Taking Charge as a General Manager: An Action Plan for Success

by

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Submitted to the Sloan School of Management in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

A study was made to determine how a newly appointed general manager can  
most effectively assume the leadership role in an organization. Conclusions and  
recommendations from past studies were reviewed. Interviews were conducted  
with current General Managers in order to check the theories and past results  
against the experience of managers in the author’s own organization. These  
findings were combined into a list of recommended actions for newly appointed  
general managers.

As a result of the study, a set of common actions was identified. These  
Seven Essential Elements of Taking Charge as a General Manager  
can be combined into three general categories as listed below:

Building Effective Personal Relationships
1. With Superiors
2. With Subordinates
3. With Key Internal and External Supporters

Assessing the Organization: Its Members and its Environment
4. Learning about the Business, Environment, and Organization
5. Assessing the Top Team and its Members

Developing a Shared Direction
6. Building the Top Team(s)
7. Developing a Shared Organizational Agenda

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Biographical Note

Keith Gockenbach is a 1997 Sloan Fellow, sponsored by Eastman Chemical Company. He has worked in various manufacturing, development, and staff assignments at Eastman in Kingsport, Tennessee for the past nineteen years. His most recent assignment was as Superintendent of the Cellulose Esters Division, which manufactures products for plastics, fibers, coatings, food, and electronic end uses. He graduated magna cum laude from Clemson University in 1977 with a B. S. in Chemical Engineering.
Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge two people, without whose support this thesis would have never reached its final form.

Deborah Ancona provided indispensable advice with respect to formulation of the thesis purpose, sources for literature, and interview questions. Her recommendations enabled the research portion of the thesis to move quickly and efficiently. In addition, her questions and comments on the draft were extremely beneficial toward sharpening the author’s initial thoughts and conclusions.

The author’s wife, Lynn, provided support and encouragement during the inevitable low spots and writing “blocks.” In addition, she fulfilled the difficult role of editor - providing critical comments in her usual supportive fashion.

The author would also like to acknowledge the invaluable help of the three Eastman executives who took time to candidly respond to a long list of interview questions. Their answers and insights were vital to the author’s understanding and his confidence in the findings of the Literature Review.
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Introduction

Taking over a general manager assignment is a complex task. It involves leading a group of top managers toward the often elusive goal of creating or sustaining a profitable and growing business. This must be accomplished in an external environment which is competitive, changing, and growing in complexity. It must be done in a way that constantly exceeds the expectations of the most demanding of all stakeholders - the customer. And it must be done in a way that always produces "the numbers" - both short-term and long-term results that satisfy the most important stakeholder - the owner.

In order to do this, the general manager must lead a group of individuals - the "top management group" - toward a vision of a future state which meets the needs of all the stakeholders. These members of the top management group are at the same time independent leaders of their own units in the organization; sometimes leading specific functions (such as manufacturing or marketing), sometimes leading business units (subsets of the total organization), and sometimes a support staff (such as legal or finance). In any case, these members are also leaders and managers in their own right, with their own individual goals, objectives, and constituencies to serve. As such, they view external changes from their own perspective, and without skillful leadership, the total organization response can be disjointed as a result of these varied outlooks.
Consequently, the general manager is responsible for results in a complex intellectual and interpersonal situation which she can neither entirely understand nor directly control. The job demands leadership under extreme uncertainty, influence over hundreds or even thousands of diverse subordinates, and gaining cooperation from a large number of people outside the organization over whom she has no formal authority.

How does a newly appointed general manager begin to cope with such complexity and responsibility?

That is the subject of this thesis. Conclusions and recommendations generated by past studies will be reviewed. Through interviews with current executives, these theories will be checked against the experience of a few successful leaders. As a result of this process, a recommended action plan will be developed for leaders to follow when taking charge of a new general manager assignment.

Although there are a number of similarities among all general manager assignments, there are also a number of differences in demands or requirements depending on the organizational or industry structure which exists. This thesis will concentrate on general manager assignments within organizational structures such as exist at Eastman Chemical Company and many other relatively large corporations.
Organizational Background

Many different forms of corporate organizations exist today - leading to a great deal of variety in managerial jobs. This thesis is directed at general manager jobs in organizations which are structured in ways similar to the author’s own company. This section describes that organization structure as background for the remainder of the thesis.

Eastman Chemical Company (EMN) is a publicly-held corporation traded on the New York Stock Exchange. It is the tenth largest chemical company in the United States, with over $5 billion in annual sales. Figure 1 shows the current organization of Eastman Chemical Company. Known within Eastman as the “Pizza Chart,” the organization was recently described by Earnie Deavenport, Chairman and CEO, as “a highly-matrixed organization, but not a decentralized one.” At the center of the organization are Mr. Deavenport and his executive team. The four executive vice-presidents lead the four dimensions of the matrix: (1) the functions, such as manufacturing, marketing, R&D, etc., (2) the eight business organizations, which develop and implement strategies for the diverse businesses at Eastman, (3) the technologies, which are responsible for developing and extending the core competencies of Eastman, and (4) the geographies, which are responsible for growing and coordinating the business efforts outside of North America. The vice-presidents of Legal, Finance, Human Resources, and Corporate Strategy make up the remainder of the executive team.
Figure 1: Eastman Chemical Company Organization Chart
This organization structure delegates many of the decisions in the organization to managers in the four dimensions, while maintaining central management of strategic direction (which businesses Eastman is in and not in) and administrative functions at the executive team level.

This structure creates several general manager assignments:

1. The CEO.
2. The four Executive Vice-presidents, each of whom has general management responsibility over one of the matrix dimensions.
3. The seven Business Organization General Managers.
4. The three regional Presidents.
5. Four North American manufacturing site Presidents.

Since different companies use the same titles to describe executive jobs which are very different, it's worth a few words to describe these Eastman general manager positions in a little more detail:

(1) **The CEO**: At Eastman, Mr. Deavenport fills all the roles normally attributed to a CEO who is also the Chairman of the Board. He is the primary spokesperson for the corporation for external contacts as well as being the top manager for the people who work inside the organization.

(2) **The Executive Vice-presidents**: As in many organizations, these are the highest-ranking executives below the CEO. Eastman differs from many organizations in that there is no chief operating officer (COO). Instead, the four executive vice-presidents split these duties. Eastman's organization
divides these duties by the different dimensions of the matrix (business, functional, technological, and geographical), whereas many organizations split these duties primarily along business lines.

(3) **The Business Organization General Managers**: At Eastman, these positions carry the title of Vice-president and General Manager. The business organizations have primary responsibility for strategy development, implementation, and profit and loss. This is similar to most corporations who are organized into business units. A major difference at Eastman is that most of the people and other resources are managed in the functional areas (manufacturing, marketing, R&D, etc.), which are then matrixed back to the businesses.

(4) **The Geographic Regional Presidents**: The regions have responsibility for all operations outside of North America and coordination of all activities by the businesses in the region to provide a focal point for Eastman's customers and the many governmental agencies involved. The regions have also been given a large part of the responsibility for growing Eastman business outside of North America. These general managers have responsibility for most of the employees in the region while being strongly matrixed back to each of the functions as well as the businesses.

(5) **The North American Manufacturing Site Presidents**: Considering the manufacturing site Presidents as general manager roles may be somewhat arguable; certainly the literature is divided on this issue. I have included these roles in the Eastman case because they are similar in many respects to
general manager definitions in the literature. Due to the size (from several hundred to eight thousand people per site) and the importance to the communities and regions where these sites are located, there are many external responsibilities which make the site president assignment much like a general manager assignment in the Eastman context. These responsibilities include relationships with communities, the media, local and state government agencies, and others. Internally, the site Presidents have matrixed responsibility with the business organizations which manufacture products at their sites as well as the staff and functional groups which support operations at the site. Customer and supplier relations are important activities for the site President (in conjunction with the appropriate business organization). Profit and loss statements, although unofficial from a public perspective, are generated for each site and used by the site Presidents to drive behaviors and actions of employees and groups at the site.
Literature Review

What is a General Manager?

Much of the literature regarding top managers focuses on the CEO and his team members. While the CEO may be the quintessential general manager assignment, many other managers are considered general managers because of the roles and responsibilities they fill in the organization. Kotter (1982), in his book *The General Managers*, defines general managers as “individuals who hold positions with some multifunctional responsibility for a business (or businesses).” The fifteen managers studied by Kotter were also differentiated from other managers by the fact that they had partial or full profit-center responsibility.

Kotter also found that GM jobs were defined in terms of a set of responsibilities and a set of relationships, as listed below:

A. Responsibilities
   1. Long run - for setting some or all of the basic goals, directions and priorities for an organization, including deciding what business or businesses to be in, and how to secure key resources.
   2. Medium run - for deciding how to allocate resources effectively to that business or businesses so as to achieve long-run goals.
   3. Short run - for the efficient use of the human, financial, and material resources employed in that business or those businesses, including some profit responsibility.

B. Relationships
   1. Up - reporting to a GM boss (or a board of directors).
2. Lateral - sometimes (but not always) having to rely on other internal groups for support (e.g. corporate staff) or having to coordinate groups that are associated with the business but do not report to this GM position.
3. Down - authority over what is usually a very diverse set of subordinates (not just specialists in a single function).

These responsibilities and relationships lead to six key problems and dilemmas which must be faced by the general manager in accomplishing her assignment (Kotter, 1982):

1. Setting basic goals, policies, and strategies despite great uncertainties.
2. Achieving a delicate balance in the allocation of scarce resources among a diverse set of functional and business needs. Not allowing short-run concerns to dominate long-run ones, or marketing issues to stifle production needs, etc.
3. Keeping on top of a very large and diverse set of activities. Being able to identify problems ("fires") that are out of control and to solve them quickly.
4. Getting the information, cooperation, and support needed from bosses to do the job. Being demanding with superiors without being perceived as uncooperative.
5. Getting corporate staff, other relevant departments or divisions, and important external groups (e.g., big unions or customers or suppliers) to cooperate despite the lack of any formal authority over them; getting things done through them despite resistance, red tape, and the like.

Kotter identified seven different kinds of general manager jobs in his study of corporations: (1) Functional CEO, (2) Multidivisional CEO, (3) Group GM, (4) Autonomous Division GM, (5) Semiautonomous GM, (6) Product/Market GM, and (7) Operations GM. In including all seven of these types of managers as GM's, Kotter emphasized that the core of the job is responsibility-oriented; all seven have some multifunctional responsibility for a business or businesses.
Although not specific to General Managers, others have chosen to describe an executive's job in terms of roles rather than responsibilities and relationships. Finkelstein and Hambrick (1996) refer to Mintzberg for a comprehensive list of executive roles (Figure 2).

Although there are some differences between the two ways of defining the job (responsibilities and relationships combined with associated problems and dilemmas vs. roles), these two outlooks provide a complementary and fairly complete look at what makes a general manager assignment different from other management positions. Although almost all management jobs have somewhat similar demands, general management assignments are unique due to the overall diversity of these demands. As Kotter states:

No other managerial or professional job places a person in a position where he or she must deal with long-, medium-, and short-run tasks, as well as with a very diverse group of specialists in a variety of different kinds of relationships. All other jobs somehow limit the diversity of demands. For example, lower-level management jobs do not have the long-run responsibilities. Other higher-level jobs do not have the same variety of specialists as subordinates. Staff jobs and traditional professional jobs seldom have many subordinates at all. Only GM jobs contain all this task- and people-related diversity. Ultimately, therefore, it is the diversity of complex demands that makes the job a general management job, that makes it different, and that makes it particularly difficult.
### Figure 2

**Summary of Mintzberg’s Executive Roles**

<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Figurehead</td>
<td>Symbolic head; obligated to perform a number of routine duties of a legal or social nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leader</td>
<td>Responsible for motivation and activation of subordinates for staffing, training, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaison</td>
<td>Maintains self-developed network of outside contacts and informers (information and favors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Seeks and receives wide variety of information to develop understanding of the organization and its environment. Emerges as “nerve center” for internal and external information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disseminator</td>
<td>Transmits information from outsiders or insiders to members of the organization. Some of it is factual and some involves interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesperson</td>
<td>Transmits information to outsiders regarding: organizational plans, policies, actions, results, etc.; acts as an industry expert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisional</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Searches for opportunities and initiates improvements. Supervises design of certain projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disturbance Handler</td>
<td>Responsible for corrective action when the organization faces important, unexpected disturbances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource Allocator</td>
<td>Responsible for allocation of organizational organization's resources - in effect, making or approving all significant organizational decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiator</td>
<td>Responsible for representing the organization during major negotiations with others.</td>
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Special Situations for General Managers

In addition to the complexity of the "normal" general manager assignment, there are three special situations which further complicate the job:

1. **Turbulent Environment** - Management in a turbulent environment has different demands and requires different thinking on the part of the general manager and his top group (Tushman, Romanelli, and Newman, 1986; Tushman and Rosenkopf, 1996; Ancona, 1997; Conger, 1989; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996). Particularly critical are the leadership requirements and the potential need for additional personnel changes in the top group.

2. **Change Management** - Although similar in that a turbulent environment requires many changes, there are many major organizational changes which are not the result of the external environment. In these cases, special leadership skills are required (Conger, 1989; Nadler and Tushman, 1989), but it may be counterproductive to make major changes in top group membership (Tushman, et al., 1986; Tushman and Rosenkopf, 1996; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996).

3. **Transnational Management** - The special cultural and market differences associated with leading groups and individuals located in different countries (with different legal and social requirements) add a further degree of complexity and several barriers to the general manager job (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989; Phillips, 1992).
One common presumption which exists in management theory and individual manager opinion is that successful general managers are "generic;" i.e., a good manager can manage in any situation. Several authors take issue with this presumption as a result of their studies (Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1997; Kotter, 1982; Gabarro, 1987; Tushman and Rosenkopf, 1996). Although general manager assignments are very demanding because of their diverse challenges and tasks, they are also very "specialized" - in other words, each is complex in a different way depending on the organizational structure, culture, industry, and environment. It is foolish to expect a manager with significant experience in consumer marketing to take over in an industrial marketing company without missing a beat. It is unrealistic to expect a manager with a functional background in accounting to take a general manager role over thousands of manufacturing personnel without any experience in managing large numbers of people or without a strong support system from superiors and subordinates. It is unlikely that knowledge in an industry which involves continuous manufacturing processes, such as chemicals, will be directly applicable to an industry which involves producing small numbers of large discrete items, such as aircraft.

This makes it essential that those people who select new general managers take the time to match the demands of the job with the experience and skills of the candidates. This has been a critical difference between successful and unsuccessful general managers in several studies (Gabarro, 1987; Kotter, 1982; Tushman and Rosenkopf, 1996).
Skills Required by General Managers

The skills required by General Managers are leadership skills. Authors have described these skills in different ways, grouping them in different categories and placing emphasis on different areas due to context or perspective, but overall, there exists a great deal of agreement on what is required to be an effective leader. The lists below are a sampling of some of the better summaries.

Kouzes and Posner (1995) describe five practices and “Ten Commitments of Leadership,” which they have summarized after studying over 2,500 examples of successful projects and conducting in-depth interviews with 300 of these respondents:

Challenging the Process

1. **Search out challenging opportunities** to change, grow, innovate, and improve.

2. **Experiment**, take risks, and learn from the accompanying mistakes.

Inspiring a Shared Vision

3. **Envision** an uplifting and ennobling future.

4. **Enlist others** in a common vision by appealing to their values, interests, hopes, and dreams.

Enabling Others to Act

5. **Foster collaboration** by promoting cooperative goals and building trust.
6. **Strengthen people** by giving power away, providing choice, developing competence, assigning critical tasks, and offering visible support.

**Modeling the Way**

7. **Set the example** by behaving in ways that are consistent with shared beliefs.

8. **Achieve small wins** that promote consistent progress and build commitment.

**Encouraging the Heart**

9. **Recognize individual contributions** to the success of every project.

10. **Celebrate** team accomplishments regularly.

Kouzes and Posner go on to describe another aspect of leadership - What do constituents expect of their leaders? The majority of respondents expected four things above all others:

**Honesty** - People want to know that their leader is truthful, ethical, principled, and has integrity. This is judged by how the leader behaves, regardless of what she says. Consistency between word and deed is how someone is judged to be honest. Followers appreciate leaders who take a stand on principles - so honesty is also related to values, ethics, and the confidence to stand behind beliefs.

**Being Forward-Looking** - Leaders are expected to have a sense of direction and a concern for the future of the organization. Leaders must know where they’re going if they expect others to follow. People don’t require the “magical power of a prescient visionary.” They want a clear definition of what
the future will look like, in rich detail, if the organization is successful in reaching the destination set by the leader.

    **Being Inspiring** - Leaders are expected to be enthusiastic, energetic, and positive about the future. It's not enough for a leader to have a dream about the future, she must be able to communicate that vision in a way that breathes life into followers dreams and aspirations. This creates a “shared vision” which was common in the most successful cases studied. Enthusiasm and excitement are essential in signaling the leader’s commitment to the goal - if the leader displays no passion, why should anyone else?

    **Being Competent** - Followers must see the leader as capable and effective. This does not necessarily mean that the leader must have the same level of technical competence as the constituents - this is impossible in most high-level leadership positions anyway. Much more significant is that the leader take the time to learn the business and know the current operation before making changes and decisions that affect everyone in the organization. The leader may have functional competence in a certain area, but must bring more to the situation than that - something which adds value. Having a winning track record is the surest way to being considered competent. Expertise in leadership skills is another. Kouzes and Posner refer to this as “value-added competence.”

Together, these four characteristics define what people most want in their leaders - **credibility**. Kouzes and Posner compare this to what communications experts refer to as “source credibility.” In assessing the believability of sources of communication (newscasters, salespeople, managers, physicians, politicians,
or priests), researchers evaluate people on three criteria: their perceived trustworthiness, their dynamism, and their expertise. These parallel three of the four characteristics listed above: honesty, being inspiring, and competence. Kouzes and Posner take this to form what they call the "First Law of Leadership: If we don't believe the messenger, we don't believe the message."

An important dilemma results from wanting our leaders to be both credible and forward-looking. Leaders who are forward-looking are biased about the future. We expect newscasters to be cool, objective, and independent; we demand that our leaders have a point of view which is credibly based and also have a firm commitment to a destination for our journey. We want them to articulate the exciting possibilities of the future, even though this future is uncertain and unknowable. This bias means that leaders become the target of those who propose an alternative future. Thus, ironic as it may seem, when a leader takes a position on issues, that individual will seem less believable than someone who takes no stand. This dilemma has two important implications for leaders. First, they must learn how to balance their personal desire to achieve important ends with the followers' need to believe that the leader has their best interests at heart. Second, leaders must be ever diligent in guarding their credibility. Their ability to take strong stands depends on their being perceived as highly credible.

Conger (1989) and Bennis and Nanus (1985) identify four sets of skills which are necessary for exceptional leadership:
1. **Visioning skills** - This includes a sensitivity to their constituents’ needs along with the ability to see the deficiencies of the existing situation as well as the untapped opportunities. Bennis and Nanus (1985) call this “attention through vision.”

2. **Communication skills** - The “language of leadership” (Conger, 1991), consists of two distinct skill categories; framing and rhetorical crafting. Framing is the process of defining the purpose in a meaningful way - a way that amplifies the values and beliefs which reinforce commitment and also provides guidance for daily actions. Values should inspire, provide meaning for, and instill a sense of purpose in the organization’s members. In addition, four categories of beliefs are important to leaders: (1) the mission’s importance, (2) its root cause or need, (3) stereotypes about antagonists of the mission, and (4) the efficacy of the organization to succeed. Rhetorical crafting includes the use of metaphors, analogies, and organizational stories, speech techniques such as repetition, rhythm, balance, and alliteration, and the ability to gear the message to the audience. Skills which support this crafting include: vocal expressiveness, clear articulation, and the use of body language.

3. **Trust-building skills** - Trust is built through expertise, positioning, and commitment (Conger, 1991; Bennis and Nanus, 1985).

4. **Empowerment skills** - Empowerment is the process of strengthening each subordinate’s belief in their own abilities, thus tapping each person’s motivational energy. This can be done through accomplishments, verbal

Conger (1990) found that in charismatic leaders who led their organizations to problematic or disastrous outcomes had their roots of failure in one of three areas:

1. **Problems with the leader's vision** - Most commonly, this occurred when the vision reflected the internal needs of the leader rather than those of the market or the constituents. Other sources for problems were underestimation of the resources required, failure to adjust the vision to changing environmental conditions, or distorted perception of market or constituent needs.

2. **Manipulation through communication skills** - This includes such things as exaggerated self-descriptions or claims for the vision, using various techniques to restrict negative information and maximize positive information, fulfilling stereotypes and images of uniqueness, and attributing negative outcomes to external causes.

3. **Dysfunctional management practices** - Most of these problems have to do with relationships with people, such as: (1) poor management of people networks, particularly peers and superiors, (2) unconventional behavior that alienates, (3) "in group/out group" rivalries, (4) an autocratic, controlling style, (5) an informal/impulsive style, (6) alternating between idealizing and devaluing others, particularly direct reports, (7) creation of excessive
dependence in others, and (8) failure to develop capable successors. In addition to interpersonal mismanagement, practices such as attention to the superficial, absence from operations, and failure to manage details effectively can also result in serious problems for the charismatic leader.

Nadler and Tushman (1989) extend the findings regarding "magic" or "charismatic" leadership (Conger, 1989) to a definition of Instrumental Leadership. Whereas the Magic Leader will possess the skills of envisioning, energizing, and enabling, Nadler and Tushman argue that these can be limited unless they are complemented by the skills of structuring, rewarding, and controlling (Figure 3). Kets de Vries (1994) confirms these findings and emphasizes emotional stability as the base for several common traits which he has observed in senior executives, including: (1) conscientiousness, (2) extroversion, (3) dominance, (4) self-confidence, (5) energy, (6) agreeableness, (7) intelligence, and (8) open to experience.

Kets de Vries (1989) identifies three specific psychological forces which cause some leaders to fail. These are:

1. **Isolation from Reality**: Succession to the top leadership position in an organization is necessarily isolating in that it separates leaders from others (who now directly report to them) and leaves them without peers. As a result, their own normal dependency needs for contact, support, and reassurance rise up and overwhelm them.
2. **The Dangers of Transference**: Whether consciously or unconsciously, employees expect their organization's leaders to be infallible and even gifted to some degree with "magical" powers.
3. **The Fear of Success**: Troubled by guilt feelings about their success and fearful that it may not last, leaders may unconsciously cause themselves to fail.
Figure 3

Instrumental Leadership

From The Magic Leader

Envisioning
- Articulating a compelling vision
- Setting high expectations
- Modeling consistent behaviors

Energizing
- Demonstrating personal excitement
- Expressing personal confidence
- Seeking, finding, and using success

Enabling
- Expressing personal support
- Empathizing
- Expressing confidence in people

Toward

Instrumental Leadership

Magic Leadership

Structuring
- Envisioning
- Energizing

Controlling
- Enabling

Rewarding
Kets de Vries recommends that leaders engage in a regular process of
critical evaluation, including reflection on the following questions (which parallel
the findings of Conger (1990)):

1. How accessible is the leader?

2. How does the leader react to bad news or criticism from an employee?

3. Is the leader able to discuss any problems or ideas with colleagues?

4. Does the leader think of employees in terms of those who are “with” and
   those who are “against” her?

5. How realistic is the leader’s vision of the company’s future? Is there a large
discrepancy between her own and others’ points of view?

6. Is the leader willing to accept responsibility if things go wrong, or does she
   blame “the others?”

7. Is the leader quick to take offense and feel unfairly treated? Does she have
   a great need to “blow her own horn?”

8. Does the leader feel anxious and guilty when she is successful and have
difficulties believing that her professional success is caused by her own
accomplishments and not by sheer luck?

This concludes the review of skills required by general managers. These
skills, once developed, are used by the general manager to influence the
organization. Much of this influence is accomplished through the efforts of the
general manager and her first level of subordinates - the top management group.
What is a Top Management Group?

The definition of the top management group varies. Some researchers use titles to define the top group, some include all members of the "management committee," and some ask the CEO (or general manager in the case of a business unit) who to include. These methods lead to different groupings, usually varying in size between 3 and 10 members (Hambrick, 1994), but all result in selecting the top list of people in the organization hierarchy. These are the people who invariably have more influence on the course of the firm than any other group of similar size in the organization (Hambrick, 1994). The larger the group considered, the less likely they are to act as a team. The distinction between group and team is one which will be discussed in more detail later in this section.

Top management groups have distinctive characteristics, much in the same way that general manager jobs are different than other managerial assignments. Although many groups may exhibit some of these characteristics or contain some of the challenges, top management groups have them all. Hambrick (1984) lists three attributes which, in combination, make top management groups different:

1. **Their task is complex and has multiple elements.** They operate at the boundary of the organization and its environment. They confront informational overload and ambiguity. The information received is open to perceptual bias, interpretation, and political manipulation.
2. They carry great symbolic significance - both internally and externally. By virtue of their place in the organization, top groups influence the perceptions and actions of various constituencies merely by their surface characteristics. Since their members also head up subgroups of the firm, group members may think of themselves primarily as sub-unit group leaders rather than to group members.

3. Top groups tend to consist of strong, autonomous individuals. These are people who have demonstrated significant and sustained accomplishments during their careers and expect considerable autonomy and discretion in conducting their affairs.

Ancona and Nadler (1989) found that top teams, particularly those with the CEO as the leader, were different from others in eight ways:

1. Salience of the external environment.
2. Complexity of the task.
3. Intensified political behavior.
4. Fixed pie rewards (primarily due to the ultimate reward of CEO succession).
5. Increased visibility.
6. Composition (strong individuals, not necessarily strong team members).
7. Special meaning of team membership.
8. Unique role of the CEO as team leader.
Hambrick (1994) suggests that top management groups consist of five elements: composition, structure, incentives, processes, and the group leader (at the center of the four group elements). He defines the elements as follows:

1. **Composition** includes the specific team members and their individual characteristics.

2. **Structure** concerns team roles and their relationships.

3. **Incentives** include both explicit and implicit. An important inducement is the prospect of promotion to the group leader position.

4. **Processes** such as communication flows, sociopolitical dynamics, and behaviors are included.

5. **The group leader** often has a disproportionate influence, although what the leader can do depends on the group, just as what the group can do depends on the leader.

**Is it a top management group or team?**

Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) define a team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.” While Katzenbach and Smith believe that “the performance results of a real team will almost always outstrip that of a working group,” they are quick to point out that forming true teams at the top is a particularly difficult challenge. For one thing, a team may not be required. Particularly at the top of multibusiness firm, a working group may make more sense. The primary
difference is whether performance of the group is dependent on the individual efforts of the members or whether team members depend on each other for producing results or meeting group goals. Or, as Ancona and Nadler (1989) write: “The core defining characteristic [of an executive team] is that a group of people collectively provides strategic, operational, and institutional leadership. Thus each member is not only responsible for a unit or a function, but also explicitly wears another “hat,” that of corporate leadership.”

Hambrick (1994) uses “behavioral integration” as the term which differentiates top teams from top groups. Behavioral integration has three major elements: (1) quantity and quality (richness, timeliness, accuracy) of information exchange, (2) collaborative behavior, and (3) joint decision-making. The higher the degree of behavioral integration, the more the top group becomes a top team.

Ancona (1997) points out four factors which make formation of a team rather than a working group even more necessary. The first factor is the need for corporate coherence - in other words, the diverse parts of the organization need to work from an “integrated logic” in order to be effective and present a consistent view of the organization to outsiders. Second, the increased pace of technological, market, social, and therefore organizational change make it increasingly difficult for any one leader (or group of individual leaders) to effectively implement change quickly enough to remain competitive. Third, even if change is not a primary factor for a particular industry or corporation, the sheer number of demands on the CEO, particularly external demands, mean that she
needs strategic and operational help. Finally, the makeup of the top group and
the personality of the CEO often make the difference between working at
developing an effective top team or settling for a top management group
because of political or interpersonal factors.

While a top management team may or may not be needed, it is important
that the choice between a team and a group structure be consciously made - if a
team is not needed or if the proper work is not done to develop a true team, then
a "pseudo-team" can be the result. And the performance of a pseudo-team will
be less than that of a working group or a real team (Katzenbach and Smith,
1993a).

A true team, on the other hand, will use its synergy to increase
organizational performance: "If designed effectively, such a group is more than a
set of individuals working together; it is a truly interdependent interacting team.
That is, team members have a sense of identity - they perceive themselves as a
unit; they are interdependent - they depend on each other to produce their
output; and they have joint outcomes - their rewards and punishments are
affected by each other" (Ancona and Nadler, 1989).
Building an Effective Top Team

Since top teams are a special case, it is appropriate to first define effective teams in general. Researchers (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a; Shea and Guzzo, 1987; and Ancona, 1997) have defined various characteristics of effective teams. Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) found that effective teams possessed: (1) small numbers, (2) adequate levels of complimentary skills, (3) a truly meaningful purpose, (4) specific goal or goals, (5) a clear working approach, and (6) a sense of mutual accountability. These characteristics are discussed in detail below:

1. **Small numbers**: Small groups can convene and communicate with each other easily and frequently (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). Team members need to meet often and intensely to confront, discuss, plan, strategize, share information, develop coherence, build scenarios, and make decisions. In the process “they are developing trust in one another” (Ancona, 1997). Members understand each other’s roles and skills and hold open and interactive discussions. If necessary, the group divides into subgroups to more effectively accomplish tasks (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a).

2. **Adequate levels of complimentary skills**: Collectively, team members possess the functional/technical, problem-solving/decision-making, and interpersonal skills necessary for the team to accomplish its purpose. Team members are willing to add and enhance skills as they are needed by the team (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). This helps lead to what Shea and
Guzzo (1987) call “potency” or “the collective belief by group members that they have the skills, resources, and other requirements to be a successful group.”

3. **A truly meaningful purpose**: Team members share a purpose which is broader and deeper than just near-term organizational goals. They are able to clearly articulate the purpose (in concrete, unambiguous terms) to people outside the team. Accomplishment of the team purpose is important, and often exciting, to team members (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). In the case of top teams, this means moving beyond individual agendas and into a shared responsibility for the corporation as a whole (Ancona, 1997).

4. **Specific goal or goals**: The goals are specific to the team (versus broader organizational goals or the goals of only the leader). They are clear, simple, measurable, and allow for small wins along the way. The importance of the goals and the method of measurement vs. goals are agreed upon by all members (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a).

5. **Clear working approach**: Members agree on a concrete approach to achieving the objectives of the team which requires all members to contribute relatively equal amounts of real work. The approach provides for open interaction, fact-based problem-solving, and results-based evaluation. Fresh input and perspectives are sought and added to modify and improve the approach over time (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). As Ancona (1997) notes, effective teams value issue-oriented, rather than interpersonal, conflict. They use processes to surface differing opinions, perspectives, and
priorities so as to examine a greater range of information and alternatives, 
achieve greater understanding, and develop better solutions.

6. **Sense of mutual accountability:** Each member is individually and jointly
accountable for the team purpose, goals, approach, and work products.
Members are clear regarding items for which they have individual
responsibility and for which they are held jointly responsible. There is a
sense that “only the team can fail.” (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993a). Shea
and Guzzo (1987) refer to this as “task and outcome interdependence.”

From these six basic elements, Katzenbach and Smith’s (1993a) research
found four key lessons regarding teams and team performance:

1. Significant performance challenges energize teams regardless of where they
are in an organization.

2. Organizational leaders can foster team performance best by building a strong
performance ethic rather than by establishing a team-promoting environment
alone.

3. Biases toward individualism exist but need not get in the way of team
performance.

4. Discipline - both within the team and across the organization - creates the
conditions for team performance.

Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) concluded that there were two sets of vital
signs to indicate whether a particular group of people is a real team. The first
set of signs includes the six elements of team basics (listed above). The second set of vital signs includes the following equally powerful indicators:

1. **Enthusiasm and energy level**: Teams work hard and enthusiastically. They also play hard and enthusiastically. No one has to ask them to put in extra time; they just do it. They do the critical work of the team themselves rather than delegating it to others.

2. **Event-driven histories**: Galvanizing events, often unplanned and sometimes characterized as failures, propel team performance.

3. **Personal commitment**: Member’s strong personal commitment to each other’s growth and success is what distinguishes a high-performance team from a team where members do not truly care about each other.

4. **Performance results**: In the final analysis, performance is both the cause and effect of teams. Real teams do not come together as a team without a strong performance need. In addition, real teams outperform individuals acting as individuals.

In moving from individual or working group performance to real team performance, Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) note that the most formidable risk facing potential teams is the risk of building the interdependence and trust necessary to move from individual to mutual accountability.

As previously detailed, top management teams have unique challenges when it comes to effective performance. In addition to these challenges, there are some myths regarding top teams which offer additional roadblocks to
effective performance. Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) detail five assumptions which drive executive groups to the working group approach “without any consciousness that a choice is being made.” These five assumptions, or myths, are:

1. The purpose of the team at the top is identical to the purpose of the company. Although leading the corporation to meet its goals is the responsibility of the top management group, it represents a relatively abstract challenge which is essentially endless (in that a successful corporation outlives its managers). Absent from this statement is a clear set of team purposes, team goals, and team work-products. Most groups at the top measure themselves only by economic criteria, and while this certainly assesses the top group’s influence on the work of others, it fails to measure what they do as a team against performance goals and work-products they set for themselves.

2. The whole top group has to be “on the team.” There are two assumptions at the root of this myth. First, individuals can report to the top executive and make significant contributions to the corporation without being part of the core team. Second, there is no reason why the top group should be a single team. Instead, they should identify those challenges which require a team approach, then put together teams to attack these needs. Real teams include only members with the complementary skills, common commitment, and mutual accountability to get the team’s job done.
3. **The role and contribution of team members, including the leader, are defined by their hierarchical and functional position.** Teams at the top must develop a sense of mutual trust and interdependence. By the time most executives reach the top group, they find it hard to allow their performance to depend on others. The leader of the group (the CEO) is frequently held individually accountable (by her board of directors) for the performance of the group, which makes it hard to give up "solution space" to individual members, much less to a team. The fact that several individuals on the top group view themselves as candidates for the top job also works against the sense of mutual trust required for team performance. Each team member has (by his or her position) been hierarchically defined as an "expert" in a particular area, and are not expected to express uncertainty, depend on others, and display attitudes of "not knowing the answers."

4. **Spending extra team time is inefficient.** None of the members of the top team has much discretionary time. Executive groups are unlikely to "roll up their sleeves" and do real work together. They are expected by others to delegate such efforts to down-the-line people and then review the result of the outcomes in meetings. None of this equates to the "real work" of teams.

5. **Team effectiveness depends only on communications and openness.**

   Certainly, discussions and decisions benefit from active listening, cooperation, sharing, and recognizing the contributions and achievements of others, but these do not necessarily reflect joint team work-products or a sense of mutual accountability.
Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) suggest six ways to break through the resistance to teamwork in top teams. First, team assignments that tackle specific issues should be carved out and worked on by the team (not subordinates). Second, work can be assigned to subsets of the team, allowing individual team members to do work outside of the larger team meetings which can then be brought back for integration with the full team. This also causes team involvement and accountability to grow outside the context of “discuss and decide” sessions. Third, team membership should be based on skill, not position. It is important to be tough-minded about skill requirements to avoid the situation where the team suffers a fatal skill deficiency. A skill-specific approach also allows the option of multiple smaller tasks, constituted to address specific issues, and allowing the top executives to experience teams which offer the potential for building a larger team at the top. Fourth, all members of the team should be required to do equivalent amounts of real work. Without doing real work, firsthand knowledge of the output (and the insights which accompany such knowledge) are lost to the team, thus limiting the innovative potential of the group. Fifth, actions should be taken which break down the hierarchical pattern of interaction. By assigning work in a way unrelated to position, the barrier of formal hierarchy can be broken and team members learn to appreciate the benefits of interdependence and the contributions of other members to team success. Sixth, and finally, top teams should set rules of behavior similar to those used by other teams. Basic rules regarding attendance, discussion, confidentiality, analytic approach, end-product orientation, constructive
confrontation, and contributions are essential to achievement of purpose and performance goals. Ancona (1997) stresses that the leader of the top team (CEO or GM) must be the one to manage conflict and ensure that it does not degrade into personality clashes, competition for succession, or other detrimental forms. Creating and managing conflict will be covered in detail in the next section.

As Katzenbach and Smith (1993a) state, a single team at the top is probably unnecessary except in cases of significant change. This is why "top groups" are frequently more effective than top teams, particularly if those top teams are "pseudo-teams." At the same time, teams at the top can add significantly to organizational performance if they are issue-oriented, based on skills, and performance-driven by goals which the team members believe are important. The key thought here is that there can be several "teams at the top" whose membership is based on need and contribution, not hierarchical authority or position. The key success elements and attributes of such teams will be the same as any real team in the organization.

Creating and Managing Conflict

One of the critical skills a team leader must develop in order to get the most out of his top group of managers is the ability to create and manage conflict within the group. Research (Bourgeois, et. al., 1997; Amason, et. al., 1995) has shown that issue-oriented conflict is a necessary pre-requisite for top team
performance, while interpersonal conflict can be detrimental to team performance. Successful managers go out of their way to incite issue-oriented conflict, while at the same time holding in check interpersonal conflict. How do they do this?

Bourgeois, et. al. (1997), identify three ways to create issue-oriented conflict and five ways to avoid interpersonal conflict. Together, these are the mechanisms for managing agreement:

1. **Plan frequent interactions.** Interaction allows people to gain familiarity with each other. Such familiarity allows people to be less constrained by politeness and more willing to argue for conflicting views. Low interaction creates a sense of distance; people are less familiar with details of issues. Interaction creates a sharper understanding of one's own and others' preferences, thus overcoming the hesitancy to disagree when preferences are not clear.

2. **Create a distinct role structure.** Top teams have clear roles organized around patterns of conflict. In particular, four distinct roles emerge: Ms. Action, Mr. Steady, Guru, and Devil's Advocate. Ms. Action is a doer and go-getter, real-time oriented, with behaviors that push for quick action. Mr. Steady favors caution and the status quo and frequently brings up details to ensure nothing is missed. Gurus are visionaries with a focus on the future - often viewed as having difficulty getting things done, they exhibit an almost visionary grasp of long-term fundamentals within the industry. Devil's Advocates are challengers - as such, they are critical for protecting against
hasty agreement. Frequently these roles emerge due to the demographics of the group; sometimes they are self-designated as team members sense a role that needs to be filled in a situation. Some CEO's specifically create the role structure to encourage constructive conflict.

3. **Use multiple-lens tactics.** High-conflict decision-makers use some simple tactics to create multiple viewpoints which are at the same time synergistic with speed and group cohesion. In particular, four tactics are used: **Multiple alternative** tactics, such as non-judgmental brainstorming techniques, expand the range of discussion and perspectives. **Overlapping subgroups** are often formed to bring diverse responsibilities and concerns to a problem, thus ensuring that the individual agendas of the subgroup members combine to produce a full agenda. Considering **multiple scenarios**, which describe different environments or background conditions, ensures that strategic decisions are systematically considered in light of several possible future states. The result of considering additional alternatives, agendas, and scenarios creates clearer more vibrant debate which contributes to **fast decision-making skills**.

4. **Use an equitable, consensus-driven decision process.** An equitable and egalitarian process which invites variety in facts and ideas without judging the person who participates is critical to balancing the need to be heard with the need to make a choice. (Korsgaard, et. al., 1995, provide an in-depth discussion of importance of procedural justice in building commitment).
5. **Commit to a long-term relationship.** Even in the midst of harsh, issue-oriented conflict, degrading sentiments cannot survive if everyone recognizes that they are all on the same ship. Committing to a long-term relationship makes the end-goal explicit; once everyone agrees on the final destination, they are free to battle it out to determine the strategic route to take.

6. **Distinguish the situation from the feelings.** Feelings can easily be confused with the facts of the situation. A conscious effort to distinguish between the two reminds everyone that the focus of the conflict is to battle out the issues.

7. **Use empathic listening skills.** Distinguishing the situation from the feeling can be aided by listening for both the feeling and the content in each individual's perspective. By reflecting back both the feeling and the content of the message, the listener honors (or validates) each team member while adding the content of the message to the issue-oriented discussion.

8. **Focus on the present.** Accepting the status quo while at the same time moving on to decide on the best course of action to pursue is a characteristic of top managers. Focusing on real-time data, accepting both good and bad outcomes, assists the process of learning and keeps attention on the present.

   Amason, et. al. (1995), observe that effective groups are intuitively aware that both issue-oriented conflict (cognitive conflict) and interpersonal conflict (affected conflict) exist and must be managed to maximize performance. These teams develop attributes which other teams do not. First, effective groups are focused. They get to the core issues of the problems, stick closely to the task at
hand, and make decisions quickly and efficiently. Second, they encourage thinking beyond normal options. This creativity comes from getting the group to think of problems differently and finding solutions that approach the problem from a totally new perspective. Third, effective teams have more open communications than other groups. They enjoy a culture which allows members to speak freely and challenge the premises of other viewpoints without the threat of anger, resentment, or retribution. Finally, effective teams make the fullest possible use of all their members. They are conscious of the need to integrate and get the best from all members of the team.

How does a team leader develop these attributes in her team? Amason, et. al. (1995), suggest eight steps, or strategies, to build an effective team culture:

1. **Disseminate a full agenda early.** A clear agenda focuses team activities, gives members a chance to consider proposals prior to the meeting, and helps create a full understanding of the team's purpose.

2. **State the philosophy for the team and back it up with actions.** A discussion of the importance of cognitive conflict and the dangers of affective conflict should be part of this process. The process which will be used for decision-making should also be clearly stated.

3. **Provide the right environment for the meeting.** Although they may seem trivial, such things as seating arrangement and the shape of the table can send important signals and help reduce the potential for affective conflict.
4. **Have behavioral strategies to run the meeting in mind before beginning.**

There is a great deal of research indicating that openness and cooperation are traits which should be modeled by the leader in order to promote effective conflict. This is difficult in many cases if the leader is also concerned with running the team through the agenda. In many cases, having another member run the meeting allows the leader to focus on the process aspects of the meeting, such as reading the verbal and non-verbal cues which the team exhibits.

5. **Keep a sense of where the discussions are going.** The team leader may need to strictly monitor team discussions in order to limit personalized statements made during heated debate.

6. **Channel discussion from affective toward cognitive conflict.** It takes particular skill to be sensitive to the behavioral dynamics of the meeting. Trying to get people’s opinions on the table without personal attacks can be difficult, particularly during emotionally-charged discussions.

7. **Support the team.** A leader must continually focus on the team, rather than individuals, in order to support the team as a unit for getting things done. Use of “we” and “us” rather than “you vs. me” is essential for trust and confidence to develop.

8. **Be proactive and reactive, not passive.** The team leader must take an active role in developing a positive culture. This must be done before, during, and after each team interaction in order to constantly reinforce the culture which is being developed.
Clearly, effective executive teams are able to engage in high conflict and still cooperate with each other. It is critical that the team leader not confuse a lack of conflict with agreement, as team apathy is a precursor to poor performance. The role of the team leader is frequently one of inciting conflict in order to test for, and manage, agreement. Only then can the group or team tap into the synergy possible from team and group interactions.

The Process of Taking Charge

General managers must fill certain roles, carry out responsibilities, possess specific skills, and learn to build the top group or team within her new organization. But exactly what process is used to “take charge” of a new unit?

In his study of seventeen general manager successions, Gabarro (1987) found that taking charge of a new organization is a long process, lasting between 27 and 42 months even for experienced managers. Rather than a process of steady learning and action, it is characterized instead by alternating “stages of learning and action.” The stages include:

1. **Taking Hold:** During this stage learning is orientational and evaluative, and results in development of a "cognitive map" (mental model) of the organization, its key actors, and important functional and performance factors. Much of the manager's time is spent assessing key subordinates,
problems, and priorities. A number of changes are made during this three to six-month period, most of which are corrective in nature.

2. **Immersion**: During the second stage, lasting between four and eleven months, few changes are made. Most of the time is spent in deeper learning and diagnosis, and the changes made during the Taking Hold phase have uncovered new problems to be understood. The question of whether the right people are in place in the organization becomes a critical concern at this point.

3. **Reshaping**: Based on the learning accomplished during the Immersion stage, the manager implements many changes during this period (reshaping lasted between six and nine months in most cases). This is a busy period, as task forces and consultants are used to verify and detail the changes to be made. Many of the changes are structural - both organizational as well as changes to the mission and vision of the organization. The complete implementation of the changes is sometimes prevented by factors outside the manager’s control - the most prevalent of these factors being the unavailability of a person or persons to fill key positions.

4. **Consolidation**: This stage, which lasts approximately six months, includes the final wave of changes made during the manager’s tenure. Most of these changes are based on the evaluation, follow-through, and correction of actions made during the Reshaping phase. Learning includes understanding the details of the reshaped organization and dealing with unanticipated problems caused by the previous changes.
5. **Refinement**: This stage is characterized by relatively little change - most of the time is spent looking for new opportunities in the marketplace or in technology. By now managers had either established credibility and a power base or they had failed to do so.

Interestingly, Gabarro found that most managers "used up their newness" after 27-30 months, and made few changes after that time. Also, although there were three periods of changes, all of which were significant to the progress of the organization, the learning and changes which occurred during the first phase, Taking Hold, were critical to the success of subsequent actions. Thus, "It may be a pragmatic and a psychological necessity to approach the first six months to a year on the job as if there were only one crack at doing it right."

**Steps to Taking Charge**

Gabarro (1987) identifies three aspects of taking charge:

(1) organizational work, which includes tasks involving assessing, developing, and improving the organization, (2) interpersonal, one-on-one, work of building effective working relationships with subordinates, peers, and superiors, and (3) business-analytic and strategic work of determining business needs. The third aspect is covered in detail in business strategy literature, but Gabarro goes into detail regarding the first two aspects.
The three most important organizational tasks (due to the amount of time they occupied and the fact that they were most different between managers who failed and managers who succeeded) are:

1. **Learning, assessment, and diagnosis:** This included learning about the organization, assessing it and its key people, and diagnosing the causes of problems. This was an important part of both the Taking Hold and Immersion stages. In orientation associated with the Taking Hold stage, this included meetings with subordinates, reviewing performance data, touring facilities, etc. These were used to identify patterns, spot obvious organizational problems, and generate further questions as well as making initial assessments. After orientation, much of the early assessment and diagnosis occurred as part of the daily interactions which make up the routine part of the job. For example, much of the assessment of key people occurred during day-to-day interactions, while problem-solving and task force meetings, strategy reviews, and reporting systems provided most of the early information for assessment and diagnosis. During the Immersion stage, additional (deeper) diagnosis occurred, especially in assessing the effects of prior changes and settling questions about key people.

2. **Developing shared expectations:** This involves four key parts or steps: (1) working through shared expectations, which takes time, particularly in one-on-one and team settings, (2) building a management team which functions as a connected group, (3) symbolic behavior, such as work hours, trips to the floor, breaking down barriers, etc., and (4) rallying cries and themes.
3. **Changing the organization to improve performance**: New managers did not make major organizational changes lightly - which is especially relevant, since the four cases of failure in Gabarro's study all exhibited inappropriate, poorly timed, or overlooked organizational change. In each case, the sources of failure were related to poor diagnosis (usually related to lack of prior industry experience), lack of interaction with key players, and poor team-building within the top group.

The development of effective working relationships was identified by Gabarro (1987) as perhaps the single most important factor with respect to success or failure of a new general manager. Kotter (1982) also identified building strong relationships with key people (networking) as critical to effective functioning within the general manager role. Gabarro (1986) lists three qualities which were particularly important in developing effective relationships:

1. **Mutual expectations**: Expectations for the organization as well as expectations for the individual were considered equally important. Performance goals, standards, priorities, and how they should be achieved made up the business expectations. Expectations regarding roles, including the degree of autonomy and influence as well as what each person should do in his job, were also important, as were expectations about the relationship itself in terms of openness, support, and the way conflict would be resolved. New managers communicated expectations formally and explicitly in group or one-on-one meetings, or, more often, in day-to-day, routine interactions.
“On-the-spot feedback” was viewed as the most effective way of clarifying expectations. The ability to be clear and direct in developing mutual expectations was one of the most valued attributes of a manager by her subordinates.

2. **Trust**: Trust, like expectations, takes time to develop and become firmly grounded in a relationship. There are two sources of trust in a relationship: character-based and competence-based. Character-based sources of trust include: **integrity** - which basically includes honesty and the willingness to stand behind principles, **motives** - which includes intentions, commitment, posture, and agenda, **consistency of behavior** - including reliability and predictability, **openness** - leveling with someone and being willing to listen to the same in return, and **discretion** - the belief that one would not carelessly divulge information or violate confidences. Competence-based sources of trust include: **specific competence** - in terms of specialized knowledge and skills required to do a particular job, **business sense** - generalized competence, experience base, common sense, or wisdom, and **interpersonal competence** - the ability to work with people or "people skills."

3. **Influence**: Influence develops over time as well, since neither managers nor subordinates considered positional sources of influence as important as personal sources of influence. Positional sources of influence include: authority to make or recommend organizational changes, authority to reward or punishment through salary or promotions, power to allocate scarce resources, and the power of "being the boss". Personal sources of influence,
which were much more important, include: expertise - competence in the job, charisma or force of personality - strong communication skills, aggressiveness, and ability to create enthusiasm, decisiveness - contributing to an aura of competence, forcefulness, and inner strength (but not impulsiveness), and willingness to use power - so that the manager is taken seriously, both within the organization and with external groups.

Given that mutual expectations, trust, and influence are the three dimensions along which working relationships develop, how do these factors become developed? Gabarro (1987) suggests that there are three relatively sequential stages, or tasks, which are used to develop the relationship. While most of these take place during the Taking Hold and Immersion stages, they can be delayed if the managers are geographically distant or if the problems on which the new general manager is focused do not involve a particular subordinate in the early stages. The three tasks Gabarro describes are:

1. **Orientation and initial assessment** - During this brief period, subordinates are particularly interested in the new manager’s motives and intentions, while the manager is interested in assessing the motives and the relative competence of subordinates. This stage presents several dilemmas. For example, how does a new manager signal expectations without knowledge of the job, its problems, or the subordinates? Or, how open should a subordinate be with the new manager? Both of these problems can be addressed early in the relationship if the manager will clearly state his motives and intentions while
at the same time articulating and demonstrating a willingness to openly discuss problem areas and differences. Another problem frequently faced by new managers is dealing with subordinates who felt that they should have her job. Although this problem would best be addressed by the exiting manager or superior sitting down with the subordinate and explaining the reasons why they were not selected, this seldom happens - leaving the problem with the new manager. All evidence suggests that this problem is best dealt with directly and early in the relationship, even though this is difficult and uncomfortable for both parties.

2. Exploration and deeper assessment - The major tasks of this work are to explore individual expectations in more detailed and concrete terms, while raising and clarifying differences in expectations as soon as they occur. At the same time, both the manager and the subordinates are identifying sources (or questions about) trust and influence. At this stage, one difficulty faced by the new manager is establishing a relationship which fosters open surfacing of differences and problems while at the same time making standards and expectations clear. At the same time, the subordinate is determining whether to be frank about problems or differences at a time when he is being evaluated.

3. Testing and negotiation - This could also be called the “working-through” stage of the relationship, because unresolved issues are now becoming clearer. If prior explorations have uncovered differences in expectations, the manager should now attempt to resolve them. The testing which leads to the
uncovering of differences should be done fully, but care must be taken not to do it prematurely - before the manager has had time to fully explore the situation and test the subordinate’s judgment. The key point is that individual expectations must become mutual expectations, even if that means some negotiation. If this negotiation cannot be done to the satisfaction of the new GM, this is the time to replace the subordinate. Although this is difficult and can take time - Gabarro found that the delay experienced in replacing a key subordinate was a common reason for delays in implementing changes - effective implementation of organizational changes require that members of the top group be headed in the same direction.

Kotter (1982) found that the most successful of the fifteen general managers in his study created “agendas,” or action plans for their organizations during the first six to nine months of their assignment. These agendas were characterized by loosely connected goals and plans, the best of which were based on explicit business strategies. They addressed responsibilities ranging from the short to the long-term which included a broad range of business issues (products, finance, marketing, personnel, etc.). The agendas included both vague and specific goals and plans, as well as ones for others and themselves. They were largely unwritten and were related to, yet different from, formal written plans.

The agendas were created through aggressive information-gathering, mostly from people with whom they already had a relationship, by asking
questions on a seemingly endless basis. They used their current knowledge of the business to guide the questioning and made choices through both conscious analysis and unconscious, intuitive processes (although the latter was most prevalent). They looked for programs, processes, projects, and activities which could help accomplish multiple objectives at once, using resources they had the power to deploy.

In addition to agenda setting, the managers in Kotter's study allocated significant time and effort early in their jobs to developing an extensive network of cooperative relationships. These relationships included subordinates at all levels, bosses, peers, and outsiders such as customers, suppliers, the press, and bankers. These networks often included hundreds of people tied to the manager by an informal structure. The relationships varied in type and intensity, but often the very strongest of these were with subordinates.

The networks were developed by focusing on people they felt dependent upon and people who were needed to implement their emerging agendas. They "shaped their environment," particularly among their subordinates, in order to foster teamwork, minimize politics, etc. using both formal management tools and informal processes. The relationships were developed by making others feel obliged to them, encouraging others to identify with them, establishing their reputation in the eyes of others, and making others feel dependent on them. If these techniques did not work and the relationship was a critical one, the manager would replace or remove subordinates whom she felt were
incompetent, and change suppliers, bankers, or other outsiders to enable a more supportive relationship to be developed.

The general manager used the networks to help implement her agenda in ways which minimally disturbed the relationships while selecting people who could help get action moving on the important needs. In order to influence members of the network both direct and indirect methods were utilized. The manager might approach a member of the network and gain their help on an item by asking, demanding, cajoling, intimidating, or whatever technique worked best in that particular situation (keeping in mind the idea of creating minimal disturbance to the relationship). Or, she might shape an event or a set of events by directly influencing a number of people, then using time, space, meetings, language, and symbols as stories to influence the audience.

In essence, the networks become “incredible information-processing systems.” They filtered masses of information and passed on to the managers only those items which were important for agenda-setting purposes.

Obviously, members of the top group are essential to both building an effective organizational agenda and implementing the changes necessary to making that agenda become a reality. Hambrick (1987) proposes that the performance of the top team is the key to an organization’s success and that there is a specific framework which should be used in approaching this task (Figure 4).

Three basic premises underlie this framework. First, there is no such thing as a universally ideal management team - the mix of qualities required
Figure 4
Framework for Top Management Team Analysis

1. What are the Key Contextual Factors?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Internal Factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Societal</td>
<td>Key Strategic Thrusts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry and Competition</td>
<td>Key Points of Interdependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandate/Mission from</td>
<td>Human Resource Profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Corporation</td>
<td>Key Managerial Associates</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. What Managerial Qualities are Needed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Aptitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Style</td>
<td>Demeanor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. What Managerial Qualities Now Exist?

4. How Should the Gaps be Narrowed?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Replacements</th>
<th>Additions (Restructuring)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consultants/Outside Talent</td>
<td>Incentives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training/Development</td>
<td>Coaching/Counsel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Adjustment Loop?

If top management changes are infeasible or unacceptable, can the context be modified? (If so, loop back to step 1)
depends on the context and the individuals. Second, the general manager can and must think proactively about his team - the view that an existing team’s talents have to be taken as a given does a disservice to the business and the members of the team. Third, managers must think about their team in a highly personalized way - the way the general manager operates and what she values will help determine the ideal team for that organization.

As Figure 4 suggests, the framework suggests starting with an analysis of the context within which the business operates. Hambrick (1987) notes that this need not be laborious, and much of it can be done as part of a strategic planning process. The second step is to identify the ideal team profile. Hambrick suggests that this be done on a position-by-position basis and that the general manager should develop a unique set of profiling dimensions based on the needs of the business and the six arenas (qualities) from the framework. The third step involves assessing the current team. Although most managers pride themselves on being good judges of people, Hambrick suggests that most managers carry only “partial, fragmented” views of the talents of their team members - making this a step on which extra effort is recommended (talking to peers and subordinates of team members, observing them at work, etc.) Finally, a plan for narrowing or closing the gaps identified must be developed. This plan should include both changes in personnel as well as bringing out new or expanded contributions from existing team members.
Success and Failure Patterns

Gabarro (1987) identified three patterns of behavior within his study which led to success: (1) assessing the organization and diagnosing its problems, (2) building a management team focused on a set of shared expectations, and (3) bringing about timely changes which addressed organizational problems. Kotter (1982) found that the more successful of the fifteen general managers in his study were more aggressive in two areas than their less successful counterparts: (1) getting information to use in agenda setting and using it to create a more complete (long and short-range) strategy for the organization, and (2) building strong networks, with more and better people and relationships with those people.

Failure patterns discovered by Gabarro included: (1) lack of relevant experience prior to the assignment, and (2) poor working relationships with key people, including subordinates, peers, and (particularly critical) their immediate superior. Kotter's findings were similar, as those managers who had little experience in the industry or business had difficulty identifying and separating relevant items from the endless stream of information which accompanied the general manager position, and those who had weak interpersonal skills had difficulty establishing relationships necessary to build the strong networks required to efficiently perform the GM duties.
Interview Methodology

Three interviews were conducted with executives who are currently holding general manager jobs. Each represented a different general manager role: one was leading a business organization, one was a geographic regional president, and one was a North American site president. Two of the three had held general manager roles prior to their current assignment. Each of the three had been highly-successful managers and were recognized throughout the organization as among the best leaders in the company. The writer was very familiar with all three executives and had worked with each of them in numerous business settings prior to the interview sessions.

Each of the managers agreed to answer questions during a two-hour interview session with the writer. The interviews were structured into four parts: (1) a brief introduction and review of the purpose and methodology to be used during the interview, (2) a set of background questions to break the ice and establish some basic facts about the management situation, (3) a set of general, open-ended questions, intended to allow the manager to answer without being biased by the writer’s knowledge of the literature, and finally (4) a set of very specific questions related to the thesis focus areas and based on the findings from the literature review. A copy of the Interview Guide is included in the Appendix.

The purpose of the interviews was not to do an in-depth study in the field as has been done by several researchers (Gabarro, 1987, Kotter, 1982,
Hambrick, 1987; Bennis, 1985). Rather, its purpose was to provide some degree of validity check for the author - particularly with respect to the applicability of the literature to the specific organizational structure and culture within this company and industry. In addition, by interviewing only highly-successful managers, the author intended to "learn from the best" in his organization and include that learning in the thesis findings.
Interview Findings

Background

The situations faced by the three general managers interviewed were very different, yet at the same time had a number of similarities. All three managers were recognized by top management and most people in the organizations as very successful managers. Not surprisingly, they were replacing managers who were less highly regarded by management; i.e., they were selected to take their current jobs because upper management felt that there were improvements needed in the organizations they were taking over.

All three were taking over business situations which were for the most part stable (as opposed to turbulent), although each identified their particular situation as either "changing quickly" or "in transition" or "improving." In two of the cases, upper management recognized the performance of the business as "headed for a record year" and "best performer in its industry." In the third case, management had already announced and begun changes which would have major impacts on the business early in the new manager's tenure. In all three cases, the new manager was given a specific charge or mandate by management upon taking over the assignment. Interestingly, all three mandates were aimed at long-term improvements, although in the third case (where
changes had already been made by management) there were specific short-term expectations as well.

The mandates are interesting enough to list specifically: (1) Grow the business significantly (greater than 20% per year in an area which had previously taken 15 years to double), build external relationships, and rebuild internal relationships which were being strained by the recently announced changes, (2) "ventilate" the organization, which had the reputation of being arrogant and uncooperative with other parts of the company and was characterized by people who had been in that particular organization for a long time, and (3) learn the business and the assignment, build external relationships, and provide a leadership role model for the managers in the organization.

All three new general managers were "outsiders" to their new organizations, although in each case they had a good deal of applicable experience and business knowledge which they brought to the assignment. When asked how well they knew the business prior to taking over, they answered: "very well," "reasonably well," and "60%, but better broad-based knowledge than any one else."

All three included themselves and three other direct reports in their "top management group." In one case, the new GM knew all three of his top managers very well (for more than 10 years) mostly through business contacts, although two of them were well-known from outside activities as well. In a second case, only one other member of the top group was in place when the new GM took over and the remaining two members came on board afterwards. In this
case, the incumbent member and one of the new members were personal friends with the new GM and the other new member was relatively unknown by the GM. In the third case, the new GM knew one of his three top managers through a few meetings at work, another by name only, and the third not at all.

With the exception of one retirement (which occurred when a top manager in one of the organizations was not selected for the GM job), none of the new GM's had chosen to replace incumbent members of their top teams. This was despite the fact that in all three cases there was some question in top management's mind about the capability of the group prior to assignment of the new GM. At the time of the interviews, the new GM's had been in place between 9 and 27 months and none had any plans to replace any of their top group in the near future.

Roles, Responsibilities, Skills Needed

All three GM's listed the word leadership when they were asked to describe the roles and responsibilities of their job. One went so far as to say that real leadership was lacking in many of the organizations in the company (as well as many of the leadership positions in most organizations he knew). As he elaborated, it was clear that he had strong feelings about what leadership required and had very high standards against which leadership was to be judged. Although not expressed as strongly, the other two also had a vision for what true leadership required and voiced disappointment at the level of
leadership in the company at this time. The key leadership attributes needed were clear and consistent from all the three interviews and are listed below:

1. **Sense of urgency** - the world is moving fast and we can’t use a process which takes the time to be “100% certain” of the outcome. Customers are becoming increasingly demanding and competition is increasing - those companies which prosper will be those who can respond quickly to their needs.

2. **A highly-inclusive style** - each GM interviewed spent a lot of time working to get everyone’s input and to develop consensus regarding the problems to be addressed and the solutions to be implemented. One called this “team-building,” another called it engaging, and the third said it was important to “make everyone feel a part of the team.” Although most managers espouse these values, it was apparent in the actions of these three GM’s that they role-modeled this in their organization (this will be discussed further when we look at the specific actions taken by these GM’s upon taking charge of their new assignment).

3. **Decisiveness** - Although consensus and an inclusive style of decision-making was highly valued by all three, each indicated that this had to be balanced with implementing the best solutions quickly. None of the three were inclined to wait long if speed could make a difference in the success or failure of a course of action.

4. **Asking for Help / Listening / Humility** - All three were willing to admit to subordinates and superiors when they did not know the answer or when
someone else was in a better position to make a judgment or decision. They asked a lot of questions and really listened to and valued the answers.

5. **Communication / Persuasive Skills** - Several examples were given by each GM regarding communications skills, including: the ability to convince people, think (on one’s feet) and respond quickly and convincingly, use tact and diplomacy, and make effective group presentations.

6. **Willingness to confront conflict** - All mentioned examples where they had accepted and worked through conflict either within their group or with people outside the group. All had confronted their immediate supervisor over issues where they disagreed. All had made decisions over the objections of other GM’s. Although each used their positional authority as a last resort at all times, they were much more comfortable using it with people outside the organization that they were with subordinates.

7. **Networking** - The GM’s expressed this in different ways. One called this “ability to work the matrix” and another stated it as “knowledge of people and relationships within the company.” Two listed the need for knowledge of people within the organization. Two also listed the need for knowledge of customers and competitors.

8. **Agenda/Strategy building** - Two of the GM’s indicated that knowledge of the product and the manufacturing process was key to knowing what could or should be done. Logical, strategic thinking was also listed as essential.
One of the GM’s listed credibility as the number one attribute necessary for someone coming into his particular assignment. By that he meant credibility within the company and also outside the company (due to the number of interactions with government officials and important customers). Although neither of the other two managers mentioned this as a requirement, the items which they listed under leadership skills are frequently associated with building credibility (honesty, competence).

**Early Learning and First Actions**

There was a lot of similarity in what the three GM’s did to get started in their new assignments. Most of these could be categorized in three ways: learning the people, learning the business, and developing interpersonal relationships, both within the organization they were leading and with people outside the organization who were major stakeholders.

Specifically, the following items were listed when asked: “What are the first things you did on taking over the assignment?”

1. Set up regular one-on-one discussions with key people in the organization (top team members and a few others). One of the managers met with each person in the organization individually to set expectations regarding openness of communications, bringing problems up for resolution, and other aspects of how he wanted the office to operate. All three increased the
coaching of their subordinates to a level which had not been experienced by
the organization up to that time.

2. Began establishing a network of communications with other groups in the
company with whom the GM’s organization would need to interface. In one
case this included establishing an upper management steering team to help
support the efforts of the group (which was only a few years old). In another
case this involved one-on-one meetings with the leaders of other functional
and business groups which had complained about the GM’s new organization
in the past.

3. Began getting involved in the “real work” of the group. One new GM
announced this was his intent up front and asked the top group which teams
they would like his help with. In another case, the GM got help for a manager
who was overworked but whose pleas for help had been ignored by his
functional management.

4. Establishing a network of outside contacts. For one GM, this meant getting
out in the community and meeting local officials. For another, this meant
visiting all the major customers with the outgoing GM before he retired.

5. One GM, whose new organization was large, spent a lot of time visiting with
different groups asking questions and listening (he specifically quoted
“seeking to understand,” from Stephen Covey’s Habit No. 4). Another
worked with his group on “thinking win-win” when interacting with other
groups in the company (Covey Habit No. 5).
6. All three GM's worked to establish the membership of and processes for their new top group. In one case, this meant extending the group for certain meetings to be more inclusive to people who needed to be involved in some of the decisions. As he said, the first thing needed was "to get these 20 people talking to each other instead of about each other." None of the three spent much time in specific "team-building" activities.

Each new GM was also asked "What would you recommend to someone who was taking over a new general manager position?" The following was their advice:

1. **Win the support and trust of the people you'll be working with** - most of the things that get accomplished are done through the people. Show them that you care about them and their career interests and that you respect them. Do this through individual discussions, group meetings, and any other method which will help establish open communications in the group.

2. **Establish and lead the top team.** Who is the team? What is the mission? What is the level of understanding of the mission? What is the level of cooperation among team members?

3. **Also, win the support of the extended team.** This includes everyone from the next (lower) level of management (who will be the implementers of the top group's decisions) to the secretaries, receptionists, shipping clerks, and others who interface with customers and people from other organizations.
4. **Be open about goals and needs for the organization.** If you’ve received a mandate from upper management, share it with the organization so they can help achieve it.

5. **Accomplish something significant in 3 months.** One simply said “move quickly!”

6. **Do some team-building.** This suggestion came from two of the three new GM’s, although only one had actually done this (to a very limited extent). All three indicated that they were so busy with other things that this had not occurred. But two also listed it as an item they wished they had done more of if they had it to do over again.

**Assessing and Building the Top Group**

All three new GM’s described their process for assessing and building the top group and individuals on the top group as “informal” or “iterative.” None of the three had a formal process for going about assessment, yet all clearly spent a great deal of time in activities which gave them opportunities to assess performance and behaviors of their direct reports. The primary methods used were:

1. **Weekly one-on-one meetings** - All three used weekly meetings with the members of their top group to discuss expectations for behaviors and performance and to provide feedback to them on their progress. These meetings were for the most part informal sessions with a lot of interchange.
2. **Frequent group meetings** - In all three cases this occurred weekly, at least on an impromptu basis. Two managers had weekly scheduled meetings, the other had monthly scheduled meetings. All three GM's used the fact that the top group was located close together to have impromptu meetings to discuss problems which came up and to make decisions as a group. This effort at "inclusion" as two managers referred to it, was the primary method used to build the effectiveness of the top group. All three managers used the top group to plan reorganizations or reallocation of responsibilities within the organization.

3. **Day-to-day interactions** - All three used daily observation and communication to assess performance and provide suggestions for improvement.

4. **Use of the formal company coaching and development process** - Two of the three specifically mentioned use of the formal company process for coaching development, but both of them also pointed out that this was only a part of the coaching they did with the group members.

5. **Seek feedback from internal stakeholder groups** - Two of the three made special efforts to ask questions from others in the company about the performance of members of the top group. This included indirect feedback from subordinates of members of the top group - this was always done in an indirect way through questions which brought out information regarding behaviors of the managers, rather than with direct questions or a formal feedback tool.
The results of these assessments was a relatively short list of improvement opportunities which were discussed with the individuals or the entire group as appropriate. Since these improvement opportunities are specific to the situations, they will not be discussed in detail. As all three managers indicated, the strengths and willingness to improve which each person brought to the job overshadowed the weaknesses in each case.

**Building Trust**

By the time this question came up in each of the interviews (approximately two-thirds of the way through the interview), each of the new GM’s had made it clear that building trust was one of their top priorities, not only within their top group but also with their extended organization. Credibility was listed as one of the top skills needed to do their job effectively. Winning the support and trust of the people both within the organization and with key outsiders was listed high on each of the new GM’s list of recommended first actions. When asked “What things have you done to develop trust between yourself and individuals in your top group?” they listed the following:

1. Worked through one-on-one discussions.
2. Held frequent meetings and visits (to the entire organization).
3. Shared information and thoughts (before they were decisions).
4. Communicated openly.
5. Reinforced each person for progress against expectations.

6. Worked to understand each one as a person (showing that you care about them, their career aspirations, etc.).

7. Brought some skills to the group as the leader (with a willingness to work).

8. Allowed them to continue working in an empowered way where they were already effective (not trying to make them "like me").

9. Role-modeled honesty - about the business situation, the mandate given by company management, and the goals needed to achieve to be successful in the company's judgment.

10. Helped individuals in the organization who were having a tough time.

In summary, each of the managers emphasized that it took time to build trust. So, each new GM spent a lot of time interacting and communicating openly about expectations, goals, desired and undesired behaviors, and problems which existed. Each also spent a great deal of time listening to others with the attitude that the GM did not have the answer in all cases (i.e., exhibiting humility and requesting help to achieve goals and resolve problems).

As a result, each of the managers expressed a great deal of trust for their top team members' abilities and motives. Interestingly, all three had some question (i.e., did not trust implicitly) their subordinates "interpersonal competence." In each case, the managers had some reservations about the leadership capabilities, relationships with key stakeholders outside the organization, or (in some cases) relationships with others in the organization.
(outside of the top group). All three were spending time working on succession plans, but none of the three were confident that they had a candidate inside their own organization, due primarily to leadership and interpersonal skill gaps.

**Influencing Others**

When asked “How do you influence members of your top group?” the responses were again quite consistent. All three mentioned the need to break down the positional use of authority which members of their group wanted to give them. As one said, “When I first got here, they call you President, Mr.____, - I mean you're like God. That was really embarrassing to me. ...I really tried to diffuse that - a lot.” Another commented that of the three sources of authority he could remember (position, relationships, and competence) he felt that positional authority was the least effective and therefore he had avoided using it within the group. Consistently, they listed consensus decision-making, participation in the group or decision process, and engaging of subordinates as the most effective means of influence at their disposal and the ones which they had used the most. Also listed were competence (logical arguments), decisiveness, strength of character, and credibility.

Two of the three indicated that they had several times used their positional authority with people outside their organization. Examples were given, primarily with staff groups, but also with peers and superiors, of times the GM had said to the outsider something like “Our organization needs this, and
although I hear your arguments against it, we’re going to do it anyway because I need to do this for our group to be successful.” Both quickly pointed out that these instances were rare because they recognized the relationship cost which occurred each time they had to resort to the use of positional authority.

All three GM’s indicated that they exerted more influence over members in their top group than the reverse. They each were influenced by members of their top group with respect to specific decisions or actions, but not with respect to attitudes or beliefs (value systems). As one stated, “We’re pretty well-aligned on most things. There are certain areas, like speed or the need to develop leadership, where I’ll try to influence their beliefs. … Because, quite frankly, I’m a better leader than they’ve had in the past or than they are now - although they have potential to be much better leaders. So, right now I’m trying to influence them.”

One comment is pertinent regarding the answers in this section. It is difficult for anyone to know which of the things they do really influence others. Although the interviewees obviously thought about this a great deal and intended to influence people as described above, all three possess very strong personalities. So, although they truly avoided overt use of their positional power whenever possible, the fact that they are very persuasive, require others to convince them on many issues prior to approval, and are the boss may result in a use of positional power regardless of the intent of the manager. Nevertheless, it is obvious that all three recognize this potential - their strong opinions on this subject indicate of their knowledge of the risk and their desire to avoid its use.
Additional Needs for Global Teams

One general manager interviewed was in the position to comment on the unique aspects of managing an international group. His comments were described as "additional challenges" and are listed below:

1. Distance - the organization is spread out over several countries and it's hard to get the extended group together except on perhaps a monthly basis.

2. Cultural differences - the group is less homogeneous and thinks differently about the issues.

3. The managers who the members of the group report to in a matrixed fashion have a six hour time difference. In the absence of a high degree of alignment and trust (which is difficult at that distance due to the limited amount of contact), this makes getting agreement much more difficult.

4. People outside of "headquarters" feel a lot less empowered - this is probably a result of No. 3.

5. Language differences make it necessary to take extra time in order not to be misunderstood.

6. Team-building is very important, perhaps more important (at least internally). Consistent with this need, this manager was the only one who had spent two days on team-building with his extended group (although that was done despite the objections of the functional groups with whom the group members had dual-reporting relationships with under the matrix system).
Summary: Interview Findings

Although the results of the three interviews conducted are very consistent and support the findings of the Literature Review, they have a number of obvious limitations. Only three interviews were conducted (a very small number) and these were all done with successful managers from the same company. Also, short interviews such as these limit the amount of information gained, particularly on sensitive issues. For example, little time was spent discussing the political aspects of the job, although in many cases the proper handling of political issues can be critical in the success versus failure of a general manager. In addition, manager’s reports about themselves are subject to certain biases. In any case, these findings should be taken as an indicative, but by no means an inclusive, list of the actions, reasons for those actions, and intentions of successful general managers in situations such as exist at a large company like Eastman Chemical.
Each general manager job is unique. Each one requires a different set of skills, knowledge, and experience in order to be successful. Each operates in a different internal and external environment, with a unique set of challenges and opportunities.

At the same time, every general manager job is similar in a number of very important ways. Every general manager has at least one boss - sometimes she has an entire board of directors to please. Every GM has subordinates - a group of whom are usually considered part of the "top team." Every GM has a number of people outside her organization whose cooperation and support are critical to the success of the GM and the organization. These include customers, suppliers, governments and government agencies, and groups inside the company which support the GM’s organization. In almost every case, the new GM has a lot of learning to do when she takes over as leader of an organization. This includes learning the markets, external environment, organizational strengths and weaknesses, as well as personally getting to know each of the subordinates, superiors, and peers who will be essential in accomplishing the goals of the organization.

The general manager accomplishes the goals of the organization through people; getting the people in a new organization all headed in the same direction is the essence of taking charge. The steps taken by a general manager in her first few months on the job are critical in determining the success of the
organization during her time as leader. Based on the literature studies and the interview results from this thesis, the following action plan suggests that there are specific elements which all new general managers should incorporate into their plan for "taking charge."

Seven Essential Elements

The seven essential elements for taking charge in a new general manager job can be divided into three general categories: (1) Building Effective Personal Relationships, (2) Assessing the Organization: Its Members and its Environment, and (3) Developing a Shared Direction. The seven elements are included in the categories as listed below:

Building Effective Personal Relationships
1. With Superiors
2. With Subordinates
3. With Key Internal and External Supporters

Assessing the Organization: Its Members and its Environment
4. Learning about the Business, Environment, and Organization
5. Assessing the Top Team and its Members

Developing a Shared Direction
6. Building the Top Team(s)
7. Developing a Shared Organizational Agenda
The details involved in carrying out these seven essential elements are discussed below.

**Building Effective Personal Relationships**

Effective interpersonal relationships are the key to effective leadership. General managers get things done through people - both people inside the organization and people outside the organization. The general manager's ability to influence others makes the difference in whether the goals of the general manager and the organization are accomplished or not.

Effective working relationships are based on three qualities: (1) mutual expectations, (2) trust, and (3) influence. The most effective ways for building these qualities in a relationship will vary with the individuals involved, but there are a number of common elements and common approaches. These are listed within each of the three actions detailed below:

**Element 1: Building Effective Relationships with Superiors**

One of the first things to be done with the boss is to clarify any mandate which may exist. This does not mean that the new GM must blindly accept the mandate and pursue it at all costs to the organization, but the boss's expectation as to what needs to be done is important to developing a set of mutual expectations for the relationship. As with all new relationships, listening to understand the other's point of view is the first step - discussions and
disagreements are better left until both parties have more information regarding the situation. Most likely, the boss has some basis for the mandate, so it can provide a good starting point for the new GM in her assessment of the organization as she begins gathering information about the new situation.

Early in the relationship is also a good time to gather some information regarding subordinates. Some good questions to ask the boss at this point include: (1) Did any of the people in the organization expect to be promoted into the general manager job instead of me? If so, why were they not selected? Has anyone discussed this with them? (2) Which of my new subordinates is particularly strong? In which areas? Are there any plans in the near future for moving them out of my organization? (3) Which of my new subordinates is particularly weak? In which areas? (4) Are there any “personality clashes” between subordinates which I should know about?

As with the mandate, these questions are important for understanding the situation and expectations of the boss; but the new GM should not accept the answers blindly as “correct” or “reality.” These four general questions are also useful for other reasons. First, they exhibit an openness and value of the boss’s opinion - a very important factor for building trust in a relationship. Second, they provide information which will be needed in building relationships with subordinates (e.g., if a subordinate has a particular career ambition, information about how this is perceived by superiors is an important first step in developing a plan for helping achieve that objective). Third, they alert the new GM to situations which could be barriers to building effective relationships with
subordinates (such as those who felt that they should have received the new GM job) and in building the top team (such as team members who do not get along well at this point).

In order to continue to clarify expectations and develop the relationship, the new GM should set regular review sessions with her boss. These can take the form of progress reviews, updates, development discussions, or coaching sessions, but the important thing is that they are frequent (at least monthly), informal enough to provide a forum for continuing to clarify expectations, and long enough (one hour) to encourage substantive interactions which serve to build trust and influence in the relationship. One of the GM’s interviewed found these sessions to be essential in addressing inconsistencies between what his boss was asking him to do and what supervisors at his boss’s level were asking him to do as part of his matrixed responsibility.

Element 2: Building Effective Relationships with Subordinates

This element is likely to consume a large part of the new GM’s time if done correctly. The most important part of this element is building relationships with subordinates who report directly to the new GM, but this is also the time to begin building effective relationships with members of the organization who are less directly associated with the new GM.

The first things subordinates want to know about the new GM are: Where is she coming from? What are her motives and intentions? What does she want - especially what does she want that is different than the last GM? Where do I fit...
into her plans? As previously discussed, this produces a difficult dilemma for the new general manager: How does she communicate values, goals, and principles before knowing the needs of the new organization? The answer is a simple one. This is the time to establish a tone in the relationship that helps build trust and mutual influence in the future. The new GM should emphasize expectations regarding openness of communications, honesty, and discretion. She should role-model humility (I don't know it all, I want to learn from you), ask for help and support, and listen with empathy. She should point out the competencies which she brings to the organization and demonstrate a willingness to utilize these skills in helping to do the real work of the organization. Particularly at this point in the relationship, she should resist using positional power to resolve differences unless she is forced to do so in order to demonstrate the willingness to use power. Extra time spent preparing for communications at this point will be especially valuable - a good impression made now will last a long time (as, unfortunately, will a bad one).

As soon as possible, the new GM should meet with each of her key subordinates one-on-one to discuss needs, problems, and expectations. This should be a two-way discussion; i.e., she should ask for help, establish needs which subordinates have for support, and role-model good listening skills throughout the meetings. This may also be an excellent time to openly share the mandate from her superior (if possible). As soon as possible, a schedule of routine one-on-one meetings should be set to demonstrate commitment to continued interchange and relationship-building. If possible, these meetings
should be held in the subordinate’s office or on the subordinate’s “turf” to send a strong message of cooperation rather than hierarchical interaction.

In a subsequent meeting (preferably not the first, although the subject could be introduced in the first meeting), it is especially appropriate for the new GM to encourage the subordinate to share career aspirations and desires. In addition to clarifying expectations and continuing to develop a relationship based on openness, this demonstrates interest (which must be sincerely felt) in the subordinate’s well-being and sets the stage for a relationship which has benefits for both parties. This conversation is especially needed if the subordinate has been identified as a person who felt they should have been selected for the new GM’s job. One of the GM’s interviewed met with each of his three top managers within the first week on the job to discuss this issue and found that his relationship with each benefited from the open, honest exchange. Although this conversation may be awkward and uncomfortable for both parties, it is an essential step in clearing the air so that the relationship can move forward without a cloud of unresolved conflict.

Of course, it’s always possible that there are one or two subordinates whose behavior and actions are unacceptable at this point. Perhaps their performance is so substandard that it obvious, even to the brand new GM. Perhaps they are so incensed at having been passed over for promotion that they are openly hostile or insubordinate. Certainly these situations must be dealt with quickly by the new GM, before they lead to an extended period of organizational conflict - in an extreme case, it may be necessary to fire or move
the offending manager. If possible, however, this is a time to proceed cautiously
and avoid making "snap judgments" which may hurt the organization in the long
run. First impressions are notoriously inaccurate for the most part - poor
performance may be due to a number of factors, only one of which is the
performance of the specific manager. Also, firing a manager early in a
relationship, especially a manager who openly disagrees with the new GM, may
make it difficult to establish an atmosphere of mutual openness, influence, and
trust. Nevertheless, the new GM must deal quickly to eliminate inappropriate or
insubordinate behaviors. Hopefully, an open, direct discussion can resolve the
matter; if not, then, removal of the offending manager may be necessary in order
to produce a constructive atmosphere for the organization in the future.

Element 3: Building Relationships with Key Internal and External Supporters

This element is another time-consuming one for the new GM. As early as
possible (once a baseline of information has been developed about the
business), the new GM should visit key internal and external customers,
suppliers, and support groups for the organization. In addition, an appropriate
way to meet all employees in the organization should be arranged. As with the
one-on-one meetings, these should be held on the group's own "turf" and should
be used to share intentions, motives, and goals to the extent possible. As
before, the emphasis of these interactions is to provide a basis for building
mutual expectations, trust, and influence within the relationship for the future.
Again, role-modeling of good listening skills, openness in communications, and a
preference for a mutually beneficial relationship is key. References to past successes and specific skills or competencies which the new GM brings to the relationship are also appropriate at this stage in order to build an accurate image of competence and confidence for the new GM. Although this must be done carefully in order for it not to be received negatively, nothing establishes credibility more quickly or convincingly than past successes. One item which helped the GM who had taken over as a regional manager outside the U. S. was his press release. Listing the civic, professional, and leadership awards he had received in his career in the press release gave him a base of credibility with local officials which would have been extremely difficult to achieve through face-to-face interactions.

Summary: Building Effective Working Relationships

Building effective relationships is based on mutual expectations, trust, and influence. All three qualities take time to build, and the nature of the relationship has an effect on how the building of these qualities is approached, but there are some basic principles which apply to building all three. First, since the building of a relationship takes time, time must be set aside in already busy schedules to make building of these relationships a priority. Frequent, routine interactions must be designed into the new GM’s schedule in order to ensure that the relationships are built. Second, expectations regarding how the relationship is to be conducted (openly, mutually, honestly, etc.) provide the basis for developing the mutual expectations, trust, and influence the
relationship needs to become effective. Voicing these expectations and role-modeling these behaviors are critical leadership skills which must be practiced by the new GM. As an example, if the mandate from the boss is expected to produce a great deal of change, now is the time to communicate that expectation. Third, certain symbolic gestures and actions carry meaning beyond their literal content. Visits to work areas of subordinates, customers, and suppliers helps break down hierarchical barriers. Finally, none of these actions will be effective if carried out mechanically or insincerely - people seldom forgive such a gross violation of trust, especially early in a relationship.

Assessing the Organization: Its Members and its Environment

After developing effective relationships, the next most important task for a new general manager is to assess the organization and its members. What are the market needs? How is it delivering on those needs? What is the financial performance? How is it performing on other important measures? What are the important performance measures? What are the strengths and weaknesses? What are the largest unmet opportunities?

What are the skills needed by top managers in the organization? Which top managers are effective in their current roles? Which are having problems? Are there gaps in the skills of the management team? If there is a problem in a part of the organization, is it a management problem or a case where the manager needs more support?
These are a sampling of the questions the new GM should ask as she does her assessment. Much of this assessment can be done in conjunction with the actions described in the first three elements for establishing interpersonal relationships.

Element 4: Learning about the Business, Environment, and Organization

This work begins with the mandate from the new GM's superior. Even if a specific mandate is not given, some sense of direction can be implied by the expectations which are discussed in these sessions. The same type of information should be gathered during the one-on-one sessions with subordinates - after the initial meeting (which will cover expectations about the working relationship) a good next step is to have each subordinate conduct an orientation of his or her area with the new GM. Included in the orientation should be performance against goals, major opportunities and unmet needs, plans for the future, and additional resource requirements.

In building the internal and external networks covered by Element 3, the new GM should ask similar questions. How is our organization performing versus your needs? Are there opportunities for us to do better? In which areas is our performance especially good? What are the most important things for us to concentrate on in the future?

An effective group orientation session (or two) can be spent by having members of the top management group review specific sections of the organization's current strategy. By asking open-ended questions at this session,
the new GM can begin to set the stage for the top group to work together in the future as well as gather important information regarding the current and planned performance of the unit. This will also allow the new GM to assess the degree of teamwork and interdependence which exists in the top group at this point. The new Eastman manufacturing site president used this method to assess the completeness of the groups plans, their commitment to achieving these plans, barriers to achievement, and their working relationships with each other.

Element 5: Assessing the Top Team and its Members

Assessing the organization as a whole begins the process of assessing the top management group and its members, but much more must be done to complete this task. By reviewing the strategy and the major performance needs of the organization, the new GM begins to understand the context within which the organization operates. Based on this context, she can then take a first look at the aptitudes, knowledge, skills, cognitive styles, demeanor, and values needed by each position on the top group. This gives her a list of qualities which she can use to evaluate the current capabilities of the members of her management team. Although most managers consider themselves excellent judges of people, in fact most of these opinions are based on little concrete information. Assessing subordinates (and herself) against the needs of the organization can be done using several sources. Individual subordinates can be asked about their strengths and development opportunities. The group as a whole can be asked to assess strengths and weaknesses against a set of needs.
The group can take a quick Myers-Briggs type assessment to see if any
cognitive style gaps exist within the team as a whole. Subordinates of top group
members can be asked to list the strengths of their bosses. Peers and others in
the developing networks can be asked to comment on specific members. The
GM who had a specific mandate to improve his new organization's degree of
cooperation with the rest of the company used one-on-one discussions with
leaders of other groups at Eastman to establish problem areas, welcome on-
going feedback, and also to communicate a commitment to change.

Most importantly, the members should be assessed daily by the general
manager versus the qualities identified as critical to the success of the top team
and the organization. Again, this takes a great amount of time, especially at the
beginning of a GM's tenure, but it pays off in the long run.

**Summary: Assessing the Organization: Its Members and its Environment**

At this point in the new GM's tenure, she is only beginning a learning
process which will continue in earnest for two or three years. Yet, this time
period is a critical one - actions which will occur as a result of the learning in the
first three months set the stage for the options which will exist in the future. As
pointed out in the discussions above, using the knowledge which already exists
in the minds of subordinates, peers, and outside contacts is key to a successful
transition. Managers who learn collaboratively are much more successful than
those who learn in isolation.
Developing a Shared Direction

As indicated previously, the first questions subordinates will want answered by a new general manager deal with her intentions, directions, goals, and motivations. There is a tremendous amount of pressure on the new GM to choose a direction for the organization as soon as she arrives on the job. Her boss may have even told her what should be done in communicating a mandate. At the same time, until she has completed some assessment and built some basic working relationships, choosing a direction for the organization would be premature. Many of the failures of new general managers occur because they selected a new direction for the organization prematurely - missing in the process some key information and alienating some critical constituents.

Nevertheless, within three months of taking over the job, the new general manager needs to be ready to communicate a direction for the organization. Subordinates will give the new GM some time for orientation and learning, but quickly will look to her for the leadership she is expected to provide. Without communication of at least a general heading for the unit, subordinates are likely to begin to seriously question the capability of the new GM to lead the unit and also to assume that the current way of doing business is adequate for the future. Both conclusions will make it even more difficult for the new GM to initiate changes at a later date.

So, how does a new GM begin to develop a shared direction for the organization?
Successful general managers recognize that they cannot choose and implement a direction on their own. Even though the final decision may ultimately rest with the GM, she must ensure that she has built the network and relationships necessary to correctly assess the needs and capabilities of the unit. The conclusions reached in the assessment stage and the resulting strategy and action plan must have the support of her superiors and subordinates or implementation will be unsuccessful.

Building an effective team at the top and using that team to develop a shared organizational agenda are the last two parts of taking charge as a general manager. These are described below.

**Element 6: Building Effective Top Team(s)**

The building of effective top teams is no different than the building of effective teams anywhere in the organization. Six components must be present in order to have an effective team at the top:

1. Small numbers - The most effective top teams consist of five or less members (usually three or four). Small groups can convene and communicate with each other easily and frequently. It is much easier to create a mutually supportive atmosphere where issues can be discussed critically and conflict surfaced constructively when the group is small. Top teams frequently fall into the trap of thinking that everyone who reports to the GM must be on the team. Such pseudo-teams can be useful for information-sharing and review, but not for true teamwork (which requires a much higher
level of interdependence). If hierarchical and power conflicts are a major
concern, the best solution is to divide the larger “top group” into subgroups,
each of which has responsibility for specific tasks.

2. Complementary skills - It’s important that the team members selected have
the interpersonal skills as well as problem-solving, decision-making, and
functional/technical skills needed to accomplish its purpose. The
assessment of members of the top group which was done in Element 5 is
essential to successful team make-up at this point.

3. A truly meaningful purpose - This requirement by itself will likely limit the
number of sub-teams which are formed by the GM. The purpose must be
one which all team members believe is important and exciting to work toward.

4. Specific goals - These goals must be specific to the team. One of the
frequent traps which top teams fall into is assuming that their team goals are
identical to the goals of the larger organization. Team goals are clear,
simple, and allow for small wins along the way.

5. A clear working approach - One of the barriers to top team effectiveness is
that top managers seldom do any actual work on their own - instead they
delegate it to staff or subordinates. Effective teams share the “real work”
among team members and thus gain the insight and depth of detail
necessary to engage in meaningful debate and discussion. The new
Eastman site president volunteered to fill needed roles on specific teams in
order to demonstrate his commitment to share in the real work and also to
show his desire to develop more of shared team atmosphere in the group.
6. Sense of mutual accountability - Each member is individually and jointly accountable for the team purpose, goals, approach, and work products. There is a sense that “only the team can fail.”

The single most important action the general manager can take with respect to the top team is to challenge them to achieve a significant performance improvement and have the discipline to hold them accountable for results toward that purpose. Establishing a team-promoting environment is useful and should be role-modeled by the GM, but building a strong performance ethic is much more critical to ultimate team results.

The discussion above assumes that top teams are “desired and needed by the new GM. Teams are not needed for all tasks to be done by the top group - many things are best done by members of the top group leading their individual organizations to accomplish goals which support the purposes and goals of the larger organization. However, teams are desirable, and perhaps essential, for tasks which require a high degree of interdependence between some or all members of the top group. Deciding which tasks are best done by the top team or sub-teams is one of the critical parts of assessing the organization and its members in Elements 4 and 5.

Element 7: Developing a Shared Organizational Agenda

The new GM may have to battle deeply-entrenched hierarchies and functional “silos” in order to build a shared agenda for the unit. These are
particularly difficult in some companies, whether the organization is structured along functional lines (as Eastman was prior to reorganization), business lines, or as a complex matrix (as Eastman is organized now). The goal for the GM is to have the organization adopt a corporate mindset in all dealings with outsiders. The building of external networks in Element 3 becomes particularly helpful in resolving this kind of issue in a matrix. Inside her new organization, the GM must role-model and reward behaviors which break down the barriers between groups and encourage a focus on total organization success. The building of top team(s) in Element 6 can greatly encourage cooperation among internal groups, as interdependence among managers will naturally break down some of the existing barriers to cooperation.

The critical element in building a shared direction for the organization is the management of agreement. By maximizing the amount of issue-oriented conflict while avoiding interpersonal conflict between members, the GM can ensure that decisions and directions are chosen which maximize the collective talents within the organization while at the same time increasing the support needed for successful implementation. Managing agreement is best accomplished by:

1. Frequent interactions - These should be planned, and if possible, agendas should be sent out in advance (with expectation for some advance preparation). Constructive conflict occurs when people have thought about the issues and are familiar and comfortable with the people in the group (frequent interaction allows people to be more familiar and less constrained).
2. A distinct role structure - Whenever possible, the leader should help the group organize around roles which are beneficial to issue-oriented conflict. In particular, the roles identified as Ms. Action, Mr. Steady, Guru, and Devil’s Advocate help to ensure that conflict emerges and that agreement is not reached prematurely.

3. Multiple-lens tactics - Methods which expand the number of alternatives (such as brainstorming), overlapping subgroups, multiple scenarios (with different external environments and events), and fast decision-making skills are all helpful in viewing problems and opportunities from varying perspectives.

4. An equitable decision-making process - A consensus-driven, egalitarian process which invites variety in facts and ideas without judging the participants is effective in balancing the need to be heard with the need to make a choice. The GM can also send a strong signal regarding equity by eliminating hierarchical seating arrangements and other status symbols.

5. Commit to a long-term relationship - Make it clear that everyone is in the same boat - the organization succeeds together or fails together. Agreement on the final destination makes it easier to battle it out regarding the route to take.

6. Distinguish the situation from the feelings - In order to help ensure this occurs, the GM may want to have other team members lead the agenda for meetings so she can sit back and monitor behaviors. Especially important is
the use of empathic listening skills to reflect both feeling and content back to team members.

7. Focus on the present - Accepting both good and bad outcomes of the status quo while at the same time moving forward to decide on the best course of action to pursue is a characteristic of top managers and top groups. It helps avoid negative actions such as second-guessing and Monday-morning quarterbacking.

The leader must be proactive and reactive, rather than passive, in setting and maintaining conditions which promote issue-oriented conflict. Setting high performance standards and inciting conflict are two of the primary leadership skills which the leader must use to manage agreement effectively.

The final element in developing a shared organizational direction is communication of that direction to all members of the organization as well as external constituents who will be effected by or asked to support the implementation of the effort. One GM interviewed accomplished this by holding roll-out sessions with every group in the organization and welcoming questions at these sessions. Regardless of the format, the leader and her top group play a major role in these communications - their effectiveness in both framing the message and crafting the delivery will go a long way toward determining the effectiveness of the organization in moving in the chosen direction.

Figure 5 summarizes the Seven Essential Elements of Taking Charge as a General Manager.
Figure 5

The Seven Essential Elements of Taking Charge as a General Manager

Building Effective Personal Relationships

1. With Superiors
2. With Subordinates
3. With Key Internal and External Supporters

Assessing the Organization: Its Members and its Environment

4. Learning about the Business, Environment, and Organization
5. Assessing the Top Team and its Members

Building a Shared Direction

6. Building the Top Team(s)
7. Developing a Shared Organizational Agenda
Appendix
Taking Charge as a General Manager

Interview Guide

Introduction

Before beginning, let me explain what my thesis is, what kinds of questions I'll be asking, and how I will use your answers:

1. My thesis is entitled "Taking Charge as a General Manager - An Action Plan for Success." What I'd like to have when I'm finished is a plan for what a newly appointed general manager should do in the first few months of taking over the assignment.

2. I'll be asking questions in three areas:
   a. Background - about your current job
   b. General questions about what the job entails - what you do, etc.
   c. More specific questions based on my thesis focus and my review of the literature.
   d. I may repeat questions during the interview to make sure I'm capturing your thinking on particularly important aspects.

3. I'll do my best to maintain the confidentiality of your answers:
   a. The thesis will identify that there are managers from Eastman who have been interviewed.
   b. It will not identify any names or specific organizations.
   c. I will do my best to aggregate answers wherever possible to make it even more difficult for anyone at Eastman to identify a particular answer or situation.

4. I'd also like to tape the interview if you don't mind so that I can refer back to specific answers as needed.

Background Questions

1. What was the situation in the business when you took the assignment?
2. Were you given a specific charge or mandate by your superior?
3. How well did you know the business before taking over?
4. How many members are there in your top group? What are their positions?
5. How well did you know them before taking over?

General Questions

6. Describe your job to me (What does the job entail? What are your responsibilities?)
7. What were your first thoughts when you learned you were going to have this assignment?
8. Has your view of the situation changed since that time?
9. What do you think is really needed to do your job (skills, knowledge, experience, political connections, etc.)?
10. What are the first things you did on taking over the assignment (in the first month or so)? Why?
11. What would you have done differently if you had the chance?
12. What problems did you encounter and how did you handle them?
13. What key events or key transition times have occurred since you took over?

Specific Questions (related to thesis focus)

14. Did you evaluate the strategy of the group when you took over? Did you do this by yourself or with others in the top group?
15. How do you assess and manage the top team?
16. How did you go about assessing members of your top group?
17. Were there any specific skills, values, or aptitudes missing when you took over? How did you go about closing these gaps?
18. How did you go about building working relationships with the individual members of your top group?
19. How did you go about developing mutual expectations with members of your top group? Have there been any disagreements?
20. What things have you done to develop trust between yourself and individuals in your top group?
21. Do you trust them (consider skill competence, business sense, integrity, motives, consistency of behavior, openness, and discretion)?
22. Do you think your top group trusts you?
23. How much do members of your top group influence your decisions, attitudes or beliefs, and actions?
24. How do you influence members of your top group? Is your source of influence do to position or some other factor (expertise, decisiveness, charisma, etc.)?
25. Is your top group a team or a working group? In other words, are members of your top group interdependent on each other or are their results more independent (the result of their own group's work)?
26. What things have you done specifically to build the effectiveness of the top working group?
27. Besides the managing of the top team, what have been the major challenges in the job?
28. If you were looking for someone to fill a similar position, what kind of person would you want to see?
For the Regional President:

29. What were the unique aspects to managing an international group?

For the Site President:

30. Would you consider this job a general manager job?
Bibliography


