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## Context to the nugget

Vinita transitioned from an American MNC in their Latin American division to Britannia in India. It was a transition across multiple dimensions. She talks about her reflections around settling into a new context.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (DJ):** Even the Coke to India transition was sort of one is clearly a geographic transition but the other is also the organizational context? In the context of leaders who transitioning back any reflections on what are the few things, what are the watch outs for leaders coming in at senior levels and what are the typical missed opportunities in these transitions?

**Vinita Bali (VB):** Oh it was huge I was coming back to India after 18 years, I think first of all people who are successful in moving geographies and countries and so on are necessarily people who are more flexible and adaptable, you have to be very flexible and adaptable, it's not the world doesn't fit into you, you have to figure out how you fit into the world that is and then determined how you are going to change that world, so you have to accept the current reality of what you are moving into and that requires a degree of sensitivity, empathy because it's very easy for the recipient organization or culture to completely reject you so the first thing is to very quickly get a sense of how this place works, very quickly get a sense of people and say ok who are the ones who will be on my team and play the transformation game, who are the ones who will feel very challenged and therefor get very defensive, you have to make some quick calls on people who are going to stay and people who are not going to stay and sometimes you can make the wrong calls but you don't have the time.

**DJ:** And back to your earlier point about sort of being the tourist and being in the listening mode versus quick early decisions any thoughts on how that trade of works? Decisiveness versus being in the tourist mode?

**VB:** You have to balance that because you almost can't do things on the fly and you almost can't take too much time to do it but what I found in all my transitions was when you focus on the organization not on them internally but externally on the market, on the consumer, on the competitiveness and those are all hard fact driven things everybody wants to be a part of the winning team and you are not there to critic and criticize what they have done you are there to say do you like the way we are winning now? Or do you want to win more? Do you like all the things that we have done now or do we need to do things differently? And frankly what I had found was I did many town halls, many meetings and I have always approached this from the point of saying I don't have the answer neither does anyone of you? But all of us together have the answers, first of all just to get people engaged in

an open dialogue I found was very difficult in India because people who are taking positions, people who are watching what their boss is saying and so on so you have to, that is where the authenticity plays a big role couple of things if I could summarize, one is that you have to focus the organization externally not internally, secondly my insight very clear is everybody wants to be on the side of winning team and people will choose to play in a winning team, some people are simply staying there waiting for direction so you need to determine who are the people who need to be very directed and then they can go and do it there are others I found that if, my style is you can't be directive it has to be a combination of where you need to be directive there are some things which are non-negotiable and there are others which have to come from the team members themselves, they have to own decisions, I found certainly in the, that there are a lot of people who are waiting to be told. People like to believe that they are decision makers but actually they are waiting to be told and they are much simpler ok so I was told to do this and therefore I did it and my thing is at a certain level you have got to take responsibility and that responsibility comes from your ability to make decisions as well as implement so you have got to size up a lot of things but if you focus them externally then the internal quibbling to a large extent comes down I don't want to simplify it by saying it just goes away there are still people who are waiting and watching you have to then be able to determine, who are the people who are standing sort of on the edge, they can tilt this way or that way you have to very quickly identify, who are the people, who are definitely not going to be able to do this and you have to have the right conversations with them and then you have got every organization has people who are drivers of change so you have got to identify those 10 or 12 with the missionary zeal to change.

**DJ: And back to the role of the hiring leader in this case they are promoter any reflections on their role in setting an incoming leader for success, who is coming from a very different context?**

VB: When I joined the Britannia, it was still a JV between Danon and the Wadia group so I was really coming into a JV and there were several Danon people on the board and so on, I had been interviewed by the Danon people and actually in many ways Britannia was a quite professional company. And one of the first things I said that I work best and that's another thing that you must know, you must know how you work and my thing was I worked best when am given responsibility and accountability I will not surprise you but I cannot work with somebody is standing on my head all the time, so we agree on deliverables and if I deliver great and if I don't, and it worked exceedingly well and I think most often people are not honest enough to say what they feel and I really feel that we do ourselves a disservice when we are not honest enough in positions of responsibility and accountability because everybody is receptive.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: The point that Vinita makes about managing upwards carefully is an interesting one. In the book 1st 90 days, Michael Watkins talks about the fact that people often have discussions around hard facts (Resources, goals, metrics etc.). But really having a discussion around governance cadence, style of working, communication preferences and agreeing on some sort of a feedback mechanism is helpful as you navigate the new organization.

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## End of nugget transcription

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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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