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**Gordon Institute  
of Business Science**  
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## **The transition to General Management**

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Master of Business Administration.

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## **Abstract**

The number of managers that continue to fail at effectively transitioning to senior levels of leadership still remains unacceptably high, and ultimately impacts company's abilities to develop succession plans and build effective leadership pipelines. This research project was undertaken to seek insight into the challenges faced by managers as they transition into the role of General Management. The research sought to understand the challenges associated with the transition and identify how successful leaders overcame them.

The research was conducted in two phases. Firstly, a quantitative survey of students attending the General Management Programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (University of Pretoria) was undertaken. The class of 35 students consisted of managers that had recently moved into, or who were about to move into, the role of General Manager and 29 of these students completed the survey. This survey intended to gain some perspective from currently transitioning managers. The second research phase was qualitative in nature and comprised of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, with nineteen (19) senior Business Leaders who had successfully made the transition. This phase aimed to gather the Business Leaders perspectives on the challenges they faced during their transitions, and how these were overcome by them.

The research highlighted the extent and significance of the transition, and identified many challenges associated with it. The findings of the research provided useful insights from experienced leaders about the challenges and surprises they encountered and how they were able to overcome them, and effectively transition into General Management. Moreover it illustrated the extent to which the managers had to change and how their own identities transformed. The need to develop informal relationships and gaining practical experience were particularly strong themes that emerged. In contrast to this, it found that the newly promoted managers did not place as much significance and importance on the transition to General Management as the experienced managers did. This highlighted the extent to which the transition process may be underestimated.

**Keywords:** General Management; leadership development; succession planning; personal development; identity

## **Declaration**

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Stephen John Mallaby

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10 November 2014

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this research project to my wife Colette, and my sons Thomas and Nicholas.

Thank you for the enormous sacrifice you have made over the last three years during my PMD and MBA, and for giving up all the lost opportunities and special occasions, so I could pursue my dream.

To Colette, thank you for your unconditional support, love and encouragement, and for being the 'rock' that has kept our family together. You will never truly know how much I value and appreciate you.

To Tom and Nicholas, never stop believing that you can achieve anything that you want.

To my Mom, it may have taken me a while to listen to your advice but thank you for letting me know I was gifted.

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Abstract.....	i
Declaration.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Research Title.....	1
1.2 Research Objectives .....	1
1.3 Research Problem .....	4
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	7
2.2 Leadership .....	8
2.3 General Management .....	11
2.4 Organisation Hierarchical Levels.....	15
2.5 Inhibitors and Facilitators of Transition .....	17
2.6 The Nature of the Transition.....	21
2.7 Conclusion .....	25
<b>Chapter 3: Research Questions .....</b>	<b>27</b>
3.1 Research Question 1 .....	27
3.2 Research Question 2 .....	27
3.3 Research Question 3 .....	28
3.4 Research Question 4 .....	28
<b>Chapter 4: Methodology.....</b>	<b>29</b>
4.1 Research Design.....	29
4.2 Quantitative Methodology – Phase One .....	30
4.2.1 Population.....	31
4.2.2 Unit of Analysis .....	31
4.2.3 Sampling.....	31
4.2.4 Data Collection.....	32
4.2.5 Data Analysis and Description.....	32
4.2.6 Assumptions and Limitations.....	32

4.3	Qualitative Methodology – Phase Two .....	33
4.3.1	Population .....	33
4.3.2	Unit of Analysis .....	33
4.3.3	Sampling.....	34
4.3.4	Data Collection.....	34
4.3.5	Data Analysis .....	37
4.3.6	Limitations.....	39
<b>Chapter 5:</b>	<b>Presentation of Results .....</b>	<b>40</b>
5.1	Phase 1 Quantitative Research and Results .....	40
5.1.1	Introduction .....	40
5.2	Phase 2 Qualitative Research .....	49
5.2.1	Introduction .....	49
5.2.2	General Research Findings.....	52
5.2.3	Facilitating the Journey into a General Management Level Role .....	52
5.3	Results Research Question 1.....	56
5.3.1	Letting go of Control and Maintaining Ownership .....	56
5.3.2	Personal Characteristics and Relationships .....	58
5.3.3	Insecurities.....	61
5.3.4	Having Courage in the Face of Loneliness.....	63
5.4	Results Research Question 2.....	64
5.4.1	A Shift of Focus: General Managers Appear to have Differing Views on what Strategy Entails.....	65
5.4.2	Understanding What is Required for Strategy Development and Leadership .....	67
5.4.3	Relationship Building.....	68
5.4.4	Realisation That a Broadening of Skills Set is Required .....	70
5.4.5	Need to Gather Information.....	73
5.5	Results Research Question 3.....	74
5.5.1	Coaching and Mentoring Plays a Vital Role in Easing the Transition for General Managers .....	75

5.5.2	There are Gaps in Leadership Development Programmes Identified by the Surprises General Managers Experience During their Transition .....	77
5.5.3	Other Development Programme Initiatives .....	78
5.5.4	Advice for Development Programme Initiatives .....	80
5.6	Results Research Question 4.....	81
5.6.1	South Africa is not Unique and Challenges Evolve.....	82
5.6.2	Culture and Diversity.....	82
5.6.3	Black Economic Empowerment.....	83
5.6.4	Transformation.....	84
<b>Chapter 6:</b>	<b>Discussion of Results .....</b>	<b>85</b>
6.1	Introduction .....	85
6.2	Research Question 1 .....	86
6.2.1	Letting go of Control and Maintaining Ownership .....	87
6.2.2	Personal Characteristics and Relationships .....	88
6.2.3	Insecurities.....	89
6.2.4	Courage and Loneliness .....	90
6.2.5	Conclusion: Letting Go and Transformation .....	90
6.3	Research Question 2 .....	91
6.3.1	A Shift of Focus: General Managers Appear to Have Differing Views on What Strategy Entails.....	92
6.3.2	Understanding What is Required for Strategy Development and Leadership .....	93
6.3.3	Relationship Building.....	94
6.3.4	Realisation that a Broadening of Skills Set is Required .....	94
6.3.5	Need to Gather Information.....	95
6.3.6	Conclusion: Shift to Strategic Perspective .....	95
6.4	Research Question 3 .....	96
6.4.1	Coaching and Mentoring Plays a Vital Role in Easing the Transition for General Managers .....	97



6.4.2	There are Gaps in Leadership Development Programmes Identified by the Surprises General Managers Experience During their Transition .....	98
6.4.3	Other Development Programme Initiatives .....	98
6.4.4	Advice for Development Programme Initiatives .....	99
6.4.5	Conclusion: Leadership Development Programme Benefit.....	100
6.5	Research Question 4 .....	100
6.5.1	South Africa is not Unique.....	100
6.5.2	Culture and Diversity.....	101
6.5.3	Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) .....	101
6.5.4	Transformation.....	101
6.5.5	Conclusion: Unique Challenges to South African General Manager Transitions .....	102
6.6	Conclusion of results discussion .....	102
<b>Chapter 7: Conclusion</b>	.....	<b>104</b>
7.1	Introduction .....	104
7.2	Major Findings .....	104
7.3	Recommendations for Aspiring General Managers .....	105
7.4	Recommendations for Organisations .....	106
7.5	Recommendations for Leadership Development Programmes.....	107
7.6	Recommendations for Future Research.....	107
7.1	Conclusion .....	108
<b>References</b>	.....	<b>109</b>
<b>Appendix A: Quantitative Survey Instrument</b>	.....	<b>116</b>
<b>Appendix B: Email: Introductory note requesting an interview</b>	.....	<b>119</b>
<b>Appendix C: Qualitative Interview Guideline</b>	.....	<b>120</b>
<b>Appendix D: List of Interviewees</b> .....		<b>122</b>
<b>Appendix E: Letter of Consent</b> .....		<b>123</b>
<b>Appendix F: Independent Analysis Letter of Confirmation</b> .....		<b>124</b>
<b>Appendix G: Consistency Matrix</b> .....		<b>125</b>

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: Bridging capabilities .....	3
Figure 2: Literature Framework .....	7
Figure 3: Evolvment of Leadership Theories .....	9
Figure 4: The Development Activities of Top Managers .....	14
Figure 5: Drotter's Leadership Pipeline.....	15
Figure 6: The Five Primary Pathways and Four Basic Career Crossroads .....	16
Figure 7: Six Key Managerial Competencies .....	21
Figure 8: The Tripartite Challenge of Transformational Change .....	23
Figure 9: The U Process Theory.....	24
Figure 10: Iceberg Model.....	25
Figure 11: Components of Data Analysis: Iterative Model .....	38
Figure 12: Source of Learning Skills and Knowledge.....	42
Figure 13: Important Subjects for General Managers .....	44
Figure 14: Development Assistance Provided by the Company .....	46
Figure 15: The Use of a Mentor.....	47
Figure 16: The Importance of a Mentor .....	47
Figure 17: Are there Transition Challenges that are Unique to South Africa? .....	48
Figure 18: Summary of Challenges Unique to the GM Transition in South Africa .....	48
Figure 19: Designation of Participants.....	49
Figure 20: Gender of Participants.....	50
Figure 21: Race of Participants .....	50
Figure 22: Facilitators and Hindrances of the Transition to the General Management Role .....	54
Figure 23: Mastering the Leadership Role.....	71
Figure 24: Selecting the Right Candidate for Development .....	80
Figure 25: Shift of Strategic Focus .....	93
Figure 26: Origins of Mentors to General Managers .....	97
Figure 27: Consolidated Leadership Development .....	99
Figure 28: Summary of Findings.....	103
Figure 29: Recommendations for Aspiring General Managers .....	106

## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: The Reality of Managing and Leading .....	10
Table 2: Key Factors Impacting the Transition to General Management.....	20
Table 3: Designations of Survey Respondents .....	41
Table 4: Motivation for Moving into the General Management Role.....	41
Table 5: 'Money' as a Motivator for Moving into the Role of General Manager .....	42
Table 6: Importance of Subjects and Topics for General Managers .....	43
Table 7: Mean Score of Subjects for General Managers .....	43
Table 8: Factors Facilitating the Transition to the General Manager Role.....	44
Table 9: Rank of Factors Impacting the Transition .....	45
Table 10: Levels of Assistance Provided by Companies .....	46
Table 11: Levels of Success Through the Transition .....	47
Table 12: Interview Audio Information .....	51
Table 13: Interview Transcriptions.....	51
Table 14: Number of Participants Having Experience in Various Job Roles .....	53
Table 15: Themes for Research Question 1 .....	56
Table 16: Themes for Research Question 2 .....	64
Table 17: Themes for Research Question 3 .....	74
Table 18: Themes for Research Question 4 .....	81

## Chapter 1: Introduction to Research Problem

*“A person does not gather learnings as possessions but rather becomes a new person with those learnings as part of his or her new self”*

*(Bennis, 1989, p.52)*

### 1.1 Research Title

The transition to General Management.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

“General Managers are the lifeblood of any business...the General Manager role is decidedly different... it is precisely this ability to manage the unknown that distinguished the General Manager role and makes it so valuable to an organization” (Day & Harrison, 2007, p.368).

The objective of this study is to gain a better understanding of the transition that managers must make to General Management. The study will utilise a model derived from the “Passages of Leadership” (Drotter, 2010; Drotter & Charan, 2001) as the basis for understanding the various levels of leadership, and more specifically, at which point there is a transition from functional to general management. The intention is to find out how managers made the transition and what they specifically did to overcome the challenges and make the transition successful and effective. Moreover, the intention is to seek greater insight into what the actual challenges are, so that potential leaders can be adequately developed and suitably prepared for the transition.

Over the last hundred odd years there has been extensive research on the topics of management and leadership. Despite the vast amount of information available there is still a high degree of failure amongst leaders, part of which is attributable to leaders failing to transition effectively (Burke, 2006; Conger & Fulmer, 2003).

There are several models and frameworks that depict the various hierarchical levels of leadership within an organisation, and although there are differing definitions for similar roles and levels, such as ‘General Manager’, ‘senior manager’, ‘business manager’, ‘enterprise manager’ (Drotter & Charan, 2001; Freedman, 1998; Watkins, 2012),

including differing definitions of the actual term 'general management', there is substantial support for the fact that the transition to this level requires a profound transformation (Ibarra, Snook, & Ramo, 2008). This study will review how successful leaders were able to make this transformation and adapt, and what coping mechanisms they adopted in the process.

According to Drotter and Charan (2001), the change in the role results in increased pressure to move away from individual tasks and activities to those more aligned with the needs of the business, thus veering the leader into unfamiliar territory. It is argued that the transition from functional management to that of running an enterprise or business unit, in the role of a General Manager, is considered to be one of the most challenging experiences (Watkins, 2012) combined with a high potential for failure (Ibarra et al., 2008).

Part of the findings established through the research is that many managers, when faced with the challenge of being in uncharted territory and dealing with unfamiliar scenarios, tend to fall back on what they know best and continue to rely on past behaviours. Although there is a common conception of, 'what got you here won't get you there' (Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007; Watkins, 2012), many managers fail to effectively adopt this principle.

Despite the vast amount of research carried out over the last few decades, there appears to be little research behind the concept of the leadership pipeline, and what it takes for managers to be successful at different levels within the organisation (Kaiser, 2011). Furthermore, whilst the aim of this report is to review the factors that have contributed to an effective transition, one needs to be cognisant of the risks associated with executive level promotions and the reasons contributing to the failure of leaders (Burke, 2006; Freedman, 2011). Through gaining a better understanding of the reasons behind the failure of leaders, useful lessons for potential leaders on what to expect and how to mitigate against the risk of their own failure to transition successfully, is provided for.

In addition to this study highlighting many of the challenges associated with the transition into General Management, it also aims to understand to what extent the challenges are universally generic, and if there are any that are specific to South Africa.

The research considers and combines two perspectives which provide information useful in highlighting the challenges of transition and how to overcome them. The first is through data gathered by means of surveys conducted with managers who are presently at the stage of making the transition, and currently attending a General Management Programme at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (University of Pretoria, South Africa). The second phase is gathering and analysing information from in-depth interviews conducted with experienced leaders that have already successfully transitioned.

Adl, Burnett, and Dapra (2013) discuss the vast extent to which a functional / mid-level manager must adjust when transitioning to a General Manager role, and the capabilities which must be bridged in the transition. These are illustrated in figure 1 below.

**Figure 1: Bridging Capabilities**

Functional/Mid-Level Manager		General Manager
<b>Tactical Execution</b> Implements initiatives set by the senior leadership team	⇒	<b>Strategic Execution</b> Demands big-picture, long-term and strategic thinking
<b>Silo Experience</b> Experience and networks concentrated within one area of the enterprise	⇒	<b>Broad Enterprise Perspective</b> Maximize cross-business interdependencies and identify, collaborate and influence stakeholders
<b>Internal Focus</b> Concentrated on strong execution, exposure to the external market is limited	⇒	<b>External Focus</b> Deep understanding of industry trends, market dynamics, regulatory changes and customer expectations is required
<b>Cost/Budget Analysis</b> Budgetary perspective, but limited financial acumen often exposed only to the P&L within their business unit	⇒	<b>Business/Financial Acumen</b> <u>Financial acumen</u> and agility with a deep understanding of the balance sheet, cash flow statement and KPIs
<b>Team Development</b> Experienced in leading professionals and driving high-performance teams through fundamental <u>leadership skills</u>	⇒	<b>Enterprise Talent Development</b> Exhibit the behaviors needed to drive the company culture, inspire large groups of employees and acquire top talent
<b>Working within the Business Today</b> Effectively work within today's business to maximize the current business model	⇒	<b>Innovating the Business for Tomorrow</b> Agility to innovate the business to create new opportunities for growth

**SOURCE: Adapted from Adl, Burnett, & Dapra (2013)**

### 1.3 Research Problem

Extensive evidence exists which indicates that many organisations have struggled to perform as a direct result of poor and failed leadership. In many instances this is a result of ineffective and ill-prepared leaders being appointed, which is partly due to the lack of depth in the leadership pipeline. This is exacerbated by the inability of leaders to adjust their skills and behaviours to those required for the new role (Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003; Lord & Hall, 2005). Managers are often functionally competent but this does not mean they will become good leaders. To some extent, this relates to the 'Peter Principle' which suggests that people are promoted to their level of incompetence (Lazear, 2004; Maroun, 2014; Tan, 2014).

In light of this there is a shortage of and demand for, good leaders, with a dire need for organisations to develop leaders and ensure suitable succession planning (Burke, 2006; Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Drotter, 2010; Quatro, Waldman, & Galvin, 2007). According to Dr Norris Dalton, CEO of the South African Institute of Management (SAIM), there is a "crisis of leadership", as companies are spending large sums of money on leadership development courses, yet they are questioning the effectiveness of the courses to develop leaders (South Africa's Leading Managers 2008/2009, 2009, p.xxxii). This perspective of management courses failing to meet the needs of managers is not an isolated case (Tucker, 2013).

The issue of leadership failures is also compounded by the general negative views on the notion of failure, and where appropriate, the lack of 'tolerance' for it. This is not to be misinterpreted as complacency for failure. As companies are under increasing pressure to perform, there tends to be greater emphasis on short term focus which places additional pressure on managers having to make the transition. At the same time leaders are required to make more decisions, at times with little or conflicting information, which sometimes leads to bad decisions (Finkelstein, Whitehead, & Campbell, 2009). This is further exacerbated by demands coming from an increasing number of stakeholders. From the research it appears there is a missed opportunity to embrace and learn from failures. Failure is considered to be an important element of success, yet Drucker (2005) suggests that for many people there is a complete absence of failure.

The potential problem with the transition to General Management is that it is common practice to look to the past in order to understand what worked for others. However,

given that the world of business is in a constant state of flux (Adl, et al., 2013; Hill, 2003; The Corporate Executive Board Company, 2014) with issues of globalisation, emerging economies and virtualisation, a different style of leadership may be required. This may impact the ability of a leader to transition, as it is not only about having to deal with the challenging nature of making the transition to General Management, but also having to deal with this in a rapidly changing business environment which entails more recent issues such as sustainability and compliance. The research has aimed to determine whether this has an impact on the transition process.

There is also the issue of management versus leadership (Watkins, 2012). Whilst the term General Manager implies the role is more related to management, it must incorporate a strong element of leadership. As a result managers transitioning into General Management must not only adapt to managing multiple functions and business units, but also have to learn to develop leadership skills. Aligned with the aspect of leadership and managing multiple responsibilities, is the ability to do so in a coherent manner and drive collaboration, thus being able to 'connect the dots'. Furthermore, as the leader needs to collaborate (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003), it requires a shift away from the reliance on one's own performance to the dependency on others to achieve a desired outcome. This also entails a process of having to know 'less and less about more and more' (Fauconnier, 2014; The Corporate Executive Board Company, 2014).

Companies are challenged to develop leadership pipelines which ensure continuity and sustainability, yet it appears that their focus has primarily been on the 'mechanical' aspect of ensuring programmes and frameworks are in place to assist with the development of the individuals' skills and abilities (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). This also raises the question of considering not *what* leaders should be taught, but rather, *how* they can be helped to learn (Hackman & Wageman, 2007).

The failure to effectively ensure continuity and sustainability of leaders impacts on business's succession planning as they risk 'clogging' their leadership pipeline. In this case they need to recruit leaders from outside of the organisation, which creates new sets of challenges relating to an outsider having to align with the culture of the organisation (Drotter, 2010).

While this study specifically focuses on the transition to general management, the subject matter is not being viewed in isolation, as General Managers are seen as a vital and potential pool of future CEO candidates and therefore a critical element of the



pipeline (Kates & Downey, 2005). In order to build the pipeline it is necessary to understand the challenges of the transition and to determine if development programmes could aid the process. Lastly there is also evidence that suggests the responsibilities of leadership development are often left to Human Capital Departments and there is an argument for the case that the executive leadership of businesses should in fact be more involved in this process (Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Trudel, 2011).

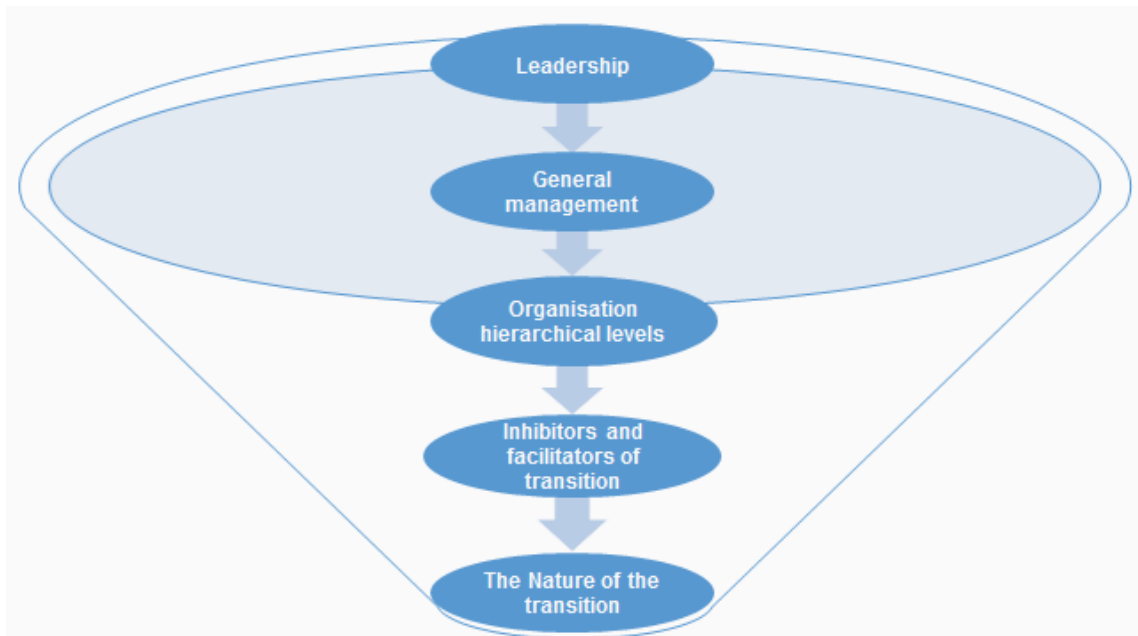
This study will assist companies in building their leadership pipelines as it will provide them with additional insight into the process and journey that the leaders must endure in order to make an effective transition to General Management. It is apparent that there are contrasting views over the development of leaders and it seems there is a need for further research in this area (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Lord & Hall, 2005).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

The following literature review provides a theoretical perspective on the transformation managers make as they transition into the role of General Management. A framework was designed by the author in order to provide a conceptual illustration of the literature review and is depicted in figure 2 below. The author found that this was a useful process in which to 'funnel' the literature.

**Figure 2: Literature Framework**



The literature review begins by providing a background on leadership theory in general and how this has evolved over time. Whilst leadership is a very broad concept, with varying forms of leaders such as political, religious and community leaders, the context of this study and literature review focuses specifically on business leaders. The theory of General Management is then explored in greater detail in order provide clarity on what this role actually entails. The review also debates the view of leaders being born versus bred and provides some insight into understanding the elements of, and differences between managers and leaders. The literature review continues to expand on the concept of leadership pipelines and the various frameworks that depict multiple hierarchical levels within an organisation. Furthermore, it continues to delve into the theory behind the myriad of factors that potentially impact the transition into General

Management. As the theories of leadership have evolved over time, research into the multitude of factors has also been expanded on, with additional factors continually being introduced and researched. Lastly, the literature review provides a detailed theoretical perspective on the actual nature of the transition, including the many failures and challenges associated with it.

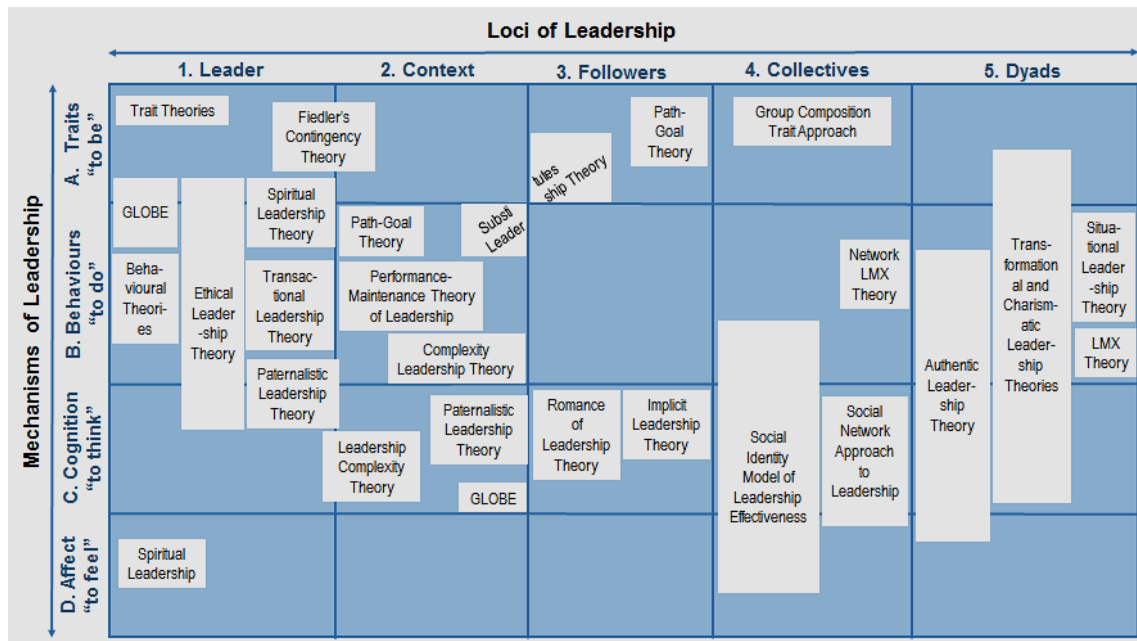
## 2.2 Leadership

General Management incorporates elements of both management and leadership, and forms part of the field of leadership. However, attempting to separate the two can be 'dangerous and destructive' (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003). Despite extensive research into the field of leadership and the many theories on leadership, including how it has evolved, there appears to be many varying opinions and no consensus as to the specific definition of leadership. There are arguments that question how leadership can be scientifically studied when it can't even be defined. Moreover there appears to be support for the fact that there is a significant requirement for further research on the topic of leadership, with more emphasis on recent theories (Avolio et al., 2009; Day & Harrison, 2007; Goldman, Wesner, & Karnchanomai, 2013; Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011).

In addition to this, although large amounts have been invested in leadership research and the development of leaders, many organisations are of the opinion that there is a shortage of good leaders. This is supported by evidence that suggests there is an increase in the number of failures of leaders and a high number of managers who fail when promoted to general management (Adl et al., 2013; Burke, 2006). Further complicating this are views that consider differences between '*the*' leader and '*a*' leader.

The concept and understanding of leadership itself, including the theories and research relating to leaders and leadership, have evolved over many decades, from 'great man' theory, to trait theories, to transactional leadership, to transformational leadership and more recently transcendent leadership. This is summarised in figure 3 below (Bass, 1985; Day & Harrison, 2007; DeChurch, Hiller, Murase, Doty, & Salas, 2010; Hernandez et al., 2011). Day and Harrison (2007) further suggest that whilst the theories have evolved, they have in fact had to go through a gradual process of evolution and acceptance.

**Figure 3: Evolvement of Leadership Theories**



**SOURCE: Adapted from Hernandez et al. (2011, p.1166)**

Aligned with the evolution of leadership theory is the evolving complexity and focus on development (Lord & Hall, 2005). In the early stages of leadership research, the focus was on the individual leader, yet this has evolved to more recent new genre concepts of collective and shared leadership styles. Recent research posits that the focus is not solely on the leader, but is expanding to include stakeholders interacting with the leader such as peers and subordinates, as well as the context in which the leader exists. This is particularly relevant for General Managers, given the need for collaborative approaches (Avolio et al., 2009; Day & Harrison, 2007; Fauconnier, 2014).

Recent new genre theories such as transformational leadership theory gave more attention to the leader's behaviours, charisma, values, ideology and levels of vision and inspiration. More traditional models such as transactional leadership theory focused more on the relationship between the leader and the follower, and the 'cost' benefit of this. Over the years research has evolved to consider the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of leaders, as well as increased literature examining and providing support for the reasons behind the increasing failure of leaders (Burke, 2006; Conger & Fulmer 2003; Lombardo, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1988).

Whilst the theories and definitions have evolved, and may differ, there remains the argument of whether leaders are born or bred. Avolio et al. (2009) argue that it is not really about the hereditary traits but rather the context and experiences that influence the ability of a leader to be developed. This aligns with the arguments that leaders need to be developed, should move from 'doing to being' and need to 'learn to crawl before being ready to run' (Hill, 2003; Ibarra et al., 2008).

Hiller, DeChurch, Murase, and Doty (2011) argue that the need for future leadership research will span over time and incorporate strategic perspectives. Furthermore there is a need for further research relating to the analysis of hierarchical levels of leadership in organisations and the theoretical perspectives of leaders. This is based on research which has assessed over 1000 empirical studies carried out over 25 years (DeChurch et al., 2010).

There is also the age old debate over the differences of management versus leadership, and although it is not a new concept, it remains relevant to this day. Whilst not all leaders are managers, and not all managers are leaders, the General Manager must develop a strong leadership competency (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003; Hill, 2003; Lord & Hall, 2005; Mintzberg, 1973). Table 1 provides a perspective on the myths and realities involved with becoming a leader.

**Table 1: The Reality of Managing and Leading**

	<b>Myth</b>	<b>Reality</b>
<b>Basic concept</b>	Authority	Interdependency
<b>Sources of power</b>	Formal authority	'Everything but'
<b>Key Players</b>	Direct reports	Includes those outside your formal authority
<b>Desired outcomes</b>	Control, compliance	Commitment, judgement
<b>Key competencies</b>	Technical	Technical, human, conceptual

**SOURCE:** Adapted from Hill (2003, p.279)

This element of the manager developing as a leader is very much about the manager shifting away from the 'doing' aspect to that of 'being' and in the process, empowering others to do the 'doing'. Drucker (2005) suggests it is through this process of relinquishing power to empower others and focusing on where one really adds value that leads to true effectiveness. Watkins (2012) concurs with this view and suggests that the challenge is over-managing the old familiar functions and under-managing the new ones. He goes on to elaborate about the need to move from a support cast member to the leading role, and providing both guidance and direction.

Lastly, there is the additional aspect of leader development versus leadership development, which differentiates between the individual and the team's respective development process and capabilities (Lord & Hall, 2005).

## **2.3 General Management**

There is extensive support for the perspective that the transition to General Management roles requires a shift away from functional specialisation (Adl et al., 2013; Bonoma & Lawler, 1989; Kates & Downey, 2005; Warner & Witzel, 1997). This shift is a profound one involving much more than transitioning to strategic thinking, but similar to the extent of shifting from left to right brain thinking (Watkins, 2012).

The aim of this study is to gain a better understanding of the transition from functional management to general management, as the role of the General Manager is considered to be one of the most valuable roles within a business (Day & Harrison, 2007). This is supported by Drucker (1967) who posited that General Managers were to become the driving force behind organisations, whilst Kates and Downey (2005) suggest that one of the most important succession efforts of a business is to develop a strong pipeline of General Managers. Although there were differing historic theories on business and scientific management in the early twentieth century, it was only in the 1950's that Drucker argued that managers needed to become more integral to the business and shift away from functional areas of expertise to more generalist perspectives (Warner & Witzel, 1997).

Described in another manner one could compare this to the analogy of moving from the violinist with an orchestra to that of the conductor of the orchestra. Watkins (2012) posits that the extent of this transformation is profound for managers and provides several analogies under the concept of 'seismic shifts'. These are aligned with the move from the functional specialist to that of the generalist, which is not dissimilar to a move from analyst to an integrator.

Given the importance of the General Management role, it is necessary to first have a clear definition of what the General Manager does and what responsibilities are expected of that particular position, before trying to understand the process of the transition into the role. It is apparent that the General Manager has to shift the focus away from operational, technical and functional activities to a more strategic

perspective, extending skills and moving from 'doing to being'. Watkins (2012) defines this as the move from the tactician to the strategist. Part of the adaptation involves being able to shift from being a functional expert in one area, to being competent in an array of new disciplines, without specialising in any of them (Burke, 2006; Casey & Goldman, 2010; Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Fauconnier, 2014; Ibarra et al., 2008). Yet, one of the challenges with the definition itself is the historic and popular perception of the term 'General Manager', as it is mistakenly thought to be a functional management role (Warner & Witzel, 1997).

"General Managers must be capable of managing the entire company...be masters of all business disciplines, finance, operations, marketing, human resource management, accounting and cost control, psychology of consumer behaviour, information technology, corporate structure, performance analysis, and environmental management...[and] also have the ability to develop a vision...to motivate...[and] to achieve the company's goals" (Warner & Witzel, 1997, p.272).

Kaplan and Kaiser (2003) add that the General Manager needs to adopt a strategic leadership approach, which requires a different level of thinking and encompasses how broadly a leader thinks about the company, aligning the vision and strategy, growing the business, and setting long terms goals. The need to align general management and strategy is by no means a new concept (Gupta, 1984; Watkins, 2012). In addition to the shift to strategic thinking, Bonoma and Lawler (1989) suggest the General Manager also shifts from task to people management.

Fauconnier (2014) posits that in addition to the new functional areas of responsibility, a General Manager's value system and moral perspectives become more relevant as these underpin the organisation and ultimately impact its performance. This also brings in elements of Corporate Governance and sustainability, which hitherto were not priorities for a manager. The view with regards to significant changes in work values receives further support from academics (Drotter & Charan, 2001; Ibarra et al., 2008).

A component of the values system is that of trust and the ability to develop relationships, both formally and informally (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003). It is suggested that the organisation is in fact built on trust, through relationships, and not by force (Drucker, 2005). This perspective receives further support from Hill (2006) who posits that the web of relationships that the newly promoted manager encounters can be overwhelming and leave them feeling out of control. An added element of trust and

values is that of power and the ability to use it responsibly. Many newly promoted leaders believe that the new level of seniority will bring an increased level of authority, yet they grapple with the understanding that the new level of power does not lead to an increased level of effectiveness.

The issue of how the leader effectively leads through delegation is related to the concept of the 'paradox of power' (Hill, 2006) which provides a contrasting perspective on the usage of power. The General Manager must consider how this newly gained power is utilised and an important element is how this power can be shared with subordinates by in fact empowering them and thus effectively delegating, and ultimately making the General Manager a more effective leader. This sharing of power helps build bridges and in the process strengthens the relationship. Watkins (2012) provides the perspective that suggests the manager should move from the problem solver to that of the agenda setter. By empowering others, the leader no longer focuses on fixing the problems but provides guidance on the problems that need solving.

Gosling and Mintzberg, (2003) posit that management involves managing multiple perspectives which include managing oneself, the organisation, the context, relationships and change. Elements of this would align with various hierarchical frameworks such as Drotter's Pipeline and Freedman's Crossroads (Drotter & Charan, 2001; Freedman, 1998). Ashkenas (2012) goes as far as to suggest that the only true General Manager is in fact the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

Although the evidence above supports the concept of transitioning from a functional to generalist role, it is noted that one is not necessarily better than the other. Rather, it is a choice made by a manager to continue to specialise or to move in another direction and take on a generalist role (Warner & Witzel, 1997), which is consistent with Drotter's Leadership pipeline (Drotter, 2010).

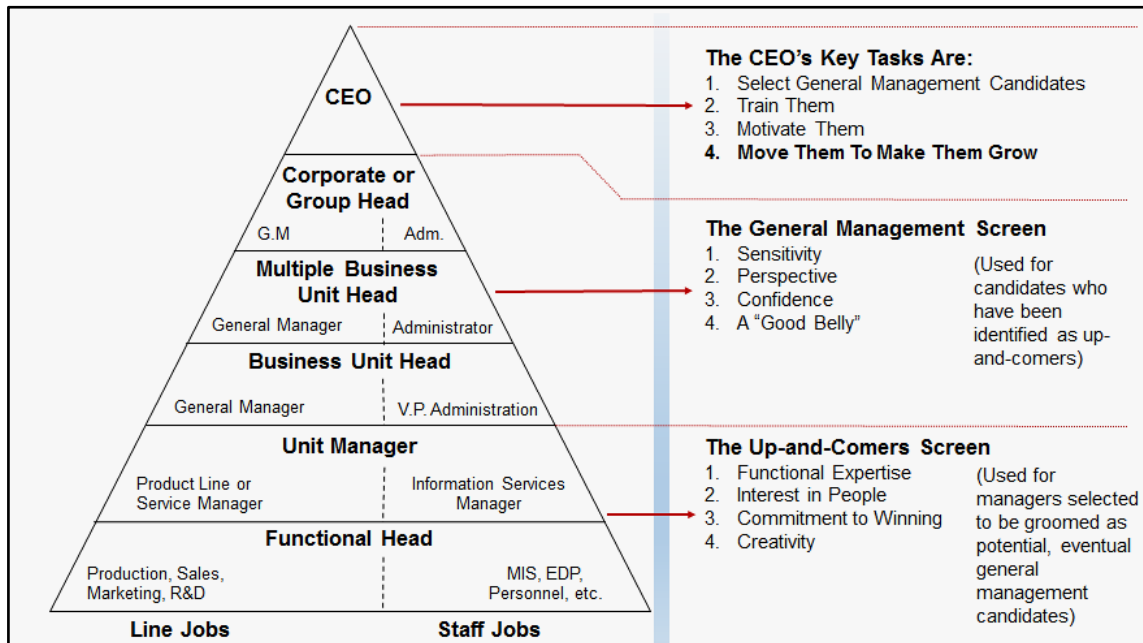
Aligned with the ability to take on a generalist role, is that of being able to let go and delegate in order to become effective. Drucker (2005) suggests that this ability to leverage the strengths of the people around you is one of those secrets of effectiveness.

It appears, from the research, that there are differing definitions of the various levels of management to which General Management is linked, with reference to terms such as, business manager, upper management, senior management, executive management.



From the definitions noted in this study, this report positions General Management at a higher executive level, which is represented in figure 4 below (Bonoma & Lawler, 1989). The depiction highlights that General Managers are seen as a pool of candidates for future CEO's.

**Figure 4: The Development Activities of Top Managers**



**SOURCE: Adapted from Bonoma and Lawler (1989, p.28)**

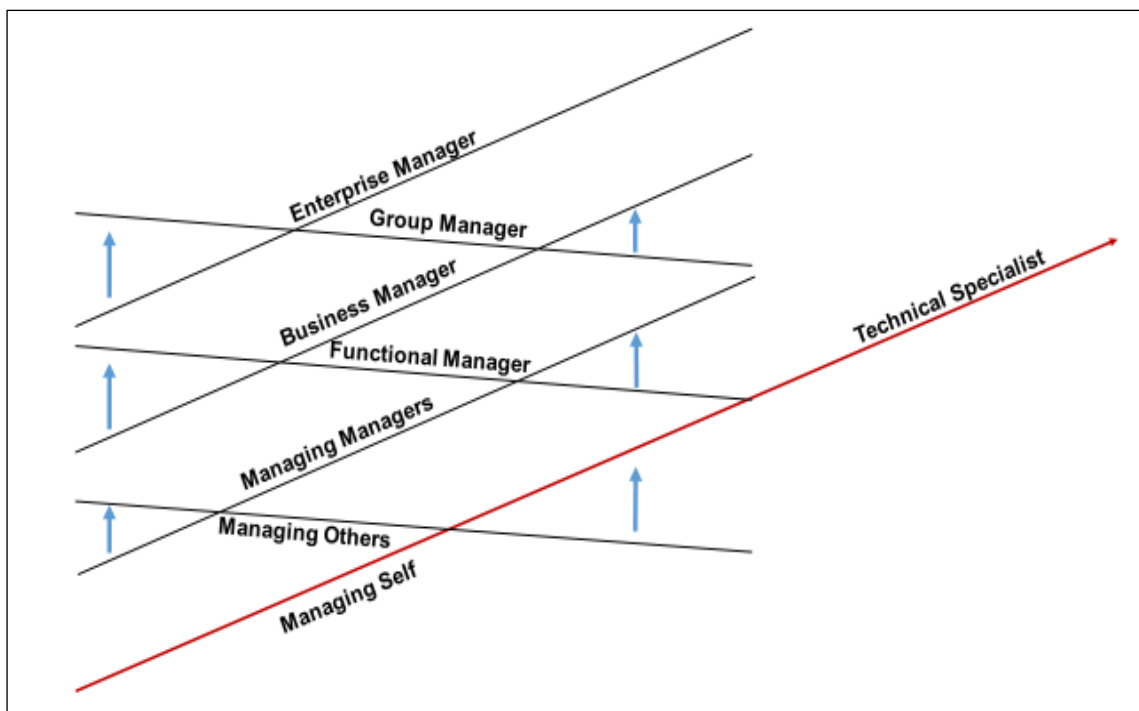
This study also incorporates elements of leadership as the author is of the opinion, based on the research, that leadership is a key element of general management (Kotter, 2008; Mintzberg, 1989). There are however, contrasting views on this as Warner and Witzel (1997) consider this approach as being too simplistic as it reduces the concept of 'leadership to simply being another function of management, and thereby undermines its value.

Kates and Downey (2005) posit that the transition to the role of General Manager is the key element in closing the gap between the manager, the leader and leadership. The perspective of leader versus leadership development was suggested by Lord and Hall (2005). A component of this transition is that of the leaders' perspective of time and the shift from short term operational to long term strategic.

## 2.4 Organisation Hierarchical Levels

Drotter and Charan (2001) developed a six passage model which sought to illustrate the various levels of leadership within an organisation and the requirements of the leaders at each level. The 'Leadership Pipeline', as depicted in figure 5, was an expansion of the original work developed by Walter Mahler at General Electric in the 1970's and was known as 'Critical Career Crossroads'. The concept of the pipeline is not only meant to illustrate levels within an organisation, but is also related to the importance of succession planning and the crucial need to keep the pipeline full without clogging it with the wrong candidates. Each of the turns in the pipeline are considered to be significant events (Charan, Drotter, & Noel, 2001).

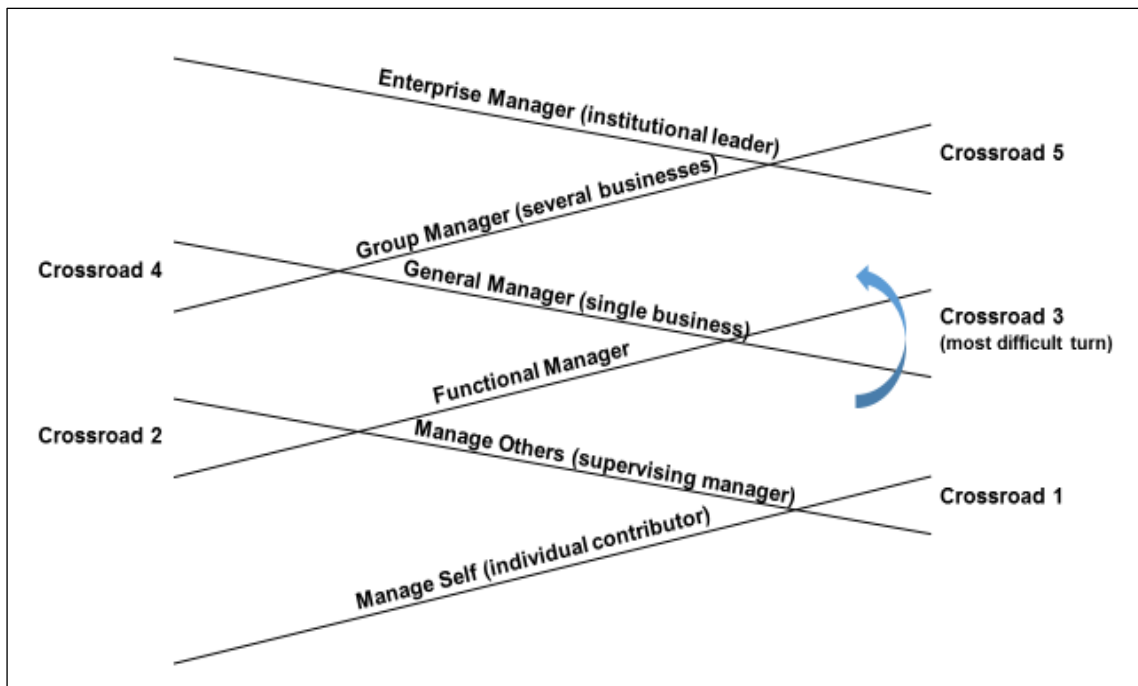
**Figure 5: Drotter's Leadership Pipeline**



**SOURCE:** Adapted from Charan et al. (2001)

Furthermore, the concept of multiple levels of leadership has been described in another manner as a journey that a leader has to traverse with 'five pathways and four cross roads' (Freedman, 1998, p. 131) as reflected in figure 6. This aligns with the principles of Drotter and Charan's (2011) concept of changing responsibilities and accountabilities across the various levels.

**Figure 6: The Five Primary Pathways and Four Basic Career Crossroads**



**SOURCE:** Adapted from Freedman (2005, p.27)

Similarly, the concept of 'Chutes and Ladders' (Bonoma & Lawler, 1989), is intended to draw an analogy to the popular children's game and highlights how managers are moved up and down based on the organisation's needs. Mumford, Campion, and Morgeson (2007) make reference to 'strata', which is also intended to be a manner in which to describe multiple organisational levels.

Dotter and Charan's (2001), and Freedman's (1998) frameworks are further supported by Watkins (2012), who describes the transition between the various levels, particularly from specialist to generalist, as 'seven seismic shifts', which in essence requires a fundamental change in leadership focus and has a component described as 'tactician to strategist'. The research posits that it is at this juncture where the middle manager transitions to executive level, that there is the highest risk of failure (Freedman, 2011).

What is noteworthy is that the various frameworks all illustrate the path of progressing upwards in an organisation. However the path does not necessarily illustrate a linear downward path in the event of failure or demotion.

Although there are numerous frameworks and models which depict the concept of multiple levels within an organisation it is debatable as to how many levels reflect today's organisations and it is argued that three basic levels identified as bottom

(supervisory), middle (middle management), and top (executive) are sufficient for research purposes (De Meuse, Dai, & Wu, 2011). The literature appears to indicate that the upward paths are linear in nature.

In the context of this paper, the aim of this study which focuses on the transition to general management, is considered to align with the transition from middle to executive management, which would be consistent with Freedman's (1998) third crossway and Drotter's (2001) fourth passage of functional to business manager transition.

## **2.5 Inhibitors and Facilitators of Transition**

Whilst Drotter and Charan (2001) and Freedman (1998) define the various levels of leadership and the requirements of the leader at each level, there appear to be a myriad of factors that contribute to a successful transition between the various levels, specifically from functional to general management. Over time, as leadership research has evolved and developed new theories, so too has the research evolved to focus on different elements impacting leadership transition.

It is apparent that leadership development and learning processes are perhaps some of the most significant concepts covered in leadership research and are considered as major factors impacting an effective transition. Yet, despite the enormous amount of research on leadership development, there is consensus that the development processes and leadership programmes need to be enhanced to include additional elements, such as 'identity processes' and psychosocial skills (Avolio et al., 2009; Ibarra et al., 2008; Lord & Hall, 2005).

Although there is agreement about the need for development, Hackman and Wageman (2007) contend that it is not so much about *what* leaders are taught, but rather *how* leaders should be helped to learn. On the other hand, McCall (2004) argues that experience plays a larger part and any development should be focused on assignments that will help leaders gain experience and build their knowledge. Thomas (2008) concurs with this and emphasises the value that can be gained from on and off job experiences. Freedman (2005) argues that experience gained through traversing the career crossroads is essential and skipping any of the crossroad levels will have a negative impact. It is also suggested that there is a need to better understand the concept of aligning personal development and the impact of leadership effectiveness (Ibarra et al., 2008; Joiner & Josephs, 2007).

It is posited that certain skills are required to be developed in order to effectively aid this transition and Mumford et al. (2007) propose a model that defines four categories of skills that must be developed by a leader as they progress through the higher levels of the organisation. They note that certain strategic skills only become evident at the higher levels and they conceptualise that the skills are layered and segmented across organisational levels, which they describe as a skills strataplex (Mumford et al., 2007). The concept of changing skills across organisational levels receives further support from De Meuse (2011) and Lord and Hall (2005). Although certain skills must be enhanced, the leader also needs to 'let go' of certain skills to move to the next level, and this contrasting concept is referred to as the 'Continuity and Discontinuity Perspective' (De Meuse et al., 2011). Similarly, Hall (2008) describes it as 'dropping the baggage acquired on the journey'.

Kaiser (2011) and Ibarra et al. (2008) agree that managerial effectiveness across the organisational levels is related to behaviour, which also includes the concept of changing from 'doing' to 'being'. Burke (2006) concurs with this and emphasises how the wrong behaviours can derail successful leaders. Adl, Burnett, and Dapra (2013) contend that a "strong track record and history of past achievements does not necessarily translate to success at the next level" (p.1).

Aligned with the development of a leader and the changes required in behaviours and development of skills, there is also the need for a General Manager to adopt a strategic perspective. It is postulated that strategic leadership has evolved over the last 20 years and argued that strategic leadership encompasses managerial wisdom, the capacity to change and the capacity to learn (Boal, 2000). Boal (2000) also suggests how strategic leadership is impacted by, and can be integrated with "new" and "emergent" leadership theories such as vision, charisma and transformational leadership. Strategic leadership requires a different level of thinking and encompasses how broadly a leader thinks about the company, aligning the vision and strategy, growing the business and setting long terms goals (Casey & Goldman, 2010; Goldman, Cahill, & Filho, 2009; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003). Although it has long been recognised that General Managers must develop strategic skills (Boal, 2000), it is strongly argued that there is a need for further research in the areas of strategic leadership and a dire need to develop leaders' strategic skills (Avolio et al., 2009; Conger & Fulmer, 2003; Goldman & Casey, 2010; Hiller et al., 2011).

It is clear from the existing research that the effective transition to general management is impacted by many elements such as leadership programmes and learning processes (Ibarra et al., 2008; McCall Jr., 2004), improving skills and competencies (De Meuse et al., 2011; Lord & Hall, 2005; Mumford et al., 2007), gaining experience and knowledge (Hackman & Wageman, 2007; McCall Jr., 2004), developing strategic thinking (Boal, 2000; Goldman et al., 2009), building a vision and motivating others (Bonoma & Lawler, 1989; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989), and receiving coaching and mentoring (Freedman, 2011; Goldman et al., 2013).

Moreover, deep personal aspects impact the ability to transition, and these include going through transformations (Day & Harrison, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2008) and changing behaviours and attitudes (Boal, 2000; Burke, 2006; Kaiser, 2011). In addition to this, personal traits such as character, personality, competence, confidence, self-awareness, and the change in activities and tasks, play an important role (Bonoma & Lawler, 1989; De Meuse et al., 2011; Freedman, 2005, 2011).

Although the issue of leadership failure and derailment (Burke, 2006; Lombardo et al., 1988) is covered in the literature, Kellerman (2004) argues that leadership research suffers from positivism. She considers that leadership is viewed in too much of a positive light and that insufficient attention is paid to failure and poor leadership. In light of this it is necessary to be cognisant of the factors that can negatively impact transition, which includes, *inter alia*, incompetence, behaviours, and personality traits such as arrogance, aloofness, questionable integrity and lack of skills.

From an extensive review of the literature, a summary of the more prevalent key factors that may inhibit or facilitate the transition into a general management role is summarised in table 2 on the following page. The objective of this study is not to research every possible factor, nor is it intended to focus on a single factor, but rather, it aims to provide a holistic view of the nature of the transition and through gaining a deeper insight in the General Managers' journey, it aims to highlight those factors that stand out.

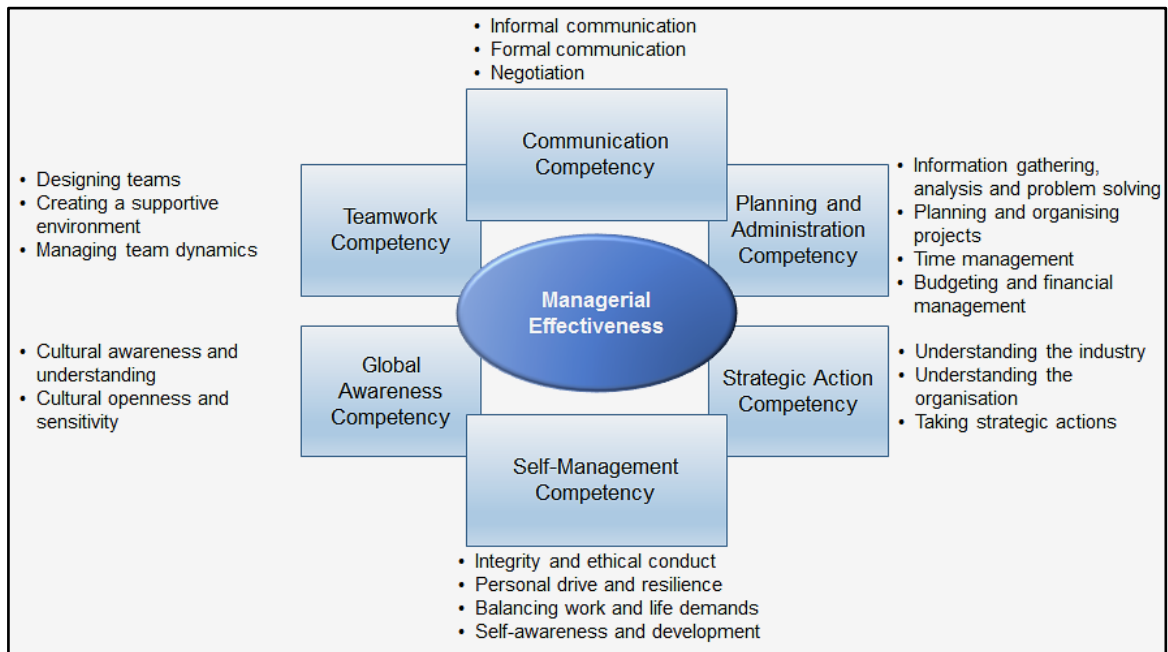
**Table 2: Key Factors Impacting the Transition to General Management**

Leadership and leader development
Personal development
Learning processes and the ability to learn
On-going learning
Capacity to learn
Experiences and learning from experiences
Strategic thinking (shifting to strategic thinking)
Strategic leadership
Developing a vision
Skills (skills strataplex)
Competencies
Characteristics
Knowledge
Ability to unlearn
Ability to let go
Ability to adjust skills and behaviours
Ability to acknowledge identity transformation
Ability to unfreeze, change and re-freeze
Coaching
Mentorship
Adapting behaviours, attitudes and characteristics
Ability to be effective
Developing confidence, comfort and competence
Self-awareness

**SOURCE:** Developed by author

To illustrate the vast array and complexity of factors, if one considers competencies alone, a single empirical study identified 67 different competencies that had to be developed to different degrees across organisational levels (De Meuse et al., 2011). The significance of competencies receives further support from other researchers and a framework depicting six key managerial competencies is highlighted in figure 7 (Hellriegel, Jackson, & Slocum, 2005). In addition to the notion of competence is that of self-awareness of one's competence. The Johari Windows (Freedman, 2011) is a model which seeks to describe the level of awareness and consciousness of one's own competence.

**Figure 7: Six Key Managerial Competencies**



**SOURCE:** Adapted from Hellriegel et al. (2005)

Whilst there is extensive literature on universally generic factors which may inhibit or facilitate the transition, as depicted in table 1 above, there appears to be no literature covering factors that are specific to South Africa which may impact the process of the transition. The only literature available tends to focus how the nation and businesses transform.

## 2.6 The Nature of the Transition

Kaiser (2011) posits that managers will face different challenges as they transition to higher job levels, and despite the extensive research on theories relating to leadership (Hiller et al., 2011) and earlier research that tends to focus on the challenges of transformation and transition research (Kotter, 1995), the literature focuses more on the organisations' process of transition and transformation and less on the leaders' journey. Whilst the term hierarchy implies an upward structure, the newly promoted leader must not take the perspective of sitting on top, but should rather consider themselves being part of the organisation and integrating themselves within it by collaborating and building trust through relationships (Watkins, 2012).

The general management transition is a very unique challenge, which shifts the leader into unfamiliar territory and empirical research suggests only 25% of executives



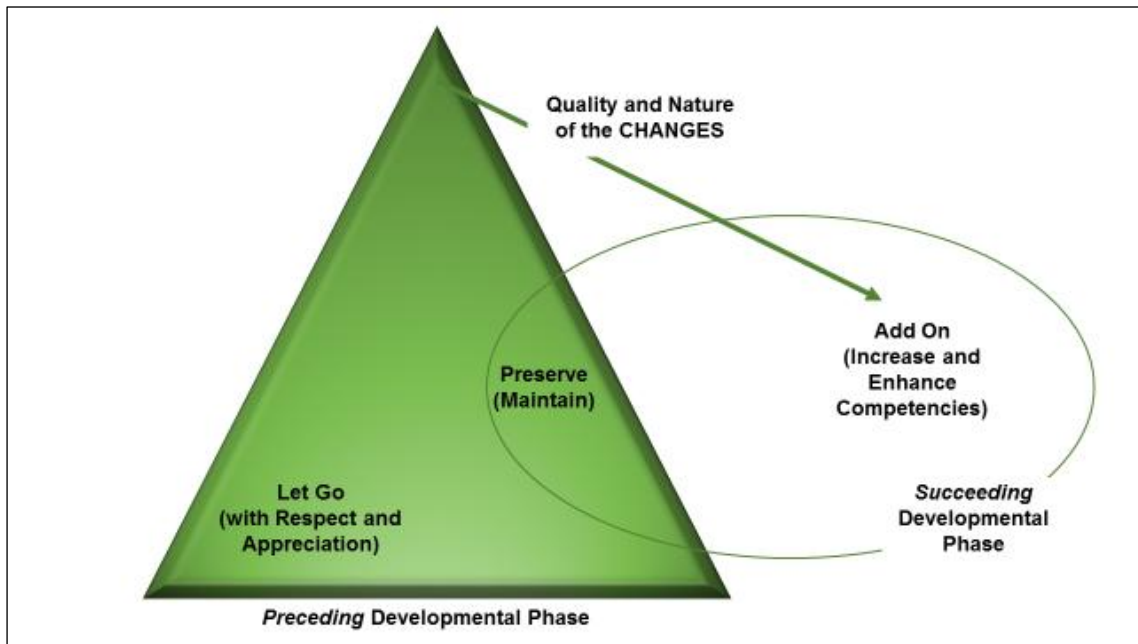
effectively transition (Freedman, 2005). This requires a change in perspective and the leader needs time to stop and think (Drotter & Charan, 2001) as they have to deal with complex and unexpected challenges and may experience the feeling of, “I’ve never been here before” and “I have no idea where I am” (Day & Harrison, 2007; Weick, 1993, pp. 633–634). Having to adapt to new behaviours and relying on others to get things done may leave them feeling ineffective and inauthentic (Ibarra et al., 2008). Freedman (2005) concurs with this and describes the General Manager as feeling “empty and without purpose or value” (p.29). Moreover, apart from the change in responsibilities, the newly appointed General Manager has to deal with a whole new set of issues in which they may have little or no experience.

The transition to the General Management requires that the leader goes through a unique transformation which requires one to do things very differently from the way they have done things in the past. As mentioned previously, they must acknowledge that ‘what got you here won’t get you there’ and accept that previous strengths may now in fact become weaknesses (Burke, 2006; Goldsmith & Reiter, 2007; Watkins, 2012). Novice leaders may well gain the basics of management but this does not guarantee being able to understand complex organisational and strategic knowledge (Ibarra et al., 2008). Freedman (2011) makes reference to the ‘distressed manager in transition’ who may fall back on previous ways of solving problems but the new problems are of a different nature and therefore the old solutions are no longer effective.

The General Manager must shift away from the functional and operational leadership perspectives as these entail getting more involved in the details of the business with increased focus on short term thinking and activities. Too much emphasis on operational details can be a hindrance, specifically when taking on more senior roles, as it can impact on strategic perspectives (Ibarra et al., 2008; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003).

There appears to be substantial support for the argument that in the process of transitioning there is a need to ‘let go’ of, and adjust certain skills, behaviours and actions (Lord & Hall, 2005). Numerous models and concepts such as Freedman’s (2005) triple challenge of ‘letting go, preserving and adding’, as depicted in figure 8, and the contrasting concepts of ‘Continuity Perspective’ and ‘Discontinuity Perspective’ (De Meuse et al., 2011) concur with this view. Strauss (2009) agrees with this notion and suggests the leader must ‘take stock, re-evaluate, revise, resee and prejudge’.

**Figure 8: The Tripartite Challenge of Transformational Change**



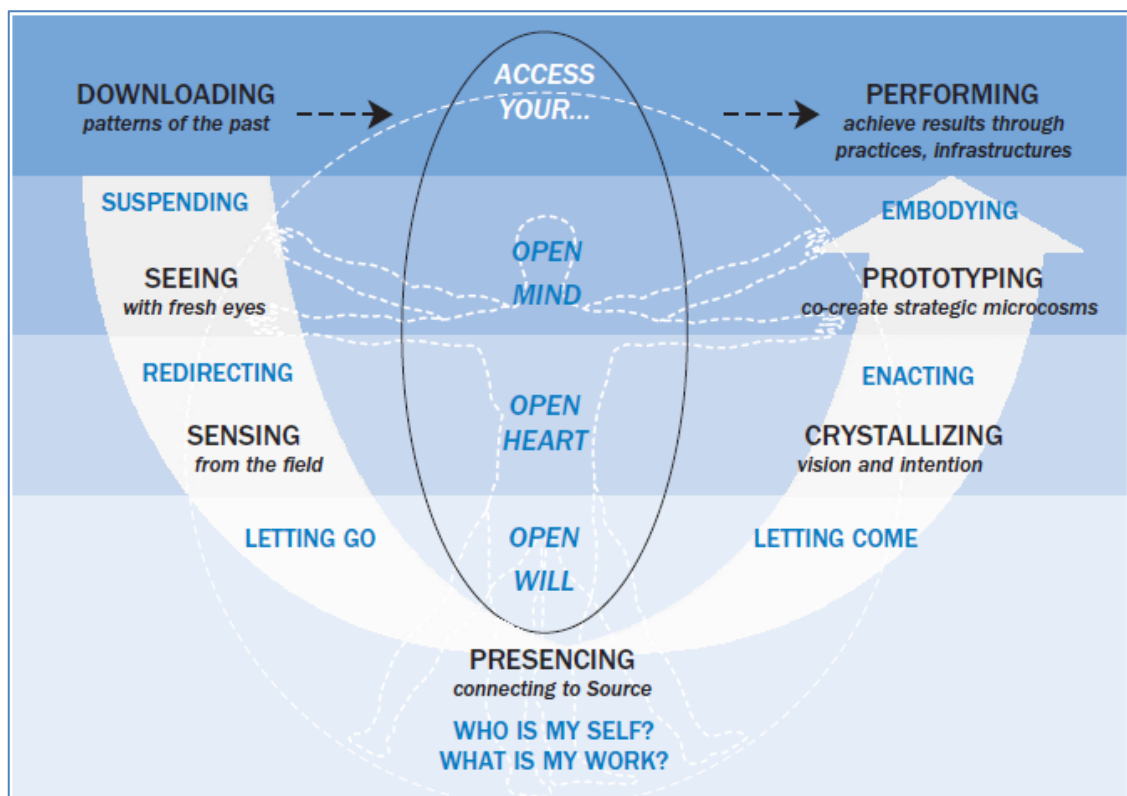
**SOURCE:** Adapted from Freedman (2005, p.34)

The challenge however, for the new General Manager is to determine what to continue and what to discontinue. Whilst it is acknowledged that their experiences and previous performance is what may have led to their success and promotion, the key difficulty is deciding what to build on and what needs to be relinquished. This aligns with the view that a leader may get trapped in the dynamics of “betwixt and between” where they feel stuck between the identity of who they were in their previous role and who they need to be in their new role (Freedman, 2011; Ibarra et al., 2008, p. 10). Similarly, Boal (2000) argues that a leader will transition through six phases which includes the honeymoon, learning curve, constant, random, null, and lastly rigor mortis, which posits that if a leader remains stuck in previous behaviours they will become a liability to the business. In addition to this transformation in identity Day and Harrison (2007) suggest there is a shift away from ‘who I am ‘ as an individual to ‘who we are’ as a collective.

This paper is suggesting a key element of the nature of this transition is a process of ‘letting go’ of certain identities and skills, which can also be related to Social Identity Theory (Hogg, Van Knippenberg, & Rast, 2012). Whilst the concept of identity transformation appears to be a more recent focus in research, it is argued that there is still a need for further research in this area (Day & Harrison, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2008; Nicholson & Carroll, 2013). In addition to the multiplicity of aforementioned factors, one also needs to consider context and the role it plays in the transition process. Freedman (2011) also suggests there is a need for further research in this area.

Moreover, the leader must go through a process which is similar to that of the ‘U process’ theory developed by Scharmer (Hall, 2008), which is reflected in figure 9. This involves multiple stages and capacities that the leader must go through and develop, and it could be argued that this is similar to Lewin’s Change Model concept, which entails ‘Freezing, Changing and Re-freezing’ (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). This would not be dissimilar to the concept of development that entails ‘unlearning’ and ‘identity loss’ (Ibarra et al., 2008).

**Figure 9: The U Process Theory**



**SOURCE:** Adapted from Hall (2008, p.43)

According to Hall (2008), it is about the “fear to let your old self, your old identities, your old context die, in order to move into that which is wanting to emerge through you” (p.45).

(Ibarra et al., 2008) emphasise the importance of ‘guiding figures’ in the form of mentors, yet they also argue that there is a need for further research with regards to how these relationships can help give guidance to managers seeking career advances into more senior roles.

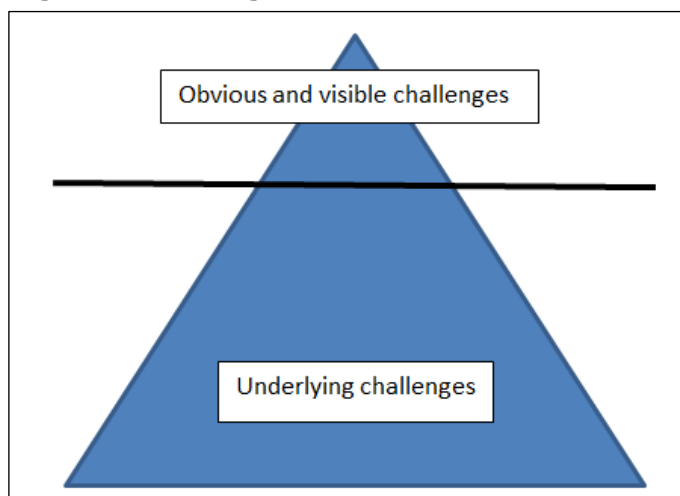
## 2.7 Conclusion

From an extensive review of the literature, it is evident that the transition to General Management is a profound process (Freedman, 2011), and the myriad of factors that impact an effective transition, pose an immense challenge for the leader. Whilst previous researchers would suggest that there are multiple facets to the effectiveness of the transition process, including leadership development (McCall Jr., 2004; Popper & Amit, 2009) and leadership efficacy (Hannah, Avolio, Luthans, & Harms, 2008), the author is proposing that the elements can be grouped and categorised in order to provide a holistic perspective.

Moreover it appears that there is still a need for further research to gain an holistic understanding of the General Management transition process, with specific focus on elements including helping leaders learn, developing strategic perspectives and understanding psychosocial, identity and motivational aspects.

When one considers all the possible factors, as listed in table 1, which may impact the transition, it seems to be a daunting process for the newly promoted General Manager. From the research there appears to be a blend of hard and soft issues, however, the fundamental challenge is for the General Manager to establish an appropriate balance and also determine the relevant priorities. If one considers the 'Iceberg Model' as depicted in figure 10, on the surface the issues and challenges appear to be quite apparent and obvious. However it is the deeper underlying and less visible soft issues and challenges that pose the greatest risk to an effective transition.

**Figure 10: Iceberg Model**



**SOURCE:** Adapted and drawn by author

Finally, by understanding how to help leaders transition effectively, particularly into the general management role, businesses will be able to reduce the risk of having their leadership pipelines 'clogged', which will ultimately aid them in the process of succession planning. By combining and integrating the approach to leadership development and succession planning it enables businesses to address a key goal of building a pool of candidates for the top jobs (Conger & Fulmer, 2003). With companies facing challenging economic conditions, they cannot afford to rely on short term thinking and 'sink or swim' strategies for retaining their key talent (Freedman, 2011).

## **Chapter 3: Research Questions**

The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper insight into the process and nature of the transition into General Management, and an understanding of the elements that facilitate and inhibit an effective and successful transition. Given the age old debate over whether leaders are born or bred (Avolio et al., 2009), the intention was also to understand the extent to which leadership development and development programmes (Day & Harrison, 2007; Lord & Hall, 2005) played a contributing role in the successful transition to General Management. Furthermore, aside from understanding the challenges of the transition and the changing nature of the new role, the questions sought to gain insight into the extent to which leaders themselves needed to change and their level of awareness (Day & Harrison, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2008) of this. In terms of change the research sought to determine the change required to move from operational and functional thinking, to Strategic thinking (Goldman et al., 2009; Goldman & Casey, 2010; Hiller et al., 2011).

### **3.1 Research Question 1**

**Are General Managers aware of what they must 'let go' of and the identity transformation process they will go through?**

The research question seeks to understand to what extent leaders realise what they must 'let go' of, specifically in terms of behaviours and skills, and furthermore, to what extent they will find themselves questioning 'who' they really are and where they fit in, as they go through a transformation of their own identity (Day & Harrison, 2007) when taking on a new role. Although the changing nature of the role may be fairly well known, does the newly promoted manager really understand their own level of change and how they will change?

### **3.2 Research Question 2**

**What are the challenges of shifting from functional and operational to strategic perspectives?**

The research question aims to understand how to shift to strategic thinking and the challenges associated with adopting a different perspective. Many managers may have achieved success prior to their promotion, through being experts in their fields and areas of specialisation. Will this focus on highly operational, functional and tactical

elements impede the shift to strategic thinking (Casey & Goldman, 2010; Goldman & Casey, 2010)?

### **3.3 Research Question 3**

**Do Leadership Development Programmes ease the transition process General Managers must endure and are the programmes offered to General Managers beneficial?**

The research question aims to determine if Leadership Development Programmes place any emphasis on what is involved in the actual transition process and whether they help leaders adequately prepare for the transition. Do Leadership Development Programmes tend to focus more on the mechanical aspect of the promotion and the associated subjects, rather than the actual transition process (Freedman, 2005; Lord & Hall, 2005)? Moreover it seeks to understand how beneficial the Development Programmes are for General Managers. The research highlights the number of Development Programmes in place, however to what extent are these targeted at General Managers and how effective (Avolio et al., 2009) are they?

### **3.4 Research Question 4**

**What are the unique challenges of General Manager transitions for General Managers in South Africa?**

Whilst it appears there are 'universally generic' challenges of the General Manager transition, the research question aims to gain some insight into whether there are challenges that are unique to making the transition into General Management in South Africa and what these are. The literature review highlights a gap in the knowledge about the challenges of General Manager transitions in South Africa. Although the literature provides some context to 'power' (Hill, 2006), there is a need for further insights.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design

The design adopted an interpretivism philosophy as, according to Saunders and Lewis (2012), this perspective is very relevant for business and management research. The topic of leadership transition involves a high degree of social involvement and interaction with the environment and organisation. According to Saunders and Lewis (2012), business situations are unique and complex and involve a particular set of circumstances and individuals. This is very appropriate and relevant to the topic of leadership transition. Marshall and Rossman (2006) posit that qualitative research is an increasingly important method of collating data for social sciences such as Management and Leadership.

The objective of the study was to gain a deeper insight into an aspect of leadership transition and in light of this, an explorative approach was adopted. Recent academic literature was reviewed and interviews were conducted with experienced leaders that had successfully made the transition, in order to develop deeper levels of knowledge about the subject matter. Furthermore, the intention was to establish if there were parallels between the leaders' own practical experiences and the academic theory.

The methodology for the collection of data incorporated two phases, which included elements of quantitative and qualitative methods, respectively. The process was not a sequential one where one phase was structured on the basis of the results of the previous phase. Rather, it was intended to gather different perspectives from different samples and utilised a different method for the different phases. For many years researchers have collected and combined qualitative and quantitative data as part of the same study (Creswell & Clark, 2006). According to Saunders and Lewis (2012), there are a number of advantages to using a variety of methods, one of which is particularly relevant to this study, and that it provides a means of focusing on different aspects of the same study. Miles and Huberman (1994) concur with this and suggest that there are benefits to combining methods to provide a 'powerful mix' of linked data. Most qualitative researchers are intrigued by social complexity, focusing on the natural environment rather than laboratory environment, and take a pragmatic approach to adopting multiple methods (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1994).



The justification for combining the methods was to get alternate perspectives on the challenges of the transition to General Management. Miles and Huberman (1994, p.40), suggest that “numbers and words are *both* needed if we are to understand the world”. The intention was also to determine the extent of the difference in perspectives of senior and experienced leaders, in comparison to those of managers that had recently transitioned or who were about to transition. This effectively enabled the researcher to combine the quantitative data from the students and the qualitative data from the senior business leaders, thus gaining the combined benefit as suggested by Creswell and Clark (2006).

## **4.2 Quantitative Methodology – Phase One**

The objective was to collect primary, quantitative and preliminary, data and this was done by means of conducting a basic survey questionnaire with students (potential respondents) who were attending the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS), General Management Programme during 2014. The rationale was that those respondents had either recently undergone the transition to General Management or would be going through the transition in the near future. The objective was to gain insight into their perspectives on General Management and their transition to the role.

According to Saunders and Lewis (2012), questionnaires are useful in asking a large number of respondents the same set of questions. Because the questions were standardised it allowed the author to use the collected data for descriptive research. The questionnaire was not open ended and consisted of a number of types of questions. There were various types of questions which included, list, category, rank or rate, and these assisted with the statistical analysis of the data.

In the process of designing the questionnaire, assistance was sought from the Gordon Institute of Business Science’s faculty and guidelines, as stipulated by Saunders and Lewis (2012) were followed, with specific focus on content validity and construct validity. Moreover it was ensured that the questions were relevant, in order to answer the research questions and avoid collection of unnecessary data (Zikmund, Babin, Carr, & Griffin, 2013). The author designed his own questions and did not use or adapt questions from other questionnaires. Considerable time was spent formulating the questionnaire, to ensure the questions were meaningful to the research and that they would be well understood by the respondents. According to Zikmund et al. (2013), the

quality of the answers is significantly influenced by the phrasing and sequencing of the questions.

Pilot testing was undertaken to ensure the questions were logical and well understood by the respondents. Zikmund et al. (2013) suggests that pilot testing provides an opportunity to test the research design. Following the initial phase of pilot testing, which was conducted with five respondents, a number of the questions were rephrased. This enabled issues of misinterpretation and language to be addressed, before data collection. Very few problems arose during the pilot testing and these were rectified before commencement of the data collection.

#### **4.2.1 Population**

The population included all business leaders at executive level. Although smaller businesses do not necessarily have as many leadership levels as large business, the “Passages of Leadership” model still applied to these businesses (Drotter, 2010).

#### **4.2.2 Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis were the students (respondents) that participated in the survey and the answers they provided. The respondents were managers that had either recently moved into the role of General Manager or were about to make the transition in the near future.

#### **4.2.3 Sampling**

A non-probability sampling technique was utilised, as it was not possible to select leaders from the entire population by random selection. Purposive sampling was applied as it was intended that judgement be used in the process of selecting sample members. The sample consisted of 35 students that were attending the GIBS General Management Programme. There was no form of quota sampling and the research intentionally refrained from seeking demographic information such as age, gender and race. The focus was more on the role of the participant.

#### **4.2.4 Data Collection**

The instrument used for data collection was in the form of a structured questionnaire and whilst designing the questionnaire guidelines on how to ensure the questions were clear and unbiased (Saunders & Lewis, 2012), were followed. The questionnaire was distributed by hand during one of the lectures in the GIBS General Management Programme and was completed by 29 students out of a total class of 35 students, resulting in an 83% response rate. The questionnaires were completed and returned to the data collector during the same lecture session. The questionnaire is shown in Appendix A.

#### **4.2.5 Data Analysis and Description**

Descriptive statistics was used to summarise the sample and population, and to present the data collected. The designations of the respondents were grouped into three categories. The data analysis was carried out on the answers provided to eleven specific questions asked in the survey.

The questions were closed ended which enabled ranking of the answers. The questions consisted of rank order, Likert scale (interval) and ratio (weighting) questions. The completed questionnaires were then manually captured and coded into Microsoft Excel. The data was cleaned, and then coded in a manner that enabled it to be ordinal and rank ordered.

Central tendency was used to describe the data and where appropriate, it was represented as measures of mean, median and mode. The sample size of 29 was relatively small and cannot be generalised to the population of General Managers.

#### **4.2.6 Assumptions and Limitations**

The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods and the findings could not necessarily be corroborated. Due to non-probability purposive sampling, the sample was not representative of the entire population. Whilst the questions were not framed, the answers to the questions were subjective. Translation errors may have occurred during the process of cleaning and coding the data as the surveys were completed by hand and the coder may have misinterpreted certain numeric figures. Since the sample was a small sample and was less than 30, the assumptions of central theorem do not

hold. The sample distribution therefore does not follow a normal distribution. The sample may not have been representative of all General Managers.

The quantitative methodology is subject to non-response error which can lead to systemic errors. Respondents may also be subject to response bias when they attempt to answer questions in a way that distorts the truth. Sampling errors may have occurred as the entire population was not used.

### **4.3 Qualitative Methodology – Phase Two**

In order to achieve the desired objective of gaining a deeper insight, the study was primarily qualitative in nature. It is suggested that a qualitative methodology enables one to illicit and draw out issues such as feelings, beliefs, thoughts, and assumptions and ultimately gain a better perspective (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Given that the objectives were attempting to gain a holistic perspective of the various factors impacting the transition to General Management, the choice of qualitative methodology was appropriate (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The intention was to gain a deep level of knowledge about the subject matter and therefore, in depth and semi-structured interviews with appropriate C-suite level individuals, were conducted. This enabled the development and adaptation of a model which relates to the transition to general leadership. During interviewing, questions that ‘framed’ answers were avoided.

#### **4.3.1 Population**

The population relevant to this research was any senior business leader that had successfully transitioned to the level of General Manager or beyond and it included all business leaders at an executive level. Although smaller businesses did not have as many leadership levels as large businesses, the “Passages of Leadership” model still applied to these businesses (Drotter, 2010).

#### **4.3.2 Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis was the C-level executives that were interviewed and their respective answers.

### **4.3.3 Sampling**

Due to the qualitative approach, a smaller sample size was selected which consisted of nineteen participants, and this sample was not representative of the entire population. As previously stated the intention was to achieve a point of saturation.

A non-probability sampling technique was utilised, as it was not possible to select leaders from the entire population by random selection. Purposive sampling was utilised as it was intended to use judgement in the process of selecting sample members. Purposive sampling allows one to get a better understanding about a subject and enables one to make logical generalisations. In certain instances convenience sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Saunders & Lewis, 2012) was used as the researcher already had access to potential interviewees. The sampling process also involved snowball sampling to some extent as certain interviewees (sample members) were requested to provide referrals to other C-levels individuals (sample members).

The aim was to select a heterogeneous sample and therefore sample members were selected from a diverse set of business types and industries. The intention was not to focus on one specific industry as this may have skewed the data. In order to ensure sample diversity an attempt was made to avoid selecting more than one sample member from the same company, and this was only done in one case where three participants were from the same listed company. By selecting a heterogeneous sample it was possible to identify trends and patterns of themes that may emerge. There was no form of quota sampling and the sample members were not selected on the basis of any demographic factors such as age, gender, or race.

### **4.3.4 Data Collection**

The intention was to collect the data through qualitative means, and although the questions related extensively to the interviewees past experience, the research was cross sectional as the data was collected over a short period of time. The data was collected by means of conducting semi-structured, face to face interviews. According to Saunders & Lewis (2012) semi-structured interviews are useful in gaining deeper levels of insight into the subject matter.

As part of the process of soliciting the interviews, the interviewees were provided with an outline of the objectives of the interview, in order to provide some context before

agreeing to the interview. The outline was in the form of an introductory note, which is shown in Appendix B. Considerable time was spent in identifying and selecting the interviewees, and in particular with the process of securing the interviews. This resulted in achieving a high success rate in soliciting interviews, with only two participants cancelling their interviews. A number of interviewees had associations with GIBS, which aided the process of soliciting the interviews.

Suggestions by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) were used during the process of designing the questionnaire, in terms of how to structure and pose questions, so as to make certain they were well articulated and unbiased. The questions were designed by the researcher without the usage or adaption of questions from other questionnaires. The interview guide containing the questions is shown in Appendix C. Considerable time was spent amending and revising the questions to be certain they covered a range of themes related to the research questions and literature. It was also ensured that the questions were valid and relevant. The relevance of questions enabled the collection of data that is useful to the research while avoiding the collection of data that is not useful or of value.

Pilot testing was undertaken with three participants to establish if the questions were logical and well understood by the interviewees. The candidates for the pilot testing were of a similar executive level to those that were interviewed as part of the formal research. Pilot test candidates that were well known to the researcher were also utilised, in order to put the researcher at ease and ensure that he was not afraid of making mistakes. The pilot testing was also used as a means to test how well the interview 'flowed', and to build the researchers' own confidence in the process of the interview. The feedback from the pilot testing was positive and helped to refine the introduction to the interview as well as make slight amendments to some of the questions. The quality of the pilot test interviews were of a high enough standard, that the data collected from the interviews was also used in the data analysis. The suggestions from the pilot interviews were included in the interview survey before commencement of the formal interviews. The participants in the pilot testing have been listed in Appendix D.

In addition to the three pilot test interviews, face to face interviews were conducted with sixteen, experienced C-Level executives that had successfully gone through the transition experience. The aim was to achieve a 'saturation' point where no new relevant information and insights were being provided. Research suggests a good

sample size for qualitative data analysis is anywhere between 6 to 12 interviews, and that the point of saturation can generally be reached with this size of sample (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The target interviewees all had vast experience and ranged from being in executive roles for a few years to some having been retired. It was intended to interview senior leaders of larger firms as the hierarchical level and pipelines would be more prevalent. The list of interviewees is attached in Appendix D

The interview process was semi-structured in order to elicit insight into certain aspects of leadership transition. However the interviewees were given latitude to talk freely and openly, whilst the interviewer ensured the discussion remained topical and relevant. The interview questionnaire consisted of twenty open ended questions that covered a number of themes and types of questions. The questions were not always all asked in a specific order, as in the process of the open discussion the interviewees would in fact provide answers to numerous questions. This also enabled the researcher to delve into detail and illicit meaningful insights. As more interviews were conducted, the interview process was refined and improved upon. It was found that all of the interviewees were very open to being approached and spoke freely which made a significant impact on the level of insight gained. The interviews were conducted during business hours and each took approximately one hour. Nineteen interviews were completed, including the three pilot interviews, within a three week period. The author personally carried out all the interviews as this was crucial to the research process and ensured consistency.

All the interviews were followed up promptly with personalised e-mails extending appreciation to the interviewees for their participation and input provided as part of the research process.

The interviewees were assured of anonymity and confidentiality to the extent that none of the feedback that they provided would be directly connected with them. All consented to the interviews being audio recorded prior to the commencement of the formal interview, with the consent letter shown in Appendix E. The researcher intentionally avoided making written notes during the interview and relied on the recordings. The purpose of this was to ensure active listening, and where a particularly relevant point or theme of interest was mentioned, probing was used to get more insight and detail on the issue. Had the researcher been trying to make notes, the ability to maintain continuity may have been negatively impacted. The recordings of each of the interviews were professionally transcribed and a content analysis of the transcriptions was undertaken to analyse the responses to questions in the interviews.

#### 4.3.5 Data Analysis

A detailed qualitative analysis of the data was conducted utilising Excel. The services of a professional research analyst was used for the analysis and coding of the data. The rationale for this was to ensure academic rigour, and to achieve an objective analysis of the data. This was done to avoid any form of self-bias and risk of positivism from the author. Moreover the author did not want to use a software content analysis application with auto-coding as this would potentially lead to the loss of important insights. Whilst content analysis software enables one to generate many types of analyses, it is still imperative that the researcher pays particular attention to the quality of the data, before drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Although nineteen interviews were transcribed, the content analysis was carried out on only fourteen transcriptions. The rationale behind this was that a high degree of saturation had emerged by the tenth transcription. The content analysis continued up to transcription number fourteen and new no meaningful and frequent codes or themes emerged. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), saturation can generally be reached between six to twelve samples. A letter confirming verification of the analysis process can be found in Appendix F.

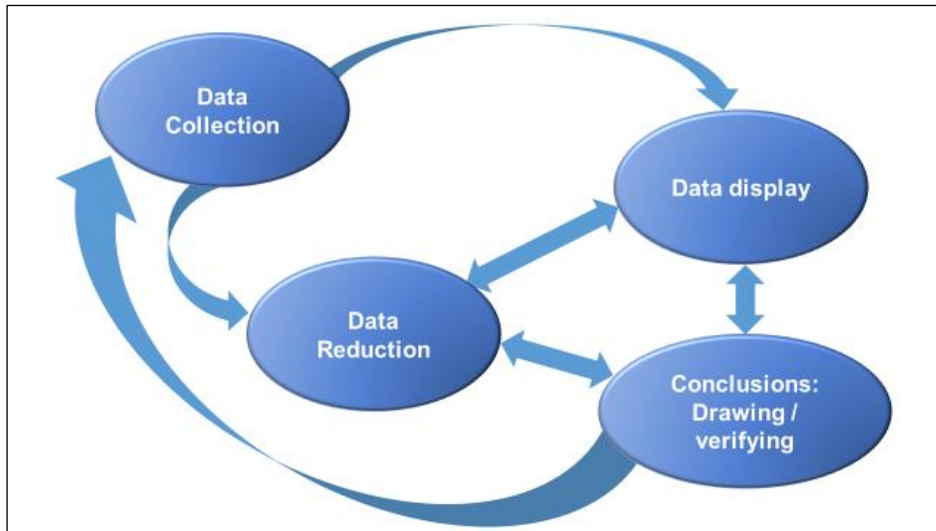
A detailed content analysis was conducted for each of the interview questions. The transcriptions were used to analyse the data in detail and entailed a process of identifying codes and themes. A process of induction was followed and the data analysis was approached with an open mind, thus allowing themes and codes to emerge from the data. Saunders and Lewis (2012) suggest that this process is useful in really understanding the context of the research and reinforces the need to pay particular attention to the research questions. The analysis process also involved an element of reduction (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which entailed aspects of selecting, focusing and simplifying the data from the transcriptions. Whilst verbatim quotations from the participants are presented in the results of the data analysis, these are not in any way connected to the identity of the participants as they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. During the process of carrying out the content analysis, each of the participants were in fact allocated a code so as to avoid any reference to the identity of a participant.

In the process of analysing data one should ask “how can we draw valid meaning from qualitative data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.1). During the process of coding and



analysing the data, guidelines from Miles and Huberman (1994) were followed and a level of scepticism and openness was maintained. The next step involved one of organising, compressing and assembling the information, for the final phase of the analysis. This last step is where conclusions were drawn, the results of which are presented in chapter five. The steps above form part of an interactive process (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as depicted in figure 11 below.

**Figure 11: Components of Data Analysis: Iterative Model**



**SOURCE:** Adapted from Miles and Huberman (1994, p.12)

The research sought to achieve a rigorous process of data collection. This was performed through the process of conducting interviews, recording their contents and then having them transcribed. With regards to the validity of data, Huberman and Miles (2002) argue that there is no procedure that will always yield the exact same conclusions and that data must be assessed relative to the context in mind. They go on to say that understanding of the data is a more important concept than validity of the data. Finally, they suggest that it is possible to have equally valid accounts, but from different perspectives.

It was ensured that in the process of data analysis and presentation of the findings, that there was a factual representation of the data and that the data was not manipulated or distorted. This aligns with the principle of descriptive validity (Huberman & Miles, 2002). Moreover, an element of interpretive validity was incorporated, which not only applies to conscious interpretation of the data but includes sub-conscious elements of beliefs, values and intentions.

#### 4.3.6 Limitations

The research combined qualitative and quantitative methods and the findings cannot necessarily be corroborated or compared. Due to non-probability purposive sampling the sample was not representative of the entire population. Sampling errors may have occurred as the entire population was not used. The author did not undertake any form of quota sampling however all the respondents were based in the Gauteng region of South Africa, and as per the results in chapter five, 84% of the participants were white males. A sample with different demographics may have provided different results.

A further limitation is that the interviewees had their own individual differences and their level of cognitive and social character would have differed. The research was cross sectional and was therefore not able to provide insight gathered over a period of time as a longitudinal study would have.

Certain interviewees strayed from the topic and due to the length of the interview, it may have limited some interviewees from having sufficient time to provide detailed insight for each question. The researcher attempted to limit this through steering the interviewee through the discussion by asking relevant probing questions. There was the possibility of observer error as the author may not have always asked the same question in exactly the same way, possibly biasing the result. Participants may have also been subject to response bias when they attempted to answer questions in a way that distorted the truth. During the process of the interviews it is possible that the respondents did not always provide an account of their own experience with regards to the question, but rather they would talk about the concept as if in the third person. Translation errors may have occurred during the transcription process and could potentially have impacted the content analysis.

The answers to the questions were subjective, and whilst the author did not frame the questions, the possibility of bias by the author cannot be ruled out. This could have led to observer bias where the author interpreted the same data in different ways. Whilst an accurate account of the data was provided by the participants, the author's interpretation of the data may have been impacted by underlying bias and perceptions, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (2002). The use of a third party coder was intended to limit these biases.

## **Chapter 5: Presentation of Results**

Chapter five is a presentation of the results obtained from data collected and analysed as per the methodology described in chapter four. The process of collecting data entailed a two phased approach, the first of which was a quantitative survey and the second a qualitative phase which collected data through face to face interviews. The quantitative phase obtained data from fairly new managers with limited experience, whilst the qualitative phase collected data from leaders with extensive experience. Whilst the data collection phases were not specifically sequential, the results are represented as phase one for quantitative and phase two for qualitative.

### **5.1 Phase 1 Quantitative Research and Results**

#### **5.1.1 Introduction**

The quantitative phase of the research consisted of a survey in the form of a questionnaire that was provided to a group of students that were attending the General Management Programme at the Gordon Institute of Science (University of Pretoria). Purposive sampling was utilised as the author used judgement in the process of selecting the sample. The intention was to get a perspective on General Management and the transition into the role. The results presented are the outcome of eleven specific questions asked, and are intended to provide a perspective of why managers moved into the role, the important elements of the role and factors potentially contributing to the success of the role, and the transition thereto.

The questions were closed ended which enabled the author to rank the answers. The questions consisted of rank order questions and Likert scale questions. The questionnaires were completed by hand by the respondents and were then manually coded into excel. The data was cleaned, and then coded in a manner that enabled it to be ordinal and rank ordered. Central tendency was used to describe the data and where appropriate it was represented as mean, median and mode. Due to the achieved sample size, of 29 respondents, the data did not follow a normal distribution curve.

Table 3 below provides a breakdown of the designations of the students attending the General Management Programme at GIBS, with the majority (62%) of these students

fulfilling senior management roles (highlighted in green in the table). It only reflects the role of those that completed the survey.

The relevance of this is that it provides insight into the managers' perceived understanding of the General Management role. This provides a basis for understanding some of their expectations and perceptions of the role, which can potentially impact their success.

**Table 3: Designations of Survey Respondents**

Current Management Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents (n=29)
Middle Management	5	17%
Senior Management	18	62%
General Management	6	21%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 4 below provides an outline of what the motivation was for a manager wanting to move into the role of a General Manager. The closed ended question requested the respondent to rank the order of importance of the motivating factors provided, with 6 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. One respondent added in "*the ability to influence strategy and change the business*". The ranking scores were added up to provide a total score for each factor. 'Career growth' scored the highest (140) and is therefore concluded to be the most significant motivating factor for these managers.

**Table 4: Motivation for Moving into the General Management Role**

Reason	Ranking	Score	Percentage (n=29)
Career Growth	6	140	22.8%
Job satisfaction	5	115	18.8%
Financial rewards	4	113	18.4%
Recognition	3	99	16.2%
Power and influence	2	90	14.7%
Job security	1	56	9.1%
<b>Total</b>			<b>100.0%</b>

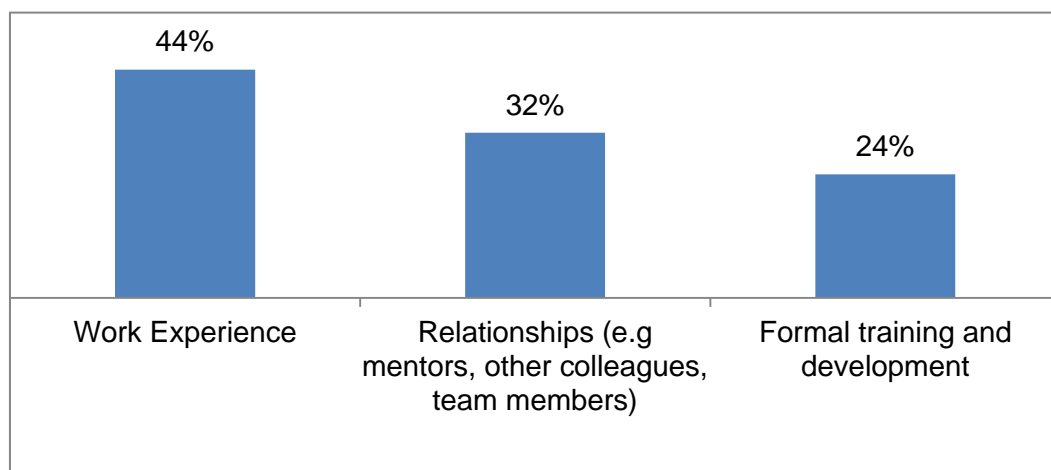
Table 5 below, provides the results of a closed question that sought to provide a perspective on the impact of money as a motivating factor for managers, in the process of deciding which role to fulfil. The respondents were asked whether they would prefer to continue fulfilling a functional specialist role or rather move to that of a General Manager role, if they were able to earn the same amount of money in either role. Table 5 reflects that 86% of the respondents would still prefer to move to the General Manager role.

**Table 5: ‘Money’ as a Motivator for Moving into the Role of General Manager**

Preferred Role when Earnings are Identical	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents (n=29)
Would remain a functional specialist / professional	4	14%
Would still prefer to move into a General Management role	25	86%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

The literature makes reference to skills and knowledge as an important aspect of transitioning to a new role. The question sought to obtain data about where the respondents thought they had gained their skills and knowledge, which were required to fulfil a General Management role. The respondents were required to apply a weighting to each of the three areas, namely work experience, relationships and formal training, with the total combined weighting not exceeding 100%. Figure 12 below reflects the results where ‘working experience’ received the highest weighted total of 44%, indicating this is where the majority of skills and knowledge was gained.

**Figure 12: Source of Learning Skills and Knowledge**



The transition to the General Manager exposes a manager to multiple subjects and requires various areas of focus. The question provided the respondents with a list of the subjects which were part of the GIBS General Management Programme and requested them to rank them in order of importance, with 1 being the most important and 6 being the least important. In table 6 below, the results show that a high percentage of students selected strategy and leadership as the two most important subjects. The mean score across the levels of importance for all subjects was 14%, whilst strategy and leadership were both ranked as most important by 43% of the respondents.

**Table 6: Importance of Subjects and Topics for General Managers**

Subject / Topic	Ranking (n=28)							Mean	Median
	Most Important $\longrightarrow$ Least Important								
	% Respondents								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Strategy	43%	29%	11%	7%	0%	7%	4%	14%	7%
Leadership	43%	29%	14%	7%	0%	0%	7%	14%	7%
Finance	7%	7%	21%	18%	25%	7%	14%	14%	14%
Change management	11%	7%	21%	11%	18%	11%	21%	14%	11%
Operations	7%	11%	14%	25%	36%	4%	4%	14%	11%
Marketing	4%	11%	7%	7%	11%	39%	21%	14%	11%
Information technology	11%	4%	11%	14%	14%	25%	21%	14%	14%

The data was then coded to show a level of importance scoring, with 7 being the highest and 1 being the lowest. Table 7 below shows the mean score for each subject, bearing in mind that 7 was the highest possible score.

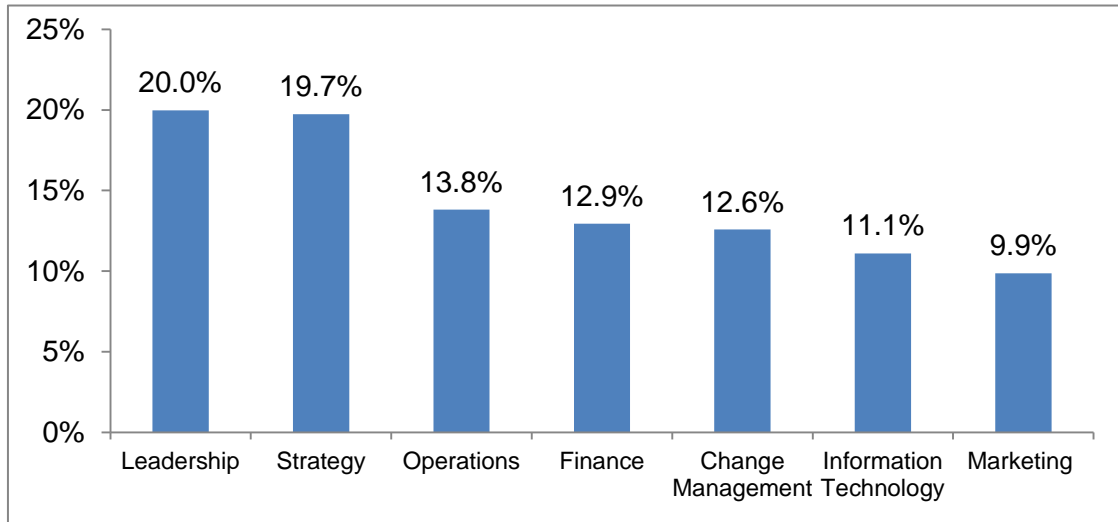
**Table 7: Mean Score of Subjects for General Managers**

Subject	Mean Score (n=28)
Leadership	5.8
Strategy	5.7
Operations	4.0
Finance	3.8
Change management	3.6
Information technology	3.2
Marketing	2.9

7 = Highest possible score
1 = Lowest possible score

A weighted score then was allocated to each subject and the total of these was combined to provide a rank order table. In figure 13 the results illustrate that leadership was ranked as the most important with a score of 20%.

**Figure 13: Important Subjects for General Managers**



The literature refers to factors that may inhibit or facilitate the transition into the General Management role. The respondents were provided with a list of factors and based on a 5-Point Likert scale, they had to rate to what extent each factor had either helped them, or would help them, make the transition. In table 8 below, the results reflect that a high majority of respondents indicated that 'confidence and self-awareness' and 'gaining relevant experience' were very helpful.

**Table 8: Factors Facilitating the Transition to the General Manager Role**

Facilitator	Rank	Very helpful	Quite helpful	Not sure	Slightly helpful	Not helpful
		% Respondents				
Confidence & self-awareness	7	79%	21%	0%	0%	0%
Gaining relevant experience	6	72%	24%	3%	0%	0%
Ability to adapt	5	69%	28%	0%	3%	0%
Behaviour & attitude	4	62%	34%	0%	3%	0%
Coaching	3	59%	28%	10%	3%	0%
Skills development	2	48%	48%	0%	3%	0%
Training & development	1	34%	52%	3%	7%	0%

One respondent added that there was a need for “*the organisation to help prepare you before appointment as General Manager*” and also stated that “*quite often training and development are only provided afterwards.*”

The 5-point Likert scale data was then coded, from 1 for ‘not helpful’ to 5 for ‘very helpful’, and for each factor the score of each of the respondents was combined to provide a total score. This enabled the data to be rank ordered, and the results are illustrated in table 9 below. The results reflect that confidence and self-awareness were ranked the highest. It is appears that all factors received fairly high scores on the Likert Scale.

**Table 9: Rank of Factors Impacting the Transition**

Subject	Rank	Score (n=29)	Weighted Total	Mean	Median	Mode
Confidence & self-awareness	7	15.2%	139	4.8	5	5
Gaining relevant experience	6	14.9%	136	4.7	5	5
Ability to adapt	5	14.7%	134	4.6	5	5
Behaviour & attitude	4	14.4%	132	4.6	5	5
Coaching	3	14.%	128	4.4	5	5
Skills development	2	13.6%	124	4.3	4	4
Training & development	1	12.9%	118	4.1	4	4

The respondents were required to give feedback regarding to what extent their companies had assisted them with development into their senior roles. The question requested that they rate three different factors on a 4-point Likert scale. The 4-point Likert scale data was then coded from, 1 for ‘not at all’ to 4 for ‘good extent’, and for each factor the score from each of the respondents was combined to provide a total score. This enabled the data to be rank ordered, and the results are illustrated in figure 14 on the next page.

Figure 14 provides the results of this, indicating that most of the development assistance was in the form of training programmes. It must be noted the data only shows what the development assistance was, but not necessarily how much.



**Figure 14: Development Assistance Provided by the Company**

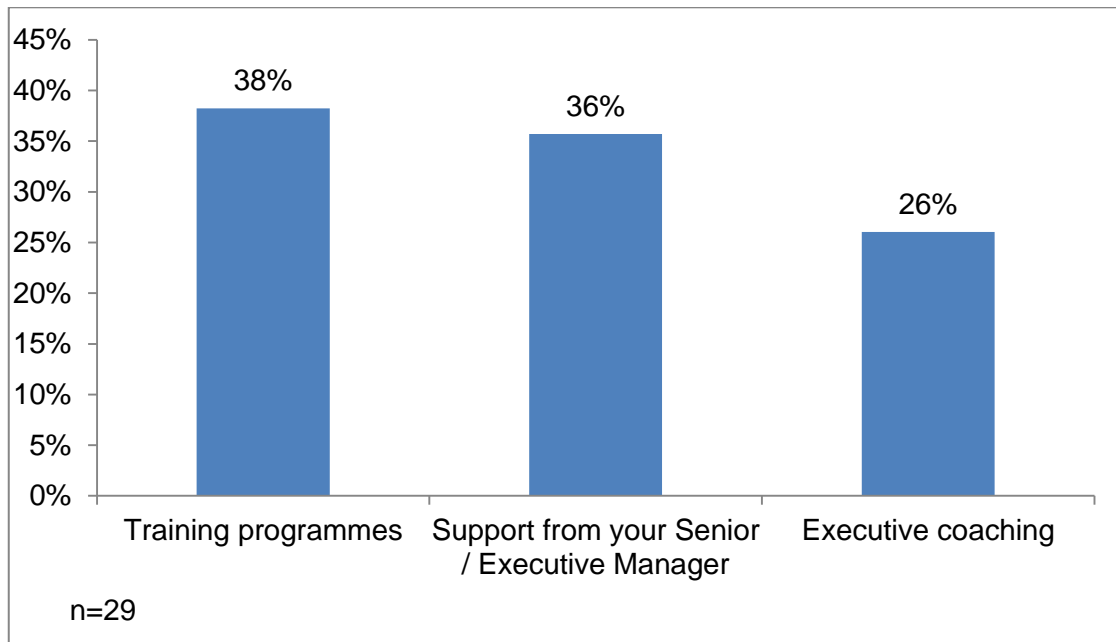


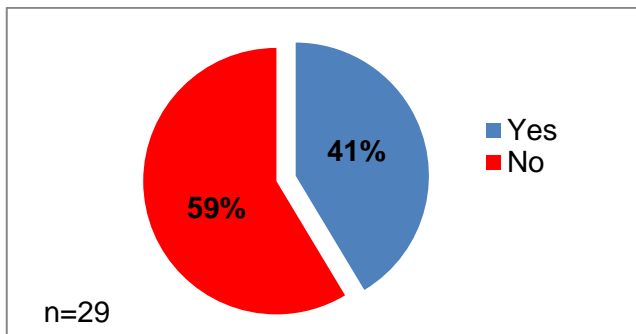
Table 10 below reflects the weighted scores allocated to each factor, with the highest mean allocated to 'support from your senior / executive manager'.

**Table 10: Levels of Assistance Provided by Companies**

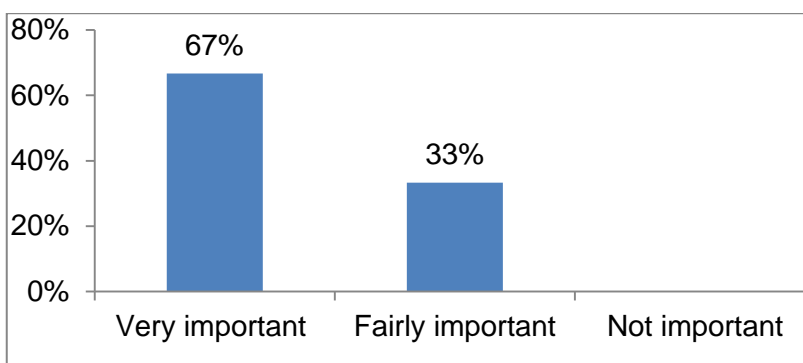
Activity	Mean	Good Extent	Reasonable Extent	Minimal Extent	Not at all
		<i>% Respondents</i>			
Executive coaching	2.1	18%	4%	46%	32%
Training programmes	3.1	38%	38%	24%	0%
Support from your senior / executive manager	2.9	34%	34%	21%	10%

The survey sought to establish if the respondents had mentors during their careers. Less than half (41%) of the 29 respondents had worked with a mentor and the results are reflected in figure 15. For those who had had a mentor, the survey further questioned how important the mentor was for them, in respect of providing assistance with the transition into the General Management role. It was found that two thirds of these rated the mentor as being very important and the other third indicated they were fairly important. This is reflected in figure 16 below.

**Figure 15: The Use of a Mentor**



**Figure 16: The Importance of a Mentor**



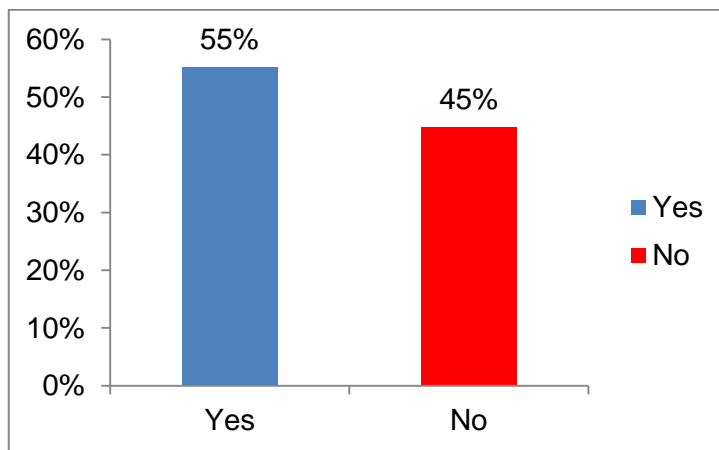
The survey sought to gather data about the levels of success the respondents perceived to have achieved, in a number of areas, through the transition from a specialist functional role into a General Management role. These areas included four different disciplines, each of which the respondents were required to rate on a 5-point Likert scale, with 5 being 'very successful' to 1 being 'very unsuccessful'. The data was then coded to enable a ranking order. Table 11 below shows that strategic thinking was the discipline that was ranked the highest. The table also shows the mean of the Likert scores allocated, with the lowest being allocated to 'letting go of previous responsibilities'. A mean score of 3.3 equates to 'not sure'.

**Table 11: Levels of Success Through the Transition**

Subject	Rank	Score	Score % (n=29)	Median	Mode	Mean
Strategic thinking	4	115	26.7%	4	4	4.0
Developing new behaviours	3	113	26.2%	4	4	3.9
Delegation	2	106	24.6%	4	4	3.7
Letting go of previous responsibilities	1	97	22.5%	4	4	3.3

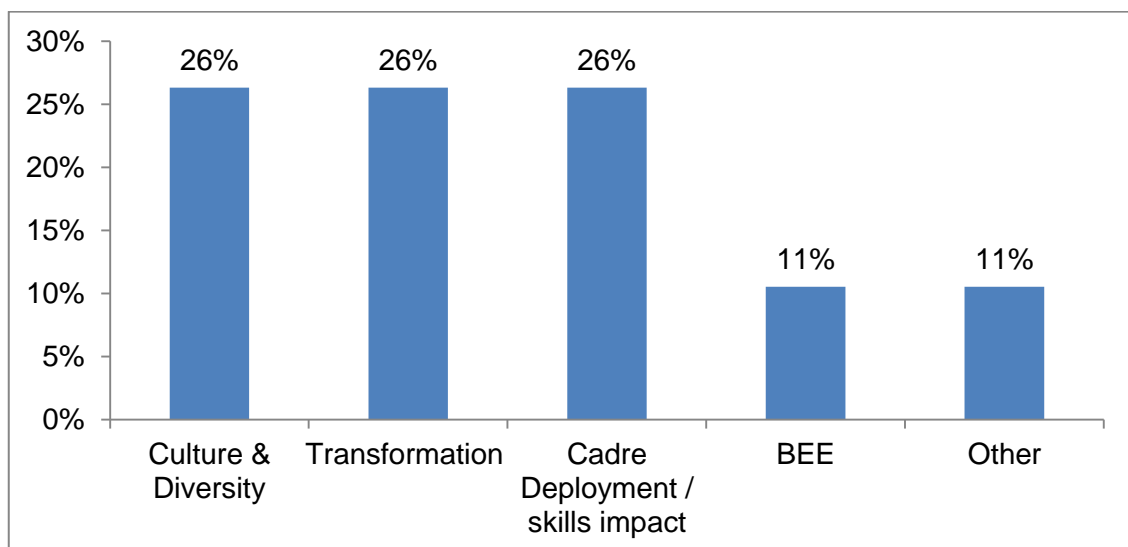
The final survey question asked if the respondents thought there were any specific challenges, as part of the transition, that were unique to South Africa. Figure 17 below reflects the respondents' perceptions on South Africa posing unique transition challenges, with just over half of the respondents (55%) indicating that there were unique transition challenges for South Africa.

**Figure 17: Are there Transition Challenges that are Unique to South Africa?**



The data was then coded and ranked, and the results of what the respondents stated as unique challenges, are presented in figure 18 below.

**Figure 18: Summary of Challenges Unique to the GM Transition in South Africa**



## 5.2 Phase 2 Qualitative Research

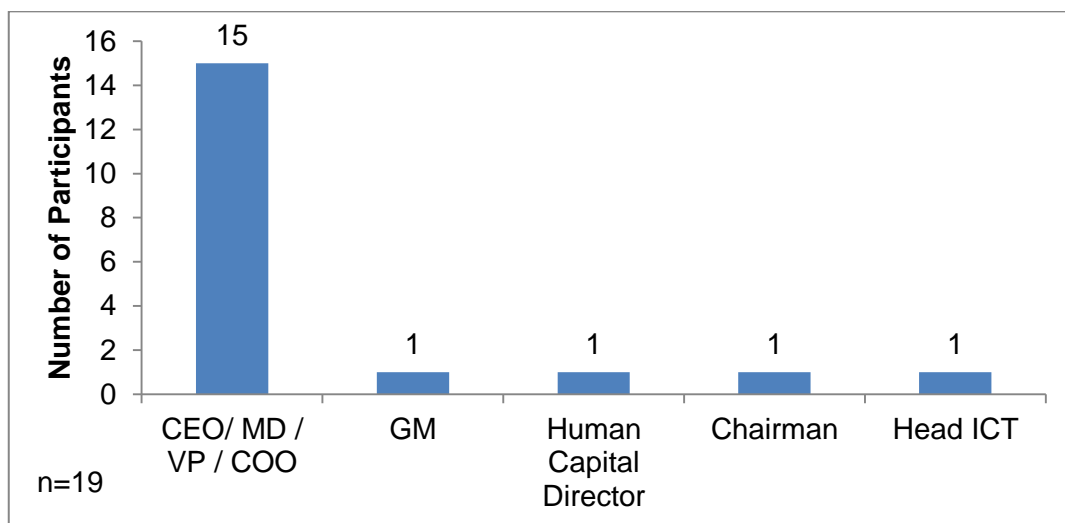
### 5.2.1 Introduction

The qualitative phase of the research was intended to gain deep insights from senior business leaders. Moreover it was attempting to gain a holistic perspective of the transition to General Management and therefore the choice of qualitative methodology was appropriate for this phase (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 19 senior business leaders were conducted. An interview guideline was used to direct the interviews and consisted of 20 open ended questions, and is shown in Appendix C. A non-probability sampling technique was used to select the participants as it was not possible to select leaders from the entire business leader population by random selection.

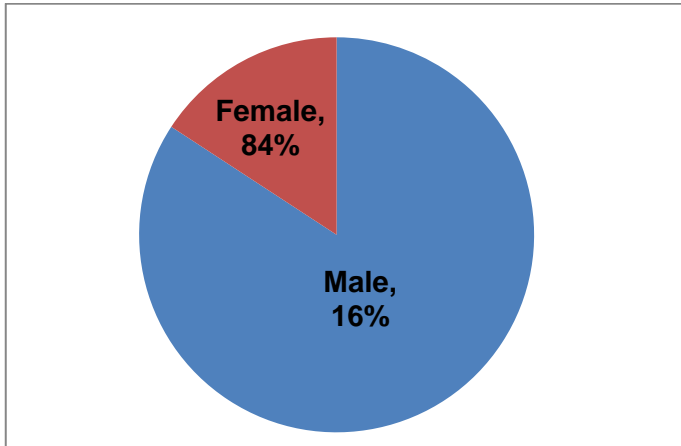
The aim was to achieve a heterogeneous sample and therefore a sample of members from diverse industry sectors and types of businesses, was intentionally sought. Quota sampling was not carried out and participants were not selected on the basis of demographic factors such as age, gender or race. The only qualifying factor was the participants' 'designation', which was required to be that of a senior business leader. The rationale for this was that sample members who had extensive experience would support the research. Figure 19 below provides a breakdown of the participants' designations.

**Figure 19: Designation of Participants**

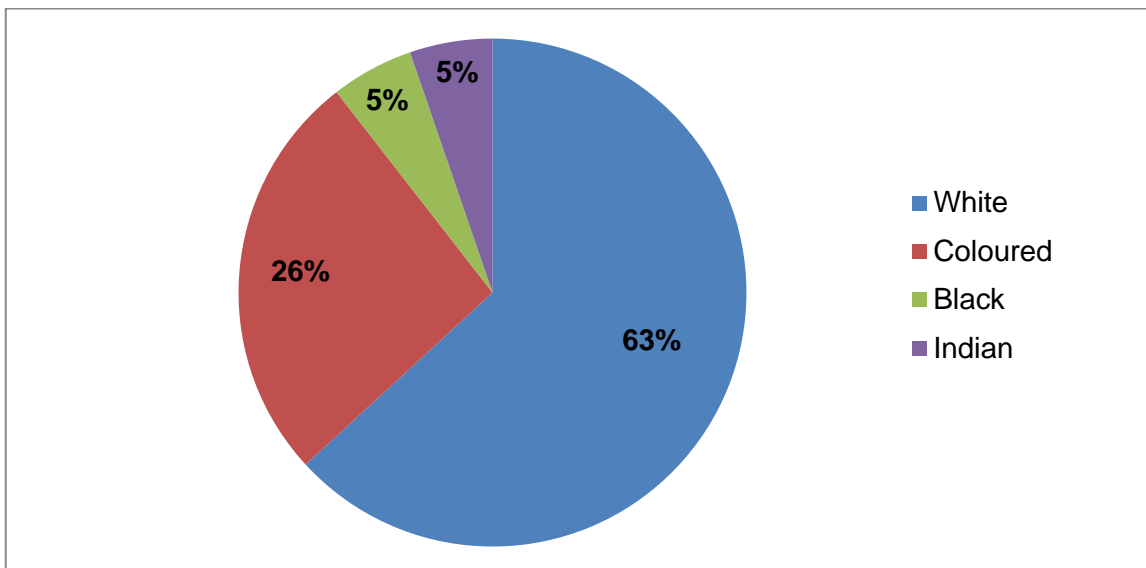


Although quota sampling was not carried out, figures 20 and 21 below, provide a breakdown of the participants in terms of gender and race respectively. It is notable that the majority of participants were white males.

**Figure 20: Gender of Participants**



**Figure 21: Race of Participants**



In the process of carrying out qualitative data analysis, the saturation point is the stage at which no new themes emerge, and can generally be achieved after six to twelve samples. Including the three pilot interviews, 19 interviews were conducted and a list of the participants is attached in Appendix D.

By asking open ended questions it enabled the participants to share their insights and speak freely. The author did not frame any of the questions. All the interviews were

audio recorded with the consent of the participants and table 12 below provides details of the audio recordings of the interviews. The level of attention paid to the process of designing the interview schedules, planning the interviews and conducting the actual interviews was done to ensure a rigorous data collection process.

**Table 12: Interview Audio Information**

Number of interviews	19
Total recording time of interviews	13 hours 46 min
Average interview time	43:31 min
Shortest interview time	32:30 min
Longest interview time	55:46 min

The audio recordings were professionally transcribed and details on the length of the interview transcriptions are provided in table 13 below below.

**Table 13: Interview Transcriptions**

Number of transcriptions	19
Average number of pages	12.3 pages
Shortest number of pages	9 pages
Longest number of pages	19 pages
Total number pages	235 pages

A detailed content analysis was gained from the transcriptions, which was carried out for each of the interview questions. The qualitative analysis was carried out by an external research analyst and it was found that a high degree of saturation was reached after ten transcriptions. A further four were analysed, however no new themes or codes emerged. The results of the analysis are presented below.

Miles and Huberman (1994) advise that in the process of coding and identifying themes from the data, it is not so much about the *words* used for coding but the actual *meaning* that is really important.

### **5.2.2 General Research Findings**

This section outlines the findings of the qualitative research which sought to answer the four main research questions. The findings for each research question will be addressed through the presentation of themes that emerged, via an inductive process, from the interviews. Each of the themes is supported by a selection of verbatim responses from the participants. In addition, where possible, these findings will be compared and contrasted with the quantitative research findings.

### **5.2.3 Facilitating the Journey into a General Management Level Role**

In order to provide perspective on the participants' responses, it was necessary to first investigate their personal career journeys and establish what may have facilitated or hindered their growth into a General Management capacity. According to participant 11, *"...the key thing is to get an education. It is very important I think. It gives you a good basis of knowledge"*.

Eight of the 14 participants indicated that they had achieved some form of higher academic qualification and two participants indicated that they moved up the corporate ladder with only a high school qualification. In most instances, a mentor or support structure was identified to be beneficial as stated by participant 3 who said, *"...the factors for me was having mentors and having support structures in place"*. The other participants made no mention of their academic qualifications.

All the participants provided a brief history of the experience they had gained over the years working in various functional and technical fields. During their career growth each participant had been exposed to an average of four different areas of the business, the results of which are depicted in table 15 below. Management, finance and executive positions were the areas they had been most exposed to.

**Table 14: Number of Participants Having Experience in Various Job Roles**

Functional/ Technical Experience	Number of Participants (n=14)
Management	10
Finance	7
Executive	7
IT Technical experience	5
Engineering	4
Planning and Operations	4
Director / Head of Department / Chief Officer	4
Secretary / PA / Executive Assistant	4
Project Management	3
Human Resources	2
Consulting	2
Logistics	1
Clerical	1
Relationship Manager	1
Business Analyst	1
Sales	1
Marketing	1
Shareholder / owner	1
<b>Average number of areas worked in</b>	<b>4</b>

The experience gained in these various areas of business seemed to be a good facilitator for the transition that the participants went through. This was also reflected in the quantitative findings (table 9) where gaining relevant experience was ranked 6 out of 7 with 96% of the participants indicating it was very, or quite helpful. This is supported by the participant verbatims from the qualitative findings below:

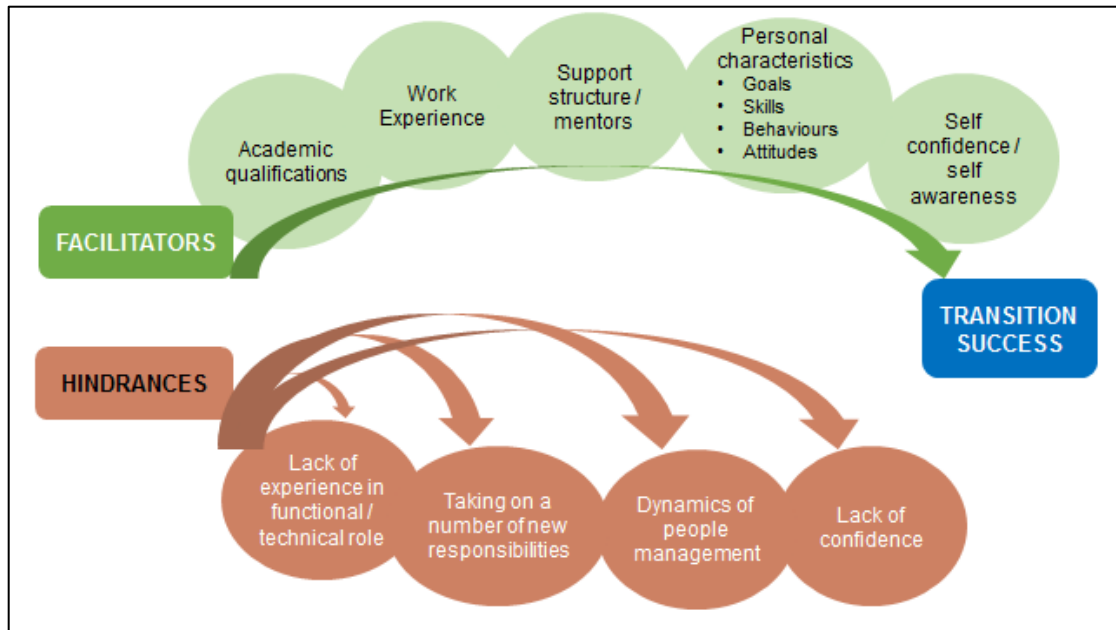
*“...then eventually looking at it and saying well there is no-one else better qualified because you have done all those functional roles, and got a very broad cross section. And that is why they head hunted me for this” (Participant 6).*

*“I was ten times more skilled than anyone else at that stage. Everyone else had got there by being a merchant or an HR person, but no-one had the breadth of skills that I had” (Participant 10).*



“Just experience... I mean being in sales most of my life and sales management and also being involved in finance back in the UK for a couple of years, it all came” (Participant 2).

**Figure 22: Facilitators and Hindrances of the Transition to the General Management Role**



Other facilitators to the transition were reflected in the participant’s skills, attitude and personal characteristics, as per figure 22 above. These managers appeared to be very goal driven and had a high propensity to actively seek out learning experiences, often combined with an entrepreneurial spirit. Reading, observing and questioning the status quo is reflected in some of their comments as a means of gaining knowledge to further their career advancement.

“I read enormously around business, and I always have, so I do. I read business books, I buy – so that’s part of it. And I will then roll out the concept, I have done that over the years....I mean for me this business I think about probably....[24hours a day]....! It’s a project. For me business is like playing a game, its Monopoly, you’ve got to keep trying to win” (Participant 5).

“I had one exceptionally good subordinate, who was in line and who had run line and I watched him like a hawk, and I knew he was successful in running line at a lower level. I watched him like a hawk to see what he was doing, which was correct. That was the first thing I did” (Participant 4).

The quantitative research findings ranked behaviour and attitude fourth out of seven (as per table 9), with 96% of the participants indicating it to be very, or quite helpful in their transition. Confidence and awareness which was ranked highest (as per table 9) (100% very/quite helpful), did not come out as strongly with the qualitative research but this was nevertheless something that was observed by the interviewer during the interviews. Participant 3 stated:

*"I think getting to grasp with your reality...I had past experience in a managerial role, in a generalist managerial role – this was just a little bit more broader....it is essentially all about a journey: recognize where you are at present, what resources you have available....from there making peace with what you have and delivering accordingly".*

Others were keen to talk about their abilities as leaders, problem solvers and having a good gut instinct. They also reflected on their self-confidence as supported by the following verbatims:

*"I think if I look at some of the profiles and stuff that was done on senior leadership, probably I am one of the more structured ones" (Participant 3).*

*"And for me going from industry to industry, I intentionally did that so that I could develop a general gut around whether the things are right or wrong, and whether it makes sense or not" (Participant 7).*

*"It is really about leading people because eventually you move from that functional thing where somebody gives you an instruction to do something that and you are actually moving to a thing that says well actually your task is not to do it yourself; your task is to get other people to do it" (Participant 6).*

A few hindrances to the transition were identified and in certain instances the same issues that were facilitators could also be viewed as hindrances if they were lacking. Moreover, issues such as taking on a number of new responsibilities and having to deal with the dynamics of people management are emphasised by Participant 6:

*"One of my biggest hassles has always been that I am almost totally red and blue – completely technical and autocratic, so it is through the whole thing, and my characteristic is be bright, be brief, be gone. So I really don't tolerate people that waste time. So I am not one of these people that will sit there and actually be all empathetic and that type of thing; it is a case of 'we are meeting here to decide what you are going to do, can we discuss it and move on' and I have actually had to learn to adapt much, much more to a thing that says people are going to do things differently. So you can tell them what to do and not how to do it. And generally my approach then when they are not actually performing to the level, is to*

*actually rather create an environment to help them, as opposed to saying to them ‘well do this, do that, do that’.*

### 5.3 Results Research Question 1

#### Are General Managers aware of what they must ‘let go’ of and the identity transformation process they will go through?

General Managers appear to have an understanding that things change after the transition to General Manager and that they need to adapt to this new role. From the supporting data for the quantitative research (table 9), 97% of the respondents indicated that the ability to adapt would be very helpful / quite helpful in easing their transition and 96% were of the opinion that their behaviour / attitude would be very helpful / quite helpful to the transition. The qualitative interviews identified four key themes, as depicted in table 15 below, which assist in answering research question 1.

**Table 15: Themes for Research Question 1**

Theme	Number of Participants (n=14)
Letting go of control and maintaining ownership	9
Personal characteristics and relationships	8
Insecurities	7
Having courage in the face of loneliness	7

#### 5.3.1 Letting go of Control and Maintaining Ownership

Successful leaders will adapt their behavior or identity, often by letting go of certain skills that they have and adopting new ones. Others may revert back to their comfort zone and try to lead from a functional perspective as opposed to a strategic perspective. Although there is a realisation among the managers that they need to adopt more of a strategic role, they still find this a difficult part of their transition, as they feel they are losing control of their power base. Participant 10 explained this in the following manner:

*“In a functional role environment, your power base tends to be knowledge or skills, and you tend to be authoritarian.... whereas true General Management leadership is all by influence; there is no power, there is no hierarchy, and so that transition, never mind your skill base, is how to get someone to go from power base to leadership – influence-based leadership is very*

*tricky. And that is probably the harder one, probably harder than unlearning all the things that you learnt as a financial guy” (Participant 10).*

The temptation to fall back onto ones historic strengths is very powerful, particularly when problems arise, but there is a definite need to transition from a power base role to a leadership role by letting go of power and managing by influence instead. Participant 9 really illustrated this internal conflict by stating that:

*“... the temptation is very strong to fall back on your ... to tap into your comfort zone, the experience that you had. So I had to broaden my perspective. I had to deepen my insight into different things; I had to become a lifelong student in the art and science of leadership. I was reasonably well equipped when it came to the science of management” (Participant 9).*

Finding ways to ensure that they don't revert to managing by their functional area of expertise, managers expressed the need to learn to trust others and hone in on other people's strengths to support them as leaders. Combined with this is the realisation that they can't do everything themselves. They stated the need to be more effective in delegating responsibility.

*“Ja, well I had to. I had to be more... it is actually something we discussed. I had to be more trusting and more over-head type, which I wasn't like that you know. I was used to managing a job totally, and that was for me a personal transition, to be able to get out of the micro-management – to me it was quite difficult” (Participant 1).*

*“I think that is relevant...You see a lot of guys move from a supervisory role into a General Management role, and you probably can see them around you: the guys who try and hold on to everything and don't tell anybody anything and don't trust anybody: ‘Unless I do it myself I can't do it’. .... and you can't do it all, you have to trust people” (Participant 4).*

*“So you have got to trust your people and let them make the decisions” (Participant 8).*

The participants acknowledged that their inherent characters made them want to be in control of everything as per the comments below:

*“...a lot of leaders are A-type personalities, that inherent ability to ‘I want to control’, and you just can't let go” (Participant 4).*

*“In an effort to try and control performance and effort to try and control the way things are done or things get done, you almost have this helpless feeling that you can’t do it yourself” (Participant 6).*

The managers acknowledge the need to let go and through making both a conscious decision to empower their subordinates and learning to step back and wait patiently for the subordinate to perform the function, it frees up their time to concentrate more on strategic issues. However, they also acknowledge that their responsibility includes reflecting on what value they could add by performing the function themselves, compared to the implications of delegating the task to a subordinate who does not adequately perform. Ultimately they take total ownership of any outcomes, as is reflected in the statements below:

*“I still struggle with it [handing over control] now, I have got to actually wait. So if you ask me what was the change? Patience” (Participant 6).*

*“But it is a conscious decision. You actually have to teach somebody how to put the intervention in place. You have got to physically ask yourself the question ‘should I be doing this?’ No. What is the worst thing that can go wrong if I don’t do it? The report can be wrong. They can re-do it” (Participant 4).*

*“So ja, it is getting to taking total ownership of things” (Participant 3).*

### **5.3.2 Personal Characteristics and Relationships**

The managers indicated that as they are promoted they tend to become distant as they feel that they should communicate and operate at a different level from their peers. Some put this down to arrogance of the leader and others explain it as being a consequence of the leader realising the added responsibility that they have undertaken. Participant 13 said: *“Well you know what? I think that when you have to assume responsibility literally for everything, I think it changes you”.*

Being promoted to the role of General Manager initially instils a sense of pride in the individual, often coupled with a level of arrogance. It has been a journey of hard work and dedication to reach this level of management. They therefore seem to experience a sense of entitlement to be in the new role and quickly have to realise that their behaviours and attitudes need to be adjusted.

*“Ja, I think the biggest thing is you come out of the MBA programme having sacrificed a lot to actually do it, and you almost have this feeling that life owes me a pay back, and actually you deserve it because actually you have already sacrificed, there is no doubt in my mind. And the people that do it – and I admire the people who do it...but the reality of it is to actually lose that little bit of arrogance that comes with that” (Participant 6).*

The arrogance of the newly appointed General Manager seems to dwindle as they realise that in order to be successful, there is a need to communicate and engage at multiple levels of an organisation. Building good teams begins with building good relationships at the various levels which involves some adaptation of personal characteristics, such as reduced arrogance.

*“...some characteristics have to change .... You can't be the arrogant, obnoxious little individual – because that is just you – when you have teams around you and different people and different characters, then you have to adapt accordingly!” (Participant 2).*

Sometimes the managers have the opportunity of being pre-warned about displaying arrogance and advised to rather concentrate on displaying those qualities that they are good at and can apply effectively so as to earn the respect of their colleagues, as per below:

*“So that was for me a transformation, and I was lucky, I went to [company name] and the person that was heading up [company name] had actually graduated as an MBA three years before me, and so he just told me straight out, ‘well if you think you learnt a hell of a lot with the MBA let's show you what real business is about and I know all the models. So yes of course we can actually discuss some of these things but you know what, it is how you apply it, it is not about the model!” (Participant 6).*

One participant had a different opinion however, stating that older General Managers may not be able to transition by adjusting their relationship building behaviour as they have become too set in their ways already. Managers with strong characters find it particularly difficult to adjust their characters when they are more mature and are entrenched in their ways:

*“I want to be blunt about it, in some cases it is impossible [to change personal characteristics], the transformation won't take place. Because when you get to 35 or 40 or 45, many of your habits are ingrained, it is then very difficult to transform yourself and to get to the point where you exude warmth, where you are sensitive to feelings, where you demonstrate a willingness to*

*serve, to get to the point where you have capacity to care...so in some cases it is not possible to convert, you know” (Participant 9).*

There is support for managers needing to adapt their behaviour in response to the situation they are in by ‘wearing the hat’ that is most suitable to the situation whilst still remaining consistent and true to themselves in the process. Moreover they need to believe in what they stand for as they represent the organisation in the eyes of the public, and their character and beliefs should be reflected in everything they do both inside and outside their corporate environment.

*“If you are a GM you also have a public persona. You need to speak very often, and suddenly you need to distinguish between your party persona which is a public thing and your formal corporate leadership persona which is also different. So you become very mindful of the difference...For me I used to practice in the mirror” (Participant 12).*

*“You know, I think one of the things that people often talk about with [people] in senior roles, is that you have got to become hard and you’ve got to be serious all the time...I think that is all rubbish....so I have to say that I do make adjustments to a point and I can’t say that I think it always makes me popular or well-liked to be who I am but ja, I am not somebody who easily changes who I am to suit the situation” ( Participant 5).*

*“The first few times you do and you present what you think will work with people, and that is a journey, that says ‘look, I can’t change who I am, I have to be true to who I am without compromising what I am saying, and understanding that I have to relate to people’. And so if you develop a bit of a fan club along the way, cool, and if you don’t, be comfortable enough to say that is also cool, because I don’t have to worry about what I said yesterday” (Participant 12).*

Changes in behaviour entail the General Manager building a strong team through interactions with their colleagues. However, in addition to General Managers internalising what behaviour modifications are required by them to strengthen the internal relationships, the people in the workforce indirectly modify the General Manager’s behaviour as well through the way they change in their interaction. It seems the behaviour of the subordinates towards the new General Manager influences the way the manager will interact with them. An example is where the General Manager becomes less tolerant of poor performance as they are more aware of their responsibility towards the success of the whole organisation.

*"I think it is not just that you change but I think that people change in their behaviour towards you as well; because I think you become less tolerant of people either withholding information or giving you wrong information, and I think that when you are managing a team of people, whether it is like 5 or 15 people as a General Manager, your ability to deliver on your objectives is actually 100% reliant on the people that are working with you, and when you hold the ultimate responsibility I think it literally changes your attitude towards non-performers" (Participant 13).*

### **5.3.3 Insecurities**

The transition to General Management appears to be an overwhelming one that managers are not properly prepared for. Furthermore, it was reported that whilst they have a great desire to succeed, they actually know very little and need to quickly learn to trust their peers, as per below:

*"I think 99% of the time the guys that move into General Management for the first time are completely overwhelmed and you're thinking and you are treading water just faster and faster and faster" (Participant 11).*

*"...adapting to that. Adapting to the fact that it is a sink or swim type of scenario, in that knowing that if it is going to be successful it has got to be exclusively based on you" (Participant 3).*

Entering into the General Manager space and realising the extent of responsibility involved, coupled with the exposure to new and unfamiliar areas of responsibility, General Managers report experiencing great insecurities. General Managers respond to these insecurities in various ways, sometimes initially to their potential detriment.

*"...trying to get to grips with things that I wasn't trained in, you know. So I was suddenly just feeling uncomfortable in my ability because I didn't know exactly what the financial story was" (Participant 1).*

The natural space for a new General Manager is for them to feel that they are in control of everything but being exposed to this feeling of insecurity sometimes results in them reverting to their comfort zones and re-taking control of the operational and hands on activities that they previously excelled in, particularly when problems arise. It also sometimes results in avoidance of areas where their understanding is limited. Although this makes the General Manager feel more comfortable initially, they need to ensure that they do not persist in this structured way of managing as they will lose sight of the



bigger picture and become ineffective. These sentiments are reflected in the participants' comments below:

*"If you are a procedure based person, I am structured, I need to do things, XYZ, I don't like grey areas , that is where you are going to go – as you say, that is your comfort zone.....which 9 times out of 10 could be disastrous" (Participant 11).*

*"...you get confronted with 'what's happening, what are the financials?' And I don't even understand ...I don't grasp that. So I felt really insecure and part of it was avoiding it" (Participant 1).*

On the other hand, successful General Managers find ways to support their insecurities and grow their characters and adapt behaviours to do so. By addressing their insecurities through reflection and support, they are able to identify what changes they need to make to effectively manage and succeed. This aligns with the concept of self-awareness. They commit to growing their knowledge and skills at a higher level so as to gain a better understanding and reduce their insecurities.

*"... you need to be able to hold that mirror up to yourself and actually not have an idea of who you are or what people think you are, but somehow get in touch with reality. So that is about people close to you, HR, colleagues, actually saying 'well you know what, this is what people are saying and this is what people think' – those are the things which ultimately determine whether or not you are going to succeed I think" (Participant 13).*

*"I am not scared to talk about it... I am able to tell them [friends and colleagues] about feelings and frustrations and able to share those; we might not share detail, but you are able to unpack" (Participant 5).*

*"And it depends on how you deal with it. Do you try and surround yourself with as much knowledge to take it forward, or do you try and basically put your own path" (Participant11).*

*"I had to deepen my insight into different things, I had to become a lifelong student in the art and science of leadership" (Participant 9).*

*"And acquiring new skills" (Participant 12).*

### 5.3.4 Having Courage in the Face of Loneliness

Much of the transition to General Management appears to involve changes in personality or identity for the individual and this can be a lonely journey for many. They find themselves in a position where they have become solely responsible for the whole and are no longer just part of a team. The responsibility that the General Manager now holds places a large burden on their shoulders and they feel they need to “*grow up*” as was stated by participant 7, with other statements such as:

*“...planning horizon changes, [and their] sense of impactfulness changes” (Participant 7).*

*“...it becomes lonely in the sense that it is you and your staff, as opposed to you working in a team with your peers” (Participant 3).*

*“What I mean by that: when I was an engineer I stuffed up, the pump blew – oops, pump dead, and I needed to explain to my boss why I just destroyed a R30000 pump because I didn’t do my job properly. Small impact. With this company I make the wrong call and I can destroy tens of millions of Rands of value. Long term impact. People lose their jobs.... That is a heavy burden to bear, and having that burden to bear almost makes you grow up in a way....So having a heavy burden to bear does change how you look at things and does change you subtly” (Participant 7).*

One of the coping mechanisms reported was that the General Managers develop their intuitive gut instinct which they learn to trust. After being in the business for some time and have developed a general understanding of the mechanics of the organisation, they have usually developed an intuition for the daily happenings in the business and can quickly identify any potential problems.

*“Somebody asked me the other day if I knew how many contracts we had and I said ‘I think 60’ and the answer was 59.... Now that is an intuitive feel that you develop after connecting things....because it’s the gut feel tool set you require” (Participant 12).*

In addition to using their intuition, having good relationships with peers and colleagues is a safety net and support system for the General Manager. So although the General Manager acknowledges their lonely role, they also realize the importance of engaging with others and building relationships of trust and respect.

*“I think I try to build good relationship with the people who either report to me or who work alongside me. So I am far more inclined to socialise with my immediate peers and team.... you do need people to believe in you otherwise it is never ever going to work” (Participant 13).*

## **5.4 Results Research Question 2**

### **What are the challenges of shifting from functional and operational to strategic perspectives?**

From both the quantitative survey results and the qualitative interviews, it was apparent that General Managers are aware of the need to shift their management focus when taking on the new role. Leadership and strategy were identified by the quantitative respondents (table 7) as being the most important subjects for them to understand when transitioning to the General Manager role. On a 7-point scale, with 7 representing the most important and 1 the least, these respondents rated leadership with a mean score of 5.8 and strategy with a mean score of 5.7. The next highest scoring subject was operations with a mean score of 4.0, indicating that the importance of strategy and leadership is paramount.

In the qualitative interviews, the participants were also vocal about the shift in focus that is required when taking on the role of General Manager and the challenges that arise with such a shift. The findings from the qualitative research, indicating what challenges are experienced by the General Managers, were grouped under 5 main themes as depicted in table 16 below. Although there is an indication of the number of participants that commented on each of these themes, the themes will not be discussed in the order represented in the table. The rationale is that it is important to first address the participants perceptions of what leadership and strategy are before discussing specific challenges they experienced.

**Table 16: Themes for Research Question 2**

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Number of Participants (n=14)</b>
Relationship building	12
Understanding what is required for strategy development and leadership	11
Realisation that broadening of skills set is required	11
Need to gather information	11
A shift of focus: General Managers appear to have differing views on what strategy entails	10

#### 5.4.1 A Shift of Focus: General Managers Appear to have Differing Views on what Strategy Entails

The majority of the participants acknowledged that there is a need to shift their focus to be more strategic when taking on the General Manager position. However, the participants indicated that people moving to a General Manager role had differing understandings of what strategy and leadership entailed as per below:

*“...based on my own journey and what I experience every day in other organisations, this is a very real issue and relatively few General Managers make that transition successfully” (Participant 9).*

*“...the word strategy is used very loosely, thrown around too often. What most people refer to as strategy is actually tactical execution. It is your prioritisation for tactical execution” (Participant 4).*

A contrasting view is the manager therefore just becomes a better manager instead of a strategic leader. They add emphasis to their functional or operational role, which includes their specialised skills set, but they fail at strategy development and execution.

*“Many of them, or the majority perhaps....remain super-duper General Managers, relatively few embrace the strategic tasks of leadership....So the common problem is that they get stuck in the management rut. So they still put all the, or the bulk of the emphasis on the functions of management, to plan and to organize and to control and they fall back on their sort of strong points and their knowledge, their insight, their functional competence.... but they fail in some instances to come up with the strategy that will create a better tomorrow” (Participant 9).*

It seems playing a purely strategic role is also perceived to be only theoretically possible. For a business that is experiencing problems, it may be more effective for the General Manager to focus on tactical issues in the short term, but for a refined operation that is performing well, the General Manager must focus on the future, develop a vision and motivate and inspire employees to live the vision.

*“If you are in the fortunate position of becoming General Manager of a company that is growing rapidly and is running slickly you can afford to be more forward looking. So I think at a principle level, yes, but it does rather depend on the specific situation and sector..... So if you become GM of a company that is sinking like a stone, I think you’re tactical, your strategic eruption is one day” (Participant 7).*

*"...operational and strategic decisions are clearly different, but happen simultaneously, but I don't subscribe to the formula that one can be operational and then later one becomes strategic. I think you have got to exist simultaneously in an operational and strategic role. You would think I would be more strategic than operational but that is not true at all; you only get to make very few strategic decisions in your career, and some people never do: but you get to participate in them" (Participant 10).*

The general consensus is that taking on the role of General Manager requires a shift in focus but this shift is not necessarily a clear cut shift to a strategic focus. Strategy execution is vital but General Managers are often only drivers of the strategy, which is determined at a much higher level. The General Manager therefore spends more efforts with tactical focus to develop, inspire and motivate employees, with the ultimate goal of achieving the organisation's strategic objectives.

*"The role where I am now is, I set the strategic direction from a technology point of view, and that is in conjunction with obviously the head of the unit that sets the strategic direction for the organisation" (Participant 11).*

*"...when we talk about a strategic process there are certain elements to it and the process is the important bit and includes operational decisions. So a strategy includes operational and strategic decisions" (Participant 10).*

The challenge for General Managers therefore is strategic human resource management and leadership. The General Manager needs to understand the ultimate strategy and through their leadership, pass that knowledge on to their subordinates and create the motivation and vision for the employees to work towards achieving the strategy. Turning the focus to driving the strategy through creating a sense of buy-in from employees, makes the decision making process for the General Manager easier.

*"...in my experience and I think for many people that grow up in a technical discipline into something like this, it is about gravitating or moving, migrating or broadening your skills; because you don't lose your IQ skills basically, it is the EQ ones though that are important (Participant 12).*

*"I think that as I have gone through in life, what is strategic is very broad decisions. Most of what we operate with at General Manager level is tactical, although we might perceive it to be strategic. So I think what we have got to understand is how do we take the people in management of the business and expose them to strategy, because if they understand in their*

*heart the logic behind a strategic decision the rest of the decisions on the tree just become easy” (Participant 4).*

#### **5.4.2 Understanding what is Required for Strategy Development and Leadership**

It has already been established, that a shift in focus is required when taking on the leadership role of General Manager. Although the General Managers are aware of this, there is still uncertainty when entering into the role, of what is required from them for strategy development and leadership. Their first challenge therefore is to gain an understanding of where the company is going and what strategy currently exists for the company.

*“I had to gain an understanding of the bigger picture and assist with the compilation of a plan that was positioning the company strategically in the right way” (Participant 9).*

General Managers need to learn the complexities of the business and understand how to change their behaviour to align with more strategic thinking. They need to become intricately involved in all aspects of operations and develop relationships with stakeholders so that they are able to establish the success factors and downfalls of the business. They also need to establish boundaries and communicate what they expect of others.

*“...for six months you are going to run your ops ragged, you are going to be working 12 to 16 hours a day, I understand all of that, you have got to learn the people, develop the relationships. You have got to learn who the suppliers are, you have to ...visit all the customers, figure out what the success factors are for this particular business, and that is going to take you a long time to do” (Participant 8).*

*“A lot of people don’t [communicate boundaries], so you wind up in a leadership or management position and you don’t set the boundaries for six months! People are pushing to see where the boundaries are. No-one taught me that, I observed that from someone else, years ago” (Participant 7).*

*“But sometimes what you get is someone saying ‘oh he doesn’t pay attention to detail therefore I don’t need to either’ – and then nobody does. And now you have a problem – but you can fix it quite quickly. Once you have picked it up you say ‘hang on a minute, I am expecting you to be a master of this subject, that is why I hired you” (Participant 8).*

Experienced General Managers seem to be aware that they cannot do everything themselves and a vital success factor for them is to build a strong team of people who have the necessary skills and who they can trust. They often find it challenging to let go and trust that the work can be done by someone else as effectively as, or even better, than they may be able to do themselves. However, successful General Managers will learn to delegate and allow their subordinates to develop. In this way, the team as a whole is strengthened and the individuals within the team experience a sense of empowerment and trust.

*“I know some people are really good at it and other people surround themselves with people that are really good at it, and I think it is a question of realising in which arenas you should play and it is actually very important that the people that are closest to you and are your direct reports, can feel secure enough to give you honest feedback” (Participant 13).*

*“One of the challenges we see bringing someone up from a specialist role into a generalist role, is they battle to make the transition from doing work themselves, to working through people. And that is I think the single biggest transition, it was a big transition for me as well....and the big transition for me was learning to work through people” (Participant 7).*

*“I am definitely nowhere near at all a super star in any of the fields – not at all –....so it is to make them the stars and I can talk in their language and it is basically providing a platform for themselves where they can achieve beyond their potential. And not be threatened; you have got to let them be super stars and let them get all the praise. Lavish praise and make them feel good about themselves” (Participant 13).*

### **5.4.3 Relationship Building**

It appears the ability to build and maintain strategic relationships comes as a challenge for many General Managers. They typically come from a background where they did not need to engage and invest heavily in relationships but moving into the role of General Manager forces them to develop their emotional quotient (EQ). They have to be able to build relationships and manage both upwards and downwards within the organisation as well as laterally and outside of the organisation.

*“I was suddenly confronted with clients, you know, so I was suddenly managing external companies more often” (Participant 1).*

*“...the first port is not outward the company, it is outward the function. It is one of the most important things that GMs have to do, is collaborate with other GMs” (Participant 7).*

Specifically, General Managers need to earn respect from colleagues and peers and in order to do this, they need to understand the most appropriate way of communicating with different individuals. Participant 11 describes how the method of interaction needs to be varied according to whom is being addressed and how this is a challenge to learn to do:

*“Now typically as a technical person I concentrate, I do what I need to do and I move on. The human interaction is a challenge....and that skill of dealing with staff, simple things, giving out work, delegating – it’s a challenge” (Participant 11).*

General Managers need to develop their soft skills and gain support from those around them, as well as developing relationships of mutual trust and understanding. Unfortunately, the ability to develop relationships is a self-taught and acquired skill, although some General Managers give credit to their mentors for assisting them to master the skill.

*“I am not an extrovert and I am not an introvert, I sit right in the middle, and it means I can actually be an extrovert when I have to be and I can be an introvert when I want to be. Now there are introverts who can force themselves to be extroverts when they need to, but then they go home and they actually sit in the loo for half an hour because they need to wind down” (Participant 6).*

*“The big challenges that I think are faced by a lot of managers or people that are moving into management, you can teach them how the organization does their budgeting...how to do financial projections...how to do financial control. So that you can teach them....you cannot teach a person interacting with his staff” (Participant 11).*

Formal relationships exist naturally within the work environment but in order to be truly effective, the General Manager needs to ensure a good level of informal contact occurs. These informal relationships and communication occur through various means as described below:

*“...the majority of my conversations I have are informal. You can be more honest informally, there are no people watching” (Participant 4).*



*“...there is a set that precedes the leadership of teams; I have to get through to the individuals. And that is a time-intensive activity, you have to walk, get around, talk, understand, listen with empathy” (Participant 9).*

*“That’s where it is happening [onsite]. I will meet you at the site and if I think you are not performing I will meet you five times in two weeks at different sites and I will tell you ‘I am going past your site, can we see each other there?’”(Participant 12).*

These informal relationships seem to be the General Managers lifelines. They are not only effective as a means to impart knowledge but also seem to assist in gathering information that may otherwise have not been shared including:

- To find out what is going on in the business;
- To identify new ways of doing things;
- To listen to people on the ground;
- To earn respect;
- To provide support;
- To be provided with support;
- To understand others opinions;
- To understand cultural dynamics;
- To have a finger on company politics;
- To build trust; and
- To communicate vision and strategy in an informal manner and in a way the recipient understands.

*“And that transition from a personal leadership, from a personal knowledge perspective, that you want to gain that knowledge and at the same time you are trying to lead a team that must have confidence in you” (Participant 4).*

#### **5.4.4 Realisation That a Broadening of Skills Set is Required**

The participants indicated that there is a gap that exists for people transitioning to the role of General Manager. These managers have been well versed in the theory of business but a theoretical understanding of business is not enough as argued by participant 13:

*“I think also there is a belief, you know people say if you do an MBA you can do any business, but I don’t believe that. They say we can come here, we are teaching you every aspect of*

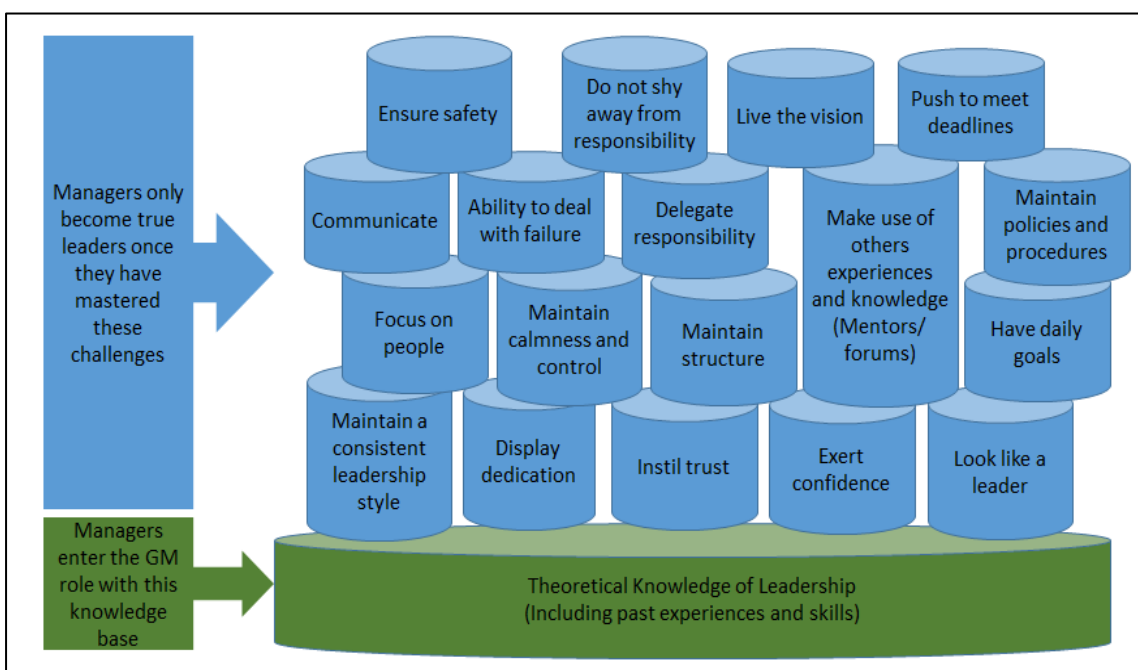
business management. So in theory I should be able to go and run a bank or you should be able to go and run a radio station – but I don't believe that” (Participant 13).

There were three main areas of the General Manager role where the participants felt challenged in their transition. Firstly, they indicated that they needed to learn how to be a leader, as leadership and management is not the same thing. Learning to be a leader involves picking up various skills along one’s development path, usually only after being exposed to practising in the role of leader.

“And I think one of the biggest problems is that they take strong technical people and the next progression is ‘I need to become a manager’. They go into management but they are not leaders and there is a definite difference between your management and your leadership in an organization” (Participant 11).

From their experiences, the participants outlined some of the things they had to learn or acquire into their skills set when they transitioned to the leadership role. These are generally skills of perception where the perception they portray to others of their own abilities needs to be strategic. Figure 23 below outlines various skills mentioned by the participants, that the General Manager needs to master in the path to successful leadership.

**Figure 23: Mastering the Leadership Role  
(coded from verbatims)**



*“You can’t over-react, you have got to be calm, methodical, because if the guy at the head doesn’t have a calm hand on the tiller, the guys underneath just go rattle off” (Participant 4).*

*“I think failure, and dealing with failure .... I think if you don’t make peace with that quickly you know, because making peace with it is not making peace with that you are not delivering, it is actually understanding that you have got it wrong”(Participant 12).*

*“....you can’t let your guard down, you can’t show that you are actually really at sea with a particular challenge. That’s a bit of a myth, but it’s true, so you are not actually as relaxed telling your chairman of the board or telling your group CEO well actually I don’t really know what is going on here” (Participant 6).*

*“....you know there are some advantages to being tall, being male, and looking like a leader – people trust you visually” (Participant 10).*

Human capital management and financial management were two other topics that came through strongly as challenges for the General Manager, and were skills they needed to further develop. The human capital element seems to be a hot topic of discussion with the General Managers and much focus has been placed on relationship building, specifically with regards to performance management, as per below:

*“....the people challenge. I think that is one where I think sometimes that has been more of a challenge, to find that. Where if I look at some of my business mentors they fired people a lot more lightly than I have been able to. So that for me has been the biggest challenge because I struggle with that. For me, I think it is a failure if I have to fire somebody, because it means I haven’t worked hard enough to make them proactive” (Participant 5).*

With the responsibility of financial management being placed on the General Manager’s shoulders, they tend to feel ill equipped to take on the burden of the financial security of the organisation. This is despite the fact that they often do have the theoretical background necessary, but have possibly not had much experience in financial management. Participant 9 illustrated their reactions as:

*“And then when I was appointed as the CEO of the organisation, well the first challenge I had was, I had to accept ... responsibility for the bottom line performance, sustained profit growth, quality earnings. So that was the immediate challenge. So previously I could talk rather easily about return on market and investment, but when I was given the overall task or responsibility for the financial health of the company it was a different ball game” (Participant 9).*

#### 5.4.5 Need to Gather Information

When transitioning into the role of General Manager, the participants indicated that they experienced challenges around the lack of information available to them. They have exited roles where they had complete functional control and in their new positions they experience an information gap. One participant indicated that the lack of information was as a result of management higher up the corporate hierarchy, not filtering information down. Another participant explained the lack of information to be as a result of taking on additional responsibility and having less time available to digest information that you can acquire.

*"...even though I had my own business unit and had to run my own business unit, again I wasn't privy to all the information that was going down at senior director level" (Participant 2).*

*"Learning to deal with incomplete information, and that is something I deal with now, every single day. The more you are in control of your environment the more information you have; the more you move up the less information you have and the less time you have to digest. One of the big transitions you have to make is learning to manage with incomplete information" (Participant 7).*

To combat this challenge, the General Managers would generally find means of gathering relevant information for themselves. Some choose to further their academic qualifications, some choose to keep abreast of things through reading as much as possible and some spend time researching and reflecting. The most utilised method of gathering information, however, was to engage, watch and learn on the job as is reflected in the following extracts:

*"I watched and learnt from people" (Participant 4).*

*"...so I was going out and selling with the sales people, I was servicing, I was learning the business, I was learning" (Participant 5).*

*"And initially is it 'oh, why is the boss here?' Actually you know what, I just want to find out what you're doing. Do you need any additional help? What's frustrating you doing it this way?" (Participant 6).*

*"And that skill of dealing with staff, simple things, giving out work, delegating – it's a challenge and it is not something that you can... you can teach the principles. It is very difficult, and that is*

where the mentorship side of things comes in – is look at the good leader and how he works with his people” (Participant 11).

### 5.5 Results Research Question 3

**Do leadership development programmes ease the transition process General Managers must endure and are the programmes offered to General Managers beneficial?**

Findings of the quantitative survey results (figure 12) indicated that the respondents placed a lower rating on formal training and development (24%) than on relationships (32%) and work experience (44%) as areas where they had gained their skills and knowledge required to fulfil a General Management role. In addition, as per table 8, only 34% of the respondents indicated that training and development was very helpful in facilitating their transition to General management compared to the 72% rating their experience, and 59% rating coaching as being very helpful. Similarly, the qualitative participants placed great emphasis on mentoring as being a vital component of their seamless transition and they identified a number of gaps in formal Leadership Development Programmes.

Four key themes were identified in the findings of the qualitative research in response to research question 3, as listed in table 17 below.

**Table 17: Themes for Research Question 3**

Theme	Number of Participants (n=14)
Coaching and mentoring plays a vital role in easing the transition for General Managers	14
There are gaps in Leadership Development Programmes identified by the surprises General Managers experience during their transitions	11
Other development program initiatives	7
Advice for development programmes initiatives to ease the transition	13

### 5.5.1 Coaching and Mentoring Plays a Vital Role in Easing the Transition for General Managers

Although business coaching and mentoring are different concepts, the majority of participants used them as synonymous terms. There was however some distinction drawn between formal and informal mentoring or coaching, where formal coaching is identified as a structured programme of meetings and learnings with a superior such as:

*“...with a management programme....[where] they had a business or a life coach that was appointed to each of their senior managers or whatever you want to call the business heads. And you would bounce things off them and go through the process” (Participant 11).*

Informal mentoring and coaching was described as guidance provided by a more experienced person and conducted in an informal manner. Therefore, for the purposes of presenting the findings the terms mentoring and coaching are used interchangeably. Where findings refer to the formal aspect, this will be highlighted in the discussion.

All the participants placed high importance on the benefits of having a mentor to ease the transition to the role of General Manager. This was also reflected by two thirds of the respondents from the quantitative survey (figure 16) indicating that a mentor is very important and the other third saying it is fairly important. Formal coaching was however not something that was readily offered to most of the participants and they either found their own coaches along the way or their immediate superior initiated the mentoring relationship. Fifty-nine percent of the quantitative respondents (figure 15) had not yet made use of a mentor.

*“I am sure it helped me tremendously” (Participant 4).*

*“I always went and asked him for help and guidance and I asked him to be my guru and my mentor and show me and teach me what he could” (Participant 1).*

*“I never had formal mentoring as in a mentorship programme; I have always found my own mentors. I still have mentors. There are people who I trust who I go to talk to” (Participant 4).*

*“...you have to make yourself available to mentors” (Participant 12).*

Mentors to the participants have varied backgrounds and the participants indicated that they used different mentors for different issues. Usually more than one mentor was used, each filling a specific role for the General Manager, with most participants indicating a relatively easy access. It seems that long term relationships are built between the mentor and the mentee, as the participants indicated maintaining contact with those who assisted them in their transitions.

*"Nothing formal, but I mean the mentoring I had was full time, understand. I spoke to the owner - at that stage it was a private company - several times every day. So I wasn't at all left to my own devices" (Participant 1).*

*"...he was also particularly good because once I started getting his confidence and started managing up, he then found it less necessary to step back into those operations.... but there were certain key areas where I needed help and he would definitely wade in and help" (Participant 14).*

*"One of my mentors has been a mentor of mine for a good couple of years and we still work actually pretty closely together" (Participant 11).*

*"I have had people like [a friend], who might be years and years younger than me but really I have found him an amazing business partner and really, and he taught me a lot and I listen to him a lot" (Participant 5).*

*"My dad was clearly one in terms of 'Roll up your sleeves, there is no harm in helping to make a sandwich to see what it entails. So before you tell people you want 17 sandwiches a minute see what it takes'" (Participant 12).*

The mentors provided both practical and theoretical learning opportunities for the General Manager. Moreover, the mentorship appeared to be mainly informal and of a non-strategic nature, thus allowing the General Manager the freedom to develop at their own pace.

*"But it was very practical, and remember he was also an engineer so it is also not a financial focus at all; it was a, get the job done, type focus. We had a very practical focus. I think he also had to go through some learning curves!" (Participant 1).*

*"I am very close to one of the senior guys here... very senior...one of the top guys...in the country and I have dinner with him once every three or four weeks, and for him he gets to learn*

*about businesses, and business views on subjects, and for me I get to learn...and that is a mentoring session for me” (Participant 4).*

It was quite apparent that the mentor acts as a sounding board and is seen as a trusted advisor who provides backup and a support structure.

*“So he is simple but really sharp...to a large extent I really 100% trusted him...if I went to him with....an idea I got brilliant feedback in my opinion....we also went into things that didn’t work, he was a risk taker as well” (Participant 1).*

### **5.5.2 There are Gaps in Leadership Development Programmes Identified by the Surprises General Managers Experience During their Transition**

The formal Leadership Development Programmes that the participants attended provided a framework of knowledge from which the leaders could develop themselves. It seems these programmes usually focus on theoretical management models. The two most important subjects which the respondents from the quantitative research (table 7) identified were leadership and strategy.

The participants in the qualitative research indicated that there were some apparent gaps in these formal development programmes that come as a surprise to General Managers when they move into the leadership role. This is one of the reasons why such high importance is placed on mentoring.

Leadership Development Programmes fail to prepare the General Managers for the quantity of workload and the time it would take to manage the administration of their roles. The complexity of the job was also underestimated as they now had to manage multiple functions and ensure they had good oversight of all activities.

*“I didn’t anticipate that that [financials] would take so much of my time and I didn’t like it, I didn’t want to do it, so I really struggled with the financials” (Participant 1).*

*“I knew them [management roles], I didn’t understand the time it would take. Because somebody else would have just done them” (Participant 4).*

*“Ja, this is in that little eco system, getting society there to abide by the rules. Make everybody inside the company stop at traffic lights that are red, make everybody take initiative that when*



*the traffic lights are out this is how you move: get out of your car and direct traffic if you have to” (Participant 12).*

*“....one of the things, you realise ‘but I am not equipped for this’. I wasn’t trained doing things like this’. You suddenly have a total financial management system that I had never even thought, you have an HR function, you have this growth / future direction, putting your toes in the water issues that I wasn’t really prepared for” (Participant 1).*

Some General Managers are perceived to be too arrogant and overconfident by their peers. In contrast to this, others lack confidence internally and therefore struggle with decision making. These are two opposite reactions to the added responsibility that General Managers take on in their transition and which has not been addressed in Leadership Development Programmes they have participated in.

Participant 1 acknowledged the impact of his overconfidence and arrogance:

*“I was stupid in thinking that it is just more of the same. The only difference is, I am now the big boss here, and I am now King of my own little throne here. So to me that was the only change, ‘now I have arrived’ – which was a total mistake...it is quite scary”.*

On the other hand, participant 6 explained his experiences as:

*“....a lack of confidence, that you actually look at some of these things and you think that the role is bigger than you and you look at it and say ‘I am not sure that I am capable of doing this’ and realising that actually the fact that you have those doubts is not a bad thing, it is actually a bit of humility that comes into it...that was a big surprise”.*

### **5.5.3 Other Development Programme Initiatives**

It seems that large investments are made by organisations into General Manager development and formal Leadership Development Programmes are quite widely available for managers transitioning to the role of General Manager. These include formal business school programmes both locally and abroad. In addition, some organisations have internal Management Development Programmes which were fully utilised by the participants, but may not necessarily have been on the same academic level as an MBA.

*"I was four years of leadership training essentially, and I did every course that [company] offers – on the mines, you name it and I did it: I trained as an artisan, I trained as a manager, I mean everything" (Participant 10).*

*"They sent us to business school in Barcelona for two weeks. Massive investment!" (Participant 12).*

*"I think the businesses have all got the programmes, whether you talk about one programme below an MBA type of programme, I think those type of programmes are there" (Participant 6).*

One participant explained that factors such as the skills shortages in South Africa, slow the development of General Managers. Furthermore, it is a challenge for organisations to release a manager into development programmes, especially when they perform a key function, which is further compounded by the skills shortage and limited back up support.

*"...because there is such a huge shortage of skills ...it is far too easy for the CEOs of those small businesses just to not release their people because they have all got key people they should be developing but there is not enough redundancy built into the systems, that actually allows those people to be released" (Participant 6).*

However, there was also mixed reactions to the benefits of formal Leadership Development Programmes and the participants' expressed that leadership development is ultimately up to themselves and the initiatives they take to learn and acquire knowledge and build their skills set. Informal training is seen to be just as beneficial as formal development programmes as suggested below:

*"...it was more the resources around me, rather than the skills given to me, the tools given to me" (Participant 2).*

*"We didn't believe in training. I don't think training would have changed anything" (Participant 1).*

*"So I guess the point really is about a bit of luck, people believe in you and invest in you, but you have to invest in yourself" (Participant 11).*

### 5.5.4 Advice for Development Programme Initiatives

The basis of ensuring that Development Programme initiatives are beneficial to both the organisation and the individual, is firstly to ensure that the right candidates are being developed. The participants added that the need for a stringent recruitment and selection process for potential General Manager candidates. Having done that, they expressed that it must be properly executed.

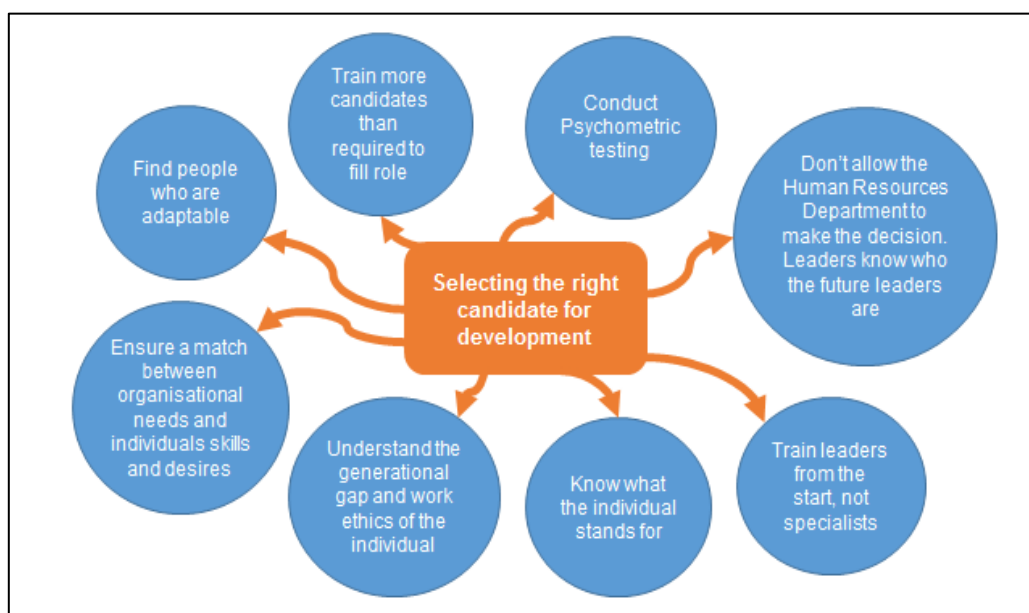
*“I think we have plenty people that are good, strong leaders” (Participant 1).*

*“In terms of development I think you can save quite a lot of money on development if you select properly” (Participant 3).*

*“...it is all the clichés but it is actually just about, do you do it, do you do it properly. Do you take any notice of it? It is like, what is the quality of your execution?”(Participant 13).*

Finding the right candidates involves the consideration of a number of factors as illustrated in figure 25. Ideally, organisations need to ensure that they are developing individuals who will grow with the organisation, which entails ensuring that the individual’s personal values align with the organisational vision and values. Current leaders in the organisation are the best people to identify future leaders as they understand what is required of the leadership role and they have an understanding of what the individual stands for and is capable of achieving.

**Figure 24: Selecting the Right Candidate for Development (coded from verbatims)**



*Development...you should make sure that you have a plan in place for them and that you understand what their intention and their plans are as well...What is the individual's needs versus what the company needs are? And when you have those two things calibrated you are good to go" (Participant 3).*

Building on the participant's feedback, a programme of "proper training" or a consolidated training programme would include elements of formal training programmes, mentoring or coaching, and practical skills development as illustrated. A vital element of being a good leader was reiterated as the ability to develop and maintain relationships and any training should emphasise the importance of accessibility, visibility and effective communication for a General Manager.

*"I amplified the importance of accessibility, visibility and effective communication. So the trap that I certainly fell into at [company], I practiced team leadership and then I realised, NO, there is a set that precedes the leadership of teams; I have to get through to the individuals. And that is a time-intensive activity, you have to walk, get around, talk, understand, and listen with empathy. So many managers when they get promoted, they become distant, and they think 'okay, I now operate at a different level" (Participant 9).*

## **5.6 Results Research Question 4**

### **What are the unique challenges of General Manager transitions for General Managers in South Africa?**

The qualitative research findings identified four key themes which are listed in table 18 below. These are in line with perceptions of the respondents from the quantitative research (figure 18), with the exception that 25% of the quantitative respondents also indicating that Cadre deployment was a challenge. This did not emerge during the interviews with the qualitative participants.

**Table 18: Themes for Research Question 4**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Number of Participants (n=14)</b>
South Africa is not unique and challenges evolve	3
Culture and diversity	8
Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)	6
Transformation	3

### 5.6.1 South Africa is not Unique and Challenges Evolve

Three of the 14 participants could not identify any unique challenges for South Africa. They discussed issues of a generic nature and considered these to be globally experienced. One participant viewed the challenges as contextual and changing, but not unique. If anything, the issues are more of a generational one.

*“...every country has the same problem. It is actually frightening how synchronized the world is” (Participant 10).*

*“...there are a couple [of challenges], and it is contextual and some stay the same and some change” (Participant 12).*

*“I think there is a definite lack of work ethic; people are coming to work to have fun. I think people are looking for balance but they have possibly gone overboard. So that managers who say you can't play on facebook during the day are seen as being autocratic” (Participant 5).*

### 5.6.2 Culture and Diversity

South Africa is well known for its diversity and diverse culture and this poses challenges for the General Manager because there is no standardised method of managing this diversity as was articulated by participant 8 below. Furthermore, it is considered that SA is less structured:

*“I have travelled the world and seen a lot of businesses – you follow a rule book. You know if you are faced with a particular situation you have a rule book generally to tell you what to do. And I think that is comforting for a lot of people, you know, people who are well qualified and even intelligent people, feel quite comfortable when someone has given them a rule book. In SA generally we don't work with rule books” (Participant 8).*

*“I think we do [have unique transition challenges]. I think if you take America, America is incredibly structured, even their management side is structured. They have a couple of really strong leaders. You take Europe and again you go through the process before you get to management. SA you are accelerating the environment” (Participant 11).*

*“I think that we don't have the scale really in this country to be able to do those things effectively. There are obviously exceptions” (Participant 8).*

South African managers or leaders were also identified to possess unique traits, including:

- Being resilient and able to adapt easily;
- Being more flexible;
- They tend to be younger leaders;
- They are able to manage diverse and dynamic cultures; and
- They are good at managing conflict.

This uniqueness opens the door of development for many young people but also poses challenges for the General Manager to strategically manage these diverse issues. Coupled with this, is the acceleration of development programmes for previously disadvantaged individuals who reach the level of General Manager very quickly. They are tasked with management of this cultural diversity, however may not have been able to acquire the adequate leadership skills to take on the new role.

### **5.6.3 Black Economic Empowerment**

There are many compliance laws in South Africa, one of which is the Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) initiative, with the challenges seeming to be twofold:

*“Well I think the problems or issues are around employment equity, because I think there is also the perception that black people get the promotion not because they are necessarily the best person for the job but because we all know that transformation needs to happen” (Participant 13).*

*“I think that for me the major thing is in SA, that if you want to be compliant your challenge is the cost of compliance has become very high because of the mobility of the black workers, of the skilled black work force” (participant 5).*

General Managers are faced with the challenges of ensuring the best possible candidate for the job receives the job and that they are able to build engagement and loyalty with these individuals to dissuade them from exiting the organisation once they have been trained up.

#### 5.6.4 Transformation

Combined with BEE, the transformation agenda of South African businesses was also identified as a unique and ongoing challenge for South African General Managers. There is a need to address the historic imbalance and grow young black individuals into higher levels of the organisation. However, in certain cases, individuals are being fast tracked into decision making roles, often without adequate experience and knowledge.

*“...the problem that we would face now for instance, we still have an ongoing challenge around transformation” (Participant 12).*

*“And then they [young black individuals] are moving through management quickly, without having the strong bases that they should have, the technical knowledge” (Participant 11).*

One participant remarked how to assist with development, whilst another commented that not enough is being done.

*“...that again is where mentorship becomes vitally important in organisations. It is not just, ‘let’s accelerate this mentorship’, it’s ‘let’s assign a dedicated strong leader’ – and I am not saying a strong manager – a strong leader, to work with, particularly the accelerated management” (Participant 11).*

*“...you see less and less of them now – these transformation workshops – people having to understand, sit with their colleagues” (Participant 12).*

Whilst racial issues are not unique to South Africa, the challenge highlighted was how young white professionals battle to manage performance issues with young black employees, without facing the risk of racial discrimination:

*“...it is important to have our young black leaders and our young white leaders to understand that they lead everybody in these positions” (Participant 12).*

*“I think also it is probably quite difficult for white managers to sometimes manage, performance manage black staff, because there is always the fear of being called racist, and that whole race card thing and discrimination. So I think that is an added dynamic that you probably wouldn’t have in other countries” (Participant 13).*

## Chapter 6: Discussion of Results

### 6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the results of a two phased approach to the research. Whilst the methodology included a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase, the phases were not intended to be sequential, where the results of one phase are built upon by the following phase. Rather, in this case the intention was to gain deep insights from experienced leaders through qualitative means, about their successful transition to General Management. In addition to this, the research also sought to gain a perspective of the transition to General Management, by means of a quantitative survey, conducted with currently transitioning managers that were attending a General Management Programme at GIBS. The intention was not to compare the specific perspectives, but rather having gained the insights from the successful and experienced leaders, to also consider those of the newly appointed managers. Given that the newly appointed managers are the potential future business leaders it is important to understand their perceptions and expectations of what the role would entail and their transition to it.

The results presented in chapter five were intended to address the research questions posed in chapter three. This chapter will review the results, and provide an interpretation in the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two. The quantitative results presented in chapter five did not follow the order of the research questions in chapter three. Rather, the research sought to follow a process which included perspectives on:

- Motivating factors for moving into the General Management role;
- The impact of money as a factor;
- The source of skills and knowledge gained;
- The important subject and topics for General Managers;
- Factors impacting the transition to General Management;
- The use and importance of mentors;
- Levels of success through the transition; and
- General Manager transition challenges unique to South Africa.



In the case of the qualitative results, these were presented in a format consistent with the order of the questions in chapter three. The discussion of the results that follow will integrate the findings from the two phases where appropriate.

It must be noted that the use of the terms *manager* and *leader* have been used extensively and interchangeably throughout this paper. Whilst the literature (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003; Watkins, 2012) debates the differences between the two, it is necessary to understand the context in which this paper has used the terms. Where the author referred to the senior business leaders (participants), from which deep insights were being sought qualitatively, in the findings they may have been referred to as managers. The reason was that it was making reference to the stage where they were in fact managers that were transitioning or had transitioned to General Management. In the case of the students attending the GIBS General Management Programme they have consistently been referred to as managers. The primary distinction between the two is really when the manager reaches a certain level of success and starts to lead, that he or she ultimately becomes a leader.

In chapter five, (figures 20 and 21) the gender and race of the qualitative participants was reported on, and reflected that 84% of the participants were white males. Whilst no form of quota sampling was undertaken, as this was not intended to be a relevant variable for the research, it must be noted that a different demographic sample may have yielded different results.

In the process of providing an analysis and interpretation of the results it is important to pay particular attention to seeking valid meaning from the qualitative data, with emphasis not only on the *words* and direct quotations but the actual *meaning*, as posited by Huberman and Miles (2002).

## **6.2 Research Question 1**

**Are General Managers aware of what they must 'let go' of and the identity transformation process they will go through?**

The research question sought to understand to what extent leaders realise what they must 'let go' of, specifically in terms of behaviours and skills, and furthermore, to what extent they will find themselves questioning 'who' they really are and where they fit in, as they go through a transformation in their own identity (Day & Harrison, 2007) when taking on a new role.

Watkins (2012) describes the transformation associated with the transition process as 'seismic shifts', and provided several concepts highlighting the extent of change, such as the move from 'the analyst to the integrator'. Moreover, Warner and Witzel (1997) posit that the General Manager needs to become a master of all business disciplines, without having to specialise in any single one. In Freedman's (2005) model of 'The five primary pathways and four basic career crossroads' (figure 6, chapter two), he describes this transition to General Management, which takes place at crossroad 3, as the most difficult turn.

The quantitative results (table 11) highlight that on the ranking of areas of success achieved, that 'letting go of previous responsibilities' was rated as the lowest, with a mean score of 3.3, where the highest possible score was 5. It seems that this is an area where they achieved the lowest level of success. It was also noted that the inability to let go of previous responsibilities impacted the ability to take on new responsibilities, thus creating a hindrance to a successful transition, as per figure 11. The data does however illustrate that 24% of the respondents felt they had been "very successful" and 52% felt they had been "fairly successful" in developing new behaviours.

The qualitative results did not only highlight the need to *let go* of certain behaviours but also emphasised the need to *adapt* behaviours and skills. In addition to this it was also highlighted that certain *characteristics* needed to change, in particular that of arrogance, which is often associated with promotions. From the qualitative analysis four themes emerged and are highlighted in chapter five as:

- Letting go of control and maintaining ownership;
- Personal characteristics and relationships;
- Insecurities; and
- Courage in the face of loneliness.

### **6.2.1 Letting go of Control and Maintaining Ownership**

The concept of letting go of power and control was a theme that received significant support from the results of the analysis. It was also highlighted as a surprising contradiction, as when managers were promoted to higher levels in an organisation

their level of power and authority increased, yet in order to be effective they needed to empower others, by letting go of power. This appears to align with the concept of the 'paradox of power' (Hill, 2006). Many of the participants reported struggling to *let go of control* to truly empower others, and it was only after struggling through the process and gaining the relevant experience that they were able to develop this ability to let go. It seems that letting go of this power, control and responsibility, is the only way to become effective. The results reflect that the leaders needed to learn how to 'lead through influencing' and not through power.

What did become apparent was the difficulty experienced when having to do this under stressful conditions. Many reported that as soon as they faced stressful situations they tended to fall back into their comfort zones, and rely on doing functional and operational activities that they were familiar with and excelled at. This aligns with the literature that highlights the concept of relinquishing power and moving from 'doing to being', as posited by Drucker (2005), and is also consistent with Hill's (2003) views on power and authority. This is particularly relevant to the research, including the problems referred to in chapter one, which relate to that of failed and ineffective leaders. Letting go of control did not only relate to power and authority, but to key tasks and activities. The challenge described by the participants, that are evident in the findings, was that of trying to figure out what to let go of and delegate, and what to continue doing because it added value. This is not dissimilar to the 'continuity and discontinuity theory' perspective (De Meuse et al., 2011). Lastly, the findings relating to letting go of control concur with Watkin's (2012) views of over-managing the old familiar functions and under-managing the new ones.

### **6.2.2 Personal Characteristics and Relationships**

The findings illustrate that many of the participants related stories about relationships, and the concept of informal relationships, was a particularly significant theme that emerged. The participants expressed their surprise at having been promoted, that even though they were at a different level in the organisation, it became even more important to develop and maintain relationships across all levels. They went on to say these relationships extended to multiple levels, including not only vertical and horizontal (lateral) relations, often common with traditional hierarchies, but also external relations. Hill (2006) describes this as a 'web of relations'. It is important to consider that none of the themes that emerged can be viewed in isolation and are all intrinsically linked. In

order to relinquish power, it requires a level of trust, and in order to develop trust, one needs to build solid relations. These complex issues cannot be viewed as sequential and methodical in nature and require a high level of psychosocial skills.

The research and findings talk a lot about letting go, but little was mentioned in the literature about arrogance as a trait impacting the transition. Competencies were mentioned extensively (Bonoma & Lawler, 1989; Hellriegel et al., 2005), however it may be necessary to better understand the role of arrogance. The issue of arrogance came through quite strongly in the findings and is supported below:

*"...some characteristics have to change .... You can't be the arrogant, obnoxious little individual – because that is just you – when you have teams around you and different people and different characters, then you have to adapt accordingly!" (Participant 2).*

### **6.2.3 Insecurities**

The change in oneself and one's own identity was a theme that emerged from the analysis. To reiterate what was said above, many of the themes that emerged are related. With the manager being recently appointed, comes a level of pride and confidence which is a fine line away from arrogance. This is related partly to the insecurity associated with the new role as the manager who is now in unfamiliar territory and has not been here before. The findings are consistent with the literature (Day & Harrison, 2007; Weick, 1993).

The managers reported having to let go of control, power and functions and with this also came a sense of 'loss'. The findings highlighted levels of insecurity because the leader had not been here before and was experiencing new responsibilities that come with the new role. A strong theme that emerged was the need to adapt to the new environment. The quotation below provides a good illustration of this:

*"...I think 99% of the time the guys that move into General Management for the first time are completely overwhelmed.... you are treading water just faster and faster and faster" (Participant 11).*

Despite the insecurities experienced by the participants during the stage of going through the transition to the General Management role, the findings reflected that most of the participants displayed high levels of self-awareness. Whilst they were going

through the process of questioning their own change in identity and who they were, they were in fact cognisant of this self-reflection process. De Meuse et al. (2011) and Freedman (2011) support the concept of self-awareness, which is consistent with the above. In many instances, the participants also made mention of the fact that their mentors had played an important part in the process. The value that the participants placed on mentors corresponds with the findings from the quantitative analysis where 67% of respondents considered mentors to be 'very important' in the transition process.

The findings from the quantitative results (table 8) also indicated that the respondents ranked 'confidence and self-awareness' as the most important factor in facilitating the transition. 79% rated it as 'very helpful' and 21% rated it as 'quite helpful'.

#### **6.2.4 Courage and Loneliness**

A key theme that emerged within the findings was the new level of responsibility that the General Managers had to assume, and the fact that they were now responsible for the 'whole', as opposed to only themselves as individuals. This is illustrated in the verbatim quote below. There was also a high level of support for the notion of loneliness, and the courage required to deal with it. Despite this burden of leadership being a lonely position, this theme is also related to the other themes and involved the ability to communicate, build relationships and develop trust, let go and delegate, and have confidence in oneself.

*"....So having a heavy burden to bear does change how you look at things and does change you subtly" (Participant 7).*

#### **6.2.5 Conclusion: Letting Go and Transformation**

It seems that the experienced leaders, upon reflection, know what they needed to let go of in order to transition. However, there is a high level of support for the fact this knowledge of what they would need to let go of and how their identities would transform, was gained primarily through experience, and that the extent of the change, in many cases, came as a surprise. The results from the quantitative phase indicated that the students were not quite aware of the extent of change they would be going through. This is not necessarily due to naivety but perhaps, lack of experience.

What seems to stand out is the level of contrasting contradictions associated with the transition to the General Management role, and this was particularly evident with regards to power, control and relationships. Moreover, whilst the research question related to the changes the General Manager would go through, it must be noted that people around the General Manager, particularly peers and subordinates, would also change towards the General Manager, which in turn further impacted the change.

The results reflected a high degree of transformation that leaders went through. In some cases they were described as complete U-turns, and a number of participants reported having to 'unlearn' things and change previous behaviours. These findings are consistent with the literature including Lewin's Change Model concept (Burnes & Cooke, 2012), and Scharmer's 'U Process' theory (Hall, 2008). The quotation below illustrates the extent of change and self-reflection:

*"... the temptation is very strong to fall back on your ... to tap into your comfort zone, the experience that you had. So I had to broaden my perspective, I had to deepen my insight into different things; I had to become a lifelong student in the art and science of leadership. I was reasonably well equipped when it came to the science of management" (Participant 9).*

In concluding, based on the findings, General Managers are less likely to know what to let go of and how they will transform, until they have actually gone through the process and it is about their ability to adapt and develop a level of self-awareness as they go through the process that will determine their level of success. This concept of experience was particularly prevalent in the findings and aligns with the literature (McCall Jr., 2004; Thomas, 2008).

### **6.3 Research Question 2**

#### **What are the challenges of shifting from functional and operational to strategic perspectives?**

The research question aimed to understand how to shift to strategic thinking and the challenges associated with adopting a different perspective. It is important to try and understand to what extent the previous focus on highly operational, functional and tactical elements may impede the shift to strategic thinking (Casey & Goldman, 2010).

The findings in chapter five highlighted five themes that emerged from the analysis, and what was particularly relevant was the extent to which the participants differed in

their views on what strategy actually is. This would probably stand out as one of the initial challenges. The one area where there was consensus from the findings was how important making the shift to strategic perspectives is to the transition to General Management, which aligns with the literature (Boal, 2000; Kaplan & Kaiser, 2003; Watkins, 2012).

The quantitative findings illustrate that the respondents considered strategy, together with leadership, to be the most important subject on the General Management Programme at GIBS. Furthermore, what was quite interesting is the fact that in respect of the areas where the respondents felt that they had achieved the most success in transitioning to General Manager, 'strategic thinking' came out as the highest, with a mean score of four, given that the highest possible score was a five.

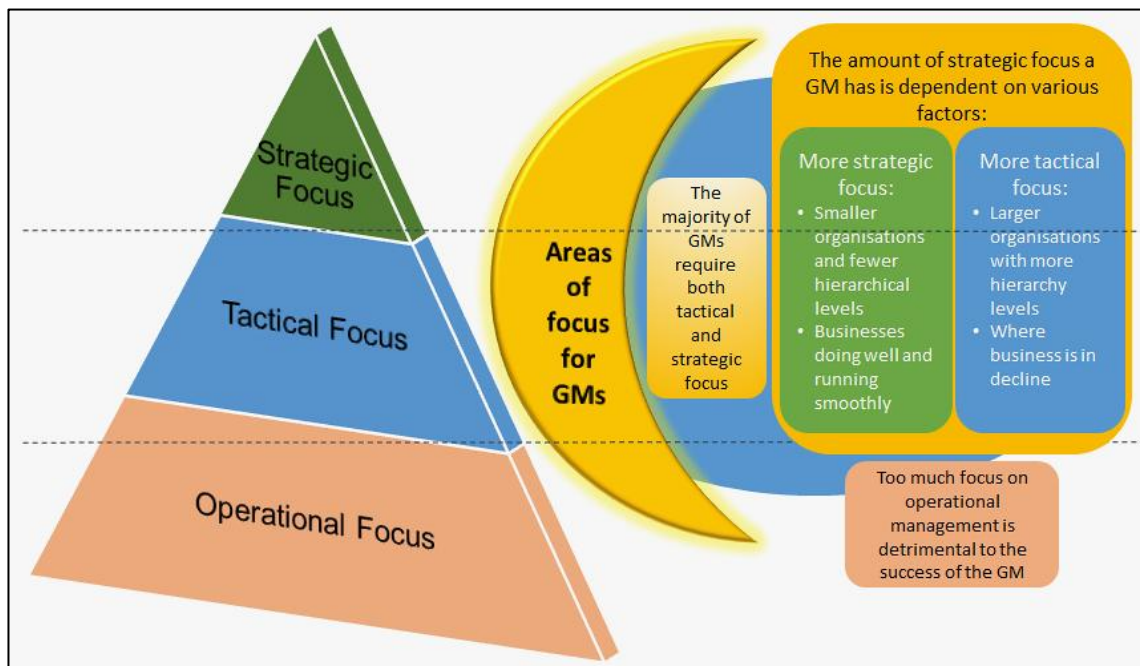
### **6.3.1 A Shift of Focus: General Managers Appear to Have Differing Views on What Strategy Entails**

The intention of the research was not to establish what strategy actually is, as this would be an entire research project on its own. However, what stands out from the findings is there are differing views on what the actual shift to a strategic perspective entails, with no definitive conclusion.

The findings reflect that there must be an element of operational and tactical decision making in order to make strategic decisions. The views are split between managers simply having to become better managers and executing on the strategy, whilst others reflect that they should be involved in strategy formulation and execution.

The literature seems unanimous about the fact that a shift is required. Watkins (2012) describes it as the shift from 'tactician to strategist', whilst Kaplan and Kaiser (2003) suggest a strategic leadership approach is required, and others suggesting strategic thinking is needed (Goldman & Casey, 2010).

**Figure 25: Shift of Strategic Focus**



**SOURCE:** Developed by Author from Research Findings (2014)

It seems there are various contributing factors which influence the amount of focus the General Manager is required to exert in strategic, tactical and operational terms, as per figure 25 above. The life stage and the industry sector of the business at the time the General Manager takes over their role, dictates to some extent, the way that strategic thinking and leadership is undertaken.

### **6.3.2 Understanding what is Required for Strategy Development and Leadership**

The qualitative findings highlight the need to better understand strategy in general, and in particular, how to develop strategic thinking and perspectives. There is however extensive literature (Boal, 2000; Goldman et al., 2009; Goldman & Casey, 2010) that provides insights to this, which includes guidelines on this. It is interesting to note the quantitative respondents consider this to be their most successful area, yet this perhaps suggests a level of naivety or inexperience.

It is clear this is a challenge, as per the quotation below, and the key aspect is to consider how to incorporate this into appropriate development programmes. The findings also suggest this is related to the previous research question in respect of



having to letting go. In this case it referred to letting go of functional activities and taking on strategic ones.

*“...that is I think the single biggest transition, it was a big transition for me as well” (Participant 7).*

### **6.3.3 Relationship Building**

As per the previous research question the theme of relationships emerged quite strongly. This was very much related to the relationships that need to be developed at multiple levels in order to be effective in the new role. The findings highlighted the extent to which external relations also had to be developed, and how they had to shift their focus from being primarily internal, to include external ones.

This is consistent with the literature which posits that relationships are required to drive collaboration (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2003). Moreover, it is also related to the aforementioned findings highlighting the need to shift away from the reliance on one's own performance, to the dependency on others in order to achieve a desired outcome.

The most pertinent aspect of the findings was that of 'informal' relationships and how this was used as a means to determining what is really going on in the business. The concept of 'informal' also related extensively to mentors, which is depicted in figure 26. The challenge highlighted, is how to learn to develop those relationships

### **6.3.4 Realisation that a Broadening of Skills Set is Required**

There was extensive support for the challenge of having to develop suitable skills, in order to effectively develop strategic perspectives. Figure 23 in chapter five (5.4) provided a graphic representation of the level and complexity of skills required. The most prevalent ones from the findings were those of human capital management and financial management skills, as highlighted below. This is perhaps as a result of a focus on previous technical roles, where soft issues such as leadership were not such a requirement.

*“...the people challenge...for me has been the biggest challenge because I struggle with that” (Participant 5).*

The findings align with the literature which provides support for the need to develop the appropriate skills, not only for strategic perspectives, but in order to facilitate the transition to General Management (Burke, 2006; De Meuse et al., 2011; Freedman, 2005; Ibarra et al., 2008).

The implications of these findings are important as they provide support for the problem statement in chapter one which highlights the extent of poor and failed leadership due to inadequate and ill prepared leaders.

### **6.3.5 Need to Gather Information**

The findings indicated that one of the biggest challenges in being able to adopt a strategic perspective, is the ability to do so without having all the necessary information at their disposal. The most significant aspect was that of having to make decisions, which in some cases need to support the strategy and vision of the business, with incomplete information.

The participants also shared how they adopted methods which they would use to gather information through ongoing learning, observation and informal channels, and interactions. They did however emphasise the challenge of making decisions with less and less information. This is consistent with some of the literature which suggests a process of having to know “less and less about more and more’ (Fauconnier, 2014).

### **6.3.6 Conclusion: Shift to Strategic Perspective**

A number of perspectives seem to stand out from the findings in this section. The first is, it is not as much about the challenge of the shift to a strategic perspective, but rather, actually trying to determine where is the clear cut line between operational, tactical and strategic perspectives, as highlighted below:

*“...the word strategy is used very loosely, thrown around too often. What most people refer to as strategy is actually tactical execution” (Participant 4).*

This shift to a strategic perspective is probably one of the more significant distinctions between a manager and a leader. The manager may be extremely good at execution, but may fail to actually make the shift to being able to adopt a strategic thinking perspective, as highlighted below:

*“...the majority perhaps....remain super-duper General Managers, relatively few embrace the strategic tasks of leadership....So the common problem is that they get stuck in the management rut” (Participant 9).*

Lastly, there seemed to be significant evidence from the findings that suggest there is a need for development assistance in helping acquire the necessary skills and being able to develop strategic thinking, in order to overcome the challenge of shifting to strategic perspectives.

#### **6.4 Research Question 3**

**Do leadership development programmes ease the transition process General Managers must endure and are the programmes offered to General Managers beneficial?**

The research question aimed to determine if Leadership Development Programmes place emphasis on what is involved in the actual transition process and whether they help leaders adequately prepare for the transition. The research highlights the number of development programmes in place, however it is questionable to what extent these are targeted at General Managers (Avolio et al., 2009; Lord & Hall, 2005).

In chapter one, the research problem makes reference to a ‘crisis of leadership’ and cites, in part, the ineffectiveness of management courses as one of the contributing reasons for this (Tucker, 2013). The literature also provides contrasting views on the development of leaders, and suggests there is a need for further research in this area (Avolio et al., 2009; Burke, 2006; Day & Harrison, 2007).

From the quantitative results (figure 12) it is interesting to note that in terms of identifying where skills and knowledge was gained by the respondents, that they only allocated a score of 24% to formal training and development. Work experience and relationships were rated significantly higher. In terms of the impact it has on the successful transition to General Management, training and development was ranked the lowest out of seven different factors (table 9).

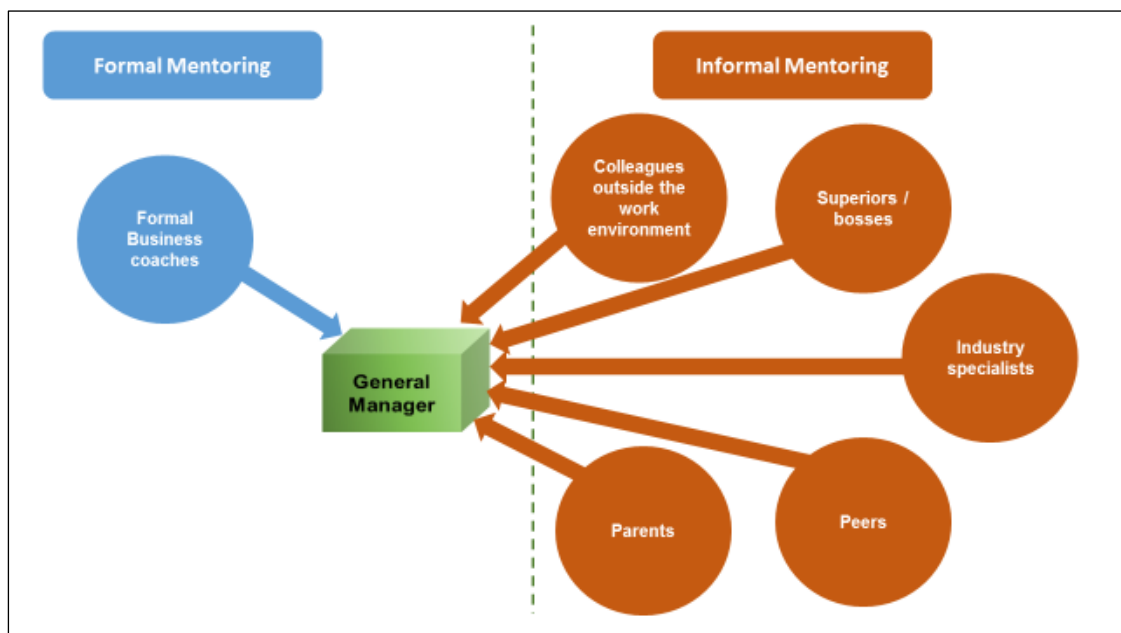
The findings emanating from the qualitative analysis highlighted four themes that emerged.

### 6.4.1 Coaching and Mentoring Plays a Vital Role in Easing the Transition for General Managers

The findings indicate a much higher preference for coaching and mentorship as opposed formal Leadership Development Programmes. It is evident that *all* the participants are in agreement about the value of mentorship, and as per the previous research question the emphasis is on the informal aspect. This aligns with the high importance level (67%) placed on mentors by the quantitative results in figure 16.

The data also highlights that the mentors had various backgrounds and, as per the findings of the previous research, relationships were a significant aspect. Figure 26 below depicts the various sources of the mentors, and reflects a distinction between formal and informal. This is supported by Freedman's (2011) views on mentorship and coaching.

**Figure 26: Origins of Mentors to General Managers**



**SOURCE:** Developed by Author from research findings (2014)

Besides learning about various leadership styles and methods to build relationships, the mentor acts as a sounding board for the General Manager. Through their interactions, the General Manager is able to learn different approaches to problem solving, is able to share both good and bad experiences, and get feedback from another perspective.

#### **6.4.2 There are Gaps in Leadership Development Programmes Identified by the Surprises General Managers Experience During their Transition**

The findings suggest there is a gap in the Development Programmes, with more emphasis being placed on theoretical aspects. Whilst it was suggested there should be more focus on the practical aspect, one has to consider how feasible this is. The findings suggested that the managers were surprised at the complexity of the job.

It has been established that a manager needs to go through multiple change processes as part of the transition. However if one considers U-Process theory (Hall, 2008), it is a deeply personal journey. The author is suggesting that it not possible to train on this aspect, as it can only come about through experiences. The development programme should rather focus on creating an awareness of what the manager will need to go through so that they are partially prepared and have some idea of what to expect. Ibarra et al. (2008) agree that the focus of development must extend beyond just training on skills and abilities, and must incorporate psychosocial aspects and processes.

#### **6.4.3 Other Development Programme Initiatives**

The findings illustrate there are opposing views on the benefits of the Leadership Development Programmes, which aligns with the debates highlighted by the literature. Whilst many participants had attended various programmes, there was varied feedback, with some participants having attended many programmes and others not having attended any programmes.

There was significant support for the fact that personal and self-driven development initiatives are an essential aspect. This is consistent with the literature (Ibarra et al., 2008; Joiner & Josephs, 2007), which also suggests the need for further research in respect of aligning personal development, leadership development and leadership effectiveness.

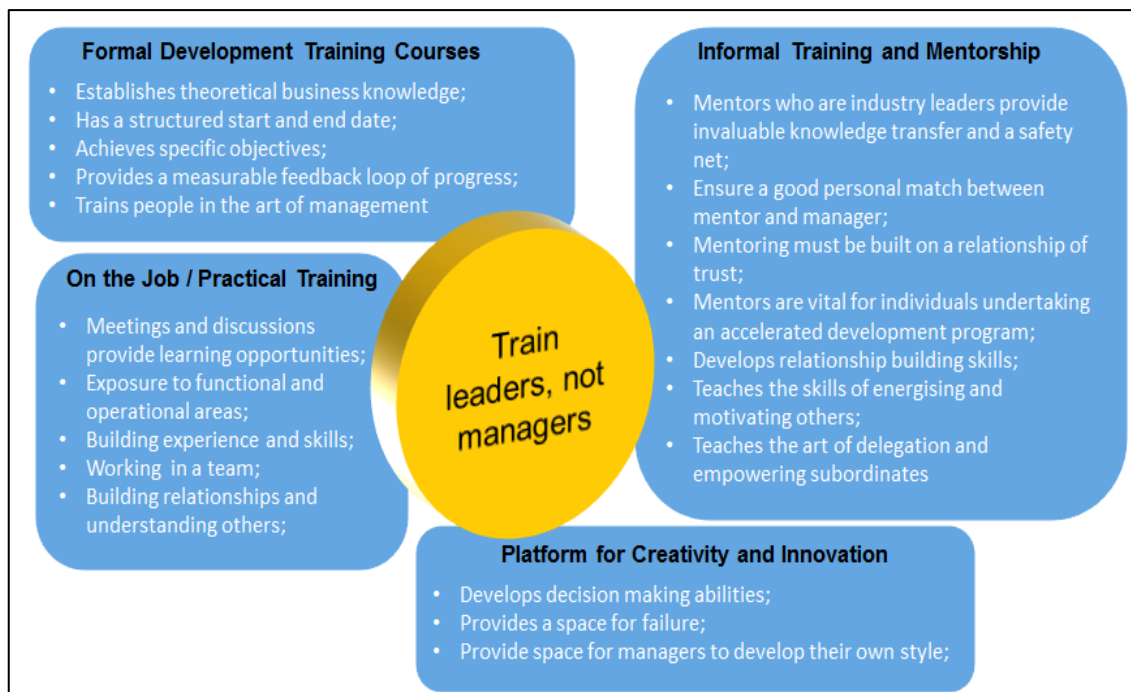
#### 6.4.4 Advice for Development Programme Initiatives

This theme really highlights the importance of selecting the right candidates for leadership development. Perhaps some of the criticism levelled at leadership development programmes is slightly misguided, as one must also consider the quality of the candidates attending the programme.

Figure 24 (chapter five) highlighted some of the criteria that emerged from the data, which should be considered when selecting potential candidates for development. There also seemed to be a fair amount of support for those candidates whose values are aligned with those of the organisation. A view that emerged was the need to identify leaders as opposed to managers, who should be earmarked for training.

Building on the participant's feedback, a programme of "proper training" or a consolidated training programme would include elements of formal training programmes, mentoring or coaching, practical skills development, and informal aspects as illustrated in figure 27.

**Figure 27: Consolidated Leadership Development**



#### **6.4.5 Conclusion: Leadership Development Programme Benefit**

Based on the findings it seems that coaching and mentoring are considered to be more beneficial than Leadership Development Programmes, when it comes to assisting with easing the transition process to General Management. This would align with the notion of focusing on *how* leaders are taught, as opposed to *what* they are taught (Hackman & Wageman, 2007).

#### **6.5 Research Question 4**

##### **What are the unique challenges of General Manager transitions for General Managers in South Africa?**

Whilst it appears there are 'universally generic' challenges of the General Manager transition, the research question aimed to gain some insight into whether there are any challenges that are unique to making the transition into General Management in South Africa, and if so, what these are.

The literature highlights many of the challenges that South Africa (SA) faces, some of which are unique to SA, whilst others are generic and exist across many countries. There does however appear to be a gap in the literature specifically about the challenges relating to General Manager transitions that are unique to SA. Hill (2006) provides some insights to the context to 'power'.

The findings of the quantitative and qualitative analysis illustrate that the sample members are divided in their opinions as to whether there are unique transition challenges or not. Both phases highlighted Black Economic Empowerment (BEE), culture and diversity, and transformation as the unique challenges, with the findings from the quantitative survey also highlighting Cadre deployment and skills shortages as an issue.

##### **6.5.1 South Africa is not Unique**

Nearly half (45%) of the survey respondents, and three of the 14 qualitative participants were of the opinion that there are no unique challenges. There is a view highlighting that we are part of a global environment and 'surprisingly synchronised'. Another view suggests the uniqueness relates more to 'generational gaps'.

### **6.5.2 Culture and Diversity**

This was highlighted as an issue unique to South African managers that are transitioning to General Management. The author, however, would suggest that many countries also have challenges associated with culture and diversity. Perhaps the more significant aspect is that relating to the concept of 'structure'.

There is support for the fact that the South African environment is more dynamic and less structured, thus enabling managers to use more initiative. However, it could be argued that this is applicable to transitions that occur with multiple levels of management transitions, and not just the General Manager level.

### **6.5.3 Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)**

There are two aspects that relate to this issue. The first impact on the newly promoted General Manager, is when the stakeholders around the General Manager consider their transition or promotion to be as a result of BEE. However, as per the previous theme, it could also be argued that this is applicable to multiple levels of management transitions, and not just the General Manager level.

The other aspect of BEE impacting the transition is the challenge associated with having to deal with a compliance issue. The manager may not have been prepared to deal with multiple compliancy issues, however it could be argued that this is part of the new responsibility that comes with the new role. The concept of being responsible for a 'compliance' issue is not new, and it is only the individual compliancy issue itself, that may be unique.

### **6.5.4 Transformation**

This theme seemed to be related to issues of race and promotion, and how to deal with the challenges this exerts on issues such as performance management. However, once again, many managers around the globe that are transitioning to General Management will face issues of dealing with different demographic factors. Perhaps, the only level of uniqueness is the extent to which these factors may differ from country to country.



It could be argued that the success of the transition to the role, and the effectiveness of the fulfilment of the role itself may be impacted by the expedient manner in which the imbalance of race representation across management is being addressed in South Africa. This may lead to managers being 'fast tracked through the ranks', without having had the opportunity to gain and develop the relevant skills and experience. This relates to the problem of managers being ill prepared, as highlighted in chapter one, and also aligns with the views of McCall Jr. (2004), on gaining appropriate experience.

#### **6.5.5 Conclusion: Unique Challenges to South African General Manager Transitions**

Whilst there is consensus that South Africa faces some unique challenges, particularly in the context of business, it does not seem clear that these are specifically related to the actual transition challenges of General Managers.

The challenges raised may well be valid challenges, however the data does not seem to provide convincing evidence that these challenges are applicable specifically the General Manager transitions. Many of the challenges highlighted could also be relevant to other levels of management and the transition thereto.

### **6.6 Conclusion of Results Discussion**

The findings from the research questions provided a good degree of insight into the objectives set out in chapter one. The findings highlighted that the transition to a General Manager role is overwhelming and the responsibility of the role is often underestimated. The themes that emerged from the findings appeared to be interrelated and should not be viewed in isolation. It was evident that there was a high degree of overlapping themes with the concepts of experience and relationships emerging as particularly strong themes.

Furthermore, as managers go through changes in their personal identities, associated with the transition in their role, they have to be mindful of the extent of this change, as not remaining true to oneself can create internal conflict and discontent. In order to successfully transition into and fulfil the General Manager role, managers must ensure they are accessible, visible and engage in effective individual communication.

Moreover there was significant emphasis on the need to develop relationships and engage with various stakeholders, with specific focus on the informal aspect. It was highlighted that this was an unexpected and time-intensive activity. A key aspect that emerged is that many of the learnings about the transition were gained through experience. Leadership Development Programmes may not necessarily be able to teach a manager about all the aspects of the transition but can play an important role in creating awareness of what to expect from the journey and what has to be achieved for others to follow one as a leader. The transition to the General Manager is aptly described by participant 10 as:

*“...it is a long hard transition, and most people can’t even see the need for it...”*

Figure 28 below provides a holistic perspective of the findings, in particularly those relating the research objectives of chapter one with the research questions in chapter three, and also illustrates the contrasting aspects that may ease or challenge the transition.

**Figure 28: Summary of Findings**



## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The transition into the role of a General Manager seems to be a journey fraught with many overwhelming challenges, as supported by the findings of the research. This chapter highlights the significant findings of the research, specifically in the context of the objectives outlined in chapter one. Furthermore, it provides recommendations for the various stakeholders on how to facilitate the transition to General Management, and lastly, it provides recommendations for future research.

### **7.2 Major Findings**

The findings highlighted that the transition is an overwhelming and profound one. It was noteworthy to contrast the views of the experienced managers who successfully made the transition with those of the newly appointed managers' views. The experienced managers highlighted a number of surprises associated with the transition and in particular, the extent to which they had to change and how those around them also changed. They emphasised the need to create a greater awareness of understanding what the transition would entail. Furthermore, they highlighted the significance that experience played, and there was substantial support for the fact that it was not necessarily something that could be taught. The newly appointed managers, on the other hand did not seem to view the significance and extent of the transition in the same light, which may possibly be due to a level of inexperience and naivety.

This was particularly relevant in the case of strategy, where the experienced managers had differing views on what strategy really entailed, and were further challenged to define the distinction between operational, tactical and strategic issues. The newly appointed managers however, seemed to think they had been able to shift to strategic perspectives quite easily. In the context of Leadership Development Programmes, it was highlighted that coaching and mentoring played a more valuable role in the transition than formal training.

The need to develop relationships across multiple levels and engage on an informal basis, in order to exert influence and lead effectively, was a theme that emerged strongly and received significant support from the participants. This applied to multiple

scenarios from interacting with staff on lower levels, peers, superiors, internal and external role players, as well as mentors. Moreover, it seemed to be a significant factor in aiding the transition to the General Management role, as well as being able to successfully fulfil the role.

Whilst it was not specifically researched, an aspect that was observed, which also relates to the literature, was the issue of leaders being born versus bred, with contrasting perspectives being provided by the various managers. There were those managers where it was clear from early on in their careers that they knew exactly where they wanted to be in terms of leadership and set specific objectives to get there, versus those who did not specifically set paths to management roles, but rather found themselves landing up in those positions. In short it could be described as those who 'wanted to be there from the start' to those who "found themselves landing up there", although it could be argued that both are equally effective.

### **7.3 Recommendations for Aspiring General Managers**

This research established that there are significant challenges associated with the transition to General Management, in particular, the need to let go of previous specialist tasks and activities in order take on different and more strategic responsibilities. Aspiring managers must accept that they will no longer be the specialists who know everything and they must surround themselves with the relevant people who have the appropriate skills and knowledge. This also extends to developing relationships with both mentors and subject matter experts, in order draw on their knowledge and advice when required.

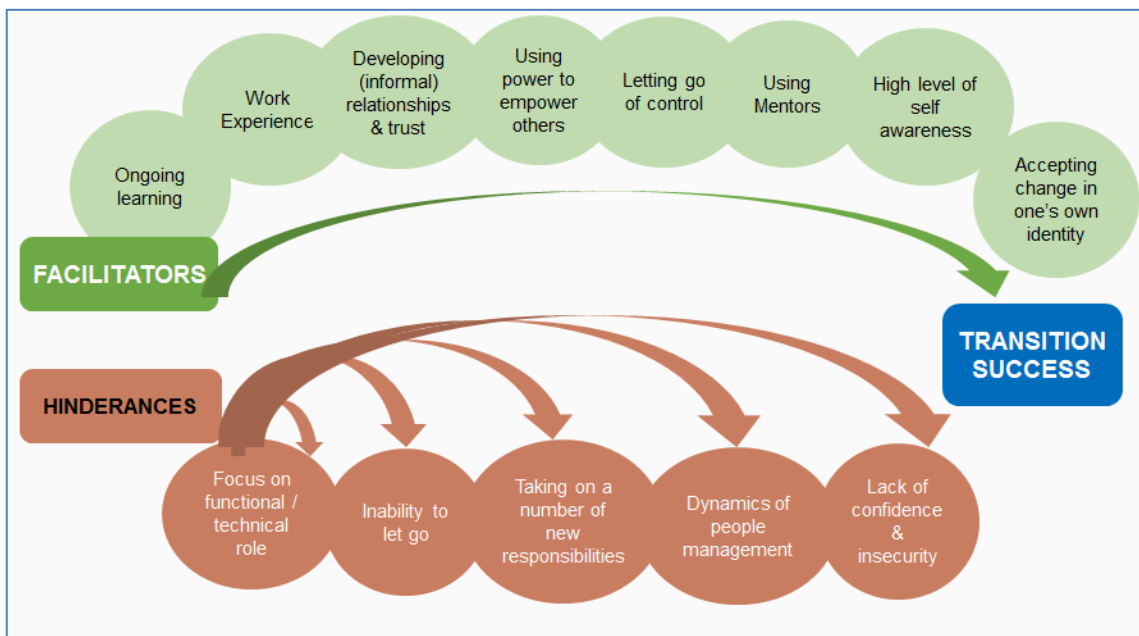
Part of this also requires a change in focus from 'doing to being' in order to achieve new objectives and responsibilities. Aspiring managers must utilise their newly acquired power wisely, and through letting go of control and empowering others, they will be able to influence others and lead effectively. They must however realise this comes with experience and that it takes conscious effort to learn how to develop their skills to influence others.

Aligned with this is the need to develop relationships, specifically on an informal level, as this is a key factor in being able to let go of previous responsibilities and develop trust in others in order to execute the role. Trust was well defined by a participant who described it as, "...when a ball is thrown to someone you know they will catch it". This

level of trust also applies to the managers trusting themselves, and a key aspect in developing the trust of others is being consistent and congruent. Developing relationships and trust may seem to be quite obvious and logical, however it must not be taken for granted, and requires a concerted effort.

Figure 29 below provides a framework for aspiring General Managers to consider when making the transition, and what aspects to focus on versus those to avoid.

**Figure 29: Recommendations for Aspiring General Managers**



Aspiring managers must accept they will need to change, and that those around them will also change, in some cases for the worse. It must be reiterated that managers must realise that the new role is no longer solely about them and is much more about other people. Associated with this need to change is the ability to maintain a high level of self- awareness. Whilst a successful transition to the new role will require a manager to depend on others for skills and information, they must still continue to educate themselves and the need for ongoing learning and staying informed is a critical element.

#### 7.4 Recommendations for Organisations

As part of succession planning and developing leadership pipelines, companies will generally continue to develop managers so that they can build a pool of future potential

leaders. They must however be cautioned not to rush the process and avoid fast tracking promotions, without allowing potential General Managers the necessary time to gain the relevant experience. This is particularly relevant to South Africa, where the need to achieve transformation and correct imbalances in terms of racial representation across management levels, may lead to early promotions.

Frameworks such as a Drotters leadership pipeline require managers to be promoted through the levels in a linear fashion and by skipping steps it may lead to managers being ill prepared as well as increasing the chances of failure and ineffective leadership, ultimately clogging the leadership pipeline.

Furthermore, the responsibility of the development of General Managers must not lie solely with the Human Capital departments, and requires a high level of support from the Senior Executives of companies. Moreover companies must ensure they provide adequate support structures for the managers in transitions, specifically in the form of mentorships.

## **7.5 Recommendations for Leadership Development Programmes**

The key recommendation for Leadership Development Programmes is to ensure that they create a high level of awareness for managers about what the actual transition process will entail, so that they are better prepared for the extent of change that they will go through. Furthermore, development must include elements of mentorships and must be an ongoing process. To support the development process, it must be emphasised that there is a high need for self-development on the part of the aspiring manager to ensure a higher level of leadership effectiveness.

## **7.6 Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was cross sectional in nature and as a result only focussed on the success of sample members at a particular point in time. In the case of the newly appointed managers who were part of the quantitative phase, they provided perspectives on what they thought the General Manager role would entail and did not place much significance on the extent of the transition. A qualitative study of aspiring General Managers may provide additional insights and perspective of their perceptions of the transition and what is required to effectively execute it. Furthermore, a longitudinal

study would provide greater insight into how effective and successful they would be at being able to transition and fulfil the General Manager role over an extended period of time.

The qualitative aspect of this research focussed on managers who had successfully overcome the challenges of the transition, and effectively fulfilled the role of a General Manager. Further research on managers who failed to make the transition successfully would provide a useful and alternative perspective, however researchers may be challenged to find a suitable sample.

Although there has been extensive research on the development of leaders over the last 100 years, the debate between leaders born versus bred still continues. Further research specifically into the impact of and effectiveness of leadership development on the transition into General Management would be valuable

## **7.7 Conclusion**

This research has shown that the transition to General Management is a profound one and has highlighted a number of significant challenges, however by creating an awareness of the challenges of the transition, through Leadership Development Programmes, and by enabling managers to gain appropriate experience, these challenges can be overcome. At the same time it must be recognised there is no single model or framework that will work for all managers and one must always consider the context in which a manager exists. What works for one manager or in one scenario, will not necessarily work for another manager or in a different scenario.

Whilst the last 100 years of research have provided great insights into leadership development, the business environment is a dynamic one and continually evolves. Even though the prevalence of technology continues to increase dramatically and in many cases, replaces the role of people, there will always be a need for good leaders.

The research highlighted the extent to which newly appointed managers underestimate the transition to General Management, which supports the need for ongoing development and education of managers to create a greater awareness of the significance of the transition to General Management.

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## Appendix A: Quantitative Survey Instrument

### Introduction

Thank-you for taking the time to complete this survey. This questionnaire forms part of an MBA research project that is studying the nature of the transition to General Management, and your input will be extremely valuable. Your participation is voluntary and will be anonymous.

### Survey Questions

1. What is your current role: *Please tick an option below*

Middle Management	
Senior Management	
General Management	

2. How important are the following topics / subject areas for you as a General Manager.

*Please rank in order of importance (1 = Highest to 7 = Lowest)*

<u>Topic / Subject Area</u>	<u>Rank</u>
Change Management	
Information Technology	
Strategy	
Finance	
Leadership	
Marketing	
Operations	

3. During your upward journey through the organisation, where have you learned the skills and knowledge needed to become a General Manager:

*Please 'weight' the items below and ensure they collectively add up to 100%*

	<u>Weighting</u>
Work Experience	
Relationships (e.g mentors, other colleagues, team members)	
Formal training and development	
<u>Total</u>	100%

4. Have you had a mentor during your career so far, who has helped you?

Yes		or	No	
-----	--	----	----	--

5. If Yes, how important was having a mentor in terms of assisting you to make the transition to General Management. *Please select one option below:*

Very important	
Fairly important	
Not important	

6. If you could earn the same amount of money as a specialist / professional, instead of moving into a General Management role, what would you choose?

Would remain a specialist / professional	
<b>Or</b>	
Would still prefer to move into a General Management role	

7. What is the key motivation for you to move into a General Management role?  
Please rank in order of importance (1 = Highest to 6 = Lowest)

	Rank
Financial rewards	
Job satisfaction	
Recognition	
Power and Influence	
Career Growth	
Job Security	

If other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

8. What has helped you / will help you to make the transition into a General Management role.  
Please rate each of the items below on the following scale:

	Very Helpful	Quite Helpful	Not sure	Slightly helpful	Not helpful
Coaching					
Skills development					
Behaviour & Attitude					
Training & Development					
Gaining relevant Experience					
Ability to adapt					
Confidence & self-awareness					

If other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

9. To what extent has your company assisted you in your development into a Senior Management role, in the following areas:

	Good Extent	Reasonable Extent	Minimal Extent	Not at all
Training programmes				
Executive coaching				
Support from your Senior / Executive Manager				



10. As you move from a technical / specialist / functional role to a General Management role, have you been successful in the following areas:

	<i>Very successful</i>	<i>Fairly successful</i>	<i>Not sure</i>	<i>Fairly unsuccessful</i>	<i>Very unsuccessful</i>
Strategic thinking					
Delegation					
Developing new behaviours					
Letting go of previous responsibilities					

11. Are there any challenges in respect of the transition to General Management that you think are unique to South Africa.

Yes  or  No

If Yes, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

**THANK YOU.**

## **Appendix B: Email: Introductory note requesting an interview**

Dear (Participant Name)

As part of my Thesis for my MBA (Gordon Institute of Business Science), I am researching the transition leaders need to make, with specific focus on the transition into General Management Roles, including the shift from operational to strategic perspectives. I intend interviewing a number of senior Business Leaders to get a better understanding of their respective journeys, and the outcome of this is intended to be beneficial to businesses, specifically SA companies, as it will hopefully provide some additional insight into building future leadership pipelines and succession plans.

I would be grateful if you would be willing to be interviewed by me. The interview shouldn't take longer than one hour and I would appreciate if you would be able to confirm if you would be available during the period X – X July 2014, or at a time that is convenient for you.

Thank you for considering my request

### **Thank You E-mail**

Dear (Participant Name)

Thank you very much for making the time available for me to interview you and for openly sharing your experiences with me.

The insights I gained from our discussion will be invaluable in assisting me with my Thesis.

## Appendix C: Qualitative Interview Guideline

### Introduction

I am trying to understand the transition leaders go through as they move into General Management roles. The GM Role is all encompassing and is the stepping stone into the CEO Role. It provides a pool of candidates for the CEO Role. Through the interview process I hope to unpack the various journeys of the leaders, better understand the challenges and things they did to make the transition successfully and effectively. I would like to know more in terms of your development, and your views on development of General Managers.

1. What is your current role?
2. How long have you been fulfilling the role?
3. Were you promoted into the role from within or did you join from an external organisation?
4. Could you tell me about your journey as you moved into a GM / or similar level role, and more specifically what mostly **helped / facilitated** your transition?
  - i. Skills
  - ii. Knowledge
  - iii. Qualities
5. What is your functional background? Did it help you make the transition to GM?
6. In your journey what mostly **hindered / inhibited your** transition?
7. What were your **major challenges** in making the transition?
8. How did you **overcome the stumbling blocks** / challenges of your transition?
9. What **surprised you** the most (you had not anticipated)?
10. Did you find you needed to shift from a Functional/operational perspective to more of a **strategic shift - how** did you do this?
11. Did you think this included a shift from an internal focus to an **outward focus**?
12. To what extent did you experience any of the following
  - a. An transformation / **loss in your ID** (U Process) - insecurities?
  - b. The need to 'Unlearn' certain things (Kolb Theory)?
  - c. Letting go of previous skills / responsibilities / behaviours?
13. Did you receive any **coaching** prior to this transition? If so please elaborate
14. Did this **coaching help you** prepare for the transition?
15. Explore development (Leadership)
  - a. What **development /assistance** did you receive (company or external)?

- b. To what extent did this development help / prepare you?
16. What **advice** would you give companies in respect of leadership development programmes they should implement to prepare leaders for the transition?
17. Do you think there are **adequate development programmes** in place for GM's and people making the transition to the role - *Quantity & Quality*?
18. GM includes elements of the following:  
(What combination of the three would you include)?
- a. Engaging
  - b. Vision
  - c. Leadership
19. Do you think there are any challenges that are **unique to SA** or generic?
20. Are there any **other main points** I should consider?

## Appendix D: List of Interviewees

The order of the list below is not connected with the order in which the participants were numbered. The content analysis process numbered the participants on a random basis to ensure objectivity, and prevent the quotations from being directly connected to any of the interviewees below. This was done to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the information provided in the interviews.

	= Pilot Tests
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Name	Designation	Company	Industry
Braam Kriek	Managing Director - Group Subsidiary	Raubex Group Subsidiary	Construction
Fabian Manual	General Manager - Regional Branch	Finbond Regional Branch	Banking & Finance
Steve Dalgarno	Managing Director	Strategix	ICT
Teryl Schroenn	Chief Executive Officer	Accsys	IT - Payroll
John Wentzel	Chief Executive Officer	Drake & Skull	Facilities Management
Jabu Mahanga	Group Human Capital Director	Primedia	Media
Anthony Diepenbroek	Chief Executive Officer	Zendai Heartland SA	Property
Kuben Pillay	Executive Chairman	Primedia	Media
Stephen Connelly	Chief Executive Officer	Hudaco Industries Limited	Import & Distribution
Clive Smith	Group CEO	Tsebo Outsourcing Group	Facilities Solutions (Outsourcing)
Dirk Goedhart	Vice President Freight Forwarding	UTI	Logistics
Paulo Cavalieri	Chief Executive Officer	Etana / Hollard	Insurance
Brand Pretorius	Ex CEO	McCarthy Limited	Training
Thomas Cronje	Head ICT	Special Investigating Unit	Government & Public Defence
Chris Jardine	Chief Executive Officer	Tsebo Catering Solutions	Catering Solutions
Yolisa Phahle	Chief Executive Officer	Mnet	Broadcasting & Media
Jane Canny	Chief Operating Officer	BCX	ICT Services Provider
Grant Pattison	Ex CEO	Massmart	Retail
Roger Jardine	Group Chief Executive Officer	Primedia	Media

## Appendix E: Letter of Consent

As part of my MBA Research Dissertation at The Gordon Institute of Business (University of Pretoria), I am conducting research into the transitions to the General Management role. The intention is to gain deeper insights into how leaders made the transition and what they specifically did to overcome the challenges and make the transition successful and effective.

The interview is expected to last about an hour, and will help us understand how leaders made the journey, and what their advice would be to General Managers and companies in respect of development programmes.

**Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without penalty.**

The interviews will be recorded and will be professionally transcribed. All data will be kept confidential. Anonymous quotations may be used in the Thesis.

If you have any concerns, please contact me or my supervisor. Our details are provided below.

<u>Researcher</u>	Stephen Mallaby
Email	<a href="mailto:sjmallaby@gmail.com">sjmallaby@gmail.com</a>
Phone	083 635 5838

<u>Researcher Supervisor</u>	Prof Karl Hofmeyr
Email	<a href="mailto:hofmeyrk@gibs.co.za">hofmeyrk@gibs.co.za</a>
Phone	(011) 771 4000

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F: Independent Analysis Letter of Confirmation

### Independent Analysis Letter of Confirmation

PO Box 121  
Ferndale  
2160  
Cell: 083 321 2251  
Fax: 086 676 3845  
E-mail: [sandra\\_reinbrech@librasquared.com](mailto:sandra_reinbrech@librasquared.com)  
Website: [www.LibraSquared.com](http://www.LibraSquared.com)



November 2014

Dear Mr Mallaby

#### INDEPENDANT EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

This serves to confirm that I have read, evaluated and analysed the transcripts of interviews given to me in the context of your research paper titled "The Transition to General Management".

I confirm that I have independently analysed 14 unedited transcripts (raw data) of interviews conducted by yourself, with various prominent business leaders in South Africa. I confirm that 19 transcriptions of interviews were received but due to the fact that saturation of data was apparent after 10 had been analysed, it was jointly decided that only 14 interviews would be used for analysis.

I have read each interview in the context of finding opinions expressed by each interviewee on the nature of the transition to general management, with specific reference to the research as outlined in your research project. I have coded the transcripts in Microsoft Excel and through discussions with yourself, we identified relevant themes to answer your research questions.

I trust that you will find my analysis and comments helpful and look forward to reading your findings and research paper.]

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Reinbrech'.

Sandra Reinbrech

## Appendix G: Consistency Matrix

### TITLE: The Transition to General Management

QUESTIONS	LITERATURE REVIEW	DATA COLLECTION TOOL	ANALYSIS
<b>Research Question 1</b> Are General Managers aware of what they must 'let go' of and the identity transformation process they will go through	Day & Harrison, (2007) Ibarra et al. (2008) Watkins (2012) Freedman (2005) Warner & Witzel (1997)	<u>Qualitative Methodology</u> Semi-structured interview with C-Level Executive	Excel and external research analyst
<b>Research Question 2</b> Are General Managers able to make the shift from functional and operational to strategic perspectives	Goldman, (2010) Hiller, (2007) Boal, (2000) Freedman (2011)	<u>Qualitative Methodology</u> Semi-structured interview with C-Level Executive  <u>Quantitative Methodology</u> Survey questionnaire	Excel and external research analyst  Excel
<b>Research Question 3</b> Do Leadership Development Programmes ease the transition process General Managers must endure and are the programmes offered to General Managers beneficial?	Avolio et al., (2009) McCall, (2004) Hiller, (2010) Day, (2007) Goldman, Cahill (2009) Lord & Hall (2005)	<u>Qualitative Methodology</u> Semi-structured interview with C-Level Executive	Excel and external research analyst
<b>Research Question 4</b> What are the unique challenges of General Manager transitions for General Managers in SA	Hill (2006)	<u>Qualitative Methodology</u> Semi-structured interview with C-Level Executive  <u>Quantitative Methodology</u> Survey questionnaire	Excel and external research analyst  Excel