

## Letter to Editor of Association Management

In the article "A Partnership Continuum" (November 2003 issue), the authors talk about different types of "strategic restructuring." In our experience, the most successful and innovative option is not directly described in the article - creating an entirely NEW organization. Together, interested parties answer the question, "If no association existed, what kind of organization would we create to meet the future needs of our industry or profession?"

This approach is very different from a merger. While the motivating circumstances are similar, the energy of leaders from all (since there can be more than two in this approach) participating organizations is focused on creating something that doesn't exist, rather than trying to merge existing organizations.

In a merger, issues related to distribution of power and existing assets tend to drive a negotiated organizational design and a negotiated approach usually creates an environment of winners, losers, and compromises. In addition, often mergers are actually acquisitions disguised as mergers to be politically more palatable to the acquired group. In such circumstances, the culture and interests of the acquiring group dominate.

By creating a new organization, the emphasis is on what makes sense for the future: "What would we build if we didn't have any association serving the industry/profession?" Strengths of participating organizations are not ignored; rather, they are incorporated in the new organization IF and WHEN they represent what the participants believe makes sense for the new organization.

We believe one of the most important reasons for the success of this option is the tendency to minimize individual egos as a primary element in the process. Even with the best of intentions, the negotiation/merger experience overemphasizes getting the best deal possible, resulting in an atmosphere of winners and losers. And in our experience, it is this issue of winners and losers that can derail the best intended efforts, often to the detriment of the members.

Our experience is consistent with that of the authors regarding predictors of success. We would add one more: share any "deal breakers" openly and honestly by revealing them early in the dialogue and then addressing those issues within the framework of the new organization.

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