Context to the nugget

Rich talks about how Google things about spotting potential and about Leadership Development. He quotes an interesting statistic from a piece of research by Corporate Leadership Council. He said that they found that that in 71% of the time people who are high performers were not high potentials but conversely 93% percent of high potentials are also high performers. He also goes on to talk about "Googliness" a term that encapsulates some of the softer aspects of an individual that flourishes inside Google.

Transcription

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Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): I'd like to talk about your insights from your days at Google where you heading executive development, I'm curious about Leadership Development in that digital age if I may use the term as compared to how traditional economy companies think about it? What are the big differences in the terms of the key livers that are the different in the digital context vs. the industrial context?

Rich Fernandez (RF): As many of you know I have led the function at Google that was looking after exactly development executive of education for the senior leaders at Google for number of years and I left there some years ago but what I saw then and what I still see now, especially compared to I guess more traditional companies or economies is that in the digital economy disruption and innovation happens at a very quick rate and accordingly leaders need to be agile to meet that kind of disruption so that when we talk about leadership development and growing the leadership capabilities of people it's really about how to help them meet those disruptive challenges in an agile way. So what's different about leadership development is that there are no simulations there are no long range strategic plans that are going to effectively address the dynamics of highly disruptive market place so if you think about it for example 10 years ago Uber or if you are in China DD you know this thing didn't really exist and now they are major players and major drivers of digital economy ,shared economy… so how do you kind of meet those challenges what we find is that in order to help people stay agile we really had to help them think about things like very effective cross-functional collaboration the ability to kind of map and navigate relationship quickly, so that they can get things done across lines and infect it's much more of a matrix organization then then it is really kind of a vertical organization people like to talk about vertical integration a lot but really, it's a lattice or a matrix of web relationship that need to work really effectively so people go quickly and meet disruption as it occurs. So what we don't see often in this context when we do leadership development I feels like business simulation. You know I use to work for more traditional economy companies, financial services companies and in that type of environment business stimulation were great. At a place like Google it doesn't really mean much because a year two years from now who knows what the business plans keep really looks like so even try to model it.

DJ: And one here is about let's say education, exposure and experience as three levers depending upon the kind of behavioural change you are driving at are there let's say the key dimension along which you think about developing leaders in a place like Google?

RF: You know certainly the education piece is important so they have the fresh hold capabilities but we also look for domain expertise or leadership and then I think the third pillar that's really not so well understood outside of Google or something called "Googliness" so this is quality of being able to interact and relate to your peers, to people who are around you on other teams as well in a kind of open, agile, warm way, may be not warm necessarily but just it's a quality of being able to work effectively across the organization and it's something that a lot of companies don't really understand and don't really assess for.

DJ: And do you codify that within Google do you spell out what "Googliness" mean?

RF: Yes, to some extent but it's more like criteria that filter for and you kind of know it when you see it as well. So you know of this person is going to be a good collaborator not so territorial but much more of a good collaborator. Obviously they have the thresh-hold intelligence they have the thresh-hold domain expertise but then what are these attributes around effective relationship and that is something that's not very well known outside of Google or even really understood in a lot of companies in my opinion. They are just a lot of companies just try to hire the best expert in the field and they don't look for other quality.

DJ: Just segueing to a related theme Rich, in the context of defining potential of a leader I am curious about how you think about that and more specifically like you know like you said "you know it when you see it" how do you see the different inflection point as you rise to top in Google let's say Director to VP to the next level, What shifts in each of this point?

RF: In an environment, tech environment usually at the time I was at Google where you and we look at Directors those are essentially the highest unit of the execution within the organization so they are still responsible for lots of execution and then we get into to the VP and above and it becomes much more strategic you know driving a lot a kind of innovation for the future and so forth. I'd like to think about potential in terms of really three things and this comes out of pretty robust body of research from the Corporate Leadership Council. I think they did a study I don't know a while ago now where they look that I think something over 10 thousand employees, across 15 different industries, 29 different Countries and they found something fascinating about potential and what they found was that often times we mistake high performance for potential. What they found was that in 71 percent of the time people who are high performer were not high potentials but conversely something like 93 percent of high potentials are also high performers. So that's a little bit if you just think about that for a second so roughly 70 percent of high performers do not have the potential to go to the next level they are really good at the position they are playing but that doesn't mean they are going to be a great leader but when you can identify those people there are high potential chances are they do have a track record of success and in fact that research and some other organizational research you know from Google and other places have suggested that its things like agility which is the willingness and ability to take on new roles that greater complexity and so for if promo ability which is the ability to kind of step to the next level and lead through that next inflection point and then finally a track record of success that the performance piece. If you combine all three of those chances are very high but you are looking at someone who has high potential

DJ: And for a development prospective in a tech context you spoke about agility a couple of times how do you move from figuring out what the area of development is to really changing behaviour

what have you seen work effectively in Google context in sort of moving from cognition to behavioural change?

RF: Google and a lot of other tech companies are dated driven places and so likewise in terms of leadership behaviours you want to look at the data so there was a very useful tool called operate feedback where the all of the direct report let's say individual leader would give feedback formally on a survey to a specific leader and that would form part of their performance reviews. So it's really easy to see how the effective they are being as leader and then being able to us that added up point to… to then grow and develop and when you get in to the develop side of things because there must be asses part of it which is gathering the data and then there is the develop part of it when you get into the development piece of it it's really about giving them the right couching and the right environment to talk to their peers and so when we use to talk about coaching… peer coaching which sets form for that to happen and then also just getting the right type of learning around leadership like what attributes of leadership are they needing to grow is it an emotional intelligence, is it adaptive leadership, stakeholder management more effective negotiation then you have specific solution that you can ensure that they are connected to once you have assist what are the specific areas to work on.

DJ: And the solution would be courses or MOOCs or those kinds of things or the experts?

RF: All of the above. Blended learning, peer learning, in person learning it's the full spectrum, one on one coaching so it really is a full spectrum development that is available to them. It's investing in your talent you can't just say to people "you need to be better at this?" Actually, it supports them and provide them a scaffolding and that the everything from an app all the way through one on one executive coaching.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: In my experience with organizations, my experience is that most of the times there is a streetlight effect that is at play. This phenomenon derives inspiration from a folk tale of Mulla Nasruddin. He once saw a man looking for keys under a street light and he asked him, what are you doing? The man said – I am looking for my home keys, I seem to have dropped them on the street. To which Mulla says, did you drop them here, to which the man says, No, but this is where there is light, so I will look for it here.

Most companies find it easy to measure performance and it is often the easy option to assume that the high performers are high potential. But Rich's statistic from Corporate Leadership Council is eye opening. 71% of High Performers are not necessarily High Potentials. Because at a transition point, often what got you here will not get you there. I imagine performance is a poor indicator of potential. The rules of the game might shift and that is where the High Potentials will have an edge over High Performers.

So, having language around how you think of potential is valuable. In my previous organization, we would look at 4 elements around what energizes people (Curiosity towards learning and feedback, Connecting the Dots, Engaging with People and Resilience); YSC another Leadership Advisory firm, looks at Judgment Influence and Drive as the drivers of Potential. Rich speaks about Agility, Promotability and Track Record of performance as three variables that indicate potential. I guess, there is no one right answer but ensuring that you have a conversation in the organization around how to think about measuring Potential that is different from measuring performance is a good place to start. If this is of interest, you might want to read the HBR article by Claudio Fernandez

Araoz – a colleague of mine at Egonzehnder when I was there. The article is titled "21st Century Talent Spotting" where he describes these variables in greater detail.

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End of nugget transcription

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Rich Fernandez- Nuggets

- 41.00 Rich Fernandez - The Full Conversation
- 41.01 Rich Fernandez - Leadership Development in the Digital economy
- 41.02 Rich Fernandez - Origins of SIY
- 41.03 Rich Fernandez - Attention and Meta-Attention
- 41.04 Rich Fernandez - Developing the meditation habit

- 41.05 Rich Fernandez - Benefits of Journaling
- 41.06 Rich Fernandez - Meta-distress and Response-flexibility
- 41.07 Rich Fernandez - 3 levels of resilience
- 41.08 Rich Fernandez - Positivity and Psychological Safety

About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work here.

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