

From manager to leader – the transition struggle

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Purpose

Executives who are promoted to senior ranks early in their career can find themselves leading a business and a large team without true leadership experience. They have moved from manager to leader and need to discover their authentic leadership style, fast.

Description

Three development dimensions can accelerate this shift, as shown in Figure 11. The strategy is adapted from research by Professor Herminia Ibarra, the Insead Chaired Professor of Organizational Behaviour.

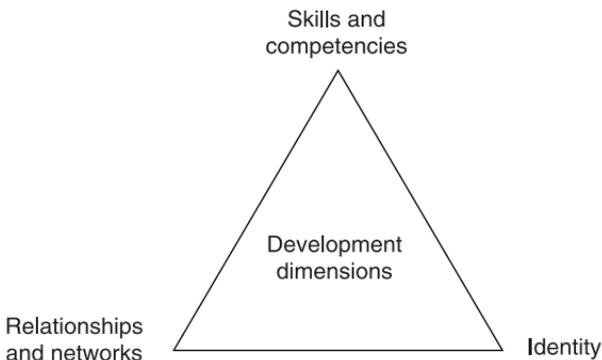


Figure 11 Development dimensions

Process

Skills and competencies

Ask your client to identify the skills and competencies that a top leader needs to have, calling upon three great leaders who they admire to talk about their style, skills, what they do and how they do it. Summarize their thoughts on paper and review the list together, challenging for clarity and to reveal gaps, while also reinforcing positive identifications.

Ask the executive to score themselves on a scale of 1–5 against each skill noted (5 being fully competent) and then prioritize in order of importance for the leadership role they are fulfilling. Their desired future score should then be stated against each leadership competency, which will enable a discussion on the actions that are required to close the gap between the current and desired rating (see Table 5). It will become clear that using old skills alone is not enough to fulfill their new role.

Table 5 Identifying developmental actions

Priority	Skill	Current level (1–5)	Desired level (1–5)	Actions
1	Strategic planning	3	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand corporate vision • Set departmental vision and goals
2	Team engagement	2	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular two-way communication • Reward and recognition
3	Delegating	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handover tactical tasks • Make the team accountable

Relationships and networks

Strong networking and relationship skills differentiate a good manager from a great leader. With the purpose, vision and goals of the business/department known, invite your client to think strategically as to whom they need to be in contact with. Capture this information in a spider diagram and then repeat the exercise from a tactical stance using a different coloured pen.

The next stage is to identify which groups and individuals are already established as part of the client's network and which are not. Previous networks may still be relevant but there will most certainly be a need to expand. Ask how the client has established good relationships and networks previously, what works for them, how they have perhaps been 'networked' and how they received this. Using the learning from this strengths-based approach, agree upon a time-bound action plan.

Identity

How does your client want to be perceived as a leader and how do they want to adapt their identity for different stakeholders? Using chairs in the room to represent each stakeholder (for example, staff, the managing board, customers) invite your client to sit in the place of the stakeholder and to provide the ideal feedback that this group or individual would give on your client's identity and reputation. As they experience the role of the stakeholder, comment on their delivery, focusing on their verbal and body language, since they will be displaying characteristics of the identity they wish to create. Your feedback will re-enforce these behaviours as those to be lived back in the 'real world'.

Pitfalls

As an established manager promoted to a leadership role, the auto-reflex will be to do what they have done before. Be robust and stimulating as the coach, since sustainable change needs to be provoked deep down. Asking 'Who are

you, who do you need to become and how do you want to develop?’ will encourage change to take place at the core of their being. Integrating this approach with action-oriented coaching will put your client on the fast track to an effective transition.