

## Our Latest Research on Expert to Leader Transitions

Here at Xancam, we are excited about our latest leading-edge talent solution - **Xpert2Leader**. We have developed this approach in response to client demand for a solution that transforms talented experts and senior specialists into successful business leaders.

### ***The Business Case***

Now more than ever, organisations need solutions that enable them to make the best use of available talent. Traditionally, there have been clear demarcations between 'specialist' and 'generalist' career paths and employees have been required to make the decision on their chosen path at a fairly early career stage. However there is now a growing realisation that taking a less rigid approach – and giving people a wider range of options in later career stages - can yield dividends for both organisations and individuals.

For the individual, the chance of a career switch is often a motivating prospect, particularly for those who have become stale in their original specialism and now seek new challenges. Offering this option can improve the retention and engagement levels of highly talented people. Sourcing business leaders from an existing pool of specialists and experts can also make sound business sense; particularly in challenging competitive scenarios. It enables the business to build a pipeline of skilled leaders who are steeped in the business's wisdom and retains their valuable market intelligence, contacts and relationships too. Offering multiple career paths with the appropriate development and support also allows the business to make the most effective use of available talent.

### ***The Approach***

The Xpert2Leader solution draws on leading-edge thinking from both psychology and business research so that it effectively *accelerates* the transition from 'senior specialist' to 'business leader'. Typically, Xpert2Leader is run as a series of workshops with transitioning leaders. Each workshop is grounded in research-based principles but tailored to meet each client's specific business context.

It is common to imagine that the transition from expert to leader is addressed mostly with business skills and knowledge – for instance finance, marketing, people processes, and so on. However our research indicates that the shift in *identity* and *perspective* is much more fundamental to success in this transition – and more difficult to achieve than mere skills transfer. This is why the Xpert2Leader programme focuses primarily on enabling participants to think about themselves – and their role as business leader – in a completely new way.

Recently in Xpress we outlined the success of Xpert2Leader with global insurance business Allianz, who now make this programme a mandatory requirement for senior specialists (for instance underwriters and actuaries) transitioning to broader, business leadership roles.

### ***Our Research with Successful Business Leaders***

We conducted some research that focused on the experiences of successful business leaders who had originally started their careers as technical or functional specialists before at some point making the switch to a business leadership role. These people hailed from a diverse range of career backgrounds including: scientific research; IT; insurance underwriting; quantity surveying; accounting and HR. They held roles at different levels of seniority; our sample included Business Unit and Regional Directors, C-Suite Directors and CEOs.

We asked these leaders: what had motivated them to make this career switch; what they found particularly challenging; what they had to learn (or let go of) and how they see the difference between themselves and specialists who have not made this career move.

To see the detail of the research in our White Paper 'From Expert to Leader – the Individual Experience'. In the paper, we describe how:

- Our respondents listed a consistent set of motivating factors that inspire specialists to make the move to business leadership
- However, even those who were highly motivated by making this move had some real concerns about what this would entail for them both personally and professionally – find out about what inhibits experts or holds them back from making this career move
- Our respondents all said that they experienced a steep learning curve – and were surprised about the issues that took the most time and energy in their new role. They were also in unanimous agreement about the most powerful means of supporting their development as business leaders
- Although most were experienced as managers before they switched roles, many were surprised at the new and different challenges that came with a more senior general management role
- The report identifies some interesting differences in personality, intellect and motivation that distinguish career 'experts' from those who go on to be successful business leaders
- We have summarised with some useful indicators for individuals who are thinking of making the switch from expert to leader, and with some observations for how businesses may support them