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There are many changes in the executive world of today... I believe that the concept of executive shelf life, the structure of the multinational, the management of information and knowledge have significant impact today while the principles of success over a long career are still roughly the same.

The concept of a career has changed. In the eighties, chances are that you would have thought of a career as working with two three companies in a narrow band of allied industries. Today, it is likely that a career over 30 years will be with about six to ten companies and across industries. The average executive shelf life in a company is down from a decade to a few years now. Twenty years ago, a company was a place to work in, a bank to borrow from (easy interest loans) to build assets and a place to build a networked family of executives outside of work. Work was work and life was work. Work life balance was hardly an issue. All that seems archaic today. This has tremendous challenges for the organization. First, how do you build commitment and loyalty to an organization? Second, how do you invest in people for the long term? Third, in terms of compensation, how do you provide more cash in the payout compared to time bound stock options? Many organizations have honed in on money as the answer to the challenges. I don't agree. Boards of companies and HR departments will need to ask themselves a fundamental question "do we provide lots of money and an ok organization culture or build a strong culture with reasonable money"

My career has essentially been with Multinationals and that's the backdrop for the thoughts here. Twenty years ago, most multinationals had a simple hierarchy, with possibly the first set of Indian managers running the firm. A matrix organization was a bookish idea and there was hardly anything known as dotted line reporting. Today, most multinationals are matrixes, some more so than the other. Reporting, Influencing, Investment and Accountability lines are not obvious and clear on paper. In a matrix orgn, it looks like everyone is responsible for everything yet no one is accountable for anything!! And worse, objectives between parts of the matrix seem at cross purpose. Building an effective, consumer and customer focused organization is a challenge for a matrixed multinational. There is no easy answer. Collaboration and Influencing are critical for delivering results in today's MNC. Managers growing up in a hierarchy structure sometimes find the adjustment difficult to make. Days of "let me keep my immediate boss happy and the rest will sort themselves out" are numbered A matrixed organization will also mean fewer general management jobs and it is likely that the first general management job for a young person starting today is a long way away. So, how does one prepare future leaders? This area is an obvious advantage area for the entrepreneur or the family firm.

Information and knowledge management has changed significantly. E mail has changed the understanding of "confidential". Thanks to e mail, everyone who is supposed to know and everyone who is not supposed to know is marked on almost everything. In today's workplace e mail is more of a security should things go wrong... "I copied you on this day," The Internet empowers young managers like never before. It is possible for a young manager to have more subject knowledge than his superiors thanks to the net. This places a pressure on leaders to constantly add value to their subordinates. Mere years in a job or grey hair are not good enough to earn respect anymore.

While a lot has changed, I believe that the longer term fundamentals of successful careers remain roughly the same. They would possibly be a combination of the seven Cs, Competence, Character, Commitment, Confidence, Communication, Clarity of Thought and Collaboration.