



SUCCESS IN THE C-SUITE

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Success in the C-Suite may be evaluated differently depending on the stakeholder, but a recent study has identified specific leadership behaviors and competencies that differentiate senior level executives from mid-level executives, as well as those behaviors and competencies that are exhibited by executives who are perceived as “superstars” or highly successful. The research study also identified behaviors and leadership practices that result in “derailment” of executives.

What may be of even more interest is that the leadership practices exhibited by executives who are successful in one phase of an organization’s life cycle (i.e. start-up, high growth and turn around) are not the same practices that are exhibited by executives successful in another.

Kensington International recently partnered with Management Research Group to perform a study on effective leadership practices in the C-Suite. The study was based on the results of MRG’s LEA 360 Assessments across a sample of C-Suite Leaders and looked at 22 behaviors (LEA Model of Leadership) and 26 competencies.

The Sample:
• 2,000 Organizations with 1,000+ Employees
• 14,362 Mid-Level Executives and Managers
• 5,312 Senior Executives (Including 859 CEOs)
• 13+ Countries
• 14+ Industries

What makes C-Suite Executives different?

The findings were interesting, but perhaps not surprising. C-Suite Executives are seen to be more confident as a leader (high-management focus), better able to sell their ideas, thoughts and opinions (high-persuasive) and more focused on setting stretch goals and objectives (high-production). On the other end of the scale, C-Suite Executives are less apt to defer to others (low-consensual), lose focus on their own agenda (low-cooperation) and will allow others more latitude in execution (low-structuring) than mid-level executives or managers. Additionally, they are stronger in business aptitude, being able to see the big picture, financial understanding, capacity for effective thinking and understanding of how to use organizational resources.

What differentiates C-Suite Superstars?

Most prominently, C-Suite “superstars” are strategic-thinkers in multiple time frames and methodical. These superstars are also extraordinarily clear about what they want and expect from others (high-communication), demonstrate a visible and active concern for people (high-empathy), and again are extremely effective at convincing others and winning them over to a point of view (high-persuasive).

What causes C-Suite Executives to Derail?

The number one profile leading to derailment is a “my way or the highway” approach to leadership demonstrated by being overly competitive and pushing people to extremes (high-dominant); too focused on their own agenda to the exclusion of others (low-cooperation); making decisions without appropriately involving others (high-self/low-consensual); providing feedback that is overly blunt and critical (high-feedback/low-empathy); demonstrating too much confidence as a leader to the point of appearing arrogant (high-management focus/low-team playing). The second and third profiles leading to derailment include the “rule follower” and the “non-thinker”, both of which have specific leadership profiles that can be easily assessed and compared.

The Turn-around Master

In today’s marketplace, a highly sought after profile is the turn-around master. This leader is highly successful in an organization requiring a significant business transformation. A turn-around master relies on the leadership practices of a superstar in the area of strategic thinking and planning, but spends more time (in order of importance) relying on selling their ideas, thoughts and opinions to get others on-board with the strategic direction (high-persuasive); comfortable being at the top, taking charge and being in the spotlight (high-management focus); operates with a visible and contagious passion (high-excitement); and makes it very clear what is expected of everyone (high-communication).

Key Point: Effective Leadership is Situational

Our experience has shown leadership is situational and an individual’s success is impacted by the organization, role and leadership style. Being able to articulate what is required for success and assessing talent against those requirements affords the organization the opportunity to improve the effectiveness of its leadership and overall business results through selection, coaching and development and/or transition. The following case study exemplifies this.

To find out more about the study, the LEA model or applications for your business please contact Danielle Spiekhout at 312.658.1065 or dspiekhout@kionline.com.

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Case Study

In the following case study, the President of an extremely successful, private equity owned, company learned how to reframe his behavior and leadership style as the organization went through significant change.

As the company grew, the CEO noticed a culture change that was inconsistent with the company values. Additionally, the business environment was challenging and there was a concern about retaining and recruiting top performers. In a decisive move, the CEO recommended to the Board that Kensington International be retained to assess the issue, determine the severity/risk and make recommendations.

The company had a highly complex business model and the financial results had been historically excellent. The first priority was to conduct executive/manager interviews and summarize the findings and present recommendations to the CEO and Board. **The heart of the problem involved:**

- Some “my way or the highway” executive behaviors
- Lack of clarity within the C-Suite with respect to responsibilities, decision making, communications and accountability
- A dis-empowered senior executive team and hesitancy to bring up problems

Without a fix, the CEO worried about future business performance and the potential for an associated drop in organizational value.

Post-assessment and CEO/Board discussion, Kensington recommended a five-step course of action that included:

- The development of a successful leadership profile, (What behaviors do we expect from our leaders?)
- A reorganization of the senior leadership team with the CEO more tactically involved and in the on-going role of “Chief Cultural Officer”
- A formal executive team development process to change how the team meets, discusses issues, makes decisions and communicates with the broader organization
- A formal leadership assessment, feedback and development plan for key executives
- The construction of a formal “rules of engagement” document to guide a rigorous but respectful culture

C-Suite Learnings:

- Culture starts at the top and is the CEO’s #1 responsibility.
- There is a real balance in terms of being a demanding vs. empathetic leader, but a leader needs to be both. In times of high stress/tension, a leader’s behaviors tend to move to the extremes- with insight and motivation to change, a derailing executive may be able to course correct with coaching.
- Well defined leadership teams are of critical importance. When in lock-step agreement around organizational strategy and priorities they provide clarity (in communications) throughout the entire organization.
- Great leadership teams don’t just happen, they need to be purposefully constructed and developed ... particularly through business challenges and changes.
- Leaders bring strengths and areas of development to the table. Being self-aware and knowing the rest of the team is critical if they are expected to hold each other accountable.