becoming a continual challenge for firm leadership.

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Consolidation in the accounting industry has resulted in more accounting firms juggling multiple locations. The advantages include retention of quality talent and access to a larger pool of clients.

For firm leaders managing across geography for the first time, however, they should prepare for new challenges. BKR International has created a top 10 list of challenges as well as guidance for firms managing multiple-office locations.

1. Silo syndrome

Too often, remote offices either become the focus of blame or the focus of envy. In the interests of autonomy, a remote manager or partner may be left on an island of leadership in which decisions are not always made for the best interests of the whole firm. This is most likely to occur when an accounting firm is acquired and a partner of the former firm is placed in charge. Be sure to integrate the leadership team of each office into a larger discussion and agreement on firm vision, best processes, branding, team oversight and revenue goals. Do it quickly and as often as possible.

2. Losing connection

Communication can become inconsistent and incomplete. Don't just rely on email communications. Leaders must circulate in person to each office regularly. They should schedule weekly calls with all locations and expect monthly progress reports on projects, team performance, financials and strategy. Online workflow/collaboration tools and communication by video are extremely helpful when you can't meet in person.

3. Logistical headaches

Some staff won't survive a merger or acquisition. Firms with multiple locations confront duplicate roles and responsibilities. Plan for difficult conversations regarding leadership and administration even after the business transaction is complete. There will be growing pains that confront everyone. Proactive communications to the entire team should address this reality. Strategize on incentives to keep top talent happy and motivated through the challenges. Plan an annual party or quarterly outings to get everyone together in person.

5. Mavericks

Many people don't like change. They may be talented and vital to the organization but refuse to adapt to a new, multi-office environment. One person *can* affect client service and morale. Identify the fears or frustrations of a maverick early in the process. Integrate his or her feedback, best practices and personal goals to get alignment with the rest of the leadership team. A maverick can either undermine your firm's culture and operations or improve them. Be open to different ideas.

6. Location-specific training

With multiple locations, you will need firm-wide development and training initiatives, but smaller training opportunities that fit the team in each location are important, too. This fact is often forgotten: individuals learn best from each other in spontaneous or informal discussions. Involve managers in each location on the specific training needs of that team. Utilize short videos as well as small group learning throughout the year. Employees need to feel that their careers are supported at the firm level, regardless of the office they serve.

7. Knowing the market

Just as tourists aren't the same as residents, visiting leaders can't have a full sense of market opportunities, challenges and threats. Leaders in each office must be involved in discussions around economic factors, new niche opportunities, client service

firm-based and niche-based communications. These efforts support connection to a team — the firm's value proposition and thought leadership. Consider client surveys and interviews to monitor levels of satisfaction and unique needs by location.

9. Rewarding performance

Team members in different offices may face varied challenges to reach performance goals. One office may have a relatively young team. Another may have a smaller team. Outside factors like economics and competition can stack the deck against a location. These factors aren't excuses for poor performance, but will help set a realistic baseline for expected performance under differing conditions.

10. Realizing profits

There will be increased expenses — at least short term — even with a fairly good idea of revenue per location. If a location doesn't meet expectations, it can eventually drag down the entire firm. Don't take a wait-and-see approach. Prioritize the financial health of each office in order to have resources and focus for team development and client relationships. Firms can get support from outside operational, finance, IT or marketing advisors.

According to a Forbes article, two-thirds of small U.S. accounting firms (with five or fewer equity partners and a max of $10 million in revenue) cited concerns over firm performance and revenue in 2016. It seems that getting bigger is a necessity to maintain revenues, either through expansion of services or acquisition. The winners will be those that can expand while continuing to develop strong client relationships, resources and talent.

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