

Emotional Excellence as Execution Multiplier for Acquisition Return

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In many acquisitions the first big decision after closing sounds like this:

“We will now bring everyone onto our standards. One brand. One system. One culture.”

It feels logical. It creates control. And there it goes wrong!! **It can quietly destroy the very strengths you paid for.**

In my work on Emotional Excellence I keep seeing the same pattern: **The most successful integrations are** not the ones that standardise the fastest, but **the ones that first learn deeply from the acquired company** and then decide what really must be the same and what should deliberately stay different.

This article is for investors and C-level leaders about this idea of two-way synergy:

- Why pushing the buyer template can erase unique value
- How a ten-day dual assessment reveals where the acquired company is actually better
- Why Emotional Excellence is not an HR add-on but a way to protect and multiply the deal thesis

1. We often buy strengths then erase them

Think of the last acquisition announcement you saw.

The press release talks about strategic fit, complementary capabilities and future synergies. The story is that the buyer and the acquired company will be stronger together than either one alone.

Then the integration playbook opens and the first wave of work looks like this:

- Move everyone onto the buyer systems
- Align all processes with the group standard
- Roll out the group values and the group leadership model

On paper this creates control and synergy. In practice it can flatten exactly the strengths that made the target attractive.

The sales team that really understands a niche customer group. The plant that runs at a higher productivity level because of a very local way of working. The leadership rituals that create trust and ownership in a way the group has not yet achieved.

Standardisation is important. But when it becomes the only story, **you risk paying a premium for capabilities that you later quietly remove.**

This is where **Emotional Excellence** comes in,... not as a soft cultural project, but as **a disciplined way to see what truly works on both sides and to design integration as a two-way learning process instead of a one-way rollout.**

2. The strange blind spot in integration planning

Integration budgets are usually expressed as a 10% to 15% of deal value.

There are line items for systems, branding, legal restructuring, consultants and programme management offices.

If you look closer, two things stand out:

1. Very little specific money is allocated to the human conditions that make execution actually happen
2. When change and culture work appear, they are often defined as communication, training or general engagement activities

In other words: ***we fund the mechanics of integration but not the adoption of the new combined strategy.***

The assumption is that people will simply follow once the structure is in place. The reality on the ground is different. **People follow when they see that their strengths matter, that they have a voice in shaping the future and that decisions are taken in a fair and transparent way.**

Without that, standardisation feels like loss and resistance is rational.

3. Emotional Excellence as an execution multiplier

In our Emotional Excellence work we define success in practical terms:

- Trust that is visible in how openly people speak up
- Ownership that shows in how teams act without waiting for a steering committee Transparency about priorities and trade-offs
- Adaptability in day-to-day decisions
- Recognition that reinforces the right behaviour rather than noise

These are not soft ideals. **They are operating conditions that either exist or do not.** When they are designed into the operating rhythm of an organisation, execution looks different.

Across programmes we see measurable shifts such as:

- Adoption of priority initiatives up by roughly 25–40%
- Time to decision on top value streams down by roughly 30–50%
- Escalations on priority work down by around 20–35%
- Meeting load for managers reduced by 15–25% in hours per week
- Early engagement scores up by 8–12 points

For an investor, these are not culture metrics. **They are indicators that the business case is becoming real rather than theoretical.**

4. Start with facts before you prescribe

One reason culture and people topics feel vague is that they are discussed through stories and impressions rather than evidence. *Leadership likes the target. The target seems entrepreneurial. The teams look tired.*

Emotional Excellence brings a more forensic approach.

Before closing or directly after Day One we run a dual assessment with two lenses:

1. **Operating model scan** across decision rights, spans and layers, process friction, governance, talent flow and technology enablement
2. **Emotional Excellence maturity** across psychological safety, ownership, transparency, collaboration quality, recognition and adaptability

Within ten days this produces **a joint evidence pack:**

- A heatmap of hotspots and value leaks
- Three to five non-negotiables tied directly to strategy
- A quick-win backlog with owners and dates
- Baseline metrics and a scoreboard that can be tracked during the first year

The essential shift is this: both buyer and target look at the same reality together rather than projecting assumptions on each other. That alone changes the quality of the integration conversation.

5. Two-way synergy instead of one-way standards

Most integration playbooks still assume that the acquiring company is the template. Systems, processes and culture are pushed into the acquired entity. Standardisation is valued more than learning.

The problem: you may be erasing the very strengths you paid for.

In an Emotional Excellence approach, integration is explicitly two-way. **SPoT sessions bring leaders and key operators from both sides together** to identify:

- Which routines in the acquiring organisation are truly non-negotiable
- Which practices in the acquired organisation outperform the group standard
- Where the combined entity can create something better than either side alone

We treat the acquired company as a laboratory of proven practices, especially in operational and emotional excellence. The goal is not polite cultural exchange. ***The goal is to surface what really works and scale it.***

For investors this is important: it means the upside is not limited to the original synergy case. You open the possibility that the smaller entity improves the larger one.

6. A ring-fenced budget that protects a large value pool

The question every investor will ask is simple: what does this cost and what do I get in return?

The short answer from our programmes:

1. Set aside a clear but modest share of programme value for Emotional Excellence and integration adoption
2. Think in the range of 20% of programme value, not of the entire acquisition price

Within this envelope you fund very specific work:

- The dual assessment and evidence pack
- SPoT sessions to align on non-negotiables and value priorities
- A core group of internal ambassadors who co-design and front the change
- Team assurance, speak-up rituals, decision forums and recognition practices that lock in behaviours at scale

The break-even point often comes inside the first few months through shorter cycle times and less rework. **Over 6–12 months the effect becomes visible in more structural metrics:**

- Cost to serve on targeted journeys goes down
- Productivity in priority teams goes up
- Safety incidents or critical defects drop

- Enterprise engagement index moves up in a way that is felt on the floor

For a large transaction this means that a relatively small, visible investment in Emotional Excellence protects a disproportionately large pool of value that would otherwise be at risk.

7. What this means for acquisition readiness

For boards and investment committees the implication is straightforward: acquisition readiness is not only about capital structure and pipeline. It is also about your ability to execute on the human side at portfolio scale.

Questions worth asking before your next deal:

- *Do we have a repeatable way to see the real emotional and operational state of both buyer and target before we impose a plan?*
- *Are we prepared to treat people and culture work as value insurance with its own budget rather than as an optional soft layer?*
- *Are we willing to let the acquired company influence our own standards where their practice is clearly superior?*
- *Can we monitor the human side of integration with the same discipline as financial and operational KPIs?*

If the honest answer is “**not yet**”, the upside is still available. And in a market where pricing is tight and competition for assets is high, being better at this dimension may become a real competitive edge.

8. A personal closing note

I have been on both sides of the table in transformations and integrations that worked and that failed. The pattern is consistent:

Where the human conditions were designed with the same rigour as the financial model, ***the value arrived faster and more predictably***. Where they were treated as afterthoughts, we paid for it in delays, talent loss and second waves of integration.

Emotional Excellence is not a new layer of culture work. It is a disciplined way to make sure that the people who must deliver the strategy are able and willing to do so.

If you are an investor, board member or C-level leader preparing for your next acquisition and you want to explore how this could look in your context, I am happy to share concrete examples and numbers from recent programmes.