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Context to the nugget

Michael speaks about the sub-optimality in feedback loops when a new leader comes into an organization. He speaks about the relevance of early conversations with the stakeholders and Day 90/120 conversations to ensure that leaders get tailored constructive feedback to ensure that they are able to course correct early in their journeys.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): What have you observed in leaders setting up healthy 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?

Michael Watkins (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, Threats) 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?

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: Building on Michael's point, I see a couple of elements of sub-optimality in the feedback flowing to the leader.

- One as Michael says, clearly there is a reluctance on part of the organization to provide the feedback to the leader especially with the Direct Reports and the peers
- The feedback often is not in the context of the role and the mission that the leader has been tasked with; it is often micro details which might be C category items in the context of the leader and the mandate the leader has. So, I do see some organizations where there is this feedback but the leader is then left with the challenge of sifting the signal from the noise when this happens
- Feedback is often relevant when it is contextual. One of the VC investors once told me that entrepreneurs get feedback from 100s of well-meaning and capable people but often implement less than 1% of those suggestions. That's because the feedback comes without appreciating the specific context of the entrepreneur. I find that there is a similar dynamic at play here when a new leader comes on board. Even if there is feedback, it comes without adequate appreciation of the specific context of the leader.

The way I see it, there are three layers to this. There is a data gathering problem, signal to noise problem and a context problem. Given this leaders often struggle to get meaningful feedback to settle into their roles.

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End of nugget transcription

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Michael Watkins - Nuggets

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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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