



Planning for successful leadership transitions

The management gap

Organisations need to succeed in an increasingly competitive, rapidly changing, challenging and disruptive business environment. A skilled, capable, high-performing workforce is key to maintaining a competitive advantage.

Effective managers provide good, ethical, inclusive leadership and management, successfully executing organisational strategy by translating leadership directives to teams. They are responsible for organising resources, delegating work, troubleshooting problems, and developing and coaching those they manage.

However, most managers (82%) are given no development before taking on these critical roles, research by the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) shows¹. This significant population of “accidental managers” impacts both organisations and the people within them. Untrained managers damage organisational culture, productivity, staff wellbeing, motivation and retention, and, as a result, the national economy.

How have we got here? A lack of understanding of the skills required to manage successfully, combined with technical skills being consistently valued over leadership behaviours, has created a workplace of ‘accidental managers’ who are promoted into jobs without the development they need to succeed.

High-quality, appropriately designed development interventions can equip managers and leaders with the knowledge, skills and behaviours they need to lead effectively. CMI’s research shows that trained managers regularly seek feedback (79%), are more comfortable managing change initiatives (87%) and employing emerging technology to improve efficiency (66%). Good managers also engender loyalty in their teams (72%), who feel valued and respected and are more satisfied with their job (74%), felt motivated (77%) and that their organisation had a good culture (67%).

Organisations face increasing competition and rapid changes, making skilled managers essential for executing strategies and maintaining a competitive edge. However, 82% of managers lack formal development in these strategically important roles, leading to “accidental managers” who negatively affect organisational culture, productivity, and employee well-being. Providing high-quality development can help managers lead effectively, fostering team loyalty, job satisfaction, and a positive workplace culture.

82%

of managers who enter management positions have not had any formal management and leadership training, they are “accidental managers” (CMI Report)

52%

of managers do not hold any management and leadership qualifications.

“The Talent Development Programme has helped me to understand the power we can all have in the way we can influence situations and other people. Our teams look to us to lead and to channel a positive energy in ways that make them feel seen and heard. Supporting and giving confidence to each other can change a good team member to one that you cannot run your business without.”

Understanding the transition phases

Organisations are pivotal in shaping careers, guiding individuals through key leadership transitions and encouraging high performance through development opportunities and well-deserved rewards. Good employers actively support their employees, ensuring a smooth journey through these transitions. In contrast, without the right support individuals can become a burden on the organisation through poor management practices, lack of leadership skill and inability to achieve objectives.

Climbing the corporate ladder or stepping into a leadership role is often perceived as a pinnacle of achievement, symbolising recognition of one's skills, capabilities, and dedication. Yet, beyond the initial excitement and validation, many new leaders encounter a complex and sometimes overwhelming adjustment period for which they may be unprepared.

Leadership transitions, regardless of the stage, follow a consistent pattern. For organisations to succeed, supporting employees moving into leadership roles is essential. Well-prepared leaders drive organisational success by improving efficiency, managing change, leveraging technology, and developing team loyalty.

“The communication skills and diplomacy I have honed at Cranfield have set me up to go into a new business, with an entirely different job role, and not just succeed but flourish. Confidently leveraging my transferable skills, I can lead with credibility and overcome imposter syndrome.”

Participant, Talent Development Programme.

Raising future leaders

To succeed in this early career transition, moving beyond simply staying busy is essential. The focus should be on adding value by taking a broader view of the organisation and understanding how your role impacts and connects with other business areas. This requires breaking free from a siloed mindset and thinking strategically, considering how external factors like political, technological, and social changes affect the business; what competitors are doing; and how these developments influence your team, your peers and your organisational goals?

Maximising early career development means more than just chasing promotions. Leaders must avoid getting caught in a cycle of task completion and target achievement. Instead, they should step back to reassess their career paths. Whether transitioning into management or exploring other roles within the same organisation, having the autonomy to make informed decisions is key.

1/3

of current managers and leaders have never received any formal management and leadership training (33%), including a quarter (26%) of senior managers and leaders.

Specialist to general leadership

It's common for leaders transitioning into their first general management role to experience imposter syndrome. This phase, positioned in the middle of an organisation, demands a delicate balance between hands-on work and leadership responsibilities, leaving little room for mistakes.

Success in this role requires self-awareness—understanding your triggers and managing old habits and emotions. Equally important is recognising colleagues' perspectives and fostering collaboration: Why is the marketing team taking that approach? Why is the supplier being difficult? – and how best to collaborate.

With this new perspective, leaders can prioritise effectively, gaining confidence in their leadership role. Supported by the organisation, they can navigate the transition smoothly, maintain a sense of control, and know when to push back. This strengthens their managerial skills and contributes to a positive work environment.

Advanced leadership for directors

Transitioning into a director role is challenging, especially in today's VUCA environment. Effective decision-making requires solid strategies, team empowerment, and an ability to manage ambiguity in a business landscape that's unpredictable.

Key focus areas during this transition include self-awareness, overcoming reluctance to delegate, and improving observation and listening skills. Leaders should prioritise their strengths, avoid micromanaging, ask insightful questions and communicate messages effectively to drive success.

Organisational support allows leaders to actively enjoy leading, achieve better results and nurture engagement with their team(s). This benefits both the leader and the organisation, which has grown its new leader by fostering growth and effective leadership.

“The [Breakthrough Leadership] programme was well organised. The teaching quality was high, focussing on various key facets of leadership and elements of running / managing a business. “

Participant, Breakthrough Leadership Programme.

98%

The topics and learning activities were relevant to you and your organisation

99%

The experience has encouraged new ways of thinking

100%

You are likely to recommend Cranfield to a colleague

Stats taken from the last cohorts for GMP, TDP and BLP (all combined) 23/24 cohorts.

Cranfield Leadership Transitions Portfolio



For more information click [here](#) or use the QR code.

At Cranfield University, we continue to develop a new generation of business leaders to help organisations prepare for the future.

Our innovative portfolio contains a programme suite designed to give professionals the skills, knowledge, and experience to transform their leadership capabilities and drive organisational performance and innovation, supporting their growth at key development transitions.

| | Talent Development Programme Professional development and personal growth to accelerate your career | General Management Programme Inspiring the next generation of cross-functional business leaders. | The Breakthrough Leadership Programme Leading with Impact |
|---|--|--|---|
| Target audience | Professionals working within a business function and seeking to become a more effective and influential leader. | Professionals leading a business function or a specialist and working across other key business functions. | Business leaders who are transitioning to lead an organisation. |
| Experience | Works within a key business function, with aspirations to progress and/or become more influential and effective in their role. | Is increasingly working across teams and projects in other functions, with the expectation of aligning them to business strategy. | Recently been promoted into a director-level role, and is responsible for communicating and implementing a business-wide plan. |
| Aim of programme | Provide emerging leaders with a broadened view of how an organisation operates. In addition, take a deep dive into self-leadership, self-awareness and how to align actions closer to business goals. | Enable general managers to effectively lead cross-functionally. In addition, how to take a step back to form a broader view of the organisation, cut through the noise and align key functions to business strategy. | Teach senior leaders how to effectively communicate and implement high-impact and value business strategies that filter down all levels of the organisation, and set the company on a path where all layers of the organisation are aligned. |
| Benefits/outcomes to individual | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A greater understanding of leadership and what it means to lead a team. A range of tools and frameworks to drive innovation. The ability to build meaningful relationships within your organisation. Enriched knowledge of business strategy to align your strategic focus and influence decision-making. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn how to lead cross functionally with confidence. A set of tools and frameworks to enhance and broaden your view of your organisation. Know-how to deal with socio-political challenges that arise from working across functions. Effective ways to manage overwhelm and the challenge of doing more with less. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to effectively communicate at all levels of an organisation. The knowledge to implement a business strategy that involves all layers of an organisation. Access a suite of tools and frameworks that can be applied directly to your organisation. How to influence, including at the board level. |
| Benefits / outcomes to organisations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A leader who can closely align their actions to business strategy. Greater collaboration within an organisation. A proactive leader with the knowledge to build meaningful relationships that create value. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater cross-functional collaboration. Leaders skilled at aligning key business functions to strategy. Effective implementation of business strategy. A leader who can deal with the inherent clashes of working across key business functions. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A leader who can successfully implement a business-wide strategy. The ability to adapt and to drive competitiveness in the business landscape. A confident leader who can anticipate and interpret organisational challenges. |

For more information about this suite of leadership programmes, [click here](#).

“Excellent. Really impressed by the variation in teaching mediums but with consistency around the central principles. Having now finished a second week on campus many of the key principles are really starting to make sense and embed in my memory.”

Participant - General Management Programme

Notes

CMI Report 2024 - [CMI_BMB_GoodManagement_Report.pdf](#)

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