

A Change is Gonna Come: Maintaining Company Culture, Managing Time Zones, and Integrating Teams after a Global Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

As a mid-sized CRO that prides itself on having a healthy company culture with emphasis on work-life balance, our US-based Biometrics team was quite good at 'running the engine' with our portfolio of clinical trial clients. And although expansion had been occurring for several years as part of the larger company strategy to build out global infrastructure and support specific client needs, there had been minimal impact to our department. In 2023, Catalyst executed the next stage of the growth plan when we acquired a Boston based Biometrics company with primary operations from India. We were now immersed in integration activities. So how did we keep that company culture and not fall victim to our fear of change? While it is still very much a work-in progress, this paper will outline the important strategies put into place to ensure a successful transition. We will detail the thoughtful approach of a multi-functional leadership team that focused on the Day 1 message of 'Do No Harm', assurances of job security and career growth, a plan for analysis of gaps and current work-state, introductions of our teams, and implementation and acknowledgement of quick wins. We will discuss how a future state work plan includes giving a voice to your teams, respecting different time zones, and sharing responsibilities. The intent of this paper is to demonstrate how to embrace change rather than fear it, whether it's company acquisitions or departmental changes. Take change as a positive experience that could improve career opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Catalyst Clinical Research, founded in 2018 by industry veterans, is committed to inspiring excellence in clinical trials. Our purpose statement intentionally emphasizes the role of **people**. As a mid-sized Contract Research Organization (CRO), we made a promise to our team: to maintain a positive company culture with a strong focus on work-life balance.

Within our organization, we established a robust US-based Biostatistics and Statistical Programming team. They excelled at delivering for our portfolio of clinical trial clients. While expansion had been part of our larger company strategy for years, our department remained relatively unaffected - until 2023. That pivotal year marked a significant change: Catalyst acquired a Biometrics company from India and integration activities were quickly in full swing, challenging us to preserve our core values while embracing transformation.

NAVIGATING CHANGE: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

So how did Catalyst maintain our differentiated company culture and not fall victim to our fear of change? This presentation delves into the delicate balance between change and continuity as our company expands its horizons. We will outline the thoughtful approach taken to ensure a smooth transition with minimal disruption to daily activities and company culture. Although the process remains ongoing and involves cross-functional efforts across Catalyst, this paper specifically focuses on strategies implemented within our operational services, particularly the Biostatistics and Statistical Programming groups.

Whether you've been an individual contributor, manager, or key leader during the time of a company merger or acquisition, or if you've yet to experience such a scenario (trust me, you will at some point during your career), this paper aims to provide valuable insights. Let's transform what might seem like a scary change into an opportunity for growth and success.

TRANSPARENCY WITH LEADERSHIP

In a clear commitment to openness and collaboration, Catalyst Clinical Research's leadership initiated a transparent dialogue with key functional leaders from both companies ahead of closing the deal. The upcoming acquisition announcement was made to us and our input was actively sought during a dedicated face-to-face meeting prior to "Day 1". This invaluable exchange of perspectives and insights allowed us to build key relationships across both teams to effectively navigate change and ensure a successful transition. It also allowed early relationship development amongst the leaders and alignment on the communications. This was supported by an Integration Management Office (IMO) which covered everything including HR, IT, Relationship Management, Business Development and Finance as well as operations.

Discussed below are the key strategies determined at that meeting.

KEY STRATEGIES

1. Day 1 Message: "Do No Harm"

Our multi-functional leadership team prioritized stability and reassured employees about job security. We acknowledged the impact of change while emphasizing continuity across a variety of communication methods including key stakeholder meetings, department meetings, town halls, and company-wide announcements. The messaging was further supported by a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document and key leader visits.

2. Analyzing Gaps and Current Work State

A thoughtful approach involved assessing existing processes and opportunities for to work together and get to know each other but also enjoy joint successes. Quick wins were celebrated to boost morale and demonstrate progress.

- Sharing conference schedules for current and future collaboration.
- Providing holiday calendars.
- Granting Catalyst India team members access to the Catalyst SharePoint site for Biostatistics and Statistical Programming resources.
- Conducting a study timeline/task comparison to manage differences effectively.
- Comparing process documents across both companies for future integration planning (including SOPs, work instructions, job aids, job descriptions, roles and responsibilities).

3. Team Introductions and Acknowledgment

Recognizing that connecting people across borders fosters collaboration, we established a Managers Connect Meeting. Despite time zones challenges (some as extreme as 13 ½ hours apart), we maintained a standard meeting time and recorded sessions for those unable to attend. Managers shared their personal and professional experiences through introductory slide decks, celebrating our shared goals and strengths.

Shared responsibilities were established to spread a sense of ownership and give a voice to team members. For example, after the initial Manager's Connect meeting, a different US and India lead was appointed as being responsible for the next meeting, both scheduling and conducting.

4. Future State Work Plan

As we look ahead, our future state involves several critical components:

- Integrated Server and Resourcing Management
 - Streamlining our systems and resources ensures efficient collaboration
 - Centralized servers and resource allocation enhance productivity
- Collaboration Enhancement

- We'll foster cross-functional collaboration, not allowing for a siloed work environment.
- Shared knowledge and expertise will drive innovation
- Optimized Folder Structures
 - Thoughtfully organized folders facilitate seamless access to critical documents
 - Clear structures enhance efficiency and reduce redundancy
- Refined Processes
 - Continual process improvement and adoption of 'best practices' to ensure agility and flexibility
 - We'll adapt to changing needs while maintaining quality.

EMBRACING CHANGE: A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

Change, whether triggered by acquisition or departmental shifts, need not be feared. Instead, view it as an opportunity for growth and career development. A focus on early key stakeholder engagement, intentional collaboration, and transparent, regular communication are key to success and ultimately will drive towards a stronger organization.

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CONTACT INFORMATION <HEADING 1>

Your comments and questions are valued and encouraged. Contact the author at:

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