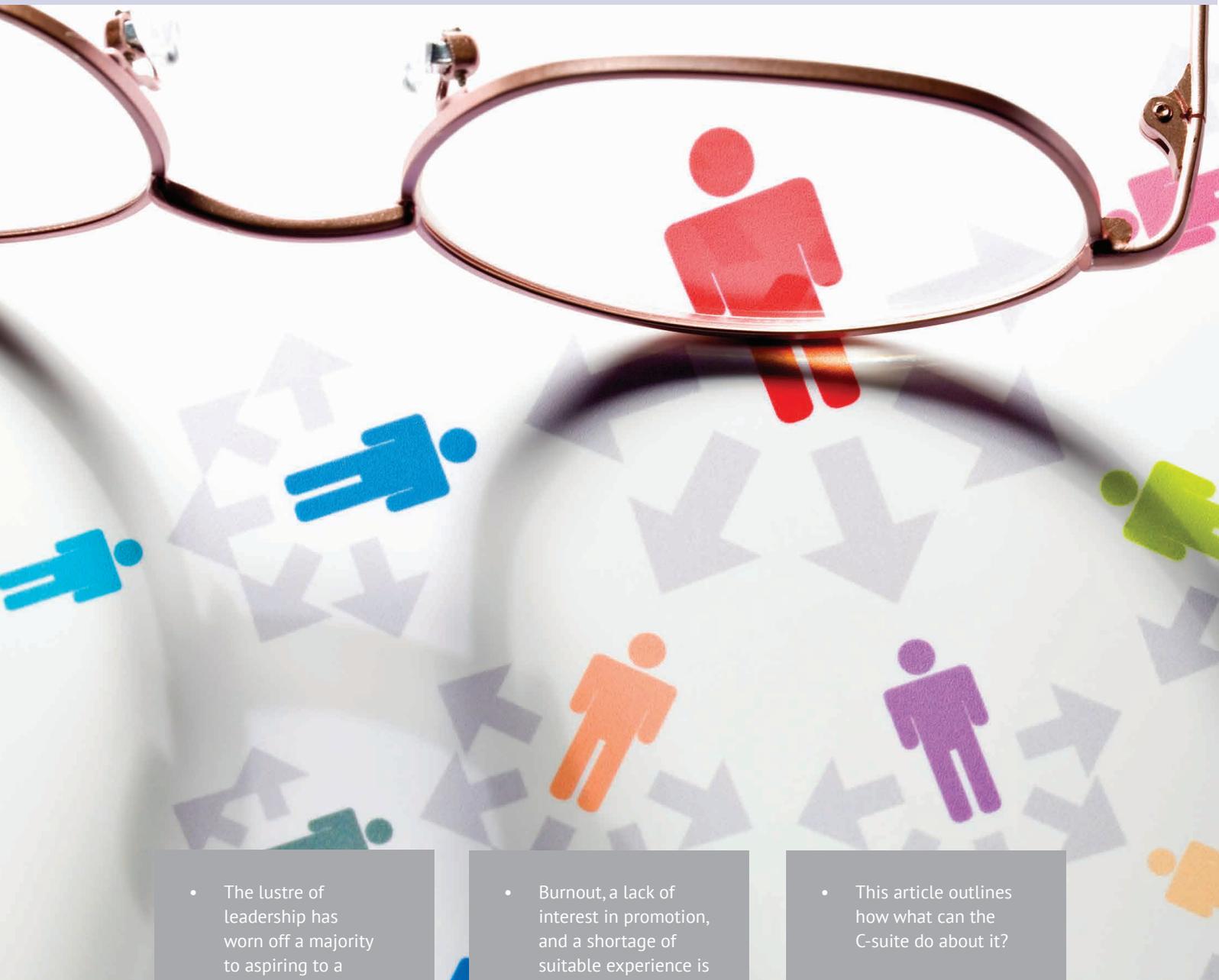


How the C-suite is Instrumental in Developing Future Executives

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- The lustre of leadership has worn off a majority to aspiring to a management role.

- Burnout, a lack of interest in promotion, and a shortage of suitable experience is creating a succession planning crisis.

- This article outlines how what can the C-suite do about it?

Middle managers are increasingly the fulcrum upon which corporate performance balances – they are the interchange between strategy and execution and between workforce and leadership. But they have experienced some pretty bad press over the last 30 years. Some of us (like Steve Jobs or Elon Musk) would do away with them entirely, some of us accept them as a necessary evil, and a few of us actively value them.

But as business velocity, complexity, uncertainty and disruption increases, we're seeing a necessary devolution of many traditionally senior leadership responsibilities to the middle management. We need more leaders with great influencing, negotiating, strategic thinking and commercial acumen to be everywhere that the C-suite cannot be.

So it's little surprise that middle management so often feels like the crumple zone on a car - folding under the pressure of immense colliding forces.

The problem is, middle managers are bred for execution – not for influence, strategy and commerce like C-suite leaders. They haven't done this before; it's not in their DNA – yet.

The middle managers that don't crumple – the leaders that can have greater impact despite all of this are what I call the B-suite – and we need many, many more of them.

Can you recall being a middle manager? It's like being middle class or a middle child – you're neither here nor there – you're not on tools but you're not inner circle either. You're not really senior, but you're not really junior either. And it's this critical but neglected cohort that is beginning to feel the squeeze of modern-day business – and they are buckling under the pressure.

What we need is to enable B-suite leaders to have C-suite impact – to be able to operate more like C-suite executives every day.

Why?

Burnout, a lack of interest in promotion, and a shortage of suitable experience is creating a succession planning crisis the likes of which we have not seen in a decade. If the C-suite doesn't address, the C-suite may find retirement age looking a lot further away.

DDI's Global Leadership Forecast 2021 tells us that:

A CEO's number one issue is developing the next generation of senior leaders.

Benchstrength is at an all-time low. Only 11 per cent of companies are ready to replace their leaders should they leave – and by the way, 26 per cent of them are intending to do so.





Burnout is real. Leadership energy has taken a nosedive. Sixty per cent of leaders now indicate that they feel 'used up' at the end of every workday, a strong indicator of burnout.

There is a notable, waning interest in C-suite roles – The BCG and Ipsos survey of 1,500 managers showed that 81 per cent say the job is harder than a few years ago and 63 per cent don't want to stay in management. And this isn't a situational blip – the long-term implications are stark: only one in ten non-managers want to become a manager. The lustre of leadership has worn off.

What can the C-suite do about it?

1. De-complicate your business

We know the velocity of business has increased and pace is exhausting. We know the disruption factor is higher and more frequent than we've ever seen and the constant need to pivot has switching costs. And we often blame business complexity on these factors, but

the truth is far closer to home – and far more addressable than we believe.

A recent BCG/Ipsos report shows that since 1955, the complexity of business has increased threefold. That same report shows that instead of combating complexity with simplification, employers are making it more complicated – 35 times more complicated in fact.

Addressing approval layers, report-writing and meeting cultures are the fastest way to alleviate a major driver of burn-out and create capacity in your B-suite for greater impact.

2. Accelerate their experience

Henry Mintzberg tells us that 'Leadership, like swimming, cannot be learned by reading about it.'

The fastest way to develop a B-suite leaders experience is to enable experience-based learning, which is where peer groups and industry mentors are unparalleled ways to learn.



empowered their B-suite to make decisions and act autonomously. When I ask them how many layers they have stripped out of their approval process or how many governance forums they no longer chair, it's evident that what most senior leaders mean by empowerment is loose at best.

What empowerment actually means is 'the act of giving power to someone'.

Empowerment is not just delegation (which is really the act of acting on your behalf), nor is it working with you on something (that's collaboration), nor being supervised (that's training), nor being told to own your decisions (that's accountability).

True empowerment means you have to give some of your power away. There is no other way to truly enable your B-suite to have the responsibility, authority and autonomy to have more impact and get more done.

The C-suite have a profound ability to make simple, significant contributions to developing future executives – which doesn't have to mean taking on more mentees! Create space through de-complicating your business, challenge yourself on what you mean by empowering people, take on a B-suite shadow for three days a quarter, and connect your B-suite leaders with their peers internally and externally so they can learn from each other's experiences. [G](#)

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The second way is to ensure they have accelerated approach to getting those experiences first-hand in their career – expose them to boom and bust conditions, to lead high and low performing teams, to driving change programs and holding steady. Think of it as delivering a classic C-suite career at today's speed of business.

3. Give them exposure to you

Let them see you in action! Often something left out of leadership development is the opportunity to shadow your C-suite, to observe an executive committee or to prepare a case alongside your leader and watch them pitch it.

This exposure will drive greater awareness for how you think, what you take into consideration, how you influence and debate. It's a window into what you're expecting from them in terms of presence, behaviours and thought processes.

4. Check your understanding of empowerment

I often hear my C-suite clients tell me that they have