

THE EUROPEAN Spring 2014

# EXECUTIVE EDUCATION REVIEW

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## UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Is management education adapting to globalisation?

## LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Cultivate the skills to achieve your full potential

## DISRUPTIVE INFLUENCES

Why business schools must react to market forces



The image features two men standing in front of a chalkboard filled with business-related diagrams and text. The man on the left is wearing a blue suit and a pink tie, while the man on the right is wearing a black leather jacket over a t-shirt with an American flag design and jeans. The chalkboard contains various diagrams, including a lightbulb, a bar chart, a line graph, and a network diagram. Text on the board includes 'teamwork', 'motivation', 'imagination', 'research', 'innovation', 'business', 'success', 'education', 'diagram', 'workshop', 'plan', 'teach', and 'leaders'. The background is a dark grid with binary code at the bottom.

# CAN YOU SPOT A LEADER?

**INSIDE:** BOARDROOM DIVERSITY ● SOUTH AFRICA ● GERMANY ● EXECUTIVE TRANSITION

# EXECUTIVE TRANSITION IN THE NEW NORMAL



If we should be less certain in the new normal that those with potential will deliver, collaborative development makes perfect sense. **Nathan Hobbs, Mannaz**, examines how to bring through the next generation of executives

**T**he first 90 days are well established as a critical time in an executive's transition to role. There are multiple agendas to pursue, everything from meeting the team, to validating strategy, building alliances, and strengthening personal capabilities. But we live in interesting times. Executives operate in an increasingly complex, uncertain and disruptive business landscape full of discontinuity and surprise, where long-standing assumptions are continually challenged. We talk about the "new normal" and reflect wistfully on the supposed certainties of the past. Seasoned executives may be coping, but what about those recently promoted or joining the firm as experienced hires? It was hard enough to "make the grade" before things became complicated, and even then we knew that as many as one in four wouldn't fulfil their potential. In recent times, we've started to hear concerns about the organisations' capability to nurture their top talent and with this, the desire to validate the high potential status of those talents feeding the leadership pipeline. The assumption seems to be that if executive transition has become problematic, it must be down to the underlying quality of the talent these days. Yet the likelihood is that the problem actually concerns how the organisation is supporting executive transition.

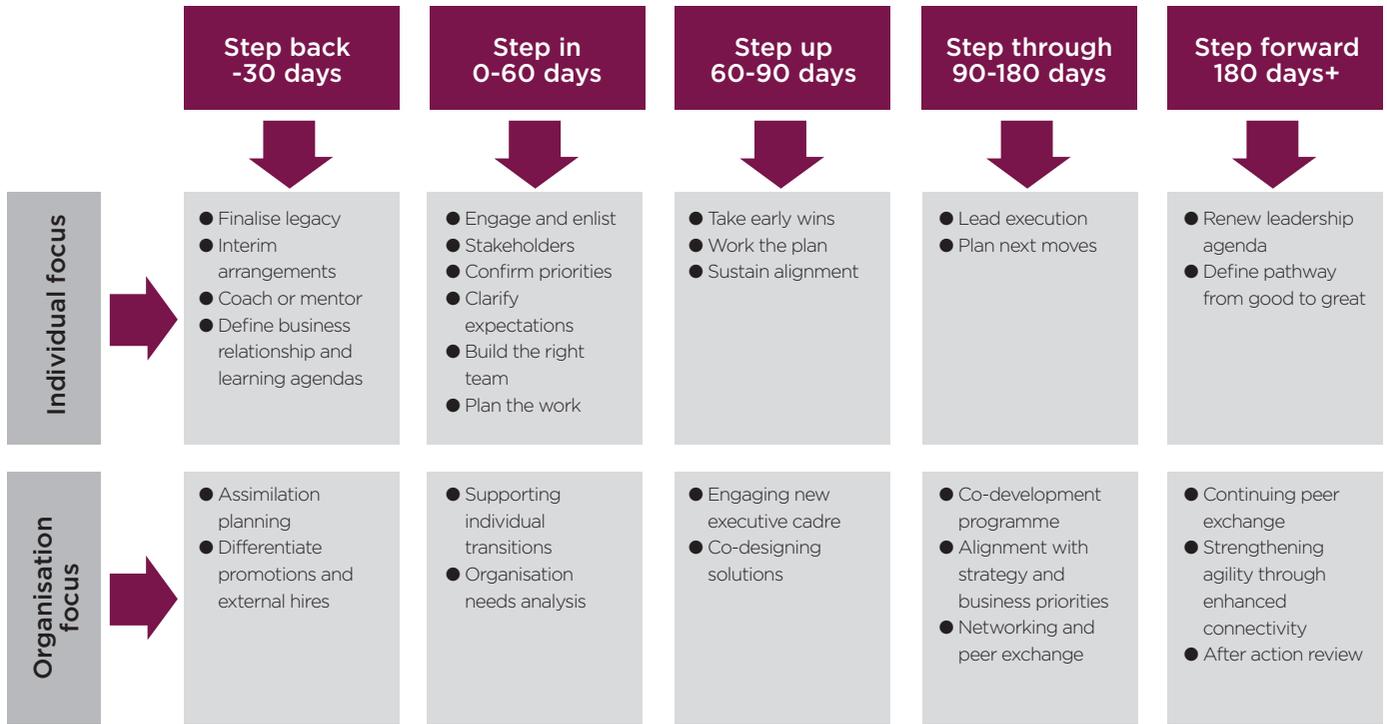
We've always known that those newly minted executives who receive generous attention from a boss or mentor reach higher levels of competence quicker. Conventional wisdom also says: "take a coach, it works", and traditionally it has. An effective working relationship with a coach brings focus and perspective to what can be a tough few

months. An International Coach Federation study from 2009 reports an ROI of 700 per cent. But does coaching reflect the new normal?

If the new normal requires flexibility and speed of decision-making we may say something useful about the qualities required of individual leaders, however, it's the organisation itself that needs agility and there may be structural or cultural reasons for its absence. Could it be that the anxieties currently expressed about the potential of new generation executives are more to do with the fact they aren't developing quickly enough in this more complex world? Perhaps they aren't achieving results because they are less well connected than they should be, less likely to mobilise those with an interest in solving the problem, less likely to collaborate beyond conventional hierarchies, over-focused on management control and more easily led than leading. And what about experienced hires? However capable the leader joining the organisation, the agile workplace requires connections and established work relationships built on a foundation of trust, and being new can be debilitating in that sense.

## **From individual charisma to collaborative development**

What kind of executive transition programme could begin to solve these challenges? Executives don't easily attend training classes, but they will accept collaborative development where this accelerates the resolution of problems and helps them get their work done. Executive transition in the new normal emphasises business goals, preparing the organisation for strategy execution and, therefore, strengthening informal networks →



The Mannaz Transitions Roadmap

← and the practice of collaboration, whilst personal development goals are addressed in the service of business goals. Participants become representatives of their teams back home, and concern themselves with the stakeholder management, collaboration and decision-making needed to get things done. They strengthen real-world networks, learn to relate to their colleagues in new ways and build the collaboration and trust needed to make organisation agility a reality. If we should be less certain in the new normal, that those with potential will deliver, collaborative development makes perfect sense. Rather than perpetuate the heroic tradition, where individual charisma is emphasised and decisions are made by the few, we reflect reality and emphasise the connectivity, collaboration and sense of ownership required to react to the unexpected and get problems solved. We encourage colleagues to support each other and lend a hand, quid pro quo. Rather than focus on an educational solution or relationship with a single coach, the developmental design leverages participants' shared reality and over time delivers a behaviour-changing mix of encouragement and reinforcement. We may invite participants to attend one or two workshops, however the focus remains squarely on the collaboration needed to deliver business results, and that takes place in-role and not in the classroom.

As the world economy continues to improve, baby boomers continue to retire and Generation X expects investment in their development along



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with that promotion, the next 10-15 years will bring increasingly interesting succession challenges, and a greater need to integrate organisation and leadership development traditions to create meaningful solutions that deliver proven results. A well-designed executive transition programme will accelerate the acquisition of competence, minimise the risk of failure and improve retention. Importantly, executive transition in the new normal directly supports the achievement of business goals and drives the development of an agile leadership culture. Given organic and acquisitive growth, departures, retirements and terminations, it's likely that 10 or 15 per cent of your executive cadre are new to role in a given year. Addressing the executive transition challenge, therefore, stands to make a significant impact on organisation performance within a relatively short time. ■

**Further information**

To learn more please visit: [www.mannaz.com](http://www.mannaz.com)

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Nathan Hobbs heads the solutions design team at Mannaz, where he draws on a wide mix of disciplines and past experiences in his approach. He has 25 years professional practice as an organisational psychologist, and consults in the areas of talent management, leadership and organisation development.