



Home > Opinion >

OPINION

Planning a transition from a middle-level manager to an executive leadership role (2)

by UCHORA UDOJI On Dec 9, 2019



Planning a transition from a middle-level manager to an executive leadership role (2)

Still on the transition to an executive leadership role, we shall be concluding other points to consider as you plan for this change.

Organisational politics

Maintaining multiple relationships especially with people who are somewhat linked means you will have to be more politically tuned in. You will sometimes need to deploy charm – smile even when you're not in the mood and so forth. You will have to identify key decision-makers, understand the

decision-making processes and how people and processes are influenced. You will also need to master and deploy power dynamics – without throwing power tantrums. And, you will have to develop your own power so that when required, you can step up not just as a player in the political game but also as an architect of the political game.

Clarity of purpose

The executive leadership group has a sensitive mandate – it is held accountable for the success and failure of an organisation. It is also a smaller and denser group than middle management. Tasks and relationships are subtly entwined and members of the executive leadership group share ties that are more expressive than instrumental. When you join such a group you will, in the process of negotiating your identity in- and out-group, necessarily step down on some your beliefs and opinions. You will also have to adjust and adapt to some of the norms of the group. So, it is important to seek clarity of purpose long before you think of assuming an executive leadership role. Having clarity of purpose prior to accepting the invitation prepares you for your new role in the sense that it helps you work out your uniqueness as well as the extent of your “belonging” to the executive leadership group.

So, let’s say you long identified, clarified and prioritised your personal governing values. If you haven’t paid close attention, you might find upon transition that some of your top priority values do not align with the top priority values of executive management and that whereas you got along perfectly in your middle management role without having to make major value shifts, your executive leadership role is demanding that you make major, extensive shifts in values. In this situation you will find it difficult to present an authentic self and to live a life that resonates with who you really are. It can also stand in the way of the other successes besides career success that you want to achieve.

Some demands of career advancement can question long held values and beliefs in very unsettling ways. On occasion there may arise a genuine need to rework one’s values – perhaps because they have become outdated or overtaken by events. But reworking values in such a way that one is forced to continuously live opposing values – sleep and wake with multiple clashing identities of self can cause the person extensive discomfort and can have adverse implications for mental health.

Two questions will direct a profound conversation with oneself that can help gain clarity of purpose: What is my life purpose and how does it align with the executive role I want to take on in this organisation? Why do “they” want me?

To the first question, figure yourself out – your personality, goals, values, your credo. Then understand your organisation, what it represents through its executive leadership and how you fit into that maze. To the second question, recognise that the suites and spaces of executive leadership are not open to walk-ins. Employees typically don’t wonder or sneak into executive roles; they don’t

gate-crash it either. Employees get invited into executive leadership. There are cases when people lobby their way into an executive leadership position. In such cases, post-lobby dynamics suggest that the new migrant has more or less been “admitted” into an existing culture which he/she is expected to adjust and adapt to.

Whatever the case, when you receive that invitation or admission you should ask yourself why the gates of executive leadership have been opened to you and what you are expected to bring to the table. There are several reasons an employee is invited or admitted – to fill a quota, to represent some interest, to bring on new skills, new perspectives, target business, target networks, and so forth. Seeking accurate answers to both questions will to a large extent help you settle into your new role quickly.

It is important to mention that your ability to stand alone on key issues usually shrinks when you become a member of the executive leadership group because you will for the most part be expected to journey with other members of the group as decisions are made for and on behalf of the organisation. Continuous lone-voice disagreements especially with key players and frequently standing solo without the requisite power is an accident waiting to happen. Whereas one might quite easily get away with this at the middle level, it is harder at the executive level.

Remember, that unlike the middle management roll, you didn't stroll into the executive role – you were invited or admitted in. So, knowing how to balance upholding your uniqueness with maintaining your identity with the executive leadership group will be a key skill. This is why it is absolutely necessary ab initio, to understand to a reasonable extent how your goals and values align with what your organisation and its executive leadership represent and later, why you were invited or admitted in.

While some may elect to learn how to be an executive leader on the job it is usually better to have a good understanding of the role, before transition. It is important while working hard at daily tasks, to find the time to prepare for executive leadership roles ahead of time, if it is for you a priority dream to join executive leadership. Preparation is the fuel of readiness and readiness the fuel of success. I wish you all the best in your journey to executive leadership.

UCHORA UDOJI

Dr Udoji is a Senior Lecturer in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resources Management, Lagos Business School, Pan- Atlantic University. She has written this article in conjunction with the Christopher Kolade Centre for Research in Leadership and Ethics (CKCRLE) at Lagos Business School. CKCRLE's vision is

creating and sharing knowledge that improves the way managers lead and live in Africa and the World. You can contact CKCRLE at crle@lbs.edu.ng.

Comments are closed, but trackbacks and pingbacks are open.

SUBSCRIBE

[Home](#) [Markets](#) [Economy](#) [Banking & Finance](#) [Technology](#) [Impact Investing](#)
[Opinion](#) [Politics](#) [Research](#) [Conferences](#)

© 2020 - Businessday NG. All Rights Reserved.

Website Design: **BusinessDay Digital Team**