Moving up the leadership ladder

“We turn out . . . to realize our greater potentialities . . . by viewing our own individual crises as opportunities to let go of who we have been, and to set forth on the journey toward becoming something more.”

—WILLIAM BRIDGES
THE WAY OF TRANSITION

When someone moves to a higher position in an organization, this progression is called a leadership transition. People tend to think of leadership transitions as those that occur at the top level of an organization when the head of the organization leaves and a new person steps in. But leadership transitions take place at all levels of an organization, every time people move from one level to the next. These transitions increase the person’s scope of responsibility and accountability for the performance of increasingly larger parts of the organization.

This chapter explores the ways in which your role changes as you move up the organizational hierarchy. It builds on the skills needed to develop a positive work climate and encourage strong team performance, and shows how these skills should be applied at each management level. We explore four typical levels of transition:

- becoming a first-time manager who leads: Level One;
- moving from managing a team to managing other managers: Level Two;
- becoming a senior manager: Level Three;
- leading and managing at the top: Level Four.

This chapter also discusses the important role that managers at all levels have in grooming those below them to become competent managers who lead, so that there is a constant flow of qualified people in the pipeline to take on increasingly more complex and senior roles in the organization.
Building a pipeline of managers who lead

“The major job of leaders is to develop other leaders.”

—NOEL TICHY
THE LEADERSHIP ENGINE

Leadership transitions, except those at the very top, are often not very visible in an organization. Part of the reason for this is that when people move from one level of responsibility to a higher one, we rarely refer to those changes as leadership transitions. More commonly, we call these transitions promotions.

In many cases, when people are promoted or move into new positions, they are not prepared to take on new management and leadership roles and responsibilities. Outstanding technical expertise is often considered a sufficient qualification for moving someone into a managerial or leadership position. For example, good doctors and nurses are frequently promoted with little consideration of their management or leadership capabilities. When someone from the outside is hired, you may not realize that he is making a significant transition in taking a position with management and leadership responsibilities. This may be a role that he is not fully prepared to handle, in spite of having excellent technical qualifications.

Researchers who have studied the progressions of managers in organizations have observed that job requirements are qualitatively different from one level to another (Jaques and Cason 1994). At each level, the time horizon (or scope of time that relates to the position’s role in planning for the future) and the complexity of the job expand. These changes require increasingly complex mental processing abilities.

When people work at levels that are above what they can handle (a time horizon and level of complexity that they cannot quite grasp), they are unable to focus on their leadership and management tasks, and often do the work they are most comfortable doing, which tends to be the work of a lower level. As a supervisor, it is the manager’s job to groom lower-level staff for taking on new management and leadership responsibilities, and when they are promoted, to support them so that they can perform well in their new role.

GROOMING MANAGERS FOR LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

Ram Charan introduced the image of a leadership “pipeline” and asserts that, if whatever is flowing through it gets stuck, the pipeline will not deliver the resource it contains (Charan et al. 2001). Where the pipeline shifts direction, things can easily get stuck. It is the task of managers who lead to help those who get stuck to move on (up or out), and make room for others.
Organizations that recognize that people do not become great leaders overnight have instituted organizational practices that develop staff to take on increasingly complex leading and managing roles. In this way, organizations effectively build a pipeline of leadership talent and support their staff in making these important leadership transitions.

To keep the pipeline full with qualified staff, it is critical that managers understand that at each level there are significant changes in the time horizon, priorities, relationships, and tasks people must deal with and differences in the skills and management and leadership practices they need. How successfully people adjust to these changes and differences will determine how well they and others flow through the pipeline.

In his book *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz urges leaders to “get off the dance floor and onto the balcony,” where they can get a broader view of the scene below. At each subsequent transition, the manager moves up to the next “balcony” (see Figure 9). As the manager moves up in the hierarchy of the organization, the details of the people on the dance floor begin to recede, while the overall setting in which the dance takes place becomes more and more visible. This metaphor illustrates the challenge of managing leadership transitions: to make sure that the balconies (levels), the rhythm of the people who dance, and the beat of the music are all in harmony with one another.

Through the four levels of leadership transition presented in this chapter, we discuss the changes that are inherent in moving up to the next “balcony.” The tasks, capabilities, and shifts in mindset that are required to perform effectively at each level are grouped into five key areas, each of which becomes more complex as you move up the hierarchy:

**Figure 9** From stage to balcony: A change in perspective

Being at a higher level provides a different perspective and helps you see patterns that are not obvious at the ground level.
- Time horizon or time frame for which you need to plan and achieve results;
- Priorities for your attention;
- Types of relationships that you need to cultivate and manage;
- Tasks or core responsibilities;
- Leading and managing skills and practices that support high performance.

Signs of derailment (presented in boxes in this chapter) indicate that the manager is not adequately performing at the requisite level and needs to improve his skills and practices before being considered for a higher-level position. It is the responsibility of the supervisor to see these signs and provide support and coaching so that a manager can be competent and effective.

Since the transitions described in this chapter are generic, they might not quite fit your specific situation. Sometimes people move back and forth between being an individual contributor and member of a team, to managing a team and being responsible for its overall performance. The challenges involved in these roles are different. This chapter is about the challenge of rising up the managerial ladder and helping others to do the same. The ability to adjust to new priorities and acquire the appropriate competencies at each level is essential to successfully making these transitions.

**Becoming a first-time manager who leads: Level One**

“I didn’t set out to be a leader; I set out to be a good worker. I set out to learn and be led by people who knew better than me so that I could learn from them.”

—DR. PETER MUGYENYI, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
JOINT CLINICAL RESEARCH CENTRE, UGANDA

Consider this story of Maria de Souza, a successful nurse who has been promoted to be the manager of a unit in which she used to work. No matter how well respected she is as an excellent nurse or how good her clinical skills are, if one member of her unit is not productive or provides care below quality standards, it becomes her problem. She is responsible for the results of the whole unit, not just for her own work or that of a few star performers. When her staff lack needed resources, Maria is now responsible for solving the problem.
For Sonny Gonzales, who is a physician, the situation is even more challenging, since he went directly from being a medical student—with all the attention on developing clinical skills—to being the head of a small rural health center. In many countries, these first postings are in remote areas, with a supervisor who is not on site. Even when the supervisor comes for a supervisory visit, the focus is most likely on clinical skills, not how to manage or lead a team. Sonny was seriously challenged in managing the dynamics between the staff in his health center and felt he was “being thrown into the deep water to sink or swim.”

These examples illustrate that the first transition, from being an individual contributor as a clinical service provider to being a manager of others, is challenging. This may be the first time in your professional career that you cannot let a conflict go unaddressed, even if it does not directly affect your own performance as a service provider. At each leadership transition, there will be less time to provide services to clients yourself and more demands on your time to be a manager who *enables* the work of others.

As a manager who leads, any problem affecting your staff is also *your* problem. Thus, as a manager at this first transition, not only do you have to learn a new set of skills, but you also have to pay attention to new priorities, cultivate new relationships, and practice new behaviors that reflect that your work now includes the work of those who report to you.

**A SHIFT IN TIME HORIZON**

A significant shift in the first transition is a change in your time horizon. Before, you were responsible only for your own timeliness—arriving at work on time and completing assigned tasks and duties on time. The time span you were responsible for ranged from one day to a few weeks, or at most one month. Now you are responsible for the accomplishments of your unit’s tasks over a longer period of time as measured by, for example, quarterly service delivery results. You also have to anticipate changes such as seasonal fluctuations in disease patterns and the corresponding resource requirements, and develop plans to make sure your team is prepared. You have to anticipate things you never had to think about before. Your time horizon has shifted from a day or a week to several months or may be even a year. You are no longer only on the dance floor; you also need to go up periodically to the next balcony to survey the scene.

**NEW PRIORITIES**

To be successful in this new role, you will also need to make a shift in how to direct your energy and spend your time. You now have to pay attention to and value the success of others, and put it ahead of your own need to be seen...
as a successful service provider. You have to be available and accessible to your staff, listen to their needs, give them feedback on their performance, and coach them to become more successful.

If you lead a team with people representing various specialties or functions (maternal and child health, family planning, child survival, infectious diseases, nutrition, and others), you also need to give each of those as much attention as you used to give to your own specialty. This shift is not easy, especially if you always believed that your specialty or your skills were more important than those of others.

NEW RELATIONSHIPS

As a newly promoted manager you need to build and maintain a network of relationships that will help your team be effective. This network of relationships may be different from the one you had before your promotion. Consider the following example.

Pauline Ntumba used to work as a family planning nurse in a health center. Although she knew about some of the resistance in the religious community about family planning, she did not have to deal with the problem directly. When she was promoted to be the head of the family planning clinic in the district hospital, she had to pay more attention to the community leaders and try to turn her opponents into supporters. To do this, she initiated a dialogue with the religious leaders in the district and engaged them in finding common ground, such as a concern for the health and well-being of their people. In this way, Pauline learned to strategize to get support from people whom she had never had to deal with when she was primarily a service provider.

In this new position you have to learn many new things as you establish relationships with people other than your patients or clients. You will need to learn:

- whom to talk with in the community, government, and private sector;
- what influence these people have on others, particularly on your clients;
- what the various political agendas are, and how to reconcile those agendas with your organization’s or program’s goals.

Within your organization, you will need to know:

- how to redefine your relationship with those who were formerly your peers and who now report to you;
who can help you get access to which resources;

- who the power brokers are so that you can get things done and get the resources your staff need;

- how to redefine your relationships with those who were formerly your peers and who now report to you.

If you live in a remote rural area, you will spend much of your waking hours with your staff. If they were formerly your peers, you will need to create new relationships with them that are both collegial and supportive, without denying that you are now also their supervisor. This change will be particularly difficult if there was any jealousy about your promotion or if your promotion was contested.

**TASKS OF THE FIRST-LEVEL MANAGER**

If this is your first transition into a position of leadership, you will need to make a number of significant shifts. Before this transition to leading teams, your success was measured by the quality and timeliness of your work, being punctual, and having positive interactions with patients and colleagues. Now, as a team leader, your success is measured by the success of your entire team.

At this level, you are responsible for helping each person on your team to perform his job well, and for supporting good relationships among the team members so you can reach your goals. Even if you complete all your assignments in a timely way and they are of high quality, if the rest of your team (or even one person on the team) is not performing well, then it is your job to work with individual members of the team to build their strengths and to make sure that the team performs well as a whole.

At this stage of transition you will usually continue to carry out your old job of working directly with patients and perform additional tasks. But now you also need to:

- make sure that the work of your team is clearly defined;

- make sure that tasks are assigned to the right person;

- spot new tasks and distribute them among the team;

- make sure that each team member has the resources and support needed to do her job well.
CRITICAL SKILLS FOR LEVEL ONE

To help you successfully navigate the transition, you will need to learn and be comfortable with using the following skills:

Organizing work. Often called work design, organizing work is the ability to match a (new) piece of work with the strengths of individual team members. Doing so requires understanding the particular tasks and the skills needed to do the work and deciding who is most likely to succeed in doing those tasks. For example, if you find that a rumor is circulating that puts your clinic in an unfavorable light, you need to find the source of the rumor, then rebuild trust within the community. If you think that you are not in the best position to resolve the issue, then you need to design a task and find the right person to accomplish it.

Delegating. Delegating is the ability to hand over the information, authority, and resources to someone on your staff while retaining full accountability for results. Delegation is not the same as abdicating, or handing over work to your staff and then withdrawing your attention. By having regular meetings and discussions in which you review progress and address challenges, you can build your team’s confidence and problem-solving skills. This follow-up will also increase your confidence in their ability to make good decisions.

Recruiting staff. This ability refers to selecting or hiring the right people for a job. You need to pay attention to such issues as fit with the culture of your unit (“how we do things here”) and that of the larger organization. If you have the authority to hire new staff, you will need to resist the urge to hire people who are most like you and the temptation to hire friends, relatives, or people with similar backgrounds or political leanings. Hiring people from different backgrounds makes workplaces richer, as long as everyone is competent to do his job and you are able to handle the dynamics. Be clear about the job requirements and skills you are looking for. Hiring people who are not up to the task will harm them, you, your team’s performance, and possibly your reputation.

Networking. The ability to find and nurture relationships with people and groups inside and outside the immediate workplace, including people higher up in the organizational hierarchy, is networking. Effective networking requires that you understand your organization, program, or division’s management structure and that you know how to connect yourself and your team to those in power. Being connected enables you to get the information and resources that you need. If you are far away from the center, you have to work hard at staying connected by communicating regularly with others outside your immediate workplace.

Networking can also be useful for psychological support. In a place where women are rarely in positions of authority, it may be useful to seek out other women in similar positions so you can support each other. In some places, it may be useful to network with the business community or such groups as
the Rotary Club. Your relationships are often as important as the authority of your position when it comes to getting things done.

**LEADING AND MANAGING PRACTICES AT LEVEL ONE**

To be successful as a first-level manager you will need to incorporate the leading and managing practices that address the elements of time horizon, priorities, relationships, tasks, and skills. These can be organized according to the key practices of the Leading and Managing for Results Model presented in chapter 1. Table 8 lists leading and managing practices that are useful for the first-level transition. Ask your supervisor to give you feedback and support so that you can perform these practices well at this stage before moving on to the next. And remember, once you are promoted to the next level, you will need to do the same with your new supervisees!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>What to do</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td>Pay attention to what is going on inside and outside your team.                                                                ----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing</td>
<td>See the relationship between yourself and your team as part of the larger management structure.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Observe and talk with patients and community members to identify health needs, and gauge your team's performance in addressing those needs.</td>
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<td>Help your team identify their challenges and their responsibilities in meeting those challenges as a team.</td>
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<td>Be able to describe the team's challenges within the context of the organization's mission.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Help people prioritize their tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aligning</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for the members of your team to see how their work fits together and serves the organization's goals through exchanges, visits, reading, new assignments, and partnering with other teams.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilizing</td>
<td>Hold discussions to align with others outside your team about desired goals or vision, gaps, priorities, expectations, and deadlines.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>Match staff skills and motivation to jobs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Implementing</td>
<td>Facilitate the work of your staff by removing obstacles to performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Model a trusting attitude, respect, and integrity in all your interactions inside and outside the team.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>Conduct performance evaluations and give people feedback on how they are doing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>Track the measurable progress of the team and share your findings.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognize individual and collective contributions to organizational goals.</td>
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SIGNS OF DERAILMENT

This first transition is difficult and the shifts are more fundamental than most managers realize. Not surprisingly, there are quite a few derailments at this stage. These derailments are serious if they are not spotted and corrected, because they will cause trouble later when the manager is promoted to the next managerial level. Therefore, it is important for the manager’s supervisor to pay attention to potential derailments and provide support, so that the manager can overcome them. As Charan and his coauthors note, when derailments happen, the pipeline becomes clogged with people who have been promoted but who cannot manage and lead at the higher levels. Such bottlenecks become increasingly difficult to clear.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of derailment at the first level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Inability to delegate work to team members</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Competition with or micromanaging team members who work in the area of one’s expertise</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Tendency to consider time spent coaching or supporting team members as wasteful or unproductive</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Considering questions or requests for help from supervisees as if they were interruptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Recurrent urge to fix supervisees’ mistakes, rather than teaching them how to prevent them in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Tendency to maintain distance from team members’ mistakes and successes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Tendency to treat patients, communities, and government officials as outsiders</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Moving from managing a team to managing other managers: Level Two

“Inexperienced managers are tremendously impressionable, and they naturally model the actions and attitudes of bosses. If their bosses are either unwilling to set a proper example and help them develop in the right direction, the leadership pipeline is clogged at its source.”

—RAM CHARAN ET AL.
THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

At this level you become a manager of other managers. You might think that the second transition would not be as significant as the first, since you already have a managerial mindset. But this transition represents the first time that you need to develop and support other managers as they go through their first transition. If you do not support the new first-level manager and you overlook signs of derailment, you will compromise the entire pipeline.

At this level, there is a new series of shifts in time horizon, relationships, and tasks that requires the application of new skills and leading and managing practices.

A SHIFT IN TIME HORIZON

You may have been promoted to this management level because you are a superb clinician: you have a good track record for delivering quality services. You have strong clinical skills and are seen as an example of the kind of service providers the organization or program needs. Unfortunately, service delivery no longer represents the majority of your work.

At this level, anticipating the needs of other levels requires expanding your time horizon to approximately three years. Planning and predicting the activities for just one year is very different from planning and predicting the activities and requirements for the next three years. To plan this far ahead, you need to know more about the larger strategic context within which your program operates, spot trends farther away, and look for synergies and opportunities. That is precisely why you need to get off the dance floor, so you can expand your view and see more of the bigger picture!

NEW PRIORITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

With an extended time horizon you will be planning with your team for activities and results farther into the future. You will be concerned not only
Developing a network of relationships to support your goals

with collaboration among your team members, but also with establishing collaborative relationships with groups outside your immediate work setting. You will look for and build collaboration across functional areas within your program or organization, among the programs and organizations in the public and private sectors, and even with ministries or organizations whose focus is not health.

You will also be seeking to establish supportive relationships with district authorities and politicians and with local organizations and leaders in the community in which your organization works. Among your new priorities will be the need to establish and nurture these relationships and garner commitment in your mutual goals to serve the health needs of the population.

Provide support appropriate to people’s skills and interests

Sometimes health professionals switch back and forth between management and clinical positions during their careers. You may discover that some people feel more useful or productive as individual contributors and that others are thriving as managers. It is important to acknowledge those strengths and preferences and support people’s ability to perform well at the appropriate levels. After all, management and leadership may not be the right fit for some people. In that case, it is better to use their skills as individual contributors, for example, as an advisor (consultant) or senior-level service provider.

Another type of transition is the shift from a field-based position to a headquarters position. This change poses a new set of challenges requiring the ability to scan broadly and take responsibility for a wider horizon of projects and programs while not being based in the field. Ideally, people will move back and forth between headquarters and the field to allow for a cross-fertilization of perspectives from these different vantage points.

The transition from service provider to manager

Tasks of the Second-Level Manager

As a manager of managers, your time spent managing will increase. This new role is especially hard for professionals who were trained to do clinical work, such as doctors, nurses, and midwives. As a manager of managers, you are now responsible for the performance of a small facility or a department that comprises several functions, some of which will be completely new to you (for example, human resource management, pharmaceutical and commodity management, financial management, and public relations).

To make sure that the managers who report to you receive the necessary support so that each of their units can fulfill its mandate, your job is to take care that:
there are sufficient supplies of pharmaceuticals and commodities;

■ the premises are clean and safe;

■ the finances are in good shape and can pass an audit;

■ service statistics are reliable and up-to-date;

■ reports are submitted on time;

■ the facility and its services comply with government standards and regulations.

You are also responsible for the facility’s reputation in the community, good relationships with authorities and community leaders, and producing the results that are spelled out in the annual and three-year plans.

Consider Fatma Mahmoudi, a newly appointed head of a department. Having made the shift from unit leader of prenatal care to department head at the provincial level, she is no longer responsible for the performance of individual service providers. She is now more than one level removed from “where the action is” and instead needs to support the various unit leaders. Fatma was used to having contact with clients and finds it hard to get used to this distance.

You may be like Fatma and need to resist the temptation of returning to the dance floor to help those individuals whose dancing needs to be improved. When you see a performance problem with a staff member, you may want to intervene directly with that person. But your responsibility now lies in helping the first-level managers improve the performance of their staff. If you bypass a manager, you will usurp her authority and undermine her credibility and success as a manager.

Standing on the balcony rather than on the dance floor means that you need to watch how people dance together. If someone is out of pace or needs assistance, make a mental note of it and talk with the team leader who is responsible for that person’s performance. In the end, this approach will be more helpful, and you will be teaching the team leader to be more proactive when there are performance problems at the service level.

In organizations where managerial work is not valued, or worse, seen as a waste of time, managers may feel ineffective. The irony is that by being a good manager and exercising managerial leadership you contribute directly to the performance of your department and to the organization as a whole by increasing efficiency, reducing duplication of effort, and having staff carry out work that is well matched to their skills and interests.
CRITICAL SKILLS FOR LEVEL TWO

To help you successfully navigate the transition to this level, you will need to learn and be comfortable with using the following skills:

Spotting leadership talent. One of the most important responsibilities at this level is to identify leadership potential among individual providers who are capable of becoming first-time managers who lead. People often look at the quality of providers’ clinical services, but that is no guarantee of future leadership success. As a second-level manager, you need to sharpen your observation skills and identify people who have good communication and interpersonal skills, can make good decisions under pressure, can manage their own stress levels, are eager to learn, and have an interest in managerial work.

Giving constructive feedback and support. Once new first-level managers have been identified, you need to work with their supervisors to identify ways to groom them for managerial leadership. This preparation may include giving a person specific assignments, such as leading a task force or a committee. But that is not enough. The unit leader needs to closely supervise these new experiences. As the supervisor of the unit leader, you need to provide constructive feedback and support to the unit leader, who, in turn, provides feedback to the individual being groomed. All parties need to apply good judgment and have a good sense of timing in providing such feedback.

Holding first-level managers accountable for results and managerial work. Your challenge is not to go over the head of the unit leader and pressure individuals to produce results, but rather to hold the unit leader accountable and offer feedback and support when needed. Meeting this challenge requires meeting regularly with each of your staff and keeping a watchful eye on what happens in the facility or department (this has been called management by walking around).

Deploying and redeploying resources among units or teams. Assigning human resources requires close contact with each of your staff members and knowing whether or not they are on track, and if they are not, why not. It may be that the team needs a specific type of expertise or an extra pair of hands. In such cases, you need to make arrangements to (temporarily) deploy the needed expertise from one team to another. Similarly, material or financial resources may be in short supply in one team and not well used in another. You need to rise above organizational politics and preferential treatment of one team over another, to make sure that all the teams that report to you can be successful. Remember, for you to be successful, all the teams need to be successful!

Managing competing priorities. As a second-level manager, you need to balance the interests of individual contributors and their team leaders, on one hand, and the rest of the organization, on the other. This is a difficult job because the realities, pressures, needs, and perspectives of each of these
groups are very different. Political considerations on one side may override technical considerations on the other. Much organizational conflict arises when managers choose sides instead of listening to and looking for ways to mitigate the impact of opposing perspectives.

To manage conflicts well, you have to rise above an allegiance to one side or the other and find ways to bridge the two points of view. Managing conflicts requires skill in understanding others’ perspectives and “fluency” in using the language of each side. It helps to be curious, ask questions, and try to understand what is behind the positions that people take on an issue. When people use a word that has a specific connotation in your work, find out if it has the same meaning to the others. Simplify your own use of language and make sure that you explain what you mean.

LEADING AND MANAGING PRACTICES AT LEVEL TWO

Table 9 presents an illustrative list of leading and managing practices for the second-level transition. They focus on your ability to oversee the work of a team and help guide you away from the tendency to take care of details yourself. These practices are intended to be instructive to you, as a manager who

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>What to do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scanning Focusing Planning</td>
<td>■ Look for signs of success or failure in first-level managers’ ability to exercise management functions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Help them set priorities.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Educate yourself about the larger strategic context within which the program operates.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Identify teams that are not performing well and look into the causes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Guide teams in their performance in relation to program strategies and priorities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aligning Mobilizing Organizing Implementing</td>
<td>■ Ensure that the teams’ work contributes to the larger program strategies.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Mobilize resources and make sure that they are aligned with needs.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Align goals and create team spirit across unit boundaries.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Provide challenging assignments to help first-level managers develop their managerial skills.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspiring Monitoring Evaluating</td>
<td>■ Coach team leaders on effective managerial behavior.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>■ Provide appropriate feedback and support.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Serve as an example to team leaders.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Check regularly on progress against stated objectives and work plans.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Share results of evaluations, and celebrate successes.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>■ Recognize and reward managerial talent.</td>
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leads, and to your supervisor, who needs to support you in learning how to step back from the details and guide and support a team toward achieving results.

**SIGNS OF DERAILMENT**

When a newly appointed second-level manager continues to operate as a first-level manager, or worse, as an individual contributor, the development of the next generation of leaders is seriously compromised. In addition, when a manager derails at the second level without anyone’s noticing and is then promoted to become a senior manager (the third level), the whole process of on-the-job leadership development is jeopardized.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signs of derailment at the second level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Interfering with the job of immediate staff (the unit managers) by managing the performance of people in those units</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Bypassing or usurping the unit leader’s authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Missing cues that show a unit leader is sliding back to being solely a service provider</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Failure to delegate tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Inability of reporting units to deliver results or to implement plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Sabotage or competition among the manager’s supervisees</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Overemphasis on doing “the real work” at the expense of important organizational culture, work climate, and strategic issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ A tendency to rewrite memos, letters, and reports that were delegated to other staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Selecting service providers as future team managers who are most like oneself or who are related or connected (for example, through family, political connections, or ethnic or tribal links)</td>
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Becoming a senior manager: Level Three

“Developing people for important leadership positions requires work on the part of senior executives, often over a long period of time. That work begins with efforts to spot people with great leadership potential early in their careers and to identify what will be needed to stretch and develop them.”

—JOHN KOTTER

“WHAT LEADERS REALLY DO”

Often the transition to this level of leadership means that you are transitioning into being a member of the senior team of your workplace or the organization. As a senior manager or program director, you are no longer responsible for a small or specialized part of the organization’s work; you are now one of the organizational decision-makers. Strategic thinking is imperative, requiring that you rise beyond professional or functional allegiances and produce results that directly promote the organization’s reputation, financial performance, and sustainability.

One of the major shifts at this level is that you have to make decisions with less-than-perfect information. Not only do you have to gauge whether the information you have is correct or reliable, but you also need to know where to find additional information and how to interpret the information you find. As evaluators know so well, information can be shaped to serve the particular needs and motives of the one who provides it. None of the divisions or departments under you will want to look bad, and data can be presented in such a way that they illuminate the good news and hide the bad.

To deal with the challenge of making decisions with inconsistent or incomplete data, you need to demonstrate a high degree of maturity and good judgment. You need to be humble and acknowledge that you don’t have all the answers, find objective information, and be comfortable making decisions based on partial information.

A SHIFT IN TIME HORIZON

With this transition you move up to another balcony, allowing you to see more of the surroundings and less of the specific activities on the dance floor. As a program director or senior manager, your time horizon expands to five years. This is the planning range that the senior management team has to consider for securing a healthy future for the organization.

With such a long timeline, the complexity of your task increases exponentially. You will need to take even more variables into consideration than before. The complex issue of organizational, programmatic, and financial sustainability is, or should be, on the forefront, especially for managers in
nongovernmental organizations. Once the organizational strategy has been mapped out, make sure that your program’s strategies support the overall organizational strategies and goals for the next five years.

NEW PRIORITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Regardless of your particular field of technical expertise, your charge now is to look out for the good of the whole program, the whole region, or, if you are in charge of medical facilities, all of them, not just those in one region or of one particular type. All the subspecialties and institutions included in your program or division’s area will claim your attention. Focusing on your new priorities may not be easy if you have strong opinions about particular functions or elements of a health program. Whatever the program’s particular function or performance, your contributions are now directed toward supporting the broader organizational goals. Consider the following scenario.

Lorenzo de la Peza was recently promoted to Director of Hospital Administration. He is now in charge of all hospitals in the country. As a surgeon, Lorenzo has always focused on doing an excellent job in curative services at a fairly well-equipped referral hospital, both as an individual service provider and, later, as the administrator. In his new role, he has to pay attention to all hospitals, not just the ones he is most familiar with.

In paying attention to larger strategic and public health issues (a function that is new to him), Lorenzo has to resist the temptation to focus only on providing the best possible curative services at a few well-equipped hospital. He has to shift his attention to looking at the role of all hospitals, their distribution across the country, the ways in which they are being used or not, and how to enlist hospitals to pay attention to public health concerns as well as to the health of individuals.

He also needs to look at ways in which he could contribute to the success of the other divisions, such as laboratories and pharmaceuticals. This job is very different than the one he had before as a hospital director, in which the success of his hospital took precedence over anything else.

People who lead at this level can bring about significant change by changing the way people work together and by supporting systems and processes that contribute to the success of the whole program or system. They can model humility and show an open mind as they focus conversations on the good of the whole, rather than on the interests of one group or another. In looking at the whole, they can see where there are blockages or competition for resources, address the obstacles, and allocate resources appropriately.

At this level, we often see people appointed to high-ranking leadership positions who have spent much of their professional life as individual contributors. Such appointments are not uncommon, either as part of the political process
or because the internal pipeline did not produce enough candidates. Taking on this role can be particularly challenging for such a high-ranking manager if he is not practiced at fostering collective success and mutual support, doesn’t place a high value on the importance of the team effort, and doesn’t recognize the importance of good processes in producing good results.

**Put the organization’s goals first**

Peter Senge (1990) describes one of the seven learning disabilities of organizations as the “Myth of the Management Team.” This myth, applicable to most organizations, tells us that the high-level managers that meet periodically and form the senior team carry out their responsibilities for ensuring the well-being of the entire organization, each contributing her special expertise to advise and guide the organization into the future.

In his work with countless organizations around the world, Senge found, unfortunately, that this ideal of what the senior management team does is often a myth. Instead, he found that it is common for division or department heads to compete with each other for resources and for ownership of success. This situation does not foster collective learning and good organizational performance.

**TASKS OF THE THIRD-LEVEL MANAGER**

Your attention to strategic issues now has to exceed your area of technical expertise. You need to educate yourself quickly about issues that other people took care of before. For example, if your focus had been on clinical or public health issues, you now also need to be knowledgeable about the strategic dimensions of financial or human resources management.

As you interact more with the external world than you had to do before, you will also become more visible. People will watch how you conduct yourself during crises and how you handle criticism.

Within your organization or program, you will have to continue facilitating the development of managerial and leadership talent. You should start looking for a successor the moment you take office, then help that person (or persons if the size of your organization requires that you groom a pool of people) develop her confidence and skills to take over when you move on.

**CRITICAL SKILLS FOR LEVEL THREE**

To help you successfully navigate this transition, you will need to learn and be comfortable with using the following skills.
**Strategic thinking.** Strategic thinking is a way of interacting with the larger environment and interpreting events that help you and your colleagues envision what the future might be like and how you might prepare your organization to be ready for it. Strategic planning involves applying the insights about trends and patterns to the planning process, and translating them into choices about where to put organizational resources. The more developed the strategic thinking, the more robust the strategic planning.

You will have to learn to think strategically about the skills, processes, and knowledge that provide significant value to your clients and that no one else can provide. (These unique capabilities are sometimes referred to as strategic competencies.) For example, your organization may be the best place to provide services to young adults and it may be a need that no other service provider is filling. Or you may decide that too many organizations are providing too many of the same types of services, resulting in unnecessary competition and duplication of services.

In such instances, you may decide to pull out of one service area and concentrate on another that adds value to those provided by others. In either case, it is important to look several years ahead and think about potential positive and negative consequences that may result from adding or removing a service. This kind of strategic thinking will help you shape your program, maximize your opportunities, and minimize any potential threats to your plan.

An exercise that can help you set priorities, “Putting First Things First: The Important and Urgent Matrix,” is included in the handbook toolkit.

**Coaching.** Being a coach is important from the very first transition, but the stakes are higher as you move up. How well you coach affects the success of other managers and team leaders all the way down the hierarchy. Coaching helps establish a culture of accountability and performance at the operational levels and provide appropriate support to other managers.

**Managing consultants.** As a senior manager, you need to learn to rely on both internal and external consultants to do specific technical pieces of work, even when you think you could do them yourself. You need to know how to contract with consultants and develop confidence in monitoring their performance even if they have more expertise and experience. You also need to become an intelligent consumer of the approaches that consultants use to guide their interventions and be willing to ask difficult questions.

**Managing conflict.** Conflict management skills are important at any level, but neglecting to manage conflict at this level has much more serious and widespread consequences than at lower levels. Whether you can tolerate conflict or not, you will have to manage conflict situations, keep small conflicts from escalating, and model effective conflict management for your staff. To carry out these tasks, you need to know your preferred style of managing conflict, your weaknesses, and specific techniques for dealing with conflict.
Using reflective skills. The higher you rise on the organizational ladder, the less likely it is that you will get honest feedback about the impact of your behavior and decisions on others lower down. This limitation means that it is even more important to be self-reflective. Develop a habit of periodically stepping back to reflect on data and decisions and the impact they have on others (clients and employees) and on the organization as a whole. If staff are reluctant to give you constructive feedback, work hard to cultivate the kind of relationship that builds trust and show people that you actually use their feedback to change your ways. Help your team become more reflective as well, so that you can learn from your experiences and do things better in the future.

In addition to the exercises noted above, the handbook toolkit offers several exercises that help to improve communication and have productive conversations. These include “Giving Useful Feedback,” “Reflecting on Communication: The ORID Method,” and “Coaching to Support Others.”

LEADING AND MANAGING PRACTICES AT LEVEL THREE

With the third-level transition, your ability to look far beyond your immediate context is important. You will need to rely on your second-level managers to directly lead and manage teams so that you can focus your energy on the larger issues in the internal and external environments. Just as your supervisor will need to support you in learning how to function effectively in this larger context, you will need to support managers at the level below you to help them provide leadership and support to their teams. Table 10 presents practices that will help you succeed in this role.

SIGNS OF DERRAILMENT

At each higher level, derailment has more profound influences on the organization as a whole. Dealing with management and leadership shortcomings at higher levels becomes increasingly difficult and political agendas are more likely to interfere. If people find it difficult to confront managers who derail at lower levels, the fact that they have moved up over the years has given the wrong signals, making it much more difficult to face these challenges later. Yet the stakes are much higher.
Table 10 Key leading and managing practices for the third-level manager

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>What to do</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td>- Take a broad view of all the developments (political, technical/technological, socioeconomic) that positively or negatively affect the services you are providing and the health of the population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focusing</td>
<td>- Immerse yourself in new areas of responsibility that are unfamiliar or not in your field of expertise.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>- Know the needs and concerns of key stakeholders who influence, receive, or affect your services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aligning</td>
<td>- Identify overall strategic priorities for the program, leaving adaptation to local conditions to be decided by the appropriate level.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mobilizing</td>
<td>- Use data to identify challenges, and identify resources and actions to address them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>- Work on interorganizational or national task forces and committees to expand your knowledge of other groups’ perspectives and your network of relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing</td>
<td>- Meet periodically with peers to see the totality of the organization’s efforts and to exchange information and receive feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>- Look for new funding sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>- Shift resources as priorities change or new opportunities arise.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating</td>
<td>- Intervene when program implementation appears to be blocked.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Support lower-level managers by helping them see the cultural and business contexts in which initiatives for change take place.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Recommend promotions for lower-level managers or provide other rewards for good leadership and sound management.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Show leadership maturity in interactions.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Show humility. (Acknowledge when you don’t know, and invite and accept feedback from staff.)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Track program progress and reflect on progress and setbacks with others.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Share successes and failures with affected parties and learn from the experience.</td>
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</table>
Signs of derailment at the third level

- An obsession with showing that one's program (district, region) is responsible for improved health indicators (rather than sharing the credit)
- The tendency to point the finger at others for mistakes, absolving oneself and one's team from blame
- Favoritism toward a particular unit in one's program
- Signs of short-term thinking and an operational rather than strategic mindset
- The tendency to ignore or ridicule organizational policies, compliance requirements, programs, needs, and procedures
- A tendency to isolate oneself from contact with the people who do the work (in the field)
- Significant turnover of staff and low morale
- Poor communication with stakeholders
- Lack of trust in others, leading to doing work oneself, and maintenance of strict control
- A tendency to overdelegate, combined with poor control systems
- Satisfaction with or use of superficial or self-serving assessments and analyses to guide the team's work
- Unwillingness to acknowledge personal weaknesses and accept coaching or support
- Inability to see one's role in causing serious organizational problems
Leading and managing at the top: Level Four

“I am conscious that being a leader is not an end in itself, but a role whose purpose is to transform society.”

—EDUARDO JAVIER BALDOMAR
CONSEJO DE SALUD RURAL ANDINO, BOLIVIA

In this transition, you become the head of the organization or of the permanent staff of the ministry. You now carry the ultimate accountability and responsibility for the current reputation and ongoing success (or failure) of the organization, and, in the public sector, for progress toward fulfilling your country’s health agenda. This is a very visible position. People look to you for answers, even if you don’t have them. The lives of many people depend on you, either for their health care needs or for employment, or both.

A DISTANT TIME HORIZON

You are now responsible for the organization’s success well into the future. In the public sector, you carry the heavy responsibility for ensuring that your country’s population is healthy—that adults can actively engage in economic production; that children can fully engage in education; and that the old, poor, and infirm are properly cared for. If you manage an HIV/AIDS program, you need to be able to think 20 years ahead and do this thinking together with other ministries, organizations, and groups that have a stake in battling the pandemic.

If in your previous position your time horizon was five years, this perspective represents a significant jump. It is one that is hard to operationalize, because few people think this far into the future, so there are few models. In the public sector, such a long-term view stands in stark contrast to the usual four- or five-year election cycles and the short-term mindset of political parties. This sort of expansive and long-term thinking in the public sector exemplifies a rare act of leadership. Those who manage to transcend narrow party politics and short-term interests are truly top-level leaders, who tend to attract a broad constellation of followers that often reaches beyond the boundaries of their country.

A SHIFT IN PRIORITIES

You now have to pay attention to the success of all the different divisions and programs that comprise your organization or ministry and do everything you can to help them be successful. This does not mean insisting on results from...
the work groups that these managers lead, because that is their responsibility. For some people this shift is difficult, because they are so used to holding groups accountable for results. Instead, you have to make sure that the senior managers who report to you are all first-class managers who lead and that, when they are ready to move on or up, there are good replacements waiting in the pipeline. The success of those managers will largely make or break your organization and, therefore, should be of great concern to you.

RELATIONSHIPS AND THE PRECARIOUSNESS OF TRUST

Leaders at the top are responsible for cultivating and maintaining good working relationships with key stakeholders. In the private sector, as the chief executive your relationship with the board of directors is of critical importance. The board is there both to look after the well-being of the organization and to help you do well, by giving you advice and feedback, and opening doors to opportunities that you could not tap into on your own. If you have chosen your board members well and established a relationship with them that is marked by respect, honesty, and a commitment to the mission of the organization, the entire organization will benefit from the combined expertise of its members. Cultivate such a relationship; it will be one of your greatest assets.

In the public sector, as the most senior civil servant in your ministry, you are the bridge between the people appointed to lead your ministry and the ministry’s permanent staff. Political appointees come with political agendas, which may or may not match the objectives that you and your staff have been

**Trust-breakers**

Leaders can lose others’ trust by:

- sending inconsistent messages;
- applying inconsistent standards;
- not intervening when there are problems with particular managers;
- providing false feedback;
- not trusting others;
- ignoring elephants in the parlor (issues that everyone knows about but that cannot be discussed openly);
- accepting rumors as fact and allowing rumors to thrive without getting enough objective information to straighten out the facts;
- not being concerned about consistent underperformance by the organization.

pursuing for the last few years. Your job is to manage the relationship between these two major constituencies and set the tone for constructive dialogue and productive outcomes. You need to watch out for the effects of politically motivated criticism and at the same time use the change at the top as an opportunity to improve performance. You have to know how to translate public health realities into politically acceptable strategies and translate politically motivated changes into actions that contribute to, rather than distract from, delivering better health care to the people.

Leaders in both sectors are highly visible at this level. Everything you say and do will be scrutinized and possibly given more meaning than you intended. You will find that the trust you painstakingly built while working at lower levels can be shattered in an instant and that rebuilding that trust is as hard as putting a broken egg back together. But preserving trust is actually not that difficult if you pay attention to how trust can be broken.

**TASKS OF THE TOP-LEVEL MANAGER**

If you have been responsible until now for one particular function, such as hospital administration, district health management, preventive services, laboratories, or a particular geographical region, you now have to consider all regions, all specialties, and all functions. In short, you are responsible for the entire organization, ministry, or government agency. This means that you have to learn about everything that affects the business you are in, namely that of delivering on promises about health and access to services. You also need to have some understanding of all the support functions that have a bearing on your mandate, such as marketing, public relations, finance, and human resource management.

Anticipating changes and trends becomes one of your key responsibilities. You need to prepare the organization for the future so that it can keep pace with the trends, and change organizational strategies if they are heading the organization in the wrong direction. Your thinking has to become truly multidimensional, not focusing on any one strategy but on a portfolio of strategies that, together, fulfill all aspects of the organization’s mission. Although strategic thinking should not be new to you at this stage, it is more complex than thinking through strategies for a particular program or a particular region or area of expertise.

**CRITICAL SKILLS AT THE TOP LEVEL**

The skills needed at the senior level include all the skills of the other levels, as well as skills in modeling a healthy work climate and encouraging productivity and excellence.
Demonstrating belief in self and others. This is the fundamental belief in your own worth, the worth of others, and your belief in the inherent desire of all human beings to make a contribution. When top-level leaders hold this belief, it empowers employees to produce extraordinary results. Recognize and develop potential in yourself and others by being optimistic, caring, trustworthy, and humble. Always be on the lookout for young talent and coach others so that they may further develop their talents.

Fostering interdependence. Interdependence is the deep understanding of one’s own interconnectedness to others in the larger web of life. The success of top-level leadership depends on recognizing that organizations are by nature interdependent networks. At the top level, you need to know when and how to use collaborative processes to facilitate group learning and decision-making, and be comfortable working across professional, national, gender, and ethnic boundaries.

Try to resist succumbing to stereotypes or false judgments. Learn to listen to the interests and concerns that are often hidden behind position statements, verify whether your judgments are correct, then focus on those concerns that you can address.

For a helpful exercise, please see “The Art of Listening” in the handbook toolkit.

Modeling integrity and authenticity. More than anyone else, leaders at the very top set the tone by acting out the values and displaying the behavior expected of employees up and down the organization. Unless you model integrity and authenticity, your words will hold little meaning. This requires that you be as open and honest in your communications as you can be without betraying confidences and pay attention to what you say and do. If you preach honesty and transparency, be honest and transparent. If you want others to be frugal, be frugal yourself. If you ask for accountability, be accountable.

Assume that everything you say about someone or some organization will eventually reach the people about whom you spoke. It is a much better strategy to talk to people directly so that you can make sure your message is communicated correctly. If it is a difficult conversation to have now, imagine what it would be like after the message reached them indirectly (and presumably, somewhat altered). If you want loyalty and trustworthiness in others, be loyal and trustworthy yourself.

Using authority wisely. Given their power to affect people’s lives, it is crucial that top-level leaders use their authority with the common good in mind. Using authority wisely is especially important when there is conflict. It is a common organizational practice in tense or conflicted situations to bypass lower-level supervisors to solve problems or use one’s power to deal with messy situations. It is an easy trap to fall into, especially if a problem appears easy to solve from your vantage point. But by solving the problem yourself you undercut the manager whose job it was to manage or resolve the conflict and undermine her success in managing future conflicts. Instead, help her be prepared to solve problems on her own.
Being a systems thinker. Systems thinking skills refer to the whole system and the interaction of its parts. Systems thinking is the ability to look for connections between seemingly isolated events and to understand the patterns of those events. Understanding these invisible connections helps you anticipate not just the intended consequences of a change but also possible unintended consequences. This is a critical skill for policymakers.

You are also responsible for designing effective systems and processes that enable people to carry out their work effectively. Process skills are one subset of system skills: understanding that how you do something has an effect on the results. “Seeing” the systems can help you understand better how the organizational culture and work climate affect performance and how features of the management systems and external environment shape staff attitudes and motivation.

Being a strategic thinker. Strategic thinking is not a new skill at this level, but it now has to pervade how you approach any organizational challenge or crisis. Look forward by trying to peek beyond the horizon, read widely, and talk with experts in various fields to help you discern trends and future challenges. Then try to get a good sense of your organization’s strengths and weaknesses and convene a group of good thinkers and practical realists to see how you can best position yourselves in ways that respond effectively, and in a sustainable way, to a changing environment.

LEADING AND MANAGING PRACTICES AT THE TOP LEVEL

Demands on your time are high at the top level. Many more people from inside and outside the organization will need to meet with you. You will need to be proficient in all the leading and managing practices (see Table 11) and comfortable with working through managers who are leading at other levels in order to achieve results. Your status in the organization increases your influence on the work environment and the impact your values and work style have on others. As a role model, you will be scrutinized, so practicing transparency, honesty, and integrity will reinforce organizational values and inspire others to do the same.

SIGNS OF DERAILMENT

Derailment at this level has a direct impact on people’s lives. Chief executives in the private sector who have derailed have dragged their organizations down with them, sometimes destroying their employees’ livelihoods and even their savings. In the public sector, executives who derail can undo years of work, prompt a brain drain of good people, compromise program performance at all levels, and create cynicism and ill will among major development partners.
In all cases, the consequences are disastrous and have ripple effects far beyond the immediate stakeholders. At the same time, bringing attention to derailment at this level requires tremendous courage from the board or carries considerable political cost for senior administration officials. It might have been prevented if derailment had been recognized earlier on. Still, it is always better to recognize derailment before the damage can no longer be undone.
Signs of derailment at the top level

- Uninspired communication with employees or stakeholders outside the organization, especially people from different backgrounds
- Inability to shift perspective from a particular technical focus (e.g., financial, clinical, evaluation) to focusing on the good of the whole organization
- Inability to put together a strong team or hire strong people outside one’s area of expertise
- Difficulty with or resistance to grasping the implications of sustainability—the financial, the programmatic, and organizational elements—or focusing on one element over the others
- Time management problems (inability to let go of tactical issues, putting out fires without trusting or supporting the team to handle its own problems)
- Ignoring one’s role as custodian of the culture of the organization by engaging in unethical actions or actions that compromise long-term organizational health, such as squandering reserves or endangering the organization’s reputation and stakeholders’ goodwill
- Little awareness of unspoken norms and of the impact of one’s behavior on others
- Self-imposed isolation from receiving useful feedback from staff (or maintaining a culture in which this is not encouraged)
- Low priority of “soft issues” that are not directly linked to business results
Transitions at the very top: Succession management

“Succession planning is perpetuating the enterprise by filling the pipeline with high-performing people to assure that every leadership level has an abundance of these performers to draw from, both now and in the future.”

—Ram Charan et al.
The Leadership Pipeline

Because of the influence top managers and leaders have on the entire organization or ministry, top-level leadership transition is of critical importance. If organizations pay attention to leadership transitions at all levels, managers who lead will emerge with a higher level of competence at each transition—thereby filling the pipeline with several strong candidates for the top position. This leadership pipeline serves the entire organization and reduces the need to go outside to find a suitable replacement for the top executive.

In the absence of a properly filled leadership pipeline—a reality in many organizations—the leadership transition at the top can be a traumatic experience, especially if the outgoing leader is the founder. Elements of ownership, a deep emotional attachment to the organization, and the fusion of the founder’s identity with that of the organization tend to compound the task of finding a successor, who has the impossible task of striking out in new ways, while at the same time preserving some of the old ways. In the public sector, political considerations create an equally difficult situation.

For additional resources on how to manage and lead leadership transitions at the very top, please refer to “Planning for Leadership Succession” and “Avoiding Common Mistakes in Recruiting New Leaders” in the handbook toolkit.

Creating a leadership culture

“Participatory management begins with the potential of people.”

—Max De Pree

Leadership Is An Art

The experience of a leadership transition at the top brings into focus the issue of “growing” talent from within or “buying” new talent from the outside. The trauma or disturbance of succession management can trigger new organizational commitment to building and maintaining a pipeline of managers who lead—a pipeline that is kept full and flowing at all times. This commitment means that managers at all levels are taught, coached, and rewarded for lead-
Three dimensions of managing leadership succession in the private sector

Whether a change in leadership at the top is imminent, being contemplated, or sudden, there are always three dimensions at play: a personal, an organizational, and a cultural dimension.

The personal dimension. The founder or long-term leader may be so strongly attached to the organization that it is nearly impossible to let go, since her identity is fused with the identity of the organization. If there is no strong, credible second and third tier of executives, staff or the key stakeholders may not want the former leader to retire, doubting that anyone is ready to take over. When a new leader eventually comes on board, he will need both the blessing of the outgoing leader and to be seen as competent in his own right, as he charts an organizational course that may be quite different.

The cultural dimension. The new leader needs to understand the culture of the organization as well as the wider cultural environment in which the organization operates and be able to play a bridging role between the two. For example, where the organizational culture is energetic and entrepreneurial, and the organization needs to negotiate its affairs with slower government bureaucracies, the organization should find a leader who demonstrates an understanding of those contrasting needs. This dimension is easier to navigate for an internal candidate than for an outsider. The incoming new leader must immerse herself deeply in the culture before trying to change it, especially if she is following in the footsteps of a popular and well-respected leader.

The organizational dimension. As the principal governing mechanism of many organizations, boards of directors play a critical role—as policymakers, evaluators, advocates, and resource mobilizers. To stay on track in a leadership transition, an organization needs a board that is engaged with staff and the outgoing chief executive in the search for the best possible replacement. Board members can also support a culture of leadership development by putting the topic on the agenda, even when an immediate transition is not planned.

ing their teams to produce results and for paying full attention to the needs and concerns of the stakeholders who depend on those results.

Organizations that want to foster such a leadership culture need to pay attention to and encourage transitions at all levels, even the first one, which often goes unnoticed. It is possible to develop and nurture a leadership mindset among managers and staff at all levels. If top executives cultivate the commitment of all their staff to the organization’s values and principles, the tent will not collapse when the central pole is taken out. In this way, leadership can pass into the hands of a new generation that is fully prepared and brings fresh views, perspectives, and energy to the evolving challenges.
Questions to consider on . . .

Moving up the leadership ladder

Considering your current level. Think about transitions you have made in your work life. Can you identify which level your current position mostly resembles?

Reflecting on shifts you have made. When you last made a transition, did you notice you had to make a shift in time horizon, priorities, relationships, and tasks? If you did, which ones were easiest for you to handle and which ones were most difficult? If you didn’t, looking back some time later, can you see some shifts that you should have made but didn’t? Have there been any consequences because these shifts didn’t happen?

Preparing others for transitions. How are you supporting people who report to you to prepare them for a role that is appropriate for their level?

Recognizing signs of derailment. Which of the signs of derailment do you recognize in others? In yourself?

Keeping staff on track. Review the signs of derailment for the level of manager that is below you. Can you see any of these signs in your staff? If so, what do you plan to do about it?

Keeping the pipeline full. Is your organization’s pipeline filled with people who have good management and leadership potential? If yes, how does the organization keep it moving? If no, what needs to change about the ways you currently groom future leaders and managers?

Planning for leadership succession. How is your organization planning for eventual leadership transitions at the top?