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## Context to the nugget conversation

Amy speaks about how psychological safety becomes even more critical in the context of a leadership transition. She speaks about the criticality of the incoming leader to portray humility and curiosity as he/she settles into a new context. She talks about the case of Alan Mulally, who transitioned from Boeing to Ford Motor Company when it was bleeding about USD 17 Billion dollars a year. She speaks about how he embodied situational humility to transition effectively to win the trust and respect and drive the turnaround.

## Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): If I link it to another area of curiosity and work Amy, leadership transitions, when a new leader joins a company and comes onboard especially in these times, covid times, what I have observed is derailments often don't happen because of the what of the job, but it's the how of the job on the interpersonal relationships. So, maybe just shining the light in the context of transitions, any nuances in what you have observed?

Amy Edmondson (Amy): Yes, I think that the challenge of transitions is that people they don't know the new context well, they don't know their new subordinates or new colleagues well, and so, they want to make a good impression. So, they are tiptoeing, they are, they may be reluctant to do or say things that will make them look bad. In the way that when we have a group of very familiar colleagues or friends, we are much more relaxed, well in new settings we are not relaxed, right? That's part of the nature of new settings, but then there's a risk there because if you are in a new setting, the very thing you should be doing is being authentic and revealing that which you know and that which you don't know and asking your new colleagues for help and for insight and explaining the things that you care about and listening carefully to what they care about. Those are the things that you do to build a great team and yet those are the things you may be less willing to do because they are interpersonally risky. So, I think, that the learn how behavior is far more salient in leadership transitions than the learn what behavior. You have already, you have likely, if you are doing a leadership transition, you have probably already read all of the published articles you can read about the new company or the new role and you know that kind of information but you don't know the information that is more people dependent and more subtle.

DJ: And if we distill it to a few insights from both sides, right, the leader coming in and the organization that is sort of welcoming the new leader.

Amy: Yes.

DJ: Any headline themes that occur to you in terms of what to bear in mind to create that safety in the context of a transition?

Amy: Yeah, I think, the two headlines for me are humility and curiosity. And by humility I do not mean false modesty, right? I mean humility about the very real fact that you don't yet know them very well, you don't know the company or the role very well, you are coming in with this wonderful opportunity to do great things but you start without all the knowledge you need to do it well. So, reminding yourself of that and then letting others know that you know that is a tremendously powerful stance for, you know, people will warm up to you, people will want to help you when you are clear and clean about the fact that you know you don't know everything yet. So, that's the humility part where there is a new situation and here, I am ready to learn. And then curiosity is a natural sibling of humility because you are all ears, you are asking good questions, you are listening intently to what people are sharing. And what I have found is when new leaders come in whether in the same organization or a new organization to a new role with humility and curiosity people are on their side, they want them to succeed.

DJ: Hmm, hmm. What I have found Amy is people often worry that if I am humble then will I get the respect and the followership when I transition companies?

Amy: Yeah, and I understand that and ironically, it's wrongheaded meaning that it's the people who come in and fail to be humble that actually lose people, they lose commitment, they lose buy-in because it's just a factual reality that you are new, you came in from the outside, you obviously have much to learn. And when you aren't open about the fact that you have much to learn people are disappointed. So, people... so there's a sort of strange irony that people think they will look better when they are more boastful or arrogant but in fact they look better when they are more humble and curious. And just to illustrate, in the United States about a decade ago, Alan Mulally came in from Boeing to become the new CEO of Ford at a time when Ford Motor Company, when the Ford Motor Company was losing 17 billion with a B US dollars that year and so if you have got this outsider coming in, new role, it's a really tough, really urgent situation. And I have written a case study about this but if you look at so much published material about this, if you look at the things that he did and said he embodies what I am talking about. He embodies a kind of situational humility that says okay team, you know, we are losing all this money, tell me what isn't working and then how can we help, how can we work on this together, what are you seeing, what are you bringing? And that is just when you stop to reflect on it, it's an incredibly powerful, confident stance. So, confidence and arrogance are not the same thing, right? Confidence is a sense that I know I have skills, I know I am able to learn, I am interested in learning and I am passionate about what's possible. Arrogance is you can't tell me anything I don't already know.

## Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: If Leadership Transitions are an area of curiosity, you might like the Curated Playlist – Settling into a new context where share perspectives from multiple people around how they transitioned into a new context. One of them is Ravi Venkatesan (RV), a seasoned Corporate Leader who had a long stint in Cummins and Microsoft, last two stints as country heads of these two organizations. He speaks about how he transitioned when he took on a Board Chairperson role with Bank of Baroda a few years back.

RV: *"I know nothing about banking and I know even less about public sector, but yet Raghuram Rajan and Jayant Sinha felt that it was important that I take it on, so I did. Now, what do you do in this situation? And you know that the place is filled with landmines and you can step on anything without*

*realizing it and get blown up. So, what you have to do is listen intently, and I did. I made a very conscious effort to listen to a bunch of people. The retired chairman of Bank of Baroda so help me understand from your perspective, what I should do, what the issues are, how would you handle them. And you get a certain perspective. I went and spoke to [Narayanan] Vaghul of ICICI and P J Nayak of Axis Bank, because they've been around and seen the evolution of the banking sector. I met a lot of our own employees and so forth. So, from this, you begin to piece together, first, the situation and then, out of that emerges a theory of change, which is, what interventions are really going to make a difference and who are going to be the important allies in this. If you don't listen and you come in with a point of view, you start jumping into action right away, you're going to make a lot of mistakes, because you haven't built this nuanced and reasonably accurate picture of the landscape. So, I am very, very intentional about these things."*

DJ: I love the point he makes about discovering and piecing together the theory of change and you can only do that if you focus not just on the Learn What but also on the Learn How as Amy says.

## End of nugget transcription

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Nugget from Ravi Venkatesan that is referenced: [Listening intently during Transition.](#)

## RELATED PLAYLISTS YOU MIGHT LIKE

**Settling into a new context:** Figuring out “where to go” is only a part of the challenge for leaders in transition. How you land effectively in a new context is as critical. Hair line cracks often become full blown fractures if not attended to carefully. Leaders talk about some key lessons Individuals could bear in mind as they transition across contexts (Army to Business world, US to India, MNC to Family Business, Consulting to Industry/Investing etc.) You can access the playlist [here](#).

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## Amy Edmondson - Nuggets

- 78.01 Amy Edmondson - Nuances of Psychological Safety
- 78.02 Amy Edmondson - Implication on Learn-what vs Learn-how

- 78.03 Amy Edmondson - Impact on leadership transitions
- 78.04 Amy Edmondson - Calculus of silence
- 78.05 Amy Edmondson - Traits that drive psychological safety
- 78.06 Amy Edmondson - Effective feedback processes
- 78.07 Amy Edmondson - Rituals that drive psychological safety
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- 78.11 Amy Edmondson - In Summary - Playing to Potential

### **About Deepak Jayaraman**

Deepak seeks to unlock the 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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