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## Context to the nugget

Michael speaks about the key shift when a leader transitions from functional leadership to General Management. He speaks about the default anchoring that people often come with when they move from a function to a General Management role. He specifically speaks about adjusting the unit of analysis and the notion of managing in the white spaces which becomes critical as a General Manager.

## Transcription

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**Deepak Jayaraman (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?

**Michael Watkins (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 perspective 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 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 project 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 a 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.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: In the book, Master your Next Move, Michael talks about a few dimensions along which leaders need to make a transition when they get to this point of inflection. Of the various pieces, two things struck me.

- Moving from being a Bricklayer to architect: This is about developing a nuanced understanding of how strategy, structure, systems, processes and skill bases in the organization interact
- Problem solver to agenda setter: This is all the more pronounced in India because a lot of us grow up as problem solving junkies and have grown up in a paradigm where tough problems were thrown at us and we developed the horsepower to solve these problems. What happens when you move to a GM role (if I stretch the metaphor) is that you need to be the one setting the question paper. And that is a very different skill set and a mind-set. It moves from being passive to things getting thrown at you to being alert and proactive about solving for the future. This is a non-trivial transition for a lot of leaders I work with

In addition, there is a piece around transitioning from being a warrior to being a diplomat which is quite a challenge for several leaders who come through the Indian system. Do tune into the next nugget if you wish to know more about this.

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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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