Values

We tailor our engagements to the needs of each organization with a process designed to surface critical issues, identify root causes, build effective solutions, monitor progress and implement.

With a scope that ranges from system and organizational interventions to work with individuals, our focus is on the heart of the relationship among the individual, the organization and the community. We believe that organizational and community prosperity are built on enabling each person to fulfill his or her potential.

Our Services

We work with individuals and groups in your organization to drive performance and development for both the short and long term. As a result people will choose to work in your organization and will prosper there.

We bring solutions when you need to:

- Reverse declining revenues and performance
- Revitalize your workforce
- Stem the loss of key talent
- Redirect your organization to new areas
- Stop losing customers or market share
- Penetrate new markets
- Combat aggressive competitors
- Handle major change
- Break down communication barriers
- Energize your leadership team
- Successfully build on an acquisition or merger

Our proprietary services include:

- State-of-the-art tools to take the pulse of your organization and then move to action
 - Web enabled systems
 - Experts to gather and analyze information, moving your organization to action
- Individual leadership coaching to give you world class leadership capabilities
 - Leaders who know themselves and their aspirations, build their capabilities and become catalysts developing others
- Workshops to build interpersonal skills in your organization so that:
 - Communication is timely, concise, accurate and personal
 - People listen to each other
 - Negotiations are quick and effective
 - Differences create rather than destroy value
 - Teams move forward, get results and quickly commercialize new products and services
 - People understand and link their motivations to your organizational needs
 - Your teams understand what it takes to create a committed, energized workforce
 - People use their time well
- Systems that make it easy to drive performance and build capabilities by:
 - Linking objectives throughout the organization
 - Strengthening key competencies
 - Making sure you have the bench strength where and when you need it
 - Giving people tools to take charge of their own careers and development and have a major long term influence on your organization
- Proprietary simulation and modeling techniques that let you explore how to maximize the value of your workforce
 - Move from guessing what might happen to looking in depth at the financial impact of different approaches