

Deployment and Development of Senior Managers in Rapid Employee Growth Organizations

ABSTRACT

This dissertation helps to understand how the deployment and development of senior managers happens in the organizations experiencing rapid employee growth (defined as doubling of employee strength within a period of five years or less). A field study was conducted to find out how the senior managers handle the challenges and opportunities associated with the rapid growth phase, and how their development gets impacted by the way in which they manage the enhanced expectations placed on their roles. Using the literature on work roles, the propositions were developed regarding the emergent, opportunistic and individual-driven nature of deployment and development processes in such organizations, and the resultant impact on the fast-track career progression of senior managers. Propositions were also developed to explore the impact of rapid employee growth on various other aspects of deployment and development processes, like job rotations, promotions, span of control, mentoring, coaching, multi-source feedback and the extent of work-embedded nature of the developmental processes.

A qualitative research methodology was employed to verify these propositions by conducting an empirical field study in the context of medium-sized Indian software services organizations that had experienced rapid employee growth. A pilot study was conducted, which helped to refine the interview questions that were used to conduct the interviews in the software services organizations. The primary data was collected through 43 in-depth semi-structured interviews and 7 meetings (totalling to 62 hours) with senior business managers, and HR and L&D (Learning & Development) Heads. The interview transcripts and meeting notes provided 265 pages (more than 1.17 lakh words) of primary data. It was supplemented by secondary data in the form of organizational documents and publicly available information.

The data was organized and content analysed using conceptually clustered matrices based on the themes covered in the propositions and the interview questions. The findings and inferences were drawn using pattern-noting, and comparing and contrasting tactics appropriate for qualitative data analysis. The propositions were evaluated in light of the findings, supported by relevant quotes from the interviews with the senior managers.

The findings provided many interesting instances showing emergent, opportunistic and individual-driven deployment and leadership development in a rapid employee growth context, which had helped to fast-track the career progression of senior managers. The increase in the team-size or span of control was not considered as a major challenge by the managers, as compared to the increase in the scope of activities or responsibilities. Some of the senior managers also benefitted from rapid out-of-turn promotions or significant job rotations during the rapid growth phase, by providing them exposure to multiple roles, functions and geographies, which helped them to grow faster. The managers placed a great value on mentoring, both formal and informal, especially if received in early career years.

There was a general shift in the development activities, from a high proportion of classroom training programs to more of computer-based training, such as online learning portals and webinars. Multi-source or 360-degree feedback system was considered by many as a time-consuming process, but it was still valued by them. Most of the managers mentioned that any form of feedback, formal or informal, was useful and required. The feedback process should be made more work-embedded and simple, for it to be sustained. Executive coaching was formally available to only very senior managers, and they considered it an important tool to follow-up on training, as it helped them to embed their learning in their work. The senior managers also said that some form of follow-up activities were required after the training programs, to help them apply their learning from these programs in their work.

The above findings and inferences helped to validate the propositions, and also revise some of them, especially those pertaining to mentoring, feedback systems and follow-up activities, by emphasizing the importance of informal channels and sources as well. The main contribution of this dissertation to research comes through its attempt to combine two distinct streams of literature on rapid growth firms and senior managerial deployment and development processes. The study has practical implications for rapid growth organizations, in terms of the deployment and development processes that they should adopt, and the opportunities that they can provide to their senior managers, for better managing the rapid growth phase. This study also shows evidence that senior managers can benefit from the rapid growth phase, by being proactive and adaptable, while leveraging their opportunities and taking on the challenges of rapid growth, to fast-track their career progression.