

***COACHING EXECUTIVES THROUGH CAREER
TRANSITIONS IN CORPORATIONS***



Pradeep Mukerjee

1. Introduction:

Corporate Executives go through various career transitions within one or more organizations during their careers. This paper defines the kind of coaching needs that may arise as Executives move from one career transition to another. Recognizing such career transitions and coaching needs will help organizations provide “just in time” and appropriate developmental inputs to their Executives leading to more effective performance of the individuals concerned, and consequently, the organization.

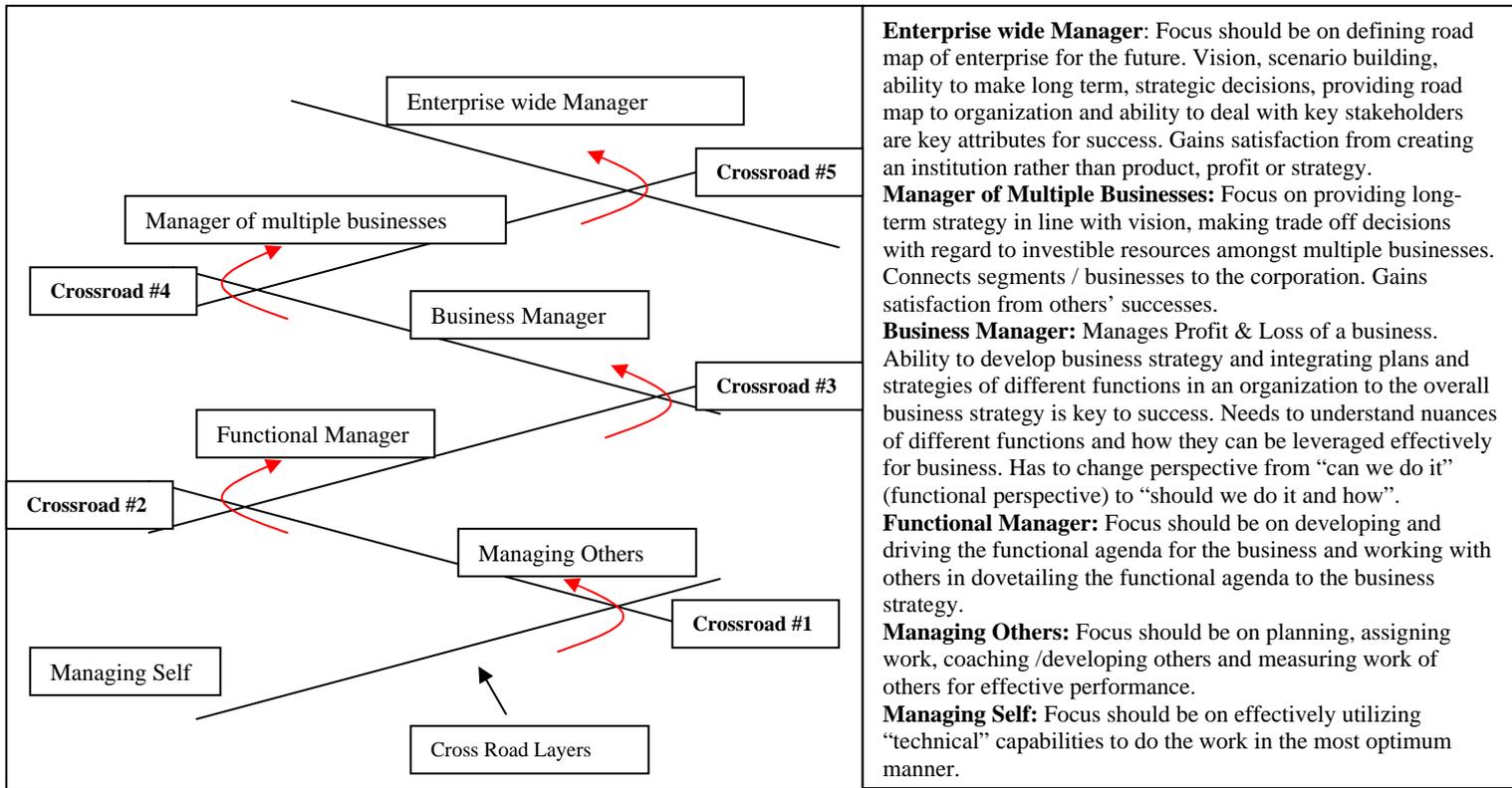
For the sake of clarity, career transitions in this paper refers to managerial / leadership roles that Executives take on, which significantly differ from one another in terms of leadership competencies demanded of Executives in those roles. For example, an Executive moving from managing a sales function within an organization to managing the whole organization as the CEO, requires to recognize that the leadership skill sets, perspectives, and value addition demanded of the CEO’s role is dramatically different than that of head of the sales function of the organization. This is an example of “Career Transition” for the purpose of this research paper.

2. Defining Career Transitions: The Crossroads model

The Crossroads Model¹ of Leadership Development is a model that defines career transitions for Executives in Corporations.

The Crossroads Model classifies the work done in an enterprise or corporation in terms of the key demands on the jobs by way of focus, time frames for results and essential value add expected from the jobs. The model described below could be used to classify all jobs in an enterprise along different crossroad layers as described in Figure 1 below. At each Crossroad, the nature of the jobs in terms of the leadership competencies required for success changes significantly. When one is “managing self”, one needs to focus on excelling in applying the knowledge required to do the job, meeting deadlines, quality of output and work with others so that interfaces between one’s work and that of others is managed smoothly and effectively. However, when one is responsible for the work of others (“Manage Others” Crossroad Layer) then the focus shifts to how to get work out of others effectively, in addition to specific individual contributions one makes. Hence at each stage of the Crossroads, the demands on role incumbents change significantly. For example, when one moves to managing a business (defined as managing Profit & Loss) from being a Functional Manager (Sales Manager as an example), the focus shifts to profitability for the business and not just sales numbers. A Business Manager has to know enough about the overall business and each function to be able to make trade off decisions between competing demands for finite resources from the various functions in the interest of profitability.

Crossroads Model (Figure 1)



Jobs of various sizes could exist along the continuum of a Cross Road layer. For example, on the Cross Road of Managing Self, one could have a job of an administrative assistant at one end of the spectrum and also that of a world renowned Professor whose job in the university is to teach students, at the other end of the continuum. The Crossroad is not necessarily a model that reflects a hierarchy of jobs in the enterprise – it merely classifies jobs along some leadership demands that are made of different jobs in the enterprise.

3. The shifts in Leadership Competencies Required for Effective Performance at each Crossroad Turn:

As Executives transition from one crossroads layer to another, key shifts in leadership competencies and orientation are required to demonstrate effective performance at the next crossroad layer. A generic and illustrative list of these shifts is given in Figure 2 based on corporate experience of the author in leadership assessment and development.

Shifts in Leadership Competencies & Orientation Required with Crossroad transitions

(Figure 2)

| Crossroad Transitions | Additional Personal / Leadership Competencies Required |
|--|---|
| Crossroad# 1: From Managing Self to Managing Others | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater self awareness of strengths and areas of development • Managerial skills: setting goals, communicating with teams, delegating, managing for performance, motivating people, developing people • Key interest in people for understanding others and their role in one's own effectiveness • Developing teams for effectiveness <p>Value shifts from one's own work to getting work from others</p> |
| Crossroad# 2: From Managing Others to Managing Function | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining functional vision and strategy and inspiring people around them • Assessing capabilities of people and building the right team with core capabilities • Influencing seniors and peers to buy into the functional vision and strategy • Building networks for benchmarking and leveraging relationships • In global organizations, driving synergy and advantages from global operations <p>Values functional contributions</p> |
| Crossroad# 3: From Functional Manager to Managing Business | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing people and organizational capabilities and building the right team with core competencies required • Understanding the power of vision • The orientation to make tough decisions • Learn the power of focus – in thought and action • Ability to break down complexities to manageable areas of focus and action • Inspiring team for greater performance • Influencing various constituencies including external constituencies (regulators, industry associations, government bodies etc.) <p>Values profitability and return to shareholders</p> |
| Crossroads# 4: From Business Manager to Manager of multiple Businesses: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging synergies and opportunities across businesses, across geographies • Assessing organizational and individual competencies across businesses • Inspiring competent and capable people who may be better than you • Building effective and powerful networks internally and externally • Leveraging power of the vision • Balancing internal and external focus <p>Values entrepreneurship and focuses on returns to stakeholders</p> |
| Crossroad# 5: From Manager of multiple businesses to Enterprise Manager | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining and selling long term vision • Inspiring and influencing capabilities – internal and external to organization • Leveraging networks • Continuing focus on developing and maintaining relationships with stakeholders. • Focusing on organizational and societal interface: environment, |

| | |
|--|---|
| | value of products and services to society, public face of organization, enterprise brand creation and management Values institution building |
|--|---|

While Executives transition from one career transition role to another, they generally learn of the shift in focus through:

- Their own observations of people who have played such roles before and who they respect – maybe role models they aspire to emulate
- Their own experiences when they start performing the new role – what works and what does not work – and modify behaviors accordingly. For this, they need to be sensitive to their environment, have good self awareness and be willing to adapt to the demands of their new role
- Feedback received from supervisors or others as they perform in their new role
- Specific training programs they may attend to prepare them for the challenges of their new role.

The learning curve for the new role can be shortened for greater effectiveness through structured inputs and interventions which can prepare the executive before or immediately after, the new role has been assigned. Such inputs can be numerous like specific training programs, mentoring within the organization, project assignments , shadowing a successful executive who has demonstrated success in a similar role **or individual coaching.**

We shall deal with the coaching intervention and their effectiveness in preparing an executive in dealing with a career transition role.

5. Coaching: how it can support Executives during Career Transitions

As per the International Coaching Federation (ICF), “Professional Coaches provide an on-going partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performance and enhance the quality of their lives.”

Coaching as defined by Thomas Leonard, ICF Founder, “A coach is your partner in achieving your personal goals, your champion during turn around, your trainer in communication and life skills, your sounding board when making choices, your motivator when strong actions are called for, your unconditional support when you take a hit, your mentor in personal development, your co-designer when developing an extraordinary project, your beacon during stormy times, your wake-up call if you do not hear your own, and most importantly your partner in living the life you know you are ready for, personally and professionally.”

According to Jeremy Robinson², Executive Coaching is “aimed at inspiring Executive leaders to make behavioral changes which transform themselves and people around them thereby increasing business results and performance.”

Coaching provides the following advantages over other methods for Executive development, especially in preparation for, or immediately post, a career transition

- a. Coaching, by definition, is focused on the individual's specific needs (as opposed to training which is targeted at meeting the general development needs of the group going through the training). Coaching is targeted and recognizes the specific changes in attitude, perspective and behavior that the Executive requires to be more effective. Training or projects can be more effective in developing knowledge or specific skills.
- b. Coaching is more effective at dealing with attitudes and perspectives. When talented executives move from responsibilities at one crossroad layer to responsibilities at another, shifts in focus require new perspectives, in addition to specific skills. Coaching addresses perspectives most effectively out of all other developmental inputs. As Robert Goodman³ has written, "perspective taking is a crucial underlying cognitive and interpersonal capacity that directs how leaders define, approach and implement their work."
- c. A coach acts as a thought provoker, sounding board and feedback provider among other roles. As Executives take on bigger responsibilities in an organizational pyramid, they get lonelier as they typically have fewer confidants they can share their concerns, issues and thoughts with. A coach can effectively provide an impartial and objective sounding board for the Executive to bounce off his or her concerns.
- d. Despite all the management research and studies which stress on how important feedback is for improving performance, a McKinsey study in 2000⁴ found that only 39% of executives surveyed by them had received candid feedback on performance. A coach, as a sounding board and feedback provider, can enhance the Executive's awareness of implications of his or her thoughts and actions which helps in aligning perspectives leading to appropriate action.
- e. Coaching is action oriented and is focused on bringing about change in the client's perspectives, thoughts and behaviors. Sustainable change requires that an Executive recognizes and understands deeper motivators for his or her behavior. This is what a coach does by definition. Therefore, coaching is much more effective than other methods in bringing about sustainable change.

7. Conclusion;

In a world where talent is considered one of the critical success factors for organizations, and at a time when various researches have concluded that shortage of leadership talent is one of the biggest concerns of corporations globally, planned and targeted executive coaching for executives and leaders will help organizations build a leadership pipeline to provide talent as organizations grow and evolve. The McKinsey survey referred to earlier revealed that the top performing leaders increase productivity, sales, revenues by as much as 40 % plus depending on the role. Coaching, as a developmental initiative can be structured to develop leaders in the organization, especially as executives make career

transitions moving from one crossroad layer to another, enhancing the overall leadership effectiveness in organizations.

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