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Context to the nugget

Michael speaks about the criticality of navigating the influence landscape especially when one gets into a Corporate Diplomacy challenge where things get done more through influence than through authority. To get things done, one needs to work through the network of allies that one has in the system. Michael speaks about some of the elements of transition involved here and talks about why engineers often struggle with this.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (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?

Michael Watkins (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 tees and may be you did a 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 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: The big shift for leaders in this transition is to focus as much on how to do things and not just figuring out what needs to be done. Michael speaks about being clear about one's own agenda and then mapping the influence landscape to determine which the winning alliances are and which the blocking alliances are. This is where a bit of systems thinking is of value where you see the results as an interplay of the various networks and systems and you think about the sequence in which you will go about building this network for yourself either in the organization or in the ecosystem around you. Like Michael says, this can be a profound shift for people with a background in Science or Engineering where they come from a frame of reference that organizations are rational systems that use human in them. They would need to pivot to a different paradigm that goes by the phrase "Organizations are human systems that attempt to act in a rational way". And this shift is not easy and often people need help of another individual, possibly a coach to make that shift and get comfortable with the fuzziness involved.

This also reminds me of my podcast conversation with Dr Ramachandra Guha (RG) who has written several books on Gandhiji. When I asked him about how Gandhiji thought about transitioning from South Africa to India, he said something very interesting.

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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End of nugget transcription

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

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- 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
- 45.08 Michael Watkins - When a promotion may not make sense
- 45.09 Michael Watkins - Mapping the influence landscape
- 45.10 Michael Watkins - Onboarding a leader
- 45.11 Michael Watkins - Entrepreneur bringing in an experienced CEO

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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