



LEADERS IN TRANSITION: STEPPING UP, NOT OFF

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*Ask any leader about the career moment in which he or she was learning more than at any other time. Most are quick to recall: Urgent crises, massive opportunities, huge projects, and impossible deadlines are all among the common scenarios in which rapid learning and personal growth happen the fastest. Also common to all of these scenarios is an element of the unknown . . . the exploration of unknown leadership territory, doing something that one has never done before, and under intense pressure. Ask the same group of people about the dominant emotions during these periods of rapid learning, and they'll tell you about the paradox: **excitement** for new challenges and **fear** of failure.*

It's true, we tend to learn most rapidly when we're under pressure. It's interesting, then, to notice that in today's environment we are advancing leaders up the ladder faster than ever before. As the findings in this report show, leaders' new roles necessitate rapid learning and that causes fear for those who step up to the challenge.

In the last decade or two, many organizations have had no choice but to accelerate the speed at which high performers are promoted. Across the globe, we face a widening gap between the demand for leadership, and

“Be prepared to see yourself change dramatically.”

– U.S. Leader

the supply of leaders ready to take on the challenges that must be conquered for their businesses to gain a competitive edge.

Few organizations are able to report that they have sufficient leadership to support their most pressing business needs. Business is more

complex, competition is fiercer, employees have higher expectations, and resources are scarce. Leadership isn't getting any easier.

Add the fact that most organizations have removed unneeded layers of leadership and non-essential leadership positions. Now, less experienced leaders from lower levels in the organization are asked to make tremendous leaps upward in leadership scope, into unfamiliar territory. It's no wonder that leadership failure happens at such a staggering rate. DDI's *Leadership Forecast 2005-2006* recently found that internally sourced leaders are failing a third of the time.

But being promoted is a good thing...right?

It is, so long as the newly promoted isn't blindsided by the challenges that come with making a transition. At each level, the leader's span of influence widens, from simply working through others on the people leader level, to managing a large group or organization and communicating on a large, multi-group scale. Tactical control also changes, with an emphasis on day-to-day operations in the beginning, and the necessity to abandon tactics in order to focus on strategy. The consequences of failure, the scope of business, degree of visibility, and size of their constituency all increase as leaders are promoted. And, there are significant personal transformations required of transitioning leaders as well. People leaders must let go of individual duties and learn that success comes not from what they personally accomplish, but what they accomplish through others. Operational leaders struggle for increased self-awareness, influence, and work/life balance as they direct bigger groups and strive for top spots. In those top spots, strategic leaders

“I have learned a lot from each position that has helped me prepare for the next possibility.”

– U.S. Leader

feel a sense of legacy, and must form the organization's culture and values. They also may feel more isolated, and see greater risks associated with all actions.

With these realities in mind, we set out to take a unique look at the issues, not from the perspective of the organizations, but from the perspectives of the people who are actually encountering these significant leadership transitions. What causes a leader to fail during transition? How do leaders themselves view their new roles? And what can your organization do to support the people that prime your pipeline? The findings in this report are based on a survey, conducted in conjunction with *World Business* magazine, of hundreds of managers in Asia, the Americas, and Europe in fall 2006.

The findings in this report focus on the responses of 385 leaders in the United States, with comparisons to their counterparts around the globe. Almost half of the organizations represented employ more than 10,000 people and 25 percent have revenues in excess of \$10 billion.

We surveyed three different types of leaders:

10.7 PERCENT HOLD STRATEGIC LEADER ROLES.

As a managing director, CEO, regional or group CEO, or president, this leader drives execution and carries a great deal of both responsibility and visibility.

27.5 PERCENT HOLD OPERATIONAL LEADER ROLES.

Often a leader of leaders, these managers are functional or business unit heads, in charge of a department or geographical area. They balance short-term functional concerns with a longer view on driving competitive advantage.

61.8 PERCENT HOLD PEOPLE LEADER ROLES.

Likely promoted as an outstanding individual contributor, these first-line or mid-level team leaders focus on day-to-day tactical accomplishments. To be successful, they need to learn to get results through others rather than relying solely on themselves.

From the responses of these leaders, we've highlighted 10 key findings.



FINDINGS AT-A-GLANCE

- 1 At all levels, making a transition is among life's most difficult personal challenges.
- 2 Transitional challenges are characterized by significant changes in the political network, job complexity, and human dynamics of the work environment, which cause tremendous stress.
- 3 Few leaders report making transitions effectively, though executives report feeling more effective than lower-level leaders.
- 4 As leaders make transitions, the biggest shifts in effort are in the areas of communicating, planning, and building the team.
- 5 In the U.S., influence and money top the list of motivations for people to take on leadership roles. However, money is less likely to motivate strategic leaders in the U.S., and all leaders outside the U.S.
- 6 Very few leaders feel that organizations are doing the right things to prepare their future leaders.
- 7 Who can help? The most important people to help leaders through transitions are one's boss and colleagues or peers.
- 8 How can organizations help those in transition? Leaders say "a clear sense of performance expectations" would have been most helpful in transitioning to new roles.
- 9 What can help? The skills leaders said would help them most included coaching, building strong teams, influencing, and dealing with complexity or ambiguity.
- 10 International experience is viewed as more important to U.S. strategic leaders and to leaders outside the U.S.

In the conclusion section, we address what individual leaders can do to prepare for transitions as well as what organizations need to do to provide the support leaders must have to transition effectively.

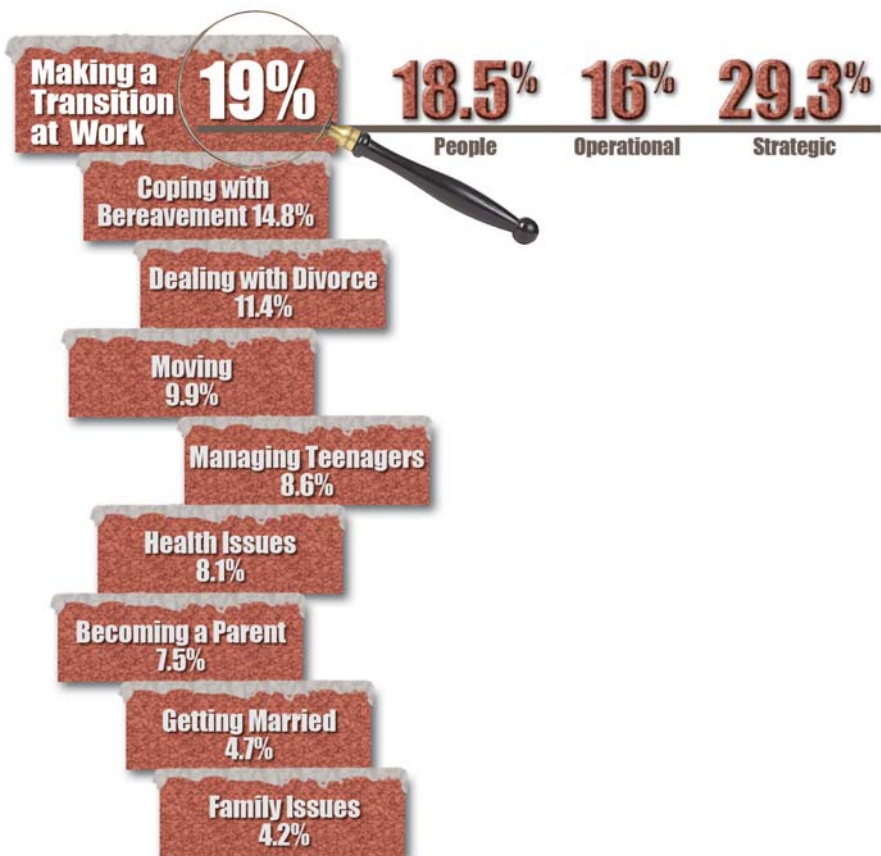
THE FINDINGS

FINDING 1:

AT ALL LEVELS, MAKING A LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IS AMONG LIFE'S MOST DIFFICULT PERSONAL CHALLENGES.

We asked leaders to rank a list of life's challenges in order of greatest difficulty. At all levels, making a leadership transition most frequently occupied the number one slot (see Table 1). Nearly one out of every five people leaders ranks it as the most challenging life event, and at the strategic level almost a third put it first on their list.

TABLE 1: RANKING LIFE'S CHALLENGES.



(Percentage of leaders choosing "Making a Leadership Transition" first on the list of challenges.)

Despite the stress, most leaders report the effects of transition to be positive (see Table 2). Significantly larger proportions report a positive effect as opposed to a negative one. At the senior level, this finding is more paradoxical. While more strategic leaders report a positive impact from being promoted, more also report a negative impact. The adage of "more risk, more reward" seems to hold true for executives.

TABLE 2: DID YOUR LATEST PROMOTION HAVE A POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE IMPACT ON YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?

WHAT KIND OF IMPACT DOES A PROMOTION MAKE?			
	People Leaders	Operational Leaders	Strategic Leaders
Positive	48.7%	41.5%	63.4%
Negative	16.4%	13.2%	19.5%

(Choices were positive, negative, or no impact.)

FINDING 2:

TRANSITIONAL CHALLENGES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL NETWORK, JOB COMPLEXITY, AND HUMAN DYNAMICS OF THE WORK ENVIRONMENT.

We asked leaders to choose their top three most difficult adjustments after taking the reins of their new positions (see Table 3). All 10 were chosen by at least a third of respondents.

TABLE 3: LEADERS RANK THE CHALLENGES THAT COME WITH A PROMOTION.

MOST DIFFICULT TRANSITIONAL ADJUSTMENTS	
Navigating organizational politics	64.9%
Dealing with ambiguity or uncertainty	55.5%
Getting work done through others	55.3%
Engaging and inspiring employees	46.0%
Creating a new network	42.6%
Managing high-risk decisions	40.2%
Representing the corporate line	37.7%
Learning to lead across borders	36.9%
Thinking strategically	36.1%
Giving up my reputation as an expert	32.8%

(Percentage of all leaders choosing, multiple selections per respondent.)

With each leadership transition, the landscape of work changes dramatically. Navigating organizational politics was the number one challenge at all levels, for both genders and also among global leaders. The common thread in the top-rated challenges is that they require the efforts of others to get results, or in other words, it is other people who present the challenges. Those challenges that are ranked lower are things a leader can accomplish alone—like thinking strategically or making high-risk decisions.

Looking at the pattern of responses, we see that each successive leadership transition creates a more demanding and ambiguous environment. Here, multiple agendas compete, necessitating a leader to become an influencer who stands above the fray and enables success. This is starkly opposed to the role of a high-performing individual “player” who may have the most technical capability in the group, and whose contribution is through direct involvement in “the work.” These transitional themes reflect a progressive loss of direct control over the work at hand, and a progressive increase in the necessity to play the game differently. Each transition takes the leader one step further from the actual work of the team or unit, and into a world where success is attained by strategy formulation, flawless execution, and maintaining strong internal and external networks.

FINDING 3:

FEW LEADERS REPORT MAKING TRANSITIONS EFFECTIVELY, THOUGH EXECUTIVES REPORT FEELING MORE EFFECTIVE THAN LOWER-LEVEL LEADERS.

In addition to asking leaders what challenges them, we asked them to rate how effective they have been in overcoming challenges detailed in Finding 2 (see Table 4).

TABLE 4:
COMPARISON
OF MOST
DIFFICULT
CHALLENGES AND
EFFECTIVENESS
IN OVERCOMING
THEM.

OVERCOMING THE GREATEST CHALLENGES		
Navigating organizational politics	64.9%	19.7%
Dealing with ambiguity or uncertainty	55.5%	22.3%
Getting work done through others	55.3%	33.8%
Engaging and inspiring employees	46.0%	35.6%
Creating a new network	42.6%	28.3%
Managing high-risk decisions	40.2%	29.6%
Representing the corporate line	37.7%	27.8%
Learning to lead across borders	36.9%	24.7%
Thinking strategically	36.1%	34.3%
Giving up my reputation as an expert	32.8%	25.7%

(Percentage of leaders rating each challenge as difficult (left column) and their ability to overcome a challenge as “very effective” (right column).)

The data indicate that, at best, only a third of leaders found themselves to be very effective at overcoming transitional challenges. Only one in five leaders report that they navigate organizational politics or deal with ambiguity very effectively. Again, we find that inspiring and getting work done through others are difficult hurdles.

We also observed a trend pertaining to leaders' confidence. Higher-level leaders report a greater sense of effectiveness than lower-level leaders. At the first level, people leaders were least likely to rate themselves as "very effective" (see Table 5). The opposite was true at senior levels, where strategic leaders reported much higher levels of confidence around their effectiveness (46.8 percent). Though faced with bigger challenges in their new roles, strategic leaders benefit from previous transitional experiences, which could contribute to their confidence.

TABLE 5:
LEADERS
RATING
THEMSELVES
AS "VERY
EFFECTIVE."



(Average of leaders' "very effective" ratings for the 10 challenges in Finding 2.)

FINDING 4:
AS LEADERS MAKE TRANSITIONS, THE BIGGEST SHIFTS IN EFFORT ARE IN THE AREAS OF COMMUNICATING, PLANNING, AND BUILDING THE TEAM.

More agendas, less personal control, more complexity...it stands to reason that when leaders transition, new skills will be required and more time will need to be spent on certain tasks. When we asked leaders how their time investments changed after transitioning, we found that the top five areas of increase are all critical leadership tasks that aid in or require working through others (see Table 6).

Leaders reported an increase in time spent on all 15 priorities on the list, but the smallest increases reported were for tasks the leader could accomplish alone, or that don't require the motivation of others to produce an end result (see Table 7).

TABLE 6 & 7: TIME SHIFTS: PROMOTIONS REQUIRE NEW PRIORITIES.



Communicating	64.7%
Planning	60.8%
Building a team	60.0%
Strategy	58.2%
Influencing	57.1%



External customers	23.6%
Other external stakeholders	20.5%
Selecting talent	18.7%
Networking	16.4%
Administration	14.5%

(Percentage of leaders choosing each; 15 possible choices, multiple choices per respondent.)

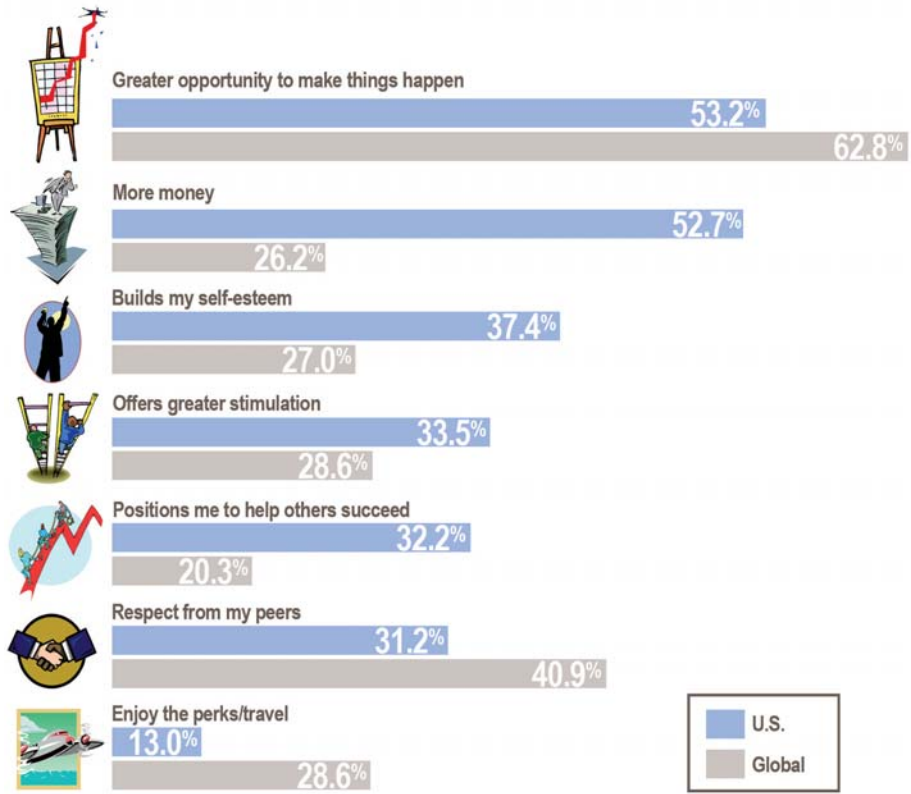
It may concern many that the most frequently reported reductions in time spent pertain to external customers and stakeholders—a sacrifice that, in concept, few would readily make. Yet this trend supports the perceived reality that upward leadership transitions pull leaders away from the actual “work.” More time is spent hovering “above” the work to build and communicate plans, establish a team to execute them, and clear a path through the organization to ensure that results can be sustained. Clearly this is a balancing act that requires considerable agility. Leaders must ensure that what is planned, communicated, and implemented is a reflection of customer and stakeholder needs, yet the demands of the transition seem to allow them less time with these constituents.

FINDING 5:

IN THE U.S., INFLUENCE AND MONEY TOP THE LIST OF MOTIVATIONS FOR PEOPLE TO TAKE ON LEADERSHIP ROLES. HOWEVER, MONEY IS LESS LIKELY TO MOTIVATE STRATEGIC LEADERS IN THE U.S., AND ALL LEADERS OUTSIDE THE U.S.

We asked leaders what aspect of a promotion gives them the greatest satisfaction (see Table 8). Looking across levels, we found that greater opportunity to make things happen was first, with money not far behind.

TABLE 8: WHAT MOTIVATES LEADERS TO TAKE THE PROMOTION?



(Percentage choosing, multiple selections per respondent.)

Increase in compensation was the number one response for U.S.-based people leaders and operational leaders. Looking deeper into the data, only a third of U.S.-based strategic leaders chose “money” as a motivator, while more than half chose “the opportunity to make things happen.” Why the difference at the strategic leader level? It stands to reason that as compensation rises with successive promotions, and as one reaches the upper percentiles of pay, this factor becomes less of a motivation. At lower levels of both leadership and pay, however, compensation increases may have a larger impact on the lifestyle that one can afford.

The difference across cultures, however, is more intriguing. (See Table 8 for global leaders’ responses to the same question of motivation.) Global leaders at all levels placed “making things happen” at the top of their motivation list (62.8 percent), and “money” ranked toward the bottom, with just 26.2 percent as opposed to U.S. leaders at 52.7 percent. While we don’t feel the data explains the differences, it is probable that American culture and tradition place more emphasis on compensation in the workplace.

YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ROLE

FINDING 6:

VERY FEW LEADERS FEEL THAT ORGANIZATIONS ARE DOING THE RIGHT THINGS TO PREPARE THEIR FUTURE LEADERS.

When asked how well their companies provide support to prepare leaders for a new transition, just 27.8 percent of American leaders indicate organizations were doing a good job overall.

We looked more closely at five best practices essential to successful transitions. In all areas, only 17 to 36 percent of leaders think their organizations effectively manage aspects of leadership transitions (see Table 9).

TABLE 9: RESPONDENTS RATE THEIR ORGANIZATIONS' ABILITY TO PREPARE LEADERS.



(Percentage of leaders rating organizations "effective" or "very effective.")

All too often, leaders are asked to assume a new role or level without the appropriate training and development activities. As such, they arrive unprepared and struggle to learn along the way, leading to high frustration and lost productivity. A close second: decisions around promotions. When organizations only use past behavior and experience to predict performance in a role with new demands/challenges, they will see an increase in promotion failure rates.

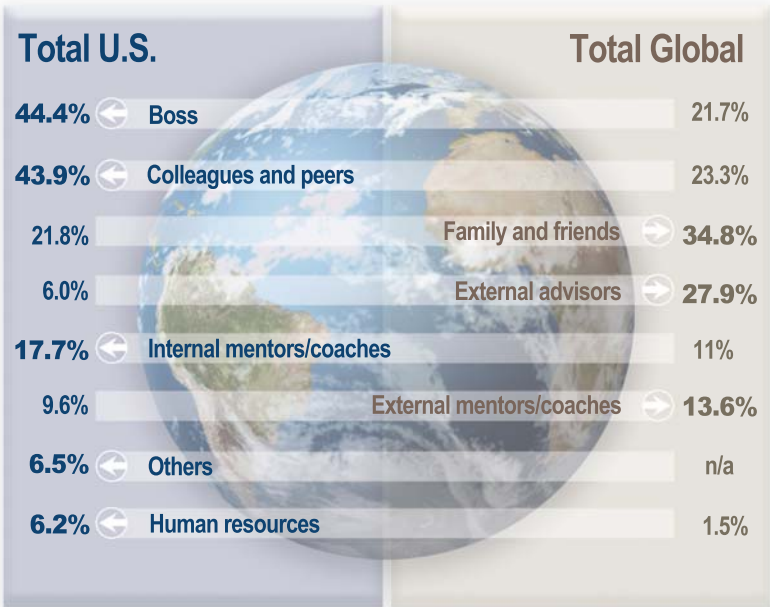
Though global leaders reported more confidence in the ability to identify high flyers, their confidence around developing leaders for the next promotion is significantly lower than that of their counterparts in the U.S. Several studies have shown that American-based corporations invest more in leadership development than organizations elsewhere in the world.

FINDING 7:

WHO CAN HELP? THE MOST IMPORTANT PEOPLE TO HELP U.S. LEADERS THROUGH TRANSITIONS ARE ONE’S BOSS AND COLLEAGUES OR PEERS.

Internal sources of support were overwhelmingly the most important ones for U.S. leaders (see Table 10). One’s boss was the top choice for people leaders, while operational and strategic leaders lean on colleagues or peers. HR, who might be expected to be a source of support, was second to last on the list for all levels of leadership, with 6 percent of U.S. leaders and just 1.5 percent of global leaders saying HR would have been helpful.

TABLE 10: WHO DO U.S. LEADERS TURN TO?



(Percent choosing, multiple selections per respondent.)

“Support from friends and family” was the number one choice by global leaders with 34.8 percent of the responses, followed by “external advisors” with 27.9 percent.

This data reveals a clear trend: U.S. leaders look internally for support, while global leaders look to outside resources. In our experience, U.S. leaders feel safe expressing professional challenges with coworkers. They are encouraged to involve those around them in the quest for solutions, and have open dialogues with colleagues and managers. Abroad, leaders want to be perceived by peers as strong or confident. Openness with coworkers could threaten this image or lead to professional consequences, so external sources are a safer place to discuss workplace challenges. Whether the source is internal or external, confidants serve the same purpose: helping leaders tackle the uncertainty that comes with a transition.

FINDING 8:

HOW CAN ORGANIZATIONS HELP THOSE IN TRANSITION? LEADERS SAY “A CLEAR SENSE OF PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS” WOULD HAVE BEEN MOST HELPFUL IN TRANSITIONING TO NEW ROLES.

TABLE 11:
WHAT WOULD HAVE HELPED THE MOST IN YOUR LAST TRANSITION?



As in previous findings, leaders reported a struggle against ambiguity and uncertainty. As they progress upward, expectations are presented with less and less clarity. Routes to success become more blurred. Respondents told us convincingly that more clarity of expectations would have helped (see Table 11).

Looking at the pattern of the top five things that would have helped the most, it is clear that leaders feel they need a better understanding of what success looks like, and guidance in how to approach it. Models, ways of thinking, training, and coaching from one’s boss are top on the wish list. The message seems to be, “Help me understand what’s expected of me by showing me what you mean, and spending time with me to help me understand.” They yearn for clarity around their priorities and expectations followed by a fair amount of leeway to get their job done.

Other welcomed sources of support include better role models and orientation of the shifts in thinking required for success.

FINDING 9:

WHAT CAN HELP? THE SKILLS LEADERS SAID WOULD HELP THEM MOST INCLUDED COACHING, BUILDING STRONG TEAMS, INFLUENCING, AND DEALING WITH COMPLEXITY OR AMBIGUITY.

TABLE 12: SKILLS MOST WANTED FOR TRANSITION BY LEVEL.

	Overall	People	Operational	Strategic
Coaching/developing others	35.6%	42%	25.5%	24.4%
Building strong teams	33.8%	37.4%	27.4%	29.3%
Influencing skills	30.6%	34.5%	27.4%	17.1%
Deal with complexity/ambiguity	30.1%	31.9%	28.3%	24.4%
Managing performance	26.8%	28.6%	25.5%	19.5%
Create & share inspiring vision	24.4%	21.4%	30.2%	26.8%
Strategic thinking ability	22.6%	21.8%	25.5%	19.5%
Networking skills	21.6%	17.2%	25.5%	36.6%
Selecting talent	16.6%	15.5%	15.1%	26.8%
Financial training	8.8%	8.8%	8.5%	9.8%
Business acumen	8.3%	7.6%	7.5%	14.6%
Global acumen	4.2%	1.3%	6.6%	14.6%

*(Percentage choosing, multiple selecting per respondent.
Bold figures are top response for each level of leaders.)*

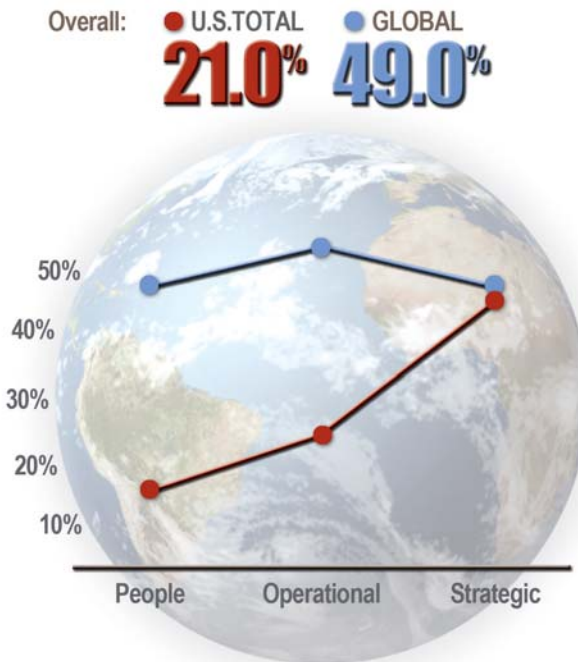
We see once again that working through others dominates top-rated skills needed in making transitions (see Table 12). Coaching others, building teams, influencing, and managing performance are all skills directly associated with the shift to a focus on the contributions of others. Far less important are the skills associated with individual effectiveness, such as business acumen or financial training.

Interesting shifts also occur as one climbs the leadership ladder. For people leaders, coaching, team building, and influencing top the list of wanted skills. A shift occurs at the senior level, however, when networking becomes the most desired skill. For operational and strategic leaders, creating and sharing an inspiring vision also ranks close to the top.

As we'll see again in the next finding, global acumen is more important to strategic leaders, with 14.6 percent valuing the skill as opposed to just 1.3 percent of people leaders. Global leaders at all levels place similar importance on this skill, with 16.8 percent of them choosing it.

FINDING 10:**INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IS VIEWED AS MORE IMPORTANT TO U.S. STRATEGIC LEADERS AND TO LEADERS OUTSIDE THE U.S.**

Our survey asked leaders to rate how international experience could have helped them make their transition (see Table 13). Once again, it was important to U.S. strategic leaders and all levels of leaders in our global survey, but not quite as important to lower levels of leaders.

TABLE 13: WHO SEES A BENEFIT FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE?

(Percentage of leaders rating international experience as “helpful” or “very helpful.”)

Emphasis on international experience for strategic leaders both internationally and domestically makes sense. Few high-level leaders in major corporations have roles that lack a significant international component. While multinationals may represent a smaller proportion of U.S.-based leaders, the numbers are still substantial. Our experience tells us that it is far more likely for leaders from abroad to have a greater need and a greater inclination for global perspectives.

This stands to reason since non-US leaders, especially in Europe, are routinely traveling and operating between many different cultures and countries. The necessity to become experienced across these cultures seems likely to be influencing the different perceptions of value placed on international assignments between US and global leaders in this research.

CONCLUSIONS:

This study did not look at organizations. We looked at the leaders who will make those organizations successful, and asked them about their perspectives. Much of what these leaders told us are things organizations should take to heart.

Politics + Complexity + Loss of Control = A Difficult Transition

This research brings forward the observation that leadership transitions are among the most stressful moments in life. Why? As one moves successively into higher levels of leadership, the world becomes far more political; cluttered with competing agendas, egos, reputations, and a great deal of intellect. Simply knowing what needs to be done is not sufficient to be successful. Leaders must also learn to operate within a highly complex environment in which accountabilities are ill-defined, competition for resources is fierce, and the routes to success must be determined anew with each new assignment. As you rise up the ladder, your boss is less and less likely to show you the way.

Compound these complexities with the ever-increasing separation of the leader from the operation, or “the work.” The higher level the leader, the more distant the operation becomes. Also consider that the de-layering of organizations means that many leadership promotions result in huge, instantaneous leaps in the scope of responsibility. This can be jarring to even the most talented professionals, whose success often results from their personal contributions to the operation, such as sales, technical proficiency, creativity, or any other critical competency. To many, it comes as a hard lesson, learned through trial and error, that rising through the ranks means leaving behind one’s reputation as an individual contributor, and developing a reputation as one who develops new individual contributors. Letting go is difficult and stressful for any leader, and crippling for the ones who don’t recognize the need to do so.

Respondents said unequivocally that they could use more help in making these stressful and challenging transitions. So what is it that organizations can do to help? The first and most important lever uncovered in this research (and supported by our experience) is the bosses or managers of leaders in transition. Leaders told us they need more time with their managers to establish clarity in their accountabilities, and to see what success looks like. If we were to sum up the collective plea of leaders, it would sound like this: “Help me understand what success is going to look like in my new role, show me with examples, help me think differently so I can apply these things to the development of my people and the appropriate influencing of the organization.” Support from peers is a close second. Leaders are asking to learn from others who are tackling the same challenges, and benefit from their experiences.

Interestingly, these concepts can not be taught in a training program or coached by an external coach. Outsourcing these crucial teaching moments will likely result in the main needs being missed. It's up to bosses or other direct management to help newly promoted leaders see what challenges lie ahead, and connect them to others dealing with similar challenges.

Given that difficulty, organizations and leaders are not providing the support and guidance leaders need to be more successful. This leads to higher stress, failure, and turnover... and ineffective management.

So what can be done about it?

WHAT LEADERS CAN DO:

GET REAL

Leadership transitions can be dicey, and perhaps the most paralyzing mistake is the failure to recognize them as such. Leaders in transition are

“I sometimes miss the clarity of the task-driven work versus the general responsibility to create value.”

– Global Leader

often riding the wave of prior successes as they begin their new roles, but there is serious danger in assuming that what made one successful in a prior role will make one successful again.

Clearly, leaders must tune into their key strengths and leverage them, but leaders in transition must also look courageously and honestly inward to understand their own leadership vulnerabilities.

The higher level the leader, the more risk of derailment, and, therefore, the more need to mitigate the risk. Knowing one's vulnerabilities and how to compensate for them is essential.

GET DATA

Leaders can make use of well-validated assessment approaches to gain insight into their own leadership patterns. It's critical for every leader to recognize that there are some things you can change about yourself, and some things you can't change. Knowing the difference is the trick—and objective, validated assessment can help.

GET FEEDBACK

The most successful leaders are hungry for learning and feedback. In fact, a personal “board of directors” can be a leader's most valuable personal tool. Putting a network of key people in place that offer advice and feedback is time well spent. Feedback should not be gathered at a single point in time, but rather it should be ongoing, embedded in the way one operates as a leader. Leaders in transition often report the magnitude of the new role to be overwhelming. It is precisely during these overwhelming moments that feedback is most helpful. Establishing the network of feedback providers and a routine for gathering their insights will ensure that the most important feedback gets to the leader at the right time.

GET INSIDE

Just as a routine for gathering others' feedback is essential, so too is a routine for self-examination. Learning one's own habits and patterns—and working on ways to enhance performance to better suit new demands—is the essence of personal development and is a hallmark of leaders who make transitions successfully. With self honesty, good assessment support, and feedback from others, self insight is vastly aided and improved. It is ultimately a task that requires judgment of one's own behavior purely from within, done in the quiet of one's own mind. The courage and independence required to exact this sort of self-evaluation stands as a good preparatory exercise for leaders in transition who will soon find themselves needing the same courage to determine how best to tackle their new leadership assignments.

WHAT ORGANIZATIONS CAN DO:

PICK THE RIGHT PEOPLE

These survey results clearly illuminate the reality that leadership transitions represent a distinct departure from prior assignments. The requirements for success change substantially with each successive transition. Yet we find many organizations using little or no process for determining who is ready to take on more responsibility. Choosing the right leaders means assessing candidates against the *Success ProfileSM* of the future role or level. Success Profiles shift in complexity as leadership roles increase in responsibility.

The critical element to promoting the right leaders is to focus on measuring “transitional skills.” Transitional skills are those competencies that were not necessary for success at a prior leadership level, but will be necessary for success at the next level. Understanding key transitional skills is pivotal to make effective promotion decisions and put the right leaders in place.

Many of our clients use a comprehensive assessment process to gauge readiness for leadership positions, matching the depth of assessment with the complexity of the leadership roles in question. A common mistake is to rely too heavily on past performance to predict one's ability to make a successful transition. Assessment centers (which include simulations) are of particular value in this case because they present leaders with challenges that they have not faced in the past. This allows organizations to observe leaders in future-focused scenarios, and gather information on how successful leaders will likely be in applying key transitional skills.

DEFINE TRANSITIONS

To be more successful in making transitions, leaders told us that their number one need is clarity—clarity around the expectations of leadership, and clear models of success. Organizations can work to define transitions by clarifying the shifts in knowledge, experience, competencies, and personal attributes required for success at the various leadership levels. Once we know what shifts are necessary, we can give leaders clear previews.

Previews can come in the form of orientation, transition training, or assessment in an environment similar to the one they will encounter in their new role. Numerous alternatives are available to offer greater exposure to the world that lies ahead. Leaders report tremendous stress in making transitions, likely due to the unknown nature of the means to success. Taking the time to provide emerging leaders with insight into the demands of future roles is likely to reduce a great deal of this stress and put leaders in a more advantageous position upon entry in their new roles.

PROVIDE SUPPORT

It's evident that few leaders will be effective in making transitions if left on their own. Organizations who adopt the “sink or swim” mentality introduce more risk of leaders derailing in transitions. More than anything, we heard leaders asking for more help from their managers, and more clarity around what success looks like and how it should be measured. Clearly, providing training for the managers of those in transition can make a difference. Basic skills associated with future-focused development planning, coaching for success, and maximizing others' potential can be enhanced through training.

“I think having a network of colleagues to talk to is very important.”

– U.S. Leader

Organizations can also facilitate formal peer-to-peer networks—and encourage informal ones—to give people a support system. Increasing the frequency and level of the dialogue about leadership transitions can help to demystify unforeseen challenges that leaders may face, and present alternative ways of tackling the toughest issues.

At more senior levels, external coaching can also play a role in helping leaders make successful transitions. Taking nothing from the criticality of internal support, executives often need the independent counsel of one not embroiled in the organization's politics to effectively gauge the best means of making a transition. External coaches can gather and/or organize information from the environment on how a transition is progressing, and can reflect objectively on how the leader's unique leadership tendencies are enabling or derailing success. Coaches can also build and monitor clear, simple plans to help leaders measure and track their progress as they establish new routines and become engaged with new people and assignments. Fundamentally, external coaches are independent, unbiased resources who offer insight, honesty, reflections, guidance, and gentle pressure.

A FINAL THOUGHT

Whether we're ready or not, the global shortage of leadership supply will perpetuate, and likely accelerate the rate at which less-experienced leaders are promoted into roles of greater responsibility. More and more, larger organizational entities will be led by people whose background and training leaves them ill-equipped for the challenges they will face. Leaders will encounter more stress, and they will continue to struggle to conquer the new and unfamiliar territory of bigger, higher-risk roles and responsibilities.

But fortunately, there are relatively straightforward ways that we can intervene to increase the rate of success in conquering these challenges. Organizations can take action to promote the right leaders by assessing their transitional skills prior to promotion, painting clear pictures of what lies ahead, and getting managers (bosses) involved in the dialogue with transitioning leaders so that they can help to clarify how success should be defined.

Individual leaders must recognize that leadership transitions require reexamination of their own strengths and vulnerabilities. Most will feel jarred by the changing political dynamics and the complexity of their roles. They will likely feel as though they have less control, and will need to find ways to put trust and capability into the hands of those who report to them. They must, with each successive step upwards, seek information about how they can apply their skills in new ways to the changing world around them. To assume that what worked before will work again is perhaps the quickest route to failure. Having a network of colleagues and peers who can provide feedback, guidance, and insight is an essential element to successful transition.

Perhaps our most significant observation from this research is that both individuals and organizations stand to gain tremendously by taking a closer look at what it means to make a leadership transition, and to abandon the traditional "sink or swim" mentalities and practices that have characterized past environments. Simply acknowledging that leadership transitions represent a far more significant career event than may have been recognized in the past is a start. But taking action to educate, communicate, and provide training, coaching, and guidance to those struggling with leadership transitions can clearly make a dramatic impact on the success rates of newly promoted leaders, and can help to build the more stable leadership pipeline that organizations need to enable competitive advantage.

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