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OF WOLLONGONG  
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# **An investigation of factors that promote and inhibit performance during leadership transitions**

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Certification**

*I, Ty Wiggins, declare that this thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the conferral of the degree Doctor of Philosophy, from the University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.*



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**Ty Wiggins**

*8<sup>th</sup> March 2019*

## **Abstract**

A widely cited statistic on leadership transitions claims that 40 per cent of executives fail within the first 18 months in a new role (Watkins 2003). Leadership transitions—a significant change in a leader’s role commonly associated with being promoted or changing organisations—are occurring more frequently in leaders’ careers and across organisations due to an increased pace of business change influenced by technology, globalisation and merger and acquisition activity. As many as 25 per cent of leaders change roles each year (Watkins 2013) and the resulting leadership transition often ranks as one of the most stressful and challenging experiences that executives have in their careers and lives. When a leadership transition is unsuccessful, the costs to the organisation and leader are significant. The estimated costs for replacing a leader who has failed the transition can range from as low as 30 per cent (Van Vark 2006) to 2400 per cent (Levin 2010) of the leaders’ annual salary. Additionally, the people surrounding the failed leader also suffer and the leader can experience considerable damage to their career and confidence.

Organisations struggle to support their leaders in transition; this is truer for leaders who are new to the organisation and who have a more difficult transition than for leaders who are promoted from within, although both are risky situations for leaders. The programs utilised to integrate new staff into an organisation include orientation, induction, socialisation and onboarding. Many of these programs are effective for general staff, but they fail to meet the needs and expectations of leaders in transition. Externally recruited leaders are often left to ‘sink or swim’ in their new role within a new organisational culture and are without the support of a relational network. Internally promoted leaders also criticise the lack of support provided during their transition into different and more senior roles.

The existing literature on leadership transitions is dominated by practitioner commentaries and opinions, with very few empirical studies. Of the research that has been published, many researchers have favoured deductive, quantitative survey-based studies that examine the subject across large samples and that are based on researcher-constructed concepts. In addition, there has been almost no research into leadership transitions conducted within the Australian business community. The quantitative nature of the existing research has largely been testing what is already known and assumed regarding

the challenges of leadership transitions. As such, there is a research opportunity for exploring the area through the lens of an inductive, qualitative research approach in which the leader identifies and articulates the factors, not the researcher. The goal of this research was to explore leadership transitions in the Australian business community and to identify aspects that promoted or inhibited transition success for leaders.

A conceptual framework was developed from the literature and a qualitative research approach inspired by Grounded Theory principles were used to identify the promoters and inhibitors of success during a leadership role transition. Utilising purposive sampling, in-depth semi-structured interviews were completed with 15 leaders, 2 senior managers and 5 members of human resources (HR) across a variety of roles and organisations in Australia, in which they discussed the experience of their most recent leadership transition. The data were coded under a constant comparison method and were grouped into themes, which produced a list of factors promoting and inhibiting transition success. These were then aggregated into four categories to summarise the factors influencing leadership transitions: (1) the situation that the leader encounters when they undertake a new role, (2) the people surrounding the leader in their new role, (3) the attributes and experiences that the leader brings to the new role and (4) what the leader does during the transition.

The findings of this research suggest that leadership transitions are a stressful and dangerous period for leaders and that organisations do a poor job of supporting both external and internal leaders in transition. The research also discovered that factors promoting transition success are increasingly associated with the leader and factors that inhibit with the organisation. Other findings include that the use of transition plans significantly benefit a leader's transition, that a lack of clarity is a common and significant inhibitor, that most organisations have no formal onboarding process and that there are few structured transition success measurement frameworks. The identified promoters and inhibitors led to the creation of a transition model that depicts an effective leadership transition. A transition action framework was also created, identifying the areas that would most assist organisations in improving the success of their leaders in transition.

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## **Chapter 1—Introduction**

A leadership transition is a significant change in a leader's role due to a promotion or secondment, changing organisations, mergers, acquisitions or restructure (Terblanche, Albertyn & Van Collier-Peter 2017; Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008a; Watkins 2003). The frequency of leadership transitions is increasing as executive tenures shorten due to the pace of business change driven by advances in technology, globalisation, merger and acquisition activity, and faster rates of promotions (Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2010; Kaiser et al. 2011). Consequently, organisations heavily rely on the success of new leaders and suffer when they experience high leader turnover and failure (Bridges 2009). Widely cited research by Watkins (2013) claimed that as many as 25 per cent of leaders' transition into new roles each year and that more than 40 per cent of leaders in new roles fail within the first 18 months. Leaders transitioning successfully into a new role has significant benefits for both the leader and the organisation, including lowering the likelihood of executive derailments, early departure, team changes and other associated financial costs.

### **Leadership Transitions Require Change**

The transition to a new role is a psychological process in which the leader is challenged by the need to learn new behaviours, acquire new perspectives and manage increasing stress and anxiety (Bridges 2003). Leadership transitions require leaders to adjust their skill sets in response to the challenges they face in their new role. Several authors have attempted to group the transition challenges and required skill changes into categories. For example, Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) explored the skills required at different hierarchy levels in organisations and developed a strataplex of layered (strata) and segmented (plex) skills based on leadership levels and grouping these required skills into the categories of cognitive, interpersonal, business and strategic. Bebb (2009) also identified four main skill set groups, but they were labelled as cognitive, behavioural, relational and role perspective. Terblanche (2018) argued for a combination of the groupings suggested by both Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) and Bebb (2009) to encapsulate the challenges identified in the literature. He extended the number of groups to five: cognitive, behavioural, interpersonal, psychological and systemic. Irrespective of categorisation, these authors concluded that a leader's ability to meet the challenges of a role transition and adjust their skills accordingly is a key determinant of success or failure.

## **Triangulation of Costs in Transitions: Financial, Economic and Personal Cost of Failed Transitions**

The undertaking of a leadership transition, either in the leader's existing organisation or in a new organisation, is one of the most stressful and dangerous times that a leader or senior executive can experience during their career and life (Terblanche, Albertyn & van Collier-Peter 2017). Research indicates that, in addition to being stressful, transitions are also a common area for the failure of executives (Watkins 2013; Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2010; Gentry & Chappelow 2009; Masters 2009; Bradt, Check & Pedraza 2006), which carries significant costs for organisations. According to Van Vark (2006), these costs for recruiting and onboarding a replacement leader can be as high as 30–40 per cent of the leaders' annual salary. The direct and indirect cost in lost turnover to an organisation when a leader exits is as much as 24 times the leaders' annual salary (Manderscheid & Freeman 2012). At a senior executive level, this can be as high as US\$2.7 million (Smart 1999). Aside from the financial effect of a failed transition, there are emotional and career costs, as well as some potential damage to the morale of people close to the leader in transition (Martin & Gentry 2011). For example, one study indicated that 12 people had their roles and lives negatively affected by the arrival of a new mid-level leader (Watkins 2003). In another study, Gierden (2007) provided evidence of the radiating effect of CEO or senior leadership change—with a leader turnover rate of up to 22 per cent in organisations with external CEO appointments, and 33 per cent in organisations that promoted CEOs from within. As such, failed transitions have significant financial and non-financial costs to organisations, their staff and the leader.

### **Leadership Transitions: An Under-Researched Phenomena**

Practitioner opinions, commentaries and models dominate the literature on leadership transitions, with very few evidence-based studies having been completed on the topic. Of the over 180 citations identified as relevant to this research project, only 11 were evidence-based studies and the majority of these are deductive studies based on the researcher determined terms of leadership transition challenges or effects. There is some consensus in the existing research, concerning what positively and negatively affects success, what leaders should do, how organisations can support the process and the costs associated with failure. This general agreement across the existing research translates to the practitioner commentaries and has not noticeably changed in the last 15 years regarding what influences leadership transition success or failure.

A branch of the literature with considerable relevance to leadership transitions is the executive derailment literature. An executive is considered to have derailed if they have fallen short of their potential, failed to perform at the required level for their role or have suffered involuntary restricted career progression (McCall & Lombardo 1983). While leaders and executives may derail for multiple reasons, many researchers believe that derailment is mostly caused by unsuccessfully managing the transition to a more senior role with greater complexity (Gentry & Chappelow 2009; Watkins 2003; Kovach 1986; McCall & Lombardo 1983). The more senior a leader becomes, the more their role can attract increased scrutiny, responsibility, ambiguous performance expectations and increasingly complicated politics (Zaccaro 2001). As such, these changes challenge the leader and any shortcomings are highlighted during the transition period, in which leaders are overly scrutinised and observed for evidence of changes and initial indicators of performance. The risk of derailment increases with the seniority of the leadership role and the transition period can be the catalyst for derailment.

### **Two Fundamental Types of Transitions**

Two fundamental types of leadership transition are highlighted in the literature. These are transitions that occur when leaders are internally promoted within the same organisation, or they are externally recruited from outside the organisation. While both situations are challenging for the leader, researchers concede that externally recruited leaders face greater challenges in the transition (Zhang 2008; Charan 2005; Ciampa & Watkins 1999), primarily due to a lack of understanding the organisations' culture (Dutton 2010; Watkins 2009; Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008b) and the need to establish a set of new relationships (Dai & de Meuse 2007; Van Velsor & Leslie 1995). These two factors cause the externally recruited leader to experience a more difficult transition, with a lower success rate than their internal counterparts. Ciampa and Watkins (1999) found that 64 per cent of externally hired executives fail at their new roles, compared to 38 per cent of leaders who are promoted from within the organisation. In another study, Smart (1999) found that 40–50 per cent of the senior leaders hired from outside the organisation fail or are 'mis-hires'. Contrary to the low success rates, the trend towards external hires appears to be increasing. For example, Neff and Citrin (2005) reported that the external hiring of CEOs among Fortune 500 companies has increased from 15 to 40 per cent between 1985 and 2005. While external and internal leaders may face different challenges, both groups

experience poor success rates in a career event, which is becoming increasingly more prevalent.

### **Why is a Leadership Transition Challenging?**

As already mentioned above, leadership transitions challenge leaders in many ways. For externally recruited leaders, the challenges include a lack of understanding the new culture and political environment, the absence of any relational network and no proven track record in their new role and organisation (Dai, de Meuse & Gaeddert 2011; Dutton 2010). They also cite the challenge of learning and navigating a new culture as the most significant, based on the common belief that organisations work on a set of unwritten rules and non-stated power structures (Watkins 2009; Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008a). To be effective, leaders must understand how the organisation truly functions.

While internally promoted leaders share many of the same challenges as their external counterparts, some challenges are unique to an internal promotion. These include managing former peers, changing their profile in the organisation from technical expert to technical leader and managing changes in the organisation's existing relationships (Charan Drotter & Noel 2011; Freedman 1998). Some data suggest that it is common for internally promoted leaders to struggle with leading their team if it consists of former peers who do not agree with the leaders' promotion, or who coveted the role personally (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011; Straub 1999). In other cases, leaders are promoted based on strong technical skills and, at their new level, other factors not related to their technical ability—such as leadership, administration and direction—start to form the assessment of their performance (Plakhotnik et al. 2011). Another challenging factor is the necessity to be more involved in setting and designing strategy (Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2010). As Hambrick (1981) noted almost four decades ago, the higher that a leader climbs in an organisation's hierarchy, the more important it is that he or she has a firm understanding of the organisation's strategy. The skill of strategic thinking is currently considered important for middle management and essential for senior leaders (Kaiser et al. 2011).

### **Neglected and Unsupported Leadership Transitions**

The challenge of how to successfully manage a leadership transition is not limited to just the leader. Companies and organisations also encounter difficulties when integrating new leaders into their structures (Bear, Benson-Armer & McLaughlin 2000). The leader is



most vulnerable to failure and most in need of organisational support during the transition period (Bawany 2012). Many organisations conduct orientation and induction programs (such as onboarding and organisational socialisation), although these often fail to meet the expectations and requirements of the leaders in transition (Wells 2005). The lack of research on leadership transitions has potentially contributed to the ineffective programs that organisations employ to support leaders in transition. Studies have indicated that less than 40 per cent of senior leaders are satisfied with how they are integrated into the organisation (Wells 2005) and that only 30 per cent consider their employer's onboarding process as satisfactory (Pomeroy 2006). The use of interventions, including executive coaching and mentoring, can positively affect the success of leadership transition (Inyang 2013; Reynolds 2011), but they are not widely adopted by organisations (Witherspoon & Cannon 2004). Organisations seem unaware of how to effectively support leaders in transition, or they are unwilling to invest the time and resources needed for transition success.

### **High Expectations but No Assessment of Performance: Lack of Leadership Transition Performance Measures**

The understanding of leadership transition appears to have been constrained by a lack of rigorous measurement. While discussions of success during and after transitions are found regularly in the literature, few authors offer a firm measurement tool or framework to gauge transition performance. Once a leader is recruited or appointed, the organisation's primary measures of success are commonly the time the leader takes to become effective in their new role and the long-term retention of the leader (Conger & Fishel 2007; Dai & de Meuse 2007). For the new leaders who do not fail outright, it often takes several months to become effective or to begin being productive in their new roles. Research indicates an average of 6.2 months needed for a middle to senior-level manager to reach a 'break-even point'—that point in which their contribution surpasses the costs of their recruitment and onboarding (Watkins 2003). Reinforcing the additional challenges of externally recruited leaders, a leadership effectiveness study discovered that 92 per cent of externally recruited leaders and 72 per cent of internally promoted leaders took at least three months to feel moderately productive; when these same leaders were assessed for their feelings of role comfort, 62 per cent of externally recruited leaders and 25 per cent of internally promoted leaders indicated that this took more than six months to develop (Institute of Executive Development & Alexcel Group 2007). The lack of measurement

for a common event that carries a high failure rate in organisations implies a poor understanding of the factors that promote or inhibit transition success. This—combined with a lack of research, a lack of theory development and the stagnant nature of the knowledge regarding how leadership transitions can be improved—was the impetus for conducting this study.

In summary, leadership transitions are an increasingly critical factor in the success of leaders and organisations across various industries and functions. Existing research indicates that transition failure is not uncommon and that it entails a variety of costs for organisations (e.g., financial) and individual leaders (e.g., career damage). Organisations either do not want to or do not know how to successfully intervene to ensure that their leaders in transition are successful. A lack of evidence-based research on the topic contributes to the low levels of success and, as the pace of business change continues to increase, the frequency of leadership transitions will also increase, further amplifying the effect of failed transitions. Improving leadership transitions is now, more than ever, critical to effective leadership and organisational success.

### **Research Problem**

The existing literature appears to accept that leadership transitions are challenging periods for leaders, that they have a low likelihood of success and that there are significant costs when they fail (Watkins 2013; Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011). Most of the research was conducted internationally, with limited empirical studies and a preference towards quantitative research methods. To the researcher's knowledge, no qualitatively empirical research has been conducted in Australia in the area of leadership transitions, nor has any research been conducted that specifically examines the promoters and inhibitors of transition success. The deductive nature of the existing quantitative research has worked to confirm the existing knowledge on the topic across increasing sample sizes. The quantitatively researched concepts have been predominately researcher generated and participant confirmed. Existing inductive qualitative research has focused on specific aspects of leadership transitions, but none have recently examined the area broadly. There is a research opportunity to revisit leadership transitions without the desire to confirm or deny the current thinking on what generates success or leads to failure—an opportunity to revisit leadership transitions with the direct experiences and voices of leaders who have

recently undergone a transition—in the hope that this will provide an updated baseline of factors for future research and theory development.

### **Research Questions**

The main research problem is addressed by the following specific research question:

- What promotes or inhibits leaders' performance during their transition into a new leadership role?

In addition, the thesis also explored two secondary research questions:

- How is this performance during the transition measured?
- What role does understanding the business strategy play in leaders' successful transition?

### **Aims and Significance**

The background provided has established the importance and risks of the transition period for both leaders and organisations. Therefore, the aims of this study are to develop a rich understanding of what promotes and inhibits performance and success during the transition period and to establish how the leaders and organisations measure this success. Further, the study will explore any influence on the transition performance, based on the leaders' strategic understanding. The research's significance will be in addressing the gap in the literature and existing qualitative research on leadership transitions, as well as in the dearth of studies in the Australian business community. The research will contribute to the knowledge in this area, as there are numerous practitioner commentaries on the subject, but there is limited quality, peer-reviewed empirical research into how leaders succeed in a new role and how organisations support the leaders' transitions. Leaders transitioning into new roles is an ongoing business challenge with significant financial and non-financial cost.

### **Research Objectives**

Based on the identified research problem and considering the existing literature in the area of leadership transitions, the objectives of this research are to:

- explore the factors that promote a leader's performance during the transition period

- explore the factors that inhibit a leader's performance during the transition period
- investigate how organisations and leaders measure performance and success during the transition period
- investigate if the leader's understanding of the organisation's strategy influences their performance during the transition period.

## **Methodology**

The qualitative research design followed a modified version of Grounded Theory (i.e., a constructivist Grounded Theory methodology (Charmaz 2006)) to interpret and analyse the data from semi-structured interviews with participants discussing the experience of their most recent leadership transitions. Interviews were conducted with 15 leaders, 2 senior managers and 5 members of human resources (HR) in a variety of roles and organisations in Australia. The participants included leaders who had undergone a role transition in the previous 36 months, senior managers who have managed a direct report who underwent a role transition in the previous 36 months, and members of HR departments who have overseen a leader who underwent a role transition in the previous 36 months. To qualify for the study, the leader must have at least three direct reports in the role being discussed. Whilst the primary participant group were leaders themselves, data was also collected from direct line managers and Human Resources managers, providing alternative perspectives (based on observation) that extended the self-reporting of leaders. The purposive sample was sourced via the researcher's personal network, via invitations sent through LinkedIn and through referrals from contacts and participants. The interviews were coded using the constant comparisons method that is consistent with Grounded Theory. Each interview was coded shortly after completion, with the codes then organised into themes and compared to the subsequent interviews. After all interviews were coded and the themes compared and contrasted, a clear distinction emerged, and four categories of promoters and inhibitors were created.

## **Thesis Outline**

An overview of the thesis is shown in Figure 1.1. Following on from the general introduction and research overview presented in this chapter, Chapter 2 reviews in detail the relevant literature in the area of leadership transitions, executive derailment, executive

and leader onboarding and transition performance management. A modelling of key themes from this literature is also provided.

The research methodology is explained and justified in Chapter 3, including the philosophical approaches and the practicalities of the methods used in the study. The sample is explained and described. The findings and data analysis are then detailed in Chapter 4, as well as the outlined and contextualised comments and responses of the participants. In Chapter 5 a selection of key findings are discussed and related to relevant literature. This discussion concludes with the presentation of an elaborated version of the conceptual map presented in Chapter 2.

Chapter 6 presents a conclusion to thesis that comments on its major insights, summarises its implications, and notes the limitations of the reported study. Also outlined are recommendations for the application of the findings, along with suggestions for further research and a comment on the research's contribution to enhancing knowledge of leadership transitions.

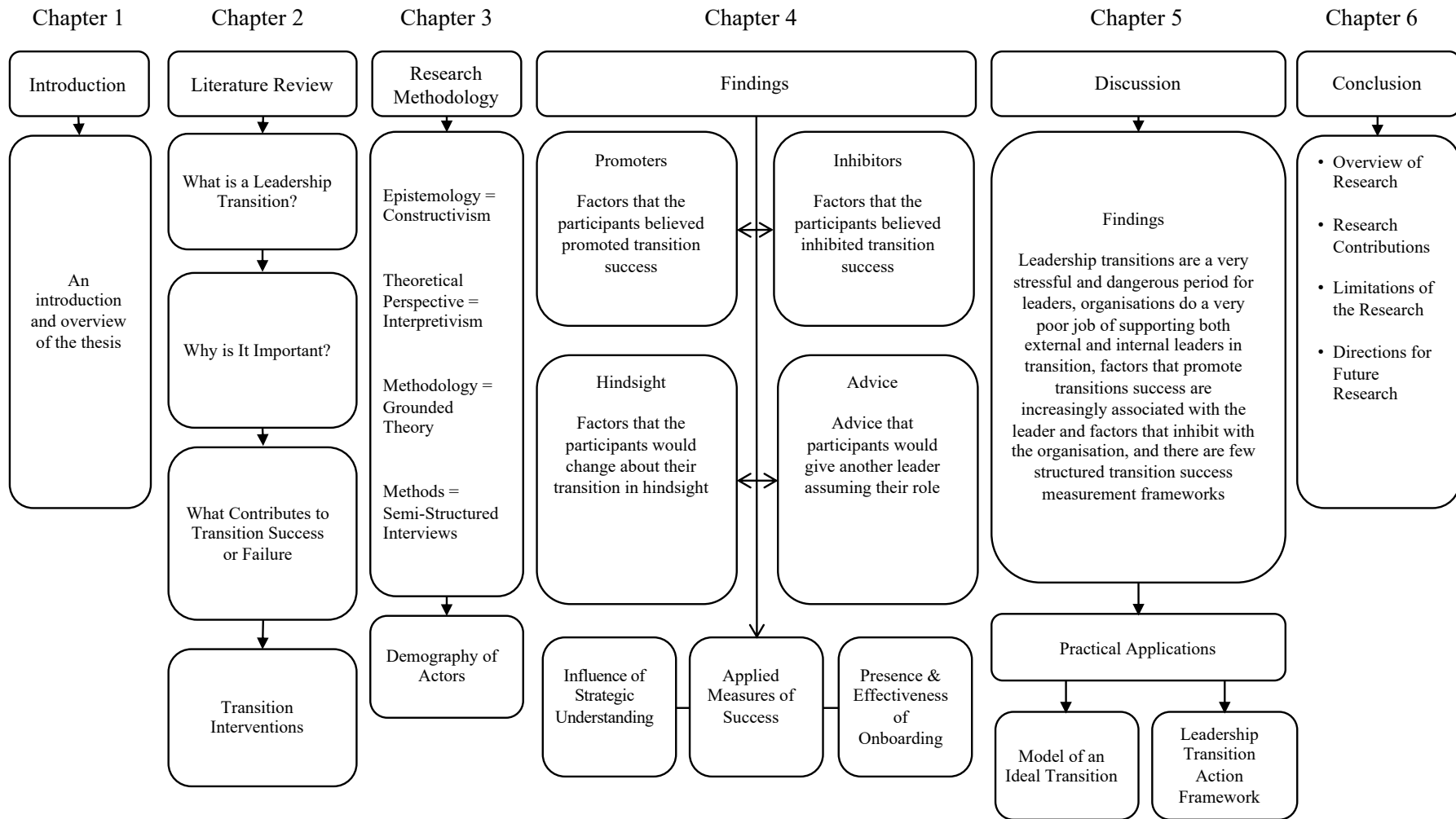


Figure 1.1: Thesis Structure

## **Summary**

This chapter has introduced the research problem, topic areas and research methodology. It has also provided the research objectives and aims, the research's potential significance, the scope of the study and an outline of the thesis. The next chapter will review the relevant literature on leadership transitions, onboarding and executive derailment.

## **Chapter 2—Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

Leadership and leadership development are and have been a core focus for organisations globally for the last several decades. The business community acknowledges the financial and non-financial benefit of effective leadership and, in the United States (US) alone, companies spend approximately US\$14 billion each year on leadership development programs (Loew & O'Leonard 2012). A major challenge for leaders and organisations is the increasing rate of change that organisations face. This change regularly affects leaders' roles, responsibilities, key objectives and strategic choices, often triggering a transition process for the leader. There is limited empirical research on why leaders fail during transition periods (Manderscheid, 2008), with most of the literature based on the direct experiences and observations of coaches and consultants working with leaders in transition (Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008a). According to Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) there has been a substantial increase over the last 10 years in the quantity of literature on leadership transitions, but that the quality is questionable with the majority of information residing in consulting organisations' white papers. Indeed, Levin (2010) observed that practice has outpaced research in understanding and supporting leaders in transition and more qualitative based empirical research is needed to define the factors that distinguish between successful and unsuccessful transitions.

This literature review will explore leadership literature that specifically addresses leadership transitions. The chapter is divided into four sections; the first discusses the key concepts that surround leadership transitions including definitions, models, frameworks, performance measures and interventions used to aid in the success of leadership transitions. The second section explains the search parameters of the literature review and outlines the existing evidence-based research. The third section explores all literature (evidence-based and practitioner) for a list of factors that promote and inhibit transition performance and success to establish the current thinking. Finally, the end of the chapter offers a conceptual framework of the existing literature.



## **Key Concepts Surrounding Leadership Transitions**

### **What is a Leadership Transition?**

The literature offers several definitions for what constitutes a leadership transition. Definitions or explanations can be grouped into three areas; the physical change of role, the psychological process the leaders undergo and the changes in tasks, activities and responsibilities the leader experiences. There is a lack of a common definition with many of the existing definitions being limited to explaining leadership transitions specific to the study or content of the article in which they appear. For example, according to Treblanche, Albertyn & Van Collier-Peter (2017) who studied internally promoted leaders, a leadership transition is a vertical ascension in which a leader is promoted to a more senior role in an existing organisation. In their study, Manderscheid & Ardichvili 1998a define it as a leader assuming a role in a new organisation. Watkins (2003) defined it as the period of transition from one leadership role to another and Gilmore (1988) described the leadership transition process as eight different stages, with the first seven centred on the recruitment process and the last covering the transition. However, a broader context suggests that leadership transitions can occur when the leader's role changes significantly due to a restructure, merger or acquisition, without necessarily changing the leader's title, job description or remuneration (Chinyamurindi 2012). Another transition recently added to the discussion are the transitions involved in maternity or paternity leave. This transition expresses the process of a leader leaving for maternity/paternity leave, then needing to reintegrate back into the organisation (Moffett 2018).

Given these differing perspectives, it is not surprising that leadership transitions are defined in many different ways. For example, Bridges (2003) suggested that role transitions are continuous psychological processes that require the learning of new behaviours and perspectives while the leader copes with higher levels of stress, anxiety and alienation. Gill (2017) described the transition process as representative of the psychological demands that leaders in new roles must address to adapt to more senior levels in the organisation. However, Ashforth (2001) argued that a physical change between roles is not required if the changes in the psychological conditions are sufficient to constitute a transition experience. Whereas, Bond and Naughton (2011) referred to transition as integration and explained it as the way in which a leader builds their awareness and understanding of performance expectations, strategic goals and

organisational purpose. Nicholson and West (1998) defined leadership transition—also called role transition—as a change of jobs, change of employment or a situation in which work duties are significantly altered and this change can be both voluntary and involuntary. Gabarro (1987, p. 106) labelled the leadership transition as ‘taking charge’ and explained it as the process of learning and taking action that a manager undertakes until he or she has mastered a new assignment enough to run the organisation as well as resources and constraints allow. He divides the transition into five distinct stages that each have specific time periods: taking hold, immersion, reshaping, consolidation and refinement (Gabarro 1987).

To avoid conceptual imprecision and for the purpose of this research which will examine the influencing factors on leadership transitions, this thesis adopts the working definition that a leadership transition is any significant change in a leader’s role caused by promotion, secondment, changing organisations, merger, acquisition, restructure or returning from maternity/paternity/career leave.

### **Transition Timeframe**

Perceptions of the time that a leader stays in the state of transition vary. The length of the transition period researched across multiple industries and role types is estimated to be between six months (Ciampa & Watkins 1999) and nine months (Watkins 2003; Gilmore 1988; Gabarro 1987) but it can be as long as 18 months (Levin 2010; Manderscheid & Ardichvili 1998a) and up to three years (Downey 2002). While many researchers consider the transition period to start on the leaders’ first day of the new role (Watkins 2003; Gilmore 1988; Gabarro 1987), some suggest that the transition period begins before the leader assumes the new role—that it begins from the offer and acceptance stage (Petrock 1990). This belief reflects the notion that as soon as the decision for a transition is made, preparation occurs for the leader and the organisation, which can be both psychological and physical.

Research has estimated a duration of 3–4 months for leaders to become fully functional in a new role (DDI’s 2004–2005 Selection Forecast cited in DDI 2007); however, Watkins (2003) found a ‘breakeven point’ that requires 6.2 months for senior leaders to reach the point in which their contribution exceeds their cost and drain on the organisation. This is consistent with earlier research that found that leaders needed at least six months to develop proficiency in performing their new roles (Gabarro 1987). Dai, de

Meuse and Gaeddert (2011) stressed the importance of comprehending that the 'breakeven point' is a measurement of break-even contribution and that it is well short of optimal contribution. This indicates that break-even is just an early stage of a successful transition and that the ultimate goal of the completed process is optimal performance.

### **Transition Challenges and Changes**

Leadership transitions are periods of change, they can be challenging and require leaders to adjust or adapt to the new state. Bridges (2003) suggested that a change is an event occurring regardless of the person's willingness, whereas a transition is a choice and a psychological process that contains three phases: an ending, a neutral zone and a new beginning. The ending is indicative of the leader discarding old beliefs, assumptions and behaviours in preparation for the new situation. The neutral zone involves the leader replacing the old beliefs and behaviours with new ones. Bridges (2003) highlighted that this stage—due to high expectations anxiety, uncertainty and a lack of definitive outcomes—is the most challenging of the three. Once the leader has grasped the new skills and outlook, they enter into the third stage, a new beginning. In addition to the leader, organisations and teams must also experience the same phases for the leadership transition to be successful (Bridges 2003).

In an organisational context, the required changes are often associated with changes in skills. Leaders are required to adjust their skill sets, both in response to the challenges faced during the transition and the requirements of the new role. Hill (2003) determined that leaders experience a mental transition when they enter a new role, during which they must reconcile past expectations and redefine current expectations in the context and reality of their new organisation and role. Leaders are challenged by learning new skills and values, by the need to develop a new perspective and by having to modify previously reinforced behaviours (Kaiser et al. 2011). Leaders thus quickly realise the disparity between the previous and current role and they can experience a state of shock in the early weeks (Nicholson 1984).

The transition challenges and required skill changes have been grouped into categories by several authors. Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) explored the skills required at different hierarchy levels within organisations and developed a strataplex of skills based on the leadership level. The term strataplex is used to describe how skill requirements are layered (strata) and segmented (plex). The skills were grouped into four

categories: (1) cognitive skills relating to basic cognitive capacity learning, processing information and oral communication; (2) interpersonal and social skills to interact and influence others; (3) business skills referring to specific role and function-based skills; and (4) strategic skills that include managing ambiguity, understanding complexity, planning and visioning and influencing groups or organisations (Mumford, Campion & Morgeson 2007). Bebb (2009) also identified four main skill set groups that leaders in transition must adapt to be successful in a new role, albeit with slightly different labels. The categories include: (1) cognitive, in which the leader learns to think differently because of the change of work requirements; (2) behavioural, in which the leader learns new behaviours due to the new role level; (3) relational, in which the leaders relinquish old biases; and (4) role perspective, in which the leader changes the type of work completed (Bebb 2009). Terblanche (2018) proposed a combination of the groupings offered by Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) and Bebb (2009) and extended the number of categories to five: (1) cognitive, which involves new thinking patterns and cognitive models; (2) behavioural, including new patterns of behaviour; (3) interpersonal, which relates to developing advanced interpersonal skills; (4) psychological, which involves managing anxiety and stress and increasing self-awareness; and (5) systemic, which includes understanding the requirements of the new role. For the benefit of this discussion and thesis, an alternative combination of the categories offered by all three authors is considered optimal. The suggested grouping of transition challenges is outlined in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Transition Challenges

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Source</b>
Cognitive	Patterns of thinking, cognitive models, long-held values and beliefs	Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007), Bebb (2009), Terblanche (2018)
Psychological	Ambiguity, complexity, anxiety, stress and the need for greater emotional control and intelligence	Terblanche (2018)

Interpersonal	The requirement for greater interpersonal skills at higher organisational levels	Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007), Terblanche (2018)
Behavioural	Adjusting and adopting new patterns of behaviour that are consistent with expectations at higher levels	Bebb (2009), Terblanche (2018)
Relational	The requirement to build new and different types of relationships with varying types of people	Bebb (2009)
Role Perspective	Understanding the new role within the organisational context	Bebb (2009), Terblanche (2018)

The suggested grouping above adds relational as a separate category to the five suggested by Terblanche (2018), which separates the challenges that leaders face with either changing or establishing the relationships from interpersonal or behavioural skills. Bebb (2009) suggests that a leader's skills concerning relationship building and management are an important and distinct set of skills from the interpersonal skills category offered by Mumford, Campion and Morgeson (2007) and Terblanche (2018). The grouping also replaces Terblanche's (2018) systemic label in favour of Bebb's (2009) label of role perspective but essentially describes the same challenges.

### **Transition Models, Frameworks and Theories**

Among the numerous leadership models and frameworks, there are few that deal exclusively with the factors relating to a leader's transition. For example, Manderscheid and Ardichvili (2008a) proposed a model of leadership transition based on an extensive literature review that described its dynamics in an organisational context (see Figure 2.1 below).

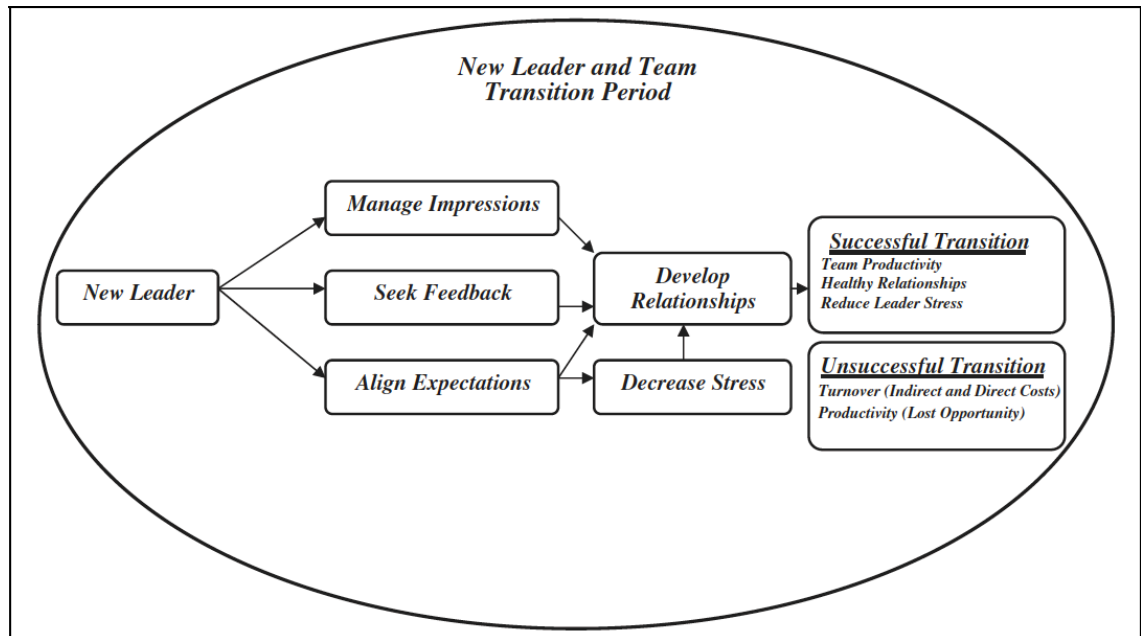


Figure 2.1: Model of Leadership Transition

They argue that the model identified the important success factors that would increase the likelihood of a successful transition; managing impressions, seeking feedback, aligning expectations and developing relationships. The authors described the mode as only a preliminary suggestion that requires further research for validation (Manderscheid and Ardichvili 2008a). To date no further research or validation has been completed on this model.

One widely cited specific transition framework is the ‘leadership pipeline’ created by Charan, Drotter and Noel (2011). This model was developed based on General Electric’s (GE) approach to leadership development, initiated 30 years earlier, and explains that there are several levels of leadership existing in organisations and that the required skills change dramatically at each level. Unlike many leadership frameworks and models that cover transition as part of overall leadership development, the leadership pipeline focuses on the aspects specific to transitioning between levels and how these may affect the leader and the organisation, and it prescribes interventions and actions for organisations to enhance the chance of success. (Freedman 2011). According to the model, leaders transition through six passages that are framed by seven leadership levels: leading self, leading others, leading leaders, functional leader, business leader, group leader and enterprise leader (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011). This is illustrated in Figure 2.2.

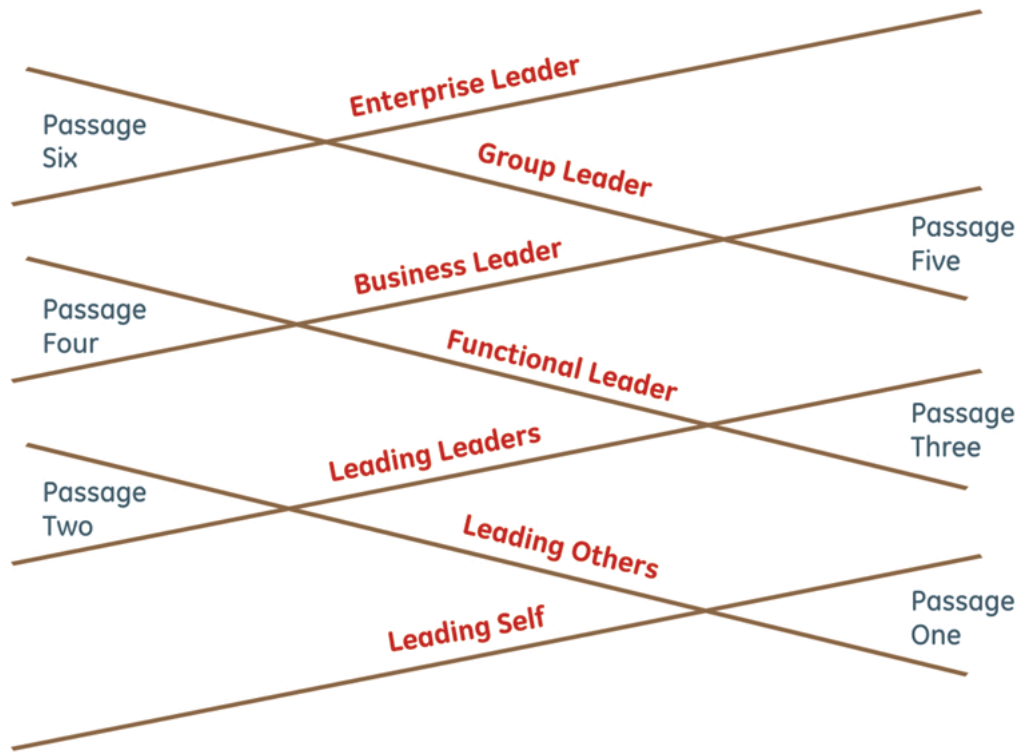


Figure 2.2: Leadership Pipeline

Each passage reflects significant changes in role requirements and necessitates new skill development. In Passage One, people who have demonstrated proficiency in a technical area as an individual contributor are promoted to a supervisor or team leader role. They are now responsible for managing their peers, or people with a similar technical skill level. Passage Two involves managers or leaders being responsible for team leaders and for helping others to lead. Passage Three positions the leader to head a function in the business with responsibility for an entire function and learning to compete with other functions for resources. In Passage Four, the functional leader transitions to leading a business unit and may now be responsible for profit and loss, as well as be required to increase their level of strategic thinking. Passage Five describes a business leader becoming the leader of a group of businesses, with aspects at this level, such as resource allocation, presenting as a challenge. The final passage (Passage Six) is for the enterprise leader level, in which the leader has ultimate responsibility for the full enterprise. Depending on the size and structure of the organisation, only some of the levels may exist, resulting in leaders jumping passages and concurrently encountering both sets of transition challenges. At each level, the leader is required to learn new thought processes and behaviours while relinquishing previous ones, to adapt to increased complexity and new time horizons, and to develop a more strategic perception of the organisation.

Whilst the leadership pipeline is perhaps the most popular model, other similar models did precede it. A model by Mahler (1986) framed the challenges that leaders face with ascending the organisational hierarchy as career crossroads. These crossroads represent a change in position that results in a severe change in behaviour needed to succeed at the higher-level role. Four crossroads were identified: managing self, managing others, becoming a functional manager and becoming a business manager (Mahler 1986). Another alternative model to the leadership pipeline is Freedman's (2011) 'Pathways and Crossroads'. This model argues for five levels of leadership transitions: individual contributor, supervising manager, single business manager, executive manager of a business portfolio and institutional leader (Freedman 2011). Each level is characterised by distinctive demands placed on the leader and the model explains that as leaders move through the crossroads, they must recognise that certain behaviours, styles and activities initially valued at lower levels can be dysfunctional or inadequate at their current level (Freedman 2011).

The primary critique of the leadership pipeline is the argument that it is not empirically based, and that subsequent research does not exist to validate the framework. Regardless it features prominently in both academic and practitioner literature as a central transition framework. Another critique is that the empirical evidence only supports three levels within organisations where roles are similar, but the required work is distinctly different (Zaccaro 2011). The three levels supported by the evidence in which the roles in organisations are qualitatively distinct: executive level leaders who create the structure, middle management roles that interpret the structure and supervisory roles that apply the structure (Kaiser 2011). The argument made by Charan, Drotter and Noel (2011) that seven distinct layers is not supported or suggested by any other model of research. However, regardless of whether they are proposing three, five or seven levels, all models contend that the skills leaders require change as they ascend the different levels—and that these skill changes are challenging.

### **Leadership Transition Theory**

While there has been some work in the development of leadership transition models, there has not been any empirical research in developing an acceptable theory of leadership transitions; in fact, leadership transition theory is rarely mentioned in the literature. Terblanche (2018) suggested that leadership transition theory is an underdeveloped



component of the larger leadership development field and stated that it is mostly linked to the work on the leadership pipeline by Charan, Drotter and Noel (2011). In his dissertation, Pape (2011, p. 7) described leadership transition theory as ‘a relatively nascent field dominated by, on the one hand, books professing “top 10” lists of advice and, on the other hand, the development of integrated models to guide leaders and organisations’. He continued to argue that, based on the lack of a well-defined theory of leadership transitions, organisations and leaders potentially do not understand the success factors associated with leadership transitions (Pape 2011). An established leadership transition theory does not currently exist which represents the lack of attention researchers have given the topic and the lack of understanding of how to influence the success of leadership transitions; however, research such as that conducted by Pape (2011), Terblanche (2018) and this study hopes to contribute towards a recognised theory.

### **Leadership Transition Risks and Failure Rates**

Organisations are promoting leaders into new leadership roles at increasing speeds due to the fast pace of enterprise expansions (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011; Watkins 2004), increasingly competitive markets and a fast-changing business environment (Manderscheid & Freeman 2012), and cost-management and efficiency priorities (Neff & Citrin 2005). Leadership transitions are one of the most challenging processes that leaders face in their careers (Terblanche, Albertyn & Van Coller-Peter 2017), if not the most challenging, according to the vast majority (87 per cent) of HR professionals (Watkins 2009). Leadership transitions are rated second in stress and anxiety to a divorce (Sparrow 2007) and are rated only marginally higher than the onset of health issues (Paese & Mitchell 2007).

Transitioning to a new leadership role provides one of the greatest environment changes that a leader can experience at a time when they are most vulnerable (Gabarro 2007). Conger and Fishel (2007) argue that new leaders face an interesting paradox during the transition period: greater role complexity, visibility and accountability with limited support for learning and coaching. As a result of increased scrutiny, responsibility, ambiguity and political complexity (Zaccaro 2001), many leaders promoted to senior positions underperform (Sutton 2008), or they fail to meet their objectives (Martin 2015). Based on performance expectations, leadership transitions are pivotal times that increases

leader vulnerability due to a lack of detailed knowledge of their new role or the working relationships necessary to be effective (Bawany 2012).

The success rate of leadership transitions is low, with 40 per cent failing in the first 18 months (Watkins 2003), 46 per cent considered to have underperformed overall (Sutton 2008) and less than a third successfully complete their objectives (Martin 2015). The difficulty of leadership transitions is highlighted in a 2004 study by the Emerge Group, that found that only 25 per cent of executives were perceived as being fully transitioned and performing in their roles to expectations. The remainder were either still acting as individual contributors or lower-level managers, or they were considered in mid-transition. The Emerge Group repeated the study in 2008 and the numbers of leaders perceived as fully transitioned had decreased to 16 per cent (Emerge Group Study 2008 cited in Freedman 2011, p. 144). Challenger, Gray and Christmas (2009) suggested that the increased attention and accountability that leaders experience during a transition leads many to fail, resulting in high leader turnover. Many organisations share the belief that it is sufficient and sometimes necessary to let the new leader 'sink or swim' in their new role (Watkins 2017; Bauer & Erdogan 2011; Levin 2010; Conger & Fulmer 2003; Freedman 1998). This approach results in the leader being left alone and potentially reluctant to ask for assistance, in the fear that it is construed as deficiency or inadequacy (Korte & DiVittis 2010; Freedman 2005). This deliberate lack of support leaves leaders to struggle and potentially fail in their new roles.

### **Executive Derailment**

When a leader is unsuccessful in their role, it is often referred to as executive derailment. In reviewing the literature on derailment, DeVries & Kaiser (2003) found that approximately 50 per cent of leader selection decisions resulted in failure, that approximately one-third of leaders derail before they achieve their expected levels of success and that most derailments occur after the leaders make a key leadership transition. This is consistent with the argument that derailments occur when the leader transitions to a more senior role (Martin & Gentry 2011; Watkins 2003; Kovach 1986) and that it is most common when moving from middle management or functional roles to the executive levels (Freedman 2011; Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2010; Bottger & Barsoux 2009; Hollander 1991). In the first published study on derailment by McCall and Lombardo (1983), the failure to transition successfully into a new role was identified as the strongest

predictor of executive derailment. They claimed that the reasons why executives derail are connected to the changes that they experience as they ascend the hierarchy within organisations (McCall & Lombardo 1983).

The causes of derailment are typically closely related (Van Veslor & Leslie 1995) and leaders often derail due to failing to adjust at critical career transition points (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011; Kaiser & Craig 2004), or as a result of errors they make during the first 100 days in the new role (Bradt, Check & Pedraza 2006; Watkins 2003). Watkins (2013) claimed that the cause of leaders' derailment is almost always linked to issues and negative cycles that the leader develops during their transition to a new role. McCall and Lombardo (1983) defined derailed executives as successful leaders who reached high levels in organisations, but who fell short of their full potential and whose restricted career progression was not voluntary. Derailment research has identified consistent themes, including the inability to build and lead a team, the failure to achieve business objectives, issues with personal relationships, an inability to adapt to change, having a narrow functional orientation and failing to think strategically (Kahn 2014, Martin & Gentry 2011; Van Veslor & Leslie 1995; McCall & Lombardo 1983). Watkins (2013) suggested that, in addition to the leaders who fail outright, there are many who manage to survive their transition, but who fail to reach their full potential. For many authors, the relationship between failed leadership transitions and executive derailment is firmly causal, not correlational.

### **Costs of Transition Failure**

A leader failing in transition has a significant cost in two principal areas: the organisation and the leader. Observed consequences of leadership failure for an organisation include poor staff morale, low levels of productivity and damage to the organisations' reputation (Inyang 2013). Conger and Fishel (2007) claimed that the cost of leadership failure can be significant both in the direct costs or severance, recruitment and training and in the indirect costs, such as damage to business reputation, loss of corporate intelligence, damaged staff morale and confidence. After failure, the new organisation will need to undertake the transition period with the replacement leader, exposing itself to that period of low productivity and costs again (Conger & Fishel 2007). The actual costs of these failures have been estimated at 20 times an executive's salary for both direct and indirect costs (Gentry, Mondore & Cox 2006), 24 times the executive's base salary (Levin 2010;

Bradt, Check & Pedraza 2006), 100–150 per cent of the salary (Somaya & Williamson 2008), 200–250 per cent of the salary (Gierden 2007) and as high as US\$2.7 million at the executive level (Bossert 2005). The search costs alone to recruit a new executive can range from 30–40 per cent of the executives' salary (Van Vark 2006).

Leadership turnover affects financial costs for the entire organisation, including staff, peers, senior management and even the customer, as well as unexpected costs to recruit again and career interruptions (Downey 2002). The turnover often negatively affects morale across the organisation and the institutional confidence from external stakeholders (Ross et al. 2014). Research indicates that replacing a CEO can trigger turnover with leaders below the CEO of up to 22 per cent when the new CEO is external and 33 per cent when the CEO is promoted from within the organisation (Gierden 2007). Watkins (2003) reported that a new leader's introduction at the middle-manager level generally has a negative performance effect on an average of 12.4 people—an effect he labelled as the 'impact network' of a transition leader.

For the leader, a failed transition can result in long-lasting career damage (Downey 2002). Failing early or having a poor start can be costly personally for the leader, as it can damage their reputation or stall their career and leave them disappointed, frustrated and lacking confidence in their abilities (Inyang 2013; Gabarro 2007; Kates & Downey 2005). The costs to the organisation and the leader are considerable across multiple areas when a leadership transition is unsuccessful (Watkins 2013).

### **Measuring Transition Success**

A component of the research question in this thesis relates to how organisations and leaders measure successful transition. The literature supports the importance and risks of leadership transitions and many factors are offered that support or restrict a leader's ability to successfully transition to a new or higher role. There must be some measurement of transition to identify the factors that support or restrict performance, upon which the effect of these factors can be assessed. Unfortunately, the existing literature is unsophisticated in the area of measurement tools or frameworks. Few organisations comprehend the need to measure a leader's transition as separate to the general key performance indicators in the executives' job description.

A study of Bank of America's onboarding program by Conger & Fishel (2007) measured transition success through the reduction in time to break-even productivity, onboarded leaders being promoted internally, reduced executive turnover rates and reducing the costs associated with leadership failures. These success measures are consistently mentioned across the literature (Bond & Naughton 2011; Dai, de Meuse & Gaeddert 2011; Gierden 2007) and suggest a benefit to establishing metrics in areas such as time to productivity, turnover, cultural fit and reputation effect on brand and engagement (Grillo & Kim 2015). Taking a less tangible measure for determining the overall success of a leader's transition, Gabarro (1987) claimed that the most prominent difference between a failed transition and a successful one was the quality of a new leader's working relationships at the end of his or her first year. Due to risks, challenges and low levels of success involved in transitioning into a new leadership role, establishing separate tangible and intangible measures to assess success is a concept that organisations may benefit from exploring.

The discussion regarding measures of transition performance, other than speed (to productivity) and retention, is limited across the literature. Of the little discussion that has occurred, much of it has been associated with planned interventions, most notably executive onboarding programs. This literature will be discussed in the next section, along with two other related organisational approaches to transition: organisational socialisation, and coaching and mentoring support.

### **Leadership Transition Interventions**

In addition to the factors that contribute to leadership transition success and failure, three interventions designed to reduce the likelihood of transition failure or executive derailment are discussed in the literature: executive onboarding, organisational socialisation, coaching and mentoring.

#### *Executive Onboarding*

Executive onboarding is an organisation-driven initiative to foster success for externally recruited leaders. It is a process designed to help leaders learn the behaviours, skills and knowledge necessary for succeeding in their new organisation (Bauer & Erdogan 2011; Bond & Naughton 2011) and it acts as an insurance policy against executive derailment for the organisation (Gierden 2007). According to Moore (2008), executive onboarding

should be a distinct process to general employee onboarding. Kumar and Pandey (2017) agreed that onboarding is unlike traditional induction or orientation, as it extends well beyond the first day or first week, it has the objective to develop a long-term relationship between the leader and the organisation and it confirms a right hiring decision. Onboarding programs are designed to address leaders' critical areas of weaknesses, to align their leadership styles with the culture of the business, to help develop effective relationships and to optimise the most desirable skills for their new role (Gierden 2007). The process often commences prior to the new leader arriving (Dutton 2010) and generally lasts 3–6 months (Dai, De Meuse & Gaeddert 2011; Dai & De Meuse 2007), although it is recommended that truly effective programs last up to 18 months and that they be a series of interventions instead of a single event at the start of the role (Conger & Fishel 2007).

Many consider that an effective executive onboarding program is an essential component of an organisation's leadership development portfolio (Conger & Fishel 2007; Johnson 2007). A strategic approach to executive onboarding is to focus on accelerating the leaders' achievement and performance instead of just working to prevent derailment (Ndunguru 2012). Onboarding has been described as the conduit between the new leaders' potential and their achievement of actual results or productivity (Snell 2006). Ross et al. (2014) explained onboarding as a process encompassing assimilation functions, including forming relationships, clarifying performance goals and metrics, developing leadership skills and providing feedback for the leader and organisation. Korte and DiVittis (2010) described onboarding as assisting leaders to become productive members of an organisation by providing resources and support as part of a learning and integration process aiming to accelerate performance in the individual, team and organisation. Dutton (2010) argued that the purpose of onboarding is not to make great leaders, but to make great leaders for a particular organisation.

Onboarding programs in most organisations tend to be ineffective and have limited scope, as many are simple orientation programs (Conger & Fishel 2007). Dutton (2010) contended that these programs should be conducted at a higher level than orientation and should be separate to coaching. A study by Korn Ferry found that only 30 per cent of senior executives thought their employers onboarding process was satisfactory (Pomeroy 2006) and another study of senior managers to CEOs found that just 39 per cent were

satisfied with how they were integrated into the organisation (Wells 2005). Onboarding can have a significant effect on a leader's success in a new role (Bauer 2010) and the absence of an onboarding program can often result in complete failure (Gladis & Gladis 2014). Research by Boston Consulting Group demonstrates that organisations who had an effective onboarding program have 2.5 times more revenue growth and a 1.9 times greater profit margin than those without an onboarding process (Strack et al. 2012). A study at Texas Instruments revealed the positive effects of a formal onboarding process, reporting that new leaders who experienced the full program achieved full productivity two months faster than those who did not (Ganzel 1998; Ross et al. 2014). This suggests that onboarding is an effective process for helping leaders perform successfully in the early period of their new roles.

An executive onboarding program can have multiple super and subordinate goals. These include increasing a leader's understanding of the role demands (Conger & Fishel 2007), avoiding opportunities for the leader to make mistakes (Gierden 2007) and decreasing time to productivity (De Meuse, Dai & Hallenbeck 2010; Watkins 2008). It might also include reducing the chances of derailment (Dai, de Meuse & Gaeddert 2011; Conger & Fishel 2007), mitigating the risks of terminations and the resulting costs of replacement (Ndunguru 2012) and ensuring integration and socialisation for the new leader (Conger & Fishel 2007; Korte & DiVittis 2010). Onboarding also assists leaders to form alliances with their teams (Gierden 2007), it helps the leader develop a sense of belonging (Downey, March & Berkman 2001) and it provides the leader with support and feedback during the transition period (Conger & Fishel 2007). Onboarded leaders develop a network of essential relationships and clarified performance expectations (Conger & Fishel 2007), they assimilate into the organisation more effectively (Bradt 2010) and they feel more connected with the company (James 2015). A well-executed onboarding program can even improve brand loyalty with the employees who leave (Steer 2013). More than just the completion of paperwork, a formal onboarding process ensures a new leader's assimilation to the organisation and its benefits, expectations, goals and rules (Kumar & Pandey 2017; Bradt 2010). It is a process that entails the acquisition, accommodation, assimilation and acceleration of new leaders into the business and culture (Ndunguru 2012; Stimpson 2009) and it should include a formal introduction to the business and key stakeholders, coaching, mentoring and a 360-degree feedback process (Gilmore & Turner 2010). Dai and de Meuse (2007, p. 2) argued that a successful

onboarding program's performance measures include the leaders' 'time to productivity' and their 'engagement and retention'. Successful onboarding aims to ensure that new leaders reach their optimal productivity quickly, through a process of networking, goal setting, learning, strategising and resource allocation (Bauer & Erdogan 2011).

While executive onboarding is a term typically reserved for leaders joining from outside the organisation, the process is more often referred to as inboarding when the leader has come from inside the organisation. Some authors advise that the requirements and process for inboarding should be similar to onboarding (Stimpson 2009). Kroh (2012) proposed that inboarding can address the potential neglect of internally promoted leaders by acknowledging that gaps in knowledge, skills and job understanding can exist; Kroh (2012) also proposed that inboarding can provide the necessary support, training and coaching to assist a successful internal transition.

#### *Organisational Socialisation*

An alternative term to onboarding used in the literature is organisational socialisation, which is explained as the process during which new leaders transition from being organisational outsiders to integrated members of an organisation (Bauer et al. 2007). According to Schein (1988), organisational socialisation is an indoctrination and training process in which the new leader learns the norms, values, required behaviours and what is important to the organisation. Downey (2002) suggested that the success of a leader in transition may hinge on how effectively the organisation manages the leader's socialisation process. The objective of socialisation is to create a sense of belonging for the leader by learning about the organisations' history, values and people and thus develop a collective organisational identity (Van Maanen & Schein 1979). The intention and process of socialisation is similar to onboarding.

#### *Coaching and Mentoring*

Remedies advocated for avoiding leadership derailment as a result of transitioning into a new role include executive coaching and mentoring (Inyang 2013; Reynolds 2011; Witherspoon & Cannon 2004); these are ideally provided by executive coaches who are familiar with the dynamics of ascending transitions and by mentors who have completed a similar transition within the same organisation (Kaiser et al. 2011; Gilmore & Turner 2010). Gray (2006) found that senior leaders benefited greatly from confidential



conversations with third parties that coaches and mentors offered. Transition coaching, a relatively new specialisation of executive coaching, is being increasingly used to support leaders in transition (Sutton 2008). Transition coaching assists leaders to identify and understand key issues that they will encounter during the transition (Terblanche, Albertyn & Van Coller-Peter 2017); it also improves leadership effectiveness through enhanced self-awareness and the practicing of new behaviours (Kombarakaran et al. 2008) and it enables leaders to act appropriately at different stages of transition to facilitate success (Korte & DiVittis 2010). Bossert (2005) claimed that transition coaching engages leaders in culture and strategy with the intention to accelerate productivity. It consequently has a positive economic effect, with a considerable return on investment. However, Bachkirova, Spence and Drake (2016) suggested that there has been limited empirical research into the potential of transition coaching to support a career transition.

Terblanche (2018) created a novel approach to transition coaching called transformative transition coaching (TTC), which facilitates transformative learning as part of the coaching process to assist the leader in transition to identify and transform problematic perspectives. A recent subset of transition coaching is maternity coaching, which is designed to support leaders returning to work from maternity leave (Moffett 2018). Maternity coaching, as part of the general support for women returning from maternity leave, is considered key to retaining women in the workplace (Millward 2006). Maternity coaching is starting to change or extend to include paternity coaching. This reflects the growing policy of many organisations to offer both men and women leave due to the birth of a child (Beacom, Cotton & Ellis 2016).

As an alternative to coaching, mentoring has also been linked to assisting leaders succeed in new roles, especially in terms of understanding the culture and politics (Allen, Eby & Lentz 2006). Mentors or organisational insiders can answer questions that leaders might be uncomfortable asking their team or direct managers (Bauer & Erdogan 2011). Research has shown that leaders with mentors had a greater knowledge of the organisation than those without mentors (Ostroff & Kozlowski 1993) and they are more likely to have grasped the key values of the culture with the help of a mentor (Chatman 1991).

## Existing Research

An extensive literature review of domestic and international sources was completed as part of this thesis. The primary search terms and topic areas were leadership transition(s), executive/leader transition(s), role transition(s), leadership pipeline, executive onboarding, leader onboarding, organisational socialisation, newcomer adjustment, leader/executive induction and leader/executive orientation, and executive/leader derailment. The University of Wollongong (UOW) electronic library was used to identify articles and resources across several databases, which were then searched separately. Databases included Scopus, Web of Science, Emerald, Proquest Central and Business Source Complete. Google Advanced Search and Google Scholar were also used for the same search terms. The relevant titles found were classified and sorted according to established inclusion criteria.

From over 180 citations consisting of articles, commentaries, books and interviews, only 11 research-based articles were identified and of these only 6 were researching leadership transitions specifically. Other research topics include executive derailment, organisational socialisation, onboarding, leadership pipeline and leader assimilation. Most of the material in this area comprises commentaries, discussions of models and non-academic material. Whilst this chapter reviews literature surrounding leadership transitions - the majority of which is non-research based, practitioner opinions, experiences and commentaries - Table 2.2 below outlines the evidence-based research on leadership transitions, the type of study and sample size, the research contribution and the relevance / limitation to this research project. Whilst there are not studies that exclusively explore the promoters and inhibitors of transition success, many of the studies make contributions towards the list of factors discussed later in the literature review.

Table 2.2: Leadership Transition Research

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Limitation
Terblanche, Albertyn & van Collier-Peter (2018)  <i>Developing leaders by supporting their transitions into senior positions</i>	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews) (n = 16)	Explored challenges faced by newly promoted senior leaders to support the design of support strategies for leaders and organisations.	<u>Relevance</u> - the qualitative findings suggest that leadership transitions present unexpected challenges on a personal and systemic level to such individuals and that they do not receive adequate support from their organisations.

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Limitation
			<u>Limitation</u> - the definition of transition for the study was limited to internal promotions only
Terblanche, Albertyn & van Collier-Peter (2018)  <i>Using transformative transition coaching to support leaders during career transitions</i>	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews) (n = 16)  *Same original study as above	Discussed application of the created Transformative Transition Coaching (TTC) framework and the ability for it to help facilitate lasting changes in the perspectives of transitioning leaders via coaching.	<u>Relevance</u> – discussed leadership transition theory, explores than different challenges leaders in transition face as they are promoted.  <u>Limitation</u> - the definition of transition for the study was limited to internal promotions only and this paper focused on the influence of coaching as an intervention
Terblanche, Albertyn & van Collier-Peter (2017)  <i>Designing a coaching intervention to support leaders promoted into senior positions</i>	Qualitative (semi-structured interviews) (n = 16)  *Same original study as above	A review of coaching as it can be applied to leadership transitions and the design of a transition coaching framework	<u>Relevance</u> - discussing the aspects of leadership transitions and a key intervention to prevent failure.  <u>Limitation</u> - the definition of transition for the study was limited to internal promotions only
Mallaby, Price, & Hofmeyr, K. (2017).  <i>The transition to general management in South Africa</i>	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews (n = 19)	Specifically explored the transition to general manager, they found that to successfully make the transition managers in functional roles need to develop appropriate skills, attitudes and personal characteristics ideally via the relevant experience in preparation for the broader scope of a general management role.	<u>Relevance</u> - one of the questions explores what facilitated and hindered the participants growth into the general manager role.  <u>Limitation</u> - it only explored one stage in the leadership pipeline whereas this study will look across all levels
Gill (2017)  <i>What is the perceived contribution of coaching to leaders transitioning to more senior roles in the NHS (National Health Service)?</i>	Quantitative (Case Study)	Coaching is perceived by leaders to be a valuable intervention helping leaders cope with the challenges associated with moving to a more senior role	<u>Relevance</u> – discussion about the challenge’s leaders in transition face plus the confirmation of the positive influence coaching has on leadership transitions.

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Limitation
		and to develop the capabilities required to successfully make an upward transition	<u>Limitation</u> – study limited to the medical industry
Mandershied & Harrower (2016)  <i>'A qualitative study of leader transitions and polarities'</i>	Qualitative Semi-structure interviews N=10	Explored leadership transitions and polarity as a specific challenge for leaders in transition. Found that despite the importance of the transition period that support is scarce	<u>Relevance</u> – researched leadership transitions and identifies five areas that challenge leaders during the transition  <u>Limitation</u> – explored transitions specifically around the predetermined five polarities, essential decisions or choices that leaders face during the transition
Levin (2010)  <i>New Leader assimilation process. Accelerating new role related transitions</i>	Qualitative Action Research	Conducted an intervention designed to accelerate transition and assimilation into a new leadership role	<u>Relevance</u> – the intervention highlighted promoters and inhibitors to successful assimilation which is a component of transition  <u>Limitation</u> – focus is on leaders recruited externally only and does not discuss any challenges to internally promoted leaders
Lam et al (2010)  <i>Does proactive personality matter in leadership transitions? Effects of proactive personality on new leader identification and responses to new leaders and their change agendas</i>	Quantitative Survey (n-206)	New leaders who are more proactive and change orientated have a more effective transition with less disruption and a greater chance of succeeding with their change agenda	<u>Relevance</u> – explored the challenge leaders in transition face with new teams  <u>Limitation</u> – examined leadership transitions solely through the lens of the leaders' personality and its impact on the leaders' team
Isopahkala-Bouret (2008)  <i>Transformative learning in managerial role transitions</i>	Qualitative Discursive interviews, self-assessments, group discussions (n=9)	Transformative learning during work role transitions does not lead to a more inclusive and reflective perspective but brings the adoption of a dominant perspective.	<u>Relevance</u> – explored the learning challenges involved in role transitions and tested these against transformative learning  <u>Limitation</u> – limited study to specific learning approach using transitions as a trigger to create the need for learning, also examined only one level of transition from individual contributor to leader

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Limitation
Bebb (2009) <i>The Structure of Role Transition- A Phenomenological Study of Successful Executives from Five Countries</i>	Qualitative Phenomenological Case Study (n = 14)	The importance of learning, agility, change readiness and adaptability. Argument for the grouping of leadership transition challenges into cognitive, behavioural, relational and role perspective changes	<u>Relevance</u> – discussion and labelling of the challenge’s leaders face when undergoing an upward transition  <u>Limitation</u> – explored one passage of the leadership pipeline, from leader of leaders to functional leader
Bradford (1995) <i>Role change- are you wasting talent?</i>	Quantitative Mixed-Methods Survey (n = 149) Phone Interview (n = 32)	In addition to effective recruitment and role matching, structured programs including coaching to support role changes drive transition success	<u>Relevance</u> – identified several factors that promote transition success which include communication, listening skills, lack of strategic thinking and lack of proactivity  <u>Limitation</u> – research is a consultancy white paper and was not peer reviewed

As can be seen in Table 2.2, the body of evidence-based research on leadership transitions is small and sparse in terms of years and focus areas. The majority of studies concentrate on one or two aspects of a leadership transition instead of a broader approach to the overall success or failure of the transition. The first three papers, while they cover three areas, all eminent from the same research project / thesis. That reduces the number of evidence-based studies in leadership transitions to nine. None of the studies address leadership transitions in terms of all the factors that influence success, positive and negative, nor do they explore at all levels of leadership transition.

A related area of research is executive derailment where many of the researchers identify a failed leadership transition as a precursor of executive derailment. Table 2.3 below lists the research on executive derailment that is heavily connected to leadership transitions and makes a contribution towards this study.

Table 2.3: Executive Derailment Research

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Limitations
Tang, Dai, & De Meuse (2013)	Quantitative Survey (n = 563)	Examined the assessment of negative leadership characteristics in 360-degree feedback	<u>Relevance</u> - it identifies derailers that affect leaders in transition and makes the connection between these

<b>Author / Title</b>	<b>Type of Study</b>	<b>Contribution</b>	<b>Relevance / Limitations</b>
<i>Assessing Leadership Derailment Factors in 360 Degree Feedback</i>		surveys and explored the derailment factors on leader effectiveness in leadership hierarchy transitions	derailers and executive derailment  <u>Limitation</u> – sourced data was historical, and the time period or derailment was not recorded so unable to directly link the impact or timing of the derailer to the transition period.
Gentry & Shanock (2008)  <i>Views of Managerial Derailment from Above and Below- The Importance of a Good Relationship with Upper Management and Putting People at Ease</i>	Quantitative Survey (n = 1978)	Effectiveness of managers' relationships and links to behaviours and characteristics that may lead to potential derailment	<u>Relevance</u> - discussion and assessment of the relationship's managers develop and possess as a precursor to derailment.  <u>Limitation</u> – discusses relationship in general and not their specific impact during the transition period
Gentry, Mondore & Cox (2006)  <i>A study of managerial derailment characteristics and personality preferences</i>	Quantitative Survey (n = 6124)	Argued that the chances of managerial derailment decrease through examining job fit & increasing self-awareness	<u>Relevance</u> – identifies factors that promote transition success  <u>Limitation</u> - this study examines managerial derailment in general and not specifically as a result of a transition.
Shipper & Dillard Jr (2000)  <i>A study of impending derailment and recovery of middle managers across career stages</i>	Quantitative Structure Survey (n = 1035)	Managers who derail generally overestimate their skills in comparison to successful managers at all career stages. Derailment can be avoided or recovered by developing both self-awareness and specific managerial skills	<u>Relevance</u> – identifies self-awareness and managerial skills as key determinants of derailment.  <u>Limitation</u> – does this across managers at all stages in their tenure with very limited mentions of the transition period or its specific effects on derailment.
Lombardo, Ruderman & McCauley (1988)  <i>Explanations of success &amp; derailment in upper-level management positions</i>	Quantitative Survey (n = 169)	Explored the difference in skills between managers who derail and those who succeed	<u>Relevance</u> – identifies the trigger for derailment in most cases as a transition  <u>Limitation</u> – explores factors that derail not specifically related to the transition

The common link in the research into executive derailment, is the identification of the transition as the trigger for derailment due to the change's leaders are required to make at their new leadership level. These required areas of change, when not successfully made by the leader, form the areas where derailment occurs. These areas of change are

essentially inhibitors in the context of this study – factors that the researchers believe lead to transition failure or derailment.

Another linked area of research is in the interventions previously mentioned in this chapter designed to mitigate the risks of transition failure and executive derailment as a result of a transition. One of the discussed interventions where relevant research exists is organisational socialisation, which is the process that people joining a new organisation undergo to integrate or assimilate to the culture. Much of the research in this area explores organisational socialisation at all employee levels however some explores it at the leader or manager level, which is more relevant to this study. Table 2.4 below outlines the research conducted in the area of organisational socialisation with relevance to the factors influencing transition success.

Table 2.4: Research on Organisational Socialisation

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Comments
Lapitor, Vanderberghe & Boudrias (2014)  <i>Organizational socialization tactics and newcomer adjustment- The mediating role of role clarity and affect-based trust relationships</i>	Quantitative Survey (n = 224)	Highlighted the importance of role clarity and trusting relationships with the supervisor and co-workers, organisational socialisation tactics & newcomer adjustment outcomes.	<u>Relevance</u> – explored and discussed the challenges external leaders face when joining a new organisation.  <u>Limitation</u> - it is only examining externally recruited leaders and not internally promoted ones
Cooper-Thomas, Anderson & Cash (2012)  <i>Investigating organizational socialization- a fresh look at newcomer adjustment strategies</i>	Qualitative Semi-structured interviews (n = 86)	Outlined and discussed strategies that experienced newcomers reported employing to help adjustment to a new organisation	<u>Relevance</u> – discussed strategic externally recruited employees use to integrate to a new organisational culture  <u>Limitation</u> - explores employees at all levels and not just leaders, therefore some of the findings may not be applicable
Korte & DiVittis (2010)  <i>Leader socialization in organizations- The importance of making connections for leadership performance</i> [Working Paper]	Qualitative Case Study (n = 18)	Importance of support from members of the management team and the importance of building high-quality relationships in organisations	<u>Relevance</u> - linking effective relationships and support to a successful transition  <u>Limitation</u> – focuses on externally recruited leaders only
Manderscheid & Ardichvili (2008b)	Quantitative (Case Study)	Supporting evidence for the importance and effectiveness of leader	<u>Relevance</u> – tests intervention to support and accelerate transition

Author / Title	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Comments
<i>New leader assimilation: process and outcomes</i>		assimilations in helping new leaders learn, adapt quickly and build relationships with their teams early in their transition	success plus review the literature over the last 20 years  <u>Limitation</u> – limited case study and externally recruited leaders only

Organisational socialisation is a response to the challenges faced when people join a new organisation and focuses on the social and relational areas of a transition. Recommended or suggested specific interventions under an organisational socialisation program could be considered as either promoters (through presence) or inhibitors (through absence) of transition success. As such its relevance is limited to these two areas, while important, do not address the broader challenges of leadership transitions.

There are three more studies where factors affecting leadership transition success were also identified in research on leadership pipelines and passages, executive onboarding and leadership levels within organisations. Table 2.5 below outlines the studies in these areas which are relevant to this study.

Table 2.5: Research Other (Onboarding, Leadership Levels)

Author	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Comments
Kaiser & Craig (2011)  <i>Do the Behaviors Related to Managerial Effectiveness Really Change with Organizational Level? An Empirical Test</i>	Quantitative Survey (n = 2175)	Determines that there are different skill requirements of managerial jobs at different organisational levels	<u>Relevance</u> – supports the view that as leaders move higher in an organisation they are required to change, adapt or add new skills to be successful  <u>Limitation</u> – does not explore how leaders negotiate the change in skills required to be successful especially in the transition period
Conger & Fishel (2007)  <i>Accelerating leadership performance at the top- Lessons from the Bank of America's executive onboarding process</i>	Qualitative (Case Study)	Effective executive onboarding improves successful leadership transition	<u>Relevance</u> – argues for the successful intervention of onboarding programs for leadership transitions, discussed measuring transition success  <u>Limitation</u> – limited to one case study, Bank of America. Also focuses on externally recruited leaders only



Author	Type of Study	Contribution	Relevance / Comments
Conger & Fulmer (2003) <i>Developing Your Leadership Pipeline</i>	Mixed-Methods (Case Study)	Succession management is a key aspect of a strong leadership pipeline	<u>Relevance</u> – discussion about the leadership pipeline as an important concept for organisations  <u>Limitation</u> – article explores on leader succession which is primarily interest in preparing leaders for promotion and not on the transition post promotion, not peer reviewed

Whilst these three studies explore areas that are adjacent to leadership transitions, they do contribute to the study in identifying aspects or conditions that influence a leaders' transition. Finally, among the peer-reviewed articles are three literature reviews and one meta-analysis that discusses leadership transition performance and success. Only the study completed by Manderscheid and Freeman (2012) is based on leadership transitions, with the others exploring the literature on derailment, leadership pipeline or levels and organisational socialisation (see Table 2.6 below). Manderscheid and Freeman (2012) review the literature on leadership transitions through the lens of the polarities, paradoxes and dilemmas found in organisations, which they describe as repetitive struggles that leaders in transition encounter.

Table 2.6: Published Reviews with Relevance to Leadership Transitions

Author	Focus of Review	Contribution / Relevance
Inyang (2013) <i>Exploring the Concept of Leadership Derailment: Defining New Research Agenda</i>	Leadership Derailment	Leadership derailment, a situation of leadership failure or career derailment is under-researched. Leadership derailment, which occurs due to a disconnect between the leader's skills and competencies and the new role responsibilities, has severe consequences on leaders, employees and organisations, as well as the larger social system.
Manderscheid & Freeman, (2012) <i>Managing polarity, paradox, and dilemma during leader transition</i>	Leadership Transitions	Literature on leader transitions argues that transitions are times of uncertainty, stress and anxiety. This article suggests that some of the uncertainty and stress could result from the inability to recognise and manage polarity, paradox and dilemma.
Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser (2010)	Executive & Manager Derailment	The academic literature on leadership leads to few useful generalisations about the distinguishing characteristics of good leaders. Research on the

Author	Focus of Review	Contribution / Relevance
<i>Management Derailment</i>		characteristics of bad leaders converges adequately. The data are quite clear that there are a large number of bad managers in the private and public sector and if organisations observe the principles of good management, including how they manage their managers, then they are more profitable.
Bauer et al (2007) <i>Newcomer Adjustment During Organizational Socialization: A Meta-Analytic Review of Antecedents, Outcomes, and Methods</i> [Meta-Analytic Review]	Organisational Socialisation	Role clarity, self-efficacy and social acceptance mediate the relationship between newcomer information-seeking, organisational socialisation tactics and socialisation outcomes, including newcomer performance, work attitudes and turnover.

The existing research into leadership transitions is scarce and the concepts studied are predominately researcher generated. While there are commonalities in the factors that researchers and practitioners believe influence the success of leadership transitions, no studies were found that explored transition related questions using leader-focused designs. It is expected that many of the same factors, concepts and themes that are described in the literature will also emerge in this study, however the goal is to test if that is the case and focus on what the participants feel promote and inhibit, without attempting to confirm or deny a prescribed list.

## What Contributes to Transition Success or Failure?

The focus for this research is to identify the factors that influence leadership transition success and numerous suggestions across the literature are made on how leaders and organisations could or should improve the leadership transition process. Whilst the theoretical and empirical literature is underdeveloped, it is noted that authors in related fields have identified a range of factors that appear to contribute to transition success or failure. In order to understand the profile of this literature, a review of peer-reviewed and practitioner generated publications was conducted and coded using NVivo. The factors were grouped into three broad categories for review; leader based factors, organisational based factors and change based factors. Table 2.7 below list the factors within the suggested grouping and explains the rationale for the broad categories

Table 2.7: Themes by Area of Challenge

Grouping	Rationale	Theme
<b>Leader Based Factors</b>	Factors that were related to the leader themselves in terms of past experience, capabilities, competencies or individual challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Functional Experience</li> <li>• Overconfidence</li> <li>• Learning Agility</li> <li>• Behavioural Limitations,</li> <li>• Industry &amp; Past Experience</li> <li>• Transition Plans</li> <li>• Transferrable or Transportable Skills</li> </ul>
<b>Organisational Based Factors</b>	Factors that were related to the organisation or role that the leader was undertaking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Situation</li> <li>• Honeymoon Period</li> <li>• Clarity, Complexity and Expectations</li> <li>• Impact of the Team</li> <li>• Lack of Support</li> <li>• External vs Internal</li> </ul>
<b>Change Based Factor</b> (Cognitive, psychological, interpersonal, behavioural, relational & role specific)	Factors related to the change, adjustment or an area of learning that the leader would need to make in order to successfully transition into the new role.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time Horizon</li> <li>• Strategic Understanding</li> <li>• Cultural Understanding,</li> <li>• Letting Go,</li> <li>• Relationship Building</li> </ul>

### Leader Based Factors

Amongst the literature a group of factors that influence transition success emerged that were leader based in their presence or application.

#### *Overconfidence*

Leaders can derail due to misplaced self-confidence created by years of management experience and success. According to Dai and De Meuse (2007), new leaders derail because they are overconfident in terms of their experience or skills. Others have argued that executives who derail tend to overrate themselves (Dunning 2006) and are often less self-aware (Lombardo & Eichinger 2006). Promotions can also contribute to derailment if the promotion process leads to a high confidence in leaders' own abilities and it discourages them from seeking feedback and support early in their new role (Conger & Fishel 2007). Overconfidence can be a leader's weakness at any stage of their career, which creates the opportunity for errors in judgment, decisions and actions. When the leader is new to a role, these mistakes can adversely damage their credibility and derail their transition.

### *Functional Experience*

Limited functional experience is another potential derailing contributor when leaders ascend to general management or to the CEO level from within a specific functional area. Leaders in general management roles can struggle in situations in which they have had no experience, or they may undervalue other functions that are now their responsibility (Kates & Downey 2005). When a leader with limited functional experience starts to struggle, they will often revert to what they are most comfortable with, focusing on the function they know well and ignoring the other functions (Watkins 2013). In a study on the transition to general management, Mallaby, Price and Hofmeyr (2017) found that gaining relevant experience outside of the leader's primary function was essential to making the successful transition to a general management role. Gabarro (2007) suggested that a leader's functional experience is the most powerful indicator influencing the changes a new leader will make and it is an indicator of how competently they will accomplish these changes. The move to general manager or CEO is rendered particularly challenging due to its breadth of functional responsibility and accountability, which presents potential risks for the leader if they lack understanding of the different functions or if they favour a particular function.

### *Behavioural Limitations*

Different leadership behaviours may influence success during transition. Research suggests that there are five behavioural weaknesses that may lead to potential leader derailment, including problems with interpersonal relationships, difficulties in leading a team, difficulty in adapting to change, failing to meet business expectations and having a narrow functional orientation (Gentry & Shanock 2008; Leslie & Van Velsor 1996; Lombardo, Ruderman & McCauley 1988). Conversely, Ashforth and Saks (1996) contended that certain personality traits and characteristics can help a leader quickly adjust to an organisation. Executive failure might rely less on lacking 'the right stuff' and rely more on having 'the wrong stuff' with characteristics that are dysfunctional and associated with failure (Lombardo, Ruderman & McCauley 1988, p. 200). Tang, Dai and De Meuse (2013), claiming an emerging consensus between scholars, noted two distinct ways that a leader can fail: due to leadership incompetence, or lacking the positive successful characteristics, and by possessing certain undesirable or negative

characteristics that lead to failure. The behavioural traits and personality of the incoming leader will influence the perceived success of their transition.

### *Industry and Past Experience*

Having relevant industry experience has a positive effect in terms of performance in a new leadership role (Groysberg, McLean & Nohria 2006), and those industry insiders tend to perform much faster than leaders without industry experience (Gabarro 2007). The challenge of being an industry outsider is recognised at both the company and industry level. A short decline is believed to occur in a leader's performance when he or she switches companies within the same industry while he or she develops an understanding of the new company's culture however, when leaders enter a new industry, it often results in a steep learning curve and the decline in performance lasts for a considerably longer period of time (Groysberg, McLean & Nohria 2006).

When leaders join a new organisation, they are often entering a complex environment and, though they may have available levers for change, they lack a deep understanding of how the organisation works and they are vulnerable to making errors (Denis, Langley & Pinealt 2000). If the leader is experienced or has spent several years in leadership roles, derailment can also occur due to high performance expectations, resulting in little developmental feedback from the organisation (Conger & Fishel 2007). Downey (2002) argued that senior-level leaders find the assimilation process more difficult due to their higher level of experience, leading to more prejudices, formed opinions and the use of existing frameworks. Due to their reputation and expectations of success, it can be more difficult for leaders to acknowledge the disappointment and disorientation that they experience during a transition. Leaders assuming roles in a new organisation are more at risk of derailment because of the increased challenges associated with learning the organisation, in addition to the role. This risk further increases if it is also a new industry for the leader.

### *Learning Agility*

Leaders in new roles often undertake steep learning curves, both organisationally and personally, during their transition across many areas. Many authors argue that the leaders' ability to learn is a key indicator of success (Kaiser & Craig 2011; Plakhotnik et al. 2011; Watkins 2003; Petrock 1990) and failure can occur due to a lack of learning agility and

emotional intelligence (Eichinger, Dai & Tang 2009). Some leaders assuming new roles are challenged both technically and professionally, in light of their previous role and specialist expertise (Peltier 2010). Leaders who have a higher level of learning agility will be better positioned to manage the learning requirements of their new role.

#### *Transferable or Transportable Leadership Skills*

When organisations attract leaders from outside, both the organisation and the leader hope to leverage existing skills in the new role. Not all leadership skills are transportable or transferrable. The least transferrable skills are those that are company specific, such as leaders' working relationships with team members and their internal networks (Groysberg, McLean & Nohria 2006). The most transferrable skills are those relating to general management and technical or operating skills (Dai, De Meuse & Gaeddert 2011). Leaders who have strong company-specific skills may lack effectiveness due to losing the network and working relationships that they enjoyed in their former organisations (Dai, De Meuse & Gaeddert 2011). If the leader and the new organisation rely on demonstrated non-transferrable skills, they may find that the leader underperforms during the transition.

#### *Transition Plans*

The literature is consistent in the perception that a transition plan assists leaders to be successful in their transition (Bond & Naughton 2011; Bossert 2005; Johnson 2005). The length of the plan is generally advised to be 90 days (Ndunguru 2012; Butterfield 2008; Watkins 2003) or 100 days (Bradt, Check & Pedraza 2006). The plan can be created alone, with the leaders' manager or with a transition coach (Watkins 2003). Bossert (2005) recommended that all newly appointed leaders should utilise a transition plan that defines the decisive actions necessary to deliver long-term success during the transition. An effective transition plan acts as a blueprint capturing the transitions' strategy, including timeframes and milestones (Cristy 2009). Kaiser and Craig (2004) suggested that the likelihood of success is maximised when the potential problems and support mechanisms are identified in a formal transition plan. Using a transition plan assists leaders in identifying the critical actions that must occur to create the opportunity for the leader and team's long-term success (Bond & Naughton 2011). The literature suggests that leaders who use a plan to manage their transition have an increased likelihood of success.

## **Organisational Based Factors**

A second group of factors influencing transition success are associated with the organisation within which the leader is transitioning.

### *First Impressions*

There is a perception that how a leader performs during their first few months is a strong indication of how they will perform in the long term (Gabarro 2007; Card 1997). Bear, Benson-Armer and McLaughlin (2000) argued that if a leader is effective during their transition, they are likely to be more effective during the tenure of their role. A leader's first impressions can strongly influence how his or her working relationships form, both internally and externally (Gilmore 1988). These early impressions during their transition can outweigh their deeds (Ciampa & Watkins 1999), in part because the new leader often has no history and context to balance these early impressions (Downey 2002). A leader's early actions and decisions could potentially have a disproportionate influence on their long-term success.

### *New Leaders' Honeymoon Period*

The concept of the 'honeymoon period' for leaders in new roles is common in the literature and in the corporate world. The honeymoon period has been explained as the initial period in which any negative aspects of the new role are less apparent to the leader (Bauer & Erdogan 2011) and as a 'window of forgiveness', in which the organisation is gracious and allows a leader time to start producing results (McGregor 2007, p .1). The general consensus is that the honeymoon period ranges between one month (Kates & Downey 2005) and six months (Burdett 1991). Much of the commentary depicts the notion that, in today's fast-paced business environment, organisations can no longer afford to allow leaders a long honeymoon period; they instead require leaders to perform immediately and this increased pressure is felt by newly appointed leaders (O'Brien 2009; Van Vark 2006). The presence or absence of the honeymoon period will influence leaders' transition and their perceived success.

### *Clarity, Complexity and Expectations*

Leaders can fail in their transition due to an inability to manage the roles' substantial increase in scale and complexity (Conger & Fishel 2007; Dotlich, Noel & Walker 2004). Leaders in transition can face increased ambiguity (Denis, Langley & Pinealt 2000),

increased demands (Freedman 1998), increased stress and uncertainty (Manderscheid & Freeman 2012) and significant increases in the amount of information and data they are required to process (Kates & Downey 2005). Misaligned expectations or limited awareness of mutual expectations are highlighted as other areas that can negatively affect a leader's ability to succeed during the transition (Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008b; Watkins 2003; Burdett 1991; Gabarro 1987). Manderscheid and Harrower (2016) suggested that leaders in transition will also struggle with polarity, in which tension is created by two ideas or tendencies that are in opposition and that are not completely solvable. Clarity of expectations and scope of responsibilities are important in every leadership role during the entire tenure. However, the early period in a new role is when the understanding of these expectations, clarity and scope is the lowest, which leads to the greatest opportunity for failure.

### *Lack of Support*

Organisational support for leaders pre- and post-promotion or recruitment is rare (Freedman 2005; Watkins 2003), even though there is anecdotal evidence that transition coaching and effective onboarding programs can decrease the leaders' time to adjust and their failure rates (Witherspoon & Cannon 2004). Watkins (2017) claimed that less than one-third of senior leaders felt that they received any meaningful support throughout their transition period and more than 80 per cent of those leaders felt that support would have had a significant influence on their early success. Why an organisation would not support a new leader may be explained in part by the sink or swim mentality mentioned earlier, in which the business is consciously or subconsciously withholding support so that leaders are compelled to prove that they are ideal for the role. Another possible explanation is that the organisation may simply lack the resources and capabilities to specifically support a leader through their transition. A third potential explanation may be that the organisation does not comprehend the risks involved in a leadership transition. The notion that a transition is a difficult and challenging process is countered with the notion that senior leaders should be able to manage the process with limited support.

### *The Business Situation*

The business situation that the new leader faces has also been identified as an important influencer of their successful transition. Watkins (2003) developed the STARS framework to distinguish between the different business situations that a leader may



encounter in a transition: start-up, turnaround, accelerated growth, realignment and sustaining success. Leaders must tailor their transition strategy to conform to the business situation (Watkins 2003). For example, leaders entering a turnaround situation are under far greater pressure to quickly improve performance than leaders entering a business in sustaining success (Gabarro 2007). Not all managers have experience in each of the situations and, therefore, they might not be equally suited to lead in all business situations (Groysberg, McLean & Nohria 2006). The business situation is a consideration for leaders in transition, organisations, recruitment agencies and search firms.

### *Impact of the Team*

The ability to attract and engage a high-performing team is central to any leader's success. Establishing an effective team is fundamental for the leader to deliver on their performance expectations (Ciampa & Watkins 1999)—and this can be enhanced when leaders can authentically connect with their staff early in the transition process (Gilmore 1988). However, the challenge lies in how to integrate, engage and manage a new team full of ambitions, aspirations and personal agendas (Neff & Citrin 2005). Developing people management skills is a pivotal leadership challenge, especially for new leaders, as their focus moves from self-centredness to caring for a team and its outcomes (Miller 2006). This can extend to the leader searching for his or her identity and confidence through the team's achievements instead of through individual contributions (Hall 2002). When a leader is new, the assessment of their team is an essential factor of their success or failure during the transition (Gabarro 2007). The challenge of engaging the team can be more difficult when the leader is managing a team of former peers (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011; Plakhotnik et al. 2011; Freedman 1995). They can be resentful and jealous (Straub 1999), they may have unsuccessfully applied for the role (Beagrie 2004) or be older than the new leader and find that dynamic challenging (Collins, Hair & Rocco 2009), or they may view the new leader as the enemy (Tobin & Edwards 2002). The way a leader interacts and engages with his or her team early in the process will be considered a strong indicator of how well they are transitioning into the new role.

### *External Versus Internal*

The literature concedes that leaders who transition from outside the organisation are more exposed than their internal counterparts in terms of the challenges to successfully transitioning (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011; Neff & Citrin 2005; Dowell 2002). Gabarro

(1987) observed that the number of outside CEOs who failed within their first three years was disproportionately higher than the number of those promoted from inside. It is more common for external hires to fail outright than for internally promoted leaders (64 per cent and 38 per cent, respectively) (Zhang 2008; Ciampa & Watkins 1999), even though organisations generally provide better support for their externally hired leaders (Kates & Downey 2005). The challenge of assuming a leadership role from outside the organisation is that leaders face a situation in which they can 'have the most to do at a time when they know the least' (Neff & Citrin 2005, p. 14).

In a survey of senior HR practitioners, Watkins (2003) found a consistent perception that the challenges for an externally recruited leader were significantly tougher than for leaders promoted from within an organisation. The interviewees identified three factors that contributed to the higher failure rate of outsiders: a lack of familiarity with the informal networks of communication and information, a lack of familiarity with the corporate culture and a lack of credibility due to being unknown in the organisation (Watkins 2003). However, external hires do have some advantages over internally promoted leaders, including having potentially broader views without the psychological ties to the organisation, employees and the organisation's history (Dai, De Meuse & Gaeddert 2011). Sessa and Taylor (2000) noted that external leaders were chosen 75 per cent of the time when the organisation was open to considering both external and internal leaders; however, research by Zhang and Rajagopalan (2006) revealed that externally recruited CEOs were not better at correcting poor performance than internally developed CEOs. When senior leaders, particularly CEOs, are appointed from outside the organisation, it often signals that change is both expected and coming (Spencer & Theis 2002). Another factor that increases the difficulty of the CEO-level transition is that CEOs may fail to prepare for the large, unstructured and time-consuming task of growing an effective working relationship with their board (Nadler & Thies 2017); in some cases, the board does not permit the new CEO to act with the authority and scope required to be successful (Nadler 2017). According to the literature, leaders promoted from within an organisation have an advantage over those recruited from outside; however, both are still susceptible to struggle during the transition period.

## **Change Based Factors**

The third high level grouping are factors influencing transition success that relate to the areas of challenge / change required discussed earlier in the chapter. These factors require the leader to learn, change adapt or adjust to be successful in the transition.

### *Cultural Understanding*

Another explanation for why executives derail during or after their transition is the leaders' inability to learn, understand and work with the culture and politics of the new organisation (Dai, De Meuse & Gaeddert 2011; Dutton 2010; Watkins 2009; Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008b). Korte and DiVittis (2010) suggested that the transition process is difficult due to the conflict between what the newly recruited leader believes they should know and be able to do, versus their actual lack of intimate knowledge of how the organisation works—though this is identified as more relevant for externally recruited leaders. This lack of understanding of the culture, stakeholders, history and company traditions positions new leaders at a significant disadvantage when they try to ensure a successful transition (Korte & DiVittis 2010).

### *Time Horizon*

Due to the changes in complexity and scope, leaders undertaking new roles at various levels in organisations must be adaptable across different time horizons. In addition to the changes in priorities, relationships and responsibilities that leaders will experience as they ascend to more senior roles, leaders must also understand how changes affect certain dimensions, including time horizons (Galer, Vriesendorp & Ellis 2005). At higher levels in organisations, the leadership role becomes more complex; the assumption is that a more complex role has a longer period of time between action and feedback, indicating that a senior leader may not be able to gauge the full effects of their decisions for many years (Kaiser & Craig 2004; Jaques 1996). Jacobs and Jaques (1987) suggested three different time horizons for leaders: three months to two years for leaders in supervisory positions, 2–5 years for leaders at the middle management level and 10–20 years for CEOs and enterprise leaders. The leaders' abilities to recognise and adjust to changing time horizons will contribute to their successful transitions.

### *Strategic Understanding*

As leaders occupy roles at higher levels in the organisation, there is an increased need for them to understand the organisations' strategy. This concept of strategic understanding has been studied in the context of several different themes. One such theme is strategic awareness, which according to Hambrick (1981) can be considered the extent to which an executive's perception of the organisations' strategy aligns with the organisations' realised strategy and with the chief executives' perception. Hambrick (1981) argued for the generally supported notions that executives' level of strategic awareness is higher the more senior they are in the organisation and that the more senior the executive is, the more s/he agrees with the CEO's perception of the strategy. Another related concept is strategic consensus, which has been researched extensively due to evidence that a high level of strategic consensus leads to high levels of organisational performance through improved coordination and cooperation within an organisation (Kellermanns et al. 2005). Kellermanns et al. (2005, p. 721) defined strategic consensus as a 'shared understanding of strategic priorities' among leaders across all levels of the organisation, indicating that the researchers regard consensus as a possible positive result of strategic understanding. The level to which a leader understands the organisational strategy should influence how they approach their transition.

### *Relationship Building*

Building effective relationships early in the process is identified as a sound practice for the leader in transition (Charan, Drotter & Noel 2011; Hill 2003; Watkins 2003; Ciampa & Watkins 1999; Gabarro 1987). Relationship problems are regularly at the centre of executive derailments (Van Velsor & Leslie 1995), with leaders derailing due to an inability to grow strong relationships or establish key connections (Dai & De Meuse 2007). Leaders entering new organisations from the outside can struggle to establish connections. Many organisations assume that senior leaders possess the social skills and understanding needed to integrate into an organisation network. Consequently, leaders are left to do this on their own, which can inhibit their success if they are unsuccessful at integrating and establishing the necessary connections (Johnson 2007). However, leaders may feel that they lack the time to develop and forge relationships across organisations during the transition (Johnson 2007). Another potential failure point is the common and risky tendency for leaders new to a role to ignore horizontal relationships and focus solely

on vertical ones—upwards to their manager and downwards to their teams (Watkins 2008). Establishing effective vertical and horizontal relationships during transition is a need that is equally applicable to both externally recruited and internally promoted leaders.

### *Letting Go*

Another common concept in the literature is that leaders must dismiss or relinquish certain attributes that contributed to their previous success so that they are successful in the new role (Watkins 2013; Dutton 2010; Kates & Downey 2005; Dotlich, Noel & Walker 2004; Freedman 1998). This concept of letting go forms part of the cognitive changes discussed earlier. For example, a cognitive change required for leaders transitioning from a functional leadership position to a general management or CEO role is the ability to let go of control whilst maintaining ownership (Mallaby, Price & Hofmeyr 2017). Many leaders find that some of the competencies mastered in previous roles do not achieve the desired results when applied in the context of their new roles (Freedman 2011). Leaders will often quickly understand that the demands made of them in their new position differ in type and quality, with the demands regularly including a lesser emphasis on technical specialist responsibilities (Kaiser & Craig 2011; Freedman 1998). When leaders are faced with uncertainty and increased performance demands, they can revert to previous and more comfortable behaviours and activities that may not be what the present situation demands (Freedman 2011; Freedman 2005).

Gentry and Chappelow (2009) argued that strengths that helped leaders to get promoted or recruited can become liabilities in more senior roles and weaknesses that were accepted can become an issue as leaders become more senior (McCall & Lombardo 1983). Downey (2002) suggested that new leaders face a struggle between how much they rely on previous experience and new agile learning paradigms. Freedman (2011) explained that there is a triple challenge for leaders early in the transition period: the decision regarding which aspects of the previous role to eliminate or reduce, which aspects they will continue to employ and those that need development or improvement. The concept of letting go for leaders in transition is a popular one and is a key feature of the cognitive challenge / change required discussed earlier.

The list of factors that influence transition success, that is promote or inhibit success, demonstrates that many of the authors have and are considering what makes leadership

transitions difficult and regularly unsuccessful. The suggested categorisation is merely an attempt to group the factors as no groups or categories were found in the literature. The lack of categorisation is reflective that there has been limited attention given to identifying a comprehensive list of the promoters and inhibitors to date.

### **An Emerging Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The literature reviewed in this chapter has revealed that there are a large number of factors that bear upon the success or failure of a leadership transition. Figure 2.2 offers a conceptual map of the literature reviewed in this chapter. The framework posits that a series of triggers can lead to a leadership transition, which then presents a series of challenges and required changes for the leader. There are several factors that either promote or inhibit success, based on their application and/or their presence or absence. The lack of measurement tools or frameworks is represented by the dotted line and the combination of all the factors for each leadership transition will result in either success, failure or derailment. Figure 2.2 outlines the conceptual framework of the current literature on leadership transitions.

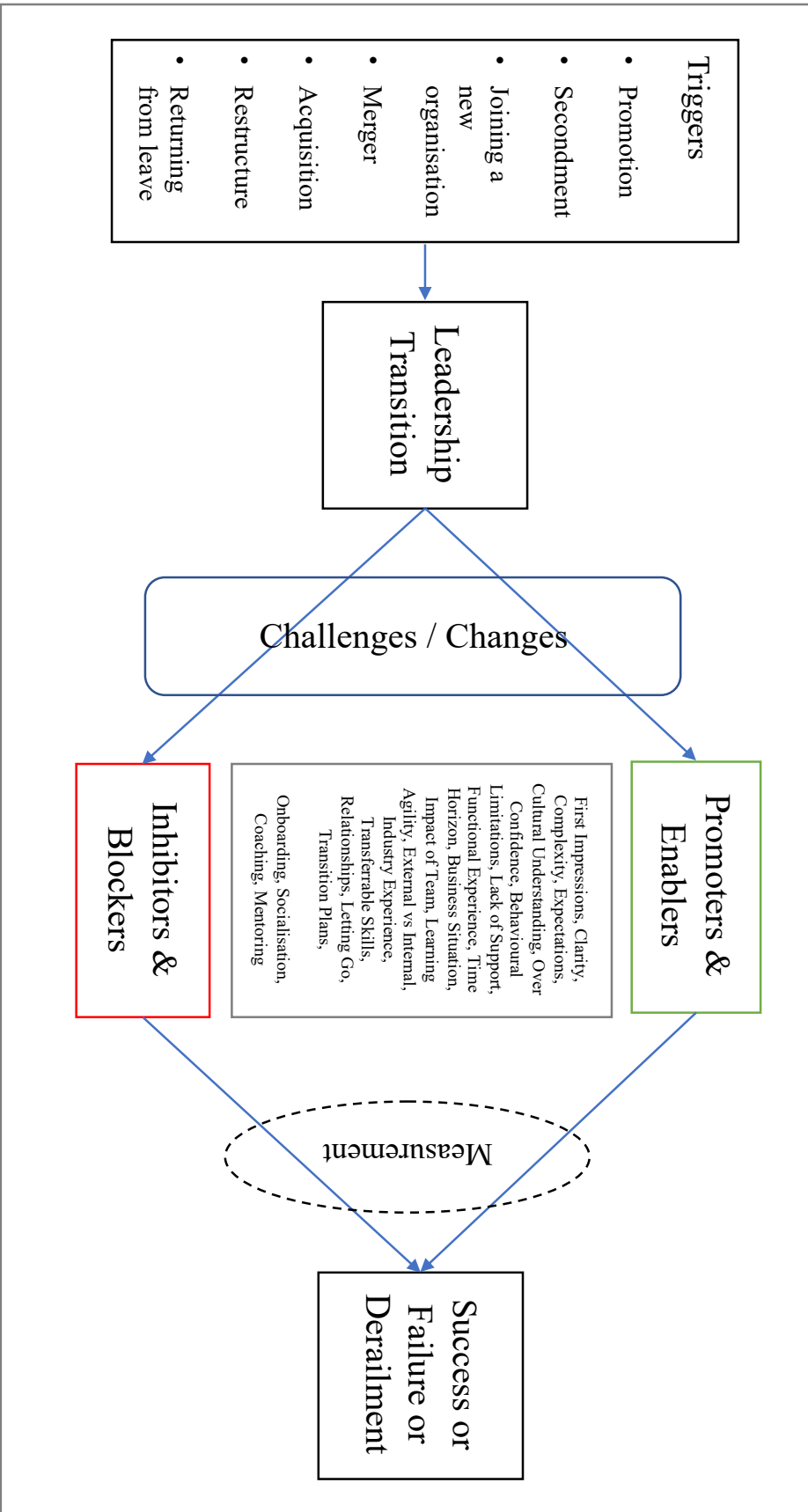


Figure 2.3: Conceptual Framework of the Literature

This study employed qualitative, semi-structured interviews guided by the principals of Grounded Theory to explore and identify success promoters and inhibitors for leaders undertaking a role transition. With pure Grounded Theory studies, researchers do not commence with a predetermined theory, as the emergence of theories from the data is a successful outcome of the inductive methodological approach of a Grounded Theory study (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Researchers instead favour the development of a conceptual framework. A theoretical framework is used when the research is underpinned by one or more theories and a conceptual framework utilises concepts from the findings to guide the research (Parahoo 2006).

This study is not a pure Grounded Theory study; it is closer to a constructivist Grounded Theory study, which acknowledges the researcher co-creates the theory based on their exposure to research, prior knowledge, preconceived thoughts/beliefs and their interactions with the participants (Charmaz 2006). A conceptual framework consists of concepts within a logical and interconnected design that represents a less formal structure and is suitable for studies in which an existing theory is insufficient or inapplicable. The concepts and propositions are derived from empirical observation. The purpose of a conceptual framework is to encourage theory development, explain the observations, provide context for interpretation of the findings, clarify the concepts and suggest relationships between the concepts in the study.

The study is limited to identifying the factors that positively or negatively affect a leadership transition. As discussed, there is currently no established or recognised theory that represents this area of leadership research and this and other studies hope to contribute to a potentially new area of emerging theory—leadership transition theory.

## **Summary**

This chapter has provided a broad overview of the literature pertaining to leadership transitions, executive onboarding and executive derailment. There is consensus that leadership transitions are a difficult and potentially dangerous period for both the leader and the organisation. There is also a consensus that when executives derail or fail, it is mostly caused by a failure to transition successfully and that the failure rate of leaders in new roles is high, both for those externally recruited and those internally promoted. The literature review highlights two primary gaps that this research hopes to address: to



broaden the base of empirical research focused on qualitative methods and to complete the research within an Australian context. Secondary gaps that the research may address include the lack of research regarding how to measure performance during the transition and the link between leaders understanding the strategy and their performance during the transition.

## **Chapter 3—Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter elaborates the methodology employed to address the research questions. The aim is to establish that quality and rigour have been applied, ensuring that the research process, analysis and findings are valid and reliable. Quality and rigour in the research methods are established through the justification and application of relevant research techniques via a logical approach and with support from the literature. This chapter entails the research design, research processes, participant recruitment and data analysis.

### **Rationale**

The purpose of this research is to examine the transition period for a leader in a new role and to identify the factors that promote or inhibit a leader's success. It is also to examine how leaders and organisations measure success during the transition period and the effect (if any) of leaders' understanding of the strategy on their transition success. The research will provide an insight into what affects a new leader's success early in their role and will comment on what is being measured to indicate success.

The literature review indicated that leadership transitions are a difficult period for leaders and are a time including a high rate of failure or derailment. The review also highlighted a gap in the leadership transition literature, including qualitatively examining what influences success during a leadership transition within the Australian business community. The exploration of this subject area via a qualitative research approach providing a leader informed view of transitions and with a localised focus will be a unique contribution to the field of leadership transitions.

Based on the literature review and personal experience, there is still confusion concerning what leaders and organisations must do to ensure that the transition process for their new leaders results in successful outcomes. Therefore, the research question focuses on the factors that help or hinder a leader's success during the crucial transition period. The research question is stated as: “what inhibits and promotes success for leaders during a transition period?”

## Research Design

According to Crotty (1998), research design has four distinct elements that can be arranged hierarchically to inform decision-making; epistemology, theoretical perspective, research methodology and methods (see Figure 3.1).

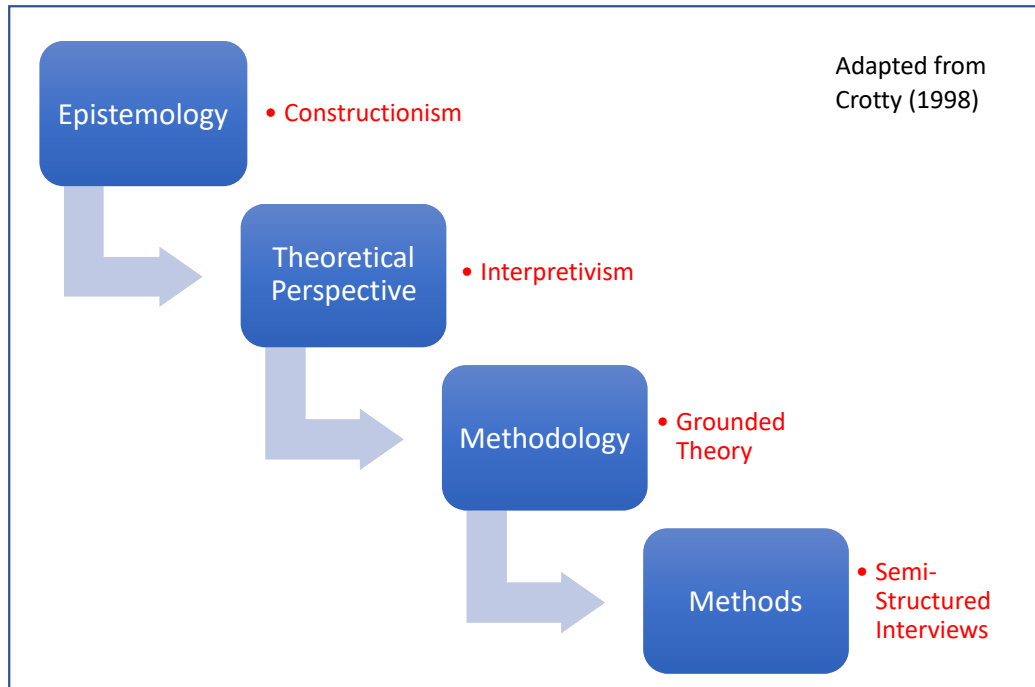


Figure 3.1: Research Design Elements

As shown in Figure 3.1, a researcher's initial decision relates to the theory of knowledge that they will adopt (their epistemology), as this will support the entire research process and inform the selection of their theoretical perspective (Crotty 1998). The theoretical perspective then determines the methodology selected by the researcher and, ultimately, the research methods that will be employed. Although an ontological perspective is omitted from this hierarchy, this is not problematic for Crotty (1998, p. 10) because 'to talk about the construction of meaning (epistemology) is to talk of the construction of meaningful reality (ontology)'.

### *Ontology and Epistemology*

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality (Bryman 2012) and epistemology depicts how the researcher uncovers and understands this reality (Crotty 1998). A researcher's ontological position addresses how they regard the nature of existence and is influenced by the researcher's values and background (Bryman 2012). Epistemology explains how

researchers endeavour to learn or gain knowledge of their reality. There are two predominately ontological positions within social sciences: positivism and interpretivism (or constructivism), with the former positing that there is a single objective reality to any research problem and the latter that reality is multiple and relative (Lincoln & Guba 1985). This researcher perceives the reality or considers the ontological position as constructivist. Following this ontological position—that there are multiple possible realities—a constructivist epistemology is adopted, which considers reality as socially constructed from the cognitive process of individuals and formed by experience and language. Based on qualitative data generated from the participants, a constructivist perspective permits the development of patterns, theories and themes. The emergence of themes is critical to identifying and understanding the factors that leaders feel affect their transition. Hess-Biber and Leavy (2011, p. 5) argued that a constructivist perspective posits that ‘the world is constantly being constructed through group interactions, and thus, social reality can be understood via the perspectives of social actors enmeshed in meaning-making activities’.

#### *Theoretical Perspective—Interpretivism*

A researcher’s theoretical perspective is the philosophical position that directs the methodology. There is potential for a particular ontological and epistemological stance to form many different theoretical perspectives (Crotty 1998). It is argued that, in social science research, a constructivist stance is synonymous with an interpretivist theoretical approach (Charmaz 2006; Schwandt 1994). Interpretivism assumes that meaning is constructed by humans as they interact and engage with the world and that humans interpret what they are experiencing based on their prior experiences and history. Interpretivism investigates and constructs ‘cultural derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life world’ (Crotty 1998, p. 67) and accepts that there is not a single objective truth to a research problem. This research employs an interpretivist theoretical perspective, which seeks to understand and describe this socially constructed reality by interpreting experience through language-based methods to generate socially relative knowledge of a social phenomenon.

### *Methodology –Grounded Theory Principles*

Grounded Theory principles guided the research. According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory is an iterative process that begins by selecting the most appropriate data-gathering method to create rich social and situational data. Grounded Theory allows the researcher to develop theories that are primarily grounded in and developed from the data and not by a preconceived assumption (Charmaz 2006). Although this research follows the principles of Grounded Theory, it does not adhere strictly to the process outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1998) due to its complexity, which is not uncommon in management research (Partington 2000). The modified version of Grounded Theory adopted is closer to what Charmaz (2006) described as constructivist Grounded Theory methodology which still acknowledges that the formed theory is grounded in participant experiences, but also that the researcher co-creates the theory based on their exposure to research, prior knowledge, preconceived thoughts/beliefs and their interactions with the participants. Grounded Theory researchers use constant comparison and memo writing as the main coding process (Glaser & Strauss 2006). The collected data are coded and concepts or ideas that emerge during this process are noted as codes and memos. This is completed during the data process and between the interviews. This alternating sequence of data collection and analysis is an iterative process of data collection, with the constant comparison between the results furthering data collection (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Constantly comparing the data, codes, themes and findings helps the research to crystallise ideas and form an emerging theory (Charmaz 2006). The iterations continue until the researcher deems that theoretical saturation has occurred, which is the point at which new concepts cease to appear during the data collection. At times during the research, gaps in the collected data may emerge, allowing the researcher to purposefully select participants; this reinforces or amends a theory being developed through the use of constant comparison.

The coding process and category development is supported by memo writing. Memos are documented elaborations of concepts regarding the data and categories representing code development (Charmaz 2006). Memos help the researcher to not force data into codes, categories or concepts and the constant comparison allows the data to be compared directly to further data collection. The interview data for this research project was coded and grouped according to the common factors or themes that the participants described.

The results or findings of the research are derived primarily from the completed research, rather than from trying to fit an existing framework.

#### *Methods –Semi-Structured Interviews*

There are several research methods that could be applied to a particular methodology. These are described as ‘the techniques or procedures used to gather or analyse data related to some research question or hypothesis’ (Crotty 1998, p. 3). This research design involves a qualitative approach using semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. It was deemed appropriate, as this research requires data based on experiences, feelings and emotions (Denscombe 1998). The use of semi-structured interviews in a qualitative approach allows the participants to explore and expand on their experiences, thoughts, feelings and, in particular, their perceptions; this provides a richer data source (Veal 2005). Current research available on leadership transitions that is predominately quantitative, may potentially miss some of the insights and observations that qualitative research is designed to elicit. The study utilises open-ended questions under a semi-structured interview technique. Although there is a list of predetermined open-ended questions, the order of topics can be flexible, allowing the issues raised to develop (Denscombe 1998; Fitzpatrick & Boulton 1994).

#### **Case for Qualitative Research**

This research examines the personal, interpersonal and organisational factors that positively and negatively influence a leader’s transition into a new role. The research posits that these factors are not numerically measurable in the detail required to understand their context or effect, that they are complex and overlapping and that they would be enriched via a holistic qualitative approach. Creswell (2009, p. 192) contended that the goal of qualitative research is to create a ‘complex and holistic picture’ of the participants in the context of their environment. Qualitative research is a process of inquiry with the goal of understanding a social or human problem from multiple perspectives and it is conducted in a natural setting, with a goal of building a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell 2009). It is also the approach often associated with the social constructivist paradigm, which focuses on the socially constructed nature of reality. It revolves around recording, analysing and attempting to discover a deep meaning and significance of human behaviour and experience, including any contradictory beliefs or views, behaviours and emotions. Researchers attempt to gain

a complex and rich understanding of a particular context and the individuals' experiences of that context, instead of obtaining information that can be generalised to other larger groups (Veal 2005). The emphasis of qualitative research methods is to uncover meaning, not numbers. Therefore, the data consists of non-numerical information, such as words, conversations or even images. Qualitative research is highly subjective in nature and is primarily based on individual researchers' heavy reliance on interpreting events through interviews and observations. Qualitative research allows researchers to mine the data and seek results that may better reflect the phenomena that are being studied. This ability to obtain a deeper understanding should, in this case, help establish context and meaning in the factors uncovered that promote and inhibit transition success.

## **Participants**

### *Sample/Participant Recruitment*

The chosen sampling methodology is fundamental to the outcomes of qualitative research, as the findings can easily be biased by the population selected. Creswell (1998) explained sampling as the process of identifying locations and people to study, as gaining access and permission to study and then as establishing a rapport to enable the participants to provide relevant data. The goal of the sampling process is to create a good representation of the target population (Mouton 1996). Although this study targeted leaders with a minimum of three direct reports who had been in their current role less than 36 months, it was still important to select participants within the aims of the research and with the best likelihood of providing rich information (Schatzman & Strauss 1973). The ideal intent for qualitative researchers is to compile a sample that includes participants with different goals. To achieve this, the research utilised purposeful sampling, which is an approach that selects rich cases for an in-depth study (Macmillan & Schumacher 1993). A purposeful or judgment sample approach is a directed, non-random method that identifies a group that the researcher believes are able to answer a specific research question (Marshall 1996). Rice and Ezzy (1999) argued that purposeful sampling is a valid method when the aims of the research are to describe the processes involved in a specific phenomenon instead of trying to ascertain its distribution. The sample size in qualitative research is less important than the concept of representativeness that is generated. With purposeful sampling, multiple variations are identified and this research

employed stratified purposeful sampling that is designed to capture significant variations across a common core (Patton 2002). It is important to acknowledge the potential limitations of purposeful sampling. These can include a bias to a group of subjects in a sector or grouping and an exclusion of other lesser known or unconnected subjects. Consequently, the sample can be less representative than the wider group. Therefore, qualitative research should also report on the description of the participants.

The sample consisted of 22 interviews where 15 were of leaders five were with human resource managers and two with direct managers. The leaders reviewed their own transition experience and the direct managers and HR participants reviewed the transition of another leader they had observed in the last three years. The primary sample were the leaders and they were the majority of participants (15). The inclusion of a small number of members of HR (5) and direct managers (2) was to test if an observational perspective would be consistent or inconsistent with the leaders' own view. The participants were sourced through the researcher's network, LinkedIn and referrals. All participants signed a consent form to participate and gave their permission for their data to be used in the thesis. Participants were informed verbally and in writing that they could withdraw their consent at any time. Twenty of the leaders interviewed or discussed were still in their new role at the time of the interview. The two exceptions were the leader discussed by HR1, who left after five months (they left the week that the interview was conducted), and the leader discussed by DM2, who had left the role after 19 months. Table 34.1 below outlines the participant information.



Table 3.1: Participant Information

	Role Type	Months in Role	Internal or External	Leadership Pipeline	Business Situation	Industry	Size of Org	Formal Onboard?
LE1	Leader	18–24	External	Business	Turnaround	Real Estate	1,001–5,000	Yes
LE2	Leader	18–24	External	Functional	Turnaround	Media & Telco	10,000+	No
LE3	Leader	12–18	External	Enterprise	Realignment	FIS	51–200	No
LE4	Leader	18–24	External	Functional	Realignment	Transportation	10,000+	Yes
LE5	Leader	24–36	Internal	Enterprise	Turnaround	Retail Trade	10,000+	No
LE6	Leader	3–6	External	Business	Realignment	Health Care	501–1,000	Yes
LE7	Leader	3–6		Business				
LE8	Leader	6–12	External	Functional	Sustaining Success	Mining	1,001–5,000	No
LE9	Leader	3–6	External	Group	Sustaining Success	Construction	501–1,000	No
LE10	Leader	6–12	External	Enterprise	Realignment	Public Administration	51–200	No
LE11	Leader	6–12	Internal	Leading	Realignment	FIS	10,000+	No
LE12	Leader	18–24	Internal	Leading	Sustaining Success	FIS	10,000+	No
LE13	Leader	6–12	Internal	Enterprise	Realignment	FIS	1,00–5,000	No
LE14	Leader	12–18	External	Enterprise	Turnaround	Public Administration	1,001–5,000	No
LE15	Leader	12–18	External	Functional	Turnaround	Real Estate	1,001–5,000	Yes
HR1	HR	3–6	External	Business	Start-Up	Media & Telco	201–500	No
HR2	HR	6–12	External	Enterprise	Realignment	Media & Telco	10,000+	Yes
HR3	HR	24–36	External	Group	Sustaining Success	FIS	10,000+	Yes
HR4	HR	6–12	Internal	Functional	Realignment	Manufacturing	51–200	No
HR5	HR	12–18	External	Functional	Start-Up	Manufacturing	10,000+	Yes
DM1	Manager	3–6	Internal	Functional	Realignment	Media & Telco	51–200	No
DM2	Manager	18–24	Internal	Business	Sustaining Success	FIS	51–200	No

Note: LE = leader; HR = human resources; DM = direct manager of leader

## **Demography of Actors**

### *Transition Circumstances*

Participants were asked what circumstances led to the transition. Whilst most transitions were a result of someone leaving or a restructure in the business, one participant started as a contractor and in another case, the role was created for the participant, who had interviewed for a lower level role and declined it; the organisation considered him a good fit, so they created a role for him. Neither case had a noticeable bearing on the results. From the leaders' viewpoints, the new role often provided rewards in terms of challenges, career advancements and financial rewards.

### *Supplementary Participant Information*

65% of the leaders had transitioned into an established role as opposed to a newly created one. 70% were industry insiders, that is had worked in their current industry previously. In relation to direct staff responsibility, 70% of the leaders had a greater number of direct reports in the new role than in the previous role and 70% had the same P&L responsibilities in the new role as the previous. Finally, 55% of the leaders commented that they considered leaving the new role within the first three months.

## **Procedure**

### *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Interviewing is one of the most common qualitative data collection methods (Mason 2002)—one that matches Grounded Theory methods well, as it is both emergent and open ended, yet directive (Charmaz 2006). Mason (2002) described three approaches to interviewing: in-depth, semi-structured and unstructured. Each approach is typically a dialogue exchange with an informal style, is narrative in nature and has a purpose of ensuring that the appropriate contexts are highlighted (Mason 2002). For this research, semi-structured interviews were selected as the best fit for the project. Each participant was invited by email, with an overview document and an interview preparation document included (see Appendix 2). This document contained the interview questions and other information designed to help prompt responses. Interviews were completed in person at locations convenient to the participant, which included offices, meeting rooms and

cafes/restaurants. The length of the interviews ranged from 43 to 58 minutes. The research was conducted over a 12-month period and each participant was only interviewed once.

### *Recording and Transcription*

The recording and transcription process is critical to any research that includes the analysis of spoken interactions. The transcription must be constructed so that it is intelligible and interpretable to those not present at the interview (Denscombe 1998). This researcher acknowledges that recording and transcription can influence the quality of the data (Maclean, Meyer & Estable 2004). Interviews for this research were concurrently and electronically recorded using the researcher's iPhone 7 and a Phillips Voice Tracker digital dictation recorder. The recordings were stored as MP4 files on the researcher's computer. Transcription was completed by a professional transcriber sourced by the researcher. It was transcribed verbatim into a word document. The transcription was checked by the researcher for accuracy against the electronic recording and the written transcriptions were then loaded into NVivo (version 11.4.1 for Mac).

### *Interviewer*

Equally important to the outcomes of the study is the interviewer and his or her skill in creating an environment that is conducive to the participant feeling comfortable enough to respond to open and direct verbal questions and to provide detailed narratives and stories (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree 2006; Fitzpatrick & Boulton 1994). For this research, the researcher conducted all the interviews, used the open questions as a guide, continuously tried to expand on concepts, pushed for more information and sought clarification from the interviewee. The researcher/interviewer has considerable past experience working as a coach/consultant and formal training in coaching skills that are core to effective interviewing.

### *Formative Questions*

In a semi-structured interview, the questions need to be well constructed and methodical (Veal 2005). The questions in this study were written to maximise the likelihood of participants fully understanding the meaning of the questions. The following are the dimensions that were deemed necessary in identifying attributes associated with success in leadership transitions:

1. Demographic. This includes gender, time in role (measured in 3-month increments) and size of new organisation.
2. External v. internal. This was the internally promoted or externally recruited leader.
3. Leadership level. This was based on the leadership pipeline that the interviewee identified as the level in which they felt best matched their new role.
4. Business situation. This included the business situation of the new organisation when participants joined.
5. Measures of success. This includes how the leader and organisation measured and assessed success during and after the transition.
6. Onboarding process. This involved participants' perceptions of the formality and effectiveness of the onboarding process they experienced.
7. Promoters. This included the participants' perspective on the factors that assisted, enabled or promoted success during their transition.
8. Inhibitors. This related to the participants' perception of the factors that hindered, inhibited or held back their transition.
9. Strategic understanding. This included participants' perceptions of their levels of strategic understanding during and at the end of their transition, in addition to the effect it had on their transition.
10. Hindsight/reflection. This involves the benefit of hindsight regarding what the participant would do differently, or what they would advise a new leader to do.

Ten questions, with probing for greater detail, were used as the question framework for the semi-structured interviews. The questions were sent to the participants prior to the interview. Table 3.2 below lists the ten questions and links the questions to above dimensions.

Table 3.2: Interview Questions Linked to Framework Dimensions

<b>Question</b>	<b>Quality Dimension</b>
What were the circumstances of your transition (change in title, organisation, staff responsibilities etc.)?	Demographic
What was the reason for your transition?	Demographic
What was the business situation when you started?	Business Situation
Which leadership level best fits your transition?	Leadership Level
Was there a formal onboarding program or process for your new role?	Onboarding
How did you measure success during the transition?	Measures of Success
What were the enablers/promoters of success during your transition?	Promoters
What were the blockers/inhibitors of success during your transition?	Inhibitors
How did your understanding of the business strategy affect your success during the transition?	Strategic Understanding
On reflection, is there anything that you would do differently if you had this transition again? What advice would you give to someone taking on your role on how to manage the transition period?	Hindsight/Reflection

## **Data Analysis**

### **Qualitative Analysis/Coding**

The primary data for this research were collected from semi-structured interviews. Coding, as the first stage of data analysis, is used to capture and comprehend the interview data (Charmaz 2006). As the interviewer and researcher are the same person, the interviews were initially coded shortly after completion, in a constant comparison analysis approach that is consistent with the principles of Grounded Theory. As the transcription was made available, the researcher completed the initial open coding by

simultaneously listening to the audio recording and reading the transcribed text in NVivo, coding the text line by line (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The adopted approach included the following questions:

1. What is going on?
  2. What is the leader thinking, feeling and doing?
  3. What are other people thinking, feeling and doing?
  4. What is the participant saying?
  5. What do these statements and actions take for granted
- (Adapted from Charmaz 2006).

The result was a list of codes and themes attached to the interview text, written in as specific terms as possible (Charmaz 2006). These codes corresponded very closely to what the interviewee has said and, in most cases, used the interviewee's own words. In the second stage, axial coding was used to refine and differentiate the list of themes by identifying and examining the links, relationships and connections between the themes. (Strauss & Corbin 1990). At this stage the codes were compared based on the situation the interviewee had described and the conditions that contributed to that situation. This led to the establishment of subcategories, categories and connections between the codes. The final stage was focused coding, in which the codes that continually reappeared were applied to larger amounts of text in a selective and conceptual manner. This process, supported by memos written post each interview, forced decisions on which codes categorised the data most accurately and completely (Charmaz 2006). The themes were then compared and combined based on frequency and similarity. While Grounded Theory methodology does not obtain meaning from quantified data, counting the frequency of codes can be helpful in confirming their importance for the participants (Strauss & Corbin 1998). These themes were then examined to identify consistencies, inconsistencies, similarities and differences so that the themes can be grouped into core categories. The process was repeated over several months and with multiple iterations.

### **Saturation**

Unlike quantitative research, in which the goal is to quantify several opinions, the goal of qualitative research is to uncover a range of views and experiences through the collection of 'rich' information. Quantitative research design dictates that the required number of participants was based on how many participants are needed to answer the research

question. In qualitative research, it is not the sample size but the adequacy of the sample that is the goal. A researcher determines that the sample is adequate by justifying that it has reached saturation (Bowen 2008). Within the methodology of Grounded Theory, a researcher seeks to achieve theoretical saturation, which is a point at which a theory emerges due to all the categories being accounted for and the differences between them that are explained and validated (O'Reilly & Parker 2012). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967), the decision for when to cease sampling depends on the categories of theoretical saturation, which signifies that there is no additional data being uncovered that further develop the categories' properties. Saturation in this research was achieved after 22 interviews.

### **NVivo**

NVivo (Version 11.4 for Mac: QSR International Software) was used to group the information provided by the participants into codes or themes, labelled in the software as nodes. Nodes (codes) are used to attribute meaning or significance to specific parts of the text or interview (Leech & Onwuegbuzie 2011). The written transcripts were loaded into NVivo as an internal source. They were classified as a 'case' and were profiled based on case classifications. They were then coded using the audio recording and the codes were created as either parent nodes or child nodes.

The case classifications were grouped as follows:

1. gender of the participant
2. gender of the subject discussed
3. time on role
4. leadership level
5. role type (leader, direct manager or HR)
6. business situation
7. previous experience in the business situation
8. productivity after three months
9. external or internal
10. direct or recruiter
11. new or established role
12. industry
13. whether they considered leaving in the first 3 months

14. profit and loss responsibility
15. staff responsibilities
16. transition level (researcher's matrix of transition difficulty)
17. onboarding process or not

### **Ethics Considerations**

In this research, participants were assured of their confidentiality. Ethical procedures as set by the ethics committee were adhered to and written permission was obtained by each participant who was free to withdraw their involvement and data from the study at any time. Interviews were conducted face to face at locations convenient to the participant and were recorded for review and transcription process.

### **Summary**

This chapter has outlined the research design, approach, methods and methodology. The case for a qualitative approach has been established and the link between ontological and epistemological approach, the theoretical perspective, methodology and methods are consistent across other qualitative studies (Crotty 1998). The next chapter explores the findings and offers a discussion on the implications of the results.



## Chapter 4—Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter provides a detailed analysis on the interview data collected and is presented as it was collected. As specified earlier, the overarching research question was ‘what inhibits and promotes success for leaders during a transition period?’. This question was addressed through the use of four main interview questions:

1. What were the enablers/promoters to success during your transition?
2. What were the blockers/inhibitors to success during your transition?
3. On reflection, is there anything that you would do differently if you had *this* transition again?
4. What advice would you give to someone assuming your role tomorrow on how to manage the transition period?

The chapter also explores the themes that emerged from a number of secondary questions; including ‘does strategic understanding influence transition success?’ and ‘how is transition success measured?’. Participants responses were also obtained on the effectiveness of onboarding programs experienced by the interviewees. The findings are presented and discussed in line with the themes that emerged in the following areas:

- Promoters and Enablers
- Inhibitors and Blockers
- Alternative Actions / Options
- Advice
- Strategic understanding
- Transition Performance Measurement
- Effectiveness of Onboarding

### Themes and Categories

To generate the promoter and inhibitor responses, the four main research questions were asked as part of a semi-structured interview process, with probing included to elicit more information regarding points of interest. The first question was: ‘what were the enablers or promoters of success during the transition period?’. In all, there were 57 codes created from 22 sources and with 170 references. The 57 codes were grouped into a series of themes. All interviewees were then asked: ‘what were the inhibitors or blockers of success

during the transition period?’. Using the same process as with the promoters, 42 codes emerged from 22 sources with 111 references and they were grouped into themes. As expected, there were several themes that occurred in both the promoters and inhibitors section. Next, interviewees were asked, ‘if you had this transition again, would you do anything differently?’ Again, they were given time to consider and respond. All were prompted at least twice with ‘anything else’ to ensure that they had exhausted their list. As the final question of the interview, participants were asked: ‘let’s assume that someone was taking over your role (or the discussed role for the HR and direct manager participants) tomorrow; what advice would you give them in order to be successful in their transition?’. It was emphasised clearly that this advice was for this role, as opposed to any leader in any role transition. Interestingly, when the interviewee was removed from their own first-person view by thinking of what someone else should do, there were different responses to the previous questions, which may potentially include certain aspects that they wished they had done differently.

### **Promoters of Transition Success**

Analysis of the data set resulted in the assignment of 170 promoter codes from the 22 interviews (sources). After further analysis, these were grouped into 43 sub categories and then into 8 theme categories based on frequency, as summarised in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1: Promoter Themes and Frequency

<b>Order</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
1	Personal Attributes and Experience	Passion, Past Experience, Work Ethic, Preparation, Pre-Work	22	38
2	Manager Support	Direct Manager, Removing Obstacles, Healthy Discourse, Freedom, Freedom to Act	22	30
3	Transition Planning	90 Day Plan, Structured Transition Program, Specific Project, Mind Maps	15	29
4	Effective and/or	Invest in Team,	13	17

	Supportive Team	Team Acceptance, Assessing the Team		
5	Industry Knowledge	Competitive Landscape, Industry Colleagues, Willing Industry Stakeholders	12	15
6	External Support	External Coach, External Strategy Consultant, Family & Friend Support	7	8
7	Stakeholder Engagement	Buy-in, Getting Out in the Field, Meetings, Peer Meetings	7	7
8	Clear Expectations	Clarity of Deliverables, Clarity of Business Strategy	5	5

### **Promoter Theme #1: Personal Attributes and Experience**

#### *Personal Attributes*

Many of the participants associated certain personal attributes as promoters to success during the transition. These personal attributes are typically characteristics or personality traits that the participant felt aided the leader or themselves early in the process. The pressure to be the expert and to have an early effect is felt by many leaders in new roles. One leader described a confidence in accepting that *'it's ok not to know it all and also not to do everything'* and that, as a new leader, they will not have a full understanding of the role immediately. For another leader, passion for the industry, not necessarily the business or the role, was perceived as a factor that helped her early in her role. She felt that her passion was clearly visible, and she resonated with the stakeholders who shared it for their industry.

An attribute that was mentioned numerous times during the interviews was credibility. Credibility, either gained during the time in the role or already possessed based on reputation, was a promoter of success during the transition. For several of the leaders it provided an accelerated adoption of their ideas and suggestions when transitioning into a new role.

*'I was fortunate coming into the role because I had a level of credibility from running the other organisation. And I've had a proven track record that people knew that ... "he took that business from there to there", that gave me a level of credibility within the organisation' (LE1).*

The leader quoted above explained that his good reputation or established credibility had a *'shelf life'* and needed to be supported by appropriate activities, decisions and actions during the transition period. According to the leader, the period of time was 3–6 months, during which the pre-existing credibility was beneficial. One of the HR participants explained that the leader they observed worked to establish their credibility in the new role through *'good communication, getting out on the floor, asking questions'* and *'understanding a day in the life of'* the people in his division.

Another HR participant noted that being focused and methodical was an advantage for the leader she discussed and a third HR participant identified the leader's focus and diligence as a key component of his transition success, especially in seeking *'as much information as possible'* and his desire to *'very quickly get up to speed'*. A strong level of *'resilience and tenacity'* is another positive coupling of attributes that two of the HR participants believed helped shorten the time to productivity for the leaders they discussed. In another third-party observation, HR5 perceived being courteous and respectful as an advantage to building relationships with people and encouraging them to support the leader. One of the direct manager's interviewed felt that *'because of [the leader's] commitment and motivation he inspired people, people wanted to work with him and be around him'*. He did state that it was a short-lived advantage in terms of effectiveness for the leader discussed. That does not negate the effect of a leader coming into a role full of energy and motivation as a potentially successful strategy to engaging the stakeholders and business as a whole. For the leader discussed by the second direct manager, it was *'an immense sense of pride and immense fear of failure'* that worked together to generate success early. The leader's concern was that he did not want to *'let anyone down and, as a result, ensured tasks were completed'*. It was the direct manager's view that this enabled him to continue when the situation became difficult and compelled him to strive to solve the problems he identified.

### *Preparation*

Several of the leaders mentioned preparation as a promoter of success and described talking to people in the new business about '*transitional change*' and asking them '*what was your biggest challenge coming here? What do I need to look out for?*' For one leader, who transitioned into a new industry, he spoke about researching the industry beforehand to become familiar with the jargon and communication.

*'The work that I did pre-starting was critical to my success. They have not had a history of integrating, or just even employing people in senior roles that are not from industry' (LE9).*

His belief was that without the pre-work, his credibility would have been damaged, as people realised that he knew very little about the industry and potentially related that to knowing very little about the business. It was expected that most participants would do some form of preparation before commencing their new roles. However, preparation was not commonly mentioned as a promoter of success, implying that either it was not done at an expected level by the leaders in the study or that it did not have the noticeable positive effects that the leaders might have expected.

### *Ability to Learn the Culture and Politics*

Several participants mentioned the ability to read or quickly understand an organisation's culture and politics is a desirable skill for anyone joining a new organisation, especially someone joining at a leadership level. One of the externally recruited leaders who considered cultural understanding important, explained that early and regular meetings with the leadership team and key stakeholders helped her to:

*'Identify how to navigate through, how things are done around here, how are decisions made and what do I need to be focused on doing more' (LE6).*

Several of the HR participants felt that the leader's '*ability to read the politics and to understand who he needed to have onside and who were the influencers*' was a strong enabler. Politics was mentioned frequently with culture, or as a subset of it. The concept of being able to navigate through the organisation is a common theme in the responses for both promoters and inhibitors.

### *Asking Questions*

A willingness and comfort to ask many questions was cited as a promoter of early success by two of the participants, as it helped to quickly generate a higher level of understanding regarding the organisation and role. One leader explained that the transition period is when one can ask the people and the business *'dumb questions'*, the answers to which one is expected to have later on. This ability to feign ignorance and innocence early in new roles was explained by the leader as a great tool to learn and challenge the business. It is the *'chance to ask the questions that may make people feel awkward, or they may expect that you'd know in six months' time, but not in that first honeymoon period'* (LE14). From the HR perspective, the leader's ability to ask the right questions was a skill that enhanced his transition, *'he asked a lot of questions...how are you going to do it differently to make that output better, how would you do it? He's really good at asking those questions'*.

### *Analyse the Data*

One leader had taken the enterprise level role in a new organisation in a new industry and was charged with leading a significant turnaround. He identified that clearly and quickly understanding the true state of the business is important for his transition. As his first response to what promoted success during his transition, he described analysing the data to accurately illustrate how the business was performing so he could make the necessary strategic decisions.

*'My biggest enabler was actually re-cutting the data, so I could see the picture of what was happening. I think that was one of the biggest enablers'* (LE14).

A HR participant explained that her leader in transition spent considerable time with a series of reports on the business. Learning the business, access to the data and his ability to interpret it greatly contributed to his transition success.

### *Deciding What Not to Do*

Leaders can struggle to make choices or to decide what to deliver during their transition, often due to incomplete information or a lack of historical knowledge combined with a sense of pressure to act. The organisation and their team are searching for them to express their understanding and, in turn, make decisions or changes. Early actions and decisions

are often over-scrutinised and critiqued. Several of the leaders highlighted that it was equally important to decide and communicate what they were not going to do during their transition.

*'What I did was I outlined what I wanted to do in that period and what I didn't want to do and wasn't going to be able to do. Because I think it's equally important to decide what you're not going to do and what you will do within a set period of time' (LE13).*

Another leader agreed that setting boundaries for what they were going to do and not do was important to set the expectations early.

### *Building Relationships*

The ability or the success in building effective relationships early in the process was identified by several participants as a promoter. Many noted relationships as crucial to success in the short term for leaders in transition and it was a focal point for the transition plans when utilised.

*'He made sure that he built relationships and he kept close to the people that he knew would support him, so we worked very, very closely together, he made sure that he was constantly communicating with people'. (HR4)*

A HR participant observed that the leader '*worked hard*' to build effective relationships and focused on this early in his transition. The need to establish effective communication with peers and staff was supported by several comments. An enterprise level leader who was attempting a significant change mandate, commented that he was '*killing them with communication and love*', acknowledging the importance of not only quality, but also quantity of communication when it comes to change.

## **Promoter Theme #2: Manager Support**

### *Supportive Manager*

A central relationship for the new leader is that with their direct manager. This theme features heavily in the responses and is included under both the promoters and the inhibitors. How supportive a transitioning leader's direct manager was determined whether the leader classified them as a promoter or inhibitor. One of the leaders explained

the positive aspect that he viewed his manager's support provided: *'My boss had the patience [and was] supportive in that perspective, but you know his approach is very hands off, very empowering'*. A way that the direct manager supported another leader was assisting him in successfully engaging difficult stakeholders in the organisation by helping to *'get them onboard'*. Without this support, he felt that he would have struggled to garner the stakeholder support needed to complete the actions he felt were necessary to succeed. Leaders having or feeling like they have the support of their direct manager developed their confidence and promoted early success. For one of the HR participants, they correlated the CEO's full support with the leader being *'set up for success'*. The direct manager's support, in this case the MD, was a sign for one of the leaders that he had confidence in her.

### *Freedom*

Both the direct manager participants mentioned the concept of freedom to make decisions and freedom to act as a promoter of transition success for the leaders they were discussing. They felt that bestowing the right amount of freedom for leaders allowed them to perform earlier. One of the direct managers offered the leader under him a *'carte blanche to do what needed to be done as part of the reorganisation'*. The direct managers are relating freedom to confidence and may be identifying an aspect of what they would want for a transition to be successful. Two of the leaders commented that freedom, which in their view was akin to empowerment, was key to their successful transition because it allowed them to make changes that they felt were required.

### *Access to Information*

Adequate access to the information that leaders require during the transition was identified as an important factor in a successful transition. A HR participant commented that the leader she discussed *'had access to a lot of information...he focused a lot on reporting ... on the business review'*. This easy and early access to the necessary information quickly developed the leaders' understanding of the business—the result of which was that the key stakeholder viewed his transition as progressing well.

### **Promoter Theme #3: Transition Planning**

Many of the participants cited using a plan for their transition—the 90-day plan influenced by the book *The First 90 Days* or 100-day plan more common in the US due



to it being considered a key period for new presidents. Most leaders acknowledged the need to have a plan for their transition. The use of a plan for the first period to move across the business and the issues was viewed as sound. This was a common theme across promoters, inhibitors, alternative options and advice they would give to someone assuming their role. Two interesting aspects that emerged, based on the number of codes for the use of a transition plan, were that externally recruited leaders were twice as likely to use a transition plan than internally promoted ones and that female leaders were twice as likely to use a transition plan than male leaders.

Transition plans provided the participants with structure, task direction, prioritisation and deliverables and likely increased not only the leaders' perceptions of self-efficacy, but also built confidence (amongst key organisational stakeholders) that the leader is performing well. Examples of the details in the plans were offered, but none of the plans were viewed, so it cannot be assessed how comprehensively the plans were designed. One of the leaders described her transition plan as more tactical than strategic. A HR participant described aspects in a structured transition plan that she designed as the onboarding process for the new leader, which included meetings with clients, regulators and internal and external stakeholders. Some leaders used multiple transition plans across sequential time periods as a method of generating success. Another leader used two consecutive 100-day plans, which he felt represented two distinct parts of his transition into an enterprise role.

Most transition plans were written by the leader, with input from their direct manager. In only one case was it written for the leader by their direct manager and the leader noted that this was not effective. Shortly after starting the role, the leader rewrote the transition plan, having decided that she *'needed to spend her time and energy in different areas'*. For some leaders, the crux of the transition plan was to understand the business so they could make a more formal business or strategic plan. Another leader spent the first 2–3 months understanding the business and then completing a detailed business plan. He explained: *'I felt I couldn't do the business plan until I understood the business and the people within the business and where we want to go to'*. Although there was no structured transition plan, leaders in two cases started with a specific project to complete and the structured nature of the project mimicked a transition plan. In both cases, the leaders felt it was an enabler and that it rendered the transition easier. One leader's transition

coincided with the business he was joining being acquired and this made his transition easier, as he had a *'very specific project where I had specific expertise'*.

### *Quick Wins*

The concept of achieving quick wins during a leadership transition is one that is featured heavily in academic and non-academic literature. It is not surprising that it was mentioned by several leaders as an enabler of their success. One of the leaders deliberately searched for specific opportunities to create a win early, believing that it would demonstrate effectiveness, and identified several that she was able to deliver during her transition. This was a common approach among the leaders interviewed. The leader that was observed by the one of the HR participants asked what quick wins could be achieved to ensure he delivered some during the transition.

*'When he first joined, he asked me what quick wins can we get from a cultural point of view, and I said we've never had drinks after work. I said how about that's one of the first things we do?' (HR2)*

Most other leaders agreed in hindsight that the actions that were considered quick or early wins positively contributed to their transition, although quick wins were not specified in their plan.

### **Promoter Theme #4: Effective and/or Supportive Team**

There are several challenges that the participants encountered with their teams as a result of their role transitions. Some of the leaders emerged from within a team to lead it; in other cases, the leaders inherited a team of people they had worked with or alongside before. Other leaders received a team of complete strangers. Most participants acknowledged the importance of a new leader interacting well with their team during the transition. Correspondingly, a common promoter and inhibitor was the attitudes and behaviours of the leaders' new teams during their transition. One leader explained: *'What helped me through the first 3 months is there's a pretty good group on balance... long termers who have got a very good feel for business...I've leveraged and leant on those guys and created quite good relationships'*. A HR participant explained that having a supportive team surrounding the leader she discussed was very influential to his success. When the leader's team or core group demonstrated support for the leader early in the process, the leader developed confidence that promoted success during the transition. For

one of the leaders it resulted in a group of four or five people *'that really bought into the process and helped him to sell it [the strategy] to everyone else'*. In addition to support—where the team openly accepted the new leader, as in the case with another of the leaders—this boosted confidence and promoted transition success.

### *Willingness to Change*

A change in leader often results in the desire or need to initiate change. This can provide an opportunity and a potential barrier for leaders in transition. Willingness for the team and the organisation to change was listed as an enabler of success for the new leader to achieve his or her goals. Described by one leader as having *'people with a vested interest and appetite to change'*. Another leader also noted that having *'really well-educated, motivated people in their spaces who wanted to change'* was a definite enabler of his ability to perform during his transition.

### *Assessing the Team*

When a leader assumes a new role, one of the required tasks during the transition period is to complete an assessment of their team that includes the members, roles and responsibilities. Leaders also assess their teams to determine who they feel will support them and who will not. Making this assessment early was regularly mentioned as a promoter, based on the leader being able to know who to work with and who to work around. For one of the leaders, it was *'making sure that we had the right people in the team and moving on that pretty quickly'*. Another leader explained that making this assessment was important and allowed him to decide with whom and how to push through his agenda for change. He described his staff as either *'allies'* or *'terrorists'* in terms of how he viewed their support, or lack thereof.

*'Identify who got it and who are your allies was important. And just as important, if not more important, was identify who were going to be the terrorists' (LE14).*

Although the use of military terms was dramatic in relation to the language used by the other participants, it presents an indication of how the leader viewed the role that his newly inherited team played in his success or failure.

### *Invest in Team*

The team plays a pivotal role for the new leaders' transitional success. Leaders are expected to invest time and effort into their teams and investing this time early in the transition was a decision that several leaders felt promoted success.

*'Getting to know the people I was working with, my team, really investing in them, trying to get a sense of what would bring out the best in that group and how I could help them was really important' (LE6).*

The above comment related to helping the team perform to the mutual benefit of the leader. Another leader mentioned it more in terms of taking the time to include them in the conversations and ensuring that they not only understood what was happening, but also that they felt they had the opportunity to raise questions and concerns. He believed that people were hungry to have conversations with him to understand the decisions and direction. He implemented what he called *'fireside chats with the CEO'* as one way of investing in his team. One of the HR participants commented, not specifically about the leader she was discussing but instead leaders in general, that leaders in her experience are sometimes so focused on learning the business that they neglect the people who, in her view, are ultimately the key to any leaders' success.

### **Promoter Theme #5: Industry Knowledge**

A good or detailed understanding of the industry and the competitive landscape was considered a promoter by several leaders who described it as *'incredibly helpful'*. This concept is supported by the multiple comments and the implied preference for organisations to hire people with industry knowledge, or for leaders to favourably consider roles in the same or similar industry (64 per cent of leaders in this research were discussing a transition into in a familiar industry). One of the leaders directly attributed his industry knowledge to his transition success. Industry knowledge extends to a solid understanding of the competitive landscape, as noted by a separate leader: *'I got the competitive landscape, I knew the competitors very well'*. For this leader, her industry knowledge was a deciding factor in her new employer's desire to recruit her. Another leader had transitioned from an adjacent industry and, although there were key differences between the two industries, she still felt that it was a promoter of early success. The fact

that this was listed as a promoter for this leader highlights the importance of industry knowledge to a successful transition.

### *Being Internal*

Participants confirmed that in their view leaders promoted from within the organisation have an advantage over externally recruited leaders, specifically regarding the factors of understanding the culture, people and the politics. Commencing a new leadership role with an '*understanding of the culture*' and '*knowing the people*' was regarded as an advantage during the transition. The leader discussed by one HR participant had been internally promoted and his understanding of what she described as a '*unique culture*' worked as a significant promoter during his transition.

### **Promoter Theme #6: External Support**

Participants who looked to external support to aid them through the transition, labelled it a promoter. Several leaders also mentioned that they would seek external support if they had to transition again. In all cases in which external support was mentioned, it was initiated by the leader him or herself. None of the leaders in the research were given external support from their organisation. One leader relied heavily on her network for assistance and insights in managing the transition. Another sought external support regarding how to navigate the organisation she had just joined. Although the support person was external, they had previously worked for the organisation and had a detailed understanding of the culture and operating behaviour.

*'Having that person outside the organisation that could help me, who had enough knowledge of the organisation, was unbelievably helpful' (LE6).*

Some external support came from family and friends, both in terms of advice but also in terms of understanding the pressures and time requirements of the leaders' new role. A leader new to the organisation engaged an external strategy consultant to help him with the strategic planning component of his role and considered it to be a promoter of his early success. Although few leaders received any formal coaching through their transition, LE6 utilised two external coaches for transition support,

*'I worked with two coaches during that period to assist me with that, one was a formal company that specialises in career transition, and the other was just a private coach who provided really good support to me during that period' (LE6).*

Again, this was initiated by the leader. Another leader re-engaged with a coach they had worked with previously during a transition at a former company. In some cases, the external support extended to advice and support from old colleagues and connections, *'a lot of my peers from my old workplace have been, still are my primary support network really'*. The research confirmed that the participants viewed support as a benefit and often a requirement for a leader transitioning into a new role.

#### *Internal Support Person*

Support for leaders in transition was distinguished between internal and external support. Several participants relied on people internally as a source of support to assist with the transition. These internal people included a friend, buddy, peer, mentor or a subject matter expert. For one of the leaders, the support person was a colleague who had started around the same time and was experiencing similar challenges in their new role.

*'I've met a peer, about two months in, a lady started just after me who I really clicked with so she's I guess my confidant and we bounce things off each other' (LE7).*

Both leaders were new to the organisation and connected early, building their understanding collectively and supported each other's transitions. The key function for the internal support person is to help the leader translate the culture and politics and to understand the way that the organisation behaves and operates. For the leader discussed by one HR participant, the assigned *'buddy acted as a bit of a sounding board'* for the new leader on the people, culture and his early decisions. The other potential benefit of an internal support person was to bridge the knowledge gap for the new leader. Another HR participant explained that it was a subject matter expert who helped the leader with his shortcomings in technical knowledge, having moved from a functional role to a general management position.

### **Promoter Theme #7: Engage Stakeholders**

New leaders have many priorities, one of which is to identify, understand and engage their new key stakeholders. These stakeholders include customers, peers, senior management, staff and people across the industry. Effectively engaging stakeholders was noted in several interviews as a promoter of success. One leader provided options for his division to choose from as part of the team engagement process and then held them accountable to that choice. One of the ways described to effectively engage stakeholders when the operation of the business is removed from the leaders' domiciled location, is to go out to meet the customers and other stakeholders. As an example, one leader worked diligently and engaged 1,000 customers in her first 100 days, believing that this was the most effective method for her to demonstrate to the stakeholders that she was committed to understanding the business. Another leader took a similar view, explaining that taking *'every opportunity to go on the road, engage with people, have meetings talking to customers and key partners'* was far more effective than *'sitting in the office'* during the transition period. The comment below is from a leader working in a retail operation. It is an apt example of getting out into the business and it is a decision that the leader felt had an enormous effect on her credibility early in the process and, therefore, her ability to win people across to the changes she wanted to make.

*'I did four-week in-store training, at my request. I went and worked in a fuel station and I went to all their training sessions at my own request... I said I want to go learn this business ... because I recognised that's the fact where you get your street cred, that you understand what they're actually doing' (LE8).*

### **Promoter Theme #8: Clear Expectations**

The importance of clear expectations for a leader in transition was a common theme raised by most participants. Expectations for the new leaders were generally communicated from management and, most commonly, from their direct manager. Many leaders interviewed decided to initiate the conversation to clarify their manager's expectations and the deliverables of the role. One of the leaders explained that she sat down with her manager in the first week and asked him to define the measures of success for the first three months, and then *'built on those ideas together to help get really clear on what his expectations were, what my expectations were and what was achievable'*. Many leaders who mentioned this as a promoter had initiated a conversation with their direct manager

regarding their expectations, in the belief that it was imperative to extract the information early in their transition and to also, in their best interest, force the discussion. In the case for another leader, it was a heated discussion about certain deliverables, and she identified aspects that she felt she needed to reject to be successful. She argued that they were not to be allocated to her role and that she would not take ownership. This highlights the leaders' roles in both seeking and setting the expectations for their performance and transition. In this case, the leader was internally promoted and had a greater understanding of this particular project/deliverable than an externally recruited leader. She also had an established relationship with the senior manager and felt comfortable contesting the point.

### **Inhibitors of Transition Success**

From the 22 interviews, there were 111 references coded for inhibitors or blockers of transition success, which were grouped based on frequency into 36 sub themes and then into 7 theme categories, as summarised in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2: Inhibitor Themes and Frequency

<b>Order</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
1	Navigating the Culture	Navigating Organisation, Culture, Culture-Country, Organisational Politics, Silo's	22	29
2	The New Team	Team, Staff or People, Negative Team, Poor Performing Team, Reports Wanting Role	13	19
3	Lack of Manager Support	Lack of Support, Poor Relationship, Lack of Freedom, Restrictions, Lack of Promotion	13	17
5	Functional Inexperience or Bias	Lack of Functional Experience, Functional Bias	5	9
6	Knowledge Gaps	Lack of Industry Knowledge, Technical Knowledge	5	6
4	Negative Attributes & Experiences	Confidence, Corporate Experience, Emotional Intelligence, Family Challenges	5	5
7	Lack of Role Clarity	Changing Role or Requirements, Ambiguity, Lack of Structure	3	4



## **Inhibitor Theme #1: Navigating the Culture**

### *No Map*

Several of the leaders articulated the challenges of not understanding the culture of an organisation for an incoming leader and the effect that it has on how quickly the leader becomes productive. In her view it was the more intangible aspects of the transition that made a real difference to her ability to succeed.

*'It's the unspoken pieces that play a bigger part in that productivity piece because, you can learn the tools, you can learn the processes but I think it's that back-end networking, politics, all of the things that go on within an organisation that take time to get across to learn and to realise and until you understand that dynamic and how you fit in and how you can influence that then it's difficult to be productive I think much sooner than that' (LE2).*

A primary issue that the culture poses to the new leader is that their attempts to gather information and take action can be stifled by not knowing who they should approach and how the organisation operates. Several of the leaders agreed that there can be a difference between the explicitly stated process and how things actually work within an organisation. One leader explained it as *'just knowing how we do thing around here and the unwritten rules around these things.'* The result was anxiety regarding *'how do I navigate through without treading on toes.'*

In certain circumstances, the challenge is not just an issue of a new culture to learn and understand, but a culture that specifically works against new people joining. In one case, the HR participant believed the culture that met the new leader was *'territorial and passively aggressive'* and there was a *'level of hostility'* that greeted the incoming leader. In his view, this systemic issue was *'very unhelpful around the leader's transition'*. A component of an organisation's culture is its politics and the effect they have on the leaders' transition. One leader explained the challenge for him was not knowing how to navigate, or having the confidence to navigate, the organisational politics. The leader discussed by one of the HR participants did not read the politics well, aligned himself with the wrong *'players'* and became too generally involved in the politics—all of which created additional challenges for his transition. For another leader discussed by a direct manager participant, the issue was not a lack of understanding of the politics, but a lack

of willingness to engage in them and with the necessary people that became a significant blocker to this leader's success; this played a part in his leaving the role within 18 months.

The view that organisational culture is a significant challenge for externally recruited leaders was supported in this research; however, contrary to much of the literature, two internally promoted leaders cited understanding the culture as an inhibitor. In one case, it was a leader who had moved between business division and in another case, it was a leader who had moved to a high level in the organisational hierarchy. In both cases, the leader felt that there was a significant difference in the culture to act as an inhibitor in the same way, as it would for a leader recruited externally, even though it was within the same organisation.

The comment made by the leader below summarises the effect of an organisation's politics, restrictions of information and lack of senior-level support on externally recruited leaders during their transition period, as well as the possible negative end result:

*'You bring a leader into an organisation, you expect them to go and lead. But then there's all these little borders they put around you, but don't say this, don't talk to that person ... There's all that politics and self-interest that goes on within an organisation that I think prevents the true leadership coming out in those early stages and, you know, unless you've got those people at more senior levels prepared to have that person's back, then you can have 20 knives in the back of you'. (LE2)*

## **Inhibitor Theme #2: The New Team**

### *Ineffective or Negative Team*

Teams and staff are integral to a leader's success during transition and in the long term. As many leaders inherit a team instead of creating one, some of the issues and challenges early in the process arise from this inherited team dynamic. One leader found herself inheriting a dysfunctional team that consumed much of her time and energy by just trying to progress through what she described as the 'noise' and 'political jostling'. What she described was a larger cultural issue that translated as an inhibitor to making the changes she felt were necessary. For another leader, the team she had inherited was underperforming and the changes she needed to make were difficult due to a lack of support and politics. From her perspective, this affected her early performance because

*'the support was really lacking ... you had people we call the change resistors and the dream stealers, there were people like that all throughout the organisation.'* Another cultural aspect was the tenure and attitude of the senior managers and their reluctance to include new leaders. One of the leaders experienced the effects of being the newest to the leadership team and he found that it inhibited his transition. His experience was that there was *'a prevailing sense of we've been here a long time, you're the new kid on the block and we know what we're doing'*. This attitude made it difficult for the leader to contribute early, which became a mounting source of pressure and stress.

For the following leader, who had originated from within their new team, the issue of familiarity with the people was noted as an inhibitor,

*'The familiarity with the existing team, that was really tough, making the decisions I had to make, looking into the eyes of the people that I've been working with for ten years' (LE5).*

This leader was promoted from his peer group to the enterprise level and needed to make changes to the business and personnel to make the business successful again. However, his familiarity with the old peer group caused him to procrastinate, and it took three months longer to execute what he felt needed to be done for the business to be successful. Rising from one's peers is a well-accepted challenge for leaders across the literature, as is the situation in which some of the new team think they are better suited or qualified for the new leadership role. One of the HR participants commented that *'some within the leadership team, who saw themselves as the right person for his role'* and it took considerable time for them to *'get over it'*, resulting in a heated exchange with the new leader. The person involved generally accepted the decision and continued in their existing role under the new leader. In two of the cases, they left the organisation.

### **Inhibitor Theme #3: Lack of Manager Support**

#### *Non-Supportive Manager*

Many participants acknowledged the importance of the direct manager relationship for a successful transition. Consistently, a lack of support from the direct manager was labelled as an inhibitor to success; however, some leaders had differing views on what constituted support, or the lack thereof. In one case, it was a manager who was unavailable during the transition period, which stifled the leader's learning and access to information. In

another case the leader experienced a manager with a *'hands-off approach'* that he considered predominately negative in hindsight. In his opinion, it enabled his learning, but it also inhibited it and he felt that he would have achieved much earlier with *'someone in the background maybe a mentor at that point, I could have just bounced this stuff off'*. For several leaders, the direct manager featured as both a promoter and inhibitor.

*'My boss has been equal parts an enabler and a disabler, so she's good in that if she can feel it's been really tough, she'll say do you want me to step in for this conversation with this person ... but she's also so demanding and so controlling of my outputs that she's also made it harder' (LE7).*

Ultimately however, the negative effects of this leader's manager outweighed the positive ones. From the perspective of the direct managers interviewed, they also recognised that they had acted as an enabler and blocker to the leaders' success early in the process. One of the direct manager participants felt that he inhibited his leader in transition through the close relationship that he had with the leader and the second direct manager acknowledged that his lack of attending meetings with the leader was a key inhibitor to his leader in transition.

#### *No Training or Support*

A lack of training regarding business systems and processes, as well as a lack of support, was also noted by several participants. One leader referred to the concept of knowing how to *'navigate'* the organisation and the different people / roles when she commented that the lack of training program made it difficult for *'someone who is new to understand how all the pieces of the puzzle fit together'*. Participants were also asked how they were supported during their transition, yielding an underwhelming response. This lack of support was specifically noted in several cases as one of the main inhibitors to transition success. Another leader had only four days of handover from the outgoing leader and a noticeable lack of support from the board, both of which were major inhibitors to his transition. A third leader cited her reputation as a self-starter as the reason that she was not supported well in her new role,

*'Unfortunately through you know reputation or whatever I carry a bit of a label which I call a liability and that's that I'm a self-starter, that can work for you and*

*against you when you're moving into new roles because there is the view that while you're a self-starter you're going to go and look after yourself' (LE2).*

The concepts of reputation and expectation were discussed by many of the participants. For many, they acknowledged that their entry into the role or organisation brought with it increased expectations based on their past performance and success, real or perceived. Consistent with parts of the literature that contend, at a senior level, that the leaders that organisations hire are expected to be self-starters and are able to succeed independently. It also implies that the reputation a leader enters with can influence the way that they are supported and onboarded in the new organisation.

#### *Sold a Lemon*

For several of the leaders interviewed, there was a significant difference in the state of the organisation between what was communicated during the interview process and the reality when they commenced. Expectations from the interview process were not met and the leader was faced with a bigger challenge than expected. For one leader, *'things were going worse than what was communicated to me so there was a bit more urgency around a couple of things'* and this urgency during the transition to make changes *'set me on the back foot a little bit'*. The result for this leader was a longer period between commencing the role and feeling as though he had made an impact. What he had planned to achieve early was not possible due to the worsened conditions. Incidentally, this leader was recruited directly so the misrepresentation or overly favourable depiction of the role came directly from the business and not via a third-party recruiter.

#### *Meeting Overload*

One leader described her onboarding process as *'being back-to-back in meetings all the time, literally everyday'* and devoid of the time to process and understand what she was learning. This lack of time delayed her being able to formulate and crystallise her thoughts and actions for her role. This example of onboarding is more akin to an orientation or induction program in which the central theme is for the new leader to meet the many stakeholders across the business; in this case, the urgency with which it occurred left the leader disorientated and confused.

### *Too Little or Too Much Freedom*

The theme freedom featured in the list of promoters in relation to the leader having freedom early to make decisions and act. Its absence was conversely mentioned as a blocker described as a process of putting borders around the new leaders restricting their ability to move freely around the organisation and its stakeholders. For another leader, the issue was too much freedom and scope that he felt made the transition more difficult. He felt that *'coming from outside the industry, I needed some context that I could work with rather than having a total blank canvas that gave me no direction'*.

### *Sans Information*

For the leaders in this study, having access to the appropriate information early is essential for developing an accurate understanding of the business, issues and opportunities. Much of the information in organisations resides with the people, so the leaders needed to work their way around the organisation, first by discovering who has the information and then working with those people to extract it. In several cases, participants talked about the difficulty in getting people to provide the information primarily due to the belief that it may hurt them. One leader stated that his initial assessment was delayed due to the deliberate withholding of information, even in response to explicit questioning. A second leader had a similar experience saying that people were *'deliberately vague and opaque'* and that *'it was very difficult extracting information because people didn't want the true story coming out'*.

### **Inhibitor Theme #4: Functional Inexperience or Bias**

Several of the leaders who had transitioned from a functional leader level to a business leader level or higher identified either their lack of cross-functional experience or a functional bias as an inhibitor during the transition period. This bias or lack of understanding can make it difficult for the leader to make decisions in these areas as quickly or as confidently as they can in their area of expertise. It can also damage their credibility with the staff of those divisions who may be questioning why the leader received the senior role.

*'My lack of experience cross functionally was really a challenge. And to be fair, it is a continuous challenge for me today. You know, I think I'm 2.5 years on but*

*I'm only about 12 months ... across the functional parts of the business because I was still playing the GM Ops part' (LE5).*

The leader quoted above had foreseen his promotion to the CEO role, but still *'did not recognise it enough to be interested in other departments enough'*. A separate leader explained his bias by explaining that he *'gravitated to operational functions that I've managed before and had some experience with'* and this resulted in him *'staying away'* from certain meetings and client interactions during his transition.

### **Inhibitor Theme #5: Knowledge Gaps**

In addition to identifying a potential functional bias, participants also identified general gaps in their or the leaders' knowledge that acted as blockers to success, especially early in the transition. One of the leaders struggled with poor knowledge at a technical level, having moved into a new industry and acknowledging that *'there's actually a lot of complexity around how the industry works and what happens'*. The ability to understand the jargon and to communicate to various people in their *'language'* was another gap noted by a leader who had also transitioned into a new industry. Not *'being able to have a conversation with some people and use the same language'* affected not only his ability to understand what was being communicated, but also his ability to build credibility and confidence.

### **Inhibitor Theme #6: Negative Attributes and Experience**

#### *Family Challenges*

One leader expressed a challenge regarding her family responsibilities. She had assumed a bigger role at a new company further away from home and was struggling with feelings of *'mummy guilt'* as a result. She also admitted to struggling to adjust to the culture of her new organisation after being with her former company for 15 years, so the pressures of family were amplified and caused a considerable inhibitor. Another leader believed that the new role would place significant pressure on his family, so he sent them home to England for the first 6 months of his role. He acknowledged that this decision was extreme and, while logical at the time, it caused distress and regret. In another situation in which the leader was coming from England, the HR participant took significant action to mitigate what she knew could be an inhibitor or a risk. She understood that *'it was really transitioning the family into the business'* and that if difficult for the family, it would

likely be unsuccessful for the leader. The effect of an international move on the family of leaders can be significant and can cause an early departure from the new role.

### *Unbalanced Learning*

Whilst most participants mentioned a requirement to learn as part of the transition, in some cases the inhibitor was not the absence of learning but in what area the leader concentrated their learning. A HR participant explained that the leader she observed focused heavily on the financial reports early in his transition at the detriment, in her view, of spending time *'learning about people'*. The result was a delayed engagement with his team. The leader quoted below clearly articulated his conscious decision to not just focus on the areas in which he was an expert at the expense of areas that he did not understand as well.

*'The need to develop a plan around how I'm going to focus my time and not get caught too much on learning unimportant stuff, how to balance out the areas that I naturally gravitate to versus the ones I would not naturally gravitate to' (LE9).*

He also understood the risk that during the transition, he would potentially *'naturally gravitate'* towards familiar areas and away from other areas and made a conscious effort to mitigate this risk.

### *Lack of Trust*

The aspect of trust was mentioned several times in response to what inhibited success. A direct manager participant explained that it took the leader considerable time to build trust within the organisation, establish the required relationships and glean support for initiatives. For one leader, *'it took me a long time to build the trust with the people that were left behind because I couldn't share with everybody why I made the changes'*. With another leader, it was the level of trust that she had for her new organisation that was the inhibitor. The political nature of the organisation had eroded her trust and she was questioning her decision to join at the time of the interview for this research. The result was a tentative start in which she was reluctant to commit completely to the role and organisation, which she felt slowed her early achievements and results.



### *Baggage from Previous Roles*

The same leader also cited an unpleasant exit to her previous role as an inhibitor to success in her new role because it dulled her energy and enthusiasm. This is the leader who also spoke about struggling to trust her new organisation, with past experiences possibly being an influence. Although not mentioned under the theme of preparation, what this leader is describing is the antithesis of the good preparation that some participants noted as a promoter of success. Other leaders mentioned that they struggled in their new organisations due to aspects that they felt were superior in their last organisation. Several leaders acknowledged that the gap between how their old organisation supported leaders compared to their new organisation, provided a challenge for them to overcome in terms of feeling positive about the new organisation. Another leader experienced a similar challenge, but in regard to the systems, process and structure that he felt were noticeably inferior at his new organisation. For another leader, it was the new organisations' weaker position in the competitive landscape that added a negative aspect to her transition.

### **Inhibitor Theme #7: Lack of Role Clarity**

#### *Ambiguity*

Clarity, or the lack thereof, featured heavily in both promoters and inhibitors. Leaders commented that clarity was key to success and that ambiguity served as a significant blocker. One leader commented that the lack of role clarity during and after their transition period was a definite inhibitor. This extends to clarity of the reporting lines, authorities and key stakeholders. A HR participant observed for her leader that not having a clear set of objectives and not having two senior leaders '*on the same page and heading in the same direction*' proved to be a considerable inhibitor during and after the transition for the new leader.

#### *Poor Structure*

Where leaders found that their new role or organisation lacked the level of structure expected, they noted that this made their transition harder. A lack of organisational structure can make it difficult for a leader in a new role to understand how to access information or how to progress tasks and actions. A HR participant acknowledged that the lack of structure was a blocker and that the leader was challenged by the need to '*work*

*it out for himself*'. One leader specified the lack of coherent systems and '*shocking processes*' that she found '*convoluted, very inefficient, difficult to navigate*' as a blocker to her ability to generate understanding and be successful in her role. The maturity of the organisation was identified by two participants as an inhibitor in relation to a lack of organisational structure. A second leader explained the effects of the lack of organisational maturity, as '*it knows what it wants, but it's not really ready to do it*'. The result was low support and direction-inhibiting the leader's ability to make clear decisions.

### **Alternative Options/Actions**

The third question exploring promoters and inhibitors involved the participants reflecting on what they would do differently if they had the ability to have this transition again. Table 4.3 summarises the themes that emerged.

Table 4.3: Alternative Options/Actions Themes and Frequency

<b>Order</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
1	Get the Right Team	Move on Staff Earlier or Quicker, Make Assessments, Delegate More	14	23
2	Seek Support	Seek Greater Support, Seek External Support Person, Help Setting Direction, More Cultural Support, More Time with Manager	7	9
3	Take Ownership	Take Ownership or Control, Speak Up, Stronger with Boss, Tackle Issues Earlier	7	7
4	Stakeholder Engagement	Better Stakeholder Engagement, Horizontal Relationships, Stakeholder Engagement	3	6

#### **Options Theme #1: Get the Right Team**

##### *Make Staff Changes Earlier*

The most common comment made by the leaders was that they would make staff changes earlier, as one leader explained: '*I would have moved quicker on making the changes I wanted to make within the executive*'. Most leaders agreed, one saying that a change he

would make would be ensuring that he had the *'right people in the team'* and *'pretty quickly'*. The importance of a leader having effective team members and the challenges of inheriting a team as a new leader is commonly discussed across the literature. If a leader felt that team members were not demonstrating the desired behaviour and attitude, they took steps to remove those team members. As indicated by the comment below, the leader did remove these people, but later than he should have done in hindsight.

*'I would have been a lot more aggressive with the people that were clearly displaying a lack of trust or a lack of willingness to work with others... those individuals have turned out to be less willing to change than I expected' (LE1).*

One of the leaders entered the role conscious that she wanted to make the staff changes quickly. Even with that clear intent, she did not do this as quickly as she felt she should have in hindsight *'I would have moved even faster on some of the people issues, I always find that, I've moved fast but I think I could've moved faster, knowing what I know now'*. Another leader referred to her reluctance to make the changes early as giving the staff too much grace or being too hopeful for the correct behaviour to develop. Leaders new to the organisation are cautious of making decisions too quickly, especially regarding people they have only just started to work with, who they are responsible for and who are instrumental to their success. It was suggested that leaders in transition should *'figure out who in the team is in or out and draw a line in the sand of acceptable behaviour'*. The leader believed that not doing that in her transition resulted in team issues continuing long into her first year and them acting as an inhibitor to her own performance.

Although the vast majority of interviewed leaders agreed that they would make staff changes earlier than they did in hindsight, none of the HR or direct manager participants commented that they thought the leaders that they were discussing should have moved faster on staff changes. This may highlight a disconnection between the leaders and the organisation, with the pressure of leaders wanting or needing to make the changes early in contrast to the key stakeholders across the business who might not see the same urgency.

## **Options Theme #2: Seek Support**

### *Seek Greater Support*

Several of the leaders commented that they would either seek external support or, where there had been external support, seek that support earlier. This was the view of LE6, based on his reflection of how it positively benefited his transition. Two of the leaders regarded external support as a way to ‘smooth’ and ‘accelerate’ their transition. For one, as the head of the organisation, he commented that support is important, as ‘you always need someone else to talk to’. Explaining a change that the organisation has already made, based on the discussed failed transition, one HR participant referred to an improved process that includes a buddy system (internal support) for leaders new to the business that did not exist when the leader discussed joined.

### *Structured Onboarding*

In the case mentioned above, in which the leader was leaving the week of the interview, the HR participant noted that the current level of onboarding was far superior than when that leader started and had that been in place, the end result may have been better. A second HR participant, who was responsible for the transition, also said she would take greater control of the transition to assist the leader better.

### *More Time with their Manager*

A theme that emerged was leaders finding or asking for more time with their direct manager, complementing the other themes regarding the importance of a supportive manager and clarity in the previous sections. One of the leaders commented that he would ‘find a way to get more time’ with his manager, although he was not sure how he would have achieved it. His comment confirms that it is the new leader who needs to initiate this with their direct manager and that requesting a greater allocation of time should help with their understanding and clarity early.

### *More Cultural Support*

In support of the comments regarding culture in the inhibitors’ sections, one of the HR participants identified that more cultural support would have aided the leaders’ transition and that they would increase the support in this area if they had this transition again. This

leader had moved from a different organisation overseas to lead a business in Australia. the HR participant recognised that he struggled to not only understand the culture at the new organisation, but also the cultural differences between the countries.

### **Options Theme #3: Take Ownership**

#### *Take Control Earlier*

Organisations that recruit leaders from outside create an opportunity to benefit from the knowledge that the leader has of other organisations and/or other industries. However, this potential gain can be squandered during the transition if the new leader is not afforded the support and opportunity to share those insights. One leader said she would be '*really bold*', push her agenda '*straight to the top*' and not hesitate to share her opinions and thoughts with the senior leadership if she had this transition again. Another stated that she would take a stronger position with her direct manager, who was more an inhibitor than promoter of a successful transition. She would have the '*tougher conversations earlier*', concerning the manager's '*stifling style of management*'. Another leader again wished that he had addressed some of the business issues earlier in his tenure to pave a way for success now. His opinion was that waiting had prolonged the issue and made it more difficult to resolve.

### **Options Theme #4: Stakeholder Engagement**

#### *Better Stakeholder Engagement*

Stakeholder engagement featured in both the promoters and the inhibitors list so, unsurprisingly, it is one of the themes that featured in leaders' reflection. For one of the leaders, it was understanding the value to be gained from early stakeholder engagement and that, in his situation, stakeholders were there to help rather than hinder. With the hindsight knowledge of how it influenced the transition success, one of the HR participants would seek to help the leader better engage the stakeholders by organising formal meetings to foster the engagement and relationships. In one case, the leader commented that she would actually spend less time building the horizontal relationships with peers. She felt that it was wasted time trying to engage people who only '*slowed her down*'. This was the only comment of this kind and the context was that these stakeholders actually hindered her progress, prevented her from gaining wider acceptance of initiatives and made the '*process more political*'.

### *Identify the Decision-Makers*

A component of poorly understanding the culture in an organisation is not knowing who truly holds power and influence. One leader said that she would seek out the people who were responsible for the decisions earlier, so she could move faster through her change agenda. However, the leader acknowledged that at the time, he did not know who held the power for the decisions, so the actual change might be seeking to earlier understand who actually holds that power.

### *Selectively Listen to Advice*

Several leaders mentioned the requirement to be selective in the advice they take during the transition period including an enterprise level leader, who had a difficult transition moving from commerce into the public sector and into an organisation that needed a strong turnaround to remain viable. He stated that he would not listen to his chair as much as he did because he has since realised that he *'comes from a whole different paradigm, perspective and agenda'*. The broader application of this comment is to be careful who one listens to early in the process, especially until they understand their motivations, perspective and agenda. For a CEO, the Chair holds considerable power and influence. For other roles, it might be a different position, but leaders in transition must be discerning of the advice they take throughout their transition.

## **Advice for Future Leaders**

The last question of the interview included what the participants would advise someone else undertaking their current role to have a successful transition into the role. Table 4.4 summarises that themes and frequencies.

Table 4.4: Advice Themes and Frequency

<b>Order</b>	<b>Grouping</b>	<b>Example Codes</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>References</b>
1	Learn, Learn and Learn	Understand the Strategy, Understand Culture, Understand the Business, Get Out into the Business, Understand the Key Stakeholders	22	24
2	Seek Clarity	Clear Deliverables,	10	10

		Manage Expectations, Seek Clarity, Confirm Support		
3	Focus on Yourself	Avoid the Politics, Be Kind to Yourself, Build Relationships, Trust Instincts, Listen & Wait	9	9

### **Advice Themes #1: Learn, Learn and Learn**

#### *Patiently Learn*

The ability to be patient early and to take the time to truly observe and understand the business and the people was one leader's advice: *'sit back and listen for the first three months'*. He identified an opportunity during the transition period to ask direct or obvious questions early, ones that a leader cannot ask later on and ones that will help the leader *'cut to the core of the issues'*.

#### *Get Out in the Business*

Not completing one's learning from the office is advice that the participants would give a new leader to prioritise in their transition. This relates to generating a thorough understanding of the business early to support assessment and decision-making. Several leaders recommended spending as much time as possible *'on the road talking to customers and getting their insights'*, or trying to *'get out into the sites and see what the business is really about'*.

#### *Plug the Technical Gaps*

One leader mentioned that gaining technical knowledge would be an advantage early in the process. This was in the specific field of superannuation products. It was acknowledged by several interviewees that leaders who lack the technical knowledge will struggle if they do not address the gap early. Other leaders recommended that if the leader lacks industry experience, they should address this as quickly as possible in their transition by working closely with the customers.

#### *Invest in Your Team*

This theme appeared heavily in the promoters' section, reinforcing that one of the key leverage points for new leaders is their team. The need to understand, assess and engage

one's team is clear from the responses. One leader identified *'the power of team'* and the benefits of *'having the best team around you as quickly as possible'* as the key piece of advice he would give.

## **Advice Themes #2: Seek Clarity**

### *Obtain Clarity Early*

Clarity in roles, relationships, actions and deliverables were all mentioned in response to this question and throughout the promoters and inhibitors. Clarity creates confidence of action, especially in prioritisation and decision-making, two areas in which leaders are judged early. Role clarity for the leader and for the team is important. One of the leaders advocated being *'firm on what needs doing and have conversations and set expectations early'* to set clear boundaries regarding what the leader is prepared to do and not prepared to do. A second leader suggested understanding the extent to which the leader can act and, therefore, understanding how and what the leader can attempt early. He encouraged seeking a documented brief regarding the scope, authority and reporting relationships. To be clear on what the leader is trying to achieve in the transition period and not attempting to do too much too early is another piece of advice imparted, explaining that leaders must be clear on what *'success is going to look like'* and then *'delivering that'*. For another leader, the advice was to deliver clarity of your intentions to avoid confusion, which can halt productivity and efficiency and explain how *'what you are doing relates to what everyone else in the team does'* as a *'lack of consistency and miscommunication can create confusion with people'*.

At the enterprise leader level, a key stakeholder is the board or the shareholders. Leaders at this level identified gaining clarity of role and goals from the board. One of the enterprise leaders extended the theme of clarity to the level of support that the leader should expect to receive when they commence.

*'What I would advise to someone else, is to confirm what kind of support will be available prior to agreeing to the contract, to signing on ... say what onboarding or transitioning support is available through the transition period?' (LE10).*

This indicates that the leader quoted felt the transition would be easier or more successful if it was better supported and that it should be an important consideration for accepting a new leadership role. This leader also noted that anyone new should continually focus on



the mission of the organisation to guide their decisions. Whether it is mission or the strategy, what this leader is expressing is the need for a clarity of purpose and direction to know what to focus on early.

### *Understand the Culture*

The link between understanding the culture and a successful transition was supported by the numerous responses to the advice question. Focusing early to gain an efficient understanding of the culture is a common thread in the responses encouraging a new leader to *'understand the culture of the organisation that you're stepping into'* and to *'spend a lot of time asking people for their perspective of the business'*. This advice was extended to understanding the history of the organisation as an additional benefit. One of the HR participants believed that the history and legacy of an organisation is important to understand, as it heavily influences the current culture, values and behaviours. Another piece of advice is to caution leaders against making assumptions about the culture they are joining. Another HR participant mentioned that assuming *'you understand the culture because you have moved from a competitor'* is a mistake.

### **Advice Themes #3: Focus on Yourself**

#### *Avoid the Politics*

One piece of advice from a direct manager participant was to not get overly involved in the politics of the organisation, as it can slow a leader's progress during the transition. He accepted that *'the politics are important, but they can sometimes drag you into things you might not want to be involved in, sometimes it's better to focus on results and let the politics play out'*. The context of his comment relates to an organisational culture that was, in his opinion unhealthy, had changed on the back of an acquisition and was still a potential inhibitor to any incoming leader.

#### *Build Effective Relationships*

Relationships with the direct manager and the other key stakeholders feature throughout the study and several of the participants identified it as a key piece of advice they would give a leader assuming their role tomorrow. Several leaders stressed the importance of investing time and effort into establishing effective relationships, including as one leader explains *'all of the key stakeholders'*, with the desired outcome being to *'know who's who'*

*in the zoo*'. A HR participant suggested that leaders will be more successful if they can establish the core issues that are important to the key stakeholders and if they can gain the stakeholders support for their change, plan or strategy.

### *Be Kind to Yourself*

This comment was made by two participants, one at the Enterprise Level (highest level) and one at the Leading Others (lowest level). The kindness they encourage leaders show is in terms of the expectations that leaders put on themselves to learn, understand quickly and feel that they should have all of the answers. One of the leaders advised that leaders should not *'expect to know it all straight up'* and *'if you're not ready to make a decision, don't but let people know that you're not going to'*. Another advised to not *'judge yourself too much'* when it is not possible to *'get your head around'* a new role quickly. Similar to the response in the previous section around what you would do differently, several leaders would advise that a new leader should deliberately go seek a support person, a mentor or coach.

### *Careful with the Shadow You Cast*

This relates to being mindful of the early comments, statements and actions due to the increased attention that leaders have early in the transition period. One leader believed that when a leader is new, *'everything you do is amplified'* and it is possible for people to overanalyse their early actions and comments, creating a *'shadow'* that inhibits their ability to succeed longer term.

## **Strategic Understanding**

During the interviews, questions were asked to encourage the participant to explain what their (or the leaders') level of strategic understanding was during their transition and what effect, if any, this level of understanding had on their transition. No explanation was given for the term *'strategic understanding'* or *'understanding of strategy'*, nor did any of the interviewees asked for clarification. The responses support that it was how they *'understood'* the strategy of the organisation. Participants were also asked to share how they had acquired their understanding in an effort to identify the means of communication or education that generated their understanding. At the business-leader level and above, the responses indicated that it is one of the tasks of the leader to assess and set the strategy

for the organisation. For leaders at that level and above, their understanding of the strategy was less relevant, in their view, than their understanding of the key factors that strategically affect the business. *'Setting, setting and redefining'* the strategy was a key responsibility which included *'where are we verses our competitors, what opportunities do we have, how do we leverage the bringing together of two businesses, where will we play in the market'*.

If the leader had a good understanding of the strategy early, then they felt confident to make assessments and decisions within the strategic context. If they did not, they felt apprehensive and worried that the decisions they were making were wrong. For some participants, the lack of understanding was due to the organisation not having a clearly articulated strategy or a common language around strategy for staff and leaders to understand and be able to articulate the strategy. There was no *'stated organisational strategy, vision, mission or purpose statement'*, according to one of the leaders when he joined. This increased his anxiety during the transition. Two other leaders also stated that there was no existing strategy when they commenced their roles. Another leader acknowledged that *'there was a strategy, but it was unclear and generally not understood'*. The absence of clarity regarding the strategy was an equal inhibitor as that of the absence of a strategy with one leader complaining that the ambiguity of the strategy and lack of any *'real direction'* made his transition challenging.

For a leader who transitioned at the enterprise level, the absence of a strategy was a positive aspect, as it meant that he did not have to move the organisation away from an existing strategy, a job he viewed as potentially difficult. Not needing to *'come in and reset people's expectations around a previous strategy'* was in his opinion a positive outcome of the absence of a strategy.

Participants distinguished between having a good and a poor understanding of the strategy during their transition. Overall, more participants felt they had a poor understanding of the strategy than those who felt that they had a good understanding. This was supported by the direct manager and HR participants. The group with a poor understanding included the participants who felt that there was not a clear strategy and thus nothing with which to align their assessments and decisions. One of the direct manager participants admitted that the leader he discussed was at a disadvantage, as the organisation was extremely poor at sharing their strategy.

Another theme in the responses was that senior leaders are expected to know the strategy and if they do not, then it was a slant on them as a leader.

*'If you don't know the strategy of the company, then there's something wrong with you' (LE11).*

This expectation, that senior leaders should just know the strategy, renders it harder for leaders to ask the necessary questions to establish a clear understanding. Participants were asked to explain how they gained their understanding of the strategy, irrespective of their level of understanding. One of the leaders explained that due to a recent change in strategy, there was an extensive communication program resulting in a high level of strategic understanding early into the transition. There were few examples in which a leader considered their organisation competent at communicating the strategy and in which it was independent of a recent or significant change. In one leader's opinion, the high level of passion across the organisation resulted in clear articulation of what they *'need to do and why it matters'*.

In terms of who delivers the message on the strategy, it is still commonly the domain of the CEO, especially with new leaders to the organisation and it is often delivered personally or firsthand. In one case, the communication was *'just the standard business delivery sort of thing...they send out emails with the structure on it...we have team meetings for the whole department, and we have team meetings for our particular area'*. The leader felt she had a poor understanding of the strategy and the way it was communicated was a major contributor. She received most of the information *'via emails and townhall style meetings'*. This was not an effective process in her opinion. A HR participant described the process that she partially owned and indicated that the strategy is covered at a broad level, but that it did not translate to clarity for the leader transitioning into the business: *'the strategy for him personally and his objectives I would say probably wasn't very clearly defined for him at all'*.

One leader talked about workshops explaining the strategy, which had been organised on the back of a new strategic direction. The timing of her joining the business conveniently coincided with those workshops. She did comment that her understanding would have been poor had she missed those workshops and that it was a factor of good timing instead of good transition planning from the business. Another example of good timing occurred

for a leader, who joined in the midst of the communication and restructure after the decision for a new strategy. Across the participants, there was consensus that strategic understanding was fundamental early in a new leadership role due to the requirement for leaders to make assessments and decisions. Without it, leaders in transition struggle to perform:

*'If I didn't properly understand the strategy, I would've been operating in a vacuum. I wouldn't have been able to shape my functional strategies appropriately' (LE6).*

The one contrary view was from a leader who felt that it was not important to the early part of his transition because he was new to the industry/company and was concentrating on learning about the people and the business first. This may indicate that while understanding the strategy is very important to leaders in new roles, there might be an optimal timing in which they can both absorb and comprehend the strategy in the midst of other learning that they undertake during the transition. One of the HR participants made the link from strategic understanding to the leaders' decision to join the organisation, essentially arguing for its importance during the recruitment process at a senior-leader level. In her opinion, the leader would not *'have joined the organisation if he didn't know the strategy at the start'*. The importance of the strategic understanding can be summarised in this quotation, which was in response to the question of what advice the leader would give someone taking over their role tomorrow:

*'Really make sure you understand the strategy, so you make the right choices' (LE6).*

## **Measures of Transition Success**

While the participants' responses varied, there was a common theme that measurement during the transition period was not widely formalised by the organisation and that the leader was often responsible for devising his or her own measures with limited direction. The measurements used by the organisations were commonly used to assess performance only after the transition and many measurements mentioned were financial or metric based. The literature review highlights this gap in terms of the measurements of transition performance and success. To explore this area, participants were asked how they

measured success during the transition period. It was clear that there was no common set of tangible measures across the different transitions and organisations. Consequently, there were many intangible measurements used. For one of the leaders, *'there weren't any hard targets or anything like that there were all soft measures...there was nothing tangible/objective really to measure. It was all subjective, getting to know people'*. For some participants, there was a preference for the intangible measures during the transition. One HR participant cited the performance measures listed in the leaders' job description as the primary measures but believed that the leader would not be able to demonstrate performance in these areas during the transition, hence the reliance in the intangible measures. Examples such as general feedback, peer review and what their direct reports are saying is often more important *'than hard-line KPI measurements'*. An intangible measure that one leader used for herself was the hours she worked each day during the transition.

*'I found that I've really noticed the length of my days, it hasn't taken me nearly as long to do things, which I think is telling many ways' (LE6).*

She associated the level of her integration and effectiveness with the time required to complete the necessary tasks she had each day. She interpreted the reduced time as progress through her transition and towards success. Another example of intangible measures in an organisation particularly strong on their values was the extent to which the leader demonstrated alignment to these values during the transition.

#### *Transition Plan as a Measurement Tool*

Several of the interviewees had set or attempted to set a 90 or 100-day plan for their transition as a method of measuring performance. One leader *'set some activities that I was going to do over the first 30, 60 and 90 days that would be the measurement of success'*. Another leader was also measured on whether she achieved the goals on her 100-day plan. In many cases in which a plan was established, this became a measurement tool for the leader. In all but one example, the transition plan was the initiative of the leader and it was the leader who designed, measured and reported on the progress. Several of the leaders felt that they needed to do this to safeguard themselves and to have something to offer the organisation at the completion of the transition period. The need

to perform early was articulated by all leaders interviewed and drove many to construct their own plan or measurement tools.

### *Feedback as a Measurement*

Three of the organisations used 360-degree feedback as part of their employee and leadership development. One organisation measured transition success via feedback from the leaders' direct reports and peers. For the leaders in these organisations, the timing of the organisational feedback process coincided with their transition period and became a measure of success. However, none of the 360-degree surveys were altered to include questions specifically related to a transition, so the leaders were assessed in the same way and by the same measures as established leaders. One of the leaders recruited externally recognised that, unlike her last employer, her new organisation did not have a formal 360-feedback process. She instead decided to drive the process with the people directly, seeking feedback on her transition progress. For this leader, the absence of feedback during the transition period had caused some anxiety. She felt that she needed to seek out the feedback to guide her transition. Another leader noted that a key measurement was general feedback delivered informally to his direct manager on how he was progressing. Informal feedback was a common method of assessing the leaders in transition and several participants commented that the intent was not necessarily to identify key areas of positive performance, but rather to expose any negative feedback. For these organisations, the absence of negative feedback was a positive measure. For a third leader, it was how he *'was settling in'* and whether he was *'getting on well with people'* that indicated success or failure.

At a senior leader level, the performance measures can be much broader and take longer to show results, such as changing the organisational culture and establishing a new strategy. For these senior leaders, the measurements cited centred on their responsibility for the strategy for the business, both in terms of understanding the existing business structure and strategy, as well the ability to set and execute a new strategy:

*'They were looking to someone to ... provide a clear strategy for the business. If that hadn't been evident in the 90-day period, they would have questioned me' (LE1).*

Another area of measurement identified was stakeholder engagement. The level at which the new leader was able to interact, integrate and engage the key stakeholders in their role was noted as a method of determining the level of transition success. One leader was measured based on his *'ability to integrate with the key people in the business'* and *'feedback from the stakeholders'*. Another leader, who had transitioned from an individual contributor to the leading others' level role, identified a key measurement of success as the time spent not on operational tasks. One of the changes that a first-time leader experiences is the change from the tasks required as an individual contributor to the tasks related to leading a team. Although it required much longer than she had hoped in this area, it was still a valuable measurement.

### *Trust*

Successfully gaining the trust of the organisation was another measure that was mentioned from the leaders' perception. One of the leaders continually questioned himself during the transition: *'Am I getting the trust of the organisation?'*. His perspective was that trust was necessary for him to deliver on his role and it also reflected a confidence in himself as a new leader. The trust of the team, even though the leader is new to the organisation and to the industry, is another indicator. Another leader regarded an increase in trust from her team as relating to confidence in her as a leader and to an acknowledgment that she understood the business sufficiently for the staff to approach her with their queries. The shift in behaviour in approaching her instead of approaching another staff member was when she felt she had reached a significant milestone in her transition.

### *Team as a Measurement*

Several leaders mentioned that the establishment of their team was an important measurement for the organisation and for themselves. A major theme throughout this research in terms of a leader's core responsibilities and accountability is how he or she interacts, develops and manages his or her team. Leaders new to a role often have a change in team personnel and the process to establish new relationships can be difficult and time consuming. The challenge for the leaders interviewed was that the objectives and measures of success concerning the team were intangible and vague. During the transition period, the absence of negative feedback or staff issues was deemed a success. Related to



a broader team, one leader identified that a key measure was when he began to hear people in the business adopting his language. He started noticing suggested initiatives that matched with his objectives for the business. For him, it was a pleasing indication of success.

#### *Lack of Disruption as a Measurement*

In line with the comments that indicate the absence of a negative is considered to be a positive, another intangible measure was a lack of disruption to the business due to the new leader joining. This notion was offered by a direct manager participant, who reflected on a key leadership role reporting to him. In his opinion, the *'lack of disruption to staff, to process and in general'* was a clear measure of a successful transition. Although comments such as these regarding disruption might appear to be self-serving, the context was linked to the manager's view that the first three months in a leadership role should focus on learning instead of acting.

#### *Understanding the Business as a Measurement*

Finally, understanding the business was a measure that leaders used for their own assessment, although some acknowledged that the organisation was most likely using the same measurement to assess their success. One of the leaders expressed that he would have been disappointed if, at the end of 90 days, he did not understand the business and had not come up with a *'business plan that clearly outlined where the business needed to go for the next three to five years'*.

## **Onboarding Process**

Onboarding, as discussed in the literature review, is the organisations' process of managing the entry of employees. As a process, it can range from comprehensive to basic and is often confused with orientation or induction. The question, 'was there a formal onboarding process?' was asked and 65 per cent of the interviewees responded no. The participants found the lack of an onboarding process a surprise and contrary to their expectations. Several leaders claimed that it was *'non-existent'* for their transition and one leader expressed that he was *'really shocked'* that his transition had no onboarding program. Another leader made a distinction between onboarding and induction or orientation.

*'Absolutely not. We do induction but not onboarding, when I think about onboarding I think of it a bit more than induction which is here's the kitchen, here's the evacuation plan, here's the people that sit to the left and to the right of you. I think of onboarding as a period ... that gets you established in the business and gets you clarity. There isn't one of those' (LE9).*

All three activities are valuable for employees at different levels, but the leaders were frustrated and disappointed when the organisation did either induction or orientation and labelled it onboarding. In the examples in which there was an onboarding process, the common response from the participants was that it was poor and ineffective. One of the leaders described her onboarding experience as *'awful'* and another said hers was a *'debacle'*. Of the 35 per cent of the leaders who had an onboarding process or program, only 30 per cent felt that the program was effective.

The absence of an onboarding process or the presence of a poor one both disappointed the interviewed leaders who, in most cases believed that there would be one. This negative start soured many of their initial experiences in their new roles. Upon reflection, some did say that they were potentially naive to expect a robust onboarding program, as many had never experienced a good onboarding program in their previous roles. Based on these comments, the basis of the expectation was questioned, and the response was that a supportive onboarding program was promoted during the interview process. If the organisation feels that they are providing a leadership onboarding program, then the misunderstanding may occur at the expectations level. What leaders expect or want appears different from what organisations are providing. It was more common for the interviewees who worked in HR to comment positively on the quality of the onboarding process than the leaders interviewed, further highlighting a possible disconnection between what HR may think they are providing and what leaders either expect or receive. One of the HR participants acknowledged the shortcoming of his organisation's onboarding process and although it has improved, it is still not at a level that the organisation expects. He feels that the program they have *'meets the demands of the business, but it's not actually what I would call great'*.

The most positive response regarding the onboarding process encompassed several areas that other interviewed leaders recommended as important to successful onboarding. Some aspects were fortuitist, in that the timing on this leader's transition coincided with the

company strategy sessions. In the leader's opinion, it was *'quite a good onboarding program'* that ran over two months and involved meeting key people, training on systems, good access to information and understanding the *'key players and priorities'*.

A second question was also asked of all participants: 'regardless of whether or not there was a formal onboarding process, were you happy with how you were onboarded?' Sixty per cent responded yes (the five non-leader interviewees were asked if they felt that the leader they were discussing was happy with how they were onboarded). Though not an overwhelming majority, it did indicate that the absence of a formal onboarding process did not necessarily signify that a leader would have a negative transition experience. This could be a result of low expectations being met in terms of what the leader expected and what the organisation delivered. Positive responses were linked to either a supportive direct manager or a good understanding of the people and culture prior to starting, as in the example for one of the leaders. She had worked for another business that itself worked closely with her new company, so there were established relationships that she could leverage and a basic understanding of the culture.

The research delivered consistent feedback that, in most cases, there was no onboarding process and if there was, it was poorly delivered and failed to meet the leaders' expectations. This was a disappointing start for the leaders joining a new organisation, who often moved from a place of confidence and high performance to a new opportunity, one that they acknowledged exposed them to risk. The recruitment process has often been a romantic affair, with talk of support, potential and growth. Improving or building executive onboarding programs is a clear opportunity for organisations in which even a small improvement could separate them from their competition.

## **Summary**

This chapter has explored the findings in detail and has offered a narrative on the salient aspects. The next chapter will highlight the key research outcomes and discuss these against the literature review, making suggestions for practical applications.

## **Chapter 5—Discussion of Findings and Implications**

This thesis began with the aim of investigating what promotes or inhibits leader performance during the transition into a new role. It was also interested in examining how transition performance is measured and how that performance is influenced by a leader's understanding of the business strategy. This chapter will address these research focal points by discussing the findings presented in Chapter 4 and relating them to relevant published literature. It concludes with a synthesis of this work and the presentation of a new conceptual framework plus two conceptual models that have relevance to the practical application of the research findings.

### *Transitions Are Still Tough*

There is a consensus throughout the literature that leadership transitions are a difficult and dangerous period for externally recruited and internally promoted leaders (Bond & Naughton 2011; Bebb 2009; Butterfield 2008). The current research confirmed this view. All 15 leaders interviewed commented that their transition was difficult, stressful or challenging in some way. The participants also confirmed a general lack of support for leaders in transition, despite the existence of literature that confirms its importance (Witherspoon & Cannon 2004) and the prevalence of promotional material advocating for the use of coaching, training and executive development. For the leaders that participated in this study, that lack of support was unexpected as transition assistance had been promised and discussed during their recruitment or promotion process. Consistent across the participants in this research is a wide acceptance of the risks and challenges that leaders face when assuming new roles, as well as a significant lack of effort to mitigate these risks for organisations. There might be several reasons for this, including that it is not a significant enough problem in relation to other issues that organisations face; that it is too difficult to address; that the return on investment is not sufficient; or that it is not known how to address it. Regardless of the reason, the end result as demonstrated in this research, is that leaders still struggle with their transition and organisations fail to provide adequate support for leaders during this challenging time.

### *Leaders Promote, Organisations Inhibit*

In comparing the promoters and inhibitors, the trend was that the participants considered factors that promoted success to be associated more frequently with the leader, with inhibitors more often associated with the organisation.

In this study good transition experiences appeared to be associated with factors that leaders had the greatest amount of responsibility over (e.g. their attitude, actions). This sat in stark contrast to negative experiences, which appeared to originate from organisationally controlled factors (e.g. poor management practices). Put another way, organisations seemed to do more to inhibit transition success than promote it. This concept that leaders promote and organisations inhibit was not identified as a clear theme in the literature review. None of the articles reviewed discussed an imbalance or weighting towards the leader over the organisation in terms of promoters, nor do they label the organisation as the primary inhibitor. Although many articles discuss leaders' actions to generate success (Bauer & Erdogan 2011; Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2010; Conger & Fishel 2007), they do not make a direct negative comparison to the organisation, except in reference to the lack of support provided to leaders in transition. The clear message from the participants in this research is that it is the leader who will determine if the transition is successful. This perspective was clearly articulated by LE2, who identified that everything that would or could inhibit her transition was internal to the organisation. This is interesting for organisations to consider, that it may not be introducing or promoting activities and interventions, but the removal of the inhibiting activities that yields the greatest value in increasing the likelihood of transition success.

### **What Promotes and Inhibits Success during the Transition?**

As discussed in Chapter 4, many of the key themes that emerged from the interviews were common to promoters, inhibitors, alternative actions and advice indicating that they represent the potential to be both a positive and negative influence on success, either through their application or their presence/absence. Table 5.1 below is a summary of the key themes identified in Chapter 4 and represented in their ranked order.

Table 5.1: Summary of Key Themes

<b>Ranking</b>	<b>Promoters</b>	<b>Inhibitors</b>	<b>Alternative Options / Actions</b>	<b>Advice</b>
1	Personal Attributes & Experiences	Navigating the Culture	Get the Right Team	Learn, Learn, Learn
2	Manager Support	The New Team	Seek Greater Support	Seek Clarity
3	Transition Planning	Lack of Manager Support	Take Ownership	Focus on Yourself
4	Effective and/or Supportive Team	Personal Attributes & Experiences	Stakeholder Engagement	
5	Industry Knowledge	Functional Inexperience or Bias		
6	External Support	Knowledge Gaps		
7	Stakeholder Engagement	Lack of Role Clarity		
8	Clear Expectations			

From the promoter and inhibitor themes discussed in Chapter 4, there were several that warrant further discussion due to their importance to the participants, perceived impact on transition success, participant insight or because they are incongruent with the literature.

*Personal Attributes and Experience— Key Promoter*

The prominent promoter theme was personal attributes and experiences. This aggregated codes that included qualities that leaders possess, decisions that leaders make, actions that leaders take and experiences and knowledge that leaders bring to a new role. It included

themes such as passion, past experience, work ethic, preparation, research, asking questions, building relationships and deciding what not to do. This is consistent with the literature which suggests that certain personality traits and characteristics can help a leader transition more successfully (Kaiser & Craig 2011; Ashcroft & Saks 1996). The theme of personal attributes was the most popular for promoters and the fourth most popular for inhibitors. It was also third in the advice that participants would give someone assuming their role tomorrow.

A lack of credibility can contribute to high rates of leadership transition failure (Watkins 2003) and for the participants, credibility was a frequently mentioned positive attribute. Based on either reputation or early actions, leaders in transition found that credibility afforded them an accelerated adoption of their ideas, suggestions and plans. Where the leader does not enter with reputational credibility, he or she must establish it early in the transition. However, credibility based on reputation had a shelf life and could not be relied on long-term unless it was supported by appropriate activities, decisions and actions during the transition period. Although it boosted their transition performance, leaders needed to re-establish and continue developing it during the transition for it to be a sustained advantage.

The other attributes or competencies that emerged as most valuable for a leader in transition were the ability to manage ambiguity and complexity and possessing a flexible learning style. The research clearly indicated that most leaders suffered from a lack of clarity during their transition and that leaders who were comfortable with ambiguity and complexity had an advantage over those who found the lack of clarity difficult. Linked to this was the lack of onboarding support and training in their new role, which is demonstrated in this research. Due to a lack of structured onboarding, the participants needed to be flexible in their approach to learning and understanding the areas of the role and organisation that they felt necessary for their transition success. Leaders who could adjust and adapt their learning style garnered a greater level of understanding during their transition than those who could not. This also led to greater transition performance and success.

#### *Navigating Culture—Biggest Inhibitor*

Learning, understanding and navigating the culture is highlighted as the major challenge that a leader faces when they are transitioning into a new organisation (Reimer & Meighan

2017; Manderscheid & Ardichvili 2008b; Watkins 2008; Conger & Fishel 2007). The use of the term ‘navigate’ when describing the leaders’ need to learn and understand the organisational culture was common amongst participants, confirming its place in the present business lexicon. This concept of navigating—using judgement and discovery to progress through an unfamiliar environment—in the minds of the participants accurately depicts the challenge of integrating into a new organisational culture. Learning the nuances of the organisation is critical for an externally recruited leader to demonstrate understanding, to begin making decisions and taking action. It is most commonly noted as the key challenge for externally recruited executives (Rockwood 2016; Dai, de Meuse & Gaeddert 2011); however, in this study, it was not exclusive to external leaders. Culture was noted as an inhibitor for internally promoted leaders in two cases in this research. In one case, the challenge of culture related to a siloed business; the promotion forced movement outside the leader’s silo, in which they experienced difficulty due to differences in the culture. The second case concerned culture differences in different hierarchy levels in the organisation, as well as the steep learning curve moving to the next level of culture, even as an internally promoted leader. This highlights that within certain organisations, there may be many different cultures horizontally across business units or divisions and vertically between different levels of management or hierarchy (Reimer & Meighan 2017). Many interviewees stressed that they would advise someone assuming their role to commit time to developing a deep understanding of the culture before they make any decisions or try to affect change.

#### *The Boss—Both a Promoter and Inhibitor*

The relationship between the new leader and their direct manager is identified as vital throughout the literature (Hogan, Hogan & Kaiser 2010; Gabarro 2007) and it was consequently expected that the direct manager relationship would feature highly for both promoters and inhibitors. As discussed in the findings chapter, most organisations represented in the study did not have a formal onboarding process for leaders and if they did, it failed to meet the needs of the leader. In situations in which there is a lack of formal onboarding, the responsibility of the leaders’ successful integration falls heavily on the direct manager. In examples in which the direct manager was considered a promoter, the direct manager would demonstrate support and patience, promote the leader across that organisation, be generous with their time, provide access to information and a degree of freedom that enabled the leader to be successful early in the transition. As an inhibitor to



success, the manager was more inclined to abandon the leader, be unavailable, controlling and in some cases, restrict the leader's ability to access key stakeholders.

In several cases, the participant acknowledged that it was not a lack of willingness, but a lack of time that resulted in the manager neglecting the leader early. Several participants mentioned that if they had this transition again, they would seek more time with their manager and would advise anyone assuming their role to seek more clarity from the direct manager during the transition period, concerning performance expectations, authority and scope. A supportive direct manager relationship is central to a leader's transition success and they are largely responsible for clarifying the leaders' role and performance expectations.

### *Clarity Breeds Confidence*

The literature on transitions suggests that the alignment of expectations is critical to a leader's success (Terblanche 2018; Hill 2003; Watkins 2003; Gabarro 1987). Role and performance clarity were mentioned frequently during the interviews. Under inhibitors, the respondents mentioned it as an ambiguity or a lack of clarity regarding the role, responsibilities, authority, scope and key performance indicators. The ability of the leaders to quickly understand the business, its people and to take action was significantly hampered when there was a lack of clarity. Leaders commented that it regularly took months for them to truly understand the extent of the role and what was expected of them, which is a poor reflection considering these were, in most cases, large mature organisations with detailed organisational charts and job descriptions. On the positive side, clarity was regularly mentioned under the theme of manager support as a promoter in which the direct manager provided the leader with clarity regarding what they must do to be successful and by what measures they would be deemed successful. Seeking clarity was the second most popular advice that leaders would give another leader assuming their role. Clarity, for the participants, created confidence of action, especially in prioritisation and decision-making—two areas in which leaders are judged early in the process (Goodyear & Golden 2008). Without clarity, the new leaders struggled to make assessments and decisions with confidence. Failing to feel or display confidence can have a negative effect on the leaders' perception of themselves and others' perception of them within the organisation. In terms of its potential effect on other success factors, clarity of role and performance expectations are significant determinants in a leader's transition.

### *The New Team—A Double-Sided Coin*

For many participants, their team was either a strong promoter or inhibitor of success, depending on how supportive and effective the team was when the leader commenced in the role. The activities that promoted success include acceptance of the new leader, supporting what the leader is attempting to achieve and sharing detailed knowledge to assist the leader in quickly understanding the business and culture. Conversely, teams that are underperforming, have poor reputations, poor relationships with other areas of the business or are passive aggressive can significantly inhibit the new leaders' success. For one enterprise-level leader new to the organisation, his direct team worked hard to restrict his ability to access information that exposed that they were performing badly. Many participants suspected that a version of deliberate withholding was also occurring during their transition. The challenge of managing one's peers is frequently discussed in the literature (De Hann & Copeland 2015; Bebb 2009), although it did not feature heavily in this study, potentially due to the fact that only two of the leaders interviewed had been promoted from among their former peers. However, there were several comments about the difficulty in managing people who had unsuccessfully applied for the role and how these people appeared to sabotage the new leader. Manzoni and Barsoux (2009) suggested that a leader should identify these potential saboteurs and work with HR early in the process to address their grievances and assess whether they are capable of performing within the new structure. The participants in this research agreed with this approach.

### *Get the Right People on the Bus Fast*

Most leaders commented that they would make changes to their team/staff earlier if they had this transition again. This was the most popular comment when the leaders were asked to reflect on their transition. Several of the leaders entered their new roles having made the decision that they were going to act quickly to establish the right team and, even with this predetermined decision, all who made this comment also stated that they would act even faster if they had the time again. However, none of the HR or direct manager participants felt that the leader they were discussing should have moved faster with staff decisions. This highlights a potential issue in how the different parties view the priorities of the transition and the acceptable speed of certain actions. In several of the cases, the leaders felt that they had made the correct assessments of the staff early and that either through their hesitation to act or the organisational hurdles to make staff changes, they

had left unsuitable people in their team too long. The primary effect of this was that the leader via their team did not perform as early or as well as expected.

Leaders in transition, particularly those recruited externally, experienced political challenges when making staff changes, especially during the transition. They feared that if they made the changes too early, it could be perceived that they had not invested enough time to understand the people and their skills. If they moved too late, it might inhibit their ability to perform. This research has established that if transition success is related to leaders becoming effective quickly, then organisations can assist by providing new leaders the relevant staff information early and working to remove some of the barriers to making changes to their team during the transition period. This research suggests that leaders in transition will be more quickly successful if they trust their early assessments and make the changes that they deem necessary to their new team.

#### *Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail*

One of the most popular books on leadership transitions is Watkins' (2013, 2003) *The First 90 Days*, which describes the process of designing a plan for leadership transitions. Other popular books on leadership transitions also advise using a transition plan (Bradt, Check & Pedraza 2006) and the concept of a transition plan was common among the participants. If a transition plan was used, then it was rated as a promoter. If it was not used, then it was often mentioned as a tool that the interviewee would utilise if they had the transition again. How effective these plans were, how detailed and how rigorously they were measured against performance was not explored. It is the researcher's view that the detail and quality varied greatly and that many were simply loose outlines. This does not diminish the view that a plan is a promoter in transition success, which is a view held by both the leaders and the organisations, even if they are completed at a basic level.

In this study the use of a transition plan appeared to give the participants structure, task direction, prioritisation and clear deliverables during their transition, which increased the level of confidence the leader had in themselves and the organisation had in the leader. Participants who were externally recruited were twice as likely to use a transition plan than internally promoted ones. This could be explained due to externally recruited leaders having a clean start to their new role and internally promoted leaders having a rolling start, in which they often move from one set of tasks and responsibilities to another within the same organisation. It is probable that the internally promoted leader will have a series

of ongoing objectives to mesh with their new role, in comparison to an externally recruited leader who is starting fresh in terms of tasks and projects. Internally promoted leaders may not perceive the promotion as new, but as different and may thus not perceive the need or may not be encouraged to take the time to pause and set a specific transition plan in the same way that leaders new to the organisation might. This might make the transition plan a more obvious choice for the externally recruited leader. In all but one case, the transition plan was a leader and not an organisation lead initiative.

Linked to the transition plan and featured heavily in Watkins' (2003, 2013) book is the concept of early or quick wins that leaders can identify and deliver during the transition period. Many leaders sought and completed actions that they considered as early wins, which in their perspective contributed to their transition success. If leaders recognised in hindsight that there had been early wins during the transition, then they considered those to have contributed positively to their success. The quick wins mentioned by the participants all had two common criteria: the leader felt confident that they had enough information about the action or decision and that they had the authority to act.

#### *Plug the Knowledge Gaps*

The benefits of having strong industry knowledge or being an industry insider is noted in the literature (Gabarro 2007; Groysberg, McLean & Nohria 2006). In this study there appears to be a proclivity to hire leaders from within the same industry for the benefit that this knowledge provides the organisation in the short and long term. This industry preference extends to the participants who readily identify the increased risks associated in accepting a role in a new industry. The nuances and jargon within industries creates a steep learning curve for people entering and this is amplified for leaders and senior executives (Dai & De Meuse 2007). Under the inhibitors, a popular theme was the knowledge gap that leaders experience when they undertake a new role. The comments made during the interviews were regarding the technical aspects of the role/industry, or the non-transferrable skills, which appear to be the antithesis of the promoter theme of 'industry knowledge'. The research supported that an understanding of the industry is considered a positive influence on transition success, and its absence is considered a noticeable inhibitor.

### *Beware the Functional Bias*

For several of the participants who had moved from a function leadership role to a general or business leadership role, one clear inhibitor to their transition success was a lack of multifunctional experience or a functional bias towards their specific skill set. The lack of functional experience is an ignorance on how the other functions operate and deliver results, whereas the bias involved the leader favouring a function over others, typically the one matching their skill set and training. The leadership transition literature discusses a lack of functional experience (Kates & Downey 2005), but not the concept of ‘functional bias’ as described in this thesis, in which a clear distinction was made between a leader not understanding a particular function and the conscious or subconscious bias against or for specific functions. Organisations such as General Electric have for many years utilised programs that moved high potential leaders around the business, forcing leadership of different functions, regions and countries as development for general manager and CEO roles (Groysberg, McLean & Nohria 2006). This research supports the approach that if organisations are keen to develop their CEOs and general managers internally, then a program should exist that exposes leaders to different functions within the business to give them a breadth of skills and to reduce the chances that a functional bias derails their future transitions.

### *External Support*

Another popular theme under promoters was access to external support during the transition to help the leader manage the challenges of the transition better. The support mentioned included coaches, mentors, past colleagues, friends and family. The participants felt that there were areas of doubt, ambiguity, understanding and action that were well suited to assistance from someone external to the organisation. Not understanding the business and feeling uncertain of who they could confidently talk with made it difficult for some of the interviewed leaders to internally access advice and counsel. Many felt that this gap was best filled by external support. None of the leaders interviewed or discussed in this research were offered external support from their organisation, yet many sought and valued it. This theme was echoed under what leaders would do differently in which many mentioned that they would seek greater support, both internally and externally. In both the literature (Bond & Naughton 2011; Baranik, Roling & Eby 2010) and this research, the popular inclusion of the need of support during a

leadership transitions confirms that the transition is still a difficult and risky period for leaders.

### *Ignore Stakeholders at Your Peril*

The stakeholders for the participants were often numerous and each stakeholder group had the potential to influence the leaders' early success. Stakeholder management was a key performance criterion for many of the participants, so identifying who they were early, seeking to understand what was important to them and establishing good working relationships was regarded as a pathway to transition success. Better stakeholder engagement was a popular theme under what leaders would do differently if they had the same transition again and several leaders reflected that poor stakeholder engagement had inhibited their performance during and post the transition. Many believed that with better engagement of the key stakeholders, they would have achieved greater success earlier. In this research, the challenge of stakeholder engagement was greater for externally recruited leaders who lacked the understanding of who the key stakeholders were, who held the power and influence and also because they had no established relationship with these key people.

### *Male v. Female*

The split between male and female leaders in this research was 60/40, respectively. There were limited differences in the factors that promoted or inhibited transition success between male and female leaders, both in terms of frequency of responses and in how the participants judged importance and effect. One factor in which a difference emerged was that female leaders were half as likely to list their direct manager as a promoter than male leaders. A second was that female leaders were twice as likely to rate the use of a transition plan as a promoter than male leaders. The explanation for these differences was not explored, as the observation was made post-interview. There was also a subtle difference regarding how males and female leaders assessed their effectiveness during the transition period. Although the sample size was not large enough to quantitatively show any statistical significance, it was observed that when the participants were asked about how effective they felt after three months, female participants rated themselves lower, at an average of 46 per cent effective compared to their male counterparts, who averaged 54 per cent. This average effectiveness increased to 62 per cent for males when the HR and direct management participants are included. Although not offering an explanation, both

this and the difference in promoters is a potential area for further research, exploring how male and female leaders differ in their leadership transitions.

#### *To Onboard or To Not Onboard*

In most of the transitions discussed in this research (70 per cent), there was no onboarding process and where there was, it was poorly delivered and failed to meet the expectations of the leader (65 per cent). This creates a disappointing start for a leader joining a new organisation, who often moves from a position of confidence and strong performance to a new opportunity, one that they acknowledge exposes them to risk and one in which the recruitment process has often poorly communicated the realities of the role and organisation (Chaneski 2015; Dai, De Meuse & Gaeddert 2011; Dai & De Meuse 2007). The disconnection appears to be in how the leader and the organisation define the requirements of onboarding. Organisations discussed in this study had built competent orientation and induction programs, but these programs were not sufficient to meet the needs of the participants in their transition. The HR participants all acknowledged that their process of onboarding leaders was poor. They also admitted that their organisation lacked the skill or resources, or both, to improve it. This research clearly identifies the lack of onboarding programs for leaders as a significant inhibitor to transition success. There is a clear opportunity from the research, for organisations to develop or extend the formal onboarding process for leaders in transition.

#### *What Gets Measured Gets Managed, and Supported*

The first of two secondary research questions explored how performance was measured during the transition. The study confirmed that there are few formal measurement processes for performance and a lack of structure and consistency regarding measures of success for leaders in transition. In several cases, the transition plan became the primary measurement tool for the transition performance, especially for the leader in transition who, in all but one case, initiated and designed the transition plan. The plan permitted the leaders to articulate their progress and achievements during the transition, which built their confidence and reduced the anxiety caused by a lack of performance or deliverables. Three of the organisations used a 360-degree feedback tool during the leaders' transition; however, the timing was coincidental and none of the questions were altered to reflect the transition. In the examples explored in this research, it is the leader who initiates the establishment of some type of measurement. The majority of the measurements that were

utilised by the organisations occurred post transition and were often simply related to retention and business results.

The research indicated that organisations have different expectations from leaders during and post the transition however there were no formal adjustments for the transition period with any of the organisations in the study in terms of performance measurements, with all using the general role performance measures. Participants confirmed that early in a role they feel the pressure of performance more than after they have fully assimilated into the role and the study found that leaders feel more confident when the expectations of them in their new role are clear. This may form a valid argument for the development of metrics, measures or key performance indicators that are specific for the transition period, to help leaders successfully move through the transition period into their full role, expectations and accountabilities. There is an opportunity for both organisations and leaders to identify transition performance measures so that both can have confidence in short-term success. Organisations might benefit from setting separate measurements or performance indicators through that earlier period. The reason for the current lack of transition specific performance measurements is that potentially neither organisation nor leader understand the transition period sufficiently to be able to set separate measurements.

#### *Influence of Strategic Understanding*

The second of the two secondary research questions concerned the influence of the leaders' strategic understanding on their transitions. Although understanding the strategy is a component of the general business understanding that leaders must develop during their transition, the responses indicated that it is a fundamental or core aspect. Most participants felt that they had a poor understanding of the strategy during their transition period and that this inhibited their transition. Leaders in transition are acutely aware of the conflicting pressure to act and the risks of action when they are in a new role (Gabarro 2007). Leaders interviewed who felt they had a poor or basic understanding of the strategy during their transition expressed that they experienced increased anxiety during the transition. This increased anxiety related to the need to make assessments and decisions quickly and without clarity regarding the strategy they feared making the wrong decisions.



The research indicated that the more senior the leader was in the organisation, the greater their reliance on their strategic understanding to guide their early efforts, focus, decisions and actions. The level of strategic understanding certainly has an effect on a leader's transition and the effect increases as the leaders' seniority increases. The greater the strategic understanding a leader has, the more confidence they will display with their early assessments, actions and decisions. The research also indicated that although understanding the strategy is important to leaders in new roles, there might be an optimal timing in which they can both absorb and comprehend the strategy in the midst of the other learning that they undertake during the transition. There was also an implied link between the leaders' strategic understanding and their decision to join a new organisation, highlighting that it might form a key part of the recruitment process for leaders at a certain seniority.

### **Post Research Conceptual Framework**

Earlier in this thesis, a conceptual map of the literature on leadership transitions was offered and discussed (see Figure 2.3). The insights emerging from this research now provides an opportunity to enhance the conceptual understanding of leadership transitions and offer an expanded conceptual framework. As the key emerging themes were aggregated and compared, two main distinctions emerged: factors relating to the organisation and factors relating to the leader. None of the participants mentioned any promoters or inhibitors that were related or derived from anything other than the organisation or the leader. Once the themes were grouped into these two categories, it became clear that the participants clearly distinguished between their key people in the organisation (i.e. *Who They Get*) and the structure and business situation they encounter (i.e. *What They Get*). Similarly, the participants also distinguished between the importance of what the leader does during the transition (i.e. *What They Do*) and the personal attributes they possessed prior to undertaking the new role (i.e. *What They Bring*). As such, the organisation and leader categories divided into four sub-categories that covered all the themes. Table 5.2 lists the two categories, four sub-categories and the rationale.

Table 5:2: Grouped Categories of Themes

Category	Sub Category	Description
Organisation	Situation (What They Get)	Themes that relate to the situation that a leader encounters when they commence a new role and that are not people related
	People (Who They Get)	Themes that relate to the people that work with the leader, including staff, management and other key stakeholders
Leader	Personal Attributes & Experiences (What They Bring)	Themes that relate to the personal attributes, characteristics and experiences that the leader brings to the new role
	Actions (What They Do)	Themes that are actions or decisions that the leader makes during the transition period

The triggers for a leadership transition remain the same as the original conceptual framework in Chapter 2. The difference occurs in the transition. Surrounding all aspects of the transition and central to it are the proposed six areas of challenge/change: cognitive, psychological, behavioural, interpersonal, relational and role specific. All the aspects that influence the leadership transition success have one or more of the six areas as an overarching context. Many of the factors that promote or inhibit success are both promoters and inhibitors either through their application, their presence or their absence. Thus, they all reside in the same general area and the driving aspects are the four core categories of the situation (What They Get), the people (Who They Get), the past experience and attributes (What They Bring) and their actions (What They Do). These four areas are intertwined and connected, and they occur as a continuous process during the transition period. Measurement tools and frameworks are still sparse represented as the smaller dotted oval. The result options are the same; success, derailment and failure.

Based on the research findings and the literature review, a new conceptual framework of leadership transitions is proposed in Figure 5.1.

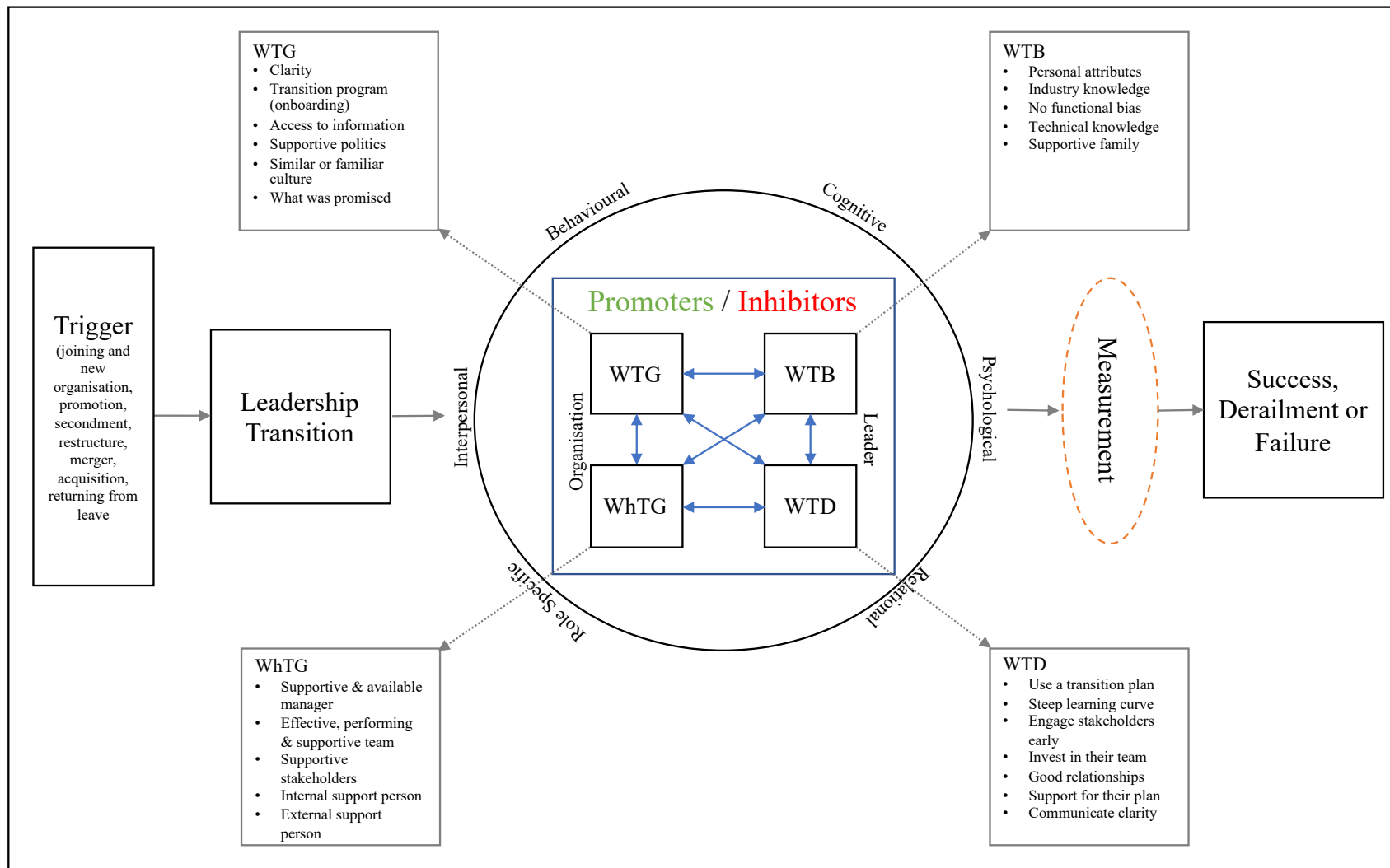


Figure 5.1: Leadership Transition Conceptual Framework

## **Practical Implications**

The research has generated a list of factors that promote and inhibit a leader's transition into a new role. Taking measures to ensure the presence or enhancement of the promoters and, conversely, the absence or reduction in the inhibitors would assist both leaders and organisations to achieve greater success with their leadership transitions. To make a practical application of this research, two models are outlined for an effective leadership transition. The first model considers an effective leadership transition and outlines what would be present across the four categories for the transition to be successful, based on the research findings. The second model places the research findings into an action framework that uses the similar categories as the four actions framework developed as part of the blue ocean strategy (Kim & Mauborgne 2005).

Although the research identified a list of promoters and inhibitors, it did not examine these aspects in relation of the optimal timing for intervention (apart from them occurring during the transition period) or a weighting for influence and effect. Therefore, the best application of the completed research findings and the literature review is to present an outline of what might be an effective leadership transition, acknowledging that the research indicates that all of the components interact together at differing levels depending on the leader, organisation and situation.

## Transition Model

Utilising the grouping from the findings chapter, Figure 5.2 below is a conceptual model for an effective leadership transition. The model demonstrates that all four categories are dependent on each other and must work in concert for the leadership transition to be effective. Each category contains aspects that should be present and others that must be absent for the transition to have the best possibility of success. The model can be divided into two areas: organisation (What They Get and Who They Get) and the leader (What They Bring and What They Do). The figure below shows the four areas divided as discussed and lists the key aspects that would make a transition best practice based on the research.

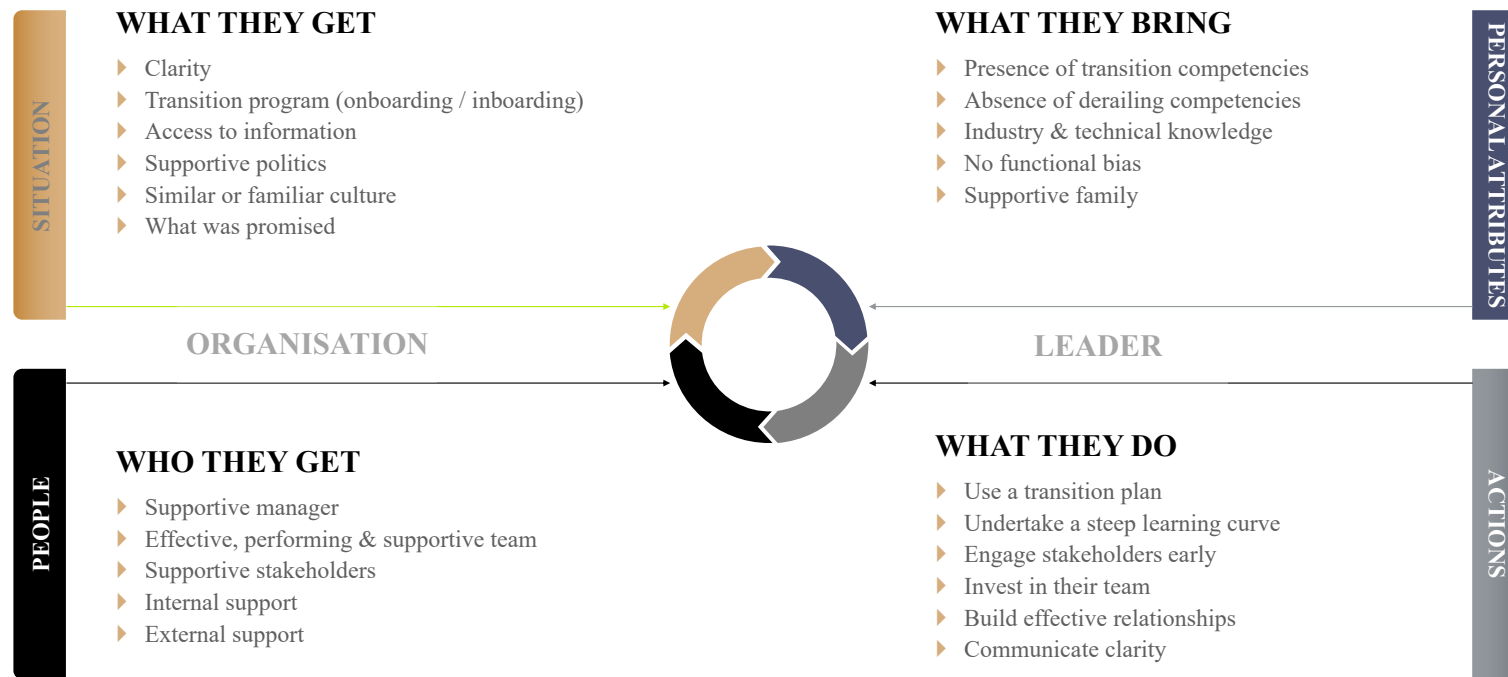


Figure 5.2: Ideal Transition Model

## What They Get?

Figure 5.3 below expands on the component under ‘What They Get’ to explain what would make the transition effective. This section is focused on the situation that the leader finds themselves facing when they take on a new role.

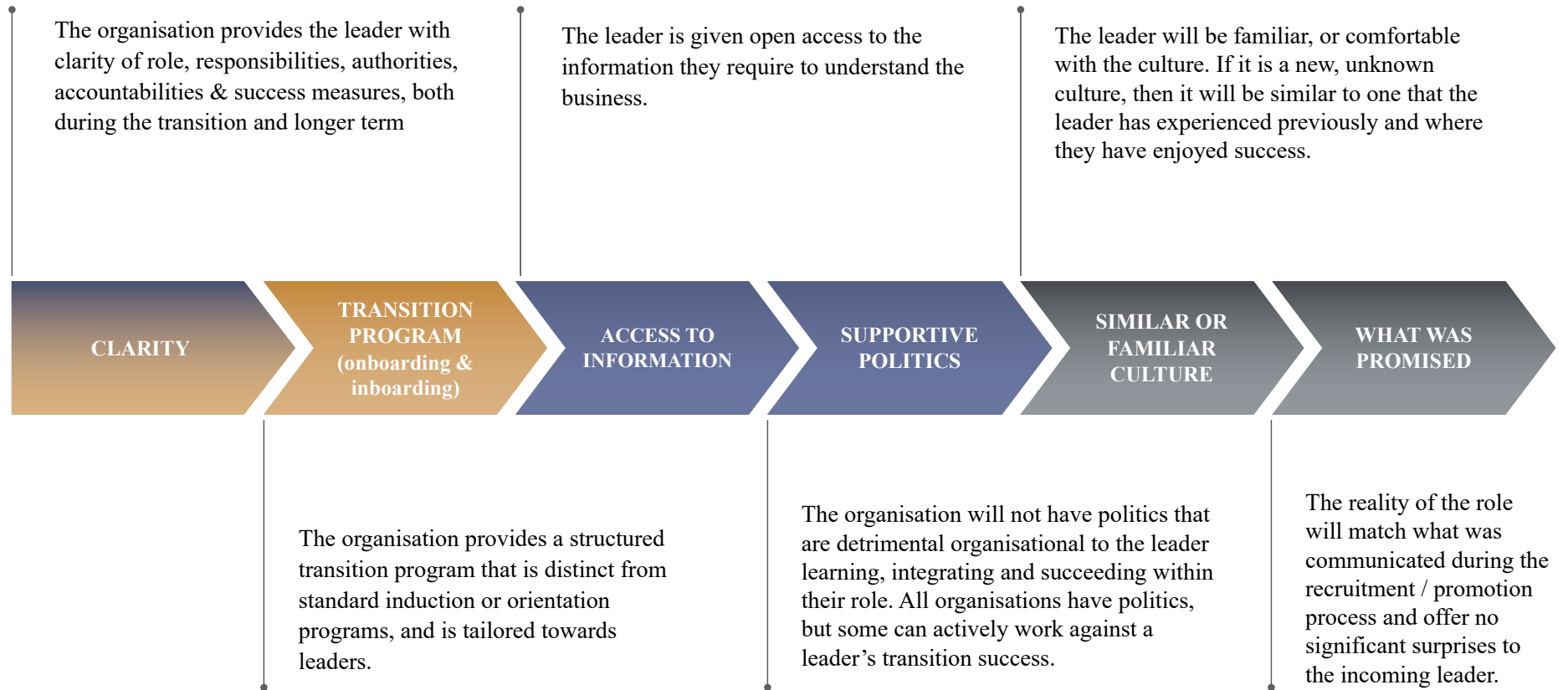


Figure 5.3: What They Get

## Who They Get?

Figure 5.4 outlines what would need to be in place in terms of the people in the organisation for the transition to be effective.

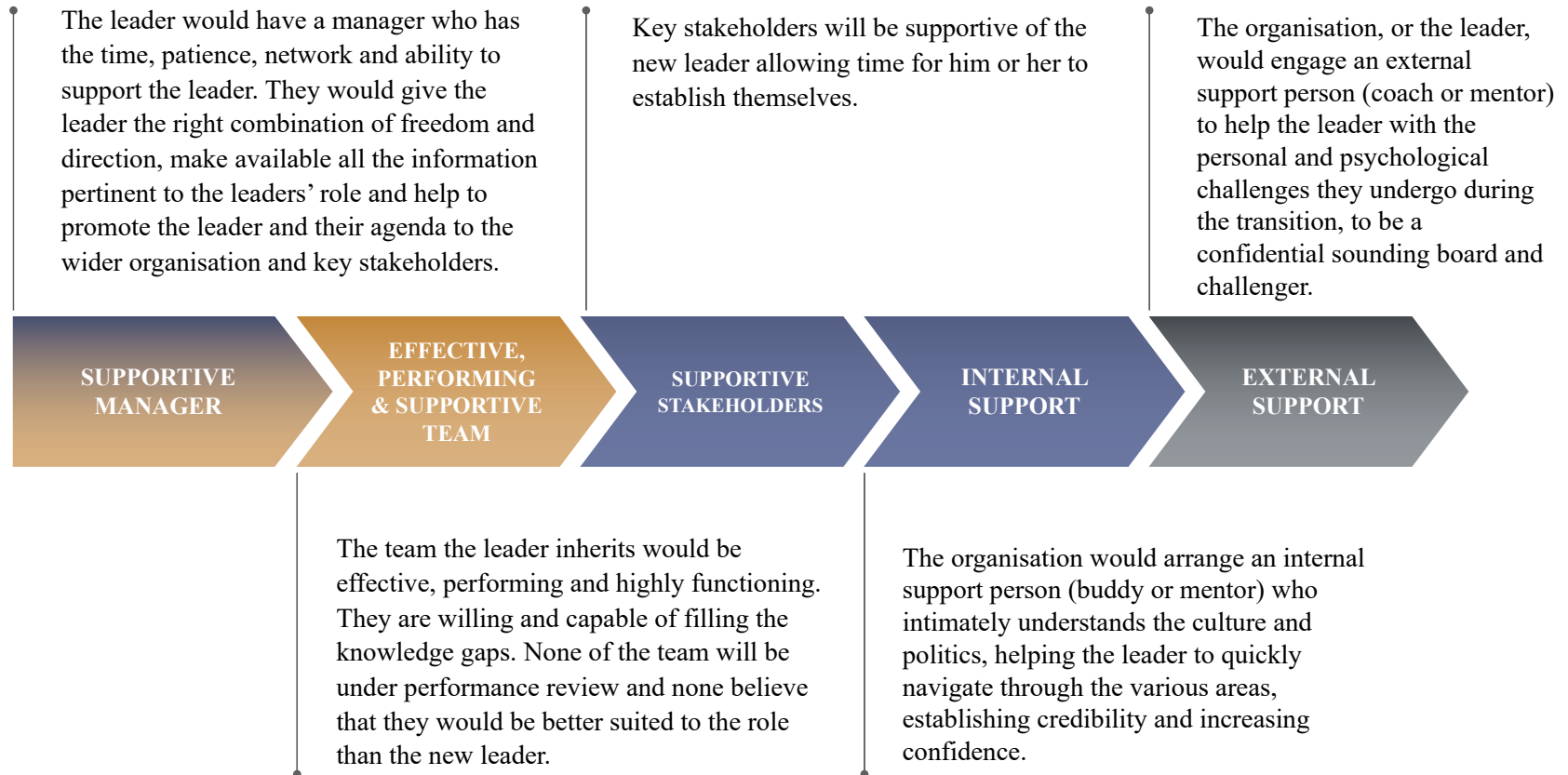


Figure 5.4: Who They Get

## What They Bring?

The research has established that the leader has the greatest effect on the level of success during the transition period and Figure 5.5 below outlines what a leader would bring under an effective transition.

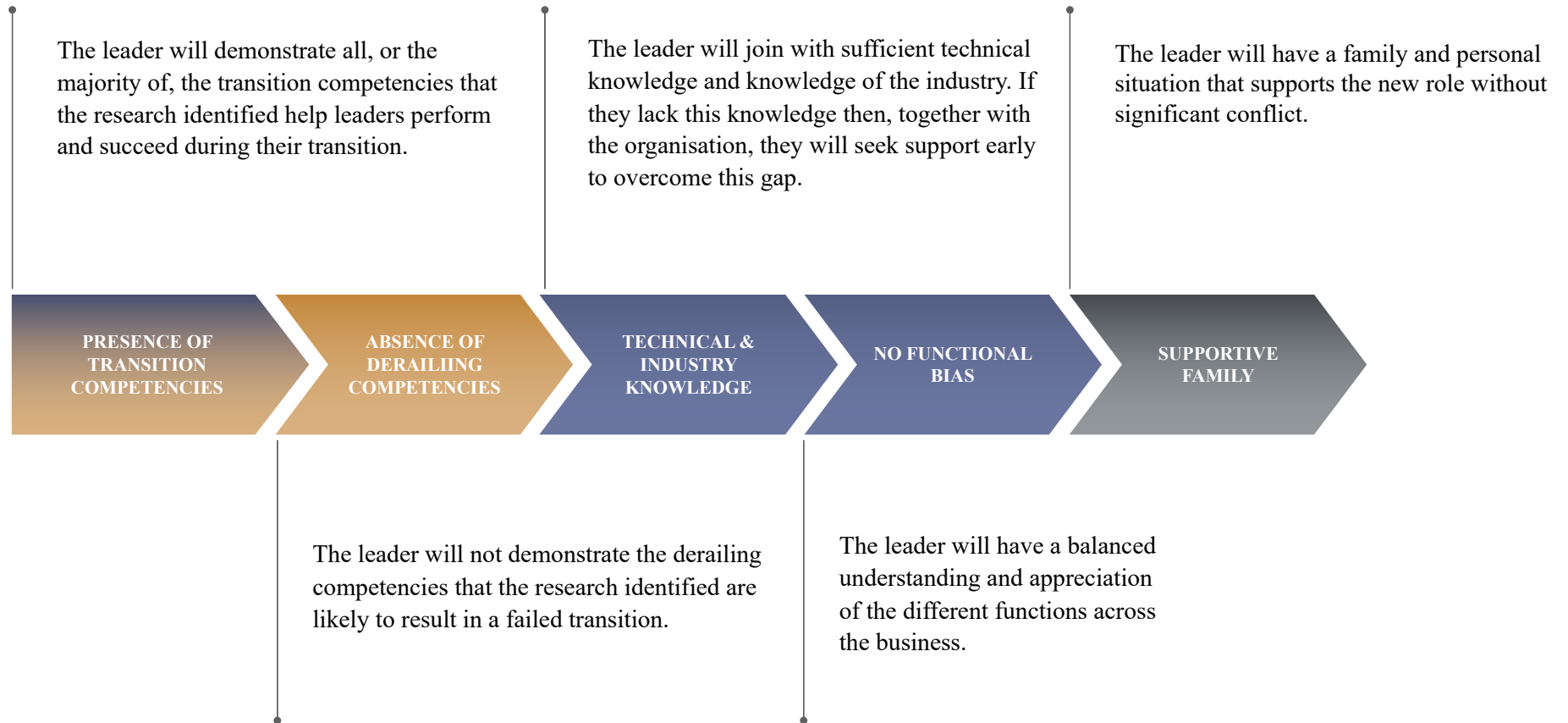


Figure 5.5: What They Bring



## What They Do?

The actions and decisions a leader make during their transition are carefully scrutinised and carry a disproportionate weight in terms of the perception of their early performance, as shown in Figure 5.6.

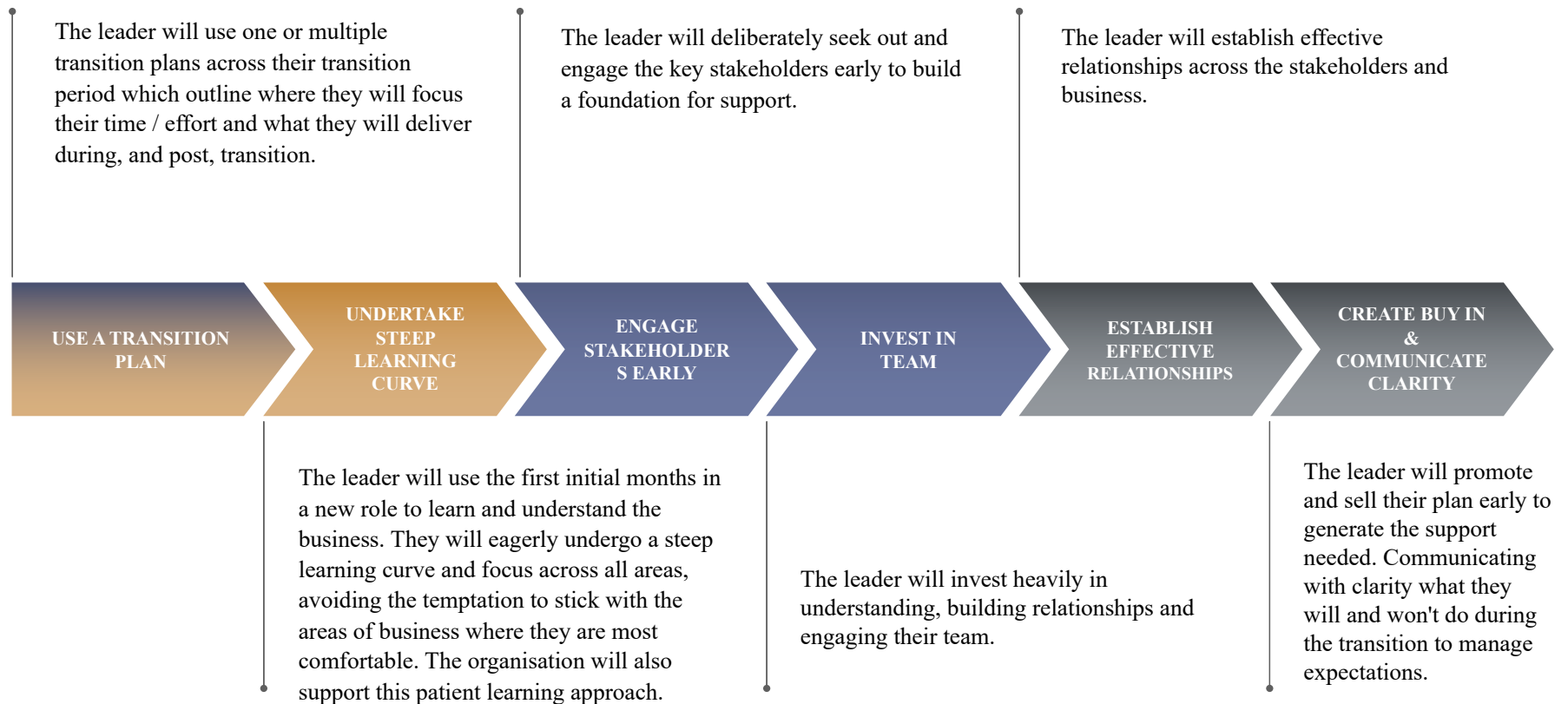


Figure 5.6: What They Do

## **Recommendations for Leaders and Organisations**

A potential outcome of this research project is the ability for the research findings to be applicable by organisations for improvement in the research area. This research has clearly identified aspects of a leadership transition that both leaders and organisations should adopt if one of their goals is to improve the likelihood of success during and after a leadership transition (as depicted in Figures 5.2 to 5.6). The second model positions these research findings into key actions that leaders and organisations may consider adopting to improve their leadership transitions.

## **Leadership Transition Action Framework**

Accepting that every transition situation is unique and that many will have some of the required factors for success, the second model highlights the key factors from the research that organisations should endeavour to increase, create, reduce and eliminate for their leadership transitions to improve the likelihood of success. Where the first model discusses the results of the research as a general list of promoters and inhibitors, this model takes the results and highlights the factors, based on the research, that are more influential or lacking. Using the popularity and frequency of the responses and the participants' emphasis on importance of each factor, the research would present the action framework as shown in Figure 5.7:

<b>Reduce</b>	<b>Increase</b>
Which factors should you reduce to improve your leadership transitions	Which factors should you increase to improve your leadership transitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reliance on the direct manager as primary transition support</li> <li>• Conditions that lead to functional bias</li> <li>• Pressure on leaders to act early in their transition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity of role, responsibilities, accountabilities &amp; strategy</li> <li>• Use of transition plan</li> <li>• Access to stakeholders</li> <li>• Access to internal &amp; external support</li> </ul>
<b>Remove</b>	<b>Introduce</b>
Which factors should you remove to improve your leadership transitions	Which factors should you introduce to improve your leadership transitions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Restrictions for dealing with poor performers early</li> <li>• Belief that induction or orientation equals onboarding</li> <li>• Sink or swim attitude</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structured onboarding &amp; inboarding program designed for leaders</li> <li>• Separate success measures for the transition period</li> </ul>

Figure 5.7: Leadership Transition Action Framework

## Summary

This research has identified several promoters and inhibitors to a successful transition and has offered commentary in terms of the context and application of these factors. It has also offered several suggestions for both organisations and leaders that may encourage more successful leadership transitions. It additionally provided a conceptual framework of leadership transitions, a model of the ideal leadership transition and an action framework for leaders and organisation. The next chapter will conclude the thesis, summarise the chapters and identify areas for potential future research.

## **Chapter 6—Conclusion and Recommendations**

The previous chapter discussed, and reflected upon, a novel set of empirical findings and used them to make some observations about key aspects of a successful transition. This chapter summarises the contributions of this thesis, along with an acknowledgement of its limitations and suggestions about future research that might advance scholarship in the area of leadership transitions.

### **Overview of the Research**

This research achieved its aims and delivered significance by addressing several gaps in the leadership transition literature. The first was the lack of empirical research. Whilst the leadership and management research literatures are broad, areas like leadership transitions and executive onboarding have generally been neglected. The research and literature on executive derailment expresses a direct link between derailment and a leader's inability to negotiate a role transition successfully. This belief alone should warrant greater research attention in the area. Second, in the empirical research that does exist, there is a bias towards quantitative methods that use primarily survey-based research. The qualitative approach and use of semi-structured interviews that allow the participant to richly describe the experience results in this research presenting a different perspective on this important challenge for leaders. Finally, there is a dearth of leadership transition research conducted in the Australian context. Although smaller in size than its US or major European counterparts, the Australian business community is a developing market for leadership and is worthy of localised research that provides valuable insights.

The thesis delivered on the stated research objectives by:

- exploring and identifying the factors that leaders believed promoted success during their transition
- exploring and identifying the factors that leaders believed inhibited success during their transition
- investigating the measures of performance and success organisations and leaders utilise during a leadership transition, and

- determining whether a leader’s understanding of the organisation’s strategy influenced their transition success or performance.

This thesis was focused on answering the following questions (outlined in Table 6.1): what promotes or inhibits leaders’ performance during their transition period in a new role, how is this transition performance measured and what role does understanding the business strategy play in leaders’ transition performance??

Table 6.1: Answering the Research Questions

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Status of Research in Extant Literature</b>	<b>Extent of Contribution of this Research to the Current Stock of Knowledge</b>
<b>What promotes or inhibits leaders’ performance during their transition period in a new role?</b>	Key promoters and inhibitors were identified across the extensive literature review and grouped into the most common themes.	A list of 8 promoter themes and 7 inhibitor themes emerged from the research. These themes were ranked on frequency and discussed at length.
<b>How is this transition performance measured?</b>	Two primary measurements were identified in the literature review (time to productivity and retention) demonstrating a lack of formal and tangible transition performance measures.	The research confirmed that that there were very few formal performance measures used with leaders in transition and that most commonly the leaders themselves established measures in an attempt to demonstrate performance.
<b>What role does understanding the business strategy play in leaders’ transition success??</b>	Understanding the strategy was noted as a potential promoter but not discussed as a significant one.	The research concurred that whilst strategic understanding did act as a promoter when present and inhibitor when absent, it was no more important across the study than other promoters or inhibitors.

## Research Contributions

This research contributes to the leadership transition literature in several vital ways:

Table 6.2: Thesis Contributions

Area	Contribution of the Thesis
Qualitative Leadership Transition Research / Leadership Transition Theory	It adds a qualitative methodology and an Australian context to a global leadership challenge that is specific to transitions. The inductive approach has resulted in participant-generated factors, not those generated by the researcher. This study did not commence to confirm or deny any set of promoters or inhibitors. Rather, it allowed for the experience and voice of the leader to dictate what promotes or inhibits leadership transition success.
Improving Leadership Transitions	It outlines a list of the promoters and inhibitors to transition success, ranks them in terms of perceived prominence, and discussed how leaders and organisations might maximise or minimise these factors.
Conceptual Framework	Through combining the literature review and the research findings it posits a new conceptual framework for leadership transitions.
Practical Model	Based on the ranked ordering, an Effective Transition Model (based on the key promoters and inhibitors) was presented and described. This model represents a unique contribution to the literature, as it may potentially act as a benchmark or guideline for leaders and organisations, as well as an organising framework for articulating future research questions.

Action Framework	This thesis combines the research findings with the literature dimensions to offer a concise leadership transition action framework that offers practical guidance for leaders and organisations.
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### **Limitations of the Research**

From an objectivist ontology, several limitations can be identified. First, the participants all lived and worked in one of two major commercial centres (i.e. Sydney or Melbourne). As such, their views may not be representative of other parts of Australia and future researchers may wish to sample across a more balanced selection of geographical areas. Second, the researcher is an experienced practitioner who has been interested in leadership transitions for some time. As such, some bias may be reflected in the findings, based on personally held assumptions and beliefs formed through past experienced. Whilst multiple raters were not used in this study, this may be worthwhile for future researchers.

Finally, whilst the study attempted to balance the data – by including the perspectives of managers along with others who observed their transition experience – the sample was still dominated by self-reporting (i.e. 15 leader perspectives). Whilst this is not overly problematic, given the intention was to capture the transition experiences of leaders, *as told by the leaders*, it seems worthwhile to pursue these viewpoints in future. Doing so would act as a counter balance to any tendency that managers might have to idealise their performance during transition (i.e. a bias towards seeing themselves as doing more right than wrong) and to demonise the contribution of their organisation.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Aside from the research suggested above, several other possibilities exist:

- The research identified the promoters and inhibitors, many of which are actions, decisions or interventions made by the leader or the organisation. What this research did not explore is the timing of the promoters and inhibitors in relation to the level of effect. As the leader progresses through the transition, there may be optimal times for each of the promoters or inhibitors to positively

or negatively influence the transition. A potential future study might explore this idea.

- The concept of the transition plan was a popular promoter and features heavily in the academic and non-academic literature. This study did not explore the detail or quality of the transition plans used by the leaders in the research. A valuable study would be one that aimed to identify the best practice in terms of transition plans, how to successfully apply and review them and the skills needed from the direct managers to help their leaders in transition.
- In the research, there were few significant differences in the promoters and inhibitors across male and female leaders, such as the lack of identification of the direct manager as a promoter, the higher use of transitions plans and the lower self-rating on effectiveness after three months. Another potential study would be to explore in more detail the differences in the challenges of leadership transitions between male and female leaders.
- This research asked the participants how they measured success during and after the transition and recorded the responses. Based on the list of promoters and inhibitors, it would now be possible to conduct a case study within one or two organisations, tracking a number of leadership transitions and measuring the performance of the leaders compared to the promoters and inhibitors over a longer period of time. This potential study could provide both the effective measures of success as well as the timing of interventions to influence success.
- Finally, the data indicated that few organisations offer a leader onboarding program. To advance knowledge in this area, the findings from this research could be used to design and test the efficacy of an onboarding program, using an experimental or quasi-experimental research design. This might include delivering an on-boarding program to one group of leaders and comparing their transition performance to a treatment-as-usual group within the same organisation.

## **Summary**

The goal of this research was to identify what promotes and what inhibits performance and success during and after a leadership transition. The findings confirmed that leadership transitions are a difficult period for leaders and organisations, with many of the leaders failing to successfully transition into the new role. From the findings, two



models have been offered to assist leaders and organisations in making improvements in their transitions, in their support and in their onboarding programs. The challenge of leadership transitions is significant, but it is one that has a promising room for improvement and, hopefully, this research has contributed towards that improvement.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1—Research Consent Form

#### Research Consent Form

RESEARCH TITLE: What promotes or inhibits leader's performance during their first 90 days in a new role, how is this performance measured and what role does understanding the business strategy play in their performance?

RESEARCHER: Ty Wiggins

I have been given information about the above-mentioned study and discussed the research project with Ty Wiggins, who is conducting the study as part of a DBA within the Sydney Business School at the University of Wollongong.

I have been advised of the potential risks and burdens associated with this research, which include participation in a 60-minute interview (part of which will be audio taped for transcription purposes only). I declare that I have had the opportunity to ask Ty Wiggins questions about the research and my participation in the study.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time. I further understand that my refusal to participate or withdrawal of consent will not affect any current or future relationship I might have with the researchers, Sydney Business School or the University of Wollongong.

I understand that the data from my interview and my confidentiality is assured. This will be achieved by having the UOW research team organise all the research arrangements directly with me, including scheduling research interviews and all other associated communication. Confidentiality will also be assured as no individual or organisation will make demands on the research team for information about the interview process, including requests for transcripts or details about specific interviews.

If I have any enquirers about the research, I can contact Ty Wiggins on 0404 010 010 or if I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact the Ethics Officer, Human Research Ethics Committee, Office

of Research, University of Wollongong on (02) 4221 3386 or email rso-ethics@uow.edu.au.

By signing below, I am indicating my consent to participate in one 60-minute interview. I understand that this interview will be strictly confidential and that the reporting of data from this study will be done in a way that preserves my anonymity.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix 2—Participant Information Sheet**

### **Participant Information Sheet**

#### RESEARCH TITLE

An investigation into the inhibitors and promoters of performance in leaders during their first 90 days in a new role.

#### PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

This is an invitation to participate in a student research project conducted by researchers at Sydney Business School, University of Wollongong. The research is focused on your experience during a transition into a new leadership role or your experience managing or observing a leader undertaking a transition. The purpose of the study is to understand the factors that inhibit and promote success for leaders within the transition period in a new role.

#### BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH

The research explores how leaders in a new role succeed and the interviews allow the participants to reflect on their own experiences and observations, which may help them to clarify some of these experiences and assist with future transitions, both individually and across the organisations where they work. Potential future benefit for organisations is that the research may also identify certain actions or processes that businesses could change or improve in order to help leaders transition more successfully as well as provide insight in effective methods of measuring success in leadership transitions.

#### WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO DO

Participation would involve taking part in one 60-minute face-to-face interview designed to understand what factors assisted or detracted from your success in transitioning into a recent new leadership position, how you measured success during and post transition and if your understanding of the business' strategy during the transition affected your success. The interview will involve a discussion of 10 open-ended questions about your transition. Sample questions include, "What was the business situation upon transition?" and "What were the enablers in the transition?" You will be asked for a preferred date and time to participate in the interview and a list of the interview questions will be sent to you two days before that date.

## TELEPHONE/SKYPE INTERVIEWING POLICY

Whilst it is preferred that the interviews be conducted face-to-face, where circumstances require it the interviews may need to be conducted via telephone or Skype. In such a circumstance we will elect which of these options is preferred on the basis of personal privacy and familiarity. If you are uncomfortable with either of these options, you will not be required to continue and can request another time be chosen to permit a face-to-face interview.

## CONFIDENTIALITY AND POSSIBLE RISKS, INCONVENIENCES AND DISCOMFORTS

Please note that no other parties will become involved in the data collection and your confidentiality will be assured. Apart from setting aside the 60-minutes needed for the interview, we can foresee no risks for you. Whilst the interview will be audiotaped and transcribed to permit analysis of the data, the interview will be strictly confidential and none of your responses will be viewed by anyone other than the researcher or nominated research assistant(s). At the completion of the study your data will be grouped with data collected from other leader interviews and used for the preparation of the thesis and potentially a journal article. However, any reporting of the data from this study will be done in a way that does not identify you.

Your involvement in the study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw your participation from the study at any time, including the withdrawal of any data by you to that point.

## ETHICS REVIEW AND COMPLAINTS

This study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Social Science, Humanities and Behavioural Science) of the University of Wollongong. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the way this research has been conducted, you can contact the UOW Ethics Office on (02) 4221 3386 or email [rso-ethics@uow.edu.au](mailto:rso-ethics@uow.edu.au).

Thank you for your interest. If you would like to participate, please contact Ty Wiggins on 0404 010 010 or via [ty.wiggins@me.com](mailto:ty.wiggins@me.com).

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## Appendix 3—Interview Questions and Discussion Frameworks

### Interview Questions & Discussion Frameworks

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview. If you could read through this document prior to the interview that would be great.

#### WHAT IS THE TRANSITION PERIOD?

The transition period for this study is considered to be the first 90 days in a new leadership role.

#### GENERAL INFORMATION

Current Role Title	
Time in current role	
Is it a new or established role	New / Established
Promoted internally or recruited externally	Internal / External
If recruited externally agency or direct	Agency / Direct
If recruited externally from the same industry	Yes / No
Predecessor now superior	Yes / No
Number of direct staff in current role	
Number of direct staff in previous role	
P&L responsibilities in current role	Yes / No
P&L responsibilities in last role	Yes / No
Organisational honeymoon period	

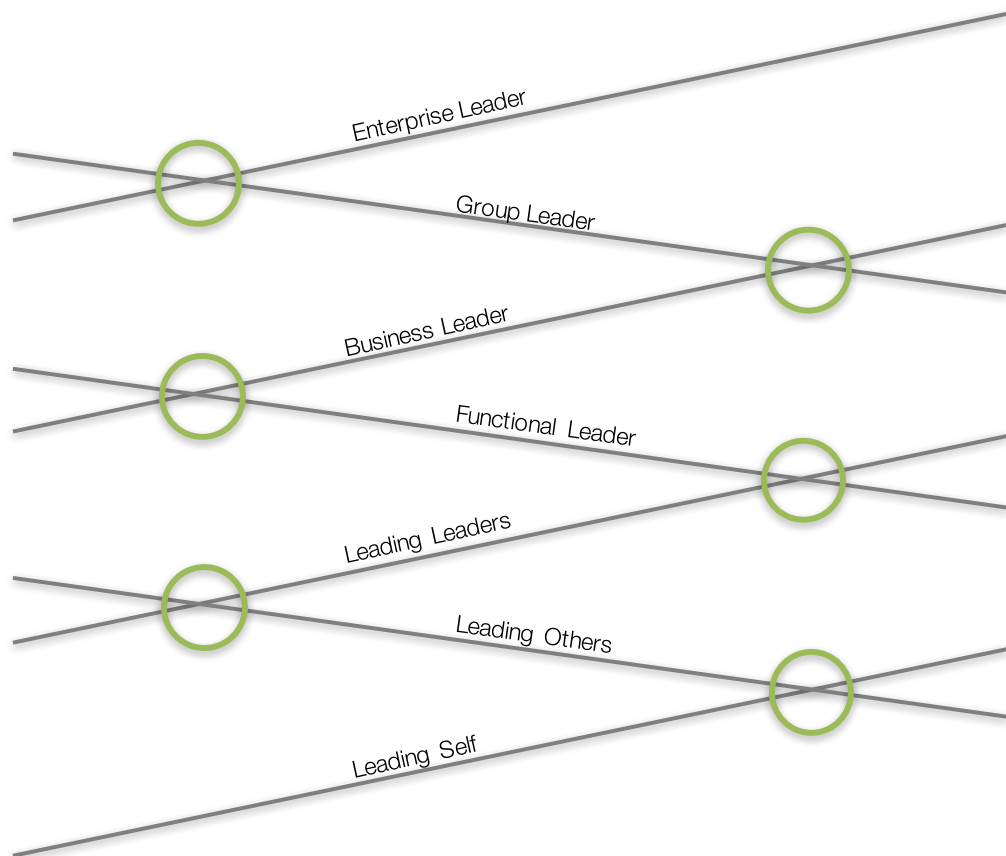
## BUSINESS SITUATION

These are four broad types of business situations that face new leaders. What was the business situation at the time of this transition?

1. Start-up
2. Turnaround
3. Realignments
4. Sustaining success.

## LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

Below are the common transitions and turning points leaders face. Where does this transition sit?



## LEVEL OF TRANSITION

Where on the table below would you rank your transition in terms of required change in skill and change in culture from the previous role to this role?

<b>Change in Skill:</b>	Significant Change	7	8	9
	Moderate Change	4	5	6
	No Change	1	2	3
		No Change	Moderate Change	Significant Change
<b>Change in Culture</b>				

#### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was the reason for your transition?
2. Was there a formal on-boarding program or process for your new role?
3. How did you measure success during the transition?
4. What were the enablers / promoters to success during your transition?
5. What were the blockers / inhibitors to success during your transition?
6. How did your understanding of the business strategy affect your success during the transition?
7. On reflection is there anything that you would do differently if you had this transition again? What advice would you give to someone taking on your role on how to manage the transition period?

## Appendix 4—Example Memos

### Interview with LE8

Bit rushed, spent a lot of time on the first question and a lot of time on projects at Yum. She did warn me at the beginning, but I didn't do a great job at controlling her. I need to set better boundaries and expectations with the interviewees

By the time we got to the important questions we were running low on time. This made me rush and stress even though she said we could have more time.

Didn't ask the question about considering leaving question so will need to go back.

Team and managers seem to be the key issues in the interview. She took extreme action re her learning to go out to the gas stations and work all of the jobs to understand. I doubt I will see anyone else taking similar action.

She was very candid and open with her staff and managers during her transition which I see as both a positive and a potential risk.

First to identify the 'mummy guilt' Another key factor for this leader is the fact that she was at her previous employer for 16 years. Moving from a place where she knew everything and everyone, was able to get almost anything through and was well regarded clearly has a huge impact. Might be common in other cases

### Interview with LE6

Great interview with XXXX. Seems to have been a very good transition by an experienced leader. Being the HR Director means that she has a heightened awareness of the transition issues and was able to easily articulate the pros and cons

6 months in role, change of industry, 6 direct reports (8 in last role), no P&L, business leader, realignment (yes to previous), formal on boarding, 3 months 60%, 6 months 80-90%, leadership transition = 6.

\*Key recognition is days are getting shorter - not taking as long to get through the work. This a new transition success measure

Promoters list very good

1. Meetings with CEO
2. Early and regular meetings with leadership team and chair
3. Mentor in external influencer (managing how to navigate politics)
4. Role clarity
5. Investing time in the team
6. Making team changes early
7. External coach
8. Forming good relationships with peers

Investing time in relationships and her team - maybe a factor of her HR focus.

Made moves on staff early and would have done so even quicker on reflection. Actually, said that she had pre-planned to move quickly and still didn't move quick enough

Good timing had her involved in the strategic planning early and it made a huge difference to her ability to make decisions and choices. This would have been a blocker if not included

### **Interview with LE7**

Interesting interview - XXXX is 5 months into her role and has had a really hard time with the culture and her team which she described as like the TV show 'Mean Girls'

Has given the team too much consideration / grace and delayed taking action which she now needs to do. This is causing her stress around how her superiors are viewing her performance.

Toughest transition of her career and has thought several times about leaving. Still unsure about whether it is the right fit for her.

Mentioned that trust was an issue but not in her, from her to the organisation.

Also mentioned that issues leaving her last role have created some concerns for her in the new role. Not a lack of preparation like in the other cases – this is a negative exit affecting the entry into a new role.

Is HR so having good understanding of the transition issues. Even though found the reflection very helpful and was really considered. Very clear when discussing the process in general or for someone else, less so for herself

### **Interview with HR4**

HR Manager talking about the NSW Operations Manager who had been in the role 7 months coming from sales. She is unsure why he got the role except that the GM liked him, and they are close friends. 9 direct staff now from 7 direct before and no P&L responsibilities in either role.

Business is in realignment current functional leader.

She joined just before this promotion and the business asked her to do whatever it took - what she did was coach him through the first 90 days (used the book) and helped structure a plan for him to follow which did a lot to retain him and get him performing. This seems to have had a very positive impact on the leader staying and starting to deliver

Good example of a very tough role supported by a coach with a transition plan

Good info on measurements based around the 90 day plan she co-created. The use of the transition plan as the measures of success is coming up a bit. I think it is based out of fear that if the leader does not create it then they will have nothing to support their first few months and be exposed.

Promotors

Methodical approach

built relationships

Built credibility through good communication

90-day plan

Like a sponge to learning

Had excellent technical advisor

CEO manager support

Understanding of culture

Able to navigate organisation

Clear plan and clarity of role

### **Interview with LE5**

The role is established in that it is the MD role but, in his view,, it changed dramatically due to the compliance issues they were having.

Honeymoon period first 12 months

Turnaround but not worked in that situation before.

Had an extremely tough transition (somewhat self-inflicted). He sacked most of the ET straight away and then did their roles while he recruited replacements which took months. He was working from 3am to 10pm. He actually sent his wife and daughter back to the UK for 6 months so he could focus on the role.

At the time he thought this was reasonable but now he sees that it isn't. Appreciates that it sets a terrible example for the business and would do it differently if he had his chance again.

Mentioned a bias towards his function and away from other functions like marketing. Also talked about challenges managing his former peers.