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Context to the conversation

Carol and David speak about how leaders who inherit a new context (external candidates or even internally promoted individuals) need to tune into the vantage point based on various priorities and preferences people in the ecosystem (within the company or outside) might have.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): Just building on the vantage point insight, I guess it is all the more pronounced when transitions happen, when a new CEO takes charge, then discerning what is the right vantage point is that much harder because you are also trying to make sense of the topography, the characters, the political magnetic forces at play, so do you want to expand on how to think about vantage point, especially in the context of a leader that is transitioning into a new role?

David Noble (DN): Sure. So, when you look at the model of MOVE, again, it does not have to be sequential. So, the thing that really pops for us if you are in a big new job whether you are the CEO or not, is the vantage point because literally, whether you are being promoted into that role or you are coming in from outside the organization, all these relationships are new in some way. Even if you are within role, you are looking at things from a different perspective. So, your old peers are now you are direct reports and that is a very challenging situation. So, we actually encourage leaders coming into a role to look at all the people that are involved in that role from a 360-degree perspective. So, it is to really understand like what is the agenda, what is needed of me, what kind of relationship do I want to have with my new boss, even if I am the CEO, I have got a board to deal with, with other stakeholders that are around me, like regulators or analysts or whatever, with my team and then across my organization. So, it is actually trying to read what is actually happening there in terms of other people interpersonally and then, how I want to meet that challenge. And there are other things around on vantage point that also come into play when you have got a new role. So, for example, there is mandates that are sometimes illusions or not illusions. So, you come into a job and you are the new leader in a group and it is like, yes, you have a mandate to transform the group, and the moment that you do that, you meet resistance from the very people who gave you that mandate. So, there is no amount of due diligence that you can do to actually make sure that that does not happen but how can you explore that in front. So, for example, if you are contemplating going into a new job and you understand what you think the scope of magnitude of the challenges, you just say like, well, okay, and what happens if we need to take the group in this kind of organization. And if you hear, oh yeah, that is okay, okay, let us keep pushing on that a little bit further, well, what if that means a massive investment, what if that means a massive transformation, what if that means a new type of acquisition, what if that means a product extension. So, you get more and more specific and if the answer is yes, all the way through, it is like,

okay, that is not a red flag. But often when you ask those kinds of questions, it makes it more real to the person that you are talking to and they will say things like, oh, well, you know, it would depend on the circumstances, that is a red flag and that is something to really push on to make sure that your perception of the mandate is as close to reality as possible. The other thing is, just one other thing which really pops for us for people get into new jobs is, there is this tendency to want to do too much too quickly. So, if you do not read the organization's capacity that you have got, you can make people tip over and that can make you not succeed. So, it is like having enough self-awareness and self-regulation to calibrate how hard you are pushing the organization and to be able to read them as well. So, all these things are vantage points and then, being able to step into other people's perspectives as much as you could step into your own perspective which is part of diversity and inclusion, all those are important dimensions in a new role too.

DJ: Hmm. Got it.

Carol Kauffman (CK): Yeah, we have a whole chapter on that by the way, I am stepping in, so we have two chapters on that and it is interesting you picked up on that because the first half of the two chapters is just on the vantage point of a new CEO and new leader. And then, the others are the mindful alertness, the options generator and engage and effect change of that leader, so that is great. So, you were asking about E.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: I am reminded of an insight from R Gopalakrishnan (RG) who has studied fault lines in Leadership Transitions and has authored the book CRASH which profiles 15 high profile hires who couldn't quite land and despite a lot of fanfare ended up as a failure. He speaks about the criticality of discerning the pecking order of stakeholders.

RG: *"So, one of the things I learnt, I am not sure where I learnt it, how I learnt it but I am sure I learnt it from somewhere or the other some experience is if you want to change things in the organization which you are going to lead or be a leader of first you have to change yourself. The so-called objective metrics are actually subjective in the sense they focus on increase profits by 20%, diversify into X or Y, which are all fine, but those depend on the context. So, we set targets for various companies in February for the year 2021, who the hell knew Covid was coming? So, the context has changed and therefore the performance metrics automatically change, coming to the other part, the invisible part, boards are not interested only in your achieving objectives, they are interested in how you achieve the objective also. It is stylish to say just deliver me the results, I don't care how you do it but in reality, we are interested how they did it also. If a CEO is slitting a few necks every night to achieve his results, then you have to accept that there's a criminal case building up. So that's what I mean by the soft part, there are multiple stakeholders, you know, you have so far grown in your career thinking I have one boss, if I satisfy him everything is all right. Your board itself has a chairman and directors who have been around 20 years, directors who have been around 2 years but then you have your leadership team, your subordinates if I may use that word, then you have your stakeholders your shareholders, you have your allies, you know, suppliers, vendors, bankers and depending on the way you act and behave the pecking order emerges. If you are a very strong domain person, so you have been in the auto industry for 30 years and you joined an auto company then you pick up the phone and start energizing your old network, you know of some fellow who supplies very good components. That might be misinterpreted in your new environment you are doing that because you were a head of purchase in some other auto company you don't sort of bring in all your old buddies, but then very strong in recruiting talent and then you go and fill up the place with people from your own company or perceive to have done so even whether you have actually*

done so or not and people don't like that. So, I use the word pecking order of stakeholders to mean what was in your strength until the other day can play out to be a weakness. So, while you must have a 360-degree approach to all your stakeholders without doubt the angles of the pie keep changing depending on who is the person who's there. I have known situations where people say that, you know, he came from so and so place, he has filled it up with people from that place. It's not at all uncommon in CEO transitions."

DJ: I like what Gopal says. Even what seem like objective metrics are often subjective to context. Being able to read the room and discern the various vantage points can be a big advantage as you settle into a company.

Thank you for listening.

End of transcription

Nugget from R Gopalakrishnan that is referenced: [Discerning the pecking order of stakeholders.](#)

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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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