

Developing Middle Managers into Senior Leaders

Introduction

Froth at the top, dregs at bottom, but the middle excellent

-Voltaire

Listening to today's corporate world, the above saying doesn't seem to be true, instead the story of middle managers is waking out of their slumber in the middle of the ocean realizing that their ship is about to run out of fuel.

The slowing of economic growth in India and a not so bright economic scenario in most parts of the world has presented unique challenges for leaders at all levels and the middle layer is no exception.

The skills and mindset acquired, nurtured and applied by the middle managers in many of the industries seem to be either insufficient or inappropriate to deal with today's challenges for e.g. In some of the fast growing industries few years back employees were hired and rewarded largely for their ability to meet or exceed the target number. This achievement almost guaranteed the next designation because of the growth of the overall industry. Today the same middle manager has to still meet those target numbers in a sluggish environment, keep maximum stakeholders happy, build appreciation for many other factors e.g. compliance etc and still accept the fact that the volatility of today's world can hit him/her and his/her team anytime.

To prepare today's middle managers to be tomorrow's senior leaders is challenging, intriguing and fascinating because of the sheer amount of variables that one needs to deal with yet being open to the idea that most of it may not get the expected returns.

The world of people development is toying and experimenting with many novel ideas, Thanks to the world of internet and social media. The latest in the genre seem to be the concept of pervasive learning (3/33) model. In an era where the business models become redundant every quarter, leaders want to deliver quickly and economically and employees are expected to be intrapreneurs, the old ways of people development are also being examined and challenged.

One such people development process is coaching which is in its incipient stage in a lot of countries. The merits and demerits of this process still seem to be debatable; however a lot of organizations agree that in today's VUCA world, one of the most promising ways of people development can be coaching applied in different shapes and forms.



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Development journey from Middle manager to Senior leader

What matters the most in this area is the intent and then the execution to make it possible.

Organizations and senior leaders seems to have some degree of caution in promoting people from within to senior leadership roles because of the risk associated with it and the risks get heightened if the complexity in the role is fairly high. The preferred option many a times (debatably) is hiring someone from outside where the immediate risk apparently seems to be lesser. However to ensure smooth and quick transitioning to the new role as well as culture, coaching is one of the most effective ways as it allows individuals to open up and share their vulnerabilities and assumptions and in the process test and get over with some of the perceptions and constraints. A lot of companies therefore have an on-boarding/transitioning coaching as a part of their talent development strategy for senior roles.

Sandeep Girhotra : *"We need a fundamental shift in our thinking, why don't we take risks with our own people, at times processes limits people to move up, how can we accelerate the movement? Taking risk is one such example"*

Lipika Verma *"Internally we can prepare people for senior roles to a certain percentage lets say 60% , still organization has to hire people from outside for the remaining 40%. It gets difficult to integrate people from outside, that's where coaching comes into the picture."*

When we study today's middle managers, the situation in most of the cases is similar to a swimmer who only knows how to remain afloat and till now the tides and the water current helped him/her to move forward. Now the water is calm and still (or worst, the tide is in the opposite direction) and to move ahead, skills of grabbing and pressing are also required other than simply remaining afloat. Middle managers of today need to understand the changing reality and mould their beliefs that the earlier idea of performance in a narrow or a limited sense will not guarantee future success and therefore confronting today's reality, shedding past success baggage and formula as well as building openness and courage to learn and experiment with new things and ways is the only option to move forward in this VUCA world. It is here that coaching can contribute immensely because it not only works at the level of building skills and capabilities but also works at the motivation, inhibitions and beliefs front.

Sandeep Girhotra: *"Till now we have mostly evaluated people on performance linked to growth, can we look something beyond performance? Balancing performance and potential together is the requirement of the future."*

Whose need is it anyway?

The need to develop middle managers into Sr leaders gets interesting when different stakeholders involved share or express their reason behind it. For the top leadership team, which is more outward/customer centric, the margin pressure and ways of retaining/increasing the customer share is the fundamental driving force. This need translates into creating seamless customer experience which invariably means end of the verticalization era within organizations. The top leadership therefore wants middle and senior leaders to be open and appreciative of this reality and demonstrate collaborative and solution centric mindset and capabilities.

Bimal Rath: *It appears that the intersection between the agendas of senior leadership, HR and middle managers with respect to developing middle managers is relatively small, there is a strong need to broaden it*

The HR fraternity within the organizations is trying its level best to catch up with the pace of business demands and uncertainty associated with it. The methods and processes of leadership development are often at best conventional and at worst anachronistic. There is an added challenge of budget constraints and also each HR initiative's need of being perceived as strategic in its approach. In global/transnational organizations, where there is a matrix structure, the complexity further increases as there are a host of agendas and one need to strike a balance between standardization and customization.

Saurabh Upadhyay: *Development is a broader issue, coaching should enable a person to be deeply centered. Our attempt as HR professionals should be to coach CEOs and senior leaders to realize this".*

The middle manager, who seems to be at crossroads, wants to move quickly to the next level. Middle managers also look for an intersection of their aspiration, capability and fulfillment in their work. They are proficient with technology, socially well connected via internet, receive a lot of information and lead a generation (Gen Y & Millennial) that is weaned on the diet of choices, options and risk taking. Finding some semblance and clearly communicating a common agenda is the need of the hour when we plan to create a meaningful middle management development charter. In a scenario where there is so much flux and high pressure, coaching can not only act as a credible professional development process but many a times acts as a self-clarification process that provides clarity, confidence and self-centeredness which is the basic fabric required to perform senior leadership roles.

Sanjay Chaturvedi: *"The true value of development gets realized when we are able to find a sweet spot between aspiration, availability and adaptability and coaching helps in this area"*



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The Rainbow of people development –Value of Coaching

Ways of developing people for the present and the future has undergone a lot of change. From an era where people development meant specific number of training hours to be covered, it has moved to a level where organizations are advocating and living the principle of each employee being the CEO of his/her career. The ownership, independence and choice of development now rest on the employees. This shift in approach towards people development has also resulted in the new models that are better aligned to the requirements of the new age workforce. One such framework is 3-33 Pervasive Learning model. It divides learning into formal, informal & social categories and utilizes traditional methods like physical classrooms along with technology tools like podcasts, Webjam, microblogging etc. The new models not only create newer ways of developing people but also open up the opportunity of offering traditional development methods in new, scalable and economic platforms.

The prevalent model of people development (70/20/10) clearly indicates that people need to apply their learning to fine-tune it further and deeply embed it in their behavior and thinking. It also highlights the fact that coaching is an important tool of development however, the long lasting and deeper benefits are realized when it is combined strategically with other tools of development. As one of the studies conducted by Personnel Management Association reveals that while ordinary training typically increases productivity by 22%, training combined with life coaching increases productivity by 88%.

Nature and meaning of coaching

Coaching in the corporate world conjures up different images in the minds of the professionals. At one level it is about why is the service being deployed- Is it to fix a problem or to develop/prepare someone. At another level it is about who should deliver it and lastly it is about how- the manner in which we deploy coaching service.

General consensus with respect to the Why question is that in most of the developing economies, coaching is deployed largely to address a capability gap (though there are a few exceptions), in the developed world where coaching is being practiced for more than two decades, the reason for deploying the service is largely developmental in nature. The maturity of a market in terms of understanding the service also reflects in the quality of coaches, expectations from the organization and the coachee from the service and the price points at which the service is available (the last point has a lot of other variables impacting it). Growth or stability (in sector, business, portfolio, market etc) also is a key factor as the needs during these two times are very different. Any development mechanism including coaching at a thematic level will play a different role during these two scenarios.

Rahul Goswami: “When you are growing aspirations are different as compared to when you are in a stable phase. Also, different portfolios grow differently. When you are not growing as a business, you are at times asking for self development to play a bigger role.”

Gurmohan Singh: “Nature of coaching depends on environment, company and business context”



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Coaching Internally vs Externally

There are different opinions about coaching getting done by an external coach vis-a vis internal one. Some believe that for senior leaders an external coach can really provide great value because at senior levels it is less about capability building and more about bouncing off a few ideas, acting as a mirror and sounding board, helping the coachee to look at things from a new perspective and many a times these can be sensitive and delicate discussions.

For middle managers the opinion seems to be divided, some leaders feel that internal coaches who are familiar with the culture, strategy and business can really help the managers to develop and move to the next level within the system, others feel that even for the middle managers, an external coach can be of tremendous value as it provides a non threatening environment to open up and discuss controversial/sensitive issues without any conflict of interest and it also helps the coachee to come up with some fresh/out of the box perspectives.

Rohit Thakur: *"You really cannot differentiate between external and internal coaching. It is important how you build coaching capability inside your organization. In coaching done by an external coach, relevance of coaching, matching of wavelength and what will coachee get out of the intervention is important."*

Deepak Bharara: *"Both internal and external coaching's acceptability is high. For senior leader the preferred option is an external coach, to get an outside view. For middle managers go for internal coaches as you are preparing them for multiple positions and varied portfolios."*

The How question is a debatable one, there are organizations and leaders that strongly believe that every manager should be a coach and should be able to do timely structured coaching discussion as well as can coach employees on the go. There are other leaders who believe that the real benefit of coaching gets realized when it happens in a systematic, organized and protracted manner with clearly defined goal(s). While answering this question one also needs to look at the demographics and the psychographics of the new middle managers. Many of them are always on the move (due to the nature of their work), they learn and get influenced a lot by social communities and friends/peers. The currently prevalent method of coaching where 60-90 mins are exclusively devoted in a room with a coach (usually an elderly figure) may not be the most appropriate, acceptable and effective development methodology with the new crop of middle managers.

Anusha Suryanarayan: *"One needs to be clear about who are the people coming to middle management, what do they want-spending 60-80 minutes in a room or social communities."*

Dr.V.P Singh: *"There are multiple models and methods of coaching. Its like having a dinner –Can we term grabbing a burger and Pepsi as dinner, or having a seven course meal in candlelight is the only definition of dinner"*

Leadership levels and the meaning of development

More often than not, senior leaders value and take enormous pride in their past success. There is nothing wrong in celebrating past success and achievements, however many a times, this in itself becomes a sort of mental barrier which roughly translates into “I have already arrived and therefore any form of development including coaching may have no or very limited value for me” However the same set of senior leaders usually are very gung-ho about getting their next line coached or developed (most of the times to fix the issues and problems!). At times the conventional view of the life stage in which many of the senior leaders are, impacts or limits the professional hunger to stretch, test the boundary limit and take risks (although we see some exceptions). The two possibilities that emerge are either the senior leaders are sure about their skills and capabilities, mostly based on the past success, to move to the next level or because of their life stage are contented with their achievements or are unwilling/apprehensive to open the next professional chapter of their lives. In both these cases the openness to learn and develop using any method including coaching is limited. The ones who don’t believe in either of the two possibilities are able to galvanize themselves, their teams and organizations to move to the next growth orbit.

P.N Sukla: “My own impression is senior leaders (likes of the Head of the Departments) think that they have travelled quite a bit and therefore in most of the cases, hunger is limited. In the middle rung there is hunger to grown and achieve. They are going through some degree of value flux”

Sandeep Girhotra: “You got to have a mindset of being a coach to get one into your organization”

Middle managers are open to the idea of getting development inputs and support. They realize that the journey ahead is a difficult one which requires a lot of unlearning and relearning. Their global connectivity helps them in becoming aware of the trends and requirements of the current and future workplace. Most of them are eager to move ahead in their careers and they want to move really fast. Some of them have also realized the long term virtue of combining their strengths/talents, aspirations with the job requirements. In small pockets, there is also a strong sense of entrepreneurial spirit which is simmering inside today’s middle managers which is encouraging them either to venture out on their own (if they are not able to find purpose and meaning in their jobs) or experiment within their roles/jobs to create a greater sense of engagement. The organizations neither want their best of the talent at the middle level to leave or to become disengaged. This issue is very well addressed through coaching as it allows individuals to discover and unleash their potential in a manner which contributes to the organization and energizes the individual.

Suraj Choudhry : “When you water the tree, you don’t look for immediate and equal results from all sides. Don’t treat coaching as a quick fix.”

Praneet Mehrish: “Middle managers are asking for coaching intervention. Top leadership is unsure about the returns, for them at times it is an expensive proposition.”



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Developing the workforce and balancing the budgetary requirements at times appear as contradictory forces. However with the new formats of coaching e.g. group coaching coming into picture, it offers economical yet effective coaching opportunities for the middle level. People Development should be looked at from a long term perspective specially when it's the question of preparing future senior leaders who will be taking critical judgment calls for the business and the organization.

Suresh Munjal: *"The bigger issue is , growing up v/s growing old and the corollary to this is do organizations grow leaders or leaders grow the organisations."*

Conclusion

Developing middle managers into senior leaders is seen as a business imperative by most of the organizations. The nature of work and learning preferences has changed significantly therefore ways of developing and also areas in which development is required needs to be reassessed. The power of technology and social communities is to be leveraged more meaningfully while creating a learning environment. Different forms of development including coaching needs to come up with new and innovative formats to meet the requirements of a new, success hungry, tech savvy and anxious middle management population.

Coaching can act as a powerful developmental process as it allows the coachee to not only build capabilities/skills but to reflect about various aspects of professional life in a guided manner with a confidante and arrive at a deeper understanding about self and the context of work. In that sense it is unique as it helps individuals in integrating better with their inner self and their outside world in a more informed and aware manner. The real power of coaching lies in enabling professionals make informed decisions and choices about themselves and their careers. In today's consumerist world with abundance of choices in almost all areas of life, one of the biggest benefits of coaching lies in providing an internal compass to professionals so that they can take charge and navigate their professional journey with courage and aplomb.

Bimal Rath: *"People see coaching as an organizational process with a structure, I see it as a philosophy of development."*

Participants Profiles

Anusha Suryanarayan

Global Head – Talent Management , Ranbaxy

A graduate in Psychology from Lady Shri Ram College Delhi, and a Masters in Business Administration in Human Resources from XLRI, Jamshedpur, Anusha has over 13 years of experience in Human Resources.

Anusha started her career with Coca Cola India, and then moved on to United Nations Development Program, India as Head of HR. Post that she was with Sapient Corporation as head of People Strategy before joining Nokia where she is currently the Head of Sales and Marketing HR India.

Anusha enjoys working on anything related to Talent Management, Organizational Development, Change Management and Leadership development. In her many roles, she has led multiple programs related to career development, employee engagement, Asia talent development program to name a few. Her passion towards her work not only drives her to excellence but also others around her.

On the personal front, Anusha is married to Akshay. She enjoys reading, listening to music, plays guitar and works with various NGOs where she loves to teach music to the children out there

Gurmohan Singh, Head Human Resources, BPTP Ltd.

Gurmohan heads Human Resources at BPTP Ltd, a leading company in NCR's real estate. With its impressive portfolio of contemporary commercial, residential, IT park and retail development, the company is spearheading the growth and expansion of the real estate Sector. Gurmohan's last assignment was with Uninor as Associate Vice President - People & Organization.

Lipika Verma Director - Rewards, Schneider Electric

Lipika has done several assignments in HR Business partnering roles as well as specialised roles in the areas of Compensation & Benefits. Strategic player in the business, as member of the HR Leadership team. Have been involved in operational Human Resources, project management, also led some strategic global projects. Have experience in mergers and acquisitions as well. Sharp in execution with strong project management skills and have worked extensively across industries in Human Resources.

Dr. V.P Singh

Executive Director – Human Resources , R J Corp.

A Ph.D. in organization effectiveness has written more than 20 research papers and was a Study Fellow with University of Leeds UK in 80's. He has been visiting faculty with reputed business schools and is a member of the Advisory Council of Asia Retail Congress 2012. He is involved in planning and monitoring interventions to enhance organization capabilities at macro level and Build People Centric Organisation. With more than 38 years of experience he is a constant inspiration to the Devyani International Limited family.

Rohit Thakur

Senior HR Director , Microsoft

Rohit is an alumnus from XLRI Jamshedpur & Shri Ram College of Commerce. He has over 20+ years of experience. He has been associated with organizations like GE , Cadence , Bausch & Lomb & Eicher. He brings diverse experience in the field of compensation & benefits , performance management , employee engagement , talent acquisition & succession planning.

Sandeep Girotra

Senior Vice President & Head-Global Human Resources , Ranbaxy

Sandeep Girotra is a graduate in Commerce and has done his Master's in Personnel Management and Industrial Relations from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. He has over 20 years of rich experience, working in various organisations in India and abroad like SIEL Limited, DuPont India, General Electric and Convergys Corporation. Mr. Girotra has successfully built and led strong teams across various geographies and has considerable knowledge and functional expertise in the core areas of Human Resource Strategy, Leadership Development, Talent Management and Human Resource operations.

Saurabh Upadhyay

Director - Human Resources, India and South East Asia , Bacardi

Saurabh Upadhyay has been with Bacardi since June 2010 and working as an Director - Human Resources. As Head of HR for Bacardi, he own and drive the people strategy of the organization. Currently he is focused on Capability Enhancement, Talent Development and Organizational Design. Saurabh was associated with Nokia, TAS, and Tata Motors. Prior to working with Bacardi as a Director, he was Head HR for Markets Organization of Nokia India, this included functions like Sales, Marketing, Services, Logistics, Finance and Control, Legal and Government Relations etc.



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Deepak Bharara,
Director- Corporate HR, LANCO Infratech Ltd

Deepak Bharara is Director – Corporate HR of Lanco Infratech Ltd and takes care of people processes across the Group. With over three decades of experience with multinationals and big business Indian groups, he has held leadership positions at Eicher Tractors Ltd, Indian Express Group, Samtel India Ltd, Whirlpool India Ltd, Bharti Group, Jindal Steel, Aditya Birla Group and GMR. He has a Masters degree from Faculty of Management Studies (FMS) with specialization in HR & People Management. He is an LL.B from Delhi University. He is well versed with Infrastructure Industry & its processes to achieve operational efficiencies with customer service orientation approach aligned with commercial acumen.

P N Shukla
Independent Consultant & Visiting Faculty

P.N. Shukla brings a set of diverse experiences spanning over 45 years in HR. He has worked as a corporate executive, a trainer, a faculty in prestigious institutions in the country and as a HR consultant. His managerial experience in the functional leadership roles in Indian Oil Corporation, in AVBirla Group and Escorts Group was focused on large scale change management, leadership development, training, competency assessment, and performance management. His association with prestigious institutions (such as JBIMS and NMIMS in Mumbai, MDI, IIFT, LBSIM in Delhi) as a visiting faculty enriched his functional leadership role and benefited his operational experience.

Praneet Mehrish
Sr. Vice President, Corporate Human Resources, The Karan Thapar Group

Praneet is a human resource professional. He has over three decades of experience in Strategic and Operational HR, career spread across Blue chip and Global organizations . His Corporate assignments in India the Country HR Director in Oracle Corporation and in ST Micro electronics ,the Global Head of HR for Essar Steel and Group HR Head in the Karan Thapar Group. He has valuable hands on experience in a diverse Industry portfolio which includes Steel ,Automobiles ,Tyres, Information Technology, High Tech (Semiconductors), Engineering and Process Industries. His focus in recent years has been on Top Leadership Talent Acquisition, Organisational and Management revamp, Building and maturing Management teams, Executive Coaching, Compensation restructuring ,Key Talent Management, Succession Planning and Change management interventions.

Suraj Choudhry
Founder ,Woodruff Advisory Services

Suraj is a strong proponent of team work who believes everyone has inherent strengths and something to contribute. He has established his independent consulting practice, Woodruff Advisory Services. His work has been in the area of enhancing business performance through best practices and leadership team facilitation. He has over 17 years of intense industrial experience, on a significant international and multi-functional scale. His experience has been with companies like IBM, GE, Bharti Airtel and Idea



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Cellular. His senior management assignments, with global leadership and responsibilities, included Sales and Business Development, Management Big 4 and Strategy Planning.

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Suresh Munjal

Director , Braahmam Net Solutions

Suresh Munjal has over 16 years of experience in the fields of finance and accounts. He is currently holding the position of CFO at Blaser Swisslube. It is a Privately held chemical industry with 501-1000 human capital. He has an exceptional track record of handling all financial matters for a significant era in automotive industry. Earlier he has worked with organizations like Eicher Motors, Eicher tractors. He is an ICWA, Commerce and an M.Com from Delhi School of Economics.

Rahul Goswami

Founder, StratVi Consulting

Rahul has over 3 decades of rich industrial experience. After an initial two and half years with the Power Engineering Company BHEL, he spent over twenty eight years with Ranbaxy, both overseas and in India. His recent senior management assignments, with global leadership and developmental responsibilities, included Corporate and Business Finance, Information Technology, Strategic Sourcing and Strategic Planning. He has held the position of VP-Finance, VP-Strategic Material Sourcing, VP-Strategic Planning & CIO in Ranbaxy. He has started a consulting practice, StratVi Consulting.

Sanjay Chaturvedi

Founder, P2V

Sanjay Chaturvedi is a seasoned HR professional with 22 years experience gained in the manufacturing, auto, processing, energy / oil and IT industries in cross-cultural international environments with a demonstrated track-record of formulating HR strategy that aligns with business objectives, integrating business process performance with people capability, initiating and managing large scale and complex HR projects at a business group level and harmonizing policies and work practices across the business group.