Context to the nugget

Herminia speaks about the criticality of not over-thinking around transitions and urges us to take actions which give us new "material" for us to reflect on and move forward. She specifically urges us to craft experiments (try new activities and roles), shifting connections (find doors into new worlds) and making sense to rework our story.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I want to start with the quote from one of your books from Richard Pascale that you talk about "Adults are more likely to act the way into a new way of thinking then think the way into a new way of acting" I found that profound in many ways and in a way that quote captures the essence of what you believe in. So talk to us about what the crux of the insight here and what do people get wrong when they think about this?

Herminia Ibarra (HI): So let me first bring it to a concrete example of most people can relate too and then we can get to the science because all the research shows that's we learn by doing. The insight is that we learn by doing. But let's take for example that classic the person who want delegate the micro manager control freak. So, they know in their head that the writing answer is to delegate and empower people. So, you know what the writing answer is? Is this not the matter of finding the right answer and then just executing just implementing your steps toward a better delegate you know what it is but the minute it matters you see it controlling your micro manage. The fact of the matter is the issue is that the real mind set behind that behaviour with your experiences is tied you what's made you successful is being a control freak. You are convinced you know that your work is better when you do it by yourself. Is so that's ultimately why you don't do? Why don't you execute on the right answer? How do you fix that? You have to take some small steps that actually get you success or more success with delegating and that's harder so what I found in my research is if you actually get people forget about the delegation actually get them focused on what are some things outside your immediate area that are exciting that you want to work on and as soon as they have something else more interesting that they want to do that they really want to do in their gut they delegate so easily because it's in their own interest and then they realize they see the positive and then they do more of it and you are on the virtual cycle but they have acted their way into a new way thinking about delegation as supposed just to being a superficial in my head thing that keeps me from doing what we know the right answer is.

DJ: And in the context of transition Herminia I found this quote quite interesting as well because I the work I do and when I see the leaders in the way they approach the transition they often back into your work in working identity you talked about the distinction between the 3 step process

HI: So the application are often pretty scary for people because we don't want to jump until what we are jumping to and in fact we like certainty I take step one which leads me to step two and gets me to step three but that doesn't work at all when you are trying to make an career change particularly when you don't know what you are changing to and I found an working identity that people are very good at knowing what they no longer want but they are less good at articulating what they want to do instead and so you cannot do the classic plan and implement model of career change you have to experiment and learn. So you have to take some steps may be you learn more and you decide that's not quite it but that leads you to talk to a different person it's much more iterative but it takes longer its more on certain you have less control is a people require from that institutively at first eventually that find that's the only way you can go about it.

DJ: And the other term you use Herminia is the term outsight as compared to insight as the key element that will unlock future possibilities and I guess there are different pieces it going to outsight but talk to us about one of the few pieces?

HI: So the think that can implement method can also be introspective so for example what kind of leader am I? What kind of leaders would I like to be? How do I adapt? How do I grow in a better direction? So those are all things that we are tempted to treat much more introspectively but in fact when we are making a transition whether it's in your career into different way of leading to something you haven't done before to a situation you haven't faced that kind of approach more reflective is not that helpful because it just brings you back to you what you have always taught and who you have always been and so what I call outside is just a little way of saying get out of your head and get fresh perspective by trying some new things, connecting to some. Such like get some new experiences and then you can reflect on them but don't just keep reflect on the same old creek so new material for you to learn from and that's what outsight is do some new things and then reflect on it

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of my conversation at this podcast with Nandan Nilekani (NN) who speaks about his experience with entering politics after his Rajya Sabha stint. Just to set some context, he had had a phenomenal run at Infosys and was its CEO when it was around a USD 3 Billion company. He then took on the UID project and led the Aadhaar initiative. Post that 5 year term he decided to run for elections and here he speaks about his reflections from the experience.

NN: *"when I spent that time in the government was that the potential of technology to transform India was not sufficiently internalize by the system because people didn't come from that background, people were not technological background very few people like me were there in the system so then I realize that if, and I will be believer that technological transformation is a way to go because that's the only way you are going to fix a lot of India's endemic issues and then I thought and many times I was not able to sell my ideas saying you can do this, you can do that so I was getting a bit frustrated with my inability to sell my ideas, so then I said maybe I should be one of them may be if I am a politician then I will be the decision making guy, and then I have a legitimacy to say this is the way to do it, that's what, it was an intellectual choice actually to get into politics but my experience was not very happy, and in that sense, I think that was one transition where I step too far in some sense, it was way out of my comfort zone, so after the election campaign and after that I realize that this was not where I want to be, that I didn't have the leverage, I didn't have competitive*

advantage in that area I didn't think I would be very effective so I realize actually my effectiveness comes from being what I am good at which is a technology lead transformation agent and use my talents and abilities to solve large intractable problems and make that available to anybody who wants to use it, so that was my shift and them of course I explained to you that I was looking for something to do and this except happened and then the whole portfolio approach.

DJ: and just back to that transition for let's say leaders and CEOs who are looking for a career in politics or considering a career in politics any lessons?

NN: Yes, so I will tell you it very simple a lot of my consensus building skills which are honed in government were obviously useful there but it is a, first of all it was extremely time intensive activity, retail politics I am not talking about, there is always this so called Rajya Sabha route where you get nominated but then you become beholden to someone and then you didn't want to get out of that situation so then I said if I am going to be in this game I should win an election that's the rights of passage if that business but then it becomes very retail intensive, because in every constancy there are millions of people, it's a B to C business, its B to C kind of thing and everybody wants real time attention, you can't say send me an email or call centre or something, so it's very time intensive it's also lots of pressure groups, different caste, religions this that all that stuff and also I was hampered by the fact that I was not a good public speaker in any Indian language, and I don't think you can win an Indian politics unless you are very good at it being a public speaker in Hindi or Kannada or Marathi or whatever, so I didn't have leverage so they quickly realize that I was not going to be effective in this."

DJ: After losing the election, he went back to his core theme of technology led transformation agent and reorganized his life and now is back as the Non Exec Chair of Infosys.

To use Herminia's language, contesting the election gave Nandan fresh material for him to reflect on what would give him energy and make choices based on the reflection.

If you are in transition, it is worth reflecting on what are the Adjacent Possible opportunities for you to craft an experiment and see how it goes. The related corollary is that you probably need to have a clear stop loss point at which you will stop the experiment and go back to your core.

If you wish to listen to the conversation, please go to playtopotential.com and look for nugget 11.08 from Nandan Nilekani.

Thank you for listening. For more podcast content, please visit playtopotential.com. The website also has content organized by specific themes in the Curated Playlists section. Given you are listening to this podcast; you might specifically find the themes Reinventing yourself and Navigational principles relevant.

The Playlist reinventing yourself is about leaders who were at inflection points who were courageous to try different things and move into a new context. This includes Amish Tripathi speaking about how he moved from a career in Financial Services to writing, Roopa Kudva moving from CRISIL to Omidyar Network, Papa CJ speaking about moving from Management Consulting to Stand up, Nandan Nilekani moving from Infosys to the UID project and to politics, Atul Kasbekar moving from being a Photographer to a Producer, Devdutt Pattanaik moving from Healthcare to Mythology and so on. Hopefully the diversity of perspectives will provoke your thinking around how to navigate the transition.

The Playlist Navigational Principles gives you a flavour of the frameworks that various people used to deal with the various inflection points. In a world with more divergent pathways than before, the quality of the steering wheel is possibly as important if not more important than the quality of the engine we have in our car. This playlist gives you some thought starters which will help you build a more robust steering wheel for yourself.

You can access these playlists in the Curated Playlists section at playtopotential.com. And to know more about the Leadership and Transition Advisory work I do, please visit the about section at playtopotential.com. Bye now.

End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Nandan Nilekani that is referenced: [Reflections from Politics as a Career](#).

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Herminia Ibarra - 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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