

## Swimming Upstream: Negotiating Promotional Crossroads<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Chapter 2. In Kaiser, R.B. (2005), editor. *Filling the leadership pipeline*. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership, pp. 25-43.

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In 1998, I published an article, “Pathways and Crossroads to Institutional Leadership” (Freedman, 1998), in which I asserted that.

When upwardly-mobile persons are promoted from lower, individual contributor roles to higher, managerial roles, they are confronted by the challenge of negotiating a series of 135-degree “crossroads” or shifts in their careers. For those who make the complete journey, they must traverse five pathways and four crossroads. These critical career crossroads are comprised of discontinuous and unprecedented changes in the role responsibilities and accountabilities to which managers-in-transition must respond. At each crossroad, people are confronted by a triple challenge: letting go of anachronistic responsibilities and competencies; preserving those that continue to be useful; and adding on new, discontinuous responsibilities and consequences. Managers-in-transition can cope with these demands by making adaptive changes in their preferred activities, behavior patterns, and style (p. 131).

Promotable, ambitious managers-in-transition must bridge unprecedented discontinuities at each of four crossroads to reach the senior leader position. They must recognize and respond in an acceptable manner to the demand characteristics of each major career crossroad. To assure their effectiveness, they must alter their beliefs, perspectives, attitudes, and behavior patterns at each crossroad.

Levinson (1980) identified 20 normative criteria to describe characteristics of effective organizational leaders. He thought these would predict whether candidates would perform effectively and derive gratification from the CEO role. To a great extent, these criteria still seem relevant to me, 24 years later.

A critical question is, how do ambitious, upwardly-mobile managers develop proficiency in applying such competencies, traits and qualities to perform their responsibilities? In spite of Henry Mintzberg's (1994) admonitions, most MBA programs omit leadership competencies, traits, and qualities from their core curricula.

Few organizations address the evident demand to prepare upwardly mobile persons to assume roles as ethical and effective leaders within their enterprises. Their practices seem to convey the belief that it is acceptable, if not appropriate, for newly promoted persons to either "sink or swim" in their new roles. It is the responsibility of the managers-in-transition; the organization does not assume any responsibility.

I disagree. I believe that organizations must create and actively manage conditions that enable high potential persons to traverse the crossroads leading from individual contributor to institutional leader roles. Such upwardly-mobile individuals must be enabled, supported, and rewarded to:

- Understand where they fit within their organization's executive continuity and leadership succession plans.
- Develop realistic career goals and plans.

- Identify personal and systemic obstacles to performing increasingly demanding leadership roles.
- Prepare themselves to change: to learn and to unlearn.
- Take advantage of relevant executive education, training, and developmental opportunities that may prepare them to assume higher-level organizational positions – *prior* to being promoted.
- Take advantage of coaching and mentoring resources.

Unless their organizations properly educate and realistically prepare them, managers-in-transition are likely to assume that traversing a promotional crossroad will be an easy *transition* rather than a challenging, discontinuous *transformation*.

Promotions trigger threats that may become evident as managers-in-transition realize that the demands made of them at higher organizational levels *differ* in type and quality from the demands that were made of them when they had lower level positions. Responding to such challenges often threaten managers-in-transition's *sense of coherence and well-being* – this critical component of one's self-esteem and confidence is weakened by any loss of strength or reliability of their *attachments* to such psychic *anchors* as their competent *performance of public roles* (Freedman, 1995b). That is, managers-in-transition gradually discover that access to appropriate opportunities to perform their familiar, reassuring, well-practiced, public roles as individual contributors or lower level managers have been drastically reduced or entirely lost. New managers often feel adrift – isolated and alone. They are both unfamiliar with and unskilled in performing their new

tasks, activities, and functions. Their dawning awareness of this discontinuity often triggers a sense of intense discomfort and insecurity. They feel hollow – empty and without value. People may feel like *frauds* who have deceived themselves, those who promoted them, and those who now depend upon them.

Managers-in-transition require at least six months of post-transition experience to recognize, accept, and develop reasonable proficiency in performing their new role responsibilities. Most organizations neither recognize nor dedicate appropriate resources to adequately prepare or support managers-in-transition. Managers-in-transition are often on their own. They may realize their existing skill sets are inadequate in coping with their unprecedented leadership responsibilities and may sense the need for assistance to adapt and cope effectively with the demands of their new roles. However, too often they will not act on that realization because they *fear* that requests for assistance may be construed as an admission of some *personal defect, deficiency, or inadequacy*.

To recreate an illusion of strength, new managers often revert to performing familiar technical responsibilities that *used to* generate recognition and approval. But, these are now their *subordinates'* responsibilities; to persist in performing them simply does not satisfy the new demands of the higher level managerial roles.

Managers-in-transition must recognize they confronted by a major *career crossroad*. They must recognize and specify the new, *unprecedented*, mostly *discontinuous* but legitimate and demanding requirements of their new career pathway. They must

recognize that some of their existing proficiencies *will* be required on their new pathway after they have traversed their next crossroad -- but the relevance of many other proficiencies will be *lost*. And, they must identify and acquire proficiency in applying many new, vastly different competencies and attributes to perform their new responsibilities and cope with and satisfy the demanding requirements of their new roles. Thus, they must *compare and differentiate between* these novel transitional demands with those that belong to their prior experience.

The first 135-degree shift at the individual contributor to first-line supervisor crossroad usually illuminates a number of unexpected, previously ignored or hidden *discontinuities*. Sudden awareness can be quite confusing and disorienting. Managers-in-transition must, somehow, learn to recognize and manage these and other apparent paradoxes they will have to manage as long as they continue to follow the pathways and crossroads leading toward institutional leadership. This attribute may be referred to as *maze-brightness*.

Of course fewer errors will be made -- and there would be fewer unnecessary casualties -- if organizations seriously studied the way in which their managers-in-transition typically respond to their career progression process. Such studies imply both an organizational diagnosis (Levinson, 1972) and self-assessments by managers-in-transition (Levinson, 1992, Hollander, 1991) that would enable them to determine what kinds of support their ambitious, upwardly-mobile people require before, during, and after each 135-degree career shift.

## THE FIVE PATHWAYS AND FOUR CROSSROADS

In complex, multi-tiered organizations, each level is unique. Each can be characterized by the distinctive demands it makes on people who operate at that organizational level. Typically, as they climb their organizational hierarchies, many ambitious, upwardly-mobile people discover an unexpected and shocking phenomenon: *Behaviors, activities, and styles which were effective, highly valued, and appreciated at lower levels are often inadequate or dysfunctional at the next higher level.* The reverse is also true: *Valued activities at higher levels may not be recognized, understood or appreciated by those at lower levels.* Unfortunately, many who participate in human resource developmental planning and promotion decisions -- executives, managers, supervisors and HR Management specialists -- often fail to recognize and apply this significant distinction.

To place the concept of leadership into a meaningful context for this discussion, we need a functional operational definition. I rather appreciate one developed by Hogan, Curphy and Hogan (1994): "... leadership involves persuading [not dominating] other people to set aside for a period of time their individual concerns and ... willingly adopt, for a period of time, the goals of the group as their own."

**The significance of the Issue:** *Flawed, inept management.* While there is no conclusive, reliable, comprehensive research to date, Hogan, Curphy and Hogan (1994) estimate that between 50% and 75% of all levels and types of North American managers are so incompetent that their managerial careers are in danger of being disrupted by their senior

management in response to unacceptable performance by and complaints from disappointed, frustrated, and vindictive subordinates.

Paradoxically, much of the responsibility for placing unprepared and inept people in managerial positions lies with senior management. Those who make such decisions may uncritically accept prevailing cultural assumptions that it is up to the newly promoted supervisor or manager to move “up or out” or “sink or swim”. Such assumptions serve to rationalize senior management’s avoidance of recognizing that each managerial level is distinctive; each has its own unique demands for managers who, to respond effectively to those demands, must be proficient in applying certain relevant and requisite competencies. These rationalizations also enable senior management to trivialize or ignore the use of reliable standardized and validated screening and selection processes -- e.g., *multirater appraisals* (360-degree assessments), *assessment centers* (simulations and role plays), and *psychological interviews and tests* (cognitive ability and personality) -- to determine if promotional candidates have mastered the requisite competencies.

*Figure 1* illustrates an hypothetical pathway from individual contributor to institutional leadership through four basic career crossroads or shifts (based on Mahler & Wrightnour, 1973).

## **[INSERT] Figure 1. The Five Primary Pathways and Four Basic Career**

### **Crossroads<sup>2</sup>**

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<sup>2</sup> Within each of the five pathways, the **vertical risers** imply rotation among related positions or progression along any career

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## **The Process of Transitional Adaptation: *Letting Go, Preserving, and Adding On***

To negotiate any of the four role transitions effectively, newly-promoted incumbents must make self-conscious decisions to *Let Go* of some of their habitual or preferred lower-level perspectives and many of their familiar responsibilities and work methods. Letting go of outmoded work habits free them up so they can recognize the demands of their new responsibilities to which they must adapt. This enables promoted persons to *adapt* to the unusual demands of their higher level roles. This process is *repeated* each time a person is confronted by the challenge of negotiating the next higher 135-degree shift they must make at each career crossroad.

Preferably prior to or at least very soon after each crossroad shift, those who are most successful in negotiating discontinuous career crossroads seem to make themselves aware of and acquire proficiency in the competencies and attributes they need to adapt to the unprecedented demands of their new roles. Upwardly-mobile people are on a journey which repeatedly requires them to abandon familiar conditions of work and, courageously, enter new, unfamiliar territory. They must be alert, astute and careful. To the naive, the new work and its demands may look deceptively familiar, particularly since new managers may feel insecure and understandably motivated to deny any differences. But, perceived or not, the differences and the adaptive challenge exist. Those who are

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pathway.

**TIME FACTOR:** Upwardly mobile managers-in-transition should not remain on the same pathway for more than three or four years. Beyond that, people become too "addicted" to using familiar routines that may have been successful at lower levels as they try to adapt and respond to the new demands presented by crossing their next career crossroad.

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not attentive or fail to enhance their adaptive capacities are vulnerable.

**[INSERT] Figure 2. Transformational Change (Freedman, 1992)**

The general principle (Harrison, 1972; Freedman, 1992, 1995b) is that at each career crossroad, upwardly-mobile managers must:

- **LET GO:** They must **stop** or **do less** of their anachronistic but familiar and *comfortable* tasks, activities and functions. They must *Let Go* of those competencies and attributes that enabled them to effectively perform no-longer-relevant responsibilities. Their existing competencies may have been useful in their previous positions when performed familiar responsibilities. People felt *confident* in themselves and in their *competencies*; they felt *comfortable* when using these reliable competencies in that familiar context. They easily *addicted* themselves to those familiar responsibilities and their use of their familiar competencies. To *Let Go* of these reliable old friends -- even when done with respect and appreciation -- is easy to prescribe but difficult and threatening to do. As in dealing with drug addiction, people need firm encouragement and support to fully experience (rather than deny) their own *withdrawal* process, to *grieve* and *mourn* the loss of their emotional attachment to these familiar, comforting competencies and responsibilities.
- **PRESERVE:** People must **continue** to perform certain familiar tasks, activities and functions which have been, still are, and probably will continue to be practical and

useful. A major difficulty is that they have to *distinguish* between those responsibilities they must *Let Go* of and those which they must retain and *Preserve*. Few people can make this distinction easily and accurately. Errors in judgment are inevitable.

- **ADD ON:** People must **start** or **do more** of new, unprecedented and *discontinuous* responsibilities with which they are unfamiliar not proficient. Managers-in-transition must adopt the role of *learners*. This can be quite uncomfortable, unless they have developed the habit of constantly seek self-enhancing personal and professional development experiences already. Many newly promoted managers find the prospect of acquiring proficiency in the application of new information, concepts, methods, technologies, skills, attitudes, and perspectives to be unreasonable or unnecessary. Often, these expressed rationalizations are a facade intended to contain their *anxiety* - - which is often quite intense. Beneath their brittle bravado, most managers-in-transition, harbor *fundamental doubts about their own capacity to learn and to adapt*.

As they rise within large, complex organizations (which they thought they thoroughly understood), people inevitably discover, as they traverse each of the four career crossroads, that they are moving into quite different, very unfamiliar worlds -- unless they construct a convenient world of fantasy. Like Dorothy, they might well say, "Toto ... I don't think we're in Kansas any more ..."

### ***A PRACTICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE TO CAREER CROSSROAD SHIFTS.***

Managers-in-transition may be confused if they have not accumulated sufficient experience to know they must acquire essential information from relevant sources and accurately judge which role responsibilities they should Preserve (*continue*) and which they should Let Go (*stop or do less*) or Add On (*start or do more*). A practical frame of reference can serve as a set of guiding principles. Four critical career crossroads are described and the many critical responsibilities and behaviors of which upwardly mobile managers must *Let Go*, *Add On*, and *Preserve* to round out their coping skills repertoires are identified. *Critical Prerequisite Competencies and Attributes* the upwardly-mobile manager will need for maneuvering through each career crossroad are also presented.

### ***I. From Individual Contributor To Functional Manager***

[INSERT] Figure 3. The First Crossroad

**Individual Contributors.** Most organizations recruit their work force from their local or national community's labor pool -- e.g., from public and trade schools, from competitors or local companies whose employees have requisite skills, or from university settings. Many professionals come with one or a mix of technical and business degrees. Their first assignments are generally one or a *series* of individual contributor roles -- e.g., salesman, assembly line or warehouse worker, engineer, accountant, salesperson, emergency room physician. When individuals are thought to be ready and the company needs them, they are promoted into supervisory positions to lead or direct the activities of a small group of

workers whose members generally do the same kind of work as the new supervisors had been doing.

The first of the four 135-degree career shifts is the most frequent and the most fundamental. It occurs when individual contributors who are considered to be *high performers* are promoted into first-line supervisory positions. These persons are often selected in preference over their former peers. That is, "... first-line supervisors are often chosen from the workforce on the basis of their technical talent rather than their leadership skills" (Hogan, Curphy and Hogan, 1994, Freedman, 1995a). It does not seem to matter if this event occurs as a result of persons being promoted out of single-discipline groups where each worker has similar backgrounds and training and are responsible for performing some *part* of a whole piece of work -- e.g., assembly work -- *or* if persons are promoted out of multi-disciplinary teams where workers may have different backgrounds and training but work together cooperatively, integrating their complimentary capabilities to perform a whole, complex piece of work -- e.g., an emergency room operating team.

Such a shift is deceptive. It is not, however, as dramatic as those crossroads which lie ahead of future leaders. The new first-line supervisors are often expected to be *working* supervisors who are expected to spend 40 and 60 percent of their available time performing familiar technical specialty work. Many of these first-line supervisors will be transferred and/or progress within their departmental roles until they reach and negotiate their second career crossroad. However, their technical knowledge and skills gradually

become obsolete or irrelevant -- unless they neglect their managerial responsibilities (in which case, their organization will have over-paid individual contributors who fail to perform the responsibilities of the role into which they were promoted); the supervisors' sense of identity will shift away from viewing themselves as technical specialists or experts to that of being *managers* of technical specialists. Subsequent to this metamorphosis, most managers spend less and less time on individual work and correspondingly more time as managers.

Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, like many technical experts-turned-entrepreneurs, may have negotiated this first career shift in starting Apple Corporation. The difficulties leading to their early exits from that company may have been a consequence of their lack of preparation to deal with the complexities of rapid growth from a couple of computer geeks working on a dramatic technological innovation in a garage to the leadership of a large, maturing organization. They may have gotten sufficient relevant leadership development experiences had they stayed with their original companies long enough to negotiate the omitted three 135-degree career shifts. Of course, had they done that, they may not have created Apple. (Just speculating.)

Initially, new supervisory level managers, feel proud and good about themselves and about the approval and recognition they have received for their performance as individual contributors. This sets up a paradoxical situation: they are promoted because of their accomplishments as individual contributors into a supervisory role in which their technical skills should become increasingly irrelevant. Perhaps as a consequence, this

first career shift is the one during which the greatest number of *promotional errors* occur. The majority of these errors are those of *omission* -- that is, the implicit demands of the first-line supervisor role and the promotional candidates' capabilities to recognize and satisfy those demands are typically *omitted* from explicit consideration. The result: the organization loses high quality individual contributors and gain supervisors with unknown managerial capabilities.

### **Characteristics of High Quality (Promotable) Individual Contributors (NAM, 1977)**

- Good at details.
- Works well without supervision.
- Improvises when plans turn out to be incomplete and when equipment break down.
- Recognizes and corrects own mistakes quickly.
- Makes quick, insightful decisions.
- Accepts responsibility for mistakes and is impatient with self for making them.
- Pushes personal problems aside.
- Concentrates very hard on job tasks.
- Works toward own perfection.

Implicitly, promotable workers pay little attention to co-workers -- unless they are part of a centralized and tightly-coupled value-chain (e.g., production line) in which their success is dependent upon the reliability of the work results produced by their up-stream suppliers. Instead, they focus on their own work. These individual contributors require

little, if any, active supervision. Their supervisors notice them because they do not make great demands. Relatively few ordinary individual contributors develop this degree of proficiency. This may indicate that an organization's selection and orientation processes, the individuals' superior capacity to learn, their ambition, their engaging style, plus the substance of the supervision they received was, for them at least, effective. The obvious questions of how many capable individuals *fail* to achieve these characteristics -- and why -- still lacks definitive answers.

**Discontinuous Responsibilities and Requisite Behaviors<sup>3</sup>:** The first-line supervisory role is not a straight-line extrapolation of the individual contributor's job. Rather, the promotion constitutes something like *a 135-degree turn* -- my term for indicating that newly-promoted persons shift upward and move off -- often unexpectedly, unplanned, and unprepared -- in unprecedented directions into unfamiliar territory. There are few aspects of the individual contributor role that can be carried forward and applied to the first-line supervisory role. That is, these two roles -- like those that follow -- are mostly *discontinuous*. Instead of directly managing work-related *action* entirely by oneself, supervisors (and higher level managers) must learn to manage action indirectly by managing *people* so they take appropriate action, and/or to manage *information* to influence people to take necessary action (Mintzberg, 1994). To adapt and to function appropriately, new supervisors must *stop* performing or do less (i.e., Let Go of) some tasks, activities and functions (responsibilities). They must *start* or do more (Add On)

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<sup>3</sup> I derived these lists of *Discontinuous Responsibilities, Requisite Behaviors, and Prerequisite Competencies And Attributes* primarily from self-awareness exercises I conducted with graduate degree and certificate students of organization development in the US and Sweden and with participants in "Management Work Conferences" and "Senior Executive Conferences" sponsored by the NTL Institute over the past five years. I supplemented -- and in some instances substituted -- my empirical data with formal research-based conceptual material drawn from such sources as Argyris (1990), Hogan, Curphy & Hogan (1994), and Levinson (1980, 1994).

other responsibilities. And, they must *continue* to do (Preserve) still other responsibilities. Needless to say, a review of the following sample of Let Go, Add On, and Preserve responsibilities can be a shocking revelation.

<b>LET GO:</b> <b>Stop / Do Less</b>	<b>ADD ON:</b> <b>Start / Do More</b>	<b>PRESERVE:</b> <b>Continue To Do</b>
Technical Expert work (you are no longer an individual contributor).	Influence those who depend on your team for their success (your <i>customers</i> ) and upon whom your team depends for its success (your <i>suppliers</i> ) to cooperate -- e.g., define their requirements and preferences, provide reliable information and feedback, make realistic commitments, deliver what you promise.	Expect and foster high performance from yourself and your co-workers. (However, at this level, your peers are other first-line supervisors of teams that are doing the same work as yours or they are supervisors of your team's customer or supplier teams.)
Feeling and acting like the work results belong to you alone.	Build or develop your group of individual technical specialists into a <i>high performance team</i>	Strive for excellence through your sustained commitment to your own continuing personal and

	<p>who <i>share</i> ownership of the work -- and the results.</p>	<p>professional development.</p>
<p>Demand accommodation from co-workers, suppliers and providers, bosses, and consumers of your work results.</p>	<p>Orient new employees, support and develop subordinates; answer questions and provide information (consulting style).</p>	<p>Do things right.</p>
	<p>Compete, fairly, with other supervisors whose goals and responsibilities are similar to yours; cooperate with those whose goals are complementary.</p>	<p>Work against schedules, budgets, cost estimates or sales forecasts.</p>
	<p>Learn as much as you can about your new subordinates' work -- how they transact business with each other AND with the suppliers and customers that are parts of your unit's value-chain.</p>	

<p>Integrate your team's deliverable work results or products into the overall work flow.</p>
<p>Experiment, take reasonable risks.</p>
<p>Free yourself from tasks your subordinates should do -- even if these are your favorite activities.</p> <p>Delegate to your subordinate individual contributors; push responsibilities down to lowest possible level.</p>
<p>Make sure your subordinates understand and accept their work assignments. Schedule and monitor work flow; help in problem-solving, action planning. Provide</p>

direction.
Communicate organizational intent and purpose down to your employees. Report your group's progress to higher management.
Explain to workers what is expected of them; provide feedback on their progress and give recognition for results.
Assure that workers receive necessary and sufficient training and coaching to perform essential tasks.  Counsel / refer employees with personal problems.

The *responsibilities* that newly promoted supervisors must *Let Go, Preserve, and Add On* in their new roles have been outlined above. To actually *do* these things, ambitious, upwardly-mobile individuals must acquire *adequate proficiency* in applying a new or latent set of relevant prerequisite *competencies*. When people feel confident in using

only a familiar, narrow, limited set of skills -- skills that have, in fact, served them well when they functioned as individual contributors and enabled them to achieve success and recognition in that now-outmoded individual contributor role -- they will *continue* to use those skills whether or not they are relevant to the discontinuous demands of the unprecedented, discontinuous first-line supervisor role they are now expected to perform. By mastering a new set of skills that *are* relevant and offer the realistic probability they *will* enable new supervisors to cope with their new role's demands, they are more likely to *refrain* from using -- and they will *Let Go* of -- their no-longer-appropriate behaviors. Further, once they feel confident and comfortable in applying these new competencies, they will be far more likely to engage (not avoid) their new responsibilities and gain sufficient proficiency in applying the requisite *Add On* behaviors.

### **Prerequisite Competencies and Attributes:**

- *Awareness that they are traversing a 135-degree career shift* which will make unprecedented, discontinuous demands on them -- demands to which new supervisors *must* respond.
- Ability and courage to *Let Go* of anachronistic but familiar responsibilities and competencies and to quickly *Add On* new competencies -- as well as the good judgment to distinguish between those responsibilities and behaviors to *Let Go* and those to *Preserve*.
- *Supervisory knowledge, practices, and skills* -- including relevant human resource policies, procedures, rules, regulations, and practices.

- *Authority* -- has the feeling that he or she *belongs* in boss's role (Levinson, 1980).
- *Sensitivity* -- able to perceive and respond to subtleties of others' feelings (Levinson, 1980).
- *Involvement* -- sees oneself as a participating member of an organization (Levinson, 1980).
- *Maturity* -- has good relationships with authority figures (Levinson, 1980).
- *Interdependence* -- accepts appropriate dependency needs of others as well as of him- or herself (Levinson, 1980).
- *Stamina* -- has physical as well as mental energy (Levinson, 1980).
- *Adaptability* -- manages stress well (Levinson, 1980).
- *Sense Of Humor* -- doesn't take self too seriously (Levinson, 1980).
- *Team-building and team development skills.*
- *Participatory management theory and methods or procedures* for team-based problem-solving, decision-making, and planning of corrective and preventive actions.
- Conceive of self as a *manager-leader* (not just as an individual contributor).
- *Communication skills* (verbal expression, active listening, literacy, and numeracy).
- *Conflict management and utilization skills.*
- *Orientation to business* (P&L accountabilities, Economic Value-Added orientation).
- *Diplomacy* -- after learning about the prevailing political factions operating at your level within the organization (and at least one level above and one level below) and their respective positions on their high priority issues, adopting a non-offensive attitude toward all significant parties that projects your understanding and appreciation of the legitimacy of each perspective, without necessarily making a

personal commitment.

- *Reliability (trustworthiness)* -- acting on what you say; walking your talk; demonstrating dependability.
- *Systems perspective*:
  1. Viewing one's own unit as having to contribute to and being dependent upon the larger organization;
  2. Viewing other organizational units as elements of an interdependent network where some are *suppliers* of essential inputs to one's own unit and others are users or *customers* of one's unit's outputs.

## ***II. From Supervisor To Managing A Single "Business"***

[INSERT] Figure 4. The Second Crossroad

First-line supervisors encounter their second basic career crossroad when they shift into roles in which they manage a "family" of specialized but interdependent units that are parts of -- and contribute to -- the same supply-chain. This is *a dramatically sharp 135-degree turn* for most managers-in-transition to negotiate.

Managers of a *business* within a larger organization are persons who manage several different but interdependent sub-units -- these may be single-discipline functional departments (e.g., customer service call centers, warehouses) or multi-discipline teams (e.g., new product development, marketing). In a small company, like many family

firms, this promotional shift could take a person all the way to the CEO position. In a large, complex organization, the “business” may be structured in a variety of ways -- by function, business unit, region, or product. Such middle managers might be called *Regional Manager, Group or Product Group Manager or Plant Manager*. The role may carry a Vice President title. New single-business managers quickly discover they are in less-than-total control of their own businesses. They gradually realize their success depends upon satisfying their downstream customers by eliciting the cooperation and effectiveness of their “subordinate” departments -- and that of their upstream suppliers. Few new single-business managers assume their positions with an adequate and comprehensive appreciation of the operations and interface transactions *among* all their subordinate departments and *between* their business unit and its suppliers and customers.

This is the level above which very few ambitious managers rise. *New single-business managers are very vulnerable*. There is a tremendous discontinuity between the *reasons* they are promoted and the *responsibilities* they must perform to be successful in this new role. Hogan, Curphy and Hogan (1994) speculate that these “... middle managers ... are often chosen from the ranks of first-line supervisors on the basis of *likeability* and *perceived ability to work with senior management*.”

**Discontinuous Responsibilities and Requisite Behaviors:** Those persons who achieve and function effectively in their new, single-business middle manager roles have to make the following 135-degree shifts in their behavior patterns and activities:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LET GO:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Stop / Do Less</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ADD ON:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Start / Do More</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PRESERVE:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Continue To Do</b></p>
<p>Work against budgets, cost estimates or sales forecasts (important as these are, they are no longer the sole criteria for your success).</p>	<p>Make quick tactical trade-off decisions within a strategic context (match decisions against corporate mission).</p>	<p>Influence those who depend on your business team for their success (your <i>customers</i>) and upon whom your business team depends for its success (your <i>suppliers</i>) to cooperate -- e.g., define their requirements and preferences, provide reliable information and feedback, make realistic commitments, deliver what you promise.</p>
<p>Win-lose competition with peers and between your business and other organizational units.</p>	<p>Rely on collateral managers (peers) and subordinate first-line supervisors</p>	<p>Experiment, take reasonable risks.</p>
	<p>Work against strategic business and marketing</p>	<p>Develop high potential subordinate staff.</p>

	plans.	
	Do the right things.	Do things right.
	Become computer-literate; begin to become familiar with the capabilities and potentialities of information systems and the management of information.	Compete fairly with other managers at your level; collaborate with senior managers and with managers of staff groups.
		Integrate your department's deliverable work results into the overall work flow (assume a customer-based, open-system orientation).
		Delegate (push responsibilities down to lowest possible levels).
		Build and develop your group of subordinate supervisory managers into a <i>high performance business management team.</i>

**Prerequisite Competencies And Attributes:**

- *Tolerance For Ambiguity* -- can tolerate and cope with ambiguity, confusion, and uncertainty until things become clear (Levinson, 1980).
- *Judgment* -- knows when to act (Levinson, 1980).
- *Activity* -- takes a vigorous orientation to identifying and seeking ways to satisfy the needs of the organization (Levinson, 1980).
- *Achievement* -- oriented toward organization's successes rather than personal aggrandizement (Levinson, 1980).
- *Articulateness* -- makes a good impression (Levinson, 1980).
- *Vision* -- is clear about progression of his or her own life and career, as well as where the organization should go (Levinson, 1980).
- *Perseverance* -- able to stick to a task and see it through regardless of the difficulties encountered (Levinson, 1980).
- *Personal Organization* -- has good sense of time and how to use time efficiently (Levinson, 1980).
- *Integrity* -- has a well-established value system which has been tested in various ways in the past (Levinson, 1980).
- Utilizing and managing legitimate but conflicting, simultaneous demands (from subordinates, bosses, peers, suppliers and users).
- Awareness of and appreciation for other departments' work functions which are interdependent with your business.
- Fundamental, strategic -- often quantitative -- business management skills (various

disciplines like marketing, production, information systems, human resource management, accounting, strategic planning, corporate modeling, etc.).

- *Diplomacy* -- after learning about the prevailing political factions operating at your current level within the organization (and at least one level above and one level below) and their respective positions on their high priority issues, adopting a non-offensive attitude toward all significant parties that projects your understanding and appreciation of the legitimacy of each perspective, without necessarily making a personal commitment.
- *Reliability (trustworthiness)* -- acting on what you say; walking your talk; demonstrating dependability.
- *Psychological Mindedness*: recognizes and applies psychological factors in viewing, understanding, and acting on organizational issues (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994). Understanding corporate organizations as complex social-technical, open, political systems.

### ***III. From Managing One "Business" To Managing Several "Businesses"***

[INSERT] Figure 5. The Third Crossroad

The third career crossroad is the 135-degree shift from managing a single business to the executive management of several related (interdependent) businesses. In medium-sized companies, this may be the CEO position. The amorphous criteria that too many large, complex organizations apply in deciding which single-business middle managers are to

be promoted to executive manager positions are: *adapt well to their seniors, fit the prevailing corporate culture*, and are *acceptable, for whatever reasons, to the key decision-makers* (Hogan, Curphy and Hogan, 1994).

If no internal candidates satisfy these criteria, the executive position may be filled by searching *outside* for someone who, theoretically, can step into the vacancy and “hit the ground running”. Curiously, organizations seem to rely on *nominations* of candidates by search firms (which are motivated by their commission structure to induce their clients to accept one of their nominees -- quickly), *background checks* and references from the candidates’ previous employers (which, because of litigation anxiety, are rarely candid or explicit about candidates’ foibles, soft spots or developmental needs), and screening/selection *interviews* (in which decision-makers are rarely skilled -- see DeVries, 1992). Alternatively, and particularly if the organization has a strong “promote from within” philosophy -- and as long as there are no current, major organizational crises -- the “best available” existing middle managers within the organization will be selected. Far too often, this candidate will *not* be good enough.

The demands of the role of senior executive responsible for leading a team of single-business middle managers are qualitatively and substantively different than those for lower-level positions. The 135-degree shift to this Senior or Executive Vice President role is much more complex than appearances may suggest. A straight-line extrapolation based upon effective single-business middle manager behavior patterns may be tempting, but it is not realistic. *A global shift in self concept, attitude and perspective is essential.*

SVPs and EVPs must redirect their attention from a mostly internal to a primarily *external perspective* (e.g., to interactions with unfamiliar stakeholder groups). The challenging problems and opportunities the S/EVPs must face are far more complex than those faced by single-business managers. They must actively manage a variety of dilemmas or dual perspectives that have always been in the background at lower levels and now emerge to the foreground -- e.g., local *plus* global events, short- *plus* long-term time perspectives, parts *plus* the whole of the larger organizational system (Johnson, 1992; Collins & Porras, 1995). The pressure is more intense and cannot be ignored as easily and it comes from more sources than the S/EVP can influence. The issues to be analyzed and decided upon are more consequential. The uncertainties and the risks are greater. The anxiety levels are higher.

Yet, criteria for promotion to this executive level are rarely comprehensive, nor do organizations always recognize or satisfy the need to fully prepare candidates to assume this role. As a result, as Peter Drucker (1970) pointed out almost thirty years ago, two thirds of those who have been elevated to executive management positions do not know what it is to adopt an entrepreneurial approach. Nor do they understand how to make strategic policy decisions. Instead, they continue to perform the operational and fire-fighting functions of middle managers. I know of nothing that suggests that this ratio has changed over the intervening years.

**Discontinuous Responsibilities and Requisite Behaviors:** Those few individuals who reach this organizational level and perform effectively and appropriately in this unique

environment have to make the following adaptive shifts in their behavior patterns and activities:

<b>LET GO:</b> <b>Stop / Do Less</b>	<b>ADD ON:</b> <b>Start / Do More</b>	<b>PRESERVE:</b> <b>Continue To Do</b>
Competing with manager-peers, supervisors or individual contributors at any level	Identify, then challenge your own pre-existing beliefs, assumptions and convictions	Make quick, tactical trade-off decisions
Focus exclusively on "local" (internal organizational) perspective	Collaborate with central corporate policy and decision making (governance) group and other executive-level managers	Build and develop your subordinate single-business managers into a high performance team
Working only against business and marketing plans	Serve as mentor to promising subordinates	Rely on peers and subordinate managers
	Do the right things	Do things right
	Adopt "global" perspective, viewing the organization as being in a dynamic	Experiment, take reasonable risks

	interaction with various external and internal stakeholder groups (stockholders, suppliers, customers, regulatory agencies, employees, etc.)	
	Perform public "ceremonial" functions as required	Develop staff
	Participate in long-term, strategic planning for the total organization	Integrate your deliverable work results into the overall corporate work flow
	Choose among available alternative tactical options on the basis of their comparative potential to contribute to the company's mission and strategic goals	Delegate (push responsibilities down to lowest possible levels)
	Play a prominent role and contribute to the desired public corporate image	

### **Prerequisite Competencies And Attributes:**

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- Non-linear, intuitive thinking.
- Management of parallel activities.
- Coping with multi-disciplinary, multi-organizational complexities.
- Deriving satisfaction from the successes of your subordinate managers, your peers, and your company.
- "Maze brightness" -- the intuitive understanding of what is organizationally possible, how to maneuver through organizational obstacles, and the capacity to intuit non-obvious (innovative) strategies and / or methods to achieve one's personal or subsystem's objectives while avoiding organizational obstacles and impediments -- without creating disadvantages for other managers or for the larger organization.
- *Diplomacy* -- after learning about the prevailing political factions operating at your current level within the organization (and at least one level above and one level below) and their respective positions on their high priority issues, adopting a non-offensive attitude toward all significant parties that projects your understanding and appreciation of the legitimacy of each perspective, without necessarily making a personal commitment.
- *Reliability (trustworthiness)* -- acting on what you say; walking your talk; demonstrating dependability.

#### **IV. From Managing Several "Businesses" To Institutional Leadership**

[INSERT] Figure 6. The Fourth Crossroad

The fourth career crossroad is *the most visible and dramatic 135-degree shift*. Very few people are selected for institutional leader roles -- i.e., the CEO and/or Chairman position in large, complex organizations. When this rare, singularly momentous event occurs, it is extremely significant for the leader's former peers, the Board of Directors, the company's external stakeholders (like customers, suppliers, competitors, regulatory agencies, the financial community, investors, and employees), and for the company's future prospects. A new institutional leader usually signals fundamental, system-wide changes that will impact all parts and all levels of an organization. The selection process is often far more *political* than are lower-level promotions. Other than that, the selection criteria are quite similar to -- and as *soft* as -- those described (above) for promotion to executive manager roles. (For example, I got to know John Walter, former Chairman and CEO of R.R. Donnelley & Sons, during a long-term consultation a few years ago. I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall in the board room to observe their decision-making process as he was being selected to be the new president of AT&T -- and nine months later when they decided to let him go.)

Increasingly, North American companies seem to be selecting their new institutional leaders by recruiting and selecting from a short list of external candidates -- provided by executive recruiting firms -- rather than by promoting from their pool of existing executive managers. In many instances, this may be realistic. It is also an acknowledgment of the inadequacy of most contemporary organizational efforts to assure corporate continuity and executive succession through appropriate and effective planning

and development.

Perhaps the most critical and most common error made by boards of directors at this crossroad is assuming that new CEOs should have very little to learn. It can be self-defeating if the involved parties assume that new institutional leaders need only *continue* to operate as they did as executive managers of a portfolio of several businesses or as the CEO of a medium-sized company -- simply adding a few new specialized businesses.

Unless the new institutional leader has already demonstrated competence and effectiveness as institutional leaders of some other organizations, *a revolutionary change in self concept and sense of identity is required*. Institutional leaders must cope with the natural anxiety that comes from realizing that their ultimate value may be based on the quality of only a handful of extraordinarily consequential decisions which they must make in any given year. The stakes are enormous and are matched by the pressure with which CEOs must learn to live. Paying attention to their varied experiences as they pass along their previous pathways and as they traverse their previous crossroads can prepare new CEOs to *learn how to learn*, effectively.

An increasing number of innovative experts in some technical specialty have chosen *not* to move up the corporate hierarchy. Undoubtedly, some are unwilling to sacrifice their family and personal lives. Others may lack an essential attribute: patience. Or, they may have assessed the opportunities available to advance rapidly and to achieve senior executive positions as *very limited and too competitive* for their preferences. Perhaps

they are unwilling to give up the gratification they derive from hands-on practice in their area of specialization. It may also be that they have become disheartened with their organization's unwillingness to develop a new business -- perhaps with them as the business manager -- based on their innovations. Many *wunderkind* have resigned and negotiated to take their patents with them to start up their own technology-based new ventures. These courageous innovators are *leaping* from the first or second to the fourth career crossroad, omitting quite a bit of essential developmental experience. Theirs is a truly *revolutionary* challenge. These innovative, entrepreneurial institutional leaders may be *successful* during the start-up of their new enterprises but are likely to be *ineffective* in leading them once they are established and have achieved some degree of stability. Such unique individuals may have to either fill in the gaps in their preparation to fulfill the role of effective institutional leaders -- or, they may have to let go of their creation and move on to start up another in a series of innovative enterprises.

**Discontinuous Responsibilities and Requisite Behaviors:** Successful institutional leaders have generally made the following adaptive changes in their behavior patterns:

<b>LET GO:</b> <b>Stop / Do Less</b>	<b>ADD ON:</b> <b>Start / Do More</b>	<b>PRESERVE:</b> <b>Continue To Do</b>
Self-centered image building	Serve as the most observable company figurehead interacting with the various internal and	Evolve your self-concept and sense of identity (merge with corporate mission and purpose)

	external corporate stakeholders	
Making quick, tactical trade-off decisions	Authorize and monitor visioning and futuring research; decide on long-term and strategic policies	Maintain a global perspective
Collaborating with peers (you won't have any peers within your own organization now)	Empower and support your subordinate executive managers; consistently reinforce global perspective, quality and customer service	Identify and challenge restrictive, limiting organizational beliefs or convictions to ensure their relevance or to discard and replace them
	Ensure consistency in your corporate leadership by managing: Attention; Meaning; Trust; and Self	Build and develop your subordinate executive managers into a high performance team
	Seek or create a sense of corporate mission and purpose with which employees at all levels, customers, suppliers and the community can identify and	Serve as mentor to promising subordinates (two or three levels down from you)

which they will endorse	
Seek and develop mutually supportive affiliations with CEOs in <i>other</i> companies in your own and in other industries, with trade or professional associations and/or with executive consultants (these are the most likely candidates for your new group of peers)	Do the right things
Nurture or start a formal executive succession <i>system</i> (not just an emergency program)	Maintain and nurture strategic planning at corporate and divisional levels
Consider what legacy you want to leave to the company after you retire	Rely on your line and staff subordinates
	Experiment, take reasonable risks
	Solicit, coordinate and integrate all contributions to

creating and developing  
your desired corporate  
image

### **Prerequisite Competencies And Attributes:**

- *Social Responsibility* -- appreciates need to assume leadership with respect to that responsibility (Levinson, 1980).
- Subordinate one's own self-interest to the welfare of the corporate enterprise and its future.
- Intense interest and curiosity about how to anticipate the future of your organization and the relevant aspects of its external environment.
- Dedication to corporate effectiveness.
- *Surgency* -- desire to advance, dominance, assertiveness, energy / activity level, verbal fluency, sociability, social participation, decisiveness, self-esteem (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994).
- *Emotional Stability* -- stress resistance, tolerance of uncertainty / ambiguity, adjustment, emotional balance, independence, self-confidence (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994).
- *Conscientiousness* -- inner work standards, responsibility, achievement, initiative, personal integrity, ethical conduct (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994).
- *Agreeableness* -- nurturance, friendliness, social nearness, support (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994).

- *Intellectual Capacity* -- broad range of active interests, conceptual capacity to comprehend and use increasingly complex levels of vital information, recognizes needs for change (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994). This includes *Practical Intelligence* and *Capacity To Abstract* -- to conceptualize, to organize, and to integrate different data into a coherent frame of reference (Levinson, 1980).
- *Charisma* -- creates compelling visions, recruits people who share the vision, builds teams that support the vision (Hogan, Curphy & Hogan, 1994).
- *Diplomacy* -- after learning about the prevailing political factions operating at your current level within the organization (and at least one level above and one level below) and their respective positions on their high priority issues, adopting a non-offensive attitude toward all significant parties that projects your understanding and appreciation of the legitimacy of each perspective, without necessarily making a personal commitment.
- *Reliability (trustworthiness)* -- acting on what you say; walking your talk; demonstrating dependability.

## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PERFORMANCE OF PUBLIC ROLES**

No matter what the career pathway they are travelling, no matter how many of the four career crossroads they have traversed, most people derive a sense of *pride* and *confidence* when they perform in their work roles with *competence*, *comfort*, *certainty* and *proficiency*. They earned this pride and self-esteem by achieving tangible, high quality accomplishments (usually measured by delivering expected results at or below budget

and within schedule). Their pride and self-esteem is enhanced when their achievements are recognized as desirable and useful by their stakeholders -- co-workers, subordinates, bosses, customers, suppliers, and others who are affected by their work and its results. Public (observable) performance of the tasks, activities and functions which resulted in these accomplishments is one of eight basic *anchors for a sense of well-being and coherence*. For most people, such opportunities for public performances are integral components of their sense of *identity* -- who they think they are as persons (Freedman, 1995b).

**The Three C's:** *Competence, Confidence, and Comfort*. It is natural for people to seek multiple opportunities to seek repeated opportunities to display such valued public performances. They are familiar and *comfortable* in the role. Through their well received public performances, people reassure themselves of their worth or value. Furthermore, people know they perform these well-practiced role responsibilities in a highly proficient manner -- that is, they know they are *competent*. Thus, they feel most *confident* in themselves and in the methods and practices they apply when performing such routines.

**Behavioral Addiction.** Unfortunately, many people like these good feelings so much that they *addict* themselves to whatever results in feeling good. As with addiction to drugs, alcohol, and tobacco, it is very difficult to *Let Go* and experience the pain of withdrawal. This is the primary basis of the *hidden threat of excessive (limited) competence*.

Leaders who are unaware of their behavioral addictions -- that is, leaders who lack self-reflective awareness -- are most likely to act in ways that are self-defeating. They “shoot themselves in the foot” and often displace blame onto others for interfering with their ability to “run the race”. When they are confronted with unfamiliar challenges, they are likely to intensify their habitual ways of coping with their historical but no longer relevant issues. (“I don’t know *how* to do this, so I’ll do more of what I *do* know.”) New circumstances, conditions, events, and situations become *threats* to such people. Over time and without modification, anachronistic coping patterns are likely to become the addicted person’s primary and *flawed* means of coping with *anything new* -- and defending themselves against the threats to their self-esteem that radical, discontinuous change so frequently provokes.

### ***IN CONCLUSION***

It serves little purpose, when we observe an under-performing or dysfunctional leader or manager, to castigate that individual. More realistically, we must keep in mind the concept of *organizational collusion*. With necessary and sufficient preparation of individuals plus organizational support and effective performance management, we might identify and do something about non-functioning managers and leaders. However, such ideal organizational conditions rarely obtain. Frequently, the dysfunctional manager or leader is merely a product of prevailing organizational conditions. Therefore, rather than blaming the victim, it seems more functional to examine the organization and its systems

to determine how to assure that individuals' behavior will match and contribute to the realization of the organizations' vision, mission, goals, strategies, and philosophy or values.

Organizational conditions can either exacerbate or ameliorate flawed individual behavior. It can be enlightening to compare those organizational assumptions and practices that seem to be either positively or inversely associated with effective leadership. The results can be practical differential diagnostic criteria that could enable managers and their consultants to identify areas for supportive, corrective, or preventive intervention.

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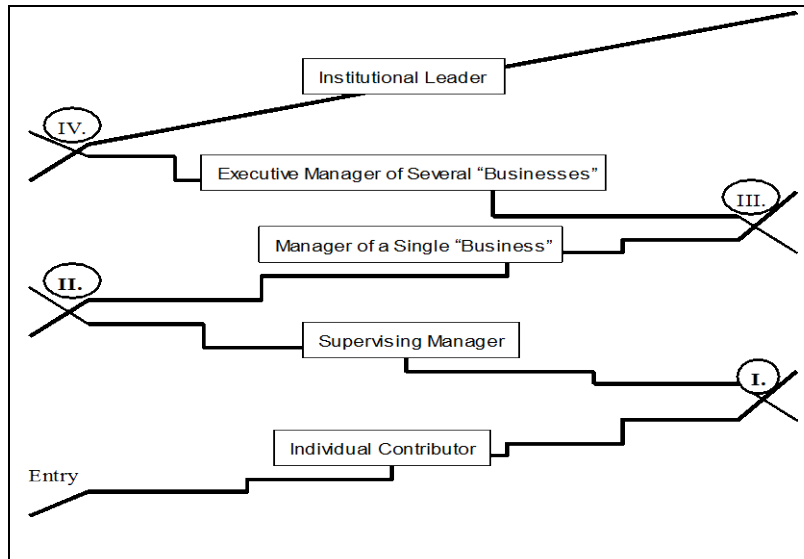
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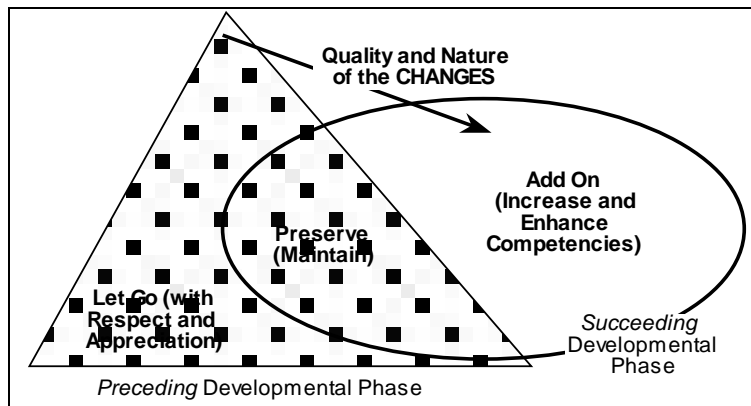
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**Figure 1. The Five Primary Pathways and Four Basic Career Crossroads<sup>4</sup>**



**Figure 2. Transformational Change (Freedman, 1992)**



**Figure 3. The First Crossroad**

<sup>4</sup> Within each of the five pathways, the **vertical risers** imply rotation among related positions or progression along any career pathway.

**TIME FACTOR:** Upwardly mobile managers-in-transition should not remain on the same pathway for more than three or four years. Beyond that, people become too "addicted" to using familiar routines that may have been successful at lower levels as they try to adapt and respond to the new demands presented by crossing their next career crossroad.

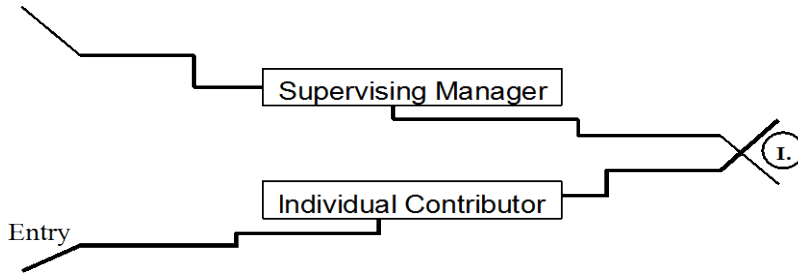


Figure 4. The Second Crossroad

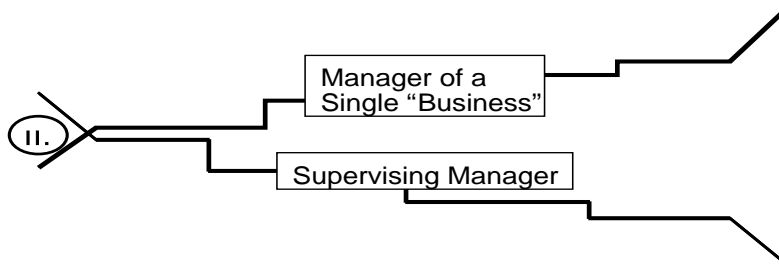


Figure 5. The Third Crossroad

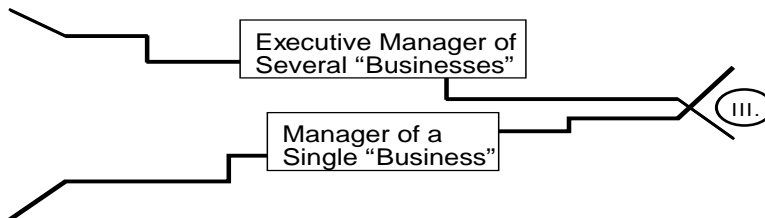


Figure 6. The Fourth Crossroad

