



Guest

Michael Watkins is the bestselling author of *The First 90 Days* and *Master Your Next Move: The Essential Companion to The First 90 Days*, published by Harvard Business Review Press. He is the Co-Founder of Genesis, a global leadership development consultancy based in Boston, MA where he coaches CEOs of Fortune 500 companies. He is also Professor of Leadership and Organizational Change at the IMD Business School in Switzerland where he teaches two open programs for leaders in transition, including a 2-day First 90 Days Course popular with global organisations headquartered in the region. He formerly served as faculty at The Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, Harvard Business School, and INSEAD.

In our conversation, we speak about his perspectives around ROI of Transition Support for a leader who is moving in and the timelines that we should bear in mind when we think about transitions. We then spent time discussing three different types of transitions which are covered in details in his recently published book (*Master your Next Move*) – 1) CXO to CEO transition 2) Leading former peers and 3) On boarding a new Leader. We spoke about some of the missed opportunities when companies and the leaders approach these situations.

Context to the conversation

Welcome to the 45th conversation at the Play to Potential Podcast. This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. I am an Executive Coach and I work with Leaders during high stakes transitions – whether it is related to an organization or the Leader's career. I feel just like companies need to be coherent about the 2 questions – where to play and how to win in the context of their strategy, we all need to be clear about our responses to the two questions – where to go and how to grow? I work with leaders to address those two questions especially during key points of transition as they go through their journeys.

In this podcast series, I talk to leaders from multiple domains (CEOs, Sportsmen, Artists, and Thought Leaders) on three broad themes – Leadership, Transitions and Careers. I am excited to talk about the next guest on the Podcast – Prof. Michael Watkins. HE is a Prof of Leadership and Organizational Change at IMD at Lausanne in Switzerland. He is clearly one of the leading thinkers in the space of leadership on-boarding and transition acceleration and he has been studying this topic for a few decades now. He has just published the book *Master you're next Move*, published by Harvard Business Review Press. It is a companion to the class *First 90 days*, a must read for leaders who are transitioning contexts. As he says, while *First 90 days* was about distilling the key themes that are common across transitions, *Master your next move* is about identifying the different types of moves and discussing elements that are unique and specific to each transition context.

Without further ado, let us dive into the conversation with Michael Watkins.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): How did you start focusing on transition in your journey in your research interest? How did you stumble upon transition as an area of focus?

Michael Watkins (MW): Also, stumble is not a bad character, I describe myself the accident were... right suddenly great said out intended to do this I was teaching at ... school government at Howard. I was a negotiation specialist decision theorist came through us I was most extended international diplomacy but, in my wisdom, I have decided to teach a co teach a course on organizational change and started talking to people and this was suddenly late 90s. It came obvious to me at some point that the respond that the lots work has been done on change and lots of work that have been done on leadership. But personally, nothing about taking into role or ended into both. You know get up to speed opt to learning curve make these substantial transitions while in pair along maybe to be change in at the same time and this is very challenging I got interested and that was the beginning is where all I started doing research with the colleague named Dan Ciampa where we wrote a book called Right from the Start that was published in late 90s and then I got contacted by Johnson and Johnson to start doing some work with them with leaders and transitions, acknowledge program, and couches leaders and that was the First 90 days which was published recently in 2003 and once that book was published my wife was basically taken over by transitions because the book did very well there was lots of interest in it and so I became Mr transition whether I kind of wanted to or not but the good news is it's a fascinating subject that one came continuous to keep very interested and occupied.

DJ: How should leaders and organizations think about return in an investment when it comes to transition support where that me sort of get to the core of it? Everybody says they do transition we have a program but in your experience what do they not account for or what do they get wrong when they think about getting help around transitions?

MW: No absolutely so I get up on my soapbox regularly and say organization should be accelerating everybody taking their role whether they are ...side moving inside because the research shows pretty consistently that you can get people up to speed an about half the time for, we have fact that we have bought half the time. If you do the right things right things meaning providing the right kind if support, using the sort of frame work and tools so this is enormous benefit and if you multiply by across many transitions that are going on the organizations and some research suggested that a quarter or more leaders are taking their roles in large organizations each year. And that pace is only increasing that's just it's a huge benefit at both the individual and the organizational level. And then across you know there is also particular research document reduction and derailment Rates for things like people on boarding. Improvements and retentions and engagement if you get people sort of connected to the organizations early. So there is rock solid business case basically for doing this and it continues to surprise me when organizations don't do it

DJ: In your experience what are the sort of the nuance of transitions at organization often miss out when they think about supporting leaders a lot of them with the right intent set up some sort of program but what are the pieces in your mind which often gets missed which are critical?

MW: So there are a few different layers to that. That I mean these organizations still don't really provide this on boarding support and then they made you the cosmetic staff let's find out that. A provisioning people but they don't really do the work at integrating people into the organization and

so it continues to be for those people who sort of sink or swim. A kind of experience to some degree and that's surprises me because there has been so much attention paid to on-boarding and documentation or the value and thoughts about how best to do that and so that's find of astonished I get some level. But there if you look at the broader landscape about transition there are still many organization that don't really don't provide much support for people making significant internal moves. And again research have been done shows on average the amount of support even the internal moves is far lower than that given to people on boarding forgot this the power of those transition are an else we sort of go through increasing competition for high potential talent organizations are pushing people further faster which is creating more risk by them making those kinds of transitions but still it doesn't seems the connection doesn't seem to have been made that you should be investing in helping those people be successful and it's not that hard to do. So, this for me and sort of me up on my soap box continue and try to make the case for investing and everybody making transitions in organization.

DJ: What's being your experience in sort of alerting people to the vale if transition support? Have you grappled with this issue?

MW: Not for sure, I think what's the antidote to that is good research the basic is as lucky as you may have people who get it right and just do it naturally or the situation really is a ... one I'm coaching a CEO right now I think health care system in the US internally promoted previously the CFO, very accomplished leader and I was right at basic to by the board and help him make a successful transition and I am having to work to find ways to find to add value because he is so good. Now he is still appointing and I able work with me because I was able to comment and sort of confirm that they put the right foundation on various interact with the board, we ensure the board and so on. So he see's value in it. But when things go like that when you cover heavily accomplished person it's a transition it's not really huge in some senses because he is kind of playing a leadership role anywhere before this. It can become less obvious to that sort of support is really reliable. But for every one of those there are dozen where people just really struggle unnecessarily and in some cases they fail. So anecdotes are always dangerous to keep at that the antidote is to look across the landscape and say on average what does the impact to this went to you as an organization at you to decide to make the investment of doing it.

DJ: With highly accomplished leaders who were who have good people skills, which can read the political context well, have relationships and so on. In those instances, what's the delta value add that a transition couch like you bring what are the axes of value-add jut to tease out the nuances here?

MW: I appreciate it's a great question right, I think there are circumstances and which it's very modest the value which you add. Although when I am finding in these situations is that even for people I the scenario you described. As it takes on for example at CEO role, they really do discover that they don't have many places to go to have conversations, take advise, may discover pretty quickly that there are still skill sets. May be its managing the board, maybe it's managing at external stake holders. But they haven't fully developed and it's really very rare that I don't find, I can add more value even with the paying for that service but some time it's more subtle I guess in sometimes it's just more obvious what the work that you need to do.

DJ: And coming back to the book you have written Michael you spoke about the first 90 days in Master your next move talk to us a little bit about your journey in writing those books and just the evaluation of your thinking process which lead to these books?

MW: So the first 90 days was published in 2003 originally and what I was trying to do there was basically the layout a set of principles and frame and tools that would work in any transition that any leader was going through. So this is kind of the general principles, the general theory of transition but to a substantial degree the leader was left to sort of work through how should I apply those principles given are going through this kind of transition... this kind of transition.... On board and I put some clue to that but it didn't really deeply into it. In 2012 second edition of First 90 Days that was really an update because leadership had changed to a degree, technology have changed to a degree, speed already had become more of an issue I have learnt a bit more about how to do this. That was a pretty substantial upgrade of the First 90 Days but it was still a set of general principle and so what I have decided to do was kind of an engineering of an engineer. An orthogonal dimension, you know dimension are sort of writing or it's to dive much more deeply into the specific types of transitions that people go through. So how do you apply those principles given to be in promoted or given that you are leaving from appears or given that you have gone from a position of authority of one that's really all about influence or we can talk about this later you are in a turnaround scenario or be lined with scenario. So I see the books as very complementary to each other right one provides the general principles the other is the place you can go to say look given the kind of transition on work how may I mix the transition you are going through. How do I really apply those principles in a powerful way?

DJ: Sticking to the First 90 days Michael and the common principles that you have observed on transitions, in what ways has your thinking have evolved in this subject over the last 15 odd years what are the some of the things that are very different today than they were 15 years back?

MW: So I think the one reality is that most of the leaders these days are operating themes that include both direct and indirect and also virtual. And so how assess the team given back reality and it's just quite different then in the old days when people were for example strongly co-located with each other with the one example. I think another example would be the types of business situations I think I understanding the demands of being in a turnaround as opposed to realignment as opposed to sustaining success situation became much deeper as I was working with leaders best third example would be the whole notion of early wins and what are those wins mean and how do to get when different kinds of situations. Proper and much deeper understanding of culture Deepak and how in almost any transition you can imagine culture play some role and that needs to be considered so there are some examples.

DJ: What have been your experiences in leaders creating the mind space to be thoughtful about transition as they settle in?

MW: I think it's one reason that I believe it's critical to start working with leaders early in the transitions before they get too deeply and because often they end up in the situation where they feel like they are too busy to plan their transition and too busy to plan your transition is a potential death spiral so you don't want to do that and so the same time transition support should be something extremely you need to do which should make you more efficient it's should help you gain deeper insight and so what I find is if you start working with people early idea will before they are even the role you can very quickly establish the value of its becomes integral to the transition process and not some extra task that you need to engage in and that's the biggest point I think I make about this really is that get going early, focus early, engage in some early planning and then I think also to your point even a little bit of popping your head up occasionally and saying what's going on go to the euphemistic balcony give some thought to it check in with your coach and about how did you going. It's just lets people crystalize their understanding a work there are up against to be a little bit more plan from above what to trying to do. But what you are describing is a very

common reason why people don't get this kind of support can't. Gosh I am just too busy and that is a fundamental of misunderstanding of the value getting help to accelerate your transition.

DJ: In your experience what's your sense of the transition time line? Give us a sense of how we should think about in terms of time?

MW: It's a great question Deepak because obviously I wrote a book called the First 90 Days were on occasionally people say well Michael Watkins says transition in 90 days and of course I never say that. The first 90 days is about how to use that critical first few months well. Now how far you get in those few months is going to depend very greatly on the situation. I want to do turnaround situation you may be meant to be very hard choices very quickly out the team very quickly. You are going to be in a different place after 3 months with someone who's command and work ... success for realignment kind of scenario. So, I told people don't get hung up on the first 90 days. But I would say and I think it gets to your point it is, I think a year is a good time frame because there are still learning to be done far beyond the first 90 days and unfortunately organizations often do sort of provide a lot of support and ... upfront and then it's nothing and so it like ohh you are not ... support that was great and fantastic... good luck and god blesses you etc. So, when we structure for example our transition coaching engagements, they are always at least 6 to 9 months. And for me I'm in that couch pretty much exclusively CEO's these days they are 9 to 12 months. Because it really is that long before someone is fully seated if you are willing in the new role.

DJ: What are the headline themes other queue sort of address over the duration is there certain seasonality to the way you address different themes at different point in time?

MW: Right now, again the specifics the time frame vary but I love getting engage with people before they are in the new role. So another example another CEO I'm working with this was an external hire coming into a 10 Billion revenue, 60 thousand employee organization he had been a CEO before and previous organizations but they have been smaller so this was a bigger leap in scale for him and I got to work with them before he actually and I got to work with them before he actually got into the new job and so what did you do when you are working with someone happy with the new job. You are helping plan their learning process what's the technical culture and political learning you can do. How can you jump start that learning right to the end to you knows get up to speed with your organization? What sort of connection you can make with the key stake holders beforehand I often do interviews in some of those peoples that help in kind of deepen that understanding and then there is a critical piece about how you are going to arrive in the organization? What's your key messaging coming in? How are you going to begin to connect and communicate? It gets down to the level of detail let's look at your calendar for the first 6 weeks and just talk about where you are going to be and how you are basically arrive and show yourself arrival posture that's the term when I use when I work with leader. What's that gone be? With this particular CEO we spent a lot of time doing that. That's critical or not Deepak sometimes it was very much the case with this the CEO the organization was very trying hard to support his arrival and with the very best of intention they had completely this calendar for the first month with stuff and over the ... he had a calendar full of stuff and I said... your calendar and we are going to rip this up and start over. I mean with due respect to the organization and with the need by the way we can talk about this later if you want to do partnership with people in the organization to support those transitions main for CEO's its communication, it's HR it's the Board. You need a support team but you also need to really be a somewhat forceful about deciding how about person is gone and you know stand out first critical you know few weeks in a row I should decide to work with them to really proactively define what they need to do and take control of it early. And I think the early months are often about initially about learning and connecting right but again it depends a lot on how seriously issues are and team assessment becomes very critical early why didn't so will be the transition quickly emerges and

thinking about the team transition and the critical roles and people and you have to make some changes personnel and there is so what kind of timing is that gone be and how are you going on board new people into the executive team. How do you want to run the executive team is it different then what you did before so this isn't big piece of that was a big pieces about strategy and vision because typically new leaders coming ... mind put them plays to do and put in place a new strategy and a vision. I specially take coming from the outside so not to believe or this right but there is absolutely logic and as the person gets more comfortable I generally transfer the transition into the conversation about leadership development right one of the skills and ability you need to build to become fully effective as the CEO of the organization. So it's sort of that sort of thing Deepak and I don't have you know it's day 32 you know where are gone be in Houston, Texas kind of you know logic to it but there is to your point there is a seasonality to the process typically.

DJ: I was curious about a couple of things of the various things you have said Michael one was the notion of arrival posture I was quite curious about what he had in mind when you said that and second was about putting a team together on the client side when you come in to enable your transition could you double click on both those?

MW: Sure so when I say the arrival posture what that mean is that the organization is straining to try and understand to who this new leader is and what they represent and so you as new leader should be helping them do that which means thinking through what are the key messages you want to send about yourself and your leadership you know its first critical few week what's signals I talked about signalling and symbolism I am just giving an example what the CEO I was just talking about there were small facilities in the organization that probably no CEO in the history and the company that would have visited or there would be mid night shifts and production facilities that no CEO would have been showed up. So people want to send a signal ... without being to being perceived to be too manipulative about it you want to be thinking about what's the maybe I am gone be show up you know or maybe I'm gone get out in the field and visit some places that haven't normally got attention and in doing so you can send some signal about yourself and about your leadership and I'm not saying two things that are inauthentic by any means right but help people understanding and that's something you can do very early knowing almost nothing really about the organization.

DJ: And yeah that's exactly what I had in I think that clarifies of I guess rather than just showing being thoughtful and deliberate about how you want people to see you as you arrive.

MW: Absolutely not on the transition support team side within the client you know I hate But it takes ... to support and makes a year coming on board right there is gone be key people, key communication that with whom you need to engage. But I find pretty consistently is rare that even the best communication people in organization have had experience with the communication associated with you know under CEO and sometimes the current CEO departed intend and then had to sort of manage that so you can add some value there. Although sometimes it's funny there is another CEO I'm working with his head of communication just blew me away recently because she didn't evolve with like 6 or 7 CEO transitions she just had absolutely ... and was just like who this is wonderful because they really thought about ok how are we going to kind of manage the outgoing CEO transitions, recognition of him, celebration of his accomplishment and then the incoming CEO at going this was an internal promote and so that's an example right you want to forge an alliance with the communication people you are not telling how to do their jobs. But you are bringing a set of experience about CEO transition communication that they may not have. The HR people that they you want to be engage because often there are the focal point for on boarding. It's a little funny sometimes because you know of course the CHRO or head of HR is part of the leadership team there being assist by the new CEO and some circumstance so it's much easier you know it's clear then the CHRO is going remain the CHRO. But then you really want to be forge an alliance with those people

right so because they aren't often helping the structure the on boarding plan right the board but you want to have the alliance with the board I mean there is recent example here were you know I was really working with the board to help convince them that they didn't want much long an overlap between the outgoing CEO and the incoming one as they were planning because in general I'm not a huge fan of overlaps and they can create a lot of complexity. So forging those alliances having it you know seeing this as a team sport Deepak I think is kind of part of how I think about the process.

DJ: What have you observed in leaders setting up health fit for purpose feedback loop right in terms of who do they speak to, where should they be sensing from, how should they be framing those conversation and how much of that is DIY verses using a coach?

MW: Yeah I think it's easier to do if you got a coach involve because you have got someone who can go in there and get that feedback but just to start with a basic premise that you know in general organization do a poor job of providing feedback to leaders in transitions. Especially when they are broader from the inside and why is that because there is some sort of sense they have to get their feet you know that give us a chance you know or a reluctance on part of direct report to kind of give upward feedback or on the case of the board the board that just may not see you know what's going on and so I'm a huge believer in providing structured feedback after pick a number 90 to 120 days certainly no longer then that because that provides some discipline in the sense of giving some serious structured guidance to the new leader upon which they can act before things have gone to a... There is very serious things that are going on and so you know you can the leader do that themselves absolutely should be for sure better thing it's often better done by having a couch who can out and conduct those stake holders interviews and by process basically ... I do an industrial stake holder interviews and then after 60 and 90 days I go back meet the same people right so I have got a little bit if the relationship with them you know I can just makes it easier to kind of collect the sort of real feedback about how this person is doing.

DJ: So what the first set of conversation with these stake holders Michael before the leaders comes in I get the 90 days conversation or 90 or the 120 days conversation what's the days zero conversation with these stake holders?

MW: So it depends a lot again it's not just that the conversation with different kind of conversation with different types of transitions whether it's an internal move or an external hire. In both cases there is conversation then that sort of almost like a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunity, and Threat) like conversation about what's the agenda? What are the challenges? What are the issues? Is there a common understanding of those things and that's obviously that the leader themselves that can do? But surprisingly an outsider often is able to get insights that is harder for the leader the gap and makes no sense if you think about the people often going to say things to me that I'm not sure that the leader I'm working with which is kind of weird. But you know right and part of me that's just my reputation and people know I'm not gone provide verbatim comments directly to the ... I do it thematically That's the another thing is I have a lot of experience in putting together this kind of data some value I think in doing that for internally promoted people there is an often an additional piece which is a kind of about. What are they need to really do to step up in the role? What concerns do you have about the moving and to this role? How do you see leading to the develop themselves to be fully effective in those roles so this kind of the additional piece? But that's the kind of sort of upfront diagnostic work that I tend to do might be built into our processes. And then you know the 60 to 90-day pieces again the kind of feedback ... how are things going? What are you going to do more of less of and continuing to pursue what you do personally doing more out less are continuing to peruse that sort of structure?

DJ: In your experience what are some of the common points of derailment when people move from functional leadership to general management in your experience?

MW: At some level it is what you have expected to be Deepak right. I mean famous American author Mark Twain has a saying I always like to talk about which is to a person with the hammer everything looks like a nail and so if you have come up through a function there is a tendency to continue to be anchored from a mind set point of view from an experience and comfort zone point of view to that function and then it takes real discipline to sort of let go of that. I see the simplicity coaching a female CEO... who is previous a CFO right under course you know knows the number of down side ways very comfortable with the responsible for managing risk in certain ways that the organization and in order to the effect to the CEO she got to give up a lot of that kind of orientation right she got to think about risk differently than she did before.. She has got to think about the organization as a whole in trade-offs kind of may be like... repair on the financial prospective and she need to have someone in hat CFO role that she trusts. So, she is not tempted to kind of become the shadow CFO rather than the CEO. So that would be one example I think I did a lot of researching and writing specific to this kind of transition and I wrote an HBR article few years ago called how managers becomes leaders. That really focuses on what are the major shifts you need to go through and going from. Being a functional leader to a general manager and one of it's what I just mentioned the... from being a specialist to the general list. But there is also the reality that you have to be the integrating across the organization and managing those trade-offs across the organizations and representing the enterprise view for someone that's been a functional leader. You need to be the role model for the organization right the people are looking to you even more than they are previously for the kinds of leadership behaviours that you are projecting need to exist in the organization so its things like that to some existence.

DJ: May be picking up on a few specific themes that came up in that section you talk about unit of analysis with which you engage with your director Ports and that shifting significantly when you move from one level to another could you talk to the listeners about the insight here?

MW: So, take a simple example you got someone who was basically a front-line leader managing a portfolio projects with the team. So, what do they are doing with that team you know working with the team to break down the project into those key pieces and make sure each of those specialist are working on their chunks. You become you go to the next level you are managing people like that. You are now deciding what projects are going to be pursued and which people are going to be pursuing the project. So, you are now looking at the portfolio projects that's the unit of analysis where previously the unit of analysis might have been projecting you task. You go to the top you may be managing people who actually are responsible for complete business. So, it just making sure that you are reset your unit of analysis actually you are delegating into the right way. But looks like an affected delegation of one level can look like micro management at the next level. So that's basically the causation the idea of people.

DJ: The other theme that I found interesting was you speak about managing in the white spaces when somebody move from functional leadership to general management role for the first time you talk about ensuring that you manage in the white spaces what's the insight here Michael?

MW: We are so very much link to that notion of the up the enterprise leader as integrator. You got to be managing the trade-offs across the enterprise because no one else is gone do it. Likewise those gone be issue that arise, challenges that emerge, opportunities that show up that don't kind of form neatly into any function or any specialty and so you got to be the one so that's what when I say the white space that's what I mean right the stuff that isn't necessarily evident to people in their functional organization or their businesses. And you got to be engaged and scanning the

environment and sensing and responding as those sorts are challenges and opportunities arise that's the basic meaning.

DJ: How leaders should make that mind shift at this level it's not even a skill shift right it's about how do you rewire you mind sets. What's been your experience with leaders that do this effectively Michael?

MW: So I took the ... it's a great observation about culture and I suppose to be smiling if you said that because we did some work recently for an Indian organization. You know part of it is wasn't transition worker but development work. Normally we use sort of little case studies to motivate some of what we do and I this organization the one the setup is sort of team versus team competition to see who would do best on the case study and analysis I had never seen a organization as per that before so it give me a better inside into what you are saying Deepak about the culture and competitiveness. But the essence of this mind set is to say at some point as you get to senior level you are orderly to move forward depend very strongly and orderly to forge alliance internally and externally. So, if you are locked in a zero sum competitive mind-set. You are gone struggle to do that and you got to kind of adjust to a set of a mind set about abundance, a mind-set about possibility, a mind-set of alignment, a mind-set of reciprocity and also recognition that you know at the top organization depend on strong relationships and alliances to move themselves forward and certainly issued what came to the externally environment the ability to shape the external environment, complex, ... social and other challenges really rest any ability to navigate diplomatically through those tickets. I'll give you specific examples I'm working with a leader who took on basically the responsibly for a global public health portfolio and a large pharmaceutical company including multi drug resistance tuberculosis This person had previously been you know running commercial responsibility for significant drive.... Are very competitive if you are doing and all of the son he was thrust in this environment whether all these NGOs or all the agencies crazy government and agencies and the and the resolution kind of shock can initially oooh my goodness how may I can do this and mean the good news without situation was I due come out by negotiation and diplomacy background and that's part of why the chapter on building alliances is in first 90 days. But it is a mind-set shift to being the thing diplomatically right to become a corporate diplomat. I think as you get to the top in the organization and probably as true and India may be as true as Indians anywhere you got to be able to make that shift.

DJ: And in the book, you also talk about distinction between alliances and relationship could you talk to the listeners about what's the nuance here and what people often get wrong here?

MW: So I can have a one formal relationship with you but you may not be willing to support and doing some very important things but I want to do and I may have a turbo relationship with you but there may be no other things on which we can agree and pursue jointly right and so don't assume that a relationship translates into a supportable alliances and don't assume that the lack of relationship rebuilt in a negative relationship precludes the opportunity to build support to accomplish important things I mean that's the essence of this Deepak does that make sense.

DJ: I found that the distinction interesting because people often take comfort or invest in relationships but sometimes, they don't have that orientation towards a building an alliance from a change perspective right in terms of where you are trying to take the organization

MW: And they are shocked to discover that those relationships is good as they may be don't translate into the kind of support that they thought they have got.

DJ: What are some of the key elements for people to bear in mind and what mistakes common mistakes do you see people make here in terms of reworking the relationships?

MW: So when you are promoted internally and that she is going to CEO and examples right there is a piece of disc that really is about the reality the people who work for you previously are not going to be able to have much access as they use to. The reality that you are now over seeing and evaluating the performance if the people who were formally appears so your relationship with them to change in some significant ways. If you don't sort of embrace that reality you can get yourself into a lot of trouble and it could be saddle it's quite interesting so again CEO clan I'm working with internal promote very accomplish leader you know when from being CFO to CEO and I'm talking to his General Counsel right who previously was appear on the executive team and she said some interesting she said you know I came and I caught myself yesterday this guy what call him Anthony right made a request to me a made to do something and... the previous CEO I would have snap to attention and done it. But because I know Anthony and I know and sort of the way he operates I didn't react to him the same way. But then I realize wait a minute he is the CEO right doesn't he deserve the same amount of responsiveness as I would have given to previous CEO and so it means a small example but it's an interesting one and likewise you know I think that the risk of continuing to operates sort of more like a super peer then a true leader that can create real problems for people right so I'm really counselling people how do you sort of step up how do you promote yourself how do you fully occupy that role and what does that mean or by the way for the relationship you have before almost certainly half the change in some substantial ways.

DJ: And you talk about the tight rope between being Napoleon verses being a super peer in the book as well which I found interesting.

MW: Absolutely, and it is a tight-rope because you don't to be coming in thank heavens I'm finally in charge clear the desk salute as I go bye but on the other hand you do have to step up in a way that demonstrates that you are operating from a position you reach them authority given in the...

DJ: You also talk about leaders having to be hard in issues and soft on people I found that distinction quite interesting when they start leading peers an and what's the key insight here in terms of how people should think about settling into a role which includes leading several peers?

MW: So one risk you face when you are promoted to the former peers is that you know the may be perception that you have favourites you like this person but you are not crazy about that person you know if that takes hold that can really politicize you know the situation and under... substantial you are trying to do and so the advice that you distension when I give is one antidote to that is to focus on the business, focus on the issues, focus on the being hard on those things and very disciplined around. Paying attention to them and in that ways ... of the issues with the individual people you know become somewhat easier to deal with because it's gone become you know it will evident but you are not. Necessarily playing favourites of the people and such the essence of that piece of advice

DJ: Cafeteria situation. Breaking from the old set and getting into the new set. What can we read from this situation?

MW: So it's a fun little thought experiment to think about doing that and that thing is bad the answer almost certainly is if not immediately, pretty quickly you should be seating with your peers. But you need to manage that in a way that's reasonably deft unless you want to be sending a different signal right intentionally in the organization. But you still want to acknowledge people or you don't want to be perceived as disconnected or dismissive about a group of people and the process. But this is hard it's just hard because I think that I mean I was speaking again a one of the

set of stake holder interviews that do one of the CEO I'm working with I was talking to one of this person's previous direct report who now obviously is you know one step removed and It was almost like he was going through a grieving process right he loved working with this leader and he is not gone have as much access as he used to have and the new person in the role you know as his past was an interim may be not the same necessarily quality or character person so it's nothing easy about it you know it's just really challenging. But the same time that new CEO can't afford to give in to the impulse to stay as connected with that like before people is they used to. I end up coming conversation about this all the time right its real struggle.

DJ: Leaders that do this effectively as they move from a high touch to the low touch kind of a mode when connecting the old set of peers are there couple of hacks that come to mind not there is a silver bullet here. But I'm curious about how people manage to do this effectively?

MW: So I think helps not to make it too abrupt but also to be very upfront about it you know one of the.... One day and sorry I can't talk to you anymore but still it's still fun. I enjoyed it. So either you can manage the transition a bit more gradually then that. But I think it doesn't hurt and then this cases what the CEO did just too kind of acknowledge this is what's going on better talk. I think that that will help kind of surface. It will move people forward more expeditiously they still gone have to through some formal previewing process and ... I think understand and keep that in mind.

DJ: How should watch out for a promotion which seems like an elevation but fundamentally changes the nature of the job and it might actually be counted into be negative?

MW: No it's such ... and such a great question Deepak and I mean you see it in different levels and different ways right so this is the example that you just gave. I do a lot of with our global Health care company and they have a lot of operating companies you know operating companies, leadership roles are they are a lot of fun right you are leading a you know when a ... team of some form and you are very much engage with the business and the next level up is basically a group leadership role and so you are managing a whole portfolio, operating companies you are not part of any one of them and you know it's very sad after to get a promotion for being and operating company present at let's say it being a group leader but then people get there kind of oooh this isn't really whole lot of fun right I'm not connected in the same way that I was I'm not sort of active in the same way I was and why do I do this exactly right its sometimes your people. Ask and I think it's very much similar to what you are saying you also see people who on a ... concrete example I'm working with right now you now leader female leader in this case who is running a country operation for a large medical device company and very successful. The organization is more a kind of traditional country management structure right so she had a lot of courage a very dynamic you know for a very action oriented person on whom they put them on a regional strategy role where she had zero responsibility and its logical way station to even higher levels but she is struggled mightily right with the fact that she didn't have the any other level to put the she use to have. So I think first of all that is just the nature of the.... The transition whether or not you decide to do it look it's very hard for ambitious people to say I'm gone nit do something which probably a pre-requisite to get into even higher level is. But you know the people are they strong enough to understand what legally moves them, energizes them should be giving those things very... because it's surprisingly easy even at senior level to make yourself quite unhappy by the choices you make. In aid of thinking that you need to do something to get at higher levels and I'm not fully answering you question Deepak it's complicated question and it's a great question.

DJ: The related theme where I was coming from was people think about their journeys and their choices how much of it should be around let me find a play-ground where I can play to my potential versus this is the rite of passage and let me adapt myself and do whatever it takes to succeeded so I

was just curious about your observation on how people think about those two questions verses of find a playground verses adept as they go through their journey?

MW: So I think there is an underpinning kind of idea or phenomenon if you are right I'm quite interested in certain forms of physiotherapist these days but you are not and one of the reasons I'm interested in that is because sometimes when I coach people I begin to kind of come up against the boundary of therapy almost it's find it in a way to think about where this coaching ending therapy begin and in fact this part is interesting relationships. I have done a few cases now we have done sort of joint engage therapist global leader with pretty interesting results. The reason I raise this is because there is certain personalities that have you know what sometimes unrelenting standing built into them that they just need to continue to push them for results for regardless of how unhappy it makes them and so I think then the reason I say this Deepak is sometimes people I don't think few of they feel like they have a choice right they have keep driving them self for regardless to one of those to them their families or otherwise and so to me the answers for your question is rooted in part in the level of up step awareness and... self-control in a deeper sense that a leader has and it's only of that thereof that they even have the ability to ask the question you know could I say NO to this never mind actually act upon it.

DJ: Back to the corporate diplomacy transition Michael you talk about influence landscape you talk about mapping the landscape and coming up with an effective strategy could you talk about some of the elements here for leaders to think about this in a structured way?

MW: So you start with the understanding and another gets involve it's well understood these days that every organization has informal networks of power and influence and that people have power that may not necessary to be obvious that the outside not may be rude in there are control recourses and may be this Natural ties and may be you did you know or can alliances that have been built. But in most organization if you don't understand that you come to understand that it gone be very difficult to get anything done. Again that sort of comes out of background and so you know someone to studies, negotiation diplomacy especially international diplomacy. You at a minimum need to understand by who are the power players in this organization? What are they as an influencer as they are? Who support is going to be crucial? How do you think about building that kind of support and that things end of things like the alignments that we talk about it earlier? But putting on that political hat and looking at the organization through a political lens I think it's absolutely essential because it's just the reality. I use to teach some a course on corporate diplomacy at Harvard Business School and that was for MBA right so the well of the early years of the career and you know some times they think that all organizations as people go to the top must become rational and more sensible and most people such power right no right they become much more political because there are no right answers to that a level of problem that those leaders that they are grappling with and they really become judgment but also alliances and support and a related thing I do if you people say sometimes it's up to course that I hate politics so my answer would get over its or be a fatality because I have my little jokes this Deepak let's say look if you want to describe at its building alliances and support for getting important things done. And that make you feel better and embrace that framing but don't kid yourself that you don't need to do it.

DJ: I was reading this book called political ... by... and he talks about people mental models like Psion there is a group of people who see organization as rational systems and there is a group of people that see organization a people system and at some level as you said fundamentally any group of people working together are gone operate more like a people system and you need to know how to work that system and it's a mental model issue.

MW: I find by the way that the engineer that struggles the more with this that they have such strong technical system training and sometimes you are not as fully touch with it they own emotions right and so they can really run afoul to these sort of things.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This segment reminds me of my conversation with Dr Ramachandra Guha (RG), a respected historian and a man who has studied Mahatma Gandhi for several years and has written multiple books on him. When I asked him about how Gandhiji transitioned from South Africa to India, this is what he said:

RG: "Gandhi once talked about taking one step at a time so he was an incremental reformer he wasn't a man in a hurry, he want to understand a society a system before seeking to improve it or transform it and his non-violence comes from that, his open mindedness comes from that and he comes back to India in 1915 spends year at looking around India looks a little more in 1917 organises some localized Satyagrahas and only 1919 after four years in India he launches his first movement at an all India level – the Rowlatt march so that he has that sense of soaking in the country and its diversity coming to grip with it before trying to change it."

DJ: Now, India is a complex country and it can take 4 years to form a nuanced picture of what is going on before you start driving change but you get the broad idea. Ensure that you understand the nuanced picture of the influence landscape in the new organization and win some small fights before you start moving forward and launch a crusade.

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Now let's get back to the conversation with Michael Watkins.

DJ: And moving to the other challenge you talk about Michael on boarding challenge. When leaders come in the new organization I'm curious about the notion of decoding the culture right especially some of the hidden elements of culture which often are not visible on the surface so can you share your insights on what can leaders do to be effective in the way they decode the culture when they come into a new organization

MW: I think the process has to begin before you even arrive which is asking people through the process of the recruitment about the culture in the organization nobody the real rules in the game how do things really get done? What gives people influence? What sorts of behavioural norms operating you can into a few dimensions that it help to think about this right one example is decision making is this more a consensus based organization where you need to you know touch based about the key stake holder or is it more as you know I'm more authoritative kind of model meeting one of my favourite ... As an anthropologist right as an organizational anthropologist it's the watering whole some up you are right up in the organization where you can visible a lot what goes on. In organizations socially and politically right so are meetings place is where issues are openly debated or meeting is a place where understanding is the reach into the meeting before the meeting... as an example. You know process verses relationships obviously a critical on terms of how you get things done. So its things like that you know is it a culture that's more culture of individual accomplishment and start culture using more collectively and you know there are frameworks that obviously you know you think about those but you know this is most subsequent to getting into the organization

engaging in that kind of observation. Sometimes they can help to find people in the organization that can help you understand what's going on. I think I'm in a sort of cultural interpreters but there is no magic fairy dust that can help you to understand the culture instantly.

DJ: And you also talk about the trade-off between degree of adaptation where the leader assimilates into the new context and the degree of driving change where the leader asserts himself in a new situation of course it's contextual but what have you seen leaders do effectively walking that tight rope?

MW: So I use a metaphor for organizational culture which is like hall of the organization immune system and like the human immune system organizational culture is there in large extent to keep bad people and bad ideas in taking root and so that risk if you do thinks that are nit cultural you know is that you will be attacked by the immune system right and the and isolated even digested if you want to go further with the biological metaphor. So, unless you are part of the critical mass that people have the power to change the culture and that's the big IF Then in general what I recommend is you become enough part of it of the place to win the ability to change the place and that means If you continue using my metaphor doing a reasonably amount of fool the immune system and not trigger things before you establish the probability, establish relationships build the mandate right with other to drive the change process. It's very different if you are part of group of people are they really there may being brought in from the outside to really drive change that's a completely different dynamic during that situation so the advice that I give is more about the kind of the be individual coming in and those organization sometimes set people up to fail and one easy way to set people to fail is to bring them into an organization as an in quotes, change agent. When there isn't really consensus the change is necessary, I mean I have my little jokes in this again right in the organization decides that some level intellectual clear out of emotionally necessarily the change is necessary so the hire change agent and the person comes in and my goodness they start trying to change things. So, and then the reaction begins. I guess that is the essence if the advice you know but it is the trade-off right because the other thing is you stay too long operating by the way the organization operates the risk... that kind of change if necessary.

DJ: And may just trying to map it to a time clock have you noticed any trend in terms of let's say leaders moving from observe and assimilate mode to taking calls mode is it 90 days or is it 6 months

MW: It's funny...actually I have never asked that Deepak and it's just an interesting question and 6 months just an wash it my mind I can't tell you why I think that right but I can tell you 3 months is the enough time to really establish the foundation sufficient to begin to drive that kind of change. How unless right you are in a turnaround where you got that scope to do it but don't try to hold me to 6 months out of 1 month, I'm not sure I can support it was just kind of intuitive response.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: This is your host Deepak Jayaraman here. It is interesting to hear Michael say that it arguably more important to earn the right to drive change before you start driving change even if you have the right ideas that will move the organization forward.

This reminds me of a podcast conversation I had with Ravi Venkatesan (RV) who used to Head Cummins in India and then transitioned to head Microsoft in India and now is UNICEF's special representative for young people. He speaks about how he thought about his transition when he took on the Chairmanship of Bank of Baroda given he had limited knowledge of the Financial Services Industry and Public Sector Organizations.

RV: *"So, as you know about 18 months ago I took on a completely new role as the chairman of a public sector bank, now I know nothing about banking and I know even less about public sector, but yet Raghuram Rajan and Jayant Sinha felt that it was important that I take it on so I did, now what you do in this situation? And you know that the place is filled with landmines and you can step on anything without realizing it and get blown up, so what you have to do in is listen intently and I did I made it very conscious effort to listen to a bunch of people retired chairman of a bank of Baroda so it helped me understand from your perspective, what I should do what the issues are? How would you handle them? And you get a certain perspective, I went and spoke to Waghul of ICICI and P.J. Nayak of Axis Bank because they had, they have been around and seen revolution of banking sector, I met a lot of our own employees and so forth, so from this you begin to piece together first the situation and then out of that emerges a theory of change which is, what interventions are really going to Make a difference and who are going to be an important alliances if you don't listen and you start to imide you are coming with the point of view you starts jumping into action right away you going to make a lot of mistakes because you hadn't built this nuance and reasonably accurate picture of the landscape"*

DJ: Piecing together the theory of change after listening to a range of people is critical before we start moving things around in the organization. Unless you are brought in for a turnaround where the context is different and where there is premium for early action.

Now let's get back to the conversation with Ravi Venkatesan.

DJ: What are some of the dimension of the risk that you think about when you think about transition risk when you have a leader coming in?

MW: So the starting point is to really at least think about that right it's pretty clear that some transitions are harder than another and create bigger risk than other and if you acknowledge that then the obvious complication is you want to provide more of the right kind of support to riskier transition because you gone reduce the likelihood underperformance of failure that kind of where I start with that thinking and then you ask yourself what makes transition s more or less risky and one dimension are you sort of... on it just the basis of the master in the book is how many... types of transitions you are going through so if just on boarding that different then you are on boarding and being promoted to and moving your family to a new country. It's only a rough measure of risk but how many types of transitions you are going through is a one way of thinking about it. Its dark riskier for an outside to come in to realignment scenario then for an outsider to come in to a turn around. You know I just want organizations to be thoughtful if you embrace the idea of accelerating everyone including people making internal moves then the next step to my mind is think about providing more support where there is more risk again seems underused illogical but then you need to operationalize right how are we going to assess? What kind of transition is more risky and I just made a stab right with this with this. What mix of transitions is you are experiencing as a way to start think about more deeply about that.

DJ: Picking up on a specific trend that we are seeing in India these days, we clearly are seeing a significant entrepreneurial activity Bangalore which is often considered as the Silicon valley in India and several entrepreneur setting up businesses and several businesses coming up to the point where they are transitioning from a start up to a scale up there you have young founders often in their 20s or 30s bringing in leaders who are possibly in their 40s who have sort of been there done that and I find that transition quite fascinating, in your experience Michel what are some of the watch outs? Both for the entrepreneur and for the incoming leader given there is so much is going on in that transition.

MW: So, first of all you know you are absolutely right, organizations do themselves transitions between phases at development and there's been pretty good research on that and the ... start up to accelerated growth when that happens typically, I describe it is kind of organization adolescence right? You need to kind of grow up and become more like your parents but it's painful and it means more structures more systems and that can be very painful for people who got into this start up world in part because they love the flexibility they love the Dynamics's, so you know one risk is that they don't make that transitions, they don't understand things you need to do that they don't bring in the leadership necessary to take that organization to the new level. Sometimes its investors the forcing issue on founders but sometimes it's not possibility to do that, so I would start with it's the wise young founder who understands that they need to bring in people with that kind of strong operating experience to take their baby and scale it into something really substantial I think it's also the rare founder that can make the transition through those stages of development to the point where there are the large global mature organization right and so sometimes it's about recognizing when you kind of want to step out because you are not gone able to effective in the new role. So there will be couple of thoughts on the founder side you know I mean you know... you people coming in but you want to be... sure of by thinkers you have got a founder, a boards and others who are gone support what you need to do and not get angry or undermining in some way or want to do things and for some reasons Uber came to mind where you can see a lack of maturity and leaders really that is undermined they gone think us someone coming in and have confidence that that they shank person who is going to understand and appreciate what I'm gone do with his or her organization.

DJ: I am curious about you're your take on transition coaching while a good coach is good coach when you look at transition coaching experiences that have gone on well what are some of the elements either the type of couch or the coaching process that stands out that lead to successful transition what's been your observation here?

MW: So, I think they really are do different things so I'd like to transition coaching verses development coaching and I think it's there is a very different set of skills required to do transitions coaching then the... coaching and I think the process is very different. On the skills set side you need coaches who can help the leader grapple with the business issues and not just the leadership style issue or the behavioural issue. So, you may have someone who is a tremendous development coach but doesn't necessarily have the depth of experience in business at senior levels to really help that leader grapple that some of the decisions that need to be made early on. You know when they are taking a CEO so this balance if business, I can mean then the coaching ability so I think it's different in transitions coaching then this on the normal coaching. Now you absolutely people give up so don't want to say you can't you can't do that and then process wise you know if you think about a standard development engagement there is often some... or things that goes on. You know definition of goals sometimes there is regular session where you can't working on this things clear picture of the process but you understand what I mean whereas transition coaching is much more intensive earlier there is much more about putting place pretty solid plan. I often spend full days for clients early on engaging and that sort of thinking so there is intense to be more or fun and load I find to the transition coaching process and there is more structure in the process and more tools. Planning tools in the process that I think is typical and most development engagements.

DJ: Just rapping up Michael you have been studying transition for several years now what element of transition are you curious about these days given your evolution in this space?

MW: So more and more I have gotten interested in the relationship between leader transition teen transition and organizational transformation how they really connect with each other I mean I'm quite interested in the executive team development these days because almost an evadable when

you are working with senior leaders you are really working with and then thinking about assessing and transforming the team and I can often lead to work in the organizational transformation so that access is pretty interesting to me I guess the other one is just more about transition becoming so frequently now that is virtually a kind of a continuous thing and so how put a system advise in organizations that helps celebrate constant transition what's going on so it doesn't become kind of just an occasional thing that happen but it's part of the core culture almost to really speed those many transitions that are going on such a set of variation under crystal on this days.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Hope you found this podcast purposeful. When I look at my experience as a search consultant at EgonZehnder and now as a Transition Advisor, I find that there are 3 or 4 broad areas where organizations and leaders often get it wrong when they think about transitions.

- One - They often see this as an HR problem and not really a business problem. The real question to ask is what is the business value at risk if the transition doesn't go well and the leader doesn't settle effectively. This should ideally include the time lost when the leader is here, the time, the running cost and the organizational bandwidth in recruiting another leader and loss in reputation for the organization and the leader which could hurt both over the long term
- Two – There is often a misplaced over-confidence bias when organizations recruit a leader. People often make the mistake of extrapolating dynamics of romance into marriage. Without getting into too much graphic detail, you know the downsides of doing that. You recruit a leader because he or she ticks 8 out 10 boxes. The derailment happens because of the 2/10.
- Three – On boarding is seen as a single person problem where the onus is on the person coming in to settle in. While the incoming leader is a key actor in the play, I would like to believe that the hiring manager arguably plays an equally important role in ensuring that the leader settles well. Success often depends on the ability of the hiring manager to seek feedback on himself or herself as well to ensure that the leader settles in effectively.
- Four - It is critical to adjust the settings of the transition clock when we have senior leaders come in. Most people see it as a 1 week or a 2 week exercise. But seeing it as a 6-12 month project would be a better way of framing it to ensure that we set the leader up for success in the new context.

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End of transcription

Nugget from Dr Ramachandra Guha that is referenced: [Settling into a new context](#).

Nugget from Ravi Venkatesan that is referenced: [Listening intently during Transitions](#).

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Michael Watkins - Nuggets

- 45.00 Michael Watkins - The Full Conversation
- 45.01 Michael Watkins - ROI of transition support
- 45.02 Michael Watkins - Creating the mind-space
- 45.03 Michael Watkins - The Transition timeline
- 45.04 Michael Watkins - Fit for purpose feedback loop
- 45.05 Michael Watkins - CXO to CEO transition
- 45.06 Michael Watkins - Warrior to diplomat
- 45.07 Michael Watkins - Leading former peers
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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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