

What is Different about working with C-Level Clients

When functional senior managers are promoted to being a corporate executive (chief officer), they experience the need to shift their perspective and mind-set.

Previously they will have focussed on the needs and priorities of their own function and department. Their authority will have come from professional technical expertise. They will be skilled at solving problems in their functional domain.

As a member of the corporate executive team they experience the demand for a shift in focus:

Functional Head - focus	Corporate Executive - focus
problems and solutions	challenges and opportunities
immediate issues	medium and long-term strategies
in their function	across functions
inside the organisation	across stakeholder groups and competitors
management	leadership
business plans	shifting strategy, culture and leadership

Many c-level executives find this a very challenging transition, moving from the comfort of their area of expertise to face unfamiliar demands and the need to speak a new language. Often they will want help in making this transition. As one c-level executive put it: "If the consultant is not helping me in facing the next examination from the non-executive members of the board, they are not on my agenda".

As relationship partners, one needs to be able to shift one's own mind-set and language from relating to functional senior managers to relating to c-level executives. The relationship partner has to undertake a similar transition to that of the c-level executive.

It is also important to remember that individuals who become c-level executives are nearly always ambitious and are focussed on how they achieve personal and organisational success and what is necessary for their next career move. If one is not sensitive to this agenda it can interrupt the relationship, but if one can include this agenda in the relationship it can deepen the business intimacy.

The Chief Executive has all of the above in a more extreme form and particular needs and differences because:

- They hold the key responsibility for Business Strategy and Transformation
- Their role is where all the internal functions integrate
- They are the key link between the Board and the senior executive team
- Responsible for integrating the needs of all the stakeholders.

They have distinct pressures because:

- Constantly under the microscope being evaluated by the Board, Shareholders & Press
- Does not have a peer group
- Needs to evaluate other senior executives and arbitrate between them
- Expertise base, may be outside current sector and in only one function

This leads them to having particular needs for some of the following:

- A sounding board
- Informed perspective on what is happening in the sector
- Latest thinking on key business issues
- Independent advice on functional areas
- Mentoring on their own personal and career development
- Coaching on handling difficult personal, interpersonal and team issues.

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