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When it comes to M&A, where are the responsible leaders?



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The recent acquisition of **Freshfayre** by **Brakes** throws up an interesting issue and one that we will see more and more this year as merger and acquisition (M&A) activity continues to grow.

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Typically, the focus in these situations is to crash processes together and pretend that the people issues are not significant and will sort themselves out with little effort. The reality can easily become a badly coordinated, poorly disciplined and

potentially disunited organisation that fails to deliver the synergies envisaged, because the people are not sufficiently engaged, aligned and motivated to perform.

So what should a newly acquiring and/or acquired organisation spend leadership time resolving? Recognise and acknowledge the issues that will present themselves at the outset and create space for people to air their views.

I've yet to meet a member of staff in any organisation who comes to work to do a poor job; we all strive to do a good job and are perceptive enough to identify the fears and concerns that arise in an M&A situation.

Leaders should acknowledge these fears, create space for them to be discussed in a positive, supported and controlled way. Build a single, clear, compelling and emotionally engaging picture of the future for the new organisation. No M&A activity is ever undertaken lightly and will always have very clearly defined commercial goals or benefits associated.

Businesses need to create a compelling picture of the future that people can emotionally engage with, create a common currency that can be used to fight the inevitable discrepancies and disagreements as the hygiene factors get shaken out and aligned.

Raise the leadership bar for all leaders in the organisation. Too often, managers and supervisors are promoted on their technical/transactional ability and when it comes to the tough challenge of leading through a significant organisational transformation, are found wanting.

Leadership in an M&A is not the sole preserve of the board – the responsibility to actively lead, to create direction and confidence, energise and engage people is the responsibility of leaders throughout the organisation.