

Stepping up requires seven shifts

Margaret Beaton 30 August 2013

Seven shifts are necessary for you to step up from a technical or functional role into one of business unit or organisational leader for the first time.

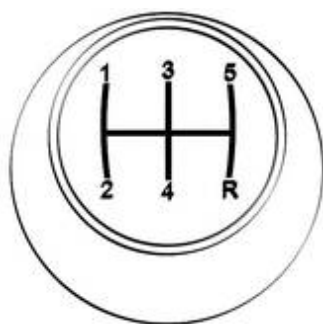
There is always a significant transition when a leader takes on a new role. And the transition is biggest when it's into general management. This is the most challenging for any leader to make. Here's why. And the seven shifts that assure success. [Dr. Michael Watkins](#), a professor of leadership and organizational change at a leading business school, offers a practical way of understanding these seven shifts. His research makes the nature of the shifts clear and provides a road map to leaders who are stepping up. Here's my précis of Michael Watkins' [full article](#).

Seven major shifts face you as you step up into a new leadership role that takes you beyond your technical or specialist roles in HR, IT or finance.

1. From specialist to generalist. An organisation's business functions are microcosms or subcultures, each with its own way and language. Managers transitioning to higher leadership roles have to learn a new whole-of-organisation fluency. If have come up, for example the product, marketing or HR route you will to rapidly become comfortable with the terms, tools and ideas of all functions the work of which you must integrate. You will need to assess and recruit the right people to lead areas in which you are not an expert.

2. From analyst to integrator. The primary responsibility of technical specialist to develop and manage people to achieve analytical depth in narrow domains. By contrast, at enterprise level you will lead cross-functional teams to address organisational challenges. Shifting to managing integrative decision-making and judging appropriate trade-offs are new high order skills.

3. From tactician to strategist. More so than functional leaders, as an enterprise leader you will need to establish and communicate strategic direction. So you must be able to define and communicate cogently the mission and goals, core capabilities, strategy and vision for your business. Additionally, you will need to switch



gears with ease, shifting between tactical focus –the trees – and strategic focus – the forest. You must think strategically; honing your ability to recognise patterns in complex environments, crystallise and communicate those patterns to others in compelling ways and use these insights to anticipate and shape the reactions of other stakeholders.

4. From bricklayer to architect. As a manager moving up in the hierarchy you will be increasingly responsible for creating the foundation for superior performance – creating the organisational context in which breakthroughs can occur. To be effective in this you must understand how strategy, structure, systems, processes and skills interact. You must also be expert in the principles of organisational design, business process improvement and human capital management. Few high-potential leaders get any formal training in change management, leaving them ill-equipped to be the architects of their organisations or to be educated users of the work of organisational development consultants.

5. From problem-solver to agenda-setter. All-too-often leaders are promoted on the strength of their problem-solving skills. But when you reach top leader level, you must focus less on fixing problems and more on setting the agenda for what the organisation should focus on. Being an agenda-setter means identifying and prioritising emerging threats. And communicating them in ways that can be responded to by others.

6. From warrior to diplomat. Leaders who have stepped up see the benefits in shaping the external environment and managing critical relationships with external stakeholders such as governments, media, investors and competitors. You will need to identify opportunities for collaborating as well as competing to help shape the rules of the game. Functional managers, by contrast, tend to be more focused on developing and deploying internal capabilities to contend more effectively with key competitors.

7. From supporting cast to lead role. People in the business look first to enterprise leaders for cues about the 'right' behaviours and attitudes and for vision and inspiration. At the functional leader level, it acceptable for you just to be an efficient, effective manager. Enterprise leaders, by contrast, are constantly at centre stage, being held to a higher standard – that of an exemplary role model. Senior leadership sets the pace. Your behaviour will be transmitted to your direct reports, who in turn pass it to the next level, and so on down. Over time, they permeate from top to bottom. Eventually you will become embodied in the culture, influencing the types of people who are recruited and promoted. You create a self-reinforcing feedback loop for better or worse.

These seven shifts in changing from functional leadership to general management or enterprise leadership are crucial to the success of the transition.

But, it's important to keep in mind the biggest reason why you may fail in the transition is because you haven't gone back into a learning mode. Nothing can fully prepare you for enterprise leadership for the first time. But there is much you can do to prepare if you know the seven shifts it entails.

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