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The Dynamic Organizational Contexts of
Executive Succession:
Consideration and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

While long a topic of interest, in recent years executive
succession has drawn increasing attention by managers and organizational
scholars alike. To be sure, thoughtful observers of organizational life
have often described the careers, challenges and fates of institutional
leaders as well as speculated upon their organizational, institutional
and societal consequences. The business and general press chronicles
newsworthy succession events almost daily. Popular books detail the
stories of prominent executives in all arenas--their rise and fall and
surrounding circumstances seem to hold an intrinsic fascination for
nearly everyone. Succession, in the guise of companion topics such as
promotion, tenure, career, training and development and a host of others
is the grist of organizational rumour mills and the target of
perservation by members of all ages, occupations, and achievement. In
recent decades, organizational scholars also have been drawn more and
more to executive succession even though it has long been of central
concern (Grusky, 1960).

Research into executive succession has recently both broadened and
deepened its focus. Initially, rates of succession in organizations,
and, whether a successor was internal or external to the organization
were related to supposed determinants, e.g., board composition, past
performance, organization size, technology and environment, and selected
consequences, e.g., organizational performance, organizational growth or
stability, and so on (Allen, Panian and Lotz, 1978; Brown, 1982; Hemich,
1977). Succession practices and systems and their relationship to

organizational performance have been described in several surveys, e.g., Fullmer (1978), Carnazza (1982) and Schaeffer (1982). A few richly descriptive field studies have also appeared over the years elaborating relevant concepts and bringing forth concerns with process, e.g., Gouldner's (1954) "strategic replacement," Guest's (1962) demonstration of the impact of the predecessor's style, Gephart's (1978) introduction of a symbolic interactionist perspective, and Gabarro's (1983) complex stages of executive succession. Succession's place in organizational renewal (e.g., Katz and Kahn, 1978), organizational adaptation to a changing environment (e.g., Perrow, 1972; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978), organizational design (e.g., Vancil and Buddrus, 1978), organizational structure (e.g., Ouchi, 1977), and leadership selection and development (e.g., Friedman, 1984), illustrate the diversity of contemporary foci as well as manifesting the focus of this essay. From the inception of scholarly attention (Zald, 1965), succession has been recognized as manifesting political processes in organizations, e.g., Gephart (1978), Pfeffer and Moore (1980), thus touching directly upon the topic most closely associated with succession--leadership. Whether leader behavior does or does not account for organizational level performance has been both debated and studied (e.g., Gamson and Scotch, 1964; Lieberson and O'Conner, 1972; Wiener and Mahoney, 1984; Gupta, 1984)--yet disagreement continues. Succession, however, continues to be seen as one of the powerful factors impacting both organizational efficiency and effectiveness, as well as survival. Who the leaders are does seem to matter. Hence, the processes, practices and circumstances of executive succession have become areas of significant inquiry. While attention has been directed to a growing number of internal and external factors, processes and practices, several areas remain relatively unexplored.

Perhaps the major omission in the succession literature relates to the organizational context of succession. As the rate of change increases for society, markets and industries, it is mirrored in organizations. To fully understand executive succession, therefore, we need to focus our attention on these dynamic organizational contents to date relatively ignored: succession contexts related to organizational change and transformation within and between stages of the organizational life cycle. These areas are significant for two main reasons: (1) many key environmental variables at the industry and economy level trigger, channel, and moderate an organization's movement through its life cycle and therefore attention to the organizational life cycle may help us to understand how and why succession occurs; and, (2) the environments of all organizations are recognized as becoming more complex and changeful requiring ongoing organizational changes and sometimes even fundamental transformations. These in turn stretch and stress all members, especially executives, bringing basic patterns and practices into bolder relief, testing core values and assumptions. Organizational changes of all kinds, swift or slow, major or minor, are increasingly not only the common circumstances of executive succession but imply competencies that successors require.

This admittedly exploratory essay unfolds in three sections. In the first one we review and map the dynamic contexts of interest here. We focus attention on change contexts and processes that are planned or evolutionary and which lead to major changes or even more fundamental transformations. The second section then turns to a discussion of the roles executives play in these processes and dynamic contexts and thereby suggests contingent criteria for successors. The third and

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final section of the essay presents some implications for executive selection and development which our attention to dynamic contexts has suggested.

THE DYNAMIC CONTEXTS OF SUCCESSION

A current truism is that the reality of organizations is increasingly dynamic, that is, organizations are always experiencing and exhibiting change of some kind and magnitude (Bateson, 1979). Given the ubiquitousness and importance of change in organizations, executive succession needs to be better understood in such terms.

In this section we shall sketch four different dynamic contexts, differentiating them along two dimensions. In one dimension, changes may be viewed as natural evolutionary ones or they are the consequence of intentional, that is, planned efforts. Here the difference is in the process of change, between changes that occur primarily reactively or opportunistically through everyday problem-solving activities, as opposed to those that are the result of proactive, focused change activities. The second dimension is essentially the degree of impact that the changes have on the fundamental character of the organization. Here elements of an organization may achieve a better fit with other elements (or the whole organization) on the one hand, or, on the other hand, there may be a shift in the organization's basic character, nature, and functioning. The former we term "organizational change." The latter is here labeled "organizational transformation" implying that an organization's essential way of being or culture changes. With the two dimensions just noted, a two by two matrix which maps the four archtypical types of organizational changes can be constructed as shown

in Figure 1.[1] The four quadrants are labeled in terms of their primary outcome.

Insert Figure 1

The organizational changes that result from conventional, ongoing problem-solving practices (cell I) ostensibly enhance the organizations' efficiency and/or effectiveness. Ongoing adjustments of this order, may, over time, accumulate incrementally (Quinn, 1980). When these micro-level changes are selectively reinforced by top management, the organization seemingly "drifts" into a different strategic posture, which can ultimately be seen as having transformative effects (cell II). Planned organizational change (cell III), while often necessitating many internal adjustments, is typically focused on achieving a better fit between the organization and its input and output domains and its general environment, i.e., it is intended to achieve better adaptation. The social technologies of strategic planning and organizational development, among others, are well known adaptive devices. When adaptive responses are insufficient, that is, when the organization finds itself "surprised" (Schon, 1983) in the sense that its unquestioned values and assumptions about how the organization operates are violated, organizational cultural transformation (cell IV) may be triggered. Cultural transformation, of course, is relatively rare and only now is beginning to be understood (Schein, 1985; Frost, et al., 1985; Kilmann, 1984).

The dynamic contexts, characterized above as evolutionary and planned organizational changes, need not be further commented upon

MAGNITUDE OF CHANGES

	CHANGE	TRANSFORMATION
NATURE OF CHANGE PROCESS		
EVOLUTIONARY	"EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS" I	II "STRATEGIC DRIFT"
PLANNED	III "ADAPTATION"	IV "CULTURAL ALTERATION"

FIGURE 1: A MAP OF DYNAMIC ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXTS

because they are both familiar and have well developed change technologies. Those contexts we have labeled as organizational transformation, however, require further explication. How does strategic drift occur? All organizations experience deviance, sometimes when required systems, structures, or processes intentionally or unintentionally are not adhered to and sometimes through innovations and experimentation. When such deviance occurs and appears functional, management may adopt or at least tolerate it. Those which are reinforced by management's tolerance or blessing can, as they accumulate over time, result in macro-level changes, i.e., the organization evolves (Weick, 1979). Note this "drift" is neither planned nor rationally conceived. The key for transformative evolution, i.e., strategic drift, is for these newer elements to be eventually acknowledged and articulated by the organization's leaders as central to the character of the system (Kanter, 1985). This post hoc reframing (Watzlawick, et al., 1974) of core cultural exemplars, beliefs and values by the dominant coalition substitutes for and/or parallels organizational strategy (Weick, 1985), for both strategy and culture function to impose coherence, order and meaning.

Planned organizational transformation, i.e., managed culture alteration, requires the organization to "learn" (Argyris and Schon, 1978) in that its unquestioned, unthoughtabout values and guiding beliefs (Davis, 1984) are brought into explicitness and substituted with a new, supposedly more appropriate "vision." Lundberg (1985) has outlined the internal and external conditions which enable organizational learning, the pressures which precipitate culture change (e.g., atypical performance demands, stakeholder pressure,

organizational growth or downsizing, and real or perceived crises), and, cataloged five classes of trigger events: sudden environmental calamities, (e.g., natural disasters, sharp recession, major competitor innovations); opportunities (e.g., technological breakthroughs, newly available venture capital); internal and external revolutions, and managerial blunders, (e.g., foolish expenditures, inappropriate tactics). Trigger events "surprise" in that they pose a "predicament" --unquestioned values and beliefs are recognized as being violated and inappropriate. Sometimes, the leaders enter into the non-ordinary activities of anticipating future conditions, creating a new image of their organization within that future, strategizing for the major transitioning implied, and action planning so that the multiple interventions necessitated impact the organizations' deeper levels of meaning, as well as its surface or cosmetic ones.

Organizational change and transformation can and does occur at any time given certain circumstances and stimuli. It seems useful, however, to note those predictable periods of relative stability and the periods of sharp transitions that organizations experience--a general process commonly referred to as movement through the organizational life cycle. Our state of knowledge about organizational life cycles is still rather modest. Various models each pose a different numbers of "stages," and they differ as to whether the sequence of stages is deterministic or not (e.g., Filley, 1962; Starbuck, 1971; Kimberly, 1978; Kimberly and Miles, 1980; Cameron and Whetten, 1981). Sequences tend to include a creation, growth, maturity, revival (sometimes), decline and end set of stages (Miller and Friesen,1980).[2] Schein (1985) argues, however, that from a cultural point of view, generational age, i.e., the organization managed

by the founder, succeeding family, and professional management in turn, is the important variable here. Here we will adopt Schein's (1985) three major developmental stages of (a) birth and early growth, (b) organizational midlife, and (c) organizational maturity and stagnation. The varieties of dynamic context are derived from a combination of the magnitudes of changes discussed previously with the idea that changes occur either within or between stages in the developmental sequence of the organizational life cycle, as shown in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2

With a map of the types of possible dynamic contexts, we can consider which of the cells of Figure 2 are likely to hold the most activity and which would seem to involve the most difficulty for managerial change agents. Clearly, organizational change within developmental stages is where most observed executive behavior lies--it is what management is mostly all about. This also is the area which most change related knowledge and experience is about, i.e., the theory and practice of organizational development. There is probably considerable organizational change between stages too. Transformations are probably relatively rare events, though more likely to occur in the transition between stages of the organizational life cycle. Our understanding about transitioning and transformations at the present time is quite modest although some conceptualization and research has occurred, e.g., Kimberly and Quinn (1984), Frost, et al. (1985), Schein (1985).

MOVEMENT IN THE ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE CYCLE

MAGNITUDE OF CHANGES	WITHIN STAGES	BETWEEN STAGES
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE		
ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION		

FIGURE 2: THE VARIETIES OF DYNAMIC CONTEXTS

Recapitulation. Thus far I have outlined my conception of the dynamic contexts in which executive succession takes place and, no doubt, influences. While it was pointed out that change in general was either natural and evolving or planned, we also emphasized the differences between changes which resulted in better adjustment and/or adaption and those which transformed the organization both strategically and culturally. In addition, we introduced a model of the organization life cycle so that changes within stages and during transition between stages could be more readily ascertained. Until this point we have not dealt with the processes of how changes and transformations actually occur, and it is to these processes that we now turn.

Change and Transformation Processes

It is axiomatic that all proactive changes begin with the perception or the experience of some environmental and/or internal threat, loss or opportunity. These perceptions/experiences, however, are then interpreted as either "problems" or "predicaments"--the former leading to organizational change and the latter leading to organizational transformation.[3] If it is a problem interpreted as necessitating organizational change, then some variant of a problem-solving or action-research process is followed: for example, (a) mobilizing concern and inducing readiness for change, (b) fact finding and diagnosis, (c) search for solutions or their invention, (d) intervention, and (e) assessment and the institutionalization of change. This process assumes several points: that it is initiated by persons with control of key resources; that the stress induced is relatively minor; that current objectives are sufficient; and that mutual adjustment of organizational elements to each other or the organization to its environment is the

purpose. It is this last point, however, that is seldom adequately achieved and which over time permits what was earlier termed strategic drift.

If the interpretation is of a predicament, the transformational process previously termed cultural alteration tends to look somewhat different.[4] If there is sufficient concern within the dominant coalition to stimulate activity, then several things seem to occur more or less simultaneously. Resources are mobilized--resources of ideas, manpower, competencies, and so forth--beyond those needed for the ongoing operation of the organization. Activities are initiated which lead to the more or less systematic envisioning of the probable future environmental conditions of the organization. Leaders and their assistants also go about surfacing the heretofore unconsciously held guiding beliefs, assumptions and values of the organization. With resources mobilized, a future more or less conceived, and the deeper basis of identity and meaning of the organization acknowledged, a reframing or visioning of the organization's image, culture or paradigm (Pettigrew, 1979; Pfeffer, 1981; Mohrman and Lawler, 1983) is defined by the leadership.

Once the activity of visioning or its product occurs, mourning for the elements of the prior culture to be abandoned is initiated and guided. At the same time power must be mobilized so that the new vision may be translated into actuality (sometimes, of course, countervailing power structures are also mobilized). A strategy, that is, a general plan for transforming the present culture into the new one, is then devised, as are the explicit action plans for intervening across all levels of meaning, from surface levels of meaning derived from artifacts

and credos and behavioral norms, to the levels of deeper meaning which reside in values, guiding beliefs and assumptions. While all of this is going on, and thereafter, care must be exercised to involve organizational members, and importantly, for leaders to absorb anxieties of members and provide ongoing reassurance. The sequence of multiple interventions, at multiple levels of meaning, then commences. When predicaments are absolved through strategic drift, much of the above takes place informally, even unconsciously, and the new state of affairs is articulated afterwards by the leadership (who usually take credit for the transformation). Regardless of whether the transformation is intended or evolves, continued espousal of the new culture is usually necessary (through stories, charters, slogans, symbols, etc.) in support of the pattern maintenance via altered structures, systems, management practices, and climate factors. This goal of persistence of performance over time leads to the existence of the new culture as established social fact (Goodman, et al., 1980). Of course as the transformation proceeds problems can and do occur, signaling the need for organizational change process to be activated.

The process of transformation just sketched, and that of organizational change before it, are summarized diagrammatically in Figure 3.

Figure 3 about here

The processes as outlined above, it should be emphasized, appear more spare, more linear, and more deterministic than the way they actually may be enacted. The sequence of activities may and often does

The Process of Organizational Change	The Process of Planned Organizational Transformation
(1) The perception of, or experience of internal or external loss, or opportunity	(I) The perception of, or experience of internal or external loss, threat or opportunity
(2) Interpretation that there is a _problem_	(II) Interpretation that there is a _predicament_
(3) Mobilize concern and initiate readiness for change	(III) Mobilization of concern among the dominant coalition
(4) Fact finding and diagnosis	(IV) a. Mobilization of transformative resources b. Envisualization of future environmental circumstances
(5) Solution search or intervention	(V) Surfacing of the organization's guiding beliefs, values and assumptions
(6) Intervention	(VI) Design of transition strategy and tactics
(7) Assessment and institutionalization of change	(VII) a. Guidance of mourning for lost culture elements b. Mobilization of power
	(VIII) a. Anxiety absorption and reassurance by leadership b. Intervention sequence activated
	(IX) a. Continued articulation of the new culture b. Initiation of pattern maintenance devices

FIGURE 3: THE PROCESSES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE AND PLANNED
ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

overlap considerably, cycling back to the earlier steps may occur, and some of them may be accomplished informally or implicitly. The flow of activities outlined, however, does appear to be required for successful change or transformation to occur; without somehow attending to each step in the sequence the processes become derailed, bogged down and only "pseudo" changes appear.

This section's somewhat lengthy review of dynamic contexts and processes has set the stage for probing their implications for executive succession. What executive behaviors seem to be called for by these dynamic contexts and their attendant processes? In the following section we respond to this question by an examination of the roles associated with change and transformation activities.

EXECUTIVE ROLE REQUIREMENTS IN

DYNAMIC CONTEXTS

If some form of change is the predominant circumstance in which organizations increasingly find themselves, then organizations will find it advisable to attract and retain, as well as develop, executives who possess change and transformation competencies. The prior extended discussion of dynamic contexts and processes enables us to now consider the roles they require, each role suggesting distinctive selection criteria. We shall first note the roles and essential activities for each major stage of the organizational life cycle, and then in more detail, note those associated with the processes of organizational change and transformation.[5]

Executive Roles During the Organizational Life Cycle

Recall the developmental, generational age influenced organizational life cycle stages previously introduced: birth and early

growth, organizational mid-life, and organizational maturity and stagnation. Organizations in the first of these stages find themselves struggling for an identity based on the development of a distinctive competence. Succession in this stage is colored, often strongly, by the person or ghost of the founder-culture creator. Founders and their successors need to articulate the organization's identity. They have to work continuously on its integration, relentlessly teaching other members that the organization is singular and unique. At the same time founders and their successors must keep internal power struggles out and provide as much psychological safety for members as possible given the normal turmoil that getting established as an organization entails. Successful successors often must resemble the founder in ways central to the emerging culture (members are prone to psychological projection here of course). If succession is crisis initiated, however, then pronounced differences in style are recommended as long as the successor hews to those organizational core values that underscore its distinctiveness. Unless faced with calamity, the successor will be advised to endure the organization's culture and not attempt to alter it, for to do so risks member alienation.

An organization's agenda during its mid-life stage turns from establishing an identity and finding an environmental niche, to how to pursue growth, and with growth, how to prevent the organization from fragmenting. During this stage, executives and their successors must continue to reiterate the culture, usually indirectly through credos, slogans and the like, and see to it that the new members acquire the beliefs and jargon that instill unity. With growth, sub-cultures will normally develop, and it is likely that parts of the organization will

get into trouble. Executives will therefore be advised to champion ongoing assessment and insist on diagnosis as needed. They will also permit some internal power struggles, especially those that foster growth and/or redress any bias or imbalances left behind by the functions essential to the first stage. During the mid-life stage, cultural assessment is seldom attempted, the exceptions being when the organization experiences the trauma of merger or acquisition, major geographical expansion, or technological obsolescence.

As organizational maturity turns into stagnation (usually because of product obsolescence and market saturation), executives fill quite different roles. Creating psychological safety for members is the increasingly essential task, especially for those units that have become dysfunctional. An executive's symbolic roles take on increasing importance for the maintenance of morale and the support of a positive organizational image. It is also important that executives capture control of key resources and monitor their use carefully. With some chance of reprieve from stagnation, effective executives find ways to selectively encourage members who seek new products, markets, or any other innovation that promises relief from demise. Part of this process may also be executive role modelling and sponsorship of self examination and selective renewal although members will be relatively immune toward such examination because their prior cognitive structures, norms and games prohibit it (Nystrom and Starbuck, 1984).

Executives who attend to their organization's movement through the organizational life cycle, as has been noted, must be sensitive to several major issues: (a) when to actively work at building/defining the organization's culture and when to essentially leave it be with just

recognition and reinforcement of it; (b) when to push for integration of organizational elements and sub-units and when to allow or even foster some inter-unit differentiation or struggle; and (c) when is ongoing organizational change sufficient and when transformation is called for. This last issue requires a sensitivity to the predicament potential of major events as well as to the natural approach of organizational life cycle stage endings. In general, executive sensitivity to these issues comes from an ongoing attention to a number of factors such as: his or her relationship with the organization's dominant coalition (Pfeffer, 1977), since having a power base is always essential; the preferences, constraints and political pressures of the organization's stake holders (Mason and Mitroff, 1981), since those must be factored into change endeavors; and, portions of the organization's history since expectations of leaders, the precedence value of part successes and failures, the crucial constraints in technology, and the like, all provide guideposts to any change efforts undertaken.

Executive Change and Transformation Roles

Turning now to the outline of the processes of organizational change and planned transformation (cf. Figure 3), we inquire into the roles these processes require of executives and the criteria for executive selection and development implied by them. Both processes begin in common with the perception, or experience of, loss, threat, or opportunity. Active scanning, surveillance and ongoing intelligence activities of the past, the environment and the organizational response are indicated. The roles may be labeled "G2/U2" as shorthand for intelligence and surveillance. Both processes also have in common the interpretation of that which is perceived or experienced. To interpret

appropriately entails considerable conceptual skill. Voicing the interpretation and being heard may in addition entail courage or boldness and the ability to risk. The role is that of "challenger" which continues on through the mobilization of concern (and the initiation of readiness for the change process, and, the mobilization resources for transformation). Here, political skills and sensitivities come into play, and the role is characterized as one of being "godfather" or "lobbyist."

For organizational change the executive may also engage in goal clarification (or see that it is done) and assign one or more others the responsibility for going forward. Thereafter, he or she more or less actively "monitors" diagnosis, solution and search invention, and intervention--and plays "nudge" as needed. When change efforts have been implemented, assessment of their impact is advised though uncommon. Here the executive has to become a tough-minded "skeptic." If the change appears to be functional, its reinforcement and its degree of congruency with other elements means the executive initiates or plays "design" and "advocate" roles.

Organizational transformation, as noted, begins with roles of "G2/U2" and "challenger." It draws early on upon political sensitivities and skills. The transformation process begins to differ from organizational change at this point. Executives involved with transformation have to lead activities which produce useful scenarios of the organization's future environmental circumstances, and which produce the surfacing of the organization's present deep meanings. These are very difficult tasks, taxing of executive leadership. Executives must play some combination of "sponsor," "enthusiast" and "first violinist"

as they guide the work which specifies the organization's future and current culture. The ability to synthesize information and to perceive themes, to in effect step outside of prevailing thoughtways, is pertinent as is the ability to articulate discoveries. Someone, most often the executive, must provide the articulated eloquence that captures and inspires others. "Wordsmithing," therefore, is another role, one that carries forward throughout the transformation process.

The next transformation role is akin to an "orchestra conductor" (Galbraith, 1985), guiding the design of a process plan (Beckhand and Harris, 1977) for transition strategy and tactics. As a new image emerges and is communicated, members quite naturally begin to feel even more strongly than earlier in the process, the anxiety associated with new uncertainties and the loss of familiar and comforting perspectives. The executive roles here are the critical ones of "eulogizer" for that which has been lost and "reassurer" that the future holds promise. From the decision that the organization faces a predicament, executives have to mobilize and channel the power to go forward. The role of power mobilizer is that of "sponsor," drawing other managers and their units into a constituency for transactioning. With the process well underway the new focal themes, values and associated practices require repeated articulation and the introduction of structures and systems which buttress them. Executives here must enact with tenacity the demanding roles of "pest" and "tire kicker"--seeing to it over time as the new culture's artifacts and norms become habitual and that members do not regress.

The above activities and roles for change and transformation each implies criteria for executive selection. No one executive is likely to

be able to perform all of these roles and probably should not be expected to do so. Selection of an executive, however, should strive to ensure that the whole complement of roles exists in the top management team and that the persons selected are competent in those critical roles common to all dynamic contexts and processes. These general, common roles appear to be the following: being a cultural spokesman, able to articulate, espouse and interpret at several levels of meaning; being a rascal in the sense of calling for change or transformation and championing the new; being power sensitive and politically adept both during and after changing or transitioning; being able to absorb anxiety and provide reassurance; being able to call forth, enlist or do the design work that change and transformation require; and, being able to persist and keep others persisting until movement has once again become stability.

ON EXECUTIVE SELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

The dynamic contexts, processes, activities and roles elaborated in the prior discussion have implied differential criteria for executive behavior in a variety of circumstances.
Now we turn to the processes of executive selection and development. In what follows we take as given that candidates for succession have general management competencies, sound conceptual and analytic abilities, and are familiar with the type of business and/or industry.

The Succession Process

Executive succession may usefully be discussed in terms of three general questions: When does it occur? Is it anticipated or not? Who should be involved? The first question highlights the very subject of this essay--the dynamic contexts and associated processes. What is the

stage of development of the organization, and is it nearing a point of transition to the next stage? Within the birth and early growth stage the successor must be able to promote organizational distinctiveness and be able to articulate its identity while keeping internal power struggles to a minimum and providing psychological safety. During the mid-life stage, beyond guiding organizational growth, the successor should be able to articulate the organizational culture, maintain internal integration, initiate ongoing assessment and perhaps allow functional internal struggles. With maturity/stagnation of the organization, successor qualities include the sponsorship of organizational self-examination and the selective promotion of innovation and experimentation while carefully monitoring key resources, maintaining morale and providing psychological safety. In each stage the successor should also be sensitive to needed major changes and possible transformative transition.

When succession occurs during a major organization change or a planned transformation, the question becomes: "At which point in each of these processes should succession occur?" The companion question is whether other managers are able and willing to perform some of the roles in the processes? At the onset of these processes, then, who will be responsible for intelligence/scanning, who will interpret problems and predicaments and challenge the system, who will be "godfather" and "lobbyist"? Thereafter the roles necessary in each process differ, but again the question is whether the successor or someone else be responsible for performing them. At minimum, the general common roles noted above, i.e., cultural spokesman, rascal, etc., are basic criteria for selection no matter when succession occurs.

The second general question asks if the succession event is anticipated or not, that is, was it planned for. The unanticipated replacement of executives, due either to surprise resignations, accidents or the lack of succession planning, puts time pressures on the organization which tend to obscure consideration of relevant selection criteria. If anticipated even to some degree, the organization is more likely to have identified an appropriate reservoir of successor talent. Pertinent is whether this reservoir has been formed and/or is structured in terms of change and transformation competencies.

The third question focuses attention on the actors involved in succession. Some one or set of persons has to decide that a successor needs to be selected, to plan the selection process, to search for potential candidates, to choose the successor, and to see to it that appropriate socialization of the executive selected takes place. The first and third of these stages is always a line responsibility. The other steps may or may not also involve staff personnel--but always under the scrutiny of top management and directors if there are any. In dynamic contexts the involvement of outsiders appears especially useful. If a consultant or external researcher exists who understands the organization and has a good ongoing relationship with top management, they may help by facilitating the selection process and providing expertise. The function of the outsider is primarily to ensure that a broad perspective is maintained and to help those responsible in confronting the dynamic realities of the succession context--functions that are difficult for those intimately involved to accomplish. Search for candidates is also helped by outsiders. While external search is commonly assisted by professional executive recruitment services,

outsiders are often overlooked, foolishly, in internal searches. This is remarkable since outsiders often are involved in the assessing and developing of the internal talent pool.

Executive Development

Selection is most likely to succeed when the right person is available. This brings us to the matter of executive development. Internal talent pools come about through recruitment, formal development programs, and ongoing developmental experiences. Managerial recruitment during or in anticipation of major organizational change or transformation might use the roles identified earlier as the basis for screening prospective management candidates. Development programs for dynamic contexts should focus on health and personal development, of course, but should incorporate agenda related to team-building skill, change and transformation processes, organizational design, strategy formulation, cultural assessment, and issues in the future and in the general society that will possibly impinge on the organization. Several ongoing developmental experiences, pertinent for managers who will become candidates in an executive succession pool, are these: coaching and mentoring experiences, especially as the coach or mentor; assignments and projects that really stretch a manager's capabilities, that foster consulting and facilitation skills, and which require broad organizational assessment and diagnosis; activities that require building internal and external professional networks, and the development and use of others as sounding boards, i.e., "shadow" consultants (Schroder, 1974); and, responsible involvement in change and transformation events.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This essay has argued that the contemporary environments of organizations are evermore changeful and impactful on organizations; that the reality of organizational life, therefore, is mostly one of change and transition; that organizations as dynamic contexts--either as moving through the stages of the organizational life cycle or as experiencing organizational change and transformation--give prominence to executive change and transition roles; and, that these roles thus provide the criteria for assessing executive behavior, selecting executive successors, and developing desirable executive competencies.

The essay has been exploratory in that considerations of dynamic contexts have heretofore been relatively underdiscussed, especially so for executive succession. No doubt as further inquiry into these areas proceeds, the preliminary conceptual frameworks provided here will be both refined and altered. They do, however, allow the work of understanding executive succession under dynamic, changeful conditions to begin in earnest. Initially these frameworks can serve to order and differentiate those descriptive studies and surveys that now exist. Hopefully, too, this essay will stimulate inquiry into the mechanisms by which these general considerations are translated into effective practices in particular organizations and industries. It is clear that the multiple considerations of executive succession in dynamic contexts contain many challenges for both organization scholars and management practitioners alike.

FOOTNOTES

1. The two dimensions, of course, really describe continua. We partition them as shown to more clearly show the differences which occur when the dimensions are combined.

2. Movement through these developmental stages may range from swift to slow and vary too. Stages may overlap somewhat, blurring transition or occasionally be coming sharply delineated.

3. Of course, the label "problem" is sometimes misleading since problem connotes solutionability. Some so-called problems are actually dilemmas or even paradoxes.

4. This transformational process has been synthesized from the recent writings and presentation of E. Schein, T. Deal, W. Dyer Jr., C. Lundberg, J. Martin, C. Siehl and P. Vaill.

5. In what follows we shall not discuss general management, technical, and business function competencies--all of which are equally vital for organizational health and survival.

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