

FIRST 90 DAYS FOR AN IT LEADER

Key strategies to help you succeed in your new role



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1. Introduction

Got a promotion? Landed a new gig at a different company? The first 90 days in this position can mean the difference between success and failure - not only in your new job but for your career as a whole.

Why are the first 90 days so important?

The first 90 days in a job are essential for establishing yourself and impressing your manager and colleagues. During this period, those around you will form opinions about you. These first impressions are difficult to change later down the line, so you definitely want to make a good one.

You want to be perceived as polished and professional and you want your new boss, colleagues and subordinates to be absolutely certain that they made the right decision to hire you.

Planning for your first 90 days on the job will allow you to hit the ground running. Rather than “sink or swim”, strategic and efficient planning will see you “survive and thrive” in your new role.

A. Approaching the first 90 days – insights for the forthcoming transition

Now that you have been hired, your first 90 days in your new role is fast approaching. How can you be assured of a successful and accelerated transition?

At Kelly, we believe that a solid and informed foundation - based on the successes and failures of others in your field - is essential.

Research shows that transition failure is not rooted in an individual but is rather a result of a detrimental interaction between an individual and their strengths or susceptibilities with an opportunity and the pitfall-riddled status quo.

With this in mind, it is advisable to systematically plan and utilise organised methods to decrease your chances of failing and make the transition a quick and easy one

B. What is the foundation for new job success?

To be successful in your transition, you need to know what exactly the foundation of the first 90 Days is. Kelly shares the below foundation components:

- Promote yourself. While it is difficult for some of us; talking about ourselves, our experiences and our successes provides those around us (our colleagues) with the information they need to build, not only an understanding about who you are and where you come from, but also forms the backbone of their first impressions of you.
- Accelerate your learning. This involves identifying which skills you need to develop further, researching the required information and / or spending time with a colleague who can assist you through skills transfer activities, and seeking feedback on your progress from your boss or manager.
- Match your strategy to the situation. Ultimately, a great strategy is no good if it does not work 'on the ground'. While you may have gone into your new position with a specific strategy in mind, this may need to be adapted or changed completely when you are more familiar with the environment and what is required of you.
- Get some early wins checked off the list. Set a few goals that are relatively easy to pin down and focus on securing these early in your first 90 days. Once you have some early wins in the bag, bigger and better things can be put into play – with the increased confidence of your team and colleagues.
- Negotiating success. Communication is key in many aspects of life, your professional life included. Effective communication skills can build your influence in your new position.
- Achieving alignment. For a company to succeed in achieving its objectives, staff need to be on the same track, working towards the same goal. A newcomer to the office, while you come with your own ideas, should align with the overall objectives of the organisation and offer new and effective ways of reaching these goals.
- Build your team. Coming in to work with an existing team can be difficult, they know – and are comfortable with – each other and have established their roles within the organisation. While there are sometimes obstacles to overcome, having a strong team is vital. Identify and develop the skills of existing staff and fill the gaps with new hires where necessary.
- Create alliances. This involves identifying a few key players within your new organisation to connect with. With their experience and relationships within the company, these alliances can assist you in understanding current focus areas and concerns.
- Don't lose your balance. In a new role, it is vital that you don't get carried away with a single project or focus but rather take a holistic and balanced approach.
- Accelerate everyone. By leading a team, you are a team member working towards a common goal. Growing those around you is crucial to your own success.

These components, when integrated, create momentum and make an impact - setting the stage for establishing relationships and building your credibility in the company.

C. Practical steps and considerations before your first day

Everyone wants to begin a new job on the right foot, but because you haven't started, you don't know which priorities or projects are critical to the organisation at this point in time. You have some idea of your duties and responsibilities in your new role but haven't met the key players or learnt how your role impacts others in the organisation yet. These factors are all critical to formulating your plan for the first 90 days.

Your learning agenda should include:

Ask:

- How does my boss prefer to communicate? (i.e. via email / instant messaging / face-to-face)
- What are my key projects/goals within the first 90 days?
- How does my department directly or indirectly support other departments within the organisation?
- How does my department contribute to businesses goals and overarching strategy?
- What are some of the successes my department has made in the past?
- How does my role support my department / the organisation's short- and long-term strategy?
- What quick wins will enable me to demonstrate my value to the organisation in the early stage of employment?

Action:

- Review the company's business / department goals and objectives
- Review your job description and organisational charts
- Schedule meetings with influential colleagues
- Learn departmental processes and systems
- Schedule recurring 'touch base sessions' with your team
- Ask your boss for feedback on processes and ways for you to contribute further

Once you have completed your learning agenda, you should be clear on:

- Your performance expectations, including: Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), how you will be evaluated, when your performance will be reviewed and merit eligibility
- Company and department strategy, mission, goals and key initiatives
- How you can add value to your department and the organisation as a whole
- How to engage influential colleagues
- Short- and long-term goals for yourself, your department and the company
- The strategic priorities set out for your role
- Your manager's assessment of your performance at various intervals (30 days, 60 days, 90 days)

It helps to create a template that includes your set priorities, goals, milestones, outputs and your manager's feedback. This template is the basis of your plan and will help you stay grounded, identify wins and chart your progress on a meaningful map. Below is an example of a template that you can adapt to suit your needs.

7 DAYS	15 DAYS	30 DAYS	60 DAYS	90 DAYS
Priorities Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3 Goals Goal 1 Goal 2 Goal 3 Milestones Milestone 1 Milestone 2 Milestone 3	Priorities Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3 Goals Goal 1 Goal 2 Goal 3 Milestones Milestone 1 Milestone 2 Milestone 3	Priorities Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3 Goals Goal 1 Goal 2 Goal 3 Milestones Milestone 1 Milestone 2 Milestone 3 Outputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diagnosis of the situation • Identification of key priorities • Plan for the next 30 days • Manager Review • Situation conversation with Manager • Expectations conversation with manager • Buy-in of plan for next 30 days 	Priorities Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3 Goals Goal 1 Goal 2 Goal 3 Milestones Milestone 1 Milestone 2 Milestone 3 Outputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of necessary resources of key initiatives • Presentation of early assessments • Plan for the next 30 days • Manager Review • Assess progress for previous 30 days • Plan for next 30 days 	Priorities Priority 1 Priority 2 Priority 3 Goals Goal 1 Goal 2 Goal 3 Milestones Milestone 1 Milestone 2 Milestone 3 Outputs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early wins • Manager Review • Review results with manager

D. SLIP-UPS TO BE WARY OF IN YOUR FIRST 90 DAYS

Research has found that leaders who under-perform or crash in a new position often do so because they committed a dreaded, but all too common slip-up in their first 90 days.

Kelly has identified several common slip-ups that leaders are susceptible to and should avoid at all costs. Here is our list of what not to do:

Fail to embrace your new organisational culture

Company's culture is ultimately the 'norms' and values of an organisation. This includes the behaviour and language of staff, the environment in which employees operate and the daily processes of the business.

Coming in to a new role, this culture is already embedded in the organisation and new leaders need to be cognisant of the need for them to think, talk and act in a way which is in line with the company culture. Failure to adapt to this culture can see a leader becoming disconnected with colleagues and be side-lined from crucial information regarding what is going on within the business. Being out of 'the loop' in this way can cause further damage through uninformed decision making.

Not getting to know the people

While new leaders may understand the importance of getting to know the new organisation they now work for, getting to know the people within that organisation may take a back seat. The danger of isolating yourself from the rest of the staff is that you may be perceived as unapproachable and unfriendly. It also hampers your chances of establishing strategic relationships and gaining valuable information about what is going on within the business.

Being too presumptuous

With the aim of proving their value, a major slip-up a lot of leaders may be tempted to commit is being too presumptuous and believing that they have what it takes to fix any and all issues within the company. Although you may need to adopt a directive and decisive approach in your new role, other staff members can often perceive the 'I can fix it all' attitude negatively. Because there are often a number of factors contributing to a single 'problem', a quick and easy solution can be seen as addressing the surface issue in isolation while ignoring the underlying, more complex contributing factors.

Retaining consistently under-performing staff

When taking on a leadership role within a new organisation, you – naturally – inherit a team which was formed by your predecessor. While these employees have been with the company for a longer period than you have, they may not necessarily be the right fit. It is fair to give your team some time to transition and become comfortable with the recent management change, however, this transition period should not exceed six months. While many leaders want to give existing staff the opportunity to prove themselves and the value they add, retaining consistently under-performing staff will hinder the success of your department and the organisation as a whole.

Select your circle of advisors wisely

As a new leader, you will have numerous employees competing for your time and attention. Some of these employees may have had some influence before you joined while others may be power-hungry, have good intentions or want to lead you on the wrong path out of jealousy or resentment. When selecting a circle of internal advisors, time and effort should be put into identifying who exactly can add most value. Internal advisors should be unbiased and knowledgeable.

Doing it all

Just like every leader has their own style, every team has its own dynamic. While a particular approach may work for one team, it may mean failure for another. This brings us to our next common slip-up of taking on too many projects at once which sends the message that – as a leader – you expect team members to be able to handle numerous projects at one time and produce results quickly.

This approach can, however, overwhelm staff – having the adverse result of everything falling apart rather than falling into place. Engaging team members on which approach works best for them and challenging them without putting too much pressure on them is advisable.

Being unrealistic and inflexible

Lastly, leaders need to be realistic and flexible. While certain project plans and requirements may have been disclosed when you were initially engaging to join an organisation or during your first few days, things can change quickly. For this reason, you should dedicate time to making a smooth transition and clarify your scope of work and expectations.

2. First 90 - 100 days in an IT leadership role

Technology is constantly changing the world we live in, and the workplace is no exception. With innovation and having a technological advantage over competitors often taking high priority for businesses, the role of strong IT leadership - within organisations and across industries - is recognised as increasingly vital.

Ultimately, managing the rapid changes and developments associated with technology and fostering innovation for the future of the organisation, while also keeping things running smoothly in the present, is the primary role of someone tackling a leadership role in IT.

This, however, can be an intimidating duty for someone who is new to the position in their current workplace or who is taking up the role with a new employer.

Kelly emphasises the importance for a professional fulfilling a new IT leadership position to note that they are not, realistically and single-handedly, expected to rebrand the businesses as an IT visionary overnight. Rather, they should take the first 90 to 100 days to determine where the organisation is, where it is going, what the current team and technology is capable of achieving (to achieve 'quick wins'), what is urgently required, and how IT fits in the broader corporate picture.

During this 90 to 100 day period, you - as a leader - will not only need to build up your understanding of the organisation but also what is expected of you (in your new role) and your team – as they are and with any changes and additions you feel necessary to make.

This means that in your first 90 to 100 days, it is vital to also set out a strategic long-term plan for the company's future while also developing a plan and short-term goals for the 'here and now'.

A. Why are the first 90 to 100 days so important for the head of IT?

We've all heard the phrase 'first impressions are lasting impressions' and this couldn't be more the case than when you start a new job.

You only get one chance to establish yourself, build your credibility and create a sense of trust with your colleagues, team, clients and management. In addition to building relationships with key players in the business, supervisors and your team, the first 90 to 100 days in an IT leadership position is an essential period to set the tone for the department moving forward.

As a leader within the business and the head of the IT department, your focus is split between goals for the business as a whole and the IT department in particular. Externally your focus should therefore be on adding business value and internally, your focus is ultimately to achieve IT excellence.

3. Have an action plan

From the day of the call to tell you that you got the job to realising your next career goal, it's always best to have an action plan and identify priorities and potential pitfalls to cover – it is advisable to have these listed (in a check list form) so that they don't fall off your radar.

While each individual and IT leadership context will differ, there are nine elements that make for a great starting point to put an action plan into play.

1. Hit the ground running – before your first day

Check list

- Research the company
- Use notes from the interview to outline your understanding of the company's culture and expectations
- Make time to chat to other company leaders as well as external experts

2. Define and clarify your job description and mandate

Check list

- Define your job-description and set clear expectations using your interview notes as a foundation
- Clarify your KPIs as well as how and when you will be measured
- Set out your strategic posture highlighting that IT is a strategic driver for a business strategy
- Identify what infrastructure / policies / processes need to be in place for business success

3. Develop relationships with key stakeholders

Check list

- In preparation for meetings with other leaders and executives, try to gain some input from members of your team who are more familiar with them, any potential concerns and how the IT department has assisted them to-date
- Develop a 'learning agenda' to identify what information you can source from key stakeholders such as how IT is currently performing within the organisation and how IT can assist stakeholders in reaching their goals and objectives
- Have a few questions and talking points prepared ahead of all stakeholder meetings
- Focus on the business imperatives which IT can assist
- Challenge current priorities and plans but only when appropriate to do so
- Keep in mind that some executives may be nervous about IT so be sure to be patient and not to undermine them if they require extensive explanations

4. Understand the role of and need for IT

Check list

- Understand the role of technology in the industry generally, and the company specifically
- Develop an IT-enabled innovation pipeline
- Identify realistic review and mitigation timelines

5. Start planning

Check list

- Develop a fact-base on IT performance (including staff numbers, costs and service requirements) as well as 'IT health' relating to infrastructure, capabilities, culture and delivery
- Consider how you may be able to leverage different technological discontinuities, such as cloud computing, social media and mobility
- Create a strategy to develop internal capabilities - only identifying potential outsourced partners to fill capability gaps if necessary for short-term wins

6. Build your IT A-team

Check list

- Sketch out the profiles of your 'A-team'
- Consider all of your options from training to external hires, transfers and promotions
- Discuss your choices with other senior executives within and business
- Develop and become comfortable with different leadership styles – customised to fit with the needs and personalities of your staff

7. Get the company on board with your IT vision

Check list

- Communicate your vision for the future of IT within the business early on and with key stakeholders
- Give colleagues compelling reasons to support your cause by discussing how IT impacts their department - link business success to IT success
- Think through the capabilities that the business needs to improve and communicate and develop a plan to address these

8. Let your actions speak for themselves

Check list

- Get some quick wins in the bag by taking action and showing your leadership capabilities (put an end to high-cost, low-return projects / initiate offshoring deals)

9. Work on your personal journey

Check list

- Develop a plan for your own personal and professional journey
- Gain as many new skills and educate yourself in the business areas you enjoy and thrive in
- Draw on internal and external resources to learn the business
- Approach a potential mentor who may be able to help with your transition and support your development
- Be realistic and not too hard on yourself by setting attainable goals and functioning at a pace you are comfortable with and are able to sustain.

Kelly advises that IT leaders prepare for both short- and long-term goals within the first 90 to 100 day period.

Kelly recommends including the following priorities:

- Prioritise highly visible issues that must be addressed immediately
- Address critical decisions
- Identify quick wins that can be accomplished and gain management support and credibility

The short-term: securing quick wins within the 90 – 100 day period

People will judge you from the start, so you have to establish credibility quickly. One way to do that is to look for an early win opportunity.

To do this, you need to (1) identify a known problem, and (2) resolve the problem to the benefit of colleagues and the organisation as a whole.

Externally, focus on the future of the enterprise and share your views on transformational change required to remain competitive.

Internally, focus on the current issues and urgent improvements. Externally, focus on the future of the enterprise and share your views on transformational change required to remain competitive.

Internally, focus on the current issues and urgent improvements.

Preparing a long-term strategy (2 – 5 years)

Developing and maintaining an IT strategy is essential to not only your success but that of the organisation.

Ultimately, the IT strategy is the 'roadmap' for the transformation of systems within a company, and - as the leader of this transformation - you must communicate the plan in simple terms that can be understood by nontechnical colleagues.

The process for developing a strategy should take the form of two parts: the current IT environment and the vision of the future IT environment – this can be summed up in five phases.

Phase 1

- Assess the current IT infrastructure
- Familiarise yourself with the existing environment
- Gain an understanding of any current issues

Phase 2

- Identify current and future IT requirements

Phase 3

- Evaluate the benefits and possibilities associated to achieving the ideal IT environment
- Define a long-term plan in line with what the company is willing to invest

Phase 4

- Conduct an analysis of the gap between the current state and desired state
- Develop a list of alternatives for management consideration

Phase 5

- Present management with alternative approaches to transform the IT environment
- Specify how each approach will impact the company and its goals
- Highlight and define your vision for the future of the business

Following through

While this initial period is vital – day 101 doesn't mean the end of planning, implementation and performance measurement. It is essential for an IT leader to follow through with the long-term strategy beyond this point.

You need to maintain a high level of communication throughout and review approaches which can be improved upon.

What does success look like on day 101?

Consider yourself successful as an IT leader if you have:

- Identified and addressed a few of the current pain points within the organisation
- Established a rapport with key stakeholders
- Researched thoroughly before making any major decisions

4. Conclusion

To conclude, Kelly advises that IT professionals set clear priorities for their first 90 to 100 days in a leadership role. While the above advisory outline and summary of existing research is a good base, each position and employer organisation comes with different objectives, issues and expectations.

Remember: This is your opportunity to excel and the time for you to make your mark and make visible progress in the IT department of the organisation.

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6. Authors

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7. About Kelly

Kelly, a division of Kelly Group, an Adcorp Holdings Limited group of companies is South Africa's first recruitment agency of choice for rapid permanent and contingency staffing solutions. Kelly has 46 years' experience in the successful job-matching and placement of top candidates.

In addition to the permanent placement of professionals across multiple industries, Kelly's specialised contingency staffing solutions include the replacement of permanent, temporary and contract workers - in line with clients staffing and capacity requirements. With detailed understanding of each client's business, Kelly's expert consultants exhibit in-depth knowledge pertaining to the industry sector in which they recruit and consult. These industries include: Administrative & Office Support, Contact Centre, Engineering & Technical, Financial, HR & Procurement and ICT.

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