Building, sustaining and dissolving large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams

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Building, sustaining and dissolving large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams

by

Nicholas B. Griffin

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of PhD of Loughborough University

30 September 1998

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Abstract

Recent studies into the political aspects of large scale change in organisations have highlighted the need for a deeper understanding of managerial elites in the change context. The extant literature is guilty of conflating large scale change into a single process, and commentators describe and prescribe political processes and behaviours without differentiating between the proposal and implementation stages of change. The research presented in this thesis provides insights into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings in the UK private sector.

Data was collected and analysed using a qualitative methodology. An elite style semi-structured interview schedule was used with a research sample of fifty members of top management teams drawn from across fourteen organisations in thirteen industries.

The findings suggest that large scale change proposal coalitions follow a five phase lifecycle: initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer. Within these phases coalition leaders tend to perform three primary roles: builder, sustainer and dissolver. The sequence of gathering support to build a coalition is heavily influenced by the hierarchical position of the builder, and the behaviours and tactics used are contingent upon whether an individual is engaged in an upward inter-tier, intra-tier, or downward inter-tier support gathering exercise.

Once a large scale change proposal coalition had been established the leadership role changes from building to sustaining. Four principal types of coalition are identified: aligned coalitions, unaligned coalitions, unfocused coalitions and fragmented coalitions. Different leadership skills are required for each.

Once a proposal has been approved or rejected the evidence suggests that coalitions should be dissolved as rapidly as practically possible using one or a combination of three dissolution techniques.

These findings have important implications for academic enquiry and practitioners.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Exhibits</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part one - Literature review and methodology

### Literature review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 1 - The changing role of the top management team</th>
<th>17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Introduction</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Management research perspectives on organisational change: a brief overview</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Stress fractures in the rational-linear approach to change</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Organisations as political arenas and the emergence of politics in top management teams</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The changing role of the top management team</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conclusion</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 2 - Intraorganisational power: nature and sources</th>
<th>48</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Introduction</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Nature and sources of Intraorganisational power</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The need for synthesis and context</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3</td>
<td>Intraorganisational politics: meanings, inevitability, behaviours and tactics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conclusion</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Introduction</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Intraorganisational politics: meanings and inevitability</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Large scale change proposal coalitions: an absence of empirical enquiry</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lines of enquiry for the empirical study</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conclusion</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Methodology**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4</th>
<th>Methodology design and construction: overcoming the problem of investigating political behaviour in top management teams</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Introduction</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The problem of investigating political behaviour in top management teams</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data sources</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The pilot study</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Selecting participants and managing identity to establish access</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conducting the interview: parameters and permissive atmospheres</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Data analysis</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Following up 'hot leads': rich interviews revisited</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Assessing the levels of participant candour</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Post interview correspondence</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Conclusions, reflections and lessons learned</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Part two - Results, discussion and recommendations

Participant organisations and interviewees

- Researcher's note on anonymity 153
- The organisations 154
- The interviewees 155

Results

Chapter 5 - Life-cycle phases and leadership roles in large scale change proposal coalitions 157

- Introduction 157
- A five phase life-cycle model 158
- Three coalition leadership roles 172
- Conclusion 181

Chapter 6 - Building large scale change proposal coalitions 183

- Introduction 183
- The concept of tiers in top management teams 183
- The coalition building process: deciding who to approach for support first, second, third... 184
- Inter-tier and intra-tier coalition building 200
- Conclusion 218

Chapter 7 - Sustaining large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams: leadership behaviours and tactics in four coalition types 221

- Introduction 221
- Four large scale change proposal coalition types 221
- Behaviours and tactics in aligned coalitions 223
## List of Exhibits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exhibit</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 1.1</td>
<td>Schaffer and Thomson's Activity-centred programs versus Results-driven programs</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 1.2</td>
<td>Dunphy and Stace's typology of change strategies and conditions for use</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 1.3</td>
<td>Buchanan and Boddy's four-quadrant model of organisational change</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 1.4</td>
<td>Mintzberg's four types of political arena</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 2.1</td>
<td>Allen et al's responses from effective political actors in the position of chief executive officer</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 2.2</td>
<td>Sources of power available to actors in organisations</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 3.1</td>
<td>Mixed meanings: alternative definitions of intraorganisational politics</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 3.2</td>
<td>Kanter's “disarming tactics”</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 4.1</td>
<td>Interviewee responses to questions on large scale organisational change and political behaviour</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 4.2</td>
<td>Research lines of enquiry</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 4.3</td>
<td>Research sample established using professional and personal ties</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 4.4</td>
<td>Sensitive off-the-record accounts</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 4.5</td>
<td>The distribution frequency of participant interview duration</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 5.1</td>
<td>The five life-cycle phases of a large scale change proposal coalition</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 5.2</td>
<td>Five life-cycle phases and three leadership roles in large scale change proposal coalitions</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 6.1</td>
<td>Four hierarchy-based large scale change proposal coalition building approaches</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 6.2</td>
<td>Support selection criteria definitions</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 7.1</td>
<td>Leadership issues in sustaining large scale change proposal coalitions</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 7.2</td>
<td>Aligned coalitions as optimal configurations</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 7.3</td>
<td>Principal leadership behaviours and tactics used in four coalition types</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 8.1</td>
<td>Reasons for dissolving large scale change proposal coalitions</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 8.2</td>
<td>Respondent skill development due to working in large scale change proposal coalitions</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 9.1</td>
<td>Four hierarchy based large scale change proposal coalition approaches</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exhibit 9.2</td>
<td>Aligned coalitions as optimal configurations</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

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Introduction

"The study of managerial elites is one of the most important, yet neglected areas of social science research." (Pettigrew, 1992, p.163)

Introduction

Academic enquiry into the large scale change process is currently failing on two key fronts. Firstly, an influential section of the extant literature is culpable of presenting change as a rational-linear process. Influenced by the humanistic objectives of the Organisational Development school of management, many writers fail to acknowledge the inherently political nature of change, and of those that do admit to its presence, a significant majority view it as a negative characteristic which should be eliminated. Politics is portrayed as an unfortunate and undesirable feature which inhibits effective change. This is a naïve and dangerous assumption which is leading researchers and practitioners in the wrong direction. Large scale change is a political process, characterised by the competing and often conflicting agendas of top management team members who attempt to influence the strategic direction of the organisation, whilst protecting and promoting their own self-interests. Political behaviour in large scale change initiatives is inevitable and if we are to deepen our understanding of the change context and produce robust and insightful descriptions, we must pursue this more realistic and pragmatic approach.

The second reason why academic enquiry into large scale change is failing is because in general it treats change as a single homogenous process. There is little acceptance that it is comprised of several stages or sub-processes. There is a paucity of empirically generated literature into the first of these, the proposal stage, when ideas for change are formed and designed. There is no empirically generated literature on the role of coalitions in the top management team during the proposal stage. The nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions have not been investigated and neither have the behaviours and tactics of those who lead them. That this crucial direction setting element of the change context has not been explored is a serious gap in our understanding of large scale change and managerial elites. This thesis will confront
the two failings by engaging the extant literature and reporting the findings of an empirical study which provides a pioneering and elucidatory insight into large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams.

The objectives of the thesis are to investigate the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviour and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings in the UK private sector for the purpose of informing academic enquiry and practitioners.

The introduction to the thesis is divided into four sections. The first section explains the background to the thesis and how the researcher came to investigate large scale change proposal coalitions. The second section highlights the key failings of the extant change literature and makes clear why the research presented in this thesis is necessary to deepen our understanding of managerial elites in the change context. In this regard it lays the foundations for a detailed engagement with the literature in chapters one, two and three. The third section headlines the key contributions of the research. The fourth and final section presents the thesis structure.

**Background to the thesis**

In 1990 the researcher was working at BP. The company operated in over seventy countries, employed over one hundred and fifteen thousand people, made profits that could be measured in billions of dollars and enjoyed a market capitalisation that ranked it in the top twenty largest industrial corporations in the world. In early 1990 BP embarked on a well publicised large scale change initiative that would see it change strategic direction, sell off two-thirds of its businesses, make half of its workforce redundant, reduce operating costs to match industry leadership standards, shift its culture from bureaucratic to entrepreneurial, post record losses and then record profits and culminate in August 1998 with the announcement of a merger with Amoco that will take it into the premier league of oil and gas companies and enable it to compete head on with the two giants Shell and Exxon for the most attractive exploration sites around the world.

During my time with the company I was involved intimately with the large scale change initiative. I had been educated at university in large scale change management so I knew what to expect. Lots of charts laying out milestones and activities, supported by
mandatory behaviour changing workshops and incentives to change. There was an abundance of literature explaining the rationale for change and the consequences of not doing so. There were helplines and chatlines inviting me to share my concerns and bulletin boards to update me and the rest of the organisation on progress. If ever a change programme had been thought through and rolled out smoothly this was it.

However, as the change began to unfold I observed that we were not following the schedule on the wall charts. Deadlines were missed, activities were revisited, and the process became political. Meetings started to take place behind closed doors as individuals and groups attempted to exert influence over the change process. Temporary alliances were formed, resources were traded, promises were made and threats were issued. Some people enjoyed significant increases in their roles and responsibilities. Others suffered a loss of status or were made redundant. Much of this failed to tally with my textbooks or the internal literature. BP was definitely out of process.

Through discussions with senior management it became clear that the battle to determine the strategic future of the firm had involved a coalition within the top management team designing a change proposal and presenting it to the key decision makers. The proposal process had apparently been characterised by a high level of political backstaging and support winning exercises which used a range of behaviours and tactics from rapid promotion to dismissal. This was not the dry, rational-linear process I had been taught. Top management team members assured me that political behaviour was an integral and normal part of large scale change. The wall charts were for public consumption only.

Excited by this finding I returned to the literature and found one or two dissenting voices who described change in a manner I had observed. However, I was unable to uncover any literature which reported on large scale change proposal coalitions. I had stumbled on an unexplored area of the change context. Ambitions to enter management consulting were placed on hold so I could investigate whether this was a peculiarity to BP or a wider occurrence. The results of that research are presented here in this thesis. I now lead large scale change projects in a range of industries, both at the proposal and implementation stages, for KPMG in our work with national and multi-national clients. This research has proved highly valuable and has been built into our approach and methodologies. The findings of this study have been confirmed many times over in my work, yet at the time of writing no other empirical research has reported in this area.
Until this problem is addressed our understanding of managerial elites in the change context is at best partial.

**Failings in the extant literature**

An analysis of the change management literature clearly identifies the heavy influence of the Organisational Development (OD) school of management. Empirical researchers and practitioners alike could be forgiven for believing that change is an orderly, processual and rational affair. We have been informed that opposition and resistance can be avoided or mitigated by ensuring participatory decision making throughout all stages of the change process (for example, Beckhard, 1967; Bennis, 1965; Blake and Mouton, 1964, 1968; Lewin, 1967 and Schein, 1965). Furthermore, adopting an open and honest approach to change meant that politics, which is inherently undesirable, were unlikely to enter the process. We know from more recent research that this approach paints an idealistic and unrealistic picture of change which is likely to produce frustration and dissatisfaction for both the empirical researcher and practitioner.

Concern with the rational-linear model of change has prompted the emergence of a power-oriented behaviour based approach that acknowledges the validity and relevance of political tactics ranging from collaboration to coercion to achieve desired outcomes. Management writers such as Buchanan and Boddy (1992), Egan (1994), Kanter (1983) Pettigrew (1985, 1987, 1992) and Pfeffer (1981, 1992) are a few of those who have been at the forefront of promoting these arguments. Pettigrew (1985) criticised OD advocates for adopting a “truth, trust, love and collaboration” approach to change. He encouraged practitioners and academics to focus instead on understanding the “political and cultural mosaic” of behaviours and processes which constitute large scale change. The increasing complexity and magnitude of large scale change and the increasing frequency with which organisations have to conduct large scale change programmes requires a resilient and pragmatic framework within which to plan and act. The contemporary environment is characterised by the globalisation of competition, convergence between industries, large scale mergers and acquisitions and new technologies such as the Internet which are changing the competitive dynamic. Organisations need to constantly identify opportunities which enable them to sustain and improve their competitiveness. The rational-linear approach is too mechanistic and simplistic. Context specific approaches to change which seek to match the scale and complexity of change with style of change
management (Dunphy and Stace, 1990) or the pace of change against the centrality or peripherality of change to the primary task of the organisation (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992) are a step in the right direction. They admit the relevance and effectiveness of political behaviours in certain situations. For example, if the fit between the organisation and its environment is incongruent and the importance, magnitude, complexity or urgency of the change is great then directive and coercive methods are an important influencing tactic for those tasked with design or implementation. The weaknesses of the rational-linear approach to change and the need for a power-oriented behaviour based alternative is debated more fully in chapter one of the literature review.

Large scale change often impacts the structure of the organisation with the result that some individuals will increase their influence due to control over additional resources, new roles and responsibilities, or access to important information. There are many more reasons than these few examples. At the same time other individuals will lose out, which can cause resistance and opposition as those impacted attempt to protect or promote their self-interests. This politicking process which involves lobbying and support gathering has been found to take place largely backstage (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992). Within the top management team the process can be intense as members jockey for position and influence. If we accept this description then we must also accept that organisations are political arenas and politics emerge in top management teams since it is the key decision makers who are able to influence the strategic direction of the organisation and the design of the change to be implemented.

Both Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) and Allison (1971) have argued that strategic decision making is political because it involves decisions with uncertain outcomes and parties who resolve conflict through the exercise of power. Others have contended that organisations are comprised of constantly shifting groups which seek to impose their will and shape the strategic direction (Burns, 1961; Butler, 1971; and Frost and Hayes, 1977). There are also several theories of why politics emerge in top management teams. One view is that the decentralisation of power within the team encourages conflict and competition. On the other hand it has been argued that the centralisation of power in the hands of the chief executive officer causes politics because it forces members to engage in insurgency behaviours in an attempt to increase their influence. Another view is that a self-serving personality generates political behaviour in colleagues. If it is the chief executive who demonstrates a propensity for political behaviour then it legitimises the use of similar actions by the rest of the top management team. A fourth suggestion is
that conflict causes politics. This may be between employees or it may evolve around issues and events. Arguably, the more radical the change being proposed, the greater the likelihood of top management team members engaging in political behaviour. However, for top management team members to engage meaningfully in political behaviour they must first understand the sources of power in organisations.

The literature on intraorganisational power is disappointingly antagonistic. Commentators tend to write from one of three perspectives which gives the impression of mutual exclusivity and fragmentation. Power is portrayed as being either a personal, structural or situational construct. These are dangerous and misleading assumptions. In reality it is all three of these but there is a tension between the schools which manifests itself in a simplistic ‘either-or’ debate and serves to cloud our understanding of the phenomenon rather than elucidate it. Supporters of the personal view believe that power is either an attribute of the individual or it exists in the interpersonal relationship between two people. It is thought of as a human phenomenon. The position is described best by Berle (1969, p.60) who stated, “Power...does not exist without a holder.” Exponents of the structural school criticise the personal power supporters for ignoring the influence of structure. For them structure is the “ultimate constraint on behaviour” (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993). Roles and responsibilities are structural endowments and network centrality, hierarchical authority and control over resources and work design are just a few of the sources of structural power. Advocates of the situational school suggest that power is a pervasive phenomenon which resides in the internal and external environment of the organisation. Individuals or organisational sub-units which can exert control over the key interdependencies and manage the critical uncertainties will acquire power (Hickson et al, 1971; Hinings et al, 1974; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977). We engage with this debate more fully in chapter two of the literature review.

Power is characterised by its tendency to erode. The amount of power that exists in a particular context or organisational setting is not fixed, and the individuals who hold it will witness it ebbing and flowing due to personal, structural and situational events. For instance a general manager could experience a deterioration in their relationship with the chief executive officer and suffer a reduction in the level of power they enjoy. Alternatively, a large scale change initiative might transfer a successful sales force to the control of the marketing director, resulting in an increase in their power to influence the strategy formulation process. Researchers and practitioners alike will understand the large scale change process better if they attempt to synthesise the three schools.
The literature on the political behaviours and tactics of large scale change proposal coalitions is non-existent. This is the point of departure for chapter three. Instead, we are left to consider the descriptions and prescriptions of those who have conflated change into a single homogenous process, or alternatively written with implementation in mind. This is a serious gap which this thesis will address. The rich descriptions of the behaviours and tactics used by large scale change proposal coalition leaders are the first to be reported, and as such constitute a pioneering breakthrough. They represent a beach-head from which others can conduct research to challenge and build on the findings.

At this juncture it is useful to note that the unit of analysis is the coalition leader in the context of a large scale change proposal coalition. It is clear from the discussion immediately above and the research objectives that our interest is on the behaviours and tactics used by large scale change proposal coalition leaders in their interactions with other members of the coalition. However, investigating behaviours without a context is of limited value, so we will also describe the nature, characteristics of the large scale change proposal coalition process in order to establish a context within which to create relevance and meaning.

Recent commentary on the role of the top management team has suggested that one of its primary tasks is to design and lead the implementation of large scale change. Bennis (1997, p.150) has asserted that top management team members need to ensure "they are constantly reinventing the organisation." In a similar vein Pascale (1989) remarked that the highly competitive and uncertain environment which organisations currently find themselves in is forcing senior management to identify and develop transformational options for change rather than incremental improvements. However, the increasing frequency, magnitude and complexity of change is too demanding a task for just one individual —the chief executive officer— to take on. What is required is for a member of the top management team to take an idea and build a large scale change proposal coalition comprising executive colleagues who will design and submit the proposal for approval by the appropriate decision makers in the top management team. This notion has recently found support in the literature. Kotter (1996) asserted:

"No-one individual, even a monarch-like CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of..."
change projects, and anchor new approaches deep in the organisation’s culture...A strong guiding coalition is always needed—one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objective. Building a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any effort to restructure, engineer, or retool a set of strategies.” (Kotter, 1996, p.51-52)

However, his arguments are based on casual observation or ancillary findings from previous initiatives rather than empirical research designed to investigate large scale change proposal coalitions. Unfortunately, he is not able to describe the coalition building process. There is no empirically generated literature on the large scale change proposal coalition building process in top management teams and this is a serious gap. It is not known who the coalition builder approaches for support or in what order they recruit members. Neither is it known what behaviours and tactics a coalition builder uses and whether or not they vary depending on the hierarchical positions of the builder and the target. Indeed the whole subject of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams is empirically unexplored. We know nothing about their nature and characteristics, if there are different types, whether they evolve over time and what happens to them when they have submitted their proposal. Similarly there is no empirical research on the behaviours and tactics of large scale change proposal coalition leaders. We do not know what behaviours and tactics are used to build the coalition, whether different behaviours are used with different people, or at different stages of evolution or in different types of coalition. These are important issues which need to be investigated. They will be researched and reported in this thesis. Given the management literatures’ fascination with change, managerial elites, decision making processes and the political behaviour of individuals, it is surprising that large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams have not been empirically studied before now. The literature on coalitions that does exist is largely theoretically derived from laboratory experiments conducted using employees outside the top management team. It is overly rational and focuses rather simplistically and in a one-sided manner on the reasons why an individual would join a coalition. It does not consider any of the questions presented above. The empirical work on coalitions in top management teams does not include large scale change proposal coalitions. The findings of the research reported in this thesis conflict with influential writings, such as Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) who asserted that temporary coalitions do not form in top management teams which operate in “high-velocity” environments. The top management teams studied here which could
be described as operating in rapidly changing environments did establish coalitions for the purpose of proposing large scale change.

One of the reasons why there is such a paucity of empirical research is the difficulty of gaining access to managerial elites. Although managerial elites is a value laden term for scholars, it is used pragmatically in this thesis to refer to members of the top management team in their role as the governing body of the organisation. They are expected, by virtue of their position in the hierarchy, to shape the strategic direction of the organisation. Others outside the top management team may contribute but it is not their primary role. Pettigrew (1992) has commented that gaining access is a complicated and frustrating process, made worse by the problem of identifying who in the top management team is a key decision maker. Titles can mislead the researcher into believing an individual is more influential than they really are. The situation is compounded yet further by the subject matter. Although the use of political behaviour is pervasive in organisations, it can be difficult to convince a member of a top management team to agree to talk about it, and even if they do, to then elicit rich, candid data that provides insightful descriptions. Therefore, an innovative research methodology is required. It may be that poor design is partly to blame for the lack of reporting. Classical structured interviews are unlikely to generate rich data because the interviewer is not supposed to allow or follow the interviewee if they go off on an unexpected but interesting tangent. There is also the danger that an unwillingness to deviate will cause the interviewer to disengage and contribute only poor quality data. Postal questionnaires are also unlikely to produce rich data because there is no opportunity to ask immediate supplementary questions or pursue an interesting line of enquiry which the interviewee raises. Direct observation techniques are highly likely to produce unrepresentative behaviour, thereby destroying the usefulness of the findings. What is required is a “permissive atmosphere” (Blum, 1952) which encourages candid reporting of the political behaviours and tactics used in large scale change proposal coalitions. This requires the establishment of trust which can be achieved, in part, by exchanging stories of political activity which legitimise the interviewee’s own actions. An elite style semi-structured interview approach in which both parties engage in an “interview-conversation” (Blum, 1952) rather than the “rat-a-tat-tat” (Dexter, 1970) questioning style of the structured interview is conducive to creating a climate of trust. The elite style interview is characterised by the presentation of the situation as a discussion between near equals, with the researcher just below the respondent so as to encourage the latter to impart their knowledge.
Professional or personal ties are highly useful when attempting to interview managerial elites about sensitive topics such as political behaviour. The researcher can generate a sample by providing in-situ or well connected contacts with a precise specification of the desired interviewee and asking them to effect an introduction. If the intermediary enjoys the trust of the interview candidate then this is a major advantage. Key decision makers can be identified by asking the intermediary—or the chief executive officer once they have been interviewed— who is involved in setting the strategic direction of the organisation and who has played an influential role in previous large scale change initiatives. Titles such as director and general manager are used only as guides. As each interview takes place and the participant finds the encounter stimulating and cathartic they can be asked to introduce the researcher to another key decision maker in the top management team or indeed, one in another organisation. This technique is known as snowball sampling. The researcher enters each interview with a degree of credibility and trust awarded by the previous participant. In a research setting where a number of interviewees are set up and conducted this way the level of trust increases cumulatively and with it the richness and candour of the responses. In summary this was the innovative methodology design employed to construct a sample of fifty members of top management teams drawn from fourteen organisations in thirteen industries in the UK private sector for the empirical study reported in this thesis. As the results will convey, this approach produced deep insights into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders. Neither of these areas of the change context have been explored by empirical researchers.

The key contributions of this research

This thesis provides a critical evaluation of the extant literature. The study engages with the literature and contributes to the debate by reporting the findings of the empirical research and assessing the implications for academic enquiry and practitioners. The key findings of the study are:

- Large scale change proposal coalitions follow a five phase life-cycle model: initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer,
- Coalition leaders adopt three primary and sequential roles: building, sustaining and dissolving,
Coalition leaders adopt one of four hierarchy-based coalition building approaches,

Coalition building processes, behaviours and tactics vary depending on whether they are upward inter-tier, intra-tier or downward inter-tier,

Four types of large scale change proposal coalition exist: aligned, unaligned, unfocused and fragmented. Each exhibiting their own nature and characteristics, and requiring different coalition leader behaviours and tactics,

Large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved as quickly as practically possible once the proposal has been approved for implementation or rejected, and

The chief executive officer, in conjunction with the coalition leader dissolves the large scale change proposal coalition using three principal techniques: new roles and responsibilities, geographic dispersal and new projects.

The two key methodology learnings were firstly, the value of pursuing an opportunistic strategy of using professional and personal ties to generate a sample, and secondly, how to investigate a sensitive topic such as political behaviour and elicit rich, candid data which provides deep insights into large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. The methodology design and construction is discussed in chapter four and the implications for research methods are debated in chapter nine.

Thesis structure

Chapter one takes as its point of departure one of the central themes in contemporary change management literature. It is argued that the rational-linear approach to change management is not the most suitable model for organisations faced with complex large scale change in environments experiencing a high state of flux and uncertainty. Instead we need to work from the assumption that organisations are political arenas and that a power-oriented behaviour based model of change is more resilient and pragmatic. This argument is presented by engaging with the extant literature. It is asserted also that because of the complexity, scale and frequency of large scale change, it is unrealistic for the chief executive officer (CEO) alone to design a large scale change proposal. Rather it is the role of the top management team to develop and execute options and within that group coalitions must form and propose change. During the debate the existing literature base is critiqued and several methodological and assumptive concerns are identified. It is asserted that the absence of empirical research into the nature of large scale change
proposal coalitions, the coalition formation and management process and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders is an important gap in the literature which must be addressed if our understanding of managerial elites is to be deepened.

Chapter two builds on the arguments presented in chapter one. We consider the three major schools of thought on the nature and sources of intraorganisational power. The first school presents power as a personal construct which resides in personal attributes or interpersonal exchange. The second school asserts that power is located in the structure of an organisation. The third school contends that power is a situational construct and those who control the strategic contingencies enjoy power. Given that large scale change is likely to re-configure the structural design of the organisation there will be winners and losers within the top management team. Therefore, the coalition leader must anticipate opposition which will require meaningful engagement in public and backstage political activity. To do this effectively the coalition leader must understand the nature and sources of power in organisations. A coalition leader who understands these issues is in a position to construct a powerful coalition. In addition, the actions of other coalitions can be understood and predicted and steps can be taken to neutralise them or reduce the likelihood of them receiving approval for implementation.

During the debate the schools are critiqued from several perspectives. Firstly, power does not reside in only one location or another but in all three locations simultaneously. Monocausal arguments are unhelpful and prevent a more elucidatory understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, there is no fixed amount of power and it ebbs and flows because of personal, structural and situational events. Secondly, much of the commentary on intraorganisational power is theoretically derived or constructed from casual observation. There is a paucity of empirical research, particularly with regard to the use of power in the context of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. Thirdly, there are a number of arguable assumptions in several influential writings. It is concluded that a more synthesised approach to the study of intraorganisational power in top management teams is necessary if we are to develop our understanding of the large scale change proposal coalition building process and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders.

Chapter three concludes the literature review. We begin by acknowledging that academic enquiry into the subject is fragmented and disparate. To evidence this we discuss the meaning of intraorganisational politics and lay out several of the main themes
around which theorists debate. The morality of engaging in political behaviour is considered briefly before the inevitability of politics in organisations is examined. The extant literature on coalition formation is critiqued on several assumptive and methodological grounds and important questions are raised. The commentary on political behaviours and tactics is criticised for being disturbingly generic, and context specific empirical research is called for to offset the dangerous conflation of large scale change into a single homogenous process by many change management writers.

On closing the literature review seven lines of enquiry are identified for the empirical study to pursue. They aim to address serious gaps in the literature and elucidate our understanding of the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviour and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams for the purpose of informing academic enquiry and practitioners.

Chapter four discusses the methodology design and construction. It describes how the approach was strongly influenced and shaped by the need to overcome the difficulties of empirically investigating the political behaviours and tactics of top management team members in large scale change proposal coalitions. We consider the two key problems of firstly, gaining access to top management team members, and secondly, the sensitivity of political behaviours as a topic for investigation. It is also explained how a combination of professional and personal ties were used to establish a research sample of fifty members of top management teams in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries in the UK private sector. The elite style semi-structured interview approach is discussed along with the thematic based content analysis data analysis technique. In addition, the chapter also discusses the issue of revisiting rich interviews, assessing participant candour, and post-interview correspondence before concluding with a brief reflection on the methodological lessons learned.

Chapter five presents the findings into the first and second lines of enquiry. It was found that the majority of large scale change proposal coalitions discussed by participants conformed to a five phase life-cycle model. The five phases are initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer. During the five phases coalition leaders adopt three principal and sequential behaviours and tactics: building, sustaining and dissolving. The nature and characteristics of the five phases are described, as are the three roles. This is the first empirical research to describe the evolution of large scale change proposal coalitions in the top management team and the roles of the coalition leader.
coalition life-cycle is clearly a managed process and the broader top management team is presented as long-termist and politically astute because of their preparedness to tolerate a temporary super-influential informal structure to exist for the benefit of the organisation.

Chapter six presents the findings which relate to the third and fourth lines of enquiry. It is reported that the sequence of building a large scale change proposal coalition is heavily influenced by the hierarchical position of the builder in relation to the potential member, and four tier-specific approaches are commonly adopted. The finding that the coalition builder's behaviours and tactics vary according to whether they are engaged in upward inter-tier building, intra-tier building or downward inter-tier support gathering exercises is also discussed. The findings in this chapter provide a unique insight into an under-explored area of management. They provide compelling evidence to support the contention that large scale change is not a single homogenous process, and neither is it a rational-linear affair. Instead it is a rich political behaviour based process with members of top management teams being influenced by their structural position in the hierarchy, the quality of their relationship with the potential coalition member, and the magnitude and complexity of the change being proposed.

Chapter seven presents the findings into the fifth line of enquiry which was concerned with whether different types of large scale change proposal coalition exist in top management teams. It was found that four types of coalition exist: aligned, unaligned, unfocused and fragmented. The nature and characteristics of each and the behaviours and tactics used by coalition leaders to sustain them to the point of proposal submission are discussed in turn. Stability and cohesion are strongest in aligned coalitions but become progressively weaker in unaligned, unfocused and fragmented types. We also discuss the finding that as stability and cohesiveness decrease, coalition leaders have to resort to higher levels of coercion and reward and more frequent renegotiations to extend the commitment and involvement of members. Overall, these three factors combine to result in increased maintenance time to keep the coalition together. The descriptive findings presented in this chapter constitute a pioneering breakthrough in our understanding of the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams, and the behaviours and tactics required to sustain them. No other empirical research has reported on these issues. The findings support the contentions made in chapters one and three that coercion has a place in the armoury of the coalition leader. They also clearly portray top management team members as
individuals with competing and often conflicting agendas who are prepared to engage in opposition and resistance.

Chapter eight presents the findings which relate to the sixth and seventh lines of enquiry. The results of the study indicate that large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved as quickly as practically possible once the learnings have been captured and transferred into the working practices of the top management team. Eleven reasons for dissolution offered by participants are presented. In addition three popular dissolution techniques used by the chief executive in conjunction with the coalition leader are also discussed. The dissolution of large scale change proposal coalitions has not previously been researched. Therefore, the findings considered in this chapter provide a unique insight into the practitioner mindset. As with each of the other chapters we link behaviour with process. The descriptive nature of the findings once again elucidates our understanding of this crucial, yet unexplored, phase of the large scale change proposal process.

Chapter nine concludes the thesis with a recapitulation of the findings and engages in a discussion which makes recommendations for academic enquiry, research methods and practitioners. Within the academic enquiry and practitioner sections the seven lines of enquiry are used as the organising device. The study findings are set against the extant literature, and where possible compared and contrasted to ascertain commonalities and differences. A view is taken on whether the findings are additive or substitutive to the existing literature. More often than not though it is not possible to compare directly with the extant literature because the research presented in this thesis is of a pioneering nature and consequently stands alone. During the debate a significant number of lines of enquiry for future research are identified which aim to test the study findings or deepen them. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how the thesis has advanced our understanding of the change context and what it means for the research agenda. Specifically, it is argued that this thesis has broken new ground by linking behaviour and process to present rich, descriptive insights into large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. A crucially important but previously unresearched and unreported element of the change context.
Part one

Literature review and methodology
Chapter 1

The changing role of the top management team

"...linear thinking is useless in a non-linear world. Instead, we have to make an intellectual leap from the linear to the non-linear. From the known to the unknown. From terra firma to terra incognita." (Gibson, 1997, p.7)

Introduction

This chapter takes as its point of departure one of the central themes in contemporary change management literature. It will be argued that the rational-linear approach to change management is not the most suitable option for organisations faced with complex large scale change in turbulent environments. Instead we should begin from the premise that organisations are political arenas and that a power-oriented behaviour based model of change is more resilient and pragmatic. This finds support from an influential section of the literature (Bateman, 1980; Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Egan, 1994; Hayes, 1984; Kanter, 1983, 1992; Mintzberg, 1985; Pfeffer, 1992). It will also be contended that because of the complexity, scale and frequency of change, it is unrealistic to expect or accept that the chief executive officer (CEO) alone designs large scale change initiatives. Rather, it is the role of the top management team to develop options, instigate and implement large scale change (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988; Kakabadse, 1991; Kotter, 1996; Tushman, Newman and Romanelli, 1986), and within that group it is the role of coalitions to form and propose change (Gandz and Murray, 1980; Kotter, 1985; Morgan, 1986).

During the discussion the existing literature base is critiqued and a number of methodological and assumptive problems identified. It is argued that the absence of empirically generated research into the nature of large scale change proposal coalitions,
the process of coalition formation and management, and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders is a serious gap in the literature, which if addressed, would deepen our understanding of managerial elites.

Management research perspectives on organisational change: a brief overview

The literature on organisational change is large and diverse, and although it is not the purpose of this short section to provide a critique, it is useful to lay out the major dimensions of the framework of enquiry since it will help locate the arguments presented in the rest of the chapter.

Theorists and empirical researchers have written from a wide range of perspectives. For example, some researchers have studied the need for change, its stimulants (Child and Kieser, 1981; Meyer, 1982), and the executive leadership's interpretative processes (Dutton and Duncan, 1987; Milliken, 1990). Others have investigated who initiates change (Katzenback, 1996; Kelly and Amburgey, 1991; Robbins and Duncan, 1988; Tichy and Ulrich, 1984), the process of change (Kanter, 1983; Katzenback, 1996; Kissler, 1991; Kotter, 1996; Pettigrew, 1985; Quinn, 1980), and the constraints on change (Aldrich and Auster, 1986; Boeker, 1989; Pettigrew, 1985; Staw, Sandelands and Dutton, 1981; Stinchcombe, 1965). Another group of writers have examined the political skills of those involved in instigating, leading and managing change (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Dubrin, 1978; Kanter, 1983; Keen, 1981; Kipnis, 1984; Pettigrew, 1972, 1985; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992). A further perspective has considered how to anticipate, predict, and create change in industries (Hamel and Prahalad, 1992; Hamel, 1996; Strebel, 1992).

Commentators have also studied the types of change an organisation may experience. Watzlawick (1978) distinguished between first-order and second-order change, while Quinn (1980) and Miller and Friesen (1984) wrote about incremental and quantum change. Continuous and discontinuous change was the subject of a series of papers involving Tushman and Romanelli (1985), Nadler and Tushman (1986), and Tushman, Newman and Romanelli (1986). Typologies of change have also been presented which plot the scale of change against styles of change management (Dunphy and Stace, 1990), and the pace of change against the centrality or peripherality of change to the primary task of the organisation (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992).
One increasingly influential section of the literature has argued that the rational-linear approach to change management is not sufficiently robust, flexible or sophisticated to enable organisations to cope effectively with complex large scale change in turbulent environments. These theorists argue instead that organisations are political arenas and that a power-oriented behaviour based model of change is more resilient and pragmatic (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Egan, 1994; Hayes, 1984; Kanter, 1983; Mintzberg, 1985; Pfeffer, 1992). It is this last position which serves as our point of departure.

**Stress fractures in the rational-linear approach to change**

Much of the change management literature from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s was based on the assumption that change was a neat linear affair. Events were predicted to unfold logically and sequentially, and practitioners were advised to follow an orderly process or one of the many checklists spawned from the Organisational Development (OD) or ‘excellence’ schools to deliver significant and lasting change. The volatile business environment of the middle to late 1990s has prompted commentators such as Buchanan and Boddy (1992) to claim the rational-linear approach to change is neither flexible or robust enough to cope with major and often unanticipated impacts. Nor is it proactive or sophisticated enough to provide practitioners with advice on how to change the rules of the game in their industry and establish a sustainable or renewable competitive advantage for their organisations. This is hardly surprising when the antecedents of conventional change management literature are considered.

In looking back at the ‘control’ literature of the early 1960s (for example, Cyert and March, 1963), it can be observed that one of the central tenets was the desirability of reducing uncertainty in order to create stability and predictability. In tracing the change management literature back to its roots, the strong influence of the control agenda can be identified. One of the underlying assumptions of the conventional change management literature is the objective of dampening down uncertainty so change agents can “refreeze” (Lewin, 1947) the organisation. If we turn these arguments upside down, we can find contemporary writers such as Hamel (1996) urging organisational members at all levels to act as “revolutionaries” and initiate change. He contends that in an era of global competition and rapidly converging markets, winning organisations are likely to be those which seek to amplify and exploit change rather than dampen it down.
Conventional change management thinking also has its roots in OD. Acolytes of this school have been criticised by Pettigrew (1985) for presenting change in a simplistic and naïve manner. He accused them of adopting a “truth, trust, love and collaboration” approach to change. A few of the leading early exponents of the school included Beckhard (1967), Bennis (1965),Blake and Mouton (1964; 1968), Davis (1967), Lewin (1947), Likert (1967), and Schein (1965). According to Cummings and Huse (1989, p.5) organisational change was a natural outlet for OD theory, but it was not one of the school’s original areas of focus. They contended that OD had emerged from four major backgrounds: the development of training groups, early survey research and feedback, Kurt Lewin’s work on group dynamics and social change, and an aim to increase productivity and the quality of working life.

An important feature of the OD literature has been the participation in the design of organisational change by those members who stand to be impacted by it. This approach avoids accusations of totalitarian rule from senior decision makers who by virtue of their hierarchical position are often able to enforce change. It is also based on the notion that involvement reduces resistance and opposition with the result that change is embedded quickly into the organisation. Cummings and Huse (1989, p.60), offered advice for change practitioners seeking to influence others: “The strategy of playing it straight is...the most widely used power strategy in OD. It involves determining the needs of particular stakeholders and presenting information for how the changes can benefit them. This relatively straightforward approach is...based on the premise that information and knowledge can persuade people about the need and direction for change.” This comment is surprising indeed, and is put forward without supporting evidence. It appears naïve and idealistic, and fails to acknowledge the emotional and political dimensions of decision making in the change context. It infers that ‘playing it straight’ will be sufficient to deter or avoid resistance.

As early as 1969 Bennis began criticising the OD school’s view of organisation man as a rational, trusting individual driven by concern for the welfare of fellow employees. By the 1980s some of the best known OD theorists had become critical of the school’s core beliefs (Beckhard and Harris, 1977; Schein, 1977). Following their earlier statement on the prevalence of ‘honest’ power strategies Cummings and Huse (1989, p.60) admitted the emergence of opposing views, “Current thinking tends to view planned change as a rationally controlled, orderly process. Critics have argued that although this may be comforting, it is seriously misleading. They point out that planned change has a more
chaotic quality, often involving shifting goals, discontinuous activities, surprising events, and unexpected combinations of changes.” Despite this acknowledgement the authors failed to indicate an acceptance that perhaps there are weaknesses in OD thinking which undermine its relevance and validity as an effective change strategy in complex environments. Contemporary change management writers such as Buchanan and Boddy (1992, p.61) agree with Quinn (1980), Pettigrew (1985; 1987; 1988), and revisionists such as Beckhard and Schein that large scale change is an “untidy cocktail”, and not a logical rational-linear process. Consequently, ‘playing it straight’ strategies are unlikely to be the most effective approach to winning support and overcoming resistance. Instead political behaviour which embraces backstage manoeuvring, negotiation and coercive tactics is more likely to be found in organisations attempting to cope with an uncertain and ambiguous change context.

Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (1990) have also criticised the “programmatic” —rational linear— approach to change. Their criticism of the OD approach was that it relies heavily on training to change behaviour. Instead they recommended a “task aligned” mindset. They argued that successful change programmes are those which seek to reshape an individual’s behaviour by modifying the task. In effect behaviour changes are ‘pulled’ through the organisation, rather than ‘pushed’ through by a series of training initiatives. This position is supported by Schaffer and Thomson (1992) who advocate a “results-driven” approach to change. They too are critical of the “energy dissipating”, “activity-centred” pursuit of performance improvement. They argue, “This ‘rain dance’ is the ardent pursuit of activities that sound good, look good, and allow managers to feel good—but in fact contribute little or nothing to bottom-line performance...Companies introduce these programs under the false assumption that if they carry out enough of the ‘right’ improvement activities, actual performance improvements will inevitably materialise. At the heart of these programs, which we call ‘activity-centred’, is a fundamentally flawed logic that confuses ends with means, processes with outcomes” (Schaffer and Thomson, 1992, p.80). The authors’ comparisons between activity-centred programmes and results-driven programmes are set out in Exhibit 1.1.

Also seeking to link results with approach Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) proposed a two-dimensional, five-factor, forty-four element model of organisational change, which they claimed, explains the difference between high and low performing organisations.
Exhibit 1.1 - Schaffer and Thomson’s Activity-centred programs versus Results-driven programs

While activity-centred programs and results-driven programs share some common methodologies for initiating change, they differ in very dramatic ways.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity-centred programs</th>
<th>Results-driven programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The improvement effort is defined mainly in the long-term, global terms (&quot;We are going to be viewed as number one in quality in our industry&quot;)</td>
<td>1 There are measurable short-term performance improvement goals, even though the effort is a long-term, sustaining one. (&quot;Within 60 days, we will be paying 95% of claims within 10 days&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Management takes action steps because they are ‘correct’ and fit the program’s philosophy. (&quot;I want every manager in the division involved in an action.&quot;)</td>
<td>2 Management takes action steps because they appear to lead directly toward some improved results. (&quot;Let’s put together a small group to work with you to solve this machine downtime problem.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The program’s champion(s) counsels patience and fortitude. (&quot;Don’t be looking for results this year or next year. This is a long-term process, not a quick fix.&quot;)</td>
<td>3 The mood is one of impatience. Management wants to see results now, even though the change process is a long-term commitment. (&quot;If we can’t eliminate at least half of the cost disadvantage within the next three months, we should consider closing the plant.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Staff experts and consultants indoctrinate everyone into the mystique and vocabulary of the program. (&quot;It will be a Tower of Babel if we try to work on these problems before everyone, managers and employees alike, has been through the quality training and has a common vocabulary and a common toolkit.&quot;)</td>
<td>4 Staff experts and consultants help managers achieve results. (&quot;We could probably work up a way to measure customer attitudes on delivery service within a week or two so that you can start improving it.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Staff experts and consultants urge managers and employees to have faith in the approach and to support it. (&quot;True employee involvement will take a lot of time and effort, and though it may be a real struggle for managers, they need to understand that it is essential to become a total quality company.&quot;)</td>
<td>5 Managers and employees are encouraged to make certain for themselves that the approach actually yields results. (&quot;Why don’t you send a few of your people to the quality course to test whether it really helps them achieve their improvement goals in the next month or two.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The process requires management to make big investments up front - before results have been demonstrated. (During the first year, we expect to concentrate on awareness building and skill training. Then, while managers begin to diagnose problems and opportunities in their areas, a consultant will be surveying all of our customers to get their views on the critical dimensions of service. And then...)</td>
<td>6 Relatively little investment is needed to get the process started; conviction builds as results materialise. (&quot;Let’s see if this approach can help us increase sales of high-end products in a couple of branches. If it does, we can take method to the other branches.&quot;)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


However, the authors claim to present the multivariate model for research and analytical purposes, and not for day-to-day application by practising managers. This self-critique is appropriate because may practitioners would likely find it difficult to derive pragmatic
benefits. The value of the model lies in the emphasis it places on process and context. Pettigrew (1985; 1987) has criticised sections of the change management literature for not taking process and context factors—external and internal, past and present—into consideration. He argues that a robust and insightful model of change is cognisant of time, multiple layers and multiple dimensions of organisations. Buchanan (1994, p.19), whilst applauding the theoretical advance of locating the strategic change process and change agent in a wider organisational and environmental setting, criticised Pettigrew on the grounds that “the richness and complexity of this perspective disable attempts to derive parsimonious models of context and process, and there is little attempt to spell out the practical management implications of a processual and contextual perspective beyond broad generalisations.”

Dunphy and Stace (1990) have also presented a typology of change, plotting the scale of change against styles of change management. Based on research into Australian organisations the authors classify the scale of change usefully into four categories: fine tuning, incremental adjustment, modular transformation, and corporate transformation. They then identify four styles of change management: collaborative, consultative, directive, and coercive. Plotting scale against style they suggest four broad types of change strategy: type 1, participative evolution; type 2, charismatic transformation; type 3, forced evolution; and type 4, dictatorial transformation. The conditions for use are explained in Exhibit 1.2. Medium to high performing organisations were found to undertake incremental and modular transformation change programmes using consultative and directive styles of change management. Lower performers were those using the same styles to ‘fine tune’ the organisation. “Corporate transformation (using directive/coercive style) is the most common change strategy when an organisation needs to radically regain fit with a changed environment” (Dunphy and Stace, 1990, p.88). The authors conclude that their differentiated contingency model enables managers to consider change strategy in situational terms. Participative evolution, as advocated by traditional OD literature, is appropriate in certain circumstances only, whereas in turbulent environmental conditions directive and coercive approaches tend to be more effective when the organisation needs to reposition itself urgently. Dunphy and Staces’s work is one of the few that explicitly draws attention to the importance of context, and acknowledges that strategies ranging from participation to coercion are appropriate and effective in specific circumstances. The authors stress the need to avoid accepting their findings as “dogmatic prescriptions” (p.vii), but they do provide provocative thought for both practitioners and researchers. Given that the authors were granted access by the
chief executive of each of the thirteen organisations studied it would have been an interesting line of enquiry if the research had investigated the role of coalitions within the top management team in shaping and selecting the appropriate change strategy. A description and analysis of the political behaviours and tactics used between top management team members at the proposal stage would have provided a unique insight into the change process in Australian organisations. As it is, reference to the use of different strategies to move the organisation at the implementation stage represent an empirical advancement of the literature.

**Exhibit 1.2 - Dunphy and Stace’s typology of change strategies and conditions for use**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Incremental change strategies</th>
<th>Transformative change strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative/consultative models</strong></td>
<td><strong>Directive/coercive models</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Participative evolution</td>
<td>2. Charismatic transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use when organisation is in fit but needs minor adjustment, or is out of fit but time is available and key interest groups favour change.</td>
<td>Use when organisation is out of fit, there is little time for extensive participation but there is support for radical change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Forced evolution</td>
<td>4. Dictatorial transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use when organisation is in fit but needs minor adjustment, or is out of fit but time is available, but key interest groups oppose change.</td>
<td>Use when organisation is out of fit, there is no time for extensive participation and no support for radical change which is vital to survival and mission fulfilment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Another ‘context’ model of change was offered by Buchanan and Boddy (1992). The authors plotted the pace of change against the centrality or peripherality of change to the primary task of the organisation. This is illustrated in Exhibit 1.3. Their four quadrant model can be used by change agents to anticipate the ‘hassle factor’ and their ‘vulnerability’ of managing four types of change. For example, in ‘quadrant four’ type change when the pace of change is radical and it is core to the primary purpose of the organisation, the change agent is likely to operate in a ‘high hassle/high vulnerability’ environment. Due to the concertinaed time frame, and quite possibly the magnitude of the planned change, the change agent is likely to encounter resistance. Consequently, they will have to engage in backstage political behaviours aimed at winning support and overcoming opposition. This in itself makes them vulnerable since by upsetting the
status quo and threatening the existing power structure, they are as likely to make enemies as win support. The change agent is also highly vulnerable because if their efforts to implement the change are unsuccessful, their career prospects and reputation may be damaged. This too will be compounded by the fact that those who were threatened may want to exact some form of revenge, or at least ensure they are unlikely to be threatened again by the individual in question. However, Buchanan and Boddy (1992, p.43) suggested that, “Few managers have built highly successful personal careers on a history of incremental and peripheral changes to their organisations.”

Exhibit 1.3 - Buchanan and Boddy’s four-quadrant model of organisational change

The work of Dunphy and Stace (1990) and Buchanan and Boddy (1992) adds a new perspective to the change management literature. Whereas large parts of the literature are either descriptively or prescriptively generic, the work of these authors is contextually specific. It recognises that organisations and change agents need to pursue different change strategies at different times, influenced in part by the need to ensure congruence between the organisation and the environment. The authors also reject the blanket acceptance of the more purist approach of the OD theorists by acknowledging the usefulness and appropriateness of political behaviours which may include directive and coercive methods.
One of the key distinctions between the work of Dunphy and Stace (1990) and Buchanan and Boddy (1992) is the way in which the latter emphasises the political nature of change. It is clear they subscribe to the view that organisations are political entities, and therefore, decision making around key events such as large scale change is inherently political. Importantly, their position was derived from empirical research. However, as with Dunphy and Stace they neglect to discuss the role of coalitions in designing the content and process of large scale change. Their unit of analysis is the individual and commentary on the expertise of the change agent fails to incorporate or acknowledge the multiplicity of inputs and interplay amongst members of the top management team before a decision is reached and the change proposal proceeds to implementation. A more informative unit of analysis would be the individual in the context of some broader decision making group. Clearly for large scale change that group would be the top management team. This is because individuals operate in a web of relationships characterised by diverse and often competing interests. Due to the magnitude and complexity of large scale change, and the often resultant threat to powerful individuals, one person is rarely able to win sufficient support and overcome resistance from peers without forming a coalition with significant —powerful— others. If we accept this logical argument then we arrive at the conclusion that organisations are political arenas and politics emerge in top management teams.

Organisations as political arenas and the emergence of politics in top management teams

As we have already noted, Pettigrew (1985) has been critical of the structured planning approach to change claiming that it consists of “subtle processes of additively building up a momentum of support for change and then vigorously implementing it.” He advised “beware the singular theory of process or indeed of social and organisational change”, advising practitioners and theorists to focus instead on understanding the “political and cultural mosaic” of behaviours and processes which underpin large scale change initiatives. Pettigrew asserted that rational and political-cultural approaches to change are intrinsically related. This finds support from Tichy (1983) who compared significant change to a rope with three strands: technical, political, and cultural. He suggested that if the three interrelated strands are not managed together, then like a rope they can unravel. Gray and Ariss (1985, p.708) have also been critical of the traditional single strand approach claiming, “Many models of how strategic change occurs portray it as a formal,
rational, neatly controlled process. They focus on environmental assessment, opportunity analysis, and logical, orderly planning cycles.” They go on to argue that such a view is severely limited because it ignores the political dimension of change.

Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) and Allison (1971) have both suggested that most strategic decision making processes are political because they involve decisions with uncertain outcomes, and actors who resolve conflict through the exercise of power. Burns (1961), Butler (1971) and Frost and Hayes (1977) suggested that organisations are comprised of constantly shifting groups, coalitions and individuals seeking to impose their will on the strategic direction and purpose of the firm. Gray and Ariss (1985) following Miles and Snow (1978), Miller (1980), and Miller and Friesen (1980), contend that a firm’s strategy is the result of a pattern of converging decisions—a gestalt—about its purpose. A snapshot of the strategy at any point in time will be the outcome of a combination of decisions influenced by the dominant coalition and the environmental setting in which the firm exists.

Allison (1971) advised researchers to adopt a political perspective if they wanted to gain insights into strategic decision making and the broader change process. Mintzberg, Rasinghani and Theoret (1976) also argued that political behaviour and coalition gameplay were an integral part of strategy formulation. Gray and Ariss (1985) remarked that theories on politics in change can be traced back to writers such as Weber (1947), Barnard (1968), Cyert and March (1963) and Crozier (1964). They noted that theory portraying organisations as coalitional in nature (Cyert and March, 1963; March and Simon, 1958) was proposed because of dissatisfaction with the notion that organisations were rational entities, and that strategy was formulated with perfect knowledge by individuals whose sole concern was the best interest of the firm.

Mintzberg (1985) has rejected arguments that politics emerge because of weak alternative systems of influence, such as authority (Klein, 1988). He argued that departmentalisation, which is created through authority, can foster conflict and politics as units jostle for influence over strategic direction and the allocation of scarce resources. Most organisations, he claimed, were political arenas, and to this end he identified four types which are described in Exhibit 1.4. Mintzberg’s classification is useful because it does not treat organisations as a fixed single stage political entity. He recognises that different organisations will likely display different characteristics. Although this is
## Exhibit 1.4 - Mintzberg's four types of political arena

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confrontation</strong></td>
<td>Intense, confined and brief conflict. Unstable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shaky alliance</strong></td>
<td>Moderate, confined, and possibly enduring conflict. Can be relatively stable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Politically organised</strong></td>
<td>Moderate, pervasive and possibly enduring conflict. Relatively stable, so long as artificially supported.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Complete political arena</strong></td>
<td>Intense, pervasive and brief conflict. Unstable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Hardly a revolutionary idea it does open the door to a discussion about how to plan and implement large-scale change in each context. However, Mintzberg elects not to enter the discussion. He does acknowledge that an organisation may transition between types over time. On the other hand, another conceptual gap in his thinking is his failure to suggest that one organisation may exhibit one or several of the four types simultaneously in various parts of the entity. A further interesting line of thought would have been the applicability of the model to describe different types of coalition in the top management team in terms of conflict level and stability. Despite an extensive search this researcher was unable to identify any empirical research describing the nature of large-scale change proposal coalitions and given that it is generally accepted that the top management team is the key strategic decision-making body this is a serious gap in our understanding of coalitions in the change context.

One problem with Mintzberg's thinking lies in his assumption that conflict is inherently dysfunctional. We know from the empirical work of Pascale (1989) that conflict can manifest itself as 'constructive tension' and improve organisational performance as
evidenced in his description of the competition between three internal business units within Honda which had to compete for scarce internal resources, whilst integrating their activities with each other and remaining competitive in the marketplace. A second and potentially more significant weakness in Mintzberg’s analysis is the fact that his commentary is a theoretical construct and has not been informed or tested in the field. Nevertheless, his paper is still valuable because of the questions it prompts during a critique. Arguments which attempt to drive a cleavage between various types of organisation were discouraged by writers such as Merriam (1950, p.9) who remarked, “Only confusion will be created by trying to draw too sharp and exclusive a line between political and other forms of organisation...On the contrary, a clearer view is gained by frankly recognising the fundamental similarity between them.”

Why politics emerge in top management teams

Why do politics emerge in top management teams? As might be expected there are several theoretically and empirically derived positions. The first of these contends that politics arise as a result of decentralising power from the key senior decision maker, while the second suggests the reverse, that too much decision making power centralised in the hands of the CEO causes political behaviour. A self-serving personality has also been cited as a cause, while outside the top management team conflict, non-routine decision making areas and radical change have all been found to generate political activity. It has also been argued that the emergence of politics is contingent upon the various stages of the organisational life-cycle. Let us now consider each of these positions.

Several authors have argued that politics in top management teams arise when power is decentralised (Dean, Sharfman and Ford, 1987; Hage, 1980; Pfeffer, 1981), although they acknowledge this tends to be for behaviouralistic reasons rather than by structural design. It is not uncommon for the top management team to be designed to place power in the hands of the senior decision maker — usually the chief executive officer, chairman or president. However, failure to exert a strong influence over the strategic direction of the organisation can create a power vacuum which in turn can generate political activity as the other key decision makers attempt to gain control. Pfeffer (1992) cited events at the Wall Street financial institution E F Hutton as an example:
“Rittereiser (the President) was not a strong leader, and the various people hired had no history with each other, no common perspective and no shared vision for the firm. Consequently there was a lot of jockeying for position.” (Pfeffer, 1992, p.323)

He went on to quote Stevens (1989) account of the same problem:

“It was fever for power—all the guys on Rittereiser’s executive committee had it. They spent more time battling each other for rank and position and clout than in trying to turn the firm around.” (Stevens, 1989, p.219)

Dichotomously opposed to the ‘decentralisation equals politics’ argument is the work of Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) who contended that politics in top management teams arise because too much power is centralised in the hands of the most senior decision maker:

“The more powerful a CEO, the greater the tendency among remaining executives to consolidate power and engage in alliance and insurgency behaviours, while the CEO engaged in tactics for controlling and withholding information.” (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, p.743)

They also argued:

“Where power was relatively decentralised, we found that the team maintained a collaborative viewpoint. In effect we found co-operative behaviour focusing on group, rather than individual goals...The executives argued, often strenuously, for their views in an open forum and avoided politics.” (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, p.753)

One of the most interesting aspects of Eisenhardt and Bourgeois’s empirically derived commentary was their definition of politics as, “the observable, but often covert, actions by which executives enhance their power to influence a decision. These actions include behind-the-scenes coalition formation, offline lobbying and co-optation attempts, withholding information, and controlling agendas.” This definition is valuable because it was generated as a result of field research, rather than desk based theory building. It
presents a vivid and intense picture of the strategic decision making process in top management teams, and clearly demonstrates the need to understand better the role of coalition leaders and the behaviours and tactics they use to gain approval for the implementation of a large scale change proposal.

As a result of interviewing chief executive officers Madison et al (1980) found that one third of them cited a senior manager’s personality as the reason for political activity occurring in the top management team. Those who displayed a political personality tended to engage in political behaviour and by their actions encouraged others to do so. In general though the authors found that politics was practised most often by individuals representing individual interests rather than group interests or both. Seventy-four per cent of managers thought individuals represented their own interests while only sixteen per cent believed group interests were the objective of political activity (Madison et al., 1980, p.87). One example from industry of the most senior decision maker displaying this personality was Robert Horton, formerly of British Petroleum. Horton was both CEO and chairman of the company from 1990 but by June 1992 his top management team had conducted a coup d’état and replaced him because his personality and management style (rather than his abilities) were deemed to be too self-serving for someone who was tasked with leading an experienced, multi-national top management team (Heller, 1992). Horton’s own widely reported remarks about his superior intelligence and right to determine the strategic direction, combined with his occupancy of both the senior roles —CEO and chairman— appears to support Eisenhardt and Bourgeois’s (1988) suggestion that the centralisation of power leads to political insurgency behaviours from the senior managers immediately below the individual acting in a political manner. The BP example also provides evidence to suggest a self-serving personality contributes to the emergence of politics in the top management team.

Several authors have argued that a source of politics is conflict (Baldrige, 1971; March, 1962; Mintzberg, 1985; Pfeffer, 1981). Mintzberg (1985, p.139) suggested that politics arise because of conflict “between employees of the organisation, between interested outsiders, or between these groups” in order to influence the behaviour of the organisation. Gandz and Murray (1980, p.239) on the other hand contended that conflict, and therefore politics, evolve around “issues and events that were not guided by explicit policy or precedent nor derived from an obvious techno-economic rationale.” This assertion was based on the findings of March (1962), and Cyert and March (1963) who defined all non-routine decision making as political.
Radical "frame-breaking" change as termed by Tushman, Newman and Romanelli (1986, p.37) is inherently non-routine because of its infrequency, complexity and magnitude. They argued also that it is the cause of political activity since tumultuous change tends to produce winners and losers as the power structure is re-configured. The authors suggested:

"Political coalitions opposing the upheaval may be quickly formed within the organisation. During converging periods a political equilibrium is reached. Frame-breaking upsets this equilibrium; powerful individuals and/or groups who see their status threatened will join in resistance."

(Tushman, Newman and Romanelli, 1986, p.40)

Radical change is only one of the options available to the key decision makers who set the strategic direction of the organisation. As discussed earlier Dunphy and Stace (1990) have proposed four degrees of organisational change: fine tuning, incremental adjustment, modular transformation, and corporate transformation. Commenting on the importance of selecting the appropriate change strategy for the situation Haveman (1990, p.48) stated "...organisational change may benefit organisational performance and survival chances if it occurs in response to dramatic restructuring of environmental conditions and if it builds on established routines and competencies." However, the contention that change, even radical change, should build on existing platforms and capabilities is not a view shared by Tushman and O'Reilly (1996, p.24) who suggested that managers may be required to "...periodically destroy what has been created in order to reconstruct a new organisation better suited for the next wave of competition or technology." Burgelman and Grove (1996) asserted that in dynamic environments executives must develop the capability to sense the need for change and assess whether current strategic initiatives are unfolding successfully without unequivocal feedback from the marketplace. They declared:

"Our key premise is that in extremely dynamic industries alignment between a firm's strategic intent and strategic action is not likely to last. Inevitably, strategic actions will begin to lead or lag strategic intent. Such divergences between intent and action cause 'strategic dissonance' in the organisation." (Burgelman and Grove, 1996, p.8-9)
In addition to the varying degrees of change that can be implemented, effective managers and political actors should be cognisant of the suggestion that political activity emerges through coalitions and evolves in line with organisational life-cycles (Gray and Ariss, 1985; Pfeffer, 1992). These commentators suggest that a contingency approach to political activity can be adopted to improve the likelihood of such manoeuvring being effective, since a strategy that produces results in the 'birth and early growth' phase of an organisation's life may be totally ineffective in the 'mature' phase. Indeed, there may even be a problem in ascertaining what stage an organisation is in (Pfeffer, 1992, p.328), as it is the cumulative result of combining and weighting of a number of factors such as what cycle stage the international economy is in, the national economy, the industry, competitors and internal factors such as technology, human resources, finances and products. Nevertheless, despite these difficulties Pfeffer (1992, p.329) noted that "it is important to recognise that the political dynamics, and their potential problems and dysfunctions, differ across the different stages and processes."

Gray and Ariss's discussion of politics and life-cycles was theoretically derived. The key criticism of their work lies in the claim that politics arise initially at the 'maturity' phase because "powerful individuals institutionalise their ideology by establishing formal policies and procedures that support their self-interests", (Gray and Ariss, 1985, p.716). Organisations are as likely to experience rapid and radical change in the 'birth' and 'early growth' phases as they are in the maturity phases. There will be both a need and opportunity for members of a top management team to shape the strategic direction of the organisation. The authors fail to recognise that political behaviour commences as soon as an individual starts to build a coalition, which for our discussion purposes may well be a large scale change proposal coalition. Such as view regards behaviours as political in a broad sense, but several writers including Buchanan and Boddy (1992), Egan (1994) and Pfefffer (1992) contend that the moment a person attempts to influence the behaviour of others by manipulating structural aspects of the organisation or by developing personal relationships for the purpose of winning support, they are engaging in political behaviour. Therefore, to suggest that politics emerge only once an organisation is mature is to ignore the crucial formative stages of political ideology and activity when top management team members create the political process and context.

Since large scale change initiatives often unfold over extended time periods, it appears logical to suggest that they too will be impacted by the organisation's life-cycle. Indeed the notion that they might follow their own life-cycle across the proposal and
implementation stages of change does not appear unreasonable. Despite an extensive search no research on the life-cycle of large scale change proposal coalitions was found. This is surprising given the general acceptance that organisations follow life-cycles. Therefore, one of the lines of enquiry—articulated at the end of chapter three—to be pursued in the empirical study will investigate the possibility of life-cycles existing in large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. Such an omission reinforces the suggestion that the change literature does not distinguish the proposal stage from the implementation stage. Whether this conflation is by intent or ignorance is unclear. A sympathetic critique would suggest that the paucity of research in this area is due in part to the access difficulties to managerial elites that academic researchers suffer. However, Pettigrew and McNulty (1985, p.848) have argued that despite entry problems, “direct access to key figures and important processes is negotiable.”

Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992) observed that the institutionalisation of power through change is a cause of politics in top management teams. The authors remarked:

“...the motivation to maintain organisations may be much greater among dependent actors, who need the organisation for an end other than wealth creation, than among owners or suppliers of capital, who value only economic performance. This motivation to preserve the organisation can, in turn, serve to entrench current leaders, as stakeholders agree to support management in order to keep their jobs or their customers. As a consequence, management might make strategic choices designed not to produce high performance but to limit or offset the power of still other stakeholders.” (Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992, p.49-50)

Pettigrew (1985, p.xix) has argued also that individuals and coalitions seek to remould the power structure to perpetuate their influence. He observed that executive leadership often adjusts and interferes with strategy, structures, culture and political processes in the organisation to control the design of change and “to create a different pattern of alignment between its internal character, strategy, and structure and the emerging view of its operating environment.”

In ‘Organisational change and the politics of success’, Bateman (1980) contended that all organisations are political arenas and the more radical proposed changes are, the greater the ensuing power struggle will be as individuals and coalitions compete to gain control
of the new power structure. Agreeing with Bennis (1978) he suggested that change agents and proposers of change should give careful consideration to the political dimension and its implications for change. Accordingly, he presented a six stage power-oriented model. Stage one formulating political goals, involves gathering the support of key figures and developing a broad political base. The second stage is to conduct a power audit and ascertain the sources of power which can be used to influence the political process. Stage three is concerned with the identification of supportive influential targets, who are invited to sit on the steering committee. Such individuals are intended to convince others who are wavering, uncommitted or currently in opposition. The fourth step is to establish a commitment plan for the influential targets, demonstrating the benefits of joining the steering committee or visibly lending support in some other way. Incentives are offered — promotions, pay rises and other perquisites. Stage five involves the use of power tactics. The steering committee is given legitimate authority and the influential supporters’ power is harnessed and directed at building up a critical mass of support for the change. Once this has been achieved the last step is to monitor results, evaluating and refining the strategy so that subsequent change initiatives can be implemented more effectively. Although Bateman’s work provides a processual insight into how political change strategy can be effective, it fails to offer the researcher or practitioner detailed descriptions of the behaviours required to successfully implement his model.

Another model offered by MacMillan and Jones (1986) refers to the formulation of organisational political strategy formulation but it is interesting to apply the process to political strategy formulation at the coalition or individual level. There are four stages: establishing independent capability, alliance selection, alliance negotiations, and offensive and defensive strategies.

The first step of establishing independent capability assesses the individual’s strengths and weaknesses in relation to those on whom they depend. This is done on the basis of what can be achieved without allies and what can be achieved with them. Any shortfall between the influence possessed and the influence required provides the input for the next two stages. Using the ‘satisficing’ principle a holistic approach that produces the optimum strategy at the expense of individual areas is formulated. Incompatible allies must be assessed for short and long term contributions to the alliance or coalition, and the authors contend it is preferable to sacrifice performance and opportunity in a non-crucial area rather than sub-optimise the overall effort. MacMillan and Jones also warn
that alliances are dynamic and therefore subject to change, so decisions may need to be reversed. The third step in the formulation of a political strategy is to negotiate the alliances that will complement the strengths and counteract the weaknesses identified in stage one. The authors offer eight points of advice.

Firstly, the major negotiation issues that will arise should be predicted and the stance to be taken on each determined. Secondly, the critical issues, key bluffs, threats and promises that both the individual and the target are likely to use must be identified. Thirdly, an agenda that maximises the benefits to be derived from having different priorities should be drawn up, and fourthly, information about the target's previous tactics, their objectives and their alternatives should be collected and analysed. The fifth stage is to identify the critical stages of the negotiating process so the strategy can be redirected if necessary in light of unexpected developments. The sixth step is to collate all the points so far into a theme that supports the manager's position and provides a credible premise or smoke-screen for wanting the coalition. The seventh recommendation is to establish a series of measures by which the manager can assess his progress at various stages in the negotiations. These will be in the form of a list of points gained and points conceded, with the manager having hopefully derived a level of benefits that warrant undertaking the negotiations in the first place. The eighth and final point is to establish a set of implementation issues so that the outcomes of the coalition negotiations can be implemented at a suitable opportunity.

Once the eight point checklist has been completed the manager then enters the coalition negotiations, the results of which are carried forward to the fourth and final stage: the formulation of a set of offensive and defensive strategies which harness the strengths of the new coalition and direct them towards the accomplishment of the political objectives. It is possible that as a result of the negotiations new information will be gained which allows the alliance former to modify the original strategy. A sophisticated and flexible strategy should "look four ways", anticipating both the potentially positive and negative developments. Typically this would involve:

"...an offensive strategy (1) to exploit the opposition's weaknesses and (2) to erode the opposition's strengths. It simultaneously develops a defensive strategy for countering the opposition's attempts (1) to exploit the alliance's weaknesses and (2) to erode the alliance's strengths."

(MacMillan and Jones, 1986, p.108)
In formulating the offensive and defensive strategies, the manager should bear in mind the following factors. Action is best taken when the resources of the coalition exceed the opponent's by a large margin because they can be used to 'out-gun' the other alliances into submission or compliance. Secondly, the key decision makers in the opposition should be identified so the coalition can calculate the effect of the opponent's strategy on them. Reciprocal action must be expected so the coalition has to formulate its own pre-emptive and reactive responses.

In their final recommendation MacMillan and Jones agree with Bateman (1980) that there is a need to establish a monitoring and evaluation system which measures progress and identifies areas of the strategy that require updating. Political strategy formulation like organisational change and power is dynamic in nature and managers who plan with this in mind are more likely to be successful in the long term than those who do not.

Both of these models seek to provide researchers and practitioners with a politically informed approach to planning change. Bateman's recommendations are grounded in field research but his model can be thought of as a 'should be' strategy as opposed to one he observed being employed in the organisations he studied. Clearly, if he was reporting a process that was being used by practitioners his propositions would be significantly strengthened. His work is one of the earliest to suggest the need to proactively plan the use of political behaviours and tactics for the purpose of winning the support and commitment of key decision makers. However, it is disappointing that he did not deepen his analysis to describe specific behaviours and tactics for winning support. It would have been interesting to understand whether they varied according to hierarchical distance between the influencer and target, or whether they evolved during the life-span of the coalition. The fact that there is no empirically generated research which addresses these questions is of serious concern and needs to be tackled if we are to gain a deeper understanding of the political behaviours and tactics of top management team members in the change context.

The main criticism of MacMillan and Jones's advice on alliance—coalition—formation is that it is processually mechanistic and fails to recognise the interactive and untidy nature of winning support. As new issues emerge the alliance negotiator will need to revisit and revise an earlier stage of the process. Over time this will produce a more robust strategy because it develops in line with new information and pressures. In the context of coalition building it means that each new member adds another layer of
complexity for the builder to factor into their attempts to create an aligned, cohesive and stable team.

**The changing role of the top management team**

An increasingly influential section of the literature has written about the role of top management teams in relation to large scale change (Beer, Eisenstat and Spector, 1990; Bennis, 1997; Burns, 1978; Gibson, 1997; Kakabadse, 1991; Kanter, 1983; Kotter, 1996; Kouzes and Posner, 1995; Pascale, 1989; Pettigrew, 1985; Pettigrew and McNulty, 1995; Tushman and Romanelli, 1983, 1985; Tushman, Newman and Romanelli, 1986). Commentators have investigated top management teams from the perspective of strategic choice (Andrews, 1971; Child, 1972), while a number of others have focused on the 'upper echelon', proposing that large scale change is not the exclusive task of the chief executive officer (Drucker, 1974; Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Gupta, 1988; Wiersema and Bantel, 1992). It is the second of these that is of particular interest given the arguments presented in this chapter so far. The theme that unites these writers is the belief that one of the primary roles of the top management team is to develop options, instigate and implement large scale change.

In reviewing the leadership literature it quickly becomes clear there are diverse perspectives. Terry (1986) claims to have found more than one hundred academic definitions of leadership. Bass, (1981) and Yukl (1981) both take the view that new definitions, conceptualisations and perspectives have emerged without necessarily refuting the existing ones. Therefore, the leadership literature base has developed largely in an additive rather than substitutive manner. However, what is clear is that much of the literature concerning leadership in the context of change has been influenced strongly by the OD school, so considerable emphasis is placed on participative decision making and power sharing between the management elite and the lower levels of the organisation (Leavitt, 1965; Locke and Schweiger, 1979; Sashkin, 1976; Schultz, 1951; Sorcher, 1971; Strauss, 1962; Strauss and Rosenstein, 1970; Tannenbaum, 1974). We have already laid out the key criticisms of the OD school in relation to change management, but there is an argument in favour of participation amongst members of the top management team in the form of coalitions. Let us consider then, the *changing* role of the top management team.
Warren Bennis (1997, p.150) has argued that one of the key challenges facing leaders in the twenty-first century, will be the need to ensure “they are constantly reinventing the organisation.” He suggested, “Tomorrow’s leaders will have to learn how to create an environment that actually embraces change, not as a threat but as an opportunity”, (p.152). Arguing that American organisations were losing their dominant grip on world markets to aggressive Asian and European competitors, Richard Pascale (1989) called for a new management mindset, one in which business improvements were thought of in transformational terms. He argued:

“The ultimate, and largely ignored task of management is one of creating and breaking paradigms...When the competitive environment pushes an organisation to its limits, the old mind-set no longer holds...A discontinuous improvement in capability is needed, and it entails transformation. The trouble is that 99% of managerial attention today is devoted to the techniques that squeeze more out of the existing paradigm and it's killing us.” (Pascale, 1989, p.14)

Pascale’s arguments were formulated as a result of his work with top management teams at organisations such as General Electric, Citicorp, Ford, Hewlett Packard, General Motors and Honda. He urges management to strive for radical innovation and describes through his case studies, examples of successful change. However, he does not provide any insights into how top management teams arrive at a decision to pursue significant change. This is important to understand because radical change is likely to be contentious since it often requires a re-configuration of the structure, which in turn will mean changes in the degrees of influence and power enjoyed by the management elite. It is unlikely that any one individual has sufficient ability or power to design and drive through complex, large scale change. Therefore, we arrive at the idea that it must be key sections of the top management team which form a coalition which has sufficient cohesion to design and unite around a proposal. As has been mentioned at several points in this chapter, there is little empirically generated research to describe how coalitions form, their characteristics and nature once they have been formed, and the behaviours and tactics used by coalition builders to win support and overcome resistance from those who oppose the planned change.

In a series of theoretical papers, Tushman and Romanelli (1983, 1985) contended that organisations develop through a combination of incremental growth and discontinuous
strategic reorientation, characterised by radical shifts in strategy, structure and power. In periods of incrementalism—convergence—the executive leadership tended to take a back seat, engaging in symbolic activities as lower level management executed strategy. However, in times of radical change, executive leadership played a substantive and symbolic role. Tushman and Romanelli (1985, p.214) argued, “only executive leadership is able to initiate and implement strategic reorientations.” This reinforces the concerns over the scarcity of literature. If commentators agree on the importance and relevance of understanding large scale change, it can be legitimately asked why more studies of guiding coalitions have not been conducted. In another paper Tushman, Newman and Romanelli (1986) suggested:

“During convergent periods, the executive team focuses on maintaining congruence and fit within the organisation. Because strategy, structure, processes, and systems are fundamentally sound, the myriad of incremental substantive decisions can be delegated to middle-level management, where direct expertise and information resides. The key role for executive leadership during convergent periods is to re-emphasise strategy, mission, and core values and to keep a vigilant eye on external opportunities and/or threats.

Frame-breaking change, however, requires direct executive involvement in all aspects of the change. Given the enormity of the change and inherent internal forces for stability, executive leadership must be involved in the specification of strategy, structure, people, and organisational processes and in the development of implementation plans. During frame-breaking change, executive leadership is directly involved in reorienting their organisations. Direct personal involvement of senior management seems to be critical to implement these system-wide changes.” (Tushman, Newman and Romanelli, 1986, p.40)

Building on these arguments Tushman, Newman and Romanelli (1986, p.41) asserted that the executive leadership must be involved in shaping the political dynamics as well as “providing the energy, vision, and resources to support, and be role models for, the new order.” Kouzes and Posner (1995, p.51) contended that “leadership is inextricably connected with the process of innovation, of bringing new ideas, methods, or solutions into use.” However, Brake (1997) suggested it is the CEO who is ultimately responsible for “galvanising” the top management team into developing options for change. This is
interesting because although it may be the CEO who needs to countenance the public role of coalitions in the top management team, the act of 'galvinising' is more likely to come from someone below the CEO who has the energy and desire to pursue the development of the change proposal. This argument finds support from both Morgan (1986) and Hamel (1996) who suggested that most instigators of large scale change are someone other than the CEO. Brake does not offer supporting evidence to substantiate his claim that it is in fact the CEO, nor does he explain how the 'galvinising' takes place in terms of process, behaviours or tactics. Kanter (1983, p.125) chose not to identify who should drive the initiative forward electing instead to suggest that, "change requires leadership...a 'prime mover' to push for implementation of strategic decisions."

Gandz and Murray (1980) investigated how coalitions emerge. They found that what is required is for someone to step into the leadership role who has sufficient verve and ambition to harness the shared views of a collection of individuals and energise them into a coalition. Morgan (1986) advanced the view that it need not be one of the most senior members who forms the coalition. He proposed, "Sometimes coalitions are initiated by less powerful actors who seek the support of others," (p.155). Although we know from writers such as Kipnis et al (1984) that individuals use different influencing strategies depending on whether their target is more senior or junior than themselves, the literature offers very little empirically gathered data on whether or not coalition builders from different hierarchical levels use different approaches when enlisting support.

In an influential paper on the changing nature of the top management team Bartlett and Ghoshal (1995, p.133) contended that "the most basic task of corporate leaders is to unleash the human spirit, which makes initiative, creativity, and entrepreneurship possible." James MacGregor Burns (1978, p.461) went even further when he claimed, "The ultimate test of practical leadership is the realisation of intended, real change that meets people's enduring needs." However, balancing a galvanising force, team cohesion and management performance is not without problems. Nadler and Tushman (1990) commented:

"For a senior team to benefit from its involvement in leading change, it must become an effective system for learning about the business, the nature of change, and the task of managing change. The challenge is to both bond the team together, while avoiding insularity. One of the costs of such team structures is that they become isolated from the rest of the
organisation, they develop patterns of dysfunctional conformity, avoid conflict, and over time develop patterns of learned incompetence.” (Nadler and Tushman, 1990, p.90)

Eisenhardt et al (1997) also emphasised the difficulties in maintaining alignment and solidarity in the top management team. They suggested that turbulence in the team is inevitable given the propensity of the organisational environment, both internal and external, to change rapidly and demand a shift in strategic direction. Additionally, the often strong characters of top management team members and the likelihood they hold a diverse range of opinions on the issue of which direction to move the organisation and how to move it, are not necessarily conducive to cohesion. The authors asserted:

“Top management teams typically face situations with high ambiguity, high stakes, and extreme uncertainty. Discord, contention, debate, disagreement—in short, conflict—are natural in such situations. Why? Reasonable people are likely to perceive an ambiguous and uncertain world in different ways, to make differing assessments about what might happen in the future, and so prefer different alternatives. In addition, given the high stakes facing senior executives, they are likely to be particularly passionate and vocal about their beliefs. The likelihood of conflict is further exacerbated by the fact that senior executives usually lead their own large and important sectors of the corporation. So they receive information and pressure from their own unique constituencies within the firm and form objectives that reflect their differing responsibilities. Thus, to the extent that uncertainty and ambiguity cloud the future, tough competition with other firms raises the stakes, and executives act as forceful advocates for ‘truth’ as they see it, there is apt to be active, engaged conflict within top management teams.” (Eisenhardt et al, 1997, p.43)

Yet these factors, they contend, must not be used to legitimise a failure to align the top management team since, “Their ability to engage in effective teamwork can determine the success of the firm,” (Eisenhardt et al, 1997, p.42). Liedtka and Rosenblum (1996) adopt a similar stance as they argued there must be:
"...a capacity for strategic conversation, or dialogue, at the organisational level that draws together these individual conversations and that shapes and is shaped by them into a coherent institutional intent." (Liedtka and Rosenblum, 1996, p.141)

Whilst the literature has accepted that there are different types of political organisation (for example, Mintzberg, 1985), and that these are both the cause and effect of political behaviour, it appears to treat coalitions in the context of change as though there is only one type. This seems unlikely given the diversity of organisational settings, management cultures, magnitude, complexity and urgency of change initiatives. Even so, there is an absence of research which describes different types, and because of this no discussion of type-specific behaviours and tactics used by coalition leaders beyond the generic. This is a surprising finding because of the large volume of writing on the topics of change management, top management teams and micro-behavioural analysis. It would be a valuable contribution to the literature if this gap were to be addressed. Therefore, it will be one of the lines of enquiry—presented at the end of chapter three—in the empirical study which underpins this thesis.

The common theme that is emerging throughout this discussion is the contention that large scale change and design is too complex for one individual to take on. Clearly, teamwork is a critical success factor. However, it is unlikely to be the entire top management team because far reaching change often creates winners and losers amongst the current executives and to resort to cliché for just a moment, turkeys don’t vote for Christmas. Therefore, it follows that it is sections of the top management team in the form of coalitions which will take on the task. This has interesting implications for academic enquiry because it means a shift in the research agenda away from taking the individual as the unit of analysis to the individual in their role fulfilment as part of a top management team coalition in the context of large scale change, or indeed, the coalition as a group. Although both approaches accept the individual as an interactive unit, the latter stresses the heavy influence of context on behaviour. This is a subtle but distinct move, and one that if followed will provide deep insights into political process, behaviour and tactics. This brings with it problems of gaining access to an increased number of top management team members in an organisation. Consequently, researchers will need to be resourceful and opportunistic to achieve wider access, and creative to construct an innovative yet rigorous methodologies. A few signs of this shift have been detected in the literature.
Writing of the decision to focus his research efforts on top management team development, Kakabadse (1991, p.9) described his dissatisfaction with the existing leadership literature base. He noted how the increasingly turbulent business environment characterised by a growth in national and cross-border mergers and acquisitions, the globalisation and convergence of industries, the emergence of continental trading blocks, advances in technology, and ever more demanding customers, was placing an unmanageable strategic burden on the chief executive officer. In light of this, he remarked, “The more I dealt with top management, the more I recognised that the top team, not the successful business leader, should be the focus of analysis.” Kakabadse went on to contend it is the top team that confronts the key business issues which drive organisational change: “Close observation indicates that the team running a business is the key unit by which meaningful business issues, such as sales and marketing, levels of costs required to induce the desired revenue streams, vision, organisation structure, team styles, people management styles, and how top managers should behave, are discussed and addressed”, (p.10). Agreeing with Kakabadse, Acona and Nadler (1989, p.20) suggested that top management team based approaches to large scale change have replaced the ‘lone hero’ CEO approach because of “external demands, organisational complexity and succession.”

In a similar vein Beer, Eisenstat and Spector (1990) argued that the first responsibility of senior management is to orchestrate company-wide change. Kotter (1996) also adds weight to the view that the role of the top management team, and not just the chief executive officer, is to generate options, instigate and lead the implementation of large scale change. He asserted:

“Major transformations are often associated with one highly visible individual...After a while, one might easily conclude that the kind of leadership that is so critical to any change can come only from a single larger-than-life person. This is a very dangerous belief. Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. No one individual, even a monarch-like CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change projects, and anchor new approaches deep in the organisation’s culture. Weak committees are even worse. A strong guiding coalition is always needed—one with the right composition, level
of trust, and shared objective. Building a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any effort to restructure, reengineer, or retool a set of strategies.” (Kotter, 1996, p.51-52)

Jackall (1988, p.75) related the observation based on his own empirical studies that much of the management literature perpetuates the myth that decision making prowess in individuals is accorded to either “the consensus guy” or the “take charge guy”. A more accurate description, he argued would be one that acknowledged “the essential political and personal problems that managers face in making decisions.” Non-routinized decisions such as large scale change require negotiations, recruitment and alignment of a number of the most influential members of the top management team. Reinforcing the arguments made earlier regarding the emergence of coalitions due to the creation of winners and losers in the top management team, Kotter remarked:

“In successful transformations, the president, division manager, or department head plus another five, fifteen, or fifty people with a commitment to improved performance pull together as a team. This group rarely includes all of the most senior people because some of them just won’t buy in, at least at first. But in the most successful cases, the coalition is always powerful —in terms of formal titles, information and expertise, reputations and relationships, and the capacity for leadership. Individuals alone, no matter how competent or charismatic, never have all the assets needed to overcome tradition and inertia except in very small organisations.” (Kotter, 1996, p.6)

His argument provides strong support for empirical research into large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams, particularly as his own comments are based on casual observation or ancillary findings from his previous research into leadership and change. There is no extant literature on large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams which is surprising given that coalitions in top management teams appear so important to the proposing and implementing of large scale change. It is imperative there is academic investigation into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders. This thesis will undertake that task.
If any further justification for empirical enquiry is required it can be noted that Pettigrew (1992) has argued that the study of managerial elites is one of the most under-researched and neglected areas of social science investigation. Much of the literature on the change agent in organisations conflates the political behaviours and tactics used to a generically descriptive and prescriptive level. Even notable exceptions such as Dunphy and Stace (1990) and Buchanan and Boddy (1992) considered the issue from a macro-behavioural perspective only, commenting on the types of behaviour most appropriate to the degree of alignment between the organisation and its environment (Dunphy and Stace, 1990), or alternatively the centrality of change to the primary task of the organisation (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992). There is a paucity of research into the micro-behaviours of change agents, and there is none on individuals who lead large scale change proposal coalitions. The empirical research reported in this thesis addresses this gap.

Conclusion

In this first chapter we have considered a wide range of contemporary change management literature and several key points of contention. The point of departure was the argument that the traditional rational-linear approach to change is not the most suitable option for organisations faced with complex large scale change in environments which are subject to significant and rapid change. It was contended that organisations are political arenas comprised of competing coalitions and top management team members with different views on which direction the organisation should move. Drawing from an increasingly large and influential section of the literature it was suggested that a more resilient and pragmatic model is the power-oriented political approach to change. Arguments were made also to support the claim that because of the complexity, magnitude and frequency of change, the chief executive officer alone cannot realistically expect to develop options for large scale change. Rather, it is the role of the top management team. The chapter concluded with the assertion that within the top management team a guiding coalition is required to develop a proposal. In putting these arguments forward the existing literature base was critiqued and a number of methodological and assumptive problems were identified. Of central concern is the shortage of empirically generated research, and in the area of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams, no research at all. If these gaps were to be addressed the findings would provide deep insights into the nature and characteristics of
large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams, and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders.
"Innovation and change in almost any arena require the skill to develop power, and the willingness to employ it to get things accomplished."
(Pfeffer, 1992, p.345)

Introduction

In chapter one we established that top management team coalitions have a key role to play in the design of large scale change proposals. We set out the argument that the rational-linear approach to change is likely to be less effective than a power-oriented behaviour based approach because of the complexity and magnitude of the planned change. We established also that because of the scale of the task, top management team coalitions, rather than just one individual, have a key role to play in the design of large scale change proposals. Given that such change is likely to impact the structural design of the organisation there will be winners and losers within the top management team. Therefore, the coalition leader must expect to encounter resistance. To overcome opposition, build and sustain a coalition the coalition leader must be able to engage meaningfully in political activity, whether publicly or privately backstage. To do this it is essential to understand the nature and sources of intraorganisational power. A coalition leader who has a deep awareness can use this knowledge to construct a powerful coalition. Furthermore, they can understand and predict the actions of other coalitions and take steps to neutralise them or reduce their likelihood of gaining approval for implementation. Clearly, on the assumption that organisations are political arenas, the coalition leader who understands power is more likely to be effective than one who does not.
Therefore, in this chapter we will consider three alternative views on the nature and sources of intraorganisational power. The first of these presents power as a personal construct which manifests itself through personal attributes or interpersonal exchange (For example, Allen et al, 1979; Berle, 1969; Chein, 1970; Dornbusch and Scott, 1975; Finklestein, 1993, French and Raven, 1954; Guardini, 1961; Martin and Sims, 1956; May, 1972; McClelland, 1970; Minton, 1972; Ogletree, 1971; Pfeffer, 1992; Winter, 1973). The second school contends that power resides in the structure of an organisation (For example, Astley and Sachdeva, 1984; Bacharach and Lawler, 1980; Bailey, 1977; Brass, 1984; Brass and Burkhardt, 1993; Ibarra, 1993; Kanter, 1983; Kotter, 1978; Krackhardt and Porter, 1985; Pettigrew, 1973; Weber, 1947). The third school suggests that power is a situational construct whereby those who can control the strategic contingencies acquire power (For example, Hickson et al, 1971; Hinings et al, 1974; Pfeffer, 1992; Saunders, 1990).

During the discussion the existing viewpoints will be critiqued from several perspectives. Firstly, power does not reside in just one location or another. Such monocausal arguments are unhelpful and serve only to cloud the development of a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. Power resides in multiple locations simultaneously, there is no fixed amount and it ebbs and flows because of personal, structural and situational events. Secondly, much of the commentary on intraorganisational power has been theoretically derived. Alternatively, theories have been constructed from casual observation. Whilst both of these approaches make valuable contributions to our understanding, there is a shortage of empirically generated research, particularly with respect to power in the context of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. Thirdly, there are a number of contentious assumptions underpinning several influential writings. These will be identified and debated. It will be concluded that a more synthesised approach to studying intraorganisational power in top management teams is required if we are to gain deeper, more informed insights into the large scale change proposal coalition building process and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders.

**Nature and sources of intraorganisational power**

Cavanaugh (1984) noted that in 1938 Bertrand Russell predicted power would become a central issue in the social sciences, and that five decades on a unified conceptualisation
of power had still not been produced. Commenting on the difficulties organisational scholars have had in establishing a universally acceptable and useful definition of power Bierstedt (1950), commented:

"We may say about it in general only what St. Augustine said about time, that we all know perfectly well what it is —until someone asks us."
(Bierstedt, 1950, p.730)

Since this observation a considerable number of writers have generated a diverse literature in an attempt to understand and describe the phenomenon more fully. Such diversity has been a cause for concern to some theorists who believe the continuous splitting of power into discrete and often opposing viewpoints, has clouded the picture rather than brought it into sharper focus. Astley and Sachdeva (1984, p.105) claimed that "researchers, unfortunately often have lost site of power as a 'global' phenomenon." Disappointingly, the authors do not suggest what the benefits of a unified theory would be.

Traditionally there have been three distinct viewpoints on power in organisations. The first of these views power as a personal construct, originating in either the individual in the form of personal attributes, or alternatively through interpersonal exchange. The second viewpoint holds that power resides in the structure of an organisation. The third viewpoint takes the position that power is a situational construct. Also referred to as the strategic contingency approach, the key premise is that power is something that accrues to organisational sub-units such as individuals, coalitions or departments that are able to cope with the critical issues facing the organisation.

Power as a personal construct

The personal attributes view. Advocates of this argument believe that power is held by a person and used at will. Guardini (1961, p.3) has described power as a "specifically human phenomenon." Similarly, Berle (1969, p.60) stated, "Power is an attribute of man. It does not exist without a holder." Chein (1970) has suggested that it is an innate driver of an individual's personality. The view that people have an inherent need to acquire and use power has two explanations. The first suggests that individuals want to be powerful and influence the behaviour of others (May, 1972; Ogletree, 1971). The
second purports that individuals seek power to protect themselves from powerful others. In effect it is a balancing item to counteract the behaviour shaping actions of others (Minton, 1972; Winter, 1973). In the change context this means that top management team members build or join large scale change coalitions either to increase their own influence over others and the strategic direction of the organisation, or to resist the initiatives of others who wish to exert influence in the same manner.

The power motive was investigated by McClelland (1970) who described two faces of power need: personalised power needs and socialised power needs. The first of these, personalised power, was characterised by the individual's pursuance of self-interest in the form of 'I win, you lose' situations. Socialised power needs reflected a concern for group and organisational objectives. McClelland concluded that individuals who had successful careers in organisations were those who aligned their own self-interests with those of the organisation. That is to say that proposers of large scale change who stand to benefit tend to do so because the change produces positive outcomes for the organisation. Another investigation into the power motive was conducted by Winter (1973). He contended it was "a disposition to strive for certain kinds of goals, or to be affected by certain kinds of incentives". His research findings suggested that individuals distinguished themselves by displaying either a "hope of power", or avoidance because of a "fear of power". Minton (1972) differentiated between intrinsic and extrinsic power motives. Intrinsic motives were self-initiated power seeking activities where the desired outcome was self-determination. Extrinsic motives were those where power accrued as a result of efforts initiated by others.

Whilst each of these investigations throw light on the drivers of behaviour in the workplace they are not sufficiently sophisticated to provide more than a partial explanation for the behaviour of large scale change proposal coalition leaders. Since these three writers put forward their propositions twenty-five to thirty years ago, large scale change has become more frequent and complex. Designing a proposal and winning sufficient support from the rest of the top management team is too demanding a task for one individual. This is why temporary coalitions are built. In this context, discussion about individuals in isolation is no longer the most appropriate since they rarely have sufficient energy or capability to create the momentum required to carry change through to implementation. It would be more informative if research into the power motive were conducted into individuals fulfilling a role, such as coalition leader, in the broader context of the coalition since they are now forced —by complexity, magnitude and
frequency—to temporarily align their motives, activities and behaviours with top management team colleagues. Arguments such as ‘I win, you lose’ undoubtedly still apply, but there is a need to research them at the sub-unit coalition level.

Power is also interesting from the perspective of who is able to instigate large scale change. Experience, seniority, education, training and professional activity are attributes which act as important sources of power (Finklestein, 1993; French and Raven, 1954; Ibarra, 1993), particularly for members of the organisation who occupy junior positions in the formal hierarchy and therefore find it difficult to instigate large scale change (Mechanic, 1962; Tushman and Romanelli, 1983). Ibarra (1993) cited the work of Kimberly and Evanisko (1981) who argued that tenure was an effective substitute for hierarchical position and legitimate authority when used to navigate the political waters of an organisation to achieve desired outcomes. However, this assumption is too general and needs further clarification. This researcher’s own casual observations made through working for KPMG in a broad range of large organisations with management at all levels for the purpose of designing and implementing large scale change indicates that the organisational setting is of crucial importance. For example, one of the UK’s largest financial institutions exhibits a culture which can be described as bureaucratic. Tenure is indeed an effective substitute for hierarchical position, not so much to instigate large scale change, but to thwart it. There exists a network of long serving individuals, many of whom have been with the organisation for longer than twenty years, which operates behind the scenes to resist change. On the other hand at one of the world’s largest high-tech companies tenure is of little or no importance. Large scale change is instigated by those with sufficient energy and capability. Tenure appears to be of little use to constrain or stop large scale change, due in part to the fact that the critical issues facing the organisation appear to change at least once a year: revenue growth, profit growth, cost containment, technology development, skills shortage and globalisation are the issues which have faced the industry leader referred to above in the last five years alone.

Personal traits and their linkage to effective political actors occupying the position of CEO was the purpose of Allen et al’s (1979) empirical investigation. The findings are conveyed in Exhibit 2.1. However, the results are of limited value only. Several assumptive and methodological criticisms can be levelled at this widely cited research.

The assumptive concerns are around the identification of cause and effect, and context as influence on behaviour. Personal characteristics such as sensitivity or being articulate
may be the effect of occupying a powerful position or having access to power rather than
the cause, and undesirable features such as aggressiveness can be suppressed once a
position of influence had been achieved. It is also the case that certain characteristics
may be required only in specific situations. Aggressiveness may surface or be necessary
in periods of economic recession when revenues are threatened, and organisational
performance has to improve rapidly, but it may be inappropriate during times of high
profitability when a popular manner might be more conducive to high performance. The
work of Dunphy and Stace (1990) discussed in the last chapter looked at change
management style. The authors found that when the organisation was out of fit with its
environment and corporate transformation was required, a dictatorial transformation
style had the greatest likelihood of achieving the change required.

Exhibit 2.1 - Allen et al's responses from effective
political actors in the position of chief executive officer

The methodological concerns lie in the integrity of the data sample since the chief
executive officers were asked to comment on themselves. Being devious and aggressive
may be seen by some as unattractive characteristics and consequently avoided in their
responses, even if they believed them to be valid. It is also hardly surprising that
characteristics such as sensitivity, being articulate and highly intelligent scored highly.
The findings would have been more credible and insightful if they were the responses of
those with a reporting relationship into the CEO. Allen et al also fail to suggest that
personal characteristics are only one contributing factor to being an effective political
actor and for this they can be accused of falling into the 'fundamental attribution error' trap. Given these criticisms and the wide citation of this work in the political behaviour literature, it is clear that researchers are very keen to gain insights into the personalities, behaviours and tactics of those in positions to shape the strategic direction of the organisation.

Based on his casual observation Pfeffer (1992, p.166) identified six personal attributes which he claimed were observable in individuals who were effective at acquiring and holding power in organisations:

- Energy, endurance, and physical stamina,
- The ability to focus one's energy and to avoid wasted effort,
- Sensitivity, which makes it possible to read and understand others,
- Flexibility, particularly with respect to selecting various means in order to achieve one's goals,
- The willingness to engage, when necessary, in conflict and confrontation, or, in other words, a certain degree of personal toughness, and
- The ability to submerge one's ego, at least temporarily, and play the good subordinate or team player to enlist the help and support of others.

It would be of academic interest if the personal characteristics and behaviours and tactics of large scale change proposal coalition leaders were empirically investigated. It would be valuable to understand whether there were any differences between successful and unsuccessful—as measured by proposal approval for implementation—leaders, whether certain personalities, behaviours and tactics were suited to coalitions with particular characteristics such as size, complexity, stability and group constitution in terms of seniority or international background of members. Another interesting line of enquiry would be to investigate whether coalition leaders from different hierarchical levels exhibit different personalities and used different behaviours and tactics. The problem is attempting to distinguish between cause and effect. A more junior member of the top management team may exhibit a 'humble' personality and employ less directive and coercive behaviours and tactics when working with more senior colleagues. However, the same individual may demonstrate a less 'humble' personality and employ directive and coercive behaviours and tactics should they become CEO. Such action indicates the
importance of structure as a determinant on behaviour. One way to partially offset these problems is to conduct a longitudinal study over an extended time period to record and analyse changes in an individual who is repeatedly a coalition leader. It is accepted that attempting to control for the multitude of variables such as changing environmental pressures, new top management team members who join the coalitions, the evolving personalities and behaviours of coalition members, the different complexities of the proposal being developed by the coalition, to name but a few would be a challenging task. Nevertheless, until academic investigations pursue a longitudinal strategy—whatever the drawbacks—we must satisfy ourselves with snapshots of coalition life.

The interpersonal view. The contention that power is a function of social relationships is an enlargement of the argument that power is an attribute of the individual. Writers who adopt the position that power is an interpersonal construct assert that for an individual to have power there must be someone over whom it can be exercised. Martin and Sims (1956, p.25) suggested that “men can only exercise that power which they are allowed to by other men...” Several years earlier Laswell (1948) had been even more declarative when he stated:

“Power is an interpersonal situation; those who hold power are empowered. They depend upon and continue only so long as there is a continuing stream of empowering responses. Even a casual inspection of human relations will convince any competent observer that power is not a brick that can be lugged from place to place, but a process that vanishes when the supporting responses cease.” (Laswell, 1948, p.10)

This contention appears to be applicable to large scale change proposal coalition leaders who having achieved the purpose of the coalition find their support base waning. However, ‘supporting responses’ can be maintained if the coalition leader is able to identify another issue to address that is sufficiently compelling for coalition members to continue their support. Furthermore, if a coalition leader can help to generate significant personal benefits for individuals they are likely to develop an embedded support base which can be mobilised if the need emerges.

The main contribution of those who suggest that power is an interpersonal construct is that it is built around the notion that the power of one party is contingent upon the party with whom they are interacting. Due to the fact that members of organisations live in a
web of continuously evolving relationships, power is subject to an incessant ebbing and flowing as the dynamics change. Power is relationship specific. For example, a coalition leader who enjoys considerable power over a more junior member of the top management team may find that power totally extinguished in their interactions with a more senior member than themselves. Dornbusch and Scott (1975) argued, "it is always a simplification to speak only of A's power, and to do so is to court danger." Supporters of this view can be sub-divided into those who believe it is important to distinguish between 'ability' and 'use'. A demarcation referred to by Mintzberg (1983, p.25) as "will and skill". Some authors contend that power exists only when it is used. For example, Thompson and Luthans (1983, p.75) maintained that "power is manifested through behavioural actions", while Dahl (1957) claimed that unrealised potential is not power. Bacharach and Lawler (1980) were clear that the potential use of power and the actual use of power are two separate dimensions. On the other hand, McCall (1979) and Mintzberg (1983) argued that to distinguish potential from actual was unhelpful, and Emerson (1972, p.67) remarked that "to have a power advantage is to use it." Others view power as the ability of one person to overcome resistance to achieve a desired result (House, 1988; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992), or quite simply, the ability to get things done (Crozier, 1964; Deutsch, 1963; Goldner, 1970; Hall and Bates, 1970; Kanter, 1977; Kaplan, 1964; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977; Strauss, 1962; Tushman, 1977; Winter, 1973).

The A-B model as this is often called, refers to the ability of A to get B to do something, with 'do' encompassing the broader notions of think, feel and act. Taking this as his point of departure Lukes (1974) identified several points of contention. First, does A consciously have to attempt to get B to do something before A can be said to have exerted power? French and Raven (1954) and Winter (1973) argued against, while Bates (1970) contended that A must have been aware. Wrong (1979) asserted that A must not only have wanted to get B to do something, but that A's actions were successful.

The issue of resistance from B to A has also been studied (Gross, 1968; Martin, 1971; Michener and Suchner, 1972; Thibaut and Kelly, 1959). These authors argued that to consider the power relationship only from the perspective of A would lead to a narrow and distorted view of the bi-lateral nature of the power relationship. They contended there must be reciprocity between A and B because A could not develop their power if they were not open to influence from B. This argument clearly portrays power as a dynamic phenomenon influenced by changes in A, their relationship with B, C and others, and the environment.
One of the classic studies of personal power was conducted by French and Raven (1954) who classified the exercise of power in organisations into five ‘bases’: reward, coercive, legitimate, expert and referent. The essence of their argument was that power is a function of the relationship between the influencer and their target. For power to be effective, that is for the target to comply with the intentions of the influencer, the target must believe the influencer has the ability and willingness to use it. In fact the influencer may or may not have the ability to punish non-compliant behaviour (coercive power), and they may or may not have the expertise (expert power) they apparently enjoy. Actual possession of power, or the ability to gain access to it, only becomes important if they are required to demonstrate it (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). However, once a bluff has been uncovered, particularly long term deception, an individual’s influence may be severely diminished so in reality organisational influencers must usually possess or have access to the powers they claim.

Reward power is based on an individual’s perceived ability and willingness to convert incentives into rewards such as promotion, praise, pay improvements and increased responsibility. To generate desired behaviour they must be perceived by the target as being worth the additional effort. Coercive power represents the other side of the coin. The individual must be perceived to possess the ability and willingness to implement negative outcomes for the target, who in turn must believe them to be both undesirable and deliverable. Although examples of coercion include the threat of demotion, reduced opportunity and loss of compensation and benefit, they can be anything of value to the individual over which the coercer has influence. Legitimate power, a concept first presented by Weber (1947), is the base that most managers have traditionally relied on when attempting to gain compliance from subordinates (Shetty, 1978). Its effectiveness hinges on the subordinate’s belief that because of their manager’s position in the hierarchy he or she has the right to determine their work content and flow, instruct, and demand compliance with rules and regulations. Expert power is based on the experience and knowledge of an individual and their ability to influence another person’s behaviour because of it. Once again the target must accept the relevance and legitimacy of the influencer’s expertise for it to be effective. The fifth base, referent power, is based on attraction and empathetic identification with the influencer. Often described as charisma or personal magnetism (Pfeffer, 1992; Shetty, 1978), the individual possesses the ability to inspire and align other people’s hopes, ideals and aspirations with those expressed by themselves. With this type of power employees comply voluntarily because they empathise with a personal trait of the influencer, or a cause they espouse. In the context
of large scale change this could be because an individual believes in what the proposer stands for — maximising shareholder value, for example — or they buy into the vision of what the future will look like if the change is successfully implemented. Although French and Raven's work is still regarded as seminal, it is more for the identification of power sources than the analysis and interpretation of when and where they are most effectively used. This has been taken on by others such as Shetty (1978) and Yukel and Taber (1983). However, none of these authors located their empirical studies in a top management team in the context of leading large scale change. The broader question of how large scale change proposal coalition leaders win support amongst top management team members, above at the same level, or below themselves remains empirically unaddressed. Once again it is clear that our understanding of managerial elites in the change context needs to be strengthened through empirical research.

Shetty (1978) found that effective managers tended to use the power bases in combinations. Prudent use of reward and coercive power can strengthen legitimate power but excessive use will often serve only to diminish their effectiveness. For example, if a manager always praised a member of staff regardless of the quality of output, then over a period of time the motivational effect of being praised was devalued until its effect was negligible. On the other hand excessive criticism may cause the subordinate to give up or stimulate conflict. Shetty (1978, p.180-181 and p.185) found the most effective managers were those who adopted a contingency approach, matching the power base to the prevailing situation. These managers tended to use expert and referent power ahead of reward, coercive and legitimate power because they induced a commitment culture rather than a compliance culture which increased employee satisfaction and performance. This proposition was supported by findings from a study by Yukel and Taber (1983). Detracting from the sole usage of referent power was the fact that some managers manipulated subordinates for personal reasons. Shetty contended that although the opportunity for personal gain can never be eliminated, the problem can be offset by using referent power in conjunction with expert power.

Tannenbaum et al (1974b, p.74) proposed a sixth base to add to the five submitted by French and Raven. They suggested that the additional base “...implies accession to influence out of a sense of commitment to a larger purpose served by the organisation.” A notion advanced earlier by Rensis Likert (1961) and Mary Parker Follett (1942), and discussed above in the context of McClelland's (1970) work on the power motive and socialised power needs. Follett referred to the greater purpose as “the law of the
situation". Adopting Follet’s term Tannenbaum et al studied large and small plants in five countries to ascertain that “the law of the situation” rated second behind legitimacy as the most important and influential power with expertise, referent, reward and coercion rating third, fourth, fifth and sixth respectively. Citing the work of Bachman et al (1968) they concluded that “coercion is indeed a relatively ineffective basis of power in the modern organisation”, (Tannenbaum, 1974b, p.75). As we have discussed already in chapter one there has been a general move against the position held by Tannenbaum and others who suggest that coercion has no role to play in large scale change. In recent years a number of writers have claimed that coercive and directive behaviours and tactics are necessary in change contexts where there is a need for urgency, or there is resistance which threatens the health of the organisation (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Egan, 1994; Hayes, 1984; Kanter, 1983, 1992; Mintzberg, 1985; Pfeffer, 1992).

In 1961 Amitai Etzioni reclassified French and Raven's five bases into two: position power and personal power. He argued that three of the bases—legitimate, reward and coercive powers—are a function of the structure rather than the person. These he referred to as position power. The other two bases—expert and referent power—which were classified as personal power, depend largely on the traits and attributes of the individual. This recasting of French and Raven's work was one of the early attempts at synthesising the personal and structural schools. Let us turn now to a discussion of those who suggest that power resides in the structure of an organisation.

Power as a structural construct

Writers such as Kanter (1972) and Ryan (1984) have criticised the personal power school for over-emphasising the scope for negotiation between individuals in decision making processes and paying too little attention to the influence of structure. According to Brass (1984, p.518), “While personal attributes and strategies may have an important effect on power acquisition...structure imposes the ultimate constraints on the individual.” If we trace arguments such as this back through the literature we arrive at two of the most influential voices: Karl Marx and Max Weber. Both writers approached the concept of power from quite different directions, but a common theme was the portrayal of power as domination which embedded in organisational structures enables managerial elites to protect and further their interests at the expense of other groups in the organisation. Marx (1976) argued that domination was achieved by controlling the economic factors of
production: chiefly capital and labour. Those who owned capital could buy labour and therefore achieve dominance. Bureaucratic organisations were the mechanism by which the capitalist class ruled the labour masses. For Marx, workers were repressed and their challenge was to overcome the structural disadvantage in order to achieve direction and power to determine their own actions. Whilst Weber (1947) acknowledged that power was derived from owning and controlling the factors of production, he did not accept that ultimately power hinged on ownership or non-ownership. He argued that workers—admittedly some groups more than others—enjoyed discretion over their decision making and work design, and therefore, could not be considered totally disadvantaged. After all, if an individual enjoyed discretion, however little, the question becomes how to increase it. It is this notion that directly underpins upward influence and power acquisition, and more indirectly, influence amongst peers such as top management team members. As we have noted already empirical enquiries into the processes, behaviours and tactics used in large scale change proposal coalitions comprising top management team peers is one area of managerial elites which has not been studied.

A central concern of Weberian analysis was how organisations sought to reduce the discretionary capabilities of workers through the use of structurally embedded rule systems. The main formal mechanism for this is the hierarchy since this generates a chain of command in which each position has a defined sphere of authority and accompanying set of rights and rules. This interlinkage serves to dampen discretion and create stability, and it these factors which give rise to bureaucratic organisations. Bureaucracies were most commonly associated with public sector organisations since these were the institutions of government. Control and order were desirable because they produced stability and reduced the possibility of revolution. Today the term bureaucracy is used disparagingly in management circles to refer to staid organisations unable to cope with uncertainty and turbulent environments. This problem has driven organisational designers—both academic and practitioner—to find ways of releasing the energies of workers to improve responsiveness and competitiveness. For example, participative management and empowerment are two of the ideas developed, at least in part, for this purpose. The emergence of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams is partly a response to an acknowledgement that the CEO is unable to plot the strategic direction of the organisation single-handed, even if structurally that power in the form of legitimate authority is conferred on the office he or she occupies.
Dalton (1959) found that some managers exceeded the authority they had been granted to make things happen whereas others did not harness their full authority. As an explanation for the differences between high-achievers and low-achievers he remarked:

“One can think of variances in exercise of authority by persons on the same level as arising 'naturally' from differences in ability to do what is needed, from preoccupation with rivalries, or from disputes about goals and methods. These concerns may be confined to individuals. But dominant and responsible individuals obviously have followers. Thus there are unofficial group identities and actions that usually sweep along those who might choose to act in the isolation indicated by a chart. The existence and action of these groups is obvious to all responsible persons in a firm...”
(Dalton, 1959, p.18-19)

With regard to the sources of power an examination of Dalton's commentary identifies individuals who gained influence at the Milo plant as a result of charisma and influence (Hardy), working relationships (Springer and Hardy), expertise (Peters and V. Ames), formal and informal authority (Springer and Hardy respectively), ethnic bonds (Geiger, Meier and Boesel) and the ability to confront the critical issue of hitting planned output levels on schedule and budget. Clearly such a variety of sources in one organisational setting lends weights to the arguments that power resides in personal, structural and situational components simultaneously.

Amongst contemporary management writers Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1979, 1983), like Weber, has proposed that power resides in the structure of an organisation. Based on the findings of a six firm study of 115 innovations she argued that an individual’s hierarchical position provides access to three essential lines —supply, information and support— from which they derived the power to engage in political activity. ‘Productive lines’ and ‘lines of supply’ were later renamed ‘basic commodities’ and ‘resources’ respectively (Kanter, 1983, p. 216). Lines of supply consist of funds, materials, money, space, staff, time and prestige. They are the things a manager can bring into their own domain by exerting influence outside of it. Lines of information represent being ‘in the know’ in both a formal and informal context and so includes data, technical knowledge, the grapevine, expertise. Lines of support supplement the other two sources of power
and provide the manager with additional influence to drive change through. Endorsement, backing, legitimacy and approval are examples.

Effective — powerful — managers aim to keep ‘productive lines’ open, while ineffective — powerless — managers suffer as a result of them being closed. Kanter claimed that first line supervisors, staff professionals — and most interestingly for this thesis — chief executive officers, are particularly prone to exhibiting closed lines. Developing the argument she suggested ‘productive’ power is also related to establishing relationships with other parts of the system, and that such connections stem from two sources. Firstly, job activities which allow discretion, recognition and are relevant to pressing organisational problems and secondly, political alliances which include coalitions, peer networks, subordinates and sponsors. Once productive power lines have been established the constituent elements can be used to support a wide range of political behaviours and tactics.

However, her analysis can be criticised because it clearly presents a monocausal view of power. She is critical of the emphasis placed on personal power which she regards as being of secondary importance to structure. Kanter also ignores the situation as a source of power. Her arguments fail to consider that organisations are open systems which are subject to impacts and pressures from the surrounding environment. A critic of Kanter’s arguments is Barley (1990) who wrote, “while people’s actions are undoubtedly constrained by forces beyond their control and outside their immediate power, it is difficult to see how any social structure can be produced or reproduced except through ongoing action and interaction”, (p.64-65). Brass and Burhardt (1993, p.443) went even further stating that, “structure does not exist beyond behaviour.” As we have already argued turbulence in the broader arena and the added complexity it brings is another reason why coalitions in top management teams are being formed to design large scale change initiatives.

Kanter’s commentary is rich in its discussion of relationships or ‘lines’ between parties. One of the earliest empirical studies into dependencies in organisations was conducted by Thompson (1956). Researching the relative power of work groups in two USAF bomber wings he found that although the aircrews enjoyed significant formal authority, the technical support teams — which had much less formal authority than the aircrews — were able to acquire and use power because of their role in ensuring flight security. If the aircraft were not safe to fly they had the power to ground them. Thompson
concluded that technical expertise and the interdependencies of roles rather than formally prescribed positions in the hierarchy explained the distribution of power. In his study of influence capabilities and techniques of lower level organisational members, Mechanic (1962) found that technical expertise was one way in which individuals could exert influence beyond that prescribed by their position in the organisation hierarchy.

Support for Thompson and Mechanic's work can be found in Crozier's (1964) empirical power study into maintenance workers in a French state-owned tobacco monopoly. The production workers, who were paid on a piece-rate system were entirely dependent upon the maintenance workers to keep their machines running. Despite the efforts of production workers and management to reduce the dependency the maintenance workers—who sabotaged the machines and removed manuals in response—were able to extract a high degree of autonomy and privilege for keeping the machines running. Such power was much greater than that designed into their hierarchical positions. In Dalton's ethnographically researched classic 'Men who Manage' (1959) it was the operations chiefs who acted as the gatekeepers to the executive management on behalf of the maintenance workers. They were able to threaten adverse publicity if repairs were not completed on time. Those who had the lowest levels of uncompleted repairs had the most influence with the operations chiefs. For those of us interested in understanding the behaviour of managers and specifically the games they play, the value of ethnography as a research method is in the granular descriptions of relationships and the context in which they operate. Dalton is able to report the fine detail of plant relations as well as colouring in the broader organisational scenery. For example we learn that V. Ames headed up the unit most critical to the functioning of the division and that his power also flowed from his 'know how' regarding negotiations with the unions and the ability to get things done which was invaluable to Springer, his new boss and division head, who was seeking to make a good impression with the executive management.

Whereas Kanter inferred that acquiring or accessing the elements which comprise 'productive lines' will make an individual more powerful, John Kotter (1978) offered explicit advice how an individual can manipulate their dependencies on other people for the purpose of increasing their own effectiveness and power. Kotter argued that to become powerful, a manager must first identify their dependencies and assess their strength. He suggested that power resides in the quality of the relationship that a
manager has with the people on whom they are dependent to perform their job. Using
the example of a plant manager and a hospital manager he had researched, Kotter noted
the former had only four notable dependencies — suppliers, customers, plant employees
and boss, while the latter had at least thirteen. From this he concluded the hospital
manager expended considerably more time on power-orientated behaviour than did the
plant manager. His research indicated that “some managers — quite literally — spent 80
per cent of their time and energy on activities directly related to gaining, maintaining, or
using power (Kotter, 1978, p. 28).” Taking his analysis a stage further he contended the
amount of managerial dependence (and therefore the location and degree of power) is
contingent upon eight contextual factors: organisational size, environmental uncertainty,
environmental dependencies, organisational goals, technology, formal structure,
measurement systems and reward systems.

Firstly, organisational size affects dependency because larger entities have a greater
division of labour and managers are forced to work with others more than they would in
a smaller organisation where the division of labour is typically less. Secondly, the
greater the level of environmental uncertainty an organisation faces the less likely it is
that set decision making patterns can be established with the result that a manager’s
dependency on others increases. Thirdly, organisations are open social systems and are
therefore subject to environmental dependencies such as suppliers, customers, trade
unions and regulatory bodies. The greater the number of these dependencies there are
the more time a manager has to spend on managing the relationships. Fourthly, the more
sophisticated and ambitious an organisation’s goals are the more efficiently it has to
operate. To achieve this it must be highly integrated which in turn demands tight co-
ordination between the groups involved: a factor that once again increases the level of
dependency. Fifthly, the more sophisticated the technology used, the greater the need for
coordination and efficiency between managers: both of which raise the level of
dependency. Sixthly, the more decentralised an organisation’s formal structure is the
more managers will have to depend on others to achieve their goals. Seventhly, the less
an organisation’s measurement systems focus on group performance, the lower will be
the level of dependency because managers will pursue individualistic objectives. Eighth
and last, the more the reward system is directed towards group performance the greater
will be the dependency level amongst managers as activities are co-ordinated to derive
the potential benefits.
To ascertain their dependencies Kotter suggested that managers ask themselves the following questions. Who do I really depend on? Who is more important than who? What is the reason for each dependency? How can I manage them in order to minimise the time spent on power-orientated behaviour, thereby freeing me for my job related objectives? How can I eradicate any dysfunctional effects on myself and the organisation? Once a manager had answered these questions they could manipulate their dependencies to maximise the value they extracted from their relationships with others. One concern with Kotter's contentions is that he seeks to measure the dependencies as a one directional absolute—from A to B—rather than a bi-lateral construct—from A to B and B to A. Firstly, he does not advise A to ask the same questions in reverse from the perspective of B in the dependency equation. A may have a high dependency on B, but B may have an even higher dependency on A. Secondly, he fails to take into consideration those on whom the individual is not dependent—for example, C—but still impact their sphere of the organisation and therefore influence the dependency between A and B, either directly or indirectly. The actions of C may intentionally or inadvertently influence the relationship between A and B. For example, if C is the CEO they could increase the headcount budget in A's—the operations director—section of the organisation, which would mean they were able to recruit their own financial controller and reduce their dependency on B—the financial director. In short, it can be argued that an apparently simple dependency between A and B is in fact subject to multiple pressures from C and others as well as the broader organisational and environmental context.

This critique once again highlights the need to gain a deeper understanding of the processes, behaviours and tactics used by leaders of large scale change proposal coalitions. With so many top management team interdependencies at stake and individuals with significant levels of formally prescribed rights in the decision making process, how does a large scale change proposal coalition leader manage to sustain the coalition? This question which is of fundamental importance to our understanding of managerial elites is addressed and the findings presented in this thesis. This researcher agrees with Watson (1994, p.37) who suggested that “Managing is essentially a process of strategic exchange because it shapes the overall activities of the organisation and how it functions in its environment through the continual and continuous exchanging of information, favours, material and symbolic resources”, (p.37). Large scale change is initiated and driven by coalitions within the top management team and one of the key processes by which it is accomplished is the act of exchange between powerful parties. It
is difficult to imagine how change in organisations and the influence of significant others can be achieved if the party attempting the change has nothing to trade.

Astley and Sachdeva (1984, p.105-107) claimed the "formal" structural elements of power such as hierarchical authority, resource control and network centrality have been overlooked because of the attention focused on the "functional" interpretation of power as a dependence generated phenomenon (see for example: Emerson, 1962; Kotter, 1978; Pugh, Hickson, Hinings and Turner, 1968). Hierarchical authority, they argued, compels the subordinate to comply with their superior's wishes, not because they are dependent on them to fulfil their role in the organisation, but because they believe the latter has a right to exercise power over them by virtue of a more elevated position in the hierarchy. The second formal structural element, resource control, is based on the notion that internal dependence between organisational sub-units is superseded by the overall relationship that exists with the external environment. The organisation is an open social system faced with critical uncertainties and those who can obtain the most critical and difficult to secure resources acquire power because of the internal and external dependencies that are created subsequently need managing. In his semi-ethnographic study of the BBC Tom Burns (1977) reported how the producer's influence waned in the early 1970s as that enjoyed by the administrators increased. The administrators argued successfully that the role of the BBC was a socially important one and programming had to be monitored and set with considerable moral care. Producers were tolerated because of the need for ratings, particularly in light entertainment, once the competing channels had raised their standards and adapted to deliver what viewers were demanding. Burns later concluded that those who shared ideological beliefs — the administrators — gained a stranglehold within the power structure and perpetuated their influence by filling the most senior positions with those who held the same views as themselves.

A derivation of the network centrality argument is the idea that power flows to those who position themselves at the centre of emergent networks. These are networks that exist around rather than within the formal structure of the organisation. Authors such as Astley and Sachdeva (1984), Bacharach and Lawler (1980), Brass and Burkhardt (1993), Ibarra (1993), Krackhardt and Hanson (1993), Mechanic (1962) and Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) have argued that emergent networks based on determinants such as friendship, trust and respect enable those with multiple contacts to enjoy significant power over
other members and to some degree the decision making processes of the organisation. It is suggested by writers such as Buchanan and Boddy (1992) that emergent networks are imperative to successful ‘backstage’ politicking in change contexts. Drawing on the work of Monge and Eisenberg (1987), Ibarra (1993, p.476) proposed that the key distinction between “formally and informally derived power is that the latter comes from actors’ positions in the actual patterns or interaction that define a social network rather than from their positions in the formally defined vertical and horizontal division of labour.” Bailey (1977) reported how committees conferred decision making power on individuals who were able to use them to influence the behaviour of others for their own interests. Pettigrew (1973) found that information-flow was a function of structure and power was conferred on those able to capture, manipulate and disseminate it.

Another debate in the literature is around the issue of whether or not power can be institutionalised in an organisation’s structure. Foucault (1980, 1981) contended that it is not possible to do so for two reasons. Firstly, power is a dynamic phenomenon which is created and shaped by the interaction of a continuously changing setting and the individual. Secondly, power is relational, and as such it is a function of the relationship between interacting parties, “not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something one holds on to or allows to slip away (1981, p.94).” Power is not something that can be artificially sustained. His position on this issue is opposed by a number of writers (Selznick, 1949; Sculley and Byrne, 1987; Pfeffer, 1992). For example, Pfeffer suggested that altering an organisation’s structure can embed the distribution of power:

“Power is built by ensuring that you control as much territory as possible, and this control is obtained by placing your allies in key positions and by expanding the activities over which you have formal responsibility.” (Pfeffer, 1992, p.273)

Support for the final suggestion from Pfeffer can be found in Jackall (1988) who contended:

“A fundamental role of corporates politics is that one never cedes control over assets, even if the assets are administrative headaches.” (Jackall, 1988, p.28)
Following Selznick (1949) Pfeffer also argued that institutionalisation can be achieved through the creation of task forces and committees. Members appointed to these groups often demonstrate loyalty to the person who nominated or appointed them, by supporting proposals put forward by their sponsor. Pfeffer has suggested that if control can be exerted over a source of power, it can be institutionalised. However, large scale change can involve having to de-institutionalise power if organisational transitions are to be implemented successfully (Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992). Thus, proposers and implementers of change need to prepare for the possibility of resistance from individuals or groups which stand to suffer a lose of influence or power when the change is implemented. An interesting notion is that large scale change proposal coalitions can also be subject to the same deinstitutionalisation arguments as other powerful groups. An extensive search of the literature failed to uncover any empirically generated research in this area which indicates what happens to such coalitions once their proposal has been approved or rejected for implementation. Do members of top management teams believe that large scale change proposal coalitions should be allowed to continue, or do they think they should be disbanded? This question will be tackled in the research study presented in this thesis. From this question emerges a series of others, none of which appear to be empirically answered in the existing literature. Do coalitions continue to exist in their pre-approval/rejection state in terms of membership once they have been approved or rejected? If so, do they have a functional or dysfunctional impact on the strategic decision making process? Do they break up naturally or are they forced to break up? Do they lapse into a state of suspension ready to re-emerge at some trigger point? Do they evolve and seek to develop their influence over the broader strategic decision making process? Once again these questions will be addressed in this thesis by empirical methods.

The issue of resistance due to loss of power and influence was refered to above. Marx suggested that the consistent and cumulative effect of power loss would result in revolution from the disenfranchised in organisations. Clearly, this has not happened but writers such as Bacharach and Baratz (1962; 1963) have argued that this is because the power-holding managerial elite have reduced the discretionary power of subordinate interest groups by manufacturing political decision making routines and processes so that contentious questions do not make it onto the strategic agenda. In other words conflict is repressed. Over time the strategic issue raising and decision making processes become accepted and embedded into the organisation culture to such a degree that individuals do not believe they have the right to contribute outside of the ‘safe’ agenda (Lukes, 1974).
Hardy and Clegg (1996, p.627) cited Saunders' (1980, p.22) observation that individuals outside the managerial elite have effectively been "duped, hoodwinked, coerced, cajoled or manipulated into political inactivity." However, whether or not political inactivity is intentionally achieved, the potential for resistance is always present. This is because hierarchy bestows authority through rights and rules, and rules confer discretion on the office holder. As long as an individual has discretion over their activity and behaviour they have the capacity for resistance. This is one of the central paradoxes of power in organisations. The powerful managerial elite cannot avoid empowering subordinates. Complete, unshared and unbridled power cannot be achieved.

Structural power commentators have been criticised by Schminke (1992). He claimed that traditional structural arguments explain power differentials between hierarchical positions but not within structurally equivalent positions. To resolve these issues he called for research to consider both structural and individual determinants of power with a view to presenting a more holistic description of how the phenomenon works. Schminke's call is a relevant one for the empirical study which constitutes this thesis. There is a notable shortage of empirical research into the political processes of top management teams in the context of large scale change. Key questions—not born solely out of the structural debate—include: How do coalition builders within structurally equivalent positions to potential members win support? Are coercive and directive behaviours and tactics valid? How does the coalition builder prioritise the order of recruitment into the coalition? These questions are posed and investigated in this thesis.

**Power as a situational construct**

In addition to personal and structural power, the situations in which individuals have to operate can also act as a source of power. In his landmark analysis Foucault (1977) suggested that it is not rule systems which confer power, rather it is social routines which normalise individuals into behaving in a way that perpetuates the continuation of prescribed power relations. In other words power has a granular quality that enables it to seep into the fabric of our everyday world, such that we simply accept it without conscious realisation. Managerial elites can reinforce this situation by means of surveillance and discipline. Their objective is to monitor and maintain the organisation's fabric so that workers do not question their rights and roles. However, and here is the crux of Foucault's proposition, such is the pervasiveness of power that even managerial
elites are severely restricted in their ability to change the power landscape. All actors are trapped in an existing web of power relations from which there is no escape. Indeed, so fatalistic were Foucault's arguments that Hardy and Clegg (1996, p.635) were moved to observe that with respect to researchers, "none were to inhabit the poststructural world."

Foucault's arguments are appealing because they locate organisations in the broadest possible context: society. If organisations are a component of society, it stands to reason that they are shaped by society. However, his argument fails to acknowledge that society is the sum of its parts and organisations influence its characteristics including the web of power relations. Overlay this with the power motive and the need for top management teams to achieve organisational competitiveness and renewal through large scale change, and the impotence of managerial elites inherent in Foucault's model is fundamentally questioned. It seems much more attractive and valuable to adopt a pluralistic view of the world. One in which top management teams are characterised by large scale change proposal coalitions competing for scarce resources. If it is organisational outputs which drive society forward then we should seek to improve our understanding of the nature and characteristics of their decision making vehicles, and the processes, behaviours and tactics of those who inhabit them.

Writing before Foucault, Hickson et al (1971) found that individuals or groups which managed the organisation's key internal or external interdependencies were able to exercise greater power over strategic decision making. This situational perspective is also referred to as strategic contingency thinking (Hickson et al, 1971; Hinings et al, 1974; Salancik and Pfeffer, 1977; Salancik, Pfeffer and Kelly, 1978; Saunders, 1990). Hickson et al (1971) proposed that power is derived from a department's ability to cope with the critical problems facing the organisation and that there are three determinants of this. Firstly, the ability to manage ambiguity and uncertainty effectively despite imperfect information describing the decision making and operational context. Secondly, the centrality of the department in the workflow of the organisation, and thirdly, the difficulty with which the department's activities can be conducted by a substitute. The greater the degree of difficulty, the more power will accrue to the department. When a department is able to achieve some unspecified combination of these three factors it is said to control a strategic contingency.

Building on this base Hinings et al (1974) conducted empirical research at five breweries and two container plants, and found evidence to support Hickson et al's strategic
contingency theory. All three determinants were found to be positively and strongly correlated with the accrual of power. One of the few subsequent tests of Hickson et al's theory was the work of Saunders (1990). She found that “combinations of determinants and control of strategic contingencies may be used to predict positional and participative power,” (p.16). It was also suggested that power strategies of departments would differ by determinant and strategic contingency, and further research on the interrelationship between power type and power source was called for.

Situational arguments of power reinforce the need for researchers and practitioners to acknowledge the erodable nature of power. It was argued earlier that organisational members live in a web of continuously evolving relationships and that power will ebb and flow as the interpersonal dynamics change. However, any reductions or increases are subject to structural and situational events. Changes in the organisational design and reporting relationships are examples of structural events. Macro-economic cycle phases such as recession or growth can also impact the power levels enjoyed by individuals. Salancik and Pfeffer (1977) and Salancik, Pfeffer and Kelly (1978) have stated that power flows to those who can cope with the critical uncertainties facing the organisation. Therefore, it would be reasonable to suggest that large scale change proposal coalition leaders who design initiatives to cope with the critical uncertainties facing the organisation increase their power. However, it would be interesting to discover empirically, whether or not CEOs and other significant players in the top management team were content to watch a group of colleagues expand their influence over the strategic direction of the organisation. Particularly if the process was an informal one, and overlapped with formally prescribed decision making roles. This raises a series of interesting research questions with respect to the life-span of large scale change proposal coalitions. Do top management team members think they should be permitted to continue after the proposal has been approved for implementation or rejected? If yes, why and what is their role? If no, why and how are they disbanded? How are learnings and benefits captured and transferred to top management team working practices? How are the negative aspects kept from finding their way into the working practices of the top management team?

The authors argued that those who have acquired power at the top of US organisations in the second half of the twentieth century have done so because their skills enabled them to cope with the major environmental pressures prevailing at the time. To illustrate this they reported that the backgrounds of CEOs in the United States during the second half
of the twentieth century were predominantly production during the 1950s, marketing in
the 1960s, finance in the 1970s, and as the 1980s approached legal experts were
increasingly taking the highest offices in organisations. Salancik and Pfeffer also
suggested that power organises itself around a number of situational—rather than
structural or personal—variables. Firstly, it clusters around the scarce and critical
resources. For example, in times of recession as profits fall, internal funds available for
distribution to divisions or departments are usually restricted. However, few senior
managers willingly countenance cutbacks in their own areas, and competition to maintain
budget sizes can be intense. Those who influence the budget allocation process—for
example, the finance department—acquire greater power than they would otherwise
possess during more profitable periods. Secondly, power tends to locate around the
critical activities of the organisation. The production department of a single product
manufacturing company is far more critical than the payroll department because the first
is an income generating department whilst the second is an overhead. An individual who
is located in a critical area and can determine what the critical activities are is likely to
possess considerable power.

Thirdly, power organises itself around uncertainty, and this confers power on those who
can cope with it effectively. Here the authors agree with Hickson et al (1971). Since
becoming CEO of US multinational General Electric in 1981, Jack Welch has acquired
an increasing amount of power because of his ability to successfully guide the company
through problems such as global competition, US deregulation and two recessions. In
doing so he has created more shareholder value than any other CEO of a listed company.
Welch reduced the number of businesses from three hundred and fifty to two hundred
and set rigid targets of being number one or two in the world for that industry or else it
had to be fixed, closed or sold (Black, 1993, p.19). Whilst the contribution of others to
the success of General Electric is not in doubt, Welch is widely regarded as the architect
of the changes. He was the person who could handle the uncertainties faced by the
organisation and his power was enhanced as a result of that ability. He proposed and led
the implementation of several large scale change programmes that were designed to
confront the critical issues facing the organisation. Pettigrew (1975) and Pfeffer (1992)
both commented on the importance of timing in the accrual of power. They suggested
that the salience of issues varies across time as the organisational context evolves.
Therefore, the acquisition of power is a matter of situational timing and not just
structural opportunity or personal behaviour. The implications for coalition leaders is
that they should be cognisant of the evolving context of change and time the submission of the proposal to maximise its relevance.

The need for synthesis and context

The three schools discussed — personal, structural and situational — are the cornerstones of our conceptual understanding of intraorganisational power. As Hardy and Clegg (1996, p.636) remarked, “Power requires understanding in its diversity even as it resists explanation in terms of a singular theory.” However, the student of power has to read a wide range of literature before beginning to make sense of it and see the multitude of connections and positions emerge. Brass and Burkhardt (1993, p.442-443) claimed they were unable to find any research that tested the links between structure and behaviour. They observed, “Structure or behaviour is investigated as if it were unaffected by or unrelated to the other.” Yet Krackhardt and Porter (1985) stated that phenomena such as power are simultaneously macro-structural and micro-behavioural and the two cannot be divorced. In his ethnographic study of a UK telecommunications company Watson (1994) noted the interconnectedness of structure and behaviour when he commented, “The structures and circumstances in which humans find themselves partly shape what they think and do, yet humans also shape those thoughts and circumstances (the extent to which they are able to do this varying with the power associated with the position in which they find themselves)”, (Watson, 1994, p.27). The true richness of the power literature is able to be appreciated only by scholars who have the time to dedicate to searching, collating, analysing, interpreting and synthesising. Reading many of the writers in any of the three schools, one could be forgiven for not realising, beyond one’s own intuition, that the other two exist. Exhibit 2.2 offers a simple description of the sources of power available to an organisational actor.

The antagonism and consequent fragmentation that exists between the three schools is unhelpful, but a unifying theory is not necessary. No-one has constructed one to date and to wonder whether one can be constructed or not misses the point. What is required is research to bring an increasingly disparate literature closer together. Clegg (1994) has suggested that empirical research has a key role to play, “By listening to the stories that subjects are constituted.” Perhaps this can be achieved in part by moving beyond the
identification and description of sources in the abstract, to the identification and
description of sources within a context. For example, to say that power resides in
structural aspects such as resource control or network centrality means very different
things depending on where the individual sits in the organisational hierarchy and why

Exhibit 2.2 - Sources of power available to actors in
organisations

they want to use it. Convincing a person to accept a secondment is rather different to a
member of a top management team seeking to build a large scale change proposal
coalition and influence the strategic direction of the organisation. Context can only
enrich the literature because it provides a base of relevance from which to investigate
political processes, and the behaviours and tactics of individuals in their relationships
with others. The call is for synthesis rather than unification.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have built on the arguments presented in chapter one. Given that large
scale change is likely to impact the structural design of the organisation, thereby creating
winners and losers, proposal coalition leaders must understand the nature and sources of
intraorganisational power if they are to overcome opposition and engage effectively in
political activity. Therefore, we considered the three major schools of thought on the
nature and sources of intraorganisational power: the first of these presented power as a personal construct which manifests itself through personal attributes or interpersonal exchange, the second school contended that power resides in the structure of an organisation, while the third suggested that power is a situational construct whereby those who can control the strategic contingencies acquire power. During the discussion the schools were critiqued on several assumptive and methodological grounds.

It was concluded that power does not reside in a single location, and that monocausal arguments are unhelpful and serve only to cloud the development of a clearer understanding of the phenomenon. Personal, structural and situational power has been investigated as if it is not affected or related to each other. Power resides in multiple locations simultaneously, there is no fixed amount and it ebbs and flows because of personal, structural and situational events. Secondly, much of the commentary on intraorganisational power has been theoretically derived or constructed from casual observation. There is a paucity of empirically generated research, into the nature and sources of power in the context of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. A synthesised approach to studying intraorganisational power in top management teams is essential if we are to gain a deeper insight into the large scale change proposal coalition building process and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders.
Chapter 3

Intraorganisational politics: meanings, inevitability, behaviours and tactics

"Politics is the wheeling and dealing, negotiation, and other processes of coalition building and mutual influence that shape so much of organisational life." (Morgan, 1986, p.148)

Introduction

In chapter one we established that the rational-linear approach to change is not the most suitable option for organisations attempting to design complex large scale change in turbulent environments. Instead, a power-oriented behaviour based approach is more resilient and pragmatic because it acknowledges the inherently political nature of change. It was argued that top management team members must form coalitions to design and propose large scale change. In chapter two we engaged with the literature to contend that power resides simultaneously in personal, structural and situational aspects of the organisation, and that the large scale change proposal coalition leader must be aware of them if they are to engage meaningfully in the political activity which will emerge as powerful individuals oppose or resist the coalition’s ideas for change. In this final chapter of the literature review we critique the extant literature on intraorganisational politics. We begin with an acknowledgement that academic enquiry into the subject is fragmented and disparate with scholars unable to agree on the meanings and inevitability of politics in organisations. We then engage the literature on coalition formation and criticise it on several assumptive and methodological grounds. The commentary on the behaviours and tactics available to the large scale change proposal coalition leader is condemned for being generic, although it is noted that this is unsurprising given the fact that large scale change is conflated by most writers into a single homogenous process. A
number of gaps and contentious points are raised during the review and the chapter concludes with the formalisation of the questions raised in this and the previous two chapters into seven lines of enquiry for the empirical study which underpins this thesis.

**Intraorganisational politics: meanings and inevitability**

Politics is the manifestation of power so it is not surprising that much of the commentary on politics refers to power. For example, Madison *et al* (1980, p.81) have remarked, “By way of analogy, power may be thought of as similar to wealth, while influence processes (such as organisational politics) are similar to cash flows by which the wealth is accumulated or dispersed. Wealth and cash flow are clearly related, but distinguishable concepts.” They asserted also that, “Casual observations and the popular press sometimes give the impression that behaviour commonly referred to as ‘political’ is rampant in organisations today.” Therefore, they were confounded to find that such an apparently pervasive phenomenon has not been researched more extensively even though “various members of the research community have recognised both the neglect and the importance of understanding political behaviours in organisations”, (for example, Baldridge, 1971; Bucher, 1970; Pettigrew, 1973; Robbins, 1976; Scott, 1974). Much of the extant literature on politics in organisations creates the appearance of a disparate and fragmented field of investigation. This criticism finds support from Kakabadse and Parker (1984) who citing several commentators (Allen *et al*, 1979; Lord, 1977; Mowday, 1975 and Pandarus, 1973) complained there is little consensus about the meaning of power and politics. They asked:

“To what do politics and power relate — intents, means, strategies, personal values, group norms of behaviour acts, or events in the life of individuals and organisations? Further, what is the appropriate unit of analysis — individual, group, division within an organisation or the total organisation?” (Kakabadse and Parker, 1984, p.93)

In answer to their own question they suggested:

“The process of political influence is best examined at the individual level, exploring the relationships amongst the key actors involved. Thereby it is necessary to focus on the recurring and non-recurring patterns of behaviour
of individuals and their attempts to influence others through interpersonal action.” (Kakabadse and Parker, 1984, p.88)

The empirical study presented in this thesis adopts the same position as Kakabadse and Parker. However, one of the criticisms of the extant literature made in chapter two was the need for context specific enquiry. Consequently the unit of analysis in the empirical study presented in this thesis is the coalition leader in the context of a large scale change proposal coalition in the top management team. Such a precise definition is important because it describes the parameters within which the study findings are relevant.

Concurring with Madison et al and Kakabadse and Parker on the lack of clarity, Gandz and Murray (1980) remarked, “There is a lack of uniformity in the ways in which different writers define organisational or workplace politics.” Exhibit 3.1 provides a range of meanings and definitions to illustrate this claim. Both Gandz and Murray (1980) and Mayes and Allen (1977) have suggested that definitions are clustered around two core themes. The first theme portrays politics as a ‘value neutral’ concept. Politics is not presumed to be inherently good or bad, it is the behaviour of those who engage in it which determines whether its translation is positive or negative. The second, casts politics as the behaviours used by an individual to realise their self-interests at the expense of others. It is inherently negative.

Exhibit 3.1 - Mixed meanings: alternative definitions of intraorganisational politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick and Mayes (1979)</td>
<td>Organisational politics involve intentional acts of influence to enhance or protect the self-interest of individuals or groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bacharach and Lawler (1980)</td>
<td>Politics is the process whereby individuals or interest groups use power to obtain or retain control of real or symbolic resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988)</td>
<td>Politics are the observable, but often covert, actions by which executives enhance their power to influence a decision. These actions include behind the scenes coalition formation, offline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gray and Ariss (1985)</td>
<td>Organisational politics consist of intentional acts of influence undertaken by individuals or groups to enhance or protect their self-interest when conflicting courses of action are possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayes and Allen (1977)</td>
<td>Organisational politics is the management of influence to obtain ends not sanctioned by the organisation or to obtain sanctioned ends through non-sanctioned influence means.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mintzberg (1985)</td>
<td>The system of politics...may be described as reflecting power that is technically illegitimate (or, perhaps more accurately, 'a legitimate') in its means (and sometimes in its ends as well).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pfeffer (1981)</td>
<td>Organisational politics involves those activities taken within organisations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Porter, Allen, and Angle (1983)</td>
<td>Organisational political behaviour is defined as: (1) Social influence attempts, (2) that are discretionary, (3) that are intended (designed) to promote or protect the self-interests of individuals and groups (units), and (4) that threaten the self-interests of others (individuals, units).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within the 'value neutral' theme there are several sub-themes. A number of writers view politics as the result of conflict over the acquisition of scarce resources (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980; Harvey and Mills, 1970; Wildavsky, 1964). Others contend it is conflict over any policy decision, not just scarce resources (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988; Gray and Ariss, 1985; March, 1962; Mintzberg, 1985; Walmsley and Zald, 1973). A third group claim the use of power in any way is a political act (Butler, Hickson, Wilson and Axelsson, 1977; Martin and Sims, 1956). The emergence of politics in top management teams was discussed at length in chapter one.

The 'self-interest' theme also has several aspects to it. Pettigrew (1973) suggested that politics are the behavioural manifestation of individuals or groups who attempt to further their own interests regardless of the impact on the organisation. Herman's (1974) research suggested that negative emotions such as anger, hate and revenge are also drivers of political behaviour. Mintzberg (1985, p.134) was even stronger in his admonition, "...behaviour termed political is neither formally authorised, widely accepted, nor officially certified. As a result, political behaviour is typically divisive and conflictive, often pitting individuals or groups against formal authority, accepted ideology, and/or certified expertise or else against each other." The problem with this view is that it is too extreme. No room is left to accept there is a positive side to politics. The tension and competition that politics causes can drive individuals to improve the quality of processes and outputs, advancing both their own skills and the performance of the organisation. Politics can be used to the detriment of others and the organisation, but it is not always the case. There is an interesting debate here about what constitutes political behaviour. Clearly, self-serving and negative behaviours are political, but what about a one-to-one session where an individual offers to back the other at some point in the future in return for their passive support now? Restricting the application of the term 'political' to overtly negative behaviour is unhelpful and reduces the debate to a simplistic 'either-or' argument. This researcher's contention is that politics is inherently value-neutral and encompasses any behaviour which attempts to modify the opinions, attitudes, values and intents or actions of another individual. This is a broad and inclusive definition which permits a wide range of behaviours to be termed political, from the collaborative to the coercive. It supports the argument presented in chapter one that change is a political process characterised by top management team members engaging in attempts to influence each other, either to win support for an idea for change or to overcome opposition and resistance.
One theme which is often made explicit in sections of the 'self-interest' school is the assertion that organisational politics is unethical, corrupting the performance of individuals and by extension organisations. Seeking to identify the roots of this thinking Kakabadse and Parker (1984) remarked that the influence of the Organisational Development (OD) school in the 1960s and 1970s meant the majority of writers approached the study of political behaviour from the perspective that it was somehow morally wrong and therefore undesirable. Burke (1976) acknowledged there was a general hesitance to investigate the "darker side of humanity" in case it encouraged managers to resort to "the blacker arts of human behaviour." As we have noted already Bennis (1969, p.81) was one of the first to criticise the naivété of his contemporaries when he stated that OD theorists "rely exclusively on two sources of influence, truth and love." Pettigrew (1985) added to Bennis's remark when he described the school as the "truth, trust, love and collaboration approach" to change. That certain OD writers had perhaps overemphasised the negative aspects of power was noted by Watson (1994, p.37) in his reference to Reed (1984, p.278) who remarked that, "the 'platonic' view of the manager as the global planner and controller...had been superseded by the 'Machiavellian' conception of the manager as a situational operator and fixer", (Watson, 1994, p.278).

More recently a number of writers have proposed that politics is an inevitable characteristic of organisations and can be used to satisfy the objectives of both the individual and the organisation (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Egan, 1994; Hayes, 1984; Kanter, 1983; Pfeffer, 1992). Approximately two thousand five hundred years ago Aristotle described politics as a mechanism to order and manage diversity while avoiding totalitarianism. Applying the same thinking to contemporary organisations Morgan (1986) argued:

"By recognising that organisation is intrinsically political, in the sense that ways must be found to create order and direction among people with potentially diverse and conflicting interests, much can be learned about the problems and legitimacy of management as a process of government..." (Morgan, 1986, p.142)
Further support for this position can be found from Baddeley and James (1990, p.44) who stated, “We believe that a manager who acknowledges politics is in a position to welcome diversity, acknowledge the pluralism that is inherent in any organisation and embrace its requisite variety.” Those who understand how to engage meaningfully in political behaviour are in a position to improve the contribution they make to the organisation. Effective change is achieved by working through others, whether by empowerment or coercion, and that requires the ability to influence. On this point Egan (1994, p.xiii) suggested, “Those who understand and constructively deal with these off-stage activities and arrangements, good or bad, can be of great benefit to the company or institution.” Schein (1977) went even further when he claimed that “power struggles, alliance formation, strategic manoeuvring, and ‘cut-throat’ actions may be as endemic to organisational life as planning, organising, directing, and controlling.” That political behaviour is inevitable in organisations is a view supported by this researcher. Morgan (1986) too has expressed strong sympathies with the ‘inevitabilists’, and argued that politics should be studied to understand and diagnose how it can be harnessed and used productively:

“Most people working in an organisation readily admit in private that they are surrounded by ‘wheeling and dealing’ through which different people attempt to advance specific interests. However, this kind of activity is rarely discussed in public. The idea that organisations are supposed to be rational enterprises in which their members seek common goals tends to discourage discussion or attribution of political motive. Politics, in short, is seen as a dirty word.” (Morgan, 1986, p.142)

The doctrine of political inevitability was opposed by Klein (1988) who contended that arguments for inevitability were based on two underlying assumptions, which although persuasive were not conclusive. Firstly, he argued that self-interest was predicated, falsely, on the assumption that individuals are driven by a personal power motive. Klein suggested instead that “self-interest does not necessarily require the maximisation of power, but rather may be satisfied by nothing more ambitious than survival.” As we discussed in chapter two this position was put forward by writers such as Minton (1972) and Winter (1973) fifteen years earlier. Secondly, he stated that resource scarcity may simply be the result of individuals attempting to make them scarce by securing them for their own purposes. Based on these arguments he remarked, “Thus, what can make political behaviour ‘inevitable’, apparently, is political behaviour itself. As further
justification for his claims he cited Pfeffer's (1981) observation that "once politics is introduced into a situation it is very difficult to restore rationality." He concluded that although politics may be a common feature, they are of questionable benefit to the organisation and are not inevitable. Unfortunately, Klein's argument is a theoretical construction and not the result of empirical research. It appears to be based on moral opposition rather than observation and as such renders it wishful rather than pragmatic.

With the exception of a small number of writers such as Klein, the majority of writing by the mid-1980s took its point of departure as the acceptance, rather than refusal, of the inevitability of politics (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Egan, 1994; Kanter, 1983; Pettigrew, 1985). With this strengthening change of perspective came a fascination with the micro-behavioural aspects of practitioners. Hayes (1984, p.25) reported that during ten years of consulting to British and overseas companies he had found that successful managers display three characteristics that differentiate them from their less successful colleagues. Firstly, they "appeared to have clear ideas about what they wanted to achieve." Secondly, they "paid attention to what needs to happen if they are to bring about the state of affairs they desire, and invest their time, energy and other resources accordingly." Thirdly, they "possessed a set of skills to do with influencing others and the exercise of power." Hayes took a positive view of this final characteristic when he concluded:

"It is not necessary to erode the power of one organisational member to enhance that of another. Interactions within organisations do not occur within the fixed framework of a zero-sum game. More political awareness and greater participation in the negotiation of a new organisational order and in the establishment of new working agreements up, down and across the hierarchy might best be viewed in the context of an increasing-sum game. Effective participation in the political process can lead to a better definition of organisational problems and to the generation and implementation of more successful solutions." (Hayes, 1984, p.33)

This researcher has not been able to locate any empirical research from the late 1990s which suggests that politics does not exist in organisations, or more specifically within the large scale change process. One of the contentions made in chapter one was that it is the role of the top management team to form coalitions for the purpose of designing and proposing large scale change. However, no empirically generated research on the nature
and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams exists, so we are left to consider the limited extant literature on coalitions. Therefore, the crucial role of the large scale change proposal coalition leader has also gone unresearched. The change management literature is guilty of conflating large scale change into a single process and describing behaviours and tactics without regard for the proposal stage and the key actors within it. This is a serious gap in our understanding of managerial elites in the change context. Therefore, let us engage the literature to identify the gaps in our understanding of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader with the aim of generating several lines of enquiry for empirical investigation.

**Large scale change proposal coalitions: an absence of empirical reporting**

We know from the discussion in chapter one that coalitions in top management teams play a key role in identifying and designing opportunities for large scale change before implementing it. We recall Kotter’s supportive remark:

"Because major change is so difficult to accomplish, a powerful force is required to sustain the process. No one individual, even a monarch-like CEO, is ever able to develop the right vision, communicate it to large numbers of people, eliminate all the key obstacles, generate short-term wins, lead and manage dozens of change projects, and anchor new approaches deep in the organisation’s culture. Weak committees are even worse. A strong guiding coalition is always needed—one with the right composition, level of trust, and shared objective. Building such a team is always an essential part of the early stages of any effort to restructure, reengineer, or retool a set of strategies." (Kotter, 1996, p.51-52)

Based on this and the remarks of several other observers it appears reasonable to suggest there are several stages in the life of a large scale change proposal coalition. The first stage is formation. There is an extant literature on coalition formation, but not large scale change proposal coalition formation. Then the coalition has to be sustained until the proposal is submitted. There is no commentary on sustaining a coalition either in terms of process or the behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader. Finally, once the
coalition has submitted its proposal it can either continue in its original state, mutate or it can disband. Once again there is no literature to describe what happens at this stage. In reality there is no empirical research on large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. This is an unexplored area of managerial elites. Therefore, we are left with the task of assessing what is at best a partially relevant extant literature with the aim of identifying elements which can inform the research questions.

Coalition formation

The extant literature on coalition formation is disappointing for several reasons. Firstly, it is derived largely from laboratory experiments conducted several decades ago. Secondly, it considers the process from the perspective of the potential member only. It ignores the crucially important role of the coalition leader and the behaviours and tactics they use to win support and recruit members. Thirdly, the rationale for joining is portrayed as mainly utilitarian. Political and emotional reasons are ignored or treated simplistically. Fourthly, as mentioned above the process of formation is considered only until the coalition is built. No consideration is given to how the coalition is sustained. Fifthly, the literature on coalition formation refers only to implementation coalitions. There is no acknowledgement of the existence of proposal coalitions. Sixthly, the majority of empirical literature does not discuss coalition formation in top management teams. It describes a generic membership which cuts across all levels of the organisation hierarchy, but resides predominantly outside the top management team.

Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s the social psychology field of study produced several theories of coalition formation. These were Caplow’s (1968) power theory of coalitions, Gamson’s (1961) minimum resource theory, Komorita and Chertkoff’s (1973) bargaining theory, Komorita’s (1974) weighted probability model, and the ideological-distance models of DeSwann (1970, 1973) and Leiserson (1970). Each of the models is constructed in an attempt to explain how individuals choose between alternative coalition membership opportunities.

Caplow’s (1956) power theory of coalitions is based on the assumption that actors will select the coalition that maximises the number of people they will have control over, both inside and outside the prospective coalition. Caplow theorises that it is the number of subordinates over whom they will be able to exercise power rather than the power
differential that will determine their choice. There are several problems with this postulation. Firstly, it casts individuals as relatively unsophisticated decision makers. A politically astute or power conscious individual would acknowledge the power differential as a crucially important determinant of control. The lower the differential the less certain the control. The power differential has been found to be a salient issue in establishing and maintaining relationships with others. Dependency theory tells us that in forming relationship management strategies, organisational actors are cognisant of which party enjoys more power in the organisation (for example, Emerson, 1962; Kotter, 1978). Caplow also fails to consider the issue of barriers to insurgency. If there are structural endowments such as decision making processes which the individual can exploit to repress behaviour aimed at overcoming control then a lower power differential can be tolerated. Caplow’s assumption that it is the number of individuals over whom the potential member will exercise control is another weakness in his theory. Once again it portrays organisational members as simplistic in their decision making. He ignores factors such as the calibre of coalition members over whom control will be exercised. If the individual is seen by others to be leading a section of the coalition with highly rated members of the organisation who typically win support for their arguments and propositions, they are likely to enjoy more power than if they were leading a larger section of lower calibre members. Similarly, if the potential member has the opportunity to lead a small section of the coalition which is working on a critical element of the large scale change proposal, they are more likely to enjoy greater power than if they were leading a larger section tackling a peripheral element of the design. Caplow treats power too simplistically. For him one person over whom control can be exercised equals one unit of power. He fails to understand that in acquiring power questions about quality are as important as concerns about quantity. His commentary conveys a shallowness and naiveté which is a function of the fact that it was generated under laboratory conditions rather than in the workplace.

Gamson (1961) contends that the distribution of resources between coalitions is a determinant of the pay-off distribution within a coalition. Pay-off refers to the division of reward—resources—between coalition members. The theory assumes that pay-offs will be equitable and proportional to an individual’s contribution of resources to the coalition. The problem with this assumption is that decision making criteria are restricted to the utilitarian. It fails to attach a value to contributions other than resources, such as expertise or influence over a key decision maker gained through successful previous working relationships. Another weakness lies in the idea that there will be
always at least two coalitions. It is possible that within the top management team, one group of individuals will decide to form a coalition to propose large scale change, while the rest of the team does not. This may be out of choice, as individuals elect to comment on the proposal from their official roles, or alternatively because the non-coalition members have no knowledge of the coalition’s formation. Coalitions can be covert and members may choose to keep their activities discrete until they believe the proposal has been sufficiently developed to cope effectively with resistance and opposition.

Komorita and Chertkoff’s (1973) bargaining theory is an extension of Gamson’s minimum resource theory. It holds, firstly, that pay-off expectations are based on the mid-point between equality and equity, and secondly, that coalitions may form as a result of conflict in its early stages rather than its later stages. The key distinction between the two theories is that Komorita and Chertkoff contend that coalition members will maintain a relationship with non-members and that this can impact the stability of the coalition. This is because non-coalition members will seek to increase their influence and join the coalition by reducing their pay-off demands to such a low level that the resource input to pay-off ratio is too attractive for the rationally driven coalition to ignore. Since this will alter the coalition dynamic, the authors infer that the stability will be impacted too. Thus, the mid-point between equity and equality will continuously shift as non-coalitions exert pressure on the coalition. The value of Komorita and Chertkoff’s theory is that it is a more realistic portrayal of organisations as dynamic, complex systems influenced by the behaviour of members and non-members. However, like Caplow and Gamson, it over-emphasises the utilitarian aspects of the decision making process.

Komorita’s (1974) weighted probability model advances the bargaining theory of coalition formation by considering the number of coalition alternatives available to potential members. The theory posits that individuals will prefer to be members of smaller, rather than larger, coalitions. This is because larger coalitions are more difficult to hold together due to a greater diversity of opinion and intent. Less stable coalitions will endanger the likelihood of pay-off. Individuals will weight the probability of successful coalition formation and existence by the number of members each prospective coalition will have. This is a contentious and potentially misleading logic. Arguably the larger a coalition is the more stable it becomes because it can tolerate diversity. If a coalition has four or five members and there are two or three strong views on the purpose of the coalition or how it should achieve its purpose, then it is fragile because if the
tensions become too much the coalition will fracture and collapse. If there are two or three strong views in a coalition with twenty or so members then the likelihood is that there are sufficient numbers to absorb the tensions. If one or two of the members with strong views decide to leave the coalition can still survive. Alternatively, before the tension escalates to such a high level there are plenty of members to act as buffers between the arguing parties. Either way it can be contended that larger coalitions, not smaller coalitions, create stability. Whilst the issue of size is indeed an important consideration another weakness of the theory is that it restricts membership consideration to utilitarian factors—principally resource pay-off. It does not take into consideration emotional factors such as the prestige an individual feels by being a member of a large coalition containing the organisation’s most senior decision makers, or alternatively having the opportunity to be highly visible in front of the organisation’s key decision makers. It also fails to acknowledge that the decision to join may be for political reasons. If the coalition appears as though it has a strong likelihood of succeeding in winning support for the implementation of its proposal, individuals may join so they can attempt to ensure they benefit from it or at least do not suffer. Alternatively, they may just want the positive political side-effect of being associated with a winning proposal. The hope being that colleagues will assume they played a key role in the design and are a key influencer in determining the future of the organisation. This can result in an increase in power because individuals will seek to consult and involve the coalition member in other decisions, thereby extending their influence. Another concern with the theory is that because the decision to join is based on size differentials, it cannot cope with coalitions that have the same number of members.

The fifth coalition formation theory is the ideological distance model. Each of the four theories discussed so far are concerned fundamentally with utilitarian factors in the decision making process. All ignore attitudinal and ideological influences. DeSwann (1970, 1973) and Leiserson (1970) proposed that individuals will seek to ally themselves with others who share attitudinal or ideological beliefs, as this contributes to coalition stability. It is important to recognise that the type of organisation, its culture and the environmental context will affect the ideological dimensions relevant to coalition formation. For example, a high-tech computer firm will likely have a different ideological framework than a chemical processing firm. Ideological dimensions include, purpose, vision, values, beliefs and attitudes. The strength of the ideological distance model is that it accepts political and emotional factors as well as utility factors as drivers of coalition formation. The underlying weakness of this and each of the other four
models discussed above are that they are theoretical constructs established in controlled laboratory experiments. None were formulated as a result of empirical research in organisations. Additionally, they consider coalition formation only from the perspective of the potential member. They ignore the active role of the coalition leader and the behaviours and tactics which can be used to win support and overcome opposition and resistance. Coalition formation is a political process rich in influencing behaviours yet the decision to join is presented as a being solely that of the potential member with no other human influences involved. This is a serious assumptive weakness. We know from the discussion in the previous chapter that behaviour is shaped by the use of personal, structural and situational power so descriptions of decision making processes or behaviours and tactics should relate to these sources. In their discussion of structural and behavioural power, Brass and Burkhardt (1993) acknowledged the centrality of coalitions in creating momentum for major initiatives. The authors remarked they are necessary when an individual's personal resources or power are insufficient to achieve the objective. They expressed surprise that with the notable exception of Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) "few intraorganisational coalition studies exist", (Brass and Burkhardt, 1993, p.448).

One of those who has investigated coalition formation in the field is Kanter (1983). The findings of her six company empirical study suggest there are five stages to the formation of a coalition. Stage one, clearing the investment, involves gaining permission from an appropriate superior or colleague, so the initiative is legitimised and permitted to proceed. Once this is done the coalition builder can then go on to preselling and making cheerleaders. Kanter found that proposers approaching more junior colleagues was twice as popular as attempting to win the support of someone more senior in the first instance. She argued this was because executives typically wanted to know the project was backed by colleagues before committing themselves. In some organisations this quasi-begging process was known as "tin-cupping" or "loading the gun" (p.223). The most favoured forum for support gathering was found to be on a one-to-one basis. On the issue of coalition size she noted:

"The broader the ramifications of the issues involved in the proposed innovation, and the greater the attendant uncertainties, the larger the coalition of supporters needs to be if the idea for innovation is to result in productive action." (Kanter, 1983, p.221)
Horse trading, the third stage, is when offers, pay-offs, exchanges and deals are struck in return for support and commitment. These can take the form of information, support for a future venture, equipment, funds, manpower, facilities or expertise. Kanter suggests the more tangible a form of commitment takes—for example, funds rather than verbal support—the greater the demand from contributors for evidence that the initiative is viable and likely to succeed. Having assembled the coalition it is still unformed until the blessings of senior level executives have been procured. She found that top management team members are interested in both the technical and political dimensions of the proposed change since they in turn have to justify supporting the plan to their own constituencies. The more radical and far reaching the proposed change, the greater is the need for a broad coalition within the top management team. The fifth and final stage of establishing a coalition is to formalise it. An action plan for the implementation stage may entail the setting up of committees, steering groups and task forces. Objectives and time frames must be set, roles communicated and deliverables agreed. Mobilising the coalition requires the acquisition of resources such as equipment and office space, particularly if the coalition intends to work in close physical proximity. Budgets also need to be established against which expenditure can be offset. Kanter concludes by noting that beneficial side-effects can emerge as a consequence of coalition formation. She found examples of new product development, unassociated with the change proposal, resulting from the cross-fertilisation of ideas between members. Another common benefit was the opening and improvement of communication channels across functions and processes. Benefits also accrued to individual members. New relationships, skills and a track record of submitting winning proposals enhanced an executive’s profile in the top management team and smoothed the way for the selling of future initiatives.

Whilst Kanter’s work offers a valuable insight into the coalition formation process, it does so in the context of innovation rather than large scale change. She studied 115 innovations in six companies and remarked, “...local innovations that corporate entrepreneurs recounted to me are not always ‘big changes’ or ‘big events’,” (Kanter, 1983, p.211). Furthermore, the coalition formation process she described was for implementation coalitions not proposal coalitions. She described the informal acceptance and approval process that circumvents the ‘red tape’ of the formal sanctioning route. A skill Kanter identified as essential to instigating and effecting change in organisations. Her failure to identify the need for a proposal coalition was no doubt due to the fact that she was not investigating large scale change initiatives which
were likely to require a strategic re-orientation or significant structural change. Both of which are contentious decisions involving rational, emotional and political argument across a significant section of the top management team. There is no suggestion that Kanter's work is not valid or applicable to large scale change but there is a need for empirical research which focuses on how large scale change proposal coalitions within top management teams are built.

Another empirical study on top management team coalition formation is that of Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988). Taking as their point of departure, Gamson's (1961) contention that people form alliances on the basis of agreement on issues, Eisenhardt and Bourgeois reported surprise to find that shifting alliances occurred rarely in top management teams characterised by political behaviour. Instead, they found that coalitions formed in politicised teams on the basis of demographic factors such as age, office location, similarity of titles and prior experience of working together. However, their empirical research into eight firms in the microcomputer industry in the San Francisco Bay Area, concluded that demographic similarity is not a sufficient condition for stable coalition formation. It produces stability only when power is centralised and the use of politics is high. Seeking to explain why their research failed to support the findings of others (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980; Stevenson et al, 1985), they asserted that industries such as microcomputers which are characterised by discontinuous changes in competition, technology and demand mean that “executives simply may not have the time to engage in the extensive cognitive processing necessary for forming fluid alliances” (Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988, p.756). They suggested also that the literature on shifting alliances was largely the result of laboratory studies of one-time-only coalition formation under conditions of perfect information about preferences and pay-offs. Such conditions do not reflect real organisational environments where complex decision making processes and the political behaviour of top management team executives lead individuals to recurring patterns of behaviour and stable coalition membership.

The research initiatives of both Kanter and Eisenhardt and Bourgeois were exclusively in US organisations. An extensive literature search has been unable to identify any UK based studies in this area. Therefore, the study in this thesis will address this problem and investigate a range of UK based organisations. The work of the writers discussed above raises several important questions that have not to date been answered but which need to be if we are to advance our understanding of managerial elites in the change
context. Firstly, how are large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams built? Who does the coalition leader approach for support and how do they decide in which order to approach individuals? What behaviours and tactics do they use to co-opt the support of colleagues in the top management team? Is there any variation if the coalition leader is attempting to recruit someone more senior than themselves rather than if they are at the same level or less senior?

The extant literature on the behaviours and tactics available to the large scale change proposal coalition leader is disturbingly generic when there is an urgent need for it to be context specific. This is not surprising when we note that most writers have been guilty of conflating large scale change into a single homogenous process. If we are to advance our understanding of managerial elites in the change context we must treat large scale change as the multi-dimensional, multi-layered process that it is. We must engage in context specific enquiry—for example, large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams—rather than the broader and less meaningful ‘change process’. Authors such as Watson (1994) offer hope that a rich vein may be tapped with comments such as:

“I have long had the suspicion that managers have a much better idea about what they are doing, or might do, than tends to be suggested by what we see of their actions in the actual setting of the everyday pressures and ambiguities of work organisations.” (Watson, 1994, p.11)

Whilst there is no directly relevant commentary on these large scale change issues we can refer to other sections of the literature to consider what the behaviours and tactics could be. For example, with respect to who the coalition might attempt to win the support of, we can turn to recent writing about the role of informal networks in decision making. Krackhardt (1990) noted that being able to map the political landscape is an important skill if an individual needs to tap into it and harness it for their own purposes. He remarked:

“An individual who has an astute knowledge of where the network links are can have a substantial advantage. First, this information provides a good assessment of who is powerful in the organisation, since the central actors in the network can be easily ascertained. Knowing who the central—and
powerful—actors are in the organisation is essential political knowledge. Second, this information can be used to identify where the coalitions are in an organisation. Knowing where the coalitions are, how large they are, and where their support comes from gives one an edge in anticipating resistance and in mobilising support for action or change. Third, an accurate assessment of the network can also reveal the weaknesses in political groups by exposing holes, gaps, and locations of lack of support for any particular coalition. Thus, understanding the network provides a source of power independent of centrality in the network." (Krackhardt, 1990, p.343)

Writing three years later Krackhardt and Hanson (1993) developed this thinking as a result of empirical research to argue there are three derivatives of the informal network: the advice network, the trust network and the communication network. The authors explained:

"The advice network shows the prominent players in an organisation on whom others depend to solve problems and provide technical information...The trust network tells which employees share delicate political information and back one another in a crisis...The communication network reveals the employees who talk about work-related matters on a regular basis.” (Krackhardt and Hanson, 1993, p.105)

The writers contended that when problems emerge which cannot be resolved within the formal network the informal network is activated. Network management is an important skill for proposers of large scale change since mapping advice networks can identify individuals whose judgement is respected by key decision makers and potential allies, resistors or opponents. They also tend to uncover political conflicts and the reasons for goal failure. Analysing trust networks can be useful when planning large scale change because lack of trust can be a cause of poor performance and team fragmentation during high risk initiatives. Communication networks can identify reasons for low productivity such as fractured information flows, poor innovation rates, and the inefficient use of resources. Whilst usefully identifying three types of emergent network Krackhardt and Hanson’s work was not entirely without precedent. The ability to map formal and informal networks was noted twenty years earlier by Pettigrew (1973, p.240) who argued “an accurate perception of the power distribution in the social arena in which he lives
is...a necessary prerequisite for the man seeking powerful support for his demands.” A contention supported by Pfeffer (1981, p.130) who suggested that Pettigrew’s assertion that power stems from the control over information flow, in fact “...derives largely from one’s position in both the formal and informal company networks.” Nevertheless, Krackhardt and Hanson’s work provides us with suggestions about who the large scale change proposal coalition leader may attempt to recruit into the coalition, and it is valuable because it is empirically generated.

A different perspective on network management was provided by Kotter (1985) who wrote from an interdependencies viewpoint. His concern was with how a manager can extract maximum value from their relationship with others rather than what they can contribute back into the network. His empirically gathered data led him to observe that effective managers used both personal and organisational resources to develop different kinds of power over whom they are dependent. He noted also that these managers used persuasive skills in conjunction with their power to influence those whose co-operation was required. The favoured approach for doing this was face-to-face discussions or alternatively via third parties. Kotter found also that managers maintained a vigilant watch over their dependencies and sought up-to-date information so they could modify their influencing strategies and tactics. He concluded that in the longer term, effective managers manoeuvred themselves into positions that were consistent with their power-oriented behaviour. Kotter’s analysis which was discussed in more detail in the context of structural power sources in chapter two provides us with an understanding of the factors determining the level of interdependency. However, he elects not to tell us what behaviours and tactics are used to manage them, so the value is limited.

Coalition sustainment

The careful use of language is an important aspect of selling the large scale change proposal to the key decision makers in the top management team. Buchanan and Boddy (1992) in their discussion on the power skills of the change agent argued that private and personal motives must be couched in acceptable organisation orientated objectives. In support of this contention they offered Tom Burns’s (1961) remark:

“In fact, the only recognised, indeed feasible, way of advancing political interests is to present them in terms of improved welfare or
efficiency, as contributing to the organisation's capacity to meet its task and to prosper. In managerial and academic, as in other legislatures, both sides to any debate claim to speak in the interests of the community as a whole; this is the only permissible mode of expression.” (Burns, 1961, p.260)

They argued that as long as personal ambition is tied to organisational efficiency and effectiveness, initiatives that advance the former are more likely to be tolerated. Ventures that appear to serve only the individual are unlikely to gain support. This concurs with the power motive theories of McClelland (1970, 1974) and Winter (1973) who suggested that individuals who demonstrated strong personalised power motives—self-interest—were unlikely to be as successful in their careers as those who aligned their own objectives with those of the organisation. Pettigrew (1985) referred to the manipulation of language for the selling of change as the “management of meaning” which is created through “the vitality, imagination, visionary ideas and persistence of a leader championing a particular strategic change,” (p.455). In an attempt to provide a checklist for practitioners Kanter (1983) claimed that proposed changes are more likely to gain approval if they display the following seven attributes: trial-able, reversible, divisible, concrete, familiar, congruent, and sexy.

*Trial-able* refers to the viability of piloting the proposal on a small scale without having to risk a full scale implementation with all the associated costs and expenses. *Reversible* means that if the initiative begins to fail the status quo can be restored easily. If a change programme is presented as *divisible*, the proposer indicates that the various parts are inter-related yet essentially separate. This has the benefit of reducing fears concerning the risks involved in resourcing a single large scale exercise, since if one component fails the rest will not automatically fail as a consequence. Kanter advises that vagueness and uncertainty in terms of potential outcomes should be avoided as far as possible in favour of *concrete*, tangible results that supporters can identify with. Additional sales, higher profits, reduced costs and new product ranges are all examples. Closely linked to this aspect is *familiarity*. She argues that by using a language which potential supporters feel comfortable with, commitment is more likely to be forthcoming than if alien terminology and concepts are thrust at them. There are circumstances that demand radical change, but a change proposal should generally attempt to be *congruent* and fit in with other changes being implemented in the organisation. Finally, project proposals should be *sexy*, invoking enthusiasm and excitement amongst those whose support is required if
they are to be implemented. Kanter stresses the seven recommendations are not exhaustive and neither are they applicable to every situation. Nevertheless, they do underline the importance of language as a political skill which can be used by the coalition leader when attempting to prepare and sell the proposal. Analysis of her suggestions leads the reader to conclude that an important element of selling is the need to reduce the appearance of risk. This is interesting given that the recommendations are for those proposing innovation rather than large scale change. Arguably then these factors will be of greater importance when the future success of the organisation is potentially at stake. Incorporating and building on Kanter's work Buchanan and Boddy (1992) offered fourteen points of advice concerning the manipulation of language. The most salient of which for large scale change proposal coalitions was the need to identify the beliefs and values of key potential members so the presentation of the idea would strike a resonant chord and produce support.

A criticism of much of the literature is that coalitions are studied only as far as the establishment of the coalition. The commentary ends once a member joins. In large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams this is only the beginning. The coalition leader must co-ordinate the work of the coalition and ensure on-going commitment from members until the proposal is submitted to the appropriate decision makers in the top management team for a decision on whether to proceed to implementation. Given the magnitude and complexity of many large scale change initiatives it is likely that large scale change proposal coalitions last for weeks or months before the proposition is submitted for consideration by the appropriate key decision makers in the top management team. We know from the work of Gray and Ariss (1985), discussed in chapter one, that organisations go through political life-cycle stages so it appears reasonable to suggest that large scale change proposal coalitions experience a life-cycle model too, even if it is in a much more concertinaed time frame. The extant literature has not addressed this question. We know from the theoretical work of Mintzberg (1985), also discussed in chapter one, that organisations may be characterised by different political coalition states, so it would be valuable to investigate whether or not there are different states of large scale change proposal coalition. It would seem reasonable to hypothesise that different types of coalition do exist because large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams are a microcosm of the larger political environment in the organisation. However, as with the life-cycle debate there is no literature against which to test or challenge these assumptions. Both of these pioneering lines of enquiry will be pursued in the empirical study which underpins this
thesis. With regard to sustaining a large scale change proposal coalition to the point of proposal submission the coalition leader will likely have to engage in a wide range of political behaviours and tactics. As we have already remarked there is no commentary on sustaining behaviours and tactics. Therefore, they will also be investigated in the empirical study.

We know from the discussion in chapter two that individuals who can manipulate structural elements of the organisation can influence the behaviour of others. This is reflected in the remarks of Pfeffer (1992) who commented:

"Structure can be used to divide and conquer the opposition. It can be used to consolidate your own power, by placing yourself or your allies in a position to exercise more control over resources and information. To the extent that structure entails the identification of responsibilities, it can be used to co-opt others and to ensure that they support our initiatives." (Pfeffer, 1992, p.267)

Concurring with Pfeffer's argument Buchanan and Boddy (1992, p.130-131) offered seven recommendations for the change agent concerning the manipulation of structure. The most relevant aspect of their advice for coalition leaders attempting to sustain large scale change proposal coalitions was to avoid overly restricting the dissemination of information and allocate responsibilities so as to create an atmosphere of influence and autonomy. Andrew Pettigrew (1972) argued famously that control over information is a power resource available to the change agent. The selective use of information can be used not only to influence the behaviour of others but also to raise the status of the disseminator for the purpose of gaining access and prime location within a desirable coalition or network that in turn can be used to gain access to positions and situations of influence. He argued that through the careful use of language, structure and relationships, information can be an extremely potent resource, communicating what an individual wishes to whom they want and when they want. A well timed word, leak or exchange of knowledge can be the basis for coalition formation on the one hand or the destruction of an opponent's change proposal on the other. Pfeffer (1992, p.248) claimed "the manipulation and presentation of facts and analysis are often critical elements of a strategy to exercise power properly," while Dubrin (1978, p.175) argued the importance of manipulating information when he stated that "power in most organisations accrues to
the individual with access to vital information.” In his study of managerial rules for survival in organisations Jackall (1988) noted that following the appointment to a senior position of an individual well known for radical cost cutting in the company being studied, managers scrambled to write position papers to defend themselves, held rushed meetings and made deals in an attempt to “...secure their domains against the coming assault”, (Jackall, 1988, p.31). Unfortunately we are not informed of the nature of the papers, meetings and deals so we are left to imagine the complexity and intrigue. However, we did learn about the importance of appearance in front of colleagues. Specifically, we are told that the ability to remain calm and steadfast whilst those around are extracting themselves from association to risky decisions earns significant credit within the management team:

“Of course, one must never betray such uncertainty to others. Here the premium on self-control comes into play and many a manager’s life becomes a struggle to keep one’s nerve and appear calm and cool in the bargain. Making a decision, or standing by a decision once made, exposes carefully nurtured images of competence and know-how to the judgements of others, particularly one’s superiors. As a result, many managers become extremely adept at sidestepping decisions altogether and shrugging off responsibility, all the while projecting an air of command, authority and decisiveness, leaving those who actually do decide to carry the ball alone in the open field.” (Jackall, 1988, p.80)

The latter part of this commentary paints a different picture to the one described earlier by several authors including Buchanan and Boddy (1992) who argued that the majority of those who make it to the top of organisations make significant changes at often considerable risk to themselves.

The behaviours and tactics discussed so far are largely proactive and based on the assumption that the proposer of change will not encounter resistance to their plans or at the very least will have the opportunity to act first. It is unlikely this will always be the case since the scarcity of resources means that competition between top management team members can be sophisticated and intense. Coalition leaders must be aware of
firstly how to overcome such threats and secondly how to counter someone else’s initiative using blocking and resistance techniques. Kanter (1983, p.231) offered several tactics with which to “disarm” opponents attempting to undermine the proposed changes. These are conveyed in Exhibit 3.2.

As a result of their empirical research into the skills of the change agent Buchanan and Boddy (1992) suggested that resistance can form once a proposal has been tabled. In the formative period opposition and resistance tend to be relatively passive and covert. Examples include: unavailability for discussions and negotiations, criticism of specific points, preference for alternative proposals and procrastination in responding to requests. In the latter phase opposition to the proposal may become more aggressive and overt with resistors directly challenging the need, viability and motives of both the change and the change agent. Hidden agendas are sought out so it is vital that private backstage language is congruent with public announcements and declarations.

Lawrence (1969) identified four management actions to deal effectively with resistance to change. Broadening staff interests by widening an individual’s sphere of activity helps to diminish their attachment to the current way of doing things. Consequently, the planned change will impact a smaller part of their working life and theoretically be easier to accommodate. Using understandable terms is important because one cause of resistance can be the lack of clarity in communication between those proposing the change and those who stand to be impacted by it. Lawrence notes that unclear, poorly explained plans allow rumour to emerge. He also urges senior managers to take a new look at resistance, and rather than expect it or consider it something to overcome, people should see it as a ‘red flag’ and work together to understand the real cause and identify a mutually acceptable and beneficial way forward. His fourth suggestion is that new job definitions are required. He contends that, “Participation will never work as long as it is treated as a device to get other people to do what you want them to.” Instead, all parties should have full involvement in the decision making process as this will reduce the potential for conflict later in the change process. It is notable that Lawrence’s advice belongs to the humanistic, participative school of management. Once again we are back to the ‘playing it straight’ OD strategy. He does not believe there is a need for coercive or directive behaviours, which more recent writers assert are necessary in time pressured situations and when resistance turns to intransigence (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Dunphy and Stace, 1990). Set against more contemporary commentators on the political nature of the change process it can be argued that Lawrence’s work is naïve, idealistic
### Exhibit 3.2 - Kanter’s “disarming tactics”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disarming Tactics</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Waiting it out</strong></td>
<td>Used when the change agent has no practical tools with which to combat the resistance. Once the overt criticism has subsided or shifted to another issue the change initiative can be revived.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wearing them down</strong></td>
<td>Repeating the same arguments for the proposed change and refusing to concede major points or the abandonment of the undertaking altogether.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appealing to larger principles</strong></td>
<td>Gaining the support of and publicly linking the initiative to a person more powerful than their opponents, thus negating and overcoming resistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inviting them in</strong></td>
<td>Offering to share the benefits that will accrue from the change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sending emissaries to smooth the way and plead the case</strong></td>
<td>Using diplomatic flag-bearers to test the ground and spread the message. Helping to create a ‘felt need’ for change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Displaying support</strong></td>
<td>Ensuring a public demonstration of approval from key backers and sponsors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reducing the stakes</strong></td>
<td>Minimising the potential losses likely to be incurred by the proposed change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Warning the critics</strong></td>
<td>Informing opponents that their position will come to the attention of more senior personnel who are supporting the initiative.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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and unlikely to be able to cope with the political interplay of top management team members in the context of large scale change proposal coalitions.

It is not always possible or desirable to have full participation in the decision making process (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Child, 1984; Dunphy and Stace, 1990). For example, in times of crisis when decisions need to be taken quickly or when the change is contentious and threatens influential groups or large sections of the organisation. If the normal consultation and negotiation channels are followed the crisis may cause significant damage to the organisation in the interim. Therefore, decisions might have to be made unilaterally and implemented by coercive means for the benefit of the organisation. Alternatively, there may be circumstances when a change agent has to ‘play it rough’ in order to gain the support of key decision makers, dissolve resistance and overcome opposition. The use of coercion, perhaps more than any other behaviour, epitomises the divide between humanistic OD commentators who strive for rationality, emotional care and the eradication of politics in the change process, and those who embrace the inevitable existence of politics in organisations and incorporate it into their approach. The coercive dimension of political behaviour and tactics warrants further consideration because in an era when large scale and transformational organisational change has become an increasingly prevalent strategy (Dunphy and Stace, 1992), the need for speed and radical restructuring mean that coercive techniques should have a place in the armoury of the large scale change proposal coalition leader.

The use of coercion may involve the delay, withdrawal or limiting of rewards (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; French and Raven, 1959; Gamson, 1968, 1975); restricting career enhancement opportunities such as promotion or secondment to highly visible and influential project teams (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992); “warning the critics” that they will be publicly challenged by more senior individuals in the organisation (Kanter, 1983); “freezing out” a particular individual or coalition from future involvement (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992); and administering costs (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980; French and Raven, 1959; Gamson, 1968, 1975). These few examples highlight the role coercion can play in the bargaining process or as a replacement for it. Within the bargaining process Bacharach and Lawler (1980, p.174) suggest that coercion can be used to “soften” the opposition’s stance on a particular issue, or alternatively it can be viewed “as an attempt by its user to gain compliance or concessions from an opponent without giving anything in return.”
Bacharach and Lawler (1980, p.178) noted that social psychology literature such as the work of Deutsch and Krauss (1962) suggests there are three elements to coercion: coercive potential, threat, and punishment. **Coercive potential** is the possible level and range of coercion that the user can deploy on the target if they choose to do so. **Threats** usually convey the level and range of coercion that the target can expect to be deployed against them, while **punishment** is the implementation of the threat. Generally, the aim of the user is not to reach the third stage and actually have to administer the punishment because it requires an expenditure of resources on their part with the result the target becomes less dependent on the user, thereby limiting the effectiveness of further coercive influence.

The effectiveness of coercive action or threats is the subject of two contradictory schools of thought. Deterence and subjective-expected-utility theory posits that threats can be a very effective method of influence by means of manipulating the utility of compliance versus the costs of non-compliance (Morgan, 1977; Schelling, 1960, 1966; Tedeschi, Schlenker, and Bonoma, 1973), whilst against this conflict-spiral theory suggests that coercion is relatively ineffective as a means of influence since the issue of losing face is more important than the utilitarian outcomes (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). Both schools have implications for the large scale change coalition leader considering coercion as a means of influence with coalition members who are members of the top management team.

Deterence theory proposes that parties with high coercive potentials will be deterred from actually using it against each other since the magnitude of reciprocal damage will be too great. Organisations which have highly interdependent units are therefore less likely to engage in coercive activity as long as the threats are credible. Deterence theory invokes the notion of utility because compliance versus non-compliance needs to be assessed on the basis of potential outcomes: positive and negative. This line of argument leads us to subjective-expected-utility theory which proposes that a political actor’s behaviour will be determined by assessing the magnitude of the potential outcomes and weighting it by the probability they will occur. Such arguments hinge on the fact that actors are assumed to select the choice that optimises their utility. During the critique of the extant literature on coalition formation we remarked on the lack of completeness and robustness of any model that fails to take into consideration emotional and political factors. Therefore, the usefulness of subjective-expected-utility theory in explaining behaviour is limited because of its reliance on utilitarian factors. For example, a large scale change proposal
coalition member might elect to suffer a short term negative impact such as reduced responsibility in favour of developing expertise and relationships which will be useful to them during the implementation phase. Alternatively, they may accept temporary hardship because they are returning a favour made to the coalition leader. This is an emotional decision not a utilitarian decision.

Conflict-spiral theory argues that threats can be a relatively ineffective means of influence. Whereas deterence theory contends that greater coercive potential reduces the likelihood of parties engaging in conflict, conflict-spiral theory posits that it will lead to greater aggression and counter aggression:

"The greater the total power in a relationship the lower the bargaining effectiveness." (Rubin and Brown, 1975)

Conflict-spiral theory suggests that for the coalition leader who operates in a top management team coercion is an ineffective means of influence. Faced with two empirically supported schools of thought Bacharach and Lawler (1980, p.186-187) contend that deterence theory appears to operate in settings where differences in power are relatively large, as in superior-subordinate relationships. Conflict-spiral theory appears to operate in settings where power is relatively equal or disparities are small.

The commentary on coercion is fascinating because of its contradictory stances. In one corner we have conflict-spiral theory which argues that coercion in top management teams is relatively ineffective. In another corner we have the deterence and subjective-expected-utility theory which believes coercion in top management teams rarely needs to be realised. In a third corner we have recent management writers (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Dunphy and Stace, 1990) who assert that coercion very definitely has a role in the armoury of the change agent. This thesis will test whether or not coercion is a valid behaviour in top management teams in the change context. It appears though as if many commentators and theorists get caught up in the 'compliance/commitment' debate. The breakthrough made by the likes of Buchanan and Boddy (1992) and Dunphy and Stace (1990) is that they side-step the question of desirability and focus on necessity. In the turbulent environment of today in which organisations have to move rapidly and decisively, compliance is acceptable. This is a powerful blow to the OD originated rational-linear approach to change. This one statement crystallises the argument that the game has changed and the old rules no longer apply, simply because they cannot cope. It
has nothing to do with toughness or being anti-humanistic. The rapidly changing environment has compelled and will continue to compel researchers and practitioners alike to develop a more resilient and pragmatic approach to large scale change, and that process begins at the proposal stage with the use of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams.

**Lines of enquiry for the empirical study**

During the last three chapters we have engaged the literature to argue that the rational-linear approach to change is not the most suitable option for organisations faced with designing and implementing large scale change in turbulent environments. Instead a power-oriented behaviour based approach is more robust and pragmatic. Due to the increasing complexity, magnitude and frequency of large scale change it is no longer feasible, or desirable, for the chief executive officer alone to design strategic options. Rather, it is the role of top management team members to form proposal coalitions and prepare a proposal for consideration by the appropriate key decision makers. Since large scale change is likely to re-configure structural aspects of the organisation such as reporting relationships and roles and responsibilities, potential winners will seek to promote the plans while those who stand to lose out will mount opposition and resistance. If the coalition leader is to defend the work of the coalition they will need to engage in political activity, and to do so meaningfully they will need to use a wide range of behaviours and tactics. Therefore, it is imperative they understand that power can be harnessed and that it resides simultaneously in personal, structural and situational aspects of the organisation. The extant literature has not identified and reported on large scale change proposal coalitions. In conflating large scale change into a single homogenous process it has neglected the crucial formative stage when the top management team designs the change to be implemented. The literature’s treatment of power is generally antagonistic and unhelpful. There is a paucity of empirical research into coalitions and the commentary on political behaviours is disturbingly generic. If we are to advance our understanding of managerial elites in the change context we need to conduct context specific enquiry. Therefore, the objective of this thesis is to investigate the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings in the UK private sector for the purpose of informing academic enquiry and practitioners. As a result of the critique laid out over the last three chapters we can establish seven...
lines of enquiry for the empirical study for which there is an urgent need. The seven lines of enquiry are:

#1 Given that large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams often exist for weeks or months do they follow a life-cycle? If so, what are the stages and what are the key characteristics of each stage?

#2 If large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams do follow life-cycles, are different roles, behaviours and tactics adopted by the coalition leader during each stage? If so, what are the roles and behaviours used in each stage by the coalition leader?

#3 Are coalition building behaviours and tactics influenced by the hierarchical position of the coalition leader in relation to the individual whose support they are attempting to enlist, and if so, how do they vary?

#4 What are the behaviours and tactics used by the coalition leader to build a large scale change proposal coalition within the top management team?

#5 Are there different types of large scale change proposal coalition? If so, what are the key characteristics of the different types and what are the behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader in the different types?

#6 Do top management team members think large scale change proposal coalitions should have a finite life-span and if so, why?

#7 What happens to large scale change proposal coalitions once the proposal has been approved for implementation or rejected? Does the coalition continue, and if so, what form does it take in terms of its membership and their behaviours? Does it disband by its own choice, and if so, how? Are coalitions forced to disband, and if so, who disbands them and how?

If the findings of these seven lines of enquiry are pursued using a rigorous and robust methodology there is a strong likelihood they will produce rich descriptions and deep insights into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders. It will then be reasonable to claim a
pioneering breakthrough in our understanding of managerial elites in the change context. No other empirical research has investigated and reported on these issues.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have brought to a conclusion the arguments laid out in chapters one and two which asserted that a power-oriented behaviour based approach to large scale change is more resilient and pragmatic than the traditional OD originated rational-linear model. Given that large scale change often threatens the interests of powerful players in the top management team the coalition leader must be able to engage meaningfully in political behaviour. This means building a strong, cohesive and stable coalition and sustaining it in the face of resistance and opposition, which will likely require the use of coercive behaviours and tactics at some point in time.

The chapter began with an acknowledgement of the disparate and fragmented nature of academic enquiry into intraorganisational politics. We considered the meaning of the term politics and identified the key themes around which the literature is organised. After briefly touching on the morality of using political behaviour we then engaged with the debate on the inevitability of politics in organisations. The extant literature on coalition formation was critiqued on several assumptive and methodological grounds and the wider change literature was used to identify potential coalition building and sustaining tactics including the use of networks, language, structure, resistance and opposition handling techniques and coercion. The literature was criticised for being disturbingly generic, although it was argued that this is unsurprising given that most commentators are guilty of conflating large scale change into a single homogenous process. During the discussion important gaps and points of contention were identified and the chapter concluded with the generation of seven lines of enquiry for investigation in the empirical study. It was asserted that there is no empirical research which has reported on the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders. This is a serious gap in our understanding of managerial elites in the change context that if addressed will constitute a pioneering breakthrough in our understanding and treatment of the subject. There will be significant implications for academic enquiry and practitioners. Let us turn then to a discussion of the methodology design and construction.
Chapter 4

Methodology design and construction: overcoming the problem of investigating political behaviour in top management teams

"The craft of research involves imagination, flair, creativity and an aesthetic sense—or it ought to." (Watson, 1994, p.78)

Introduction

In this chapter we discuss the methodology design and construction. The approach was heavily influenced and shaped by the need to overcome the difficulties of empirically investigating the political behaviours and tactics of top management team members in large scale change proposal coalitions. Against this background we consider the two key problems of firstly, gaining access to top management team members, and secondly, the sensitivity of political behaviours as a topic for investigation. A mix of professional and personal ties were used to establish a research sample of fifty members of top management teams in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries in the UK private sector. An elite style semi-structured interview approach, which facilitated ‘interview-conversations’, served to generate rich and candid data which was assessed using thematic based content analysis. In addition to a consideration of each of these aspects the chapter also discusses the issue of revisiting rich interviews—hot leads, assessing participant candour, and post interview correspondence before concluding with a reflection on the methodological lessons learned.
The research was conducted on the ontological assumption that individual members of top management teams construct a unique personal workplace reality based on their values, attitudes, motives and goals. Furthermore, their perception of reality is influenced and constrained by the culture of the organisation and the behaviour of colleagues. This assumption projects members of top management teams as assertive individuals, capable of setting and reshaping agendas in response to a changing context. Schwandt (1994) described such a view as "everyday constructivist thinking", and argued:

"...human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. We invent concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, we continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experience." (Schwandt, 1994, p.125)

This thinking contrasts with the structural-functional approach, which according to Blumer (1969, p.57-58) portrays organisational members as "...merely media for the play and expression of the forces or mechanisms of the system itself." Similarly Garfinkel (1967) criticizes the approach for presenting individuals as "judgmental dopes" incapable of objective self-determination.

To study and record the political behaviours employed by members of top management teams it was determined that direct face-to-face interaction was essential. The sensitivity of the research topic meant that participants were unlikely to yield comprehensive and honest accounts unless they felt comfortable with the researcher. Lee (1993) commented that investigating sensitive issues demands a mechanism which facilitates the creation of trust and rapport. Therefore, a qualitative methodology was adopted. A quantitative methodology "which is perfectly comfortable with aggregating large numbers of people without communicating with them face-to-face" (Janesick, 1994, p.210), was rejected because it was felt that on balance data elicited via qualitative methods such as elite-style semi-structured interviewing would provide a richness and level of insight which could not be matched by employing quantitative methods (Hoffman, 1980).

The objective of qualitative research is often theory-testing or theory-constructing, but as Layder (1993) noted, the demarcation line between the two blurs in practice. He further argued that between the two ends of the spectrum there are a number of valuable
approaches concerned with discovery and exploration but not the generation or building of theory. One of these, *sensitizing concepts and theoretical description*, aims to:

"...develop concepts and descriptions which are theoretically insightful and thus provide useful starting points for further research. In this sense, once developed, they act as ‘sensitizing devices’ which help subsequent researchers to formulate theoretical ideas or to organise their data.”  
(Layder, 1993, p.49)

Indeed there is nothing to prohibit a researcher using such an approach as the first step towards constructing theory. Layder noted that Goffman (1968) developed his theory of a ‘total institution’ as a result of an earlier study of a mental hospital in which he established several working concepts that were later tested and refined.

Accepting the advice of Layder (1993) and the practice of theoreticians such as Goffman, the aim of the research that forms the basis of this thesis is to investigate the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings in the UK private sector to establish empirically grounded sensitizing concepts and descriptions which can then be used to inform academic enquiry and practitioners.

The unit of analysis is the coalition leader in the context of a large scale change proposal coalition. Studying complete top management teams was not an option available to the author due to resource and time constraints. Therefore, the research effort was focused on individuals regarded as key players and decision makers in their organisation. The label of key player was determined either by the chief executive or managing director of each organisation, or the author’s father and uncle who had privileged insights and access into the participant organisations. The author’s existing relationships with top management teams also enabled him to identify the most influential individuals.

We will now go on to examine the methodology underpinning the research. Specifically we will consider:

- The problem of investigating political behaviour in top management teams,
- Data sources,
- The pilot study,
Selecting participants and managing identity to establish access,
Conducting the interview: parameters and permissive atmospheres,
Data analysis,
Following up 'hot leads': rich interviews revisited,
Assessing levels of participant candour,
Post interview correspondence, and
Conclusions, reflections and lessons learned.

The problem of investigating political behaviour in top management teams

In conducting an empirical study into the political behaviour of top management team members two issues strongly influenced the design of the research methodology:

- The difficulty in gaining access to top management team members, and
- The sensitivity of political behaviour as a topic for investigation.

The difficulty in gaining access to top management team members

In her study of strategic decision making by social elites and boards of directors in Canadian English speaking hospitals Hoffman (1980) remarked:

"The relative scarcity of literature...on such organisational settings as boards of directors is doubtless related to difficulties of access."
(Hoffman, 1980, p.46)

She relates that in her own experience securing access tended to be problematic for three principal reasons: protective secretaries and juniors blocked or diverted research requests; executives tended not to have much time to allocate to discretionary activities such as research; and a substantive element of the strategic decision making process occurs outside rather than inside the boardroom, thus making it more difficult to study.

That the strategic decision making process is conducted largely outside the boardroom is supported by Buchanan and Boddy (1992, p.27) who suggested that those involved in organisational change have to support their rational and public arguments with
“backstage activity”, gathering support and overcoming resistance outside the formal setting of the boardroom. They argued that such activity involves power skills and influencing tactics and as the term ‘backstage activity’ implies, it usually takes place behind closed doors. Therefore, a researcher cannot simply attend a board meeting, listen to the debate, observe the interplay, record the exchanges and the decisions taken. It would be misleading to assume that the political dimension of top management team decision making had been captured. The often covert nature of political behaviour requires individuals to be accessed when they are engaged in ‘backstage activity’ so the behavioural dynamics and power skills can be observed. However, as we will argue later in this chapter an ethnographic approach in which the researcher lived with the top management team (for example, Burns, 1977; Dalton, 1959; Watson, 1994) would not necessarily lead to observations of candid and open political behaviour. In addition to the factor of backstaging behind closed doors there is also the issue of trust in a group environment. Individuals are likely to be wary of having their exchanges recorded, analysed and reported inaccurately or unfavourably and so may make an extra effort to keep their behaviour covert or modify it because of the researcher’s presence. Either reaction is undesirable from an academic perspective because the descriptions will not be of typical behaviour. Alternatively they can be interviewed on a one-to-one basis so their opinions and experiences can be related in a confidential and anonymous setting. Discussions of data sources and the issue of participant candour will take place in later sections of this chapter.

How then does the researcher gain access to members of top management teams? One option is to randomly sample individuals from an appropriate population, for example, the board members of the FTSE100 companies. The problem with this approach according to the senior managers who participated in the pilot study is that members of top management teams receive a large number of research requests each week from members of academic institutions, trade institutions such as the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and management consultancies. The last of which are increasingly using research as a means of introducing potential clients to their services. They are often prepared to invest tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of pounds in conducting very detailed research of high commercial value to the participant organisations.
This compares with the research student who, promising a report of the results, requests access to senior individuals for the purpose of adding to the existing knowledge base. There may be commercial implications which add value to the organisation but, unlike the management consultancies, they are not the primary reason for conducting the research.

The senior manager often has to choose which invitation to accept and which to reject. For members of top management teams whose time is scarce there is an incentive to dismiss the request of the academic research student. Expressing concern in adopting this strategy the five participants of the pilot study (of which three hold PhDs) further contended that the student who is granted access after employing random sampling techniques is likely to be allocated individuals who are peripheral members of the top management team rather than the key members requested. Several participants likened random sampling to cold calling, stating that it conveyed the impression the researcher had no purposeful research strategy and was resorting to a "scattershot" approach by which to construct a sample. On the strength of these arguments it was decided that gaining access to key players in top management teams was unlikely to be achieved most effectively by random sampling methods.

An alternative method proposed by Buchanan et al (1988) and Hoffman (1980) involves the researcher exploiting professional and personal ties with individuals or organisations which satisfy the research criteria. The participants of the pilot study strongly recommended this approach as the one most likely to generate positive replies. Consequently the author's father and uncle, both of whom hold senior positions in their respective organisations, used internal and external networks to provide nineteen members of top management teams in eight organisations across seven industries. The researcher's own professional ties were used to co-opt thirty-one members of top management teams in six organisations in six different industries. Thus a research sample of fifty individuals across fourteen organisations in thirteen industries was established. The merits, limitations and process of employing such an approach are debated in subsequent sections of this chapter, but first it is important to examine how key members of top management teams were persuaded to discuss their political behaviours.
The sensitivity of political behaviour as a topic for investigation

Rosabeth Kanter (1979) wrote:

"Power is America's last dirty word. It is easier to talk about money—and much easier to talk about sex—than it is to talk about power."

(Kanter, 1979, p.65)

Yet along with a number of other commentators she came to the conclusion that to be a successful executive individuals must be skilled political operators (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Egan, 1994; Gandz and Murray, 1980; Kanter, 1979, 1983; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981, 1992). Participants in this empirical study were informed in the initial written and oral research request the topic of investigation was "top management team interpersonal dynamics in the context of large scale organisational change." Once the interview was under way it quickly became evident to the interviewee that the discussion focused on the political behavioural aspects of interpersonal dynamics between top management team colleagues. On realising this participants expressed two principal concerns. Firstly, they would be identified in published accounts, and secondly, the content of any interview would be discussed with their colleagues or superiors. The consensus was that those who visibly engage in politics are regarded by subordinates and peers as lacking in the legitimate skills of management such as empowerment, team building and leadership. Furthermore, they are seen as behaving in a manner that is morally wrong. This is a concern that finds support in the literature. Madison et al (1980), agree with Burns (1961) and Pettigrew (1973) that 'politics' might be too direct and sensitive a term to use openly. Burns (1961) remarked:

"No-one regards himself as a politician—or as acting politically—except of course on occasions when he is led into accounts of successful intrigue and manoeuvring, when he bolsters his self-esteem and reputation by projecting the whole affair into the safe social context of a game or a joke." (Burns, 1961, p.260)

Commenting on these fears one general manager observed:

"Some people are going to look at you [the researcher] and say to themselves 'why should I risk throwing it all away on someone I don't
know, and for something that I probably won’t get anything out of?" (Joe Clyde, general manager) [parentheses added]

From an organisational perspective chief executive officers were concerned that findings would be disseminated to a broader audience. Richard King, one of the CEOs explained that “although we all do it, nobody ever admits it.” He went on to remark that with the public, parliamentary and media fascination with executive pay the last thing he wanted was “to open the Financial Times next week and see an article under the headline ‘Bastards in the Boardroom!’” Burns (1977, p.xiv) had to face a similar concern from executives at the BBC who found his report “...interesting, and more than interesting, fascinating. It is also reasonable and balanced, but within its own restricted confines only and provided that you do not take these words as meaning agreement with everything in it...” In short the BBC did not want any of its ‘dirty linen’ laundered in public.

Writing about the conduct of research on sensitive topics and how to overcome concerns such as those referred to above, Lee (1993) remarked:

“In this context, privacy, confidentiality and a non-condemnatory attitude are important because they provide a framework of trust. Within this framework, researchers can lead those studied to confront, in a fundamental way, issues which are deep, personally threatening and potentially painful.” (Lee, 1993, p.98)

Once the qualitative researcher has allayed participant fears of identification by promising confidentiality and anonymity they then have to deal with the problem of respondents articulating a topic which, according to the chief executive quoted above, is not usually discussed. The difficulty for the researcher is that some senior managers do not view their behaviour as political and therefore fail to mention it. David Knight, one of the directors interviewed, expressed surprise that soliciting the support of his colleagues in the top management team by trading favours and resources could be described as political, “...it’s just what top guys do to get things done”, he explained. Yet he quite readily admitted that threatening a more junior member of the top management team in order to gain their compliance was coercive and “very definitely political behaviour".
Cooper and Branthwaite (1977) have created a useful model of responses obtained by researchers who employ interview methods, and this is illustrated in Exhibit 4.1. For the purpose of this study we will use Bogdan and Biklen's (1982, p.135) definition of an interview "...a purposeful conversation usually between two people (but sometimes more) that is directed by one in order to get information." By positioning political behaviour and large scale organisational change within Cooper and Branthwaite's construct, the problems encountered by the researcher of sensitive topics are brought to light.

With the exception of commercially sensitive information, members of top management teams were found to be generally willing and able to discuss large scale change issues, so in the context of Exhibit 4.1, interviews generate data relatively easily since responses tend to be 'spontaneous', 'reasoned', and 'conventional'. On the other hand data concerning political behaviour can be harder to extract as responses tend to be 'concealed', 'personal', 'intuitive', 'imaginative', 'unconscious' and 'repressed'. Managers may be 'aware' of the political dimension in their behaviour but they often regard it as 'private' information and therefore are unwilling to share it. Even if they are agreeable to discussions, a manager may need some assistance in 'communicating' what is often regarded as a taboo issue (Kanter, 1979). The researcher is often forced to probe and extract data from areas that may be both submerged and protected. A difficult task which cannot be tackled through questionnaires. In terms of Exhibit 4.1 the aim of the researcher is to maximise the usefulness of the data extracted by shifting the interviewee from: private to public by guaranteeing confidentiality; non-communicable to communicable by articulating or translating their knowledge and unaware to aware by guiding them into areas they have not previously discussed or articulated with an outsider. As Jackall (1988) remarked:

"Managers do not generally discuss ethics, morality or moral rules in use in a direct way with each other, except perhaps in seminars organised by ethicists." (Jackall, 1988, p.6)

The need to be able to interact with the interviewee is therefore of paramount importance. A semi-structured elite style interview schedule permits a two-way exchange of information whilst ensuring the respondent remains focused on the core
Exhibit 4.1 - Interviewee responses to questions on large scale organisational change and political behaviour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accessibility</th>
<th>Layers of response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Spontaneous, reasoned, conventional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-communicable</td>
<td>(Large scale organisational change)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicable</td>
<td>Concealed, personal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aware</td>
<td>(Political behaviour)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Intuitive, imaginative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-communicable</td>
<td>(Political behaviour)</td>
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<td>Unaware</td>
<td>Unconscious, repressed</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Political behaviour)</td>
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issues. A heavily structured survey type interview does not permit either the interviewer to probe or the interviewee to digress, while a free format in-depth interview is quite
likely to elicit large amounts of superfluous data, thereby wasting valuable time with difficult to access time conscious participants. The justification for pursuing an elite style semi-structured interview schedule are presented in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Data sources

The principal source of primary data was a elite style semi-structured interview that was piloted with five members of different top management teams before being used in the main study with another fifty participants from fourteen organisations. The interview schedule is attached as Appendix A.

The term elite is taken from the sociological literature and refers to groups of individuals who occupy the upper echelons of society’s institutions. Judges, senior civil servants, top management team members, and clerical leaders are a few examples. Thus, elite style interviewing refers to a type of interviewing designed specifically for the verbal investigation of key decision makers in organisations. Its principal characteristic is the high level of two-way interaction between interviewer and interviewee not usually associated with the classic structured interview in which the interviewer follows a tightly scripted question schedule that allows minimal room for departure. Elite style interviews tend to be semi-structured to allow the interviewer to pursue interesting lines of enquiry outside the schedule. The argument put forward for by supporters of elite style interviewing is that it increases the likelihood of capturing data that is more contextually relevant and therefore richer and more insightful than that collected using classic interviewing approaches (Adler and Adler, 1992; Hoffman, 1980; Johnson, 1875; Scott, 1965; Wax, 1952). An alternative style of interview was used by Burns (1977) in his study of the BBC. Similar in duration to those which underpin the findings reported in this thesis—between one and three hours—Burns described them as more like conversations or discussions than interviews. He characterised them as being close to normal discourse and related how he had attempted to make them as “non-threatening and intrinsically interesting” (p.xii) to his interviewees as possible. Burns admitted how his interviews were completely non-standardised and how they would discuss different issues depending on what he as the interviewer found interesting. He appears to cast
himself as a semi-ethnographer, immersed in the study environment for extended periods—fifteen weeks in 1963 and six or seven weeks in 1973—collecting and interpreting his observations. While undoubtedly such an approach generates data that is rich in its diversity the danger is it lacks focus because of the tendency to pursue the latest line of enquiry that attracts the researcher's attention. Due to the precise nature of the thesis questions and the resources available to this researcher it was rejected in preference of the elite-style semi-structured interview.

It is recognised that with a view to generalisation and theory building, the findings from fifty interviewees are not as meaningful as the findings from a larger sample. However, it can be argued that the respondents selected brought considerable experience to the study and the data they provided warrants serious consideration. For example, the seven members of the top management team at British Petroleum had over two hundred years of collective international management experience, garnered from working in more than forty countries. The chief executive officer, who aged only in his mid-forties, was responsible for instigating the strategic change which delivered record profitability and the highest share price in the company's history. He alone has held sixteen different posts within the organisation before he was appointed to its highest office. At Whyte & Mackay the seven respondents had over one hundred and ninety years of collective management experience. While at Scott's Hotels the five members of the top management team had over one hundred and forty years between them. Such lengthy service records were typical rather than atypical so although one of the limitations of the study is that only fifty individuals were interviewed, their opinions, recollections, and current behaviours are drawn from and grounded in more than one thousand two hundred years of management experience.

Furthermore, it is important to confirm the participants were key members of their organisation's top management teams. Those interviewed were not middle managers or peripheral members of the key decision making group. They were members of their core top management teams, capable of instigating, shaping or resisting large scale organisational change initiatives. Several participants have held senior positions within the British civil service at some time in their careers. One individual had been a key member of the Policy Unit of prime ministers Margaret Thatcher and John Major in the early 1990s, while another had been a senior figure in a government department. One participant, in addition to his organisational role of managing director, is the head of a
European government's think tank on industry, meeting regularly on a one-to-one basis with the country's president. Outside interests of other members of the study included being the chairman of the board of directors at an Ivy League American university, sitting on the boards of international orchestras, charities, museums and galleries. Such activities clearly illustrate the participants of the study were not only successful senior managers in their own organisations, but influential and respected members of national and international society. Appendix B provides a description of participant organisation activities.

It has already been noted the fourteen organisations studied were selected using professional and personal ties on the advice of Buchanan et al (1988) and Hoffman (1980). They were chosen to provide a diverse cross-section of British industry, organisational settings and size. Those studied operated in the following industries: building societies, computer hardware manufacturing, credit card issuing and acquisition, electricity distribution, fast food, hotels, oil and gas exploration, pharmaceuticals, property construction and management, sponsorship marketing, tobacco manufacturing, water distribution, and distilling. The number of people directly employed by the organisations ranged from under fifty to in excess of fifty thousand, with the mean average being approximately ten thousand. An opportunity to conduct a study solely in the computing industry was rejected in favour of an attempt to ascertain whether there are any commonalities in the political behaviour of top management team members across organisations and industries. The opportunity to undertake a study in the computing sector still exists so there remains the possibility of conducting a further study to test the findings. One of the limitations of the claims which can be made from the data is that the professional and personal ties only extended to the private sector. Even though several of the participants had held senior positions in public sector organisations the absence of current executives means the findings cannot be generalised to public sector institutions. Therefore, in addition to the computing sector research opportunity there is also a need to conduct an investigation into the political behaviour of top management team members of public sector organisations and contrast the findings with the results of this study.

Organisational documentation, industry reports and press articles were collected and used to select large scale change initiatives for discussion. They were also used to locate the participants within their top management team.
The pilot study

Once the lines of enquiry had been generated from an extensive review of the literature on large scale change, intraorganisational power and political behaviour, the next step was to conduct a pilot study of the interview schedule into which the lines of enquiry had been converted. Exhibit 4.2 lists the lines of enquiry derived from the literature review. Five members of top management teams in five organisations were asked to participate and provide feedback. Using pseudonyms to preserve anonymity the five individuals included one managing director (Neil Thames), one director (Josh Severn), two general managers (Joe Clyde and Niall Trent) and one senior manager (Ian Tay). The feedback can usefully be discussed under three headings: research strategy; gaining access; and the interview.

Exhibit 4.2 - Research lines of enquiry

#1 Given that large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams often exist for weeks or months do they follow a life-cycle? If so, what are the stages and what are the key characteristics of each stage?

#2 If large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams do follow life-cycles, are different roles, behaviours and tactics adopted by the coalition leader during each stage? If so, what are the roles and behaviours used in each stage by the coalition leader?

#3 Are coalition building behaviours and tactics influenced by the hierarchical position of the coalition leader in relation to the individual whose support they are attempting to enlist, and if so, how do they vary?

#4 What are the behaviours and tactics used by the coalition leader to build a large scale change proposal coalition within the top management team?

#5 Are there different types of large scale change proposal coalition? If so, what are the key characteristics of the different types and what are the behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader in the different types?
Exhibit 4.2 - Research lines of enquiry (continued)

#6 Do top management team members think large scale change proposal coalitions should have a finite life-span and if so, why?

#7 What happens to large scale change proposal coalitions once the proposal has been approved for implementation or rejected? Does the coalition continue, and if so, what form does it take in terms of its membership and their behaviours? Does it disband by its own choice, and if so, how? Are coalitions forced to disband, and if so, who disbands them and how?

Research strategy

It has already been argued that a study of political behaviour in top management teams is problematic due to the difficulty in gaining access and the sensitivity of the subject matter. Consequently the research strategy and particularly the data collection method was shaped largely by the constraints. The preferred methodology had to be re-worked around them, thus supporting Buchanan et al's (1988, p.54) remark that "...in the conflict between the desirable and the possible, the possible always wins."

The original intention was to use a three stage data capture strategy. An interview followed by a questionnaire and then a longitudinal diary issued for six months for the purpose of 'tracking' the day-to-day political behaviour of senior managers in addition to any critical incidents that occurred when initiating large scale organisational strategic change (Buchanan et al, 1988; Hoffman, 1980; Zimmerman and Weider, 1982). However, the questionnaire and longitudinal diary were abandoned after the participants of the pilot study unanimously argued that because of the time constraints placed on top management team members, individuals would agree to only one. It was argued that chasing up questionnaires and diary extracts could be construed by participants as harassment. Thereby damaging relationships and jeopardising the possibility of future access. Echoing the suggestion of Lee (1993, p.115) that diaries "can be burdensome on the respondent", Niall Trent, one of the general managers, remarked:
"Senior managers tend to dislike paperwork so you would be hard pressed to find anyone who would fill it in even occasionally, and when there is a big change they simply won't have the time. The other thing you have to remember is that you are asking them to make a written record of their political behaviour and that of their colleagues. I think I would be just a little bit concerned about somebody else taking a look at it. I know I could lock it up or take it home with me, but let's face it, it's a hassle I could do without." (Niall Trent, general manager)

The pilot participants advised that it was reasonable to expect that a request for a one and a half hour interview, rather than one hour only, would prove to be acceptable. After being interviewed with the proposed semi-structured schedule they contended that with some minor reshaping on the question sequence and style, it was fair to expect that both specific details and 'rich' anecdotal data could be collected in the revised time frame. Neil Thames, the managing director, stated that because intraorganisational politics is an emotive issue it was likely that a number of participants would be prepared to extend the interview in order to “find out if they used similar practices to senior managers in other companies.”

Therefore, it was decided that an elite style semi-structured interview represented the best opportunity to collect insightful data for three reasons. Firstly, the researcher already enjoyed access to the desired sample through an established professional and personal network of contacts, thereby avoiding the need to resort to a time consuming ‘cold-calling’ (random sampling) strategy. Secondly, the high levels of trust and rapport which existed between the interviewer and the participants helped to create a permissive information giving atmosphere, thereby off-setting the problem of investigating a sensitive research topic. The third reason was that the interview situation, unlike the questionnaire or longitudinal diary permits the interviewer to probe into partially revealed and alluded to areas. For these reasons it was contended that a questionnaire and longitudinal diary would not generate the same high levels of candour and richness. Nevertheless, the interview is not without its limitations. Kahn and Cannell (1957) have asserted that researchers enter the interview with a unique set of motives, goals, loyalties and attitudes which can manifest themselves during the interview and constitute a source of bias, thus influencing or directing the interviewee towards providing answers they otherwise might not. The interviewer effect, as this is known, can distort the data materially in both the collection and analysis stages. It can be further compounded by
bias in the questions. Moser and Kalton (1971) noted that a leading question is one by which its content, wording or structure directs the respondent to answer in a certain manner. Chisnall (1992, p.148) contends that both the interviewer effect and question bias can be minimised by thorough preparation on the part of the researcher. Implementing this advice the questions and style of questioning were tested and refined during the pilot study.

Other data sources such as participant observation were rejected because the participants of the pilot study suggested that political behaviour tended to take place behind closed doors on a one-to-one basis where it could not be observed. Often for reasons of secrecy and deniability on the part of the participants. It was suggested that members of top management teams were extremely unlikely to grant access to a researcher for the purpose of observing political behaviour. In the unlikely circumstances that they did, the presence of a researcher would distort the normal behaviours of those being observed to such a degree, the interaction would be unrepresentative. Consequently shadowing an executive over several days or weeks was neither viable or desirable. Ethnographers such as Burns (1977), Dalton (1959) and Watson (1994) believe strongly in the merits of conducting longitudinal on-site research. Watson argues that, “In ethnography, then, there is a coming together of the ‘everyday’ thinking of the ‘subjects’ of the research and the body of academic knowledge to which the researcher has access”, (Watson 1994, p.7). The problem with the approaches of academic investigators such as Burns (1977), Dalton (1959), Jackall (1988) and Watson (1994) is that their method cannot avoid polluting the organisational system they enter. Watson, for example, is quite open in revealing his hand and intent, “I was no neutral fly-on-the-wall in ZTC Ryland and I was not ‘collecting’ attitudes and other data like a naturalist netting butterflies. Like any other social researcher I was influencing those I was researching...”, (Watson, 1994, p.7).

Watson is correct in his assertion that all researchers influence those they investigate, but although the ethnographer has a first hand opportunity to form their own impression of what is taking place the degree of supposed richness is counteracted by the strength of shaping on the behaviour observed. There is no doubt the ethnographer is influencing the reality they are reporting. Therefore, even if the resources had been available to this researcher it was decided that the price of prejudice was too high and that elite-style semi-structured interviewing provided a more informatively impartial interpretation. The
issue of not being able to observe events directly was offset partially by cross-checking accounts with interviewees and comparing interview notes which gave accounts of the same situation.

The idea of using group interviews was discarded for much the same reason as observational techniques. All five participants of the pilot study argued that a very low level of candour would be present in the data collected by this method. Ian Tay stated that respondents would 'cleanse' their answers in the presence of colleagues in order to protect their relationships and status within the top management team. Video cameras or microphones were rejected on the basis that even if participants consented to their presence they were once again likely to present a sanitised and inaccurate picture of their political behaviours.

Having considered the research strategy and advocated the use of an interview the participants of the pilot study commented on the matter of gaining access.

Gaining access

The unanimous position of the five participants was to exploit any professional and personal ties to gain privileged access and establish a research sample of fifty members of top management teams. With regard to the physical process of gaining access, the primary advice was to behave professionally. One of the general managers remarked:

"Some academics, including research students, seem to think they automatically demand respect because they work at a university, and that makes them somehow more intelligent than you are. They are high-handed on the phone, arrive late and dress like they have just come back from some hippie convention. You are left in no doubt that they are doing you a favour and not the other way around." (Joe Clyde, general manager)

It was suggested that the initial contact should be made by telephone rather than letter, which lends itself more easily to a delay in communication, or indeed no communication at all. The participants suggested the most likely course of action was for the manager's secretary to ask for a written request. Consequently they proposed preparing a standardised 'information sheet' explaining the researcher's link with the proposed
interviewee or organisation, academic background, research request, a promise of confidentiality and an offer to share the results. This would then be faxed immediately following the telephone conversation. It was strongly recommended that under no circumstances should any reference be made to the intention to study political behaviour. Dexter (1970) offered the following advice to researchers:

"Use some general phrase which the interviewee can interpret for himself. Do not be any more precise than you absolutely have to be about what you are looking for." (Dexter, 1970, p.49)

The five participants argued that a successful research request to a top management team member should stimulate curiosity, encourage altruism and acknowledge the exclusivity of the targeted individual. The researcher should make it clear they welcome the opportunity to learn from the manager’s experience and will feed back a report of the results. Concurring with these views Dexter (1970) commented:

"Probably, the greatest value which many interviewees receive — the reason why they enjoy the interview — is the opportunity to teach, to tell people something." (Dexter, 1970, p.37)

Prior to transmitting the information sheet by facsimile a time was agreed with the manager’s secretary when the potential participant’s reply would be given. At the researcher’s prompting this was typically within twenty-four hours. In every instance the return phone call yielded a positive reply. Once again on the advice of those who took part in the pilot study, interviews were set up at the participant’s convenience, usually within a month, at the organisation. A review of the literature makes it clear that a hundred per cent success rate is very unusual although Dexter notes that Heard (1950, p.891) claimed to enjoy levels in excess of ninety-nine per cent. In assessing why this was so it can be argued that using a combination of professional and personal ties where a strong previous relationship existed was of considerable assistance. Furthermore, the advice of five current members of top management teams (of which three have conducted PhD research) concerning the process of how to successfully approach senior managers was consistent, unambiguous and insightful. Finally, a commitment to punctilious time keeping helped to convey a seriousness of intent.
Interview style. It was strongly recommended that a time contract be established at the beginning of the interview so questions could be prioritised and the schedule modified if necessary. Commenting on the interview style it was suggested by all five participants that members of top management teams would be more comfortable with an interview that appeared to be a two-way discussion rather than a one-way data extraction process. This appears to confirm the assertions of several writers including Burgess (1984) who prefers to think of "interviews as conversations" and Blum (1952) who describes such exchanges as "interview-conversations". Dexter (1970, p.56) who commented that he finds discussion more enlightening than "rat-a-tat-tat questioning", remarked:

"It is my experience and impression...that many elite interviewees dislike a steady flow of questions...They would prefer a discussion, or still more, perhaps, something which sounds like a discussion but is really a quasi-monologue stimulated by understanding comments. Often, at any rate, I try to handle the relationship as discussion —two reflective men trying to find out how things happen, but the less informed and experienced one (the interviewer) deferring to the wiser one and learning from him.”

(Dexter, 1970, p.56)

It was argued by the participants of the pilot study that this would encourage the richer 'story telling' which portrays political behaviour in organisations more vividly. Josh Severn, the director, suggested that in order to elicit such anecdotes a useful ploy would be to stimulate the conversation with stories from the literature and, after concealing their identity, other participants and organisations.

Question issues. It was advised, in the context of interviews as discussions, that the number of questions should be reduced from thirty to between fifteen and twenty as this would permit respondents to answer at more length. Minichello et al (1990) noted Askham’s (1982) support for this strategy:
"She proposes using the device of asking questions in such a fashion that the informant would respond with a story. The rationale for encouraging stories is that they can be used as part of the process of analysis specifically for purposes of clarification." (Minichello et al, 1990, p.117)

It was also recommended that with a research topic as sensitive as political behaviour, closed questions would make the interviewee feel threatened, eliciting taciturn, incomplete and unrepresentative responses. The participant would not have the opportunity to justify or elaborate. Therefore, six closed questions were removed. Josh Severn remarked:

"Don’t go asking dumb questions like ‘do you think politics are good or bad for company performance?’ because most people will feel compelled to say they are bad. Likewise don’t ask ‘do politics exist in your organisation?’ because people will say something like ‘no more so than in other organisations’. You must avoid asking unconsciously loaded questions. I would suggest that you make it clear to them that you recognise politics are a fact of company life and that everyone gets involved. Once the baseline has been drawn you can move on to asking what they actually do, getting them to give you examples.” (Josh Severn, director)

The final advice from the participants of the pilot study was to re-order the questions so that the non-sensitive enquiries on large scale change were at the beginning. Ian Tay, the senior manager, refered to them as “warm up questions”. Gradually the focus would shift to political behaviour by way of saying that those proposing large scale change must gather support, and when necessary overcome resistance. Participants would then be asked about their own experiences. The issue of coercion would be tackled towards the end of the interview. Once again this approach finds support in the literature with Mostyn (1985, p.135) recommending the ‘funnel’ technique so that contentious issues are investigated in the latter stages of the interview.

It can be concluded that the pilot study was highly influential in helping to shape the research strategy, planning how to gain access, and structuring the process and content of the interview situation. Being able to discuss the research strategy and test the interview
schedule greatly assisted in tightening up the methodology as well as making it more robust and operational for the fieldwork phase.

Once the pilot studies had been concluded and the modifications had been made to the interview schedule the next task was to make contact with the selected participants.

**Selecting participants and managing identity to establish access**

It was argued earlier in this chapter that in seeking to conduct an empirical investigation into the political behaviour of top management team members, the sensitivity of the research topic combined with the difficulties of gaining access, presented a methodological problem for the researcher. Observing the advice of both Buchanan *et al* (1988) and Hoffman (1980) professional and personal ties were used to gain access to fifty members of fourteen top management teams in thirteen industries in the UK private sector.

We noted earlier with regard to personal ties that two members of the researcher’s family, both of whom occupy senior management positions in different organisations, used their internal and external networks of contacts to introduce nineteen members of top management teams in eight organisations across seven industries. The researcher’s own professional ties were used to gain access to thirty-one members of top management teams in six organisations across six industries. Exhibit 4.3, which uses pseudonyms to preserve anonymity, illustrates how the research sample of fifty participants was constructed.

Random sampling, although avoiding subjective bias and personal choice, was rejected after the participants of the pilot study contended that cold calling was unlikely to recruit fifty respondents. They argued further that respondents selected by random sampling methods were unlikely to be as candid as respondents who were selected on the basis of professional and personal ties, since individuals with whom there is an established relationship are more likely to reveal potentially damaging information about their own behaviour and that of colleagues. The need to establish a level of trust sufficient to elicit data quickly was imperative because on the advice of the senior managers who took part in the pilot study, the interview was designed to last only one and a half hours. The consensus was that because of the difficulty in gaining access to top management teams,
and the sensitivity of the subject involved, methodological purity in the form of random sampling was unlikely to generate the same level of candour as could the more opportunistic approach of exploiting professional and personal ties. Hoffman (1980) found that it was to her benefit to publicise her family's relationship with the senior managers who constituted the target sample.

"By chance during one interview, my respondent discovered that he knew a member of my family. ‘Why didn’t you say so?’ The rest of the interview was dramatically different from all my previous data [collected by interviewing a representative sample]. I was presented with a very different picture of the nature of board work...The sudden richness of this data, once my informant discovered that he ‘knew’ me, signalled the importance of the researcher’s identity in field research. Who I was or was perceived to be influenced the information to which I would be given access. The management of my identity thus became an important aspect of my research strategy.” (Hoffman, 1980, p.46-7)

Strongly associated to the non-probability sampling method of using professional and personal ties is the highly effective technique of ‘snowball sampling’. As Burgess (1990) explained:

“This approach involves using a small group of informants who are asked to put the researcher in touch with their friends who are subsequently interviewed, then asking them about their friends and interviewing them until a chain of informants has been selected.” (Burgess, 1990, p.55)

In his study of managers rules for survival and success in organisations, Jackall (1988) conducted sixty interviews across four firms (chemicals, defence contractor, textiles and public relations) by snowball sampling through professional and social ties.

Of the fifty participants twenty-six were contacted directly. Then by snowball sampling nine of those individuals were responsible for introducing a further twenty-four people to the researcher. A criticism of this approach is that the researcher is 'given' respondents who they would not select themselves. The fear being that the informants and their data will prove to be unsuitable or unrepresentative. However, it can be argued that this risk
is mitigated in top management teams since they are often relatively small in number, and the researcher can stipulate the selection criteria to the sponsor so that only individuals appropriate to the study are introduced.
In this study sponsors were informed that any person they introduced to the researcher had to be a member of the organisation's top management team. That is to say, the key strategic decision making group. Where sponsors introduced multiple participants they had to ensure that a representative cross-section of functions and seniority within the team. Clusters of individuals from single grades or functions were rejected.

**Managing identity to establish access**

The process of gaining access to top management team members followed the advice offered by the participants of the pilot study. With regard to describing the area of research, 'political behaviour' was avoided, in favour of the more anodyne "top management team interpersonal dynamics in the context of large scale organisational change." Commenting on whether to fully disclose the research topic Punch (1994, p.91) quoted Gans (1962):

"If the researcher is completely honest with people about his activities, they will try to hide actions and attitudes they consider undesirable, and so will be dishonest. Consequently the researcher must be dishonest to get honest data." (Gans, 1962, p.91)

Advocating discretion rather than dishonesty Buchanan *et al* (1988) remarked:

"When asked to state research aims in writing, we do so on one page only, ensuring that while accurate and clear it reveals as little detail as possible.”
(Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman, 1988, p.57)

The issue of whether to announce the full nature of the research topic at the outset is also debated by Brannen (1988, p.553) who suggested that it is preferable to let it emerge gradually during the interview. Thus giving the interviewer more time to establish a rapport with the interviewee and create a permissive atmosphere in which to ask the more sensitive questions.

The assertion that the research topic is an important yet under-researched area was also used. The intention was to convince the potential participant their contribution would be highly valuable. It was implied that by participating they would be helping to expand
the existing knowledge base. Consolidating on this, it was stressed that the findings would be fed back into the literature base. Commenting on this issue Buchanan et al (1988) observed:

"Most people are flattered by reasonable requests to talk about themselves, and to pass on their experience, where they know it will be used in an academic context, to help with a project or on educational courses. The opportunity to reflect on one’s working life systematically and to extract valuable lessons for others can be an extremely 'satisfying, but rarely experienced, process.'” (Buchanan et al, 1988, p.57)

Bert Starling, the managing director who gave six hours of his time, explained that he had done so because he liked to “help those starting off on their careers.” Wood (1980) found much the same when as a PhD student investigating people’s reactions to redundancy, the managers of the firms affected agreed to allow him access because they thought it would help with his education. They accepted that there would be little if any benefit in terms of improved company performance. Punch (1994) appears to confirm that altruism encourages participation when he claims that “older” researchers who are established in their academic careers, may find it difficult to gain access, whereas:

“A young student, however, may be perceived as non-threatening and may even elicit a considerable measure of sympathy from respondents.”
(Punch, 1994, p.87)

The logic being that because a respondent sympathises with the difficulties faced by a young researcher they will seek to assist them by being more candid than they would to an experienced interviewer of whom they would be more cautious. As we will consider in a later section of this chapter, there is strong evidence to support the claim that the respondents in this study did provide candid accounts of political behaviour in top management teams.

On the issue of confidentiality all participants were assured complete anonymity both for themselves and their organisations. It is common practice for researchers to offer their subjects protection, and when studying sensitive topics where disclosures can be distressing or problematic if attributed to a particular individual it becomes even more important. A number of writers support this stance:
"In general, there is a strong feeling among fieldworkers that settings and respondents should not be identifiable in print and they should not suffer harm or embarrassment as a consequence of research." (Punch, 1994, p.92)

"Because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them." (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p.372)

"Pseudonyms have long been used in published reports to disguise research sites and research participants." (Barnes, 1979, p.136-7)

"Clearly, if respondents are to reveal backstage information about themselves, they need to be confident that it will not be used against them in any way." (Hoffman, 1980, p.49)

Lee (1993, p.188) summarises this debate by advocating that fieldworkers exercise "self censorship" when writing up and publishing research. The case for adhering to this appears to be particularly strong when the participants are high profile volunteers and the subject is as potentially salacious as intraorganisational power and politics.

**Conducting the interview: parameters and permissive atmospheres**

The aim of this section is to discuss several issues pertaining to the interviewing of top management team members and specifically the relationship between interviewer and interviewee.

It has already been argued that elite style semi-structured interviewing can be an effective method of obtaining rich, candid data. The semi-structured approach permits the interviewer to depart from the schedule and probe into partially revealed and alluded to areas for highly detailed accounts of incidents that substantiate and expand on the interviewee’s initial responses. However, in order to accomplish the desired collection, employing a semi-structured interview format by itself is insufficient. The interviewer must establish unambiguous parameters identifying the area of discussion and create an
information giving environment, the latter of which was described by Blum (1952, p.38) as a "permissive atmosphere".

Establishing unambiguous parameters is an integral part of creating a permissive atmosphere. Hoffman (1980) argued:

"...interviews are social encounters in which respondents are influenced by how they perceive their interviewer and the nature of the research." (Hoffman, 1980, p.56)

Clarity of purpose and objectives ensure that both parties are aware of what is expected of them. Therefore, each interview commenced with a brief introduction of the academic background of the interviewer, the research purpose and the research objective. The parameters were clearly identified as being the interviewee's experience of initiating large scale organisational change. In accordance with the suggestions of the pilot study and the research methodology literature, the researcher's link with the interviewee or host organisation was strongly emphasised (Buchanan et al, 1988; Dexter, 1970; Hoffman, 1980). Then having played heavily on that association the permissive atmosphere was encouraged further with an assurance of confidentiality. Fontana and Frey (1994) contend that if the benefits of trust—candid insights—are to accrue to the interviewer then subjects should be guaranteed:

"Protection from harm (physical, emotional, or any other kind)." (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p.372)

Observing the recommendation of Hoffman it was stated explicitly that it was not one of the aims to portray either the individual or the organisation in a detrimental light, and that all confidences would be respected.

A permissive atmosphere is desirable because it encourages what Spradley (1979) referred to as a "free flow of information." As we have already noted in an earlier section Burgess (1984) likened interviews to conversations and Blum (1952) spoke of 'interview-conversations'. In the context of political behaviour in top management teams, permissive means first of all getting participants to admit that politics exist in their organisations, and secondly they personally engage in political activities. It was found that in addition to promising confidentiality and making an issue of the
professional or personal ties the researcher enjoyed with the individual or host organisation, exchanging stories of politics in organisations with the interviewee encouraged candour.

There is strong support in the literature that a two-way interview process elicits richer data than does the traditional survey type interview (Adler and Adler, 1992; Johnson, 1975; Scott, 1965; Wax, 1952). Commenting on one of her research student’s attempts to interview ‘elite’ groups using a one-way schedule, Fine (1994, p.73) suggests that they are usually articulate enough to present a “bump free story” if they so chose. The classic one-way scheduled interview is not sufficiently sophisticated to draw a more honest account. Ann Oakley (1981, p.49), writing on the need to engage with the interviewee, claims there can be “no intimacy without reciprocity.” She argued interviewers should be willing to divulge information in order to gain information and that doing so motivates the interviewee to be more honest and forthcoming with details they would be unlikely to reveal otherwise.

Neil Thames, the managing director who took part in the pilot study advocated a candid exchange of information because he believes it provides the interviewer with an opportunity to demonstrate they are highly knowledgeable about the research subject and worthy of serious participation and input. He further contended that a senior manager faced with an interviewer who eschews interaction and asks only those questions on the schedule, will quickly become bored and arbitrarily decide when they have given enough information. Thames posited that many researchers miss collecting rich data because they “choose not to work for it.” He concluded that interviewers “only get out what they put in.” Remarking on the one-way versus two-way debate Fontana and Frey (1994) commented:

“Interviewing is currently undergoing not only a methodological change but a much deeper one, related to self and other. The ‘other’ is no longer a distant, aseptic, quantified, sterilised, measured, categorised and catalogued faceless respondent, but has become a living human being...if we treat the other as a human being, we can no longer remain objective, faceless interviewers, but become human beings and must disclose ourselves as we try to learn about the other.” (Fontana and Frey, 1994, p.373-374)
A further benefit of the interactive interview, described by Dexter (1970, p.139) as the “transactional interview”, is that it can offset and even equalise the power differential between the interviewer and the interviewee. A number of authors including Finch (1984), Graham (1983) and Mishler (1986) have written about the issue from the traditional scheduled survey interview perspective in which power tends to reside with the interviewer because as instigators they attempt to determine the obligations of the interviewer whilst electing for non-disclosure themselves. However, Lee (1993, p.105) has remarked that in elite interview situations power is more likely to reside with the interviewee. Firstly, because they are usually senior individuals in their organisation and are therefore used to being in a position of authority, and secondly because they possess the knowledge the researcher seeks they are in a position to share or restrict it to the degree they chose.

The participants of the pilot study indicated that members of top management teams were likely to have no qualms about refusing to answer a particular line of questioning if they were unsure of the interviewer’s motives. Interaction and the exchange of sensitive, anonymous, information helps to make motives more transparent as well as assuring the respondent that they have not disclosed anything more sensitive than several other participants also have done. Indeed it was found that relaying highly sensitive, but anonymous and untraceable accounts, induced a sense of empathy which resulted in respondents opening up as they sought to demonstrate that they too had major political issues to deal with. For example, on informing one individual of a respondent who in previous employment had lied to auditors about the value of stock, he replied that only the week before he had to deal with an individual who was holding and possibly distributing cocaine on company premises. Thus it can be argued that reciprocity, in addition to facilitating empathy and intimacy, permits the researcher to demonstrate to the senior executive that they are a knowledgeable individual and worthy of serious input.

There are yet two further advantages to the interactive interview which need to be considered. Firstly, there is no need to establish a “front”, as advised by Measor (1985), who speaks of the classic one-way interview as an “unnatural situation”. He suggests that richness is gained by being natural rather than deceptive. Secondly, it helps to reduce the challenges to authority which Breakwell (1990) warns the survey type interviewer to expect since authority is usually an issue of little importance in a trusting, intimate and permissive atmosphere.
It can be concluded that bilateral semi-structured interviews can generate data from members of top management teams that is richer, more insightful and candid than can be captured by the traditional survey type interview. This is because the latter does not motivate the interviewee into giving extended replies or permit the interviewer to probe into partially revealed or alluded to areas. It was found that the desired permissive atmosphere could be created by establishing unambiguous parameters and promising confidentiality at the outset, and then engaging in reciprocity with regard to political stories and sensitive information during the interview.

Data analysis

Comprehensive notes were taken in the interviews in accordance with Fontana and Frey (1994) and Lofland (1971) who advised the interviewer to write everything down, irrespective of how important it seemed at the time. Heeding the advice of Yin (1984) the notes were transcribed within twenty-four hours. Content analysis was then used to analyse the transcripts.

Content analysis has several advantages. Firstly, it is unobtrusive and does not influence the replies of the respondent because it is conducted away from the interview setting (Krippendorf, 1980). Secondly, it synthesises qualitative aspects such as the finding of patterns in the respondent’s language with an attempt to quantify those patterns in terms of the frequency of words, phrases, sentences, themes, or paragraphs used (Carney, 1972; Krippendorf, 1980; Mostyn, 1985; Weber, 1990). It is reasoned that a higher count indicates a more significant pattern than does a low count. However, a high frequency may be the result of the interviewer posing leading questions so the approach is not without fault. A third advantage is that it uses the interviewee’s language and concepts to establish categories unlike questionnaires which are precoded using the researcher’s and thus introduce bias into the results. Fourthly, it is extremely useful for identifying specific areas of interest which can be chased up as ‘hot leads’ in a second or third round of interviews as was the case in this study. Additionally, the findings may suggest areas for future research.

Thematic units, as advocated by Holsti (1969), were used to conduct the content analysis rather than words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs which were rejected because respondent answers were relatively focused as a result of unambiguous parameters
having been established at the outset of the interview. Specialised software is available which automates the analysis but it was not used here because of the focused responses and the relatively small number of participants. Content analysis was therefore conducted manually.

Gorden's (1978) four step procedure as described by Mostyn (1985) was used as the framework for conducting content analysis:

“(1) listen and read critically; (2) [ask] probing questions of the data - what is the meaning?; (3) look for meaningful relationships; and (4) synthesize, arrive at some solution about the data.” (Mostyn, 1985, p.116) [parentheses added]

Berelson (1971) described content analysis as a “process of discovery, defining and redefining one’s ideas.” It has been argued that content analysis has a number of strengths. Nevertheless, it also has its limitations. In addition to the problem of leading questions referred to earlier, there is the possibility that an individual's responses may have been influenced by atypical events in the time immediately preceding the interview. Had they not occurred then the participant's responses may have been considerably different. This criticism is not unique to content analysis. It is a problem shared by other data capture techniques such as participant observation and questionnaires, and can only be offset when the research strategy adopts a longer time frame in which to conduct the study.

After careful consideration of the advantages and limitations it was determined that given the problems of access to top management teams, the sensitivity of political behaviour as a research topic, and the need to employ an elite interviewing strategy in order to collect candid anecdotal data, content analysis was thought to represent the most appropriate means of data analysis.

Following up 'hot leads': rich interviews revisited

It was argued in the previous section that one of the strengths of content analysis is its use in identifying areas of interest for further examination. Having completed the
analysis of fifty interview transcripts several areas emerged from the data. These included:

- The existence of a five stage life-cycle within large scale change proposal coalitions,
- Three coalition leader roles which evolved throughout the five stage life-cycle of the large scale change proposal coalition, and
- Four distinct approaches to building a large scale change proposal coalition, based on the hierarchical position of the coalition leader.

In order to explore further the areas of interest six participants who had provided particularly rich data on these topics in the original interviews were contacted and invited to take part in a two hour interview. The objective was to capture data in the form of anecdotal stories which fleshed out the findings of the initial analysis.

The interviews which took place in the participants' offices were subject to content analysis and the findings are presented in the results section. The decision to follow up the 'hot leads' was taken on the basis they strengthened the claims made from the initial content analysis.

Assessing the level of participant candour

The question facing every qualitative researcher who uses interviewing to investigate behaviour is 'how candid were the participants?' For those studying sensitive topics such as political behaviour the question becomes central to assessing the validity and relevance of the data collected. It can be argued that participants were candid in their responses for four reasons:

- There existed a relatively high level of trust between interviewer and interview because participants were selected on the basis of professional and personal ties,
- Sensitive off-the-record asides were commonplace,
- Non-verbal communication intimated high levels of enthusiasm and honesty, and
- Respondents volunteered more time and input than was requested.
Participant selection on the basis of professional and personal ties

The alternative merits of detachment and intimacy between interviewer and interviewee have been debated by a number of writers. For example, Wolff (1950, p. 404) cited Simmel’s proposition that “the stranger often receives the most surprising openness — confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional.” Similarly, Oakley (1981) though ultimately advocating intimacy, contends that the single interview encourages an “ethic of detachment” which in turn facilitates penetrative questioning because the interviewer is not required to build a relationship since they will not meet the interviewee again. Advocates of detachment also believe that ‘distance’ between the interviewer and interviewee improves the accuracy, completeness and representativeness of the data obtained because the latter does not try to please the former by “giving the right answers” (Dexter, 1970).

Supporters of intimacy on the other hand suggest that a close relationship between interviewer and interviewee is more likely to produce an honest account because once trust has been established the interviewee will impart more sensitive and informative data because they believe their contribution will be treated fairly. Laslett and Rapoport (1975) have also argued that there is a need to avoid the “surface” account which is typically given in a one-off detached interview. Ribben (1989) noted Cornwell’s (1984) discussion of Douglas’s (1971) distinction between public and private accounts to argue that “it will take...quite a lengthy research relationship, before you can hear a private rather than a public account,” (Ribbens, 1989, p. 580).

Selecting participants on the basis of professional and personal ties as advocated by Buchanan et al (1988) and Hoffman (1980) enabled several positive attributes of both detachment and intimacy to be derived from a single interview. Interviewees were not aware of the researcher’s opinions on political behaviour and so were unlikely to give what they thought were the “right answers”. However, because of the professional and personal ties they were willing to trust that their confidences would not be abused. A supposition supported by Hoffman (1980, p. 50) who remarked that her respondents thought she “would ‘understand’ their perspective and would present their points of view ‘fairly’.” This claim can be substantiated further with several examples.

George Lark, a managing director who knows this researcher’s parents well, stated at the beginning of the interview, “ask me whatever you want, you’re one of the family”. Luke
Sparrow a chairman with more than forty years experience said “I know your father so I know I can trust you.” Explaining why he could “open up to me”, one of the chief executives, Nigel Kingfisher, remarked: “Your uncle and I always sink a pint whenever he’s in town and I know he thinks a lot of you. That’s good enough for me. Fire away!” Such comments were typical rather than atypical and meant that after a short preamble establishing educational background and the purpose and nature of the interview, the questioning could begin.

With regard to the researcher’s professional ties with five participant organisations, one had been the subject of a consultancy/research undertaking with Professor David Buchanan in 1993. The newly appointed chief executive commented, “You have a track record. You were alright to us then, so I assume you will be now.” Having a ‘track record’ helped gain access to another top management team which had previously contributed management time to the researcher’s final year undergraduate dissertation research. The third company which is one of the largest companies in the world as measured by revenues had employed the author for nine months during his undergraduate studies. A letter to Roger Oak, the company’s chief executive officer, explaining the research needs received an invitation to interview him and several members of his top management team. On reassuring him the researcher had no journalistic ambitions and everything he said would be treated in confidence he replied in a relaxed manner, “we have been good to you, I trust you will be fair with us”. The issue was closed and the interview began. The fourth, fifth and sixth organisations were the result of contacts established during the period of employment with the third company.

Sensitive off-the-record asides

It can be argued that if individuals were concerned the information they supplied would be used indiscreetly, then they would conceal or at least be less candid in their responses so as to be perceived in a more favourable light. They would not disclose sensitive and potentially highly damaging details that conveyed a negative image of themselves or their organisation. Exhibit 4.4 provides four off-the-record accounts offered by interviewees. Their identities have been withheld.
Exhibit 4.4 - Sensitive off-the-record accounts

Account 1 - Lying to auditors

Interviewee: "During my time with another company I lied to the auditors about how much stock we had and the value of it. It meant that the company remained solvent when technically it wasn’t."

Interviewer: "What happened?"

Interviewee: "Neither the auditors or the stock exchange found out so the company maintained its credit rating, which saved it tens of millions of dollars in loan repayments. The share price stayed up too so it deterred predators."

Interviewer: "Looking back do you think what you did was ethical?"

Interviewee: "It was illegal but it was ethical because I saved thousands of people’s jobs. The end justified the means so I would do it again tomorrow."

Account 2 - Cocaine on company premises

"Let me give you an example of the day-to-day problems I have to manage alongside change. Last week we found out that someone has been holding cocaine on the premises. At the moment we are trying to ascertain if he has been distributing it to other staff. What do we do? Legally we should inform the police, but if we do that the press will find out and have a field day. I am sure you have heard the saying about washing your dirty linen in public. Well obviously we don’t want to, but how do we protect our employees, the reputation of the firm and the guy himself? It’s ironic but we will probably pay him to leave and keep his mouth shut."
Account 3 - Terrorism in the Palestine

“I was at Harvard attending their Advanced Management Programme and this eighty-something professor was prowling backwards and forwards in the pit asking forty of us who had come from all over the world what we thought about the use and abuse of power in organisations. Suddenly this guy stood up and announced himself as one of the heads of the Israeli secret service. He took the floor and began to tell us a story that put into perspective my problem of whether or not to sack a long term secretary who had been falsifying her time sheets.”

He continued:

“The Israeli secret service had been trying unsuccessfully to capture the head of Hezbollah for years when unexpectedly one day they were tipped off unexpectedly with information about the exact route and time he would be travelling by car. As I said they wanted to take this guy out for years but the tip-off also said that his wife and new-born child would be with him. He had been responsible for the deaths of hundreds if not thousands of Israelis over the years so they decided to kill him. They called up three helicopter gunships and ambushed the car with rockets.”

He concluded:

“The Israeli said that the only way he sleeps is to think that his wife and child died instantly. I tell you the place was silent for minutes. Now for god’s sake don’t put my name to this because it is a small world and if it is read by a sympathiser I could be used to get revenge on my friend!”
Exhibit 4.4 - Sensitive off-the-record accounts (continued)

Account 4 - Sacrificial lambs on the alter of organisational change

“I know from my discussions with Geoff (pseudonym for the now departed chairman and chief executive) that during our last transformation he used what can only be described as sacrificial lambs to implement the most difficult and dirtiest change. These poor bastards were junior members of the top management team, just in their forties. They hardly saw their families because they gave everything to the company. Anyway Geoff used to call them in and fill them up with all this crap about how they would be promoted if they got the change in quickly and successfully. ‘Don’t worry about making enemies’ he would say, ‘you have my patronage’.”

After a pausing for a moment he continued:

“Well these chaps would go and do what he said but they would piss so many people off that even though the change went through their position became untenable because no-one would work with them. Geoff would then ask them to leave for the sake of unity. I still see two of them. One has done well, and is high up in an American bank, but he is still bitter about what Geoff did to him. The other one hasn’t worked since. Mid forties, no job, his wife has left him and he sees his kids one weekend in three.”

Such asides despite their differing degrees of relevance to the study of power and politics are not the kind of disclosure made by someone who is concerned that they will be handled indiscreetly. Lee (1993) has argued that self censorship is an important attribute of the skilled researcher, particularly if the intention is to maintain access for future research, as it was in this case. Adler and Adler (1989, 1992) concealed identities and withheld information about the findings from their investigations into the drug dealing and smuggling network established by one North American collegiate basketball team. In addition to wanting to maintain access rights, they also claimed loyalty to their interview subjects. They argued that to disclose particular elements of the data captured would have caused distress to many of the participants.
Non-verbal communication

An important part of assessing the level of participant candour and the third of the four reasons presented here, is what Breakwell (1990, p.81) and Gorden (1980, p.335) refer to as non-verbal communication. Gorden notes there are essentially four types:

"Proxemic communication is the use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes, chronemics communication is the use of pacing of speech and length of silence in conversation, kinesic communication includes any body movements or postures, and paralinguistic communication includes all the variations in volume, pitch and quality of voice." (Gorden, 1980, p.335)

Using these four terms it can be argued that the non-verbal communication of participants was indicative of high levels of candour.

Beginning with proxemic communication and the use of interpersonal space. Of the fifty members of top management teams interviewed, forty-six had secondary seating arrangements (conference tables, coffee tables and sofas) in their offices. Of those, thirty-two chose to conduct the interview at the secondary site rather than on opposite sides of their main desk. Of the fourteen who did not begin the interview at the secondary seating arrangements twelve interrupted the interview to suggest the discussion continue in the more informal and comfortable secondary seating arrangements. Typical reasons given by the participants for doing so were that they were finding it "fascinating", "enjoyable" and wanted to spend more time than the ninety minutes which they had agreed to originally.

With regard to chronemics communication there were relatively few periods of silence during the interviews. The only ones being when respondents were asked to think of examples which illustrated the political behaviour of colleagues. Speech tended to be evenly spaced although in terms of paralinguistic factors voices increased in volume and strength as participants became more animated. Examples of kinesic communication include the tendency for interviewees responding to highly sensitive questions to intensify eye contact and became increasingly mobile. Sitting forward, gesticulating with their arms, even standing up to pace around the room whilst recounting a story or
their opinion of a colleague’s behaviour. In one instance a senior manager leaned across
the desk until her face was a matter of inches from my own:

“Let me tell you how it really is here. They all hate each other’s guts. Oh,
they’re nice to each other’s face but talk to them in private and it’s all
about covering their own ass while exposing everyone else’s.” (Stacey
Trout, senior manager)

Such remarks, in addition to revealing the interviewee’s opinion of the political
landscape in her organisation’s top management team, appear to support the claim that
organisational politics is an emotive and sensitive topic for discussion. However, it
 tended to ignite highly animated and often lengthy discourses rather than a battening
down of the hatches and a refusal to admit engagement for the purpose of achieving
personal and organisational goals. Only one person ended the interview prematurely and
the body language usually associated with unease and lying such as an inability to
maintain eye contact, fidgeting from side-to-side in a chair, rubbing of the face and
playing with one’s clothing (Davies, 1991), were not observed.

Indeed several participants concurred with a number of writers (Brannen, 1988; Buchanan
et al, 1988; Faraday and Plummer, 1979; Lee, 1981) who claim that participants in
studies on sensitive or secretive topics can find the interview a cathartic experience. It
was noted earlier that political behaviour is rarely talked about by practitioners and when
it is, it is often associated with immoral or unethical behaviour. Therefore, to be able to
discuss political behaviour openly in the context of serious academic enquiry into large
scale organisational change was for many of the respondents their first experience, and
in the words of several “interesting and enjoyable.” One director, Patrick Queen,
remarked “I can’t say anything to my colleagues about it or I would get stuck with labels
such as ‘slick’ and ‘self seeking’, and although my wife listens to me she doesn’t really
know what it is like here.”

Respondents volunteering additional time and input

The fourth reason why it can be argued that high levels of accuracy, completeness and
representativeness were captured in the data, is the amount of additional time and input
participants were willing to commit to the research.
The level of interest was such that the average length of interview was two hours and twenty-four minutes, with the shortest at one hour and fifteen minutes and the longest at six hours in a single session. Indeed, with regard to the six hour interview Bert Starling ordered in refreshments so that "we didn't have to waste time going downstairs to the restaurant." Exhibit 4.5 conveys the range of times that participants were interviewed for.

It is important to note that the fieldwork was designed around a total of seventy-five hours of interviews. In fact, one hundred and twenty hours of interviews were conducted, with the average interview lasting two hours and twenty-four minutes: fifty-four minutes more than the requested one hour and thirty minutes. This also adds weight to the claim that the interviews generated high levels of co-operation and issues of substance, worthy of serious academic consideration.

It can be argued that a member of a top management team who is uncomfortable or bored by the research topic is unlikely to spend more time than was asked for. Similarly, it is unlikely that with the time pressures senior managers work under they would choose to extend an interview to provide inaccurate data. It is more feasible to suggest that they would curtail the interview. Only Colin Salmon was interviewed for less than ninety

![Exhibit 4.5 - The distribution frequency of participant interview duration](image-url)

147
minutes because he said that he had another appointment which had been brought forward and could not be rescheduled. Indeed, after over-running by fifteen minutes the one hour allocated, his next appointment was shown in as the interview was concluded satisfactorily.

Once again, on the premise that participants were under no obligation to continue their input those who offered to be interviewed for a second and third times were clearly doing so out of choice. It is unlikely that someone would offer to participate in further research in order to lie or mislead. All fifty participants concluded the interview with an offer of further participation if necessary and a request to see the results section of the thesis. As we will see in the next section of this chapter the network of participants has been maintained for future research initiatives.

Post interview correspondence

Letters of appreciation

Letters of appreciation were sent to each participant within twenty-four hours of the interview. Arrangements for sending the results section of the thesis were also detailed. On leaving the interview specific details were recorded which were then used to customise each letter. Ten participants proposed working with the researcher to develop a political tool-kit for senior managers, and five managers asked for advice on specific change management issues.

Network maintenance

In addition to revisiting a number of participants for second and third interviews to follow up ‘hot leads’, the network has been maintained by telephone and letter correspondence. Commenting on the need to manage productive relationships one director who volunteered to take part in future research initiatives remarked:

“You have to continuously refresh your network or it will die. Take any opportunity you can to speak to them. Let them know you are around and available and don’t ring them just when you want something. Those who
put nothing into the relationship most likely will get nothing out.”
(Geoffrey Silver, director)

Following this advice has meant that the network has not only been maintained, it has been expanded as existing members have introduced the researcher to other members of top management teams.

**Conclusions, reflections and lessons learned**

It can be argued that on concluding investigations one of the most valuable questions a researcher can ask is ‘how could the research have been improved?’. Although retrospective analysis is central to action research it is uncommon to read an academic text in which the author laments a missed opportunity or contends that a methodological modification would have yielded data of greater insight or relevancy. Oakley’s (1981, p.41) remark that “interviewing is rather like a marriage: everybody knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed door there is a world of secrets”, could well be applied to research in general. Perhaps because it is a luxury of the PhD student starting out on the academic research ladder, it is expected that mistakes will be made. Sanders (1980) remarked that it is not possible to “learn the ropes” of being a researcher without the misfortune of experiencing “rope burns”. In this spirit the final section will attempt to identify what ‘could have been’ and the methodological lessons learned.

The methodology was driven by two issues: the difficulty in gaining access to members of top management teams, and the sensitivity of political behaviour as a research topic. The problem of access was overcome by adopting an opportunistic approach which involved the researcher making use of professional and personal ties with senior managers in order to establish a sample of fifty participants. However, this meant that methodological purity in the form of random sampling was compromised, and because of the relatively small sample size quantitative techniques were also rejected. Thus, an opportunity was missed to integrate quantitative and qualitative methodologies which, if they had been supportive of one another in their findings, undoubtedly would have meant that stronger claims could have been made from the data.
The decision to use professional and personal ties was taken for two reasons. Firstly, by utilising a network of fifty individuals known to either the researcher, his father or uncle, every participant was known to be a member of their respective top management teams, and each was known to be a key decision maker capable of proposing large scale organisational change. Secondly, because of the established relationship that existed with participants, either directly or indirectly, there was a high level of trust and rapport which helped to overcome the problem of investigating an issue as sensitive as political behaviour. Thus, it was determined in conjunction with the participants of the pilot study, there was a greater likelihood of capturing candid and insightful data using professional and personal ties, than by using random sampling techniques, which although methodologically pure, could not guarantee that key decision makers had been accessed until the interview was under way.

The lesson learnt from this is that although researchers often strive for methodological purity by random sampling, it does not always follow that it will generate data of the same high quality as can be captured using non-probability methods such as professional and personal ties. However, non-probability methods are not a soft option. Indeed if any claim can be made, it is that the justifications for adopting such an approach must be more fully explained, rigorous and robust.

Having dealt with the issue of sampling and methodological purity, a further question can be posed: 'was the access fully exploited?'.

This inevitably focuses attention on the questions asked of the participants and the instrument used to ask them. In terms of the questions posed it can be argued it was appropriate to reject Eisenhardt and Bourgeois’s (1988) strategy of investigating the political behaviour of top management teams in relation to a single large scale change decision. Each person had different levels of involvement and input into decisions so some individuals would have yielded highly useful data while others would have been able to yield data of negligible value. Thus it can be posited that in this situation the access is not being fully exploited. Secondly, the researcher needed to have access to all the members of the team who were involved in the single decision. This was not a facility enjoyed on this occasion. The researcher’s access ranged from just one member of a top management team to fifteen members, but then the unit of analysis for this study was the individual in the role of coalition leader, not the top management team as a group, as was the case in Eisenhardt and Bourgeois’s (1988) study.
The pilot study was found to be an extremely valuable and worthwhile experience. The five participants offered practical advice on gaining access, interview style, question format and managing the researcher’s identity. With three of the five participants holding PhDs their advice was particularly useful from an academic perspective. Without the recommendations of top management team members it is likely the one hundred per cent acceptance rate would not have been achieved. The interviews also enabled the researcher to practice the elite style interview method in a safe environment. The five individuals provided feedback and coaching on how to engage members of top management teams in a candid discussion of their political behaviour.

Having discussed the methodology design and construction for research into the political behaviour of top management team members in the context of proposing large scale change, let us turn to a consideration of the results.
Part two

Results, discussion and recommendations
Participant organisations and interviewees

Researcher’s note on anonymity

In providing candid accounts of political behaviour in large scale change proposal coalitions, top management team members who participated in the research expressed strong concern about how their responses would be treated. They sought reassurance that all input would be treated confidentially and anonymously, and that it would not be possible for a reader to connect any remark to an individual or organisation.

To honour this commitment aliases have been used to conceal the identity of participants in the reporting of the methodology design and construction, and the results. The following page provides the names of the participant organisations. The two subsequent pages give the list of aliases and their organisational titles in hierarchical and alphabetical order. To secure the anonymity the list is not grouped by organisation, so a director of one organisation is placed next to an individual with the same title from another organisation.

Appendix B offers a brief description of each organisation’s activities.
The organisations

Anglian Water PLC
Barclaycard Limited
BP PLC
Brent Walker Limited
Britannia Building Society Limited
Gallaher Tobacco Limited
Karen Earl Limited
Olivetti Limited
Perfect Pizza Limited
Scott’s Hotels Limited
SWALEC PLC
Syntex Pharmaceuticals Limited
Whyte & Mackay Limited
Yorkshire Building Society Limited

Note: Organisation names are those at the time of research. Flotations, acquisitions and mergers mean that some no longer use the same name.
## The interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alias</th>
<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Luke Sparrow</td>
<td>Chairman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roger Oak</td>
<td>Group chief executive officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Carp</td>
<td>Chief executive officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simon Falcon</td>
<td>Chief executive officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigel Kingfisher</td>
<td>Chief executive officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurt Nightingale</td>
<td>Chief executive officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Wren</td>
<td>Chief executive officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Ash</td>
<td>Chief executive officer - geographic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Yew</td>
<td>Chief executive officer - geographic region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Kestrel</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richard King</td>
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<td>George Lark</td>
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<td>Colin Salmon</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bert Starling</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annie Swallow</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Derek Barbel</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scott Bishop</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Andre Char</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<td>Michael Gold</td>
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<td>Fred Hawk</td>
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<td>Geoffrey Silver</td>
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<td>Paul Swan</td>
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<td>Fraser Tench</td>
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<td>Dick Tern</td>
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<td>Gordon Black</td>
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<td>Francis Elm</td>
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155
<table>
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<td>Charles Rook</td>
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<td>Steven White</td>
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<td>Robert Willow</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann Cherry</td>
<td>Head of function</td>
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<td>Tom Chub</td>
<td>Head of function</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mark Finch</td>
<td>Head of function</td>
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<td>Anthony Perch</td>
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<td>Sam Raven</td>
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<td>Ian Roach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Owen Rudd</td>
<td>Head of function</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phillip Birch</td>
<td>Senior manager</td>
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<td>Ray Bream</td>
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<td>James Brown</td>
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<td>Graham Dace</td>
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<td>Andrew Minnow</td>
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<td>Leonard Plum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sally Ruffe</td>
<td>Senior manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stacey Trout</td>
<td>Senior manager</td>
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**Pilot study interviewees**

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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Title</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neil Thames</td>
<td>Managing director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Josh Severn</td>
<td>Director</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joe Clyde</td>
<td>General manager</td>
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<td>Niall Trent</td>
<td>General manager</td>
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<td>Ian Tay</td>
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Chapter 5
Life-cycle phases and leadership roles in large scale change proposal coalitions

"Designing a major change effort takes time and as the coalition evolves, going through emotional ups and downs, you have to modify your style and manage the journey." (Roger Oak, CEO)

Introduction

This chapter presents findings in relation to line of enquiry #1 which sought to investigate whether or not large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams followed a life-cycle, and if so, the characteristics of each phase. It also presents findings regarding line of enquiry #2 which was concerned with identifying and describing the variations in the roles of a coalition leader across the life-cycle phases. We will present evidence to support the claim that large scale change proposal coalitions follow a five phase life-cycle model within which coalition leaders adopt three leadership roles. To the extent the three subsequent chapters provide an in-depth examination of the micro-behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader, the intention here is to establish a context by examining the evolutionary process, and the role of the coalition leader within it. The findings constitute a pioneering breakthrough into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions, and the roles of a coalition leader. No other empirical research has been conducted into these formative stages of the change process.

One hundred and twenty hours of interviews conducted with fifty members of top management teams in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries found evidence to suggest that large scale change proposal coalitions followed a five phase life-cycle. The phases are:
Phase 1 - Initiate,
Phase 2 - Build,
Phase 3 - Sustain,
Phase 4 - Dissolve, and
Phase 5 - Capture and transfer learning.

Furthermore, participant responses indicated that within these five phases coalition leaders tended to perform three primary, and typically sequential, roles. The roles are:

- Builder,
- Sustainer, and
- Dissolver.

Before examining the three roles let us consider the process in which they were used.

**A five phase life-cycle model**

Analysis of the results suggested the majority of large scale change proposal coalitions discussed by respondents conformed to a five phase life-cycle. As noted in the introduction the five phases can be labelled usefully: initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer learning. Exhibit 5.1 illustrates the phases and the importance of capturing and transferring learning to subsequent large scale change proposal coalitions for the purpose of improving alignment and cohesiveness, and therefore the likelihood of submitting a proposal that is approved for implementation.

**Phase 1 - Initiate**

A member of a top management team must bring an idea for large scale change to the attention of colleagues if it is to move from concept through design to implementation. The coalition building process was found generally to begin in one of two ways. Either an individual would have an idea that was entirely new to the organisation, or secondly and more commonly, the idea had been discussed already in sections of the top management team but no action had been taken. Commenting on the latter Roger Oak remarked:
"I think coalitions usually start with a common view being held by a few members of the executive team. What was probably an off-the-cuff remark starts people thinking and a few days or weeks later it’s mentioned again. Before too long a few people come to thinking maybe there’s a significant opportunity. At this point most ideas die because people are too busy, or they don’t want the hassle. Those that make it through are thanks to someone who creates energy and enthusiasm, and is prepared to stand up and say 'we should do this'.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

Concurring with this sentiment, Brian Carp asserted:

“Someone has to take the bull by the horns if it seems a great opportunity. I am always amazed at how many people are prepared to sign up once someone else takes the initiative.” (Brian Carp, CEO)

To generate interest the respondents stressed the importance of selling the idea. Selling strategies tended to focus on promoting the benefits for the organisation, but coalition initiators would also emphasise the personal benefits for individuals who took a leading role in designing the change. At this stage of a coalition’s life-cycle initiators were not usually in a position to offer tangible incentives since there was no certainty a coalition
would be formed. The principal activity can be described best as 'sounding out' a few potential key members. Therefore, initiators tended to draw attention to the high level of visibility within the top management team the potential initiative would likely enjoy due to the magnitude of intent. The inference being that coalition members could expect to enjoy a high profile amongst senior colleagues.

An important factor in a large scale change idea finding support in the top management team was the issue of timing. The prevailing organisational environment, both internal and external, strongly influenced whether an idea would be accepted as legitimate and encouraged to proceed to the next phase. Respondents argued that the two most important elements of timing were the flexibility of the current strategy and the degree to which the idea conformed with or opposed the organisation leader's vision. The other most cited reason for coalition formation was agreement on the appropriateness of the proposed change in confronting the issues facing the organisation. Other important factors included pressure from investors to find new opportunities to improve performance, maximise current and anticipated future profit streams, and the desire for strategic reorientation amongst colleagues in the top management team. The following series of remarks are indicative of the broader body of opinion:

"It is quite common for someone to have a great idea that falls flat because it is simply the wrong time. If the mood at the top is not conducive it is a waste of time." (Robert Willow, general manager)

"Great company politicians and leaders are acutely aware of expectations, both in the City and amongst their own managers. They know when their position is safe or under threat, and the best ones know how to play their hand and when they need to pull an ace from their sleeve." (Scott Bishop, director)

"If management attention is focused in a different direction you have no chance. The most successful ideas, in terms of winning support quickly, are those that confront the major issues facing the business. If you can create a burning platform, people will jump into your boat." (Geoffrey Silver, director)
These contentions appear to find support in the literature. For example, Mintzberg (1984) argued that if the external context was favourable to an internal proposal it was more likely to be accepted by the organisation's key decision makers. Pfeffer (1992) commented that timing was a critical success factor in winning and mobilising support around strategic issues. Pennings (1980) and Scherer (1967) found that mature or stagnant industries represented a fertile ground for entrepreneurial propositions.

**Phase 2 - Build**

Once an idea for large scale change had received initial support from a few individuals, the next phase was to build a coalition of supporters drawn from the top management team. The purpose of the coalition was to design an initiative that convinced a critical mass of the key decision makers the proposal should be implemented. Evidence was collected which suggests that coalition member selection was determined largely by the magnitude and complexity of the change to be designed. In situations where the organisation would undergo planning aimed at making radical improvements to its current operations, members tended to be recruited from the areas of the business that would be affected. However, if the business intended to transform and reorient itself in a new direction, the membership was more diverse. Individuals who could be described as hierarchical heavyweights were teamed with those who had a strong track record in designing successful strategies for major change, and experts in the markets the organisation planned to enter. Those individuals with formal seniority, the hierarchical heavyweights, were invited to join because of their ability to advocate the change credibly at the highest level. Individuals who enjoyed informal seniority and those with a proven track record were enlisted because of their ability to firstly, incorporate learnings into the proposal and secondly, leverage their experience to influence key decision makers. Experts were used because of the technical knowledge and insights they could bring. The rationale behind the composition of coalitions was captured succinctly by William Wren who remarked:

"If what is being planned is more of the same but better, then you use those currently in control of the areas in question. As no-one is threatening their turf, confrontation is unlikely and anyway, they know their business best. On the other hand, if the proposal is for something completely new, politics becomes an issue since there will be winners and
losers. Therefore, it is vital you cover all the bases. You need some of the most senior people, you need people who have been around a long time and have the opinions listened to, and you need enough undisputed experts to make sure the plan is bullet proof.” (William Wren, CEO)

Members were also chosen on the basis that the coalition leader or key members had previously enjoyed a productive working relationship with them, or alternatively they trusted their judgement and motives. The early stages of coalition formation was found to be conducted in almost all instances by the leader alone. However, once the coalition had several members, the decision to approach an individual for support tended to be a collective one.

Evidence was also gathered which indicated that the first person a coalition builder approached for support was determined largely by the builders’ hierarchical position in the top management team. Four different approaches were identified. The chairman, chief executives and managing directors demonstrated one approach, while directors adopted a second, general managers a third and heads of function and senior managers a fourth.

The chairman, eight chief executives and six managing directors tended to approach an individual with informal seniority to be the first member. The consensus was that winning the support of an executive respected for their experience, perceived wisdom and membership of various networks sent a positive message to other key constituencies within and around the top management team. On the other hand, the thirteen directors would solicit the support of an expert in the first instance. They asserted the office of director invested sufficient decision making power in them to develop large scale change proposals without seeking permission from the chief executive. Experts were recruited because for directors, the most important objective at the outset of coalition formation was the need to demonstrate the viability of the proposal. The directors suggested that winning support was easier with the backing of experts. The five general managers unanimously agreed that the first person they sought support from was the chief executive or managing director. They argued that a public endorsement from the most senior member of the organisation improved the credibility of the proposal. The seventeen respondents who held positions as heads of function or senior managers attempted to recruit an individual with informal seniority to act as the first sounding board for how the chief executive and other key decision makers were likely to receive
the proposition. The full sequence of each of the four approaches is discussed comprehensively in the following chapter which focuses on the building phase of a coalition's life-cycle.

Coalitions were built at various speeds. Time frames ranged from several days to several months. Respondents across all hierarchical levels suggested the pace of coalition formation was contingent upon the criticality of the proposed change to the business and the immediacy with which it would impact. Coalitions were often established more quickly if the change proposal was critical to the short-term success of the organisation. However, proposals which recommended the rapid adoption of major structural changes acted as a brake on formation as top management team members jockeyed for positions that protected and promoted their own interests.

Criticality and immediacy of change were two factors that contributed to the emergence of opposition. Large scale change proposals that intended to reconfigure the power structure within the top management team tended to provoke the formation of rival coalitions which submitted alternative options. The first two of the following comments were provided by respondents who had witnessed opposition being mounted to their coalitions. The second two remarks were made by individuals who had established coalitions to counter the intentions of those proposing structural change:

"Once you go public to the executive about the need to restructure you can bet your bottom dollar that resistance will begin. This makes it important to get your pre-emptive strike in first. I always draw up a list of who I want in the coalition, and I approach the key people first before somebody else wins their ear." (Andre Char, director)

"I think it is quite useful to know who stands where. Open opposition is much easier to deal with than subversive opposition. 'Better the devil you know...' sort of argument. I don't think I have ever been involved in strategic change when there haven't been at least two opposing camps." (Michael Gold, director)

"...it was quite a simple decision really. I thought my division was being threatened unfairly so I put together a coalition to recommend a different strategy. If I had sat by and watched we would have been stuffed. Instead
we are still here, and are now one of the most profitable divisions. I wouldn’t say this to anyone here, but it probably did give us a kick up the backside, so in the end it wasn’t a bad thing.” (Patrick Queen, director)

“Executives are always going to have different view on how things should be run. That’s what we are paid for. I didn’t agree with Ronald’s [name changed] idea so I proposed a different course of action.” (Sam Raven, senior manager) [parentheses added]

The consensus amongst participants was that although competing coalitions caused tensions in top management teams, they also encouraged rival factions to improve the rigour and robustness of their proposals. It was claimed that in most cases conflicts were resolved once a winning proposal had been successfully implemented. Coalition building is discussed in more depth in chapter six.

Phase 3 - Sustain

With a coalition established, its members began to design the large scale change proposal. The most effective coalitions were found to be those that were aligned and cohesive. If a coalition’s members were unified in their objective and approach and worked together in a team-like manner, they had a greater likelihood of submitting a winning proposal than coalitions without these features. Interviewees who had been members of aligned and cohesive coalitions described the experience with adjectives such as urgent, exciting, focused and co-ordinated. The following remarks project an image of resolute co-operation:

“I cannot think of a more enjoyable way of working than to be a vital cog in a well oiled wheel. There was an air of anticipation because we knew we were going to make a difference.” (Andrew Minnow, senior manager)

“People become very intense, and goal driven. Everybody draws on each others’ strengths. It is a huge learning experience.” (James Brown, senior manager)
"We had daily meetings and progress updates. We did our project risk assessments, we mapped out deliverables and designed activities accordingly. We had all the angles covered. We always felt in control.”
(David Knight, director)

One of the most notable characteristics of coalitions during the sustaining phase was that the morale of members tended to ebb and flow in response to several factors. This was particularly so in coalitions that were not aligned and cohesive. The determinants of morale included dissension within the coalition, the fortunes of opposition coalitions, and resistance from individuals in the top management team. With regard to the first of these it was found that in coalitions other than those which exhibited aligned and focused characteristics, interviewees reported that the coalition leader had to spend a significant percentage of their total time on sustaining the coalition. Respondents suggested that members engaged in dissenting behaviour for three key reasons. Firstly, if the change proposal was highly contentious. Secondly, if members were pressured by colleagues in the top management team to leave the coalition or join another initiative. Thirdly, if the coalition culture became one in which individuals sought to maximise their self-interest. The following selection of comments provide support for these assertions:

"People are emotional beings and transformations hurt people. Fear of the unknown and an unwillingness to damage relationships, make it easy to see why some individuals baulk at having a hand in the execution of friends and colleagues.” (Graham Dace, senior manager)

"I have been in situations where I have been invited to leave one coalition and join another. When the person who asks is more senior, or it is someone you respect or are friends with, it takes guts to say no and put your career and friendships at risk. People get nervy, and some leave.” (Charles Rook, general manager)

"I think the worst type of group to be in is one where everyone is out for themselves. As soon as it becomes known that one person is doing it, everybody else dives in to see what they can get. In my experience it is a downward spiral from there on and there is little chance of coming up with a proposal that is likely to beat off the others.” (Gordon Black, general manager)
The second apparent reason for swings in members' morale were the fortunes of opposition coalitions. Respondents described how members of coalitions would engage in gamesmanship in order to unsettle rivals. Accounts were given of individuals spreading rumours about the 'real' intentions of coalition members. The most common was the claim that large numbers of job losses were a hidden part of the proposal that would be announced only after the proposal had been approved for implementation. A more personalised tactic was to create a rumour that the coalition leader along with other key members planned to remove other coalition members from the top management team and even the organisation, once the proposal had been accepted. Justifying such behaviour, George Lark explained:

"I am sure it does sound unethical to an outsider but you have to remember we are playing for high stakes. People's futures are up for grabs. Now what's that quote...'The meek shall inherit the earth', yeah that's right, what the winners decide to leave!" (George Lark, managing director)

The third assertion from interviewees regarding the ebb and flow of coalition members' morale was the resistance of individuals in the top management team. In the course of preparing a proposal, members of the coalition had to work with colleagues who were outside the coalition. Market data, financial projections, operational strategies, company alliances, and new product development plans were some of the more typical information requests. Executives who believed they were likely to lose out under the plans were often reluctant to co-operate. Colin Salmon commented:

"You begin to think you are trying to make water travel uphill." (Colin Salmon, managing director)

Coalition members found meetings difficult to arrange, documents mislaid, income projections hastily revised upwards, strategies re-crafted, and staff advised to ignore information gathering requests.

This analysis appears to paint a bleak picture of coalition life, but the evidence suggests that sustaining coalitions is a tense time for members, rival coalition members and top management team colleagues alike. It appears that large scale change proposals which threaten the power structure stimulate conflict, as individuals who stand to lose out in the changes battle to protect their self-interests. It is an acknowledgement of the strain
caused between people who have to work together in both their everyday duties and on large scale change initiatives, that the consensus amongst interviewees was for coalitions to be dissolved as soon as practically possible once a decision on the proposal had been taken. A comprehensive discussion on the findings regarding sustaining coalitions is presented in chapter seven.

Phase 4 - Dissolve

Coalition dissolution tended to be a deliberate affair conducted by the chief executive officer and coalition leader, unless both roles were occupied by the same individual. Large scale change design initiatives were high profile projects, and members of successful coalitions, expected to be rewarded for their input. Participants in unsuccessful submissions were keen to extract themselves with minimum damage to their careers. It is important to stress that in many cases unsuccessful bids were not viewed as failures by the top management teams, since their rivalry had improved the quality of the successful bid. Roger Oak provided support for this contention when he asserted:

“It is my belief that the purpose of coalitions is to design strategic change options. Whether they are implemented there and then is not important. We put them on the shelf to be used if and when appropriate. We all need to accept that options are perishable and have a limited shelf life, but if we learn something from each effort then it is has been worthwhile.” (Roger Oak, Group CEO)

Turning his attention to the issue of dissolution he suggested:

“People, either as individuals or small groups, can become very powerful when designing the future of the firm. There is a danger they introduce an unhealthy dynamic into the top management team if they are allowed to exert undue influence over the strategic process. Colleagues would become resentful, and rightly so. Therefore, it is important to disband a coalition quickly and efficiently.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

He continued:
"My management team is successful because it is stable. Everyone accepts they will get an opportunity to work on these projects, and they all recognise that some will be taken forward and some won’t. People know that to progress any higher they have to prove themselves many times in a range of areas and roles. The crucial point to get across is that everyone signs up to these rules because they are naturally fair. It is my job to make sure that stability is maintained.” (Roger Oak, Group CEO)

Participants argued that successful coalitions allowed to continue intact, often re-configured the existing power structure within the organisation. As a consequence of this top management team members would engage in destructive political behaviours in an attempt to restore the status quo or improve their position. Reductions in co-operation, teamwork and information sharing were the most frequently cited examples. Executives took umbrage at having their decision making powers eroded or usurped, and claimed they were usually a precursor to structural change. The consensus was that coalitions which became permanent were dysfunctional for organisational performance. The majority of interviewees also concurred with Roger Oak’s comment that to gain promotion to the most senior ranks of the top management team, individuals had to demonstrate large scale change design ability on a number of occasions. This served to encourage coalition members to seek new opportunities sooner rather than later, and so acted as a stimulant for dissolution.

Dissolution of successful coalitions was characterised by members negotiating for reward. Examples included pay rises, bonuses, share options and new roles and responsibilities. Commenting on this Patrick Queen stated:

“If it is the third or fourth time you have played a key role in a coalition, and on each occasion the proposal was a good one, then it is right that you are recognised. Negotiating skills are important because in most companies, you get rewarded with as little as it takes to keep you. If you know you are good and that you have options outside the firm, then you should push for what you think is reasonably due.” (Patrick Queen, director)

He concluded:
"I am sure my position as a director is the result of me pushing for it. I enjoy working here so I don't want to leave, but I think I am respected for not being an easy touch." (Patrick Queen, director)

It was also common for members to seek key roles during the implementation of the approved change. Individuals whose area of the business was impacted by the change reasoned they could exert more influence if they held an operational role. Interestingly, evidence was collected which indicated that individuals whose area of control could be described as adjacent to the main area impacted, took key positions in order to extend their control. Three instances of marketing departments taking control of sales strategy, and five occasions in which geographic heads expanded their territories to include neighbouring countries were provided by interviewees.

Dissolution of coalitions which had submitted poor quality proposals was characterised by members apportioning and avoiding blame, whilst seeking new opportunities to improve or reaffirm their reputation within the top management team. The following remarks were made by individuals who had been involved in both types of activity:

"Everyone is allowed to slip up once or twice. A company will never be a market leader if its management won't take risks. But it's important to avoid getting tagged as someone regularly associated with failed proposals, so you have to CYA [cover your ass]. You need to create the impression that the key decisions were made by someone else, or you went along with them for the sake of unity. Take some blame because that shows you are a team player, but don't chuck your life away." (Fraser Tench, director) [parentheses added]

"A couple of years ago I had a bad run, and I needed to get back into contention. So I kept myself upbeat and visible, making it clear that I wanted another opportunity. Eventually I was given a chance and since then I have slowly made my way back into favour. If things aren't going well you have to get in there and push because no-one else will do it for you." (Mark Finch, head of function)
Once a coalition had been dissolved the final phase in its life-cycle involved the capture and transfer of key learning points for use on other large scale change proposal initiatives.

**Phase 5 - Capture and transfer learning**

Learning capture and transfer tended to be conducted simultaneously by the coalition leader and individual members of the coalition. Coalition leaders were found to be interested primarily in identifying process learning points. Several coalition leaders held a learning event in the weeks following dissolution. All coalition members were invited to attend, and most of the events were facilitated by someone from outside the coalition, or indeed, the organisation. Members were asked to provide evidence of what went well and areas for improvement. The following comments convey the various approaches used by coalition managers:

“I like to go back to the beginning when I first began approaching people. I ask who else we should have had on board and why. I then run chronologically through every major element of the design and ask what we did well and what we didn’t.” (Geoffrey Silver, director)

“Usually I ask people to consider how things went from a process perspective, a technical perspective, a team perspective, and a management perspective.” (Fred Hawk, director)

“I think the toughest but most important aspect is hearing about my own performance. If you are going to succeed at the top it is because you can get people to work effectively with you. Sometimes you have to take it on the chin and learn.” (Brian Carp, CEO)

In addition to or instead of the learning event some coalition leaders approached coalition members on a one-to-one basis. Luke Sparrow, the chairman, suggested the advantage of this approach over the learning event was that people were often more candid in their feedback. He also related how several groups he had observed developed a “pack mentality” during feedback sessions with the result that coalition leaders received an unfairly negative and depressing account of their performance. Luke Sparrow concluded
that this was more than likely due to members “getting frustrations off their chest” as coalition leaders tended to “upset everyone at least once during the preparation of the proposal.”

As well as coalition leaders capturing and transferring learning, members also took the initiative. However, rather than focusing on the process, what went well and what could be improved, they were interested primarily in building networks and establishing productive working relationships. Interviewees described webs of informal micro coalitions within their top management teams. Typically relationships between two or three individuals which existed discreetly in the top management team. Sylvester Martin explained:

“I am sure you have heard the saying, ‘it’s not what you know, it’s who you know’. Well it is absolutely true. People get things done through others and working in a coalition is an excellent way of getting to know what makes an individual tick and what they are really made of.”

(Sylvester Martin, director)

Echoing this sentiment, Matthew Mallard asserted:

“Relationships are the life blood of politics. Without them you are totally ineffective. You can’t achieve anything by yourself.”

(Matthew Mallard, head of function)

Members of networks and micro coalitions discussed ideas for potential large scale change proposal initiatives and co-operated with each other to further their shared agendas. Participants also admitted assisting each other by sharing privileged information on future strategy and promoting one another’s interests in formal meetings and behind-the-scenes discussions. Christopher Green referred to this as “working the system.”

Within the three core life-cycle phases of large scale change proposal coalitions — build, sustain and dissolve — leaders were found to adopt one primary role in each. We will now examine each in turn.
Three coalition leadership roles

To the extent phases two, three and four were the core periods of activity in which the change proposal was prepared and submitted, evidence was found to support the contention that coalition leaders adopt specific roles in each of them. The three roles were:

- Builder,
- Sustainer, and
- Dissolver.

As Exhibit 5.2 conveys, the builder and dissolver roles were more convoluted, encompassing phases one and two, and phases four and five respectively. However, the roles were played out to a significantly lesser degree in these phases and this is represented by the lighter shading in the exhibit above and below the builder and dissolver roles respectively.
Role 1 - Builder

The significant majority of a coalition leader's time in phase two was spent building the coalition. This process was characterised by one-to-one support gathering sessions in which the coalition leader attempted to persuade individuals to join the initiative. In describing their roles and the skills required, participants stated they relied heavily on selling and negotiating skills and the need to adapt the approach for each candidate. The following two remarks expand on these findings and underline the importance of preparing before the one-to-one meetings take place:

"I believe that you have to be a good salesman. If you are going to ask people to stake their reputations on your idea, you have to be passionate about it. You have to convince them the changes will be good for the business and good for them. I always practice my arguments first by drawing a ‘Mind-Map’ which I break into four quadrants with opportunities and threats for the business and individuals. I then rehearse my arguments before I go meet people. The ‘Mind-Maps’ are useful for identifying concerns they are likely to raise." (Anthony Perch, head of function)

"I find the key skill to have is the ability to negotiate hard. Sometimes you have to lean on people and call in favours if the transformation appears to be high risk, but it is important to be flexible because people are switched on by different things.” (Colin Salmon, managing director)

He suggested:

"Before I go in I write up lists of what is on the table for discussion and what is not. Obviously, if the person putting the team together is at the top then the weapons at their disposal are more varied. If, on the other hand, they are not as senior then they are more limited in the scope of what they can and cannot do. I think if you are lower down then you are probably restricted to offering roles rather than things such as pay raises and promotions.” (Colin Salmon, managing director)
Interviewees reported that persuasion tactics included: stressing the importance of the planned change to the future of the organisation, aligning the target's future with the organisation's, offering personal incentives to join, and using colleagues in the top management team to influence the prospective member's decision. We will now consider each of these in turn.

The preferred tactic of coalition builders was to win support by emphasising the importance of the proposal to the future success of the organisation. Louise Pike's description of how she persuaded several colleagues to join her coalition, is representative of the stories provided by other respondents:

"I try to take the person off-site for lunch or at least a drink. That way it creates the impression that what we are discussing is out of the ordinary. It also takes them out of their territory and me out of mine, so we don't have any work baggage with us." (Louise Pike, director)

She continued:

I always make sure I know as much as possible about the person I am talking to, particularly their views on the way the company should go forward. I begin by outlining the main elements of my idea. I am careful to express it in ways that I know will strike a chord. Once I have gained their interest, I let them do most of the talking and then steer things back to next steps. The discussion usually ends with an agreement to develop a proposal and a list of other potential members." (Louise Pike, director)

In making the case for preparing the proposal the builder would lay the foundations for aligning the target's future with the organisation's. Interviewees asserted that members of top management teams were constantly on the look-out for opportunities to take a leading role in major change. Coalition builders would play on the importance of being seen to move with the tide, and the opportunities that would be created for early advocates and designers of programmes which improved competitiveness.

If a potential member required yet further persuasion to join, builders would offer incentives. As noted in the quote above from Colin Salmon, the type of incentive was dependent largely on the hierarchical position of the builder within the top management
Incentives to more senior individuals tended to be restricted to key roles in the design and presentation of the proposal, while more junior individuals were offered inducements such as salary increases and new responsibilities.

Most frequently used to support the other three tactics, the fourth commonly employed persuasion method was to use members of the top management team to influence and encourage a prospective member to join the coalition. Two individuals who particularly favoured this approach were Ann Cherry and Dick Tern:

"I think people underestimate the power of others to persuade on your behalf. Once I have a few key individuals on board, I use them to build the coalition quickly. It makes sense because three or four people can put together a team of ten to twelve people much faster than one person can. I spend probably as much as fifty to sixty percent of my time with the first three or four making sure they have bought in and are able to sell the idea to the others." (Ann Cherry, head of function)

"Getting others to present your arguments for you is smart because it casts you in the position of leader from the start, and it proves to doubters and waiverers that you have influential backers." (Dick Tern, director)

To summarise, the role of the builder was to establish a coalition of top management team members for the purpose of designing and submitting a large scale change proposal. In phase three the role switched from builder to sustainer as the coalition started work and began to experience pressures such as resistance from the organisation. This new dynamic required a different mindset and approach.

**Role 2 - Sustainer**

The primary objective of the coalition leader in their role as sustainer was to establish and maintain an aligned and cohesive team. According to interviewees this entailed motivating individuals, countering opposition and resistance outside the coalition, and managing dissension amongst coalition members.
The sustaining phase of a large scale change proposal could last several months, and it was not uncommon for the morale of members to suffer at various points in the process. For example, negative feedback or resistance from top management members in rival coalitions or concerns about the feasibility of the design were found to be a cause of reduced effort. Respondents contended that one of the main aspects of their role as leader was to ensure individuals were constantly motivated. As the following remarks indicate, a wide range of methods were employed to achieve this:

"Regular team events are the way to do it. I try and arrange something different like ten pin bowling or a night at the theatre." (Fraser Tench, director)

"It is important to treat each case individually. I don’t go for the stiff upper lip approach. I try to get to know my team intimately, and if someone is having personal problems and they need to ease off the gas to get things squared at home that’s fine. These change planning projects are tough on families because they see so little of each other, and in my experience many of the problems can be sorted by giving people time off." (Peter Ash, CEO)

"Every few weeks I ask the chief executive or chairman to drop by and chat to the team over a working lunch. It really gives people a lift." (Francis Elm, general manager)

"Every week I try to spend at least fifteen minutes with each coalition member to find out if everything is going OK. It is so important to let people know you care about their state of mind and general welfare. I find most problems can be nipped in the bud if they are dealt with early enough...Grade has nothing to do with it, I have led teams with directors in and I know they have appreciated being treated properly." (Steven White, general manager)

"I think a good idea is to put plenty of milestones in place so people can see they are making progress. I also try to make it fun by offering prizes for daft things like the funniest quote of the week from a team member, or the wackiest idea." (Sally Ruffe, senior manager)
Coalition leaders were also keen to point out that motivation was used not only to raise morale, but also to ward off complacency. Whilst not seeking to depress coalition members, leaders claimed that on occasion they had destabilised individuals with criticism and mild threat in order to encourage higher levels of commitment and output.

In addition to motivating members the sustaining role of a coalition leader also involved countering opposition and resistance outside the coalition. It was noted in the earlier discussion about phase three - sustain - that rival coalitions and members of the top management team, who stood to lose out if the proposed change was approved, had been found to be responsible for mounting sabotage campaigns. The broad body of opinion amongst interviewees with experience of managing the problems caused by non-coalition members, argued that their task was not only to deal with manifest resistance but also to predict it whilst still in its latent form. The comment of Simon Falcon summed up this contention:

"I see my job as steering the ship, but I also have to spend a lot of time up in the crows' nest looking at the horizon for signs of trouble. I think once you have led these types of projects a few times you develop an ability to see into the distance. You begin to sense when things are about to go wrong." (Simon Falcon, CEO)

Support was also found from Bert Starling who found networks a useful early warning system:

"If you wait until the shit hits the fan, then you have failed as a manager. You don't become deaf when you plan major change, although I do think there is a tendency to get your head down and become overly task focused. I make a point of staying in regular contact with trusted colleagues outside the team, and I usually hear rumours through them." (Bert Starling, managing director)

The third aspect of the sustainer role was managing dissension amongst coalition members. Dissension was found to be correlated with highs and lows in morale. The lower the morale the greater the tendency for dissension. The evidence collected indicated that coalition leaders regarded their role as part healer, part executioner as the following assertions demonstrate:
“I said earlier that I don’t believe in that ‘stiff upper lip crap’ If someone is misbehaving it’s normally for a good reason. If it is something reasonable then I will try and remove the cause of the problem for that person. Management teams are too small and people have too long a memory to have a high mortality rate.” (Peter Ash, CEO)

“If it is just one or two people causing trouble I try and sort it out first of all myself. If that fails then I ask other coalition personnel to lend a hand. If they have no success and the individuals in question are threatening the chances of success then they are off the team.” (Derek Barbel, director)

“If there is one thing it is stupid to tolerate, it is dissension. If people have a problem with me or what we are doing, then either I didn’t explain it properly when I invited them to join, or they have not been straight with me about their commitment to change. There is no room for bullshitters because if you let them stay they will wreak havoc. Get them out immediately.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

Role 3 - Dissolver

Dissolution was found to be conducted by the coalition leader and the chief executive officer, unless the two roles were occupied by the same person. The CEO, by virtue of their hierarchical position, was better placed to issue new roles and responsibilities, disperse members and appoint members on new projects. However, the coalition leader worked closely with the CEO during this process.

Interviewees with experience of disbanding coalitions were unanimous in the assertion that an orderly, and well managed break-up was important for several reasons. Firstly, to enhance their own reputation and position themselves as a leader of future large scale change proposal and implementation initiatives, and secondly, to manage coalition members’ career progression and re-entry into the top management team. With respect to the first of these two points the following remarks are illustrative of the comments by respondents on the issue of self-interest:
“Once a final decision has been taken on the proposal, everyone starts looking out for themselves. Your management comes under the spotlight, and your right to leadership evaporates. It would be easy to say thanks a lot and cheerio, but there are probably bridges to be mended and a few favours to be repaid. Therefore, you work with people and help them get back into their normal routines. I always take time to go and see their bosses and explain the value they added, and possible future roles they would be suited to. Word gets back to people that you looked out for them and it helps strengthen your own power base.” (Paul Swan, director)

“It is a small world at the top, and a person may be the brightest and the best, but if they forget they are there because of the support from below, they do so at their own peril. A few years ago we got rid of our chairman and chief executive because of his patronising management style. The change programme may have been his idea, but he rubbed people up the wrong way.” (John Yew, CEO)

Drawing conclusions from the experience Yew remarked:

It was a powerful lesson for anybody planning to get to the top. Self-interest is best served by honouring others. I make sure that every team member gets a win as a result of working with me. Whether it is public praise or a word in the right ear to help them develop, it doesn’t matter.” (John Yew, CEO)

“People are usually knackered after we finish, so it is my job to make sure they have a soft landing back into their positions. Before now I have had to soothe tempers, scratch backs and stroke a few egos that felt they had been abused by the planning team. On the basis everyone was working under me, I thought it was only right that I shouldered the blame and defused the situation as much as possible. What goes around comes around is a good creed to live by.” (Arthur Kestrel, managing director)

The following is an account of how one general manager managed the re-entry of his coalition members back into the top management team in difficult circumstances:
"Last May I finished leading a change design team that had proposed exiting four of our six business. I am sure you can imagine the hostility we received from the four businesses when the board voted in favour. Half of my ten strong team were from those four businesses. Two of them received notes in their in-trays calling them Judas, and one person was threatened by phone at home. What are you supposed to do in these circumstances? There is no book at business school that tells you how to handle situations like this. I sat down with the heads of the four businesses to discuss what could be done.” (William Wren, CEO)

He continued:

"The discussion did not begin well. One chap stood up and demanded their instant dismissal. I went over the rational arguments for the divestments and finished by saying if they didn’t make commercial sense the board would not have backed the plan. It took at least another ninety minutes before a tense silence filled the room. I then told them that I didn’t want the members from my design team to be persecuted and victimised, but they were adamant they would not be welcomed back. Seeing that it was not in anyone’s interests to force the situation I called a recess and went to see the chairman. (William Wren, CEO)

Pausing to rise from his desk and walk to the office window, he appeared to be considering what conclusions could be drawn from the episode. After a couple of minutes of silence he remarked:

"He asked me whether or not we should get rid of them for the sake of unity, but I warned him that it would send the message to our best people that sticking your neck out doesn’t pay off. He agreed and proposed finding the five individuals equivalent or more senior positions in the two businesses we planned to keep. I think the lesson here was that change is messy and there can be heavy casualties, but you have to look after the surgeons even if it means some of the patients die.” (William Wren, CEO)

Participants were keen to emphasise the importance of managing re-entry so that the top management team did not fragment into ‘them and us’ factions. Several individuals
talked of mediating sessions between coalition members and top management team colleagues in order to “clear the air” and establish a mutually acceptable way forward. Paul Swan described this attitude as a “duty of care”.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented the findings in relation to line of enquiry #1. We have examined evidence to support the contention that large scale change proposal coalitions exhibit five life-cycle phases: initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer learning. This is the first empirically generated research to describe the evolution of top management team large scale change proposal coalitions. The finding that the process is purposely managed through to dissolution suggests the top management team is acutely aware of the benefits and drawbacks of coalitions which continue to exist. It also suggests that top management team members are prepared to tolerate temporary super-influential informal structures to exist for the benefit of the organisation. This leads us to conclude that the behaviours of top management team members is in part influenced by their acknowledgement of the fusing between the organisation’s success and their own. In terms of self-interest it appears that individuals are driven by defensive self-preservation as well as offensive self-promotion. This casts top management team members as considered, politically astute individuals who in general take a longer term view of their careers and contributions to the organisation, and adjust their behaviours accordingly.

With regard to line of enquiry #2 we have discussed the finding that coalition leaders adopt three primary roles —building, sustaining and dissolving— across the five phases. Once again this provides us with a pioneering insight into coalition life. Not only do we now know that large scale change proposal coalitions exist we can also describe the behaviours and tactics used as the coalition evolves through the various phases. The linkage between process and behaviour in this stage of the change context is also an elucidatory finding.

The findings from the two lines of enquiry have important implications for academic research and practitioners and these will be discussed in more detail in chapter nine. In the following three chapters we will examine in greater detail the core life-cycle phases —building, sustaining and dissolving— of large scale change proposal coalition from the
perspective of the coalition leader. Further new insights into the nature and characteristics of coalitions and behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders used in these phases will be presented. Let us now turn to a consideration of the first of the three phases: building large scale change proposal coalitions.
Chapter 6

Building large scale change proposal coalitions

"Credibility is won in numbers, and credibility comes from putting together a combination of incentivised, ambitious, experienced, hard nosed and trusted individuals who know they can make a difference to the future of the business." (Gordon Black, general manager)

Introduction

In this chapter we will consider the behaviours and tactics used by members of top management teams in their capacity as builders of large scale change proposal coalitions. We will begin by suggesting that the fifty participants are categorised usefully into four structurally-derived tiers. We will contend also that the sequence of building a coalition is heavily influenced by the hierarchical position of the builder in relation to the potential member, and that four tier-specific approaches were adopted by the participants of this study. Furthermore, we will assert that a coalition builder’s behaviours and tactics varied according to whether they were engaged in an upward inter-tier, intra-tier, or downward inter-tier support gathering exercise. The results presented in this chapter relate to lines of enquiry #3 and #4. Respectively, the influence of hierarchical position on the support gathering process and coalition building behaviours and tactics. The findings offer a unique and detailed insight into an unexplored area of management elites in the context of large scale change proposal coalitions.

The concept of tiers in top management teams

During the interviews conducted with fifty participants in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries it became clear that top management teams are often ambiguous and
ill-defined entities. This is due to the fact that the official organisation structure charts do not match up with descriptions of who are the key decision makers. In one organisation the general managers were presented as "being more powerful than all but the most senior directors" (Charles Rook). When questioned as to why this might be so, the reply was that "the general managers run the day-to-day business and therefore decide what gets done and what doesn’t." In other organisations specific senior managers were found to exert more influence over the strategic direction of the firm than the general managers above them. In yet another organisation the directors talked about the chief executive in terms of a "puppet figure who implements our decisions" (Arthur Kestrel). As might be expected, all of the top management teams exhibited unique characteristics, but one consistent theme across the fourteen organisations was that the behaviour of individuals as coalition builders was determined to a large extent by hierarchical position. Even though one person's influence might have been greater than that of a more senior individual, they still behaved in a manner that was found to be highly similar to others at the same hierarchical level. They still approached coalition building in the same way. It was this finding that led to the observation that in the fourteen organisations the fifty participants could be categorised into four hierarchy-based tiers:

- The chairman, chief executive officers and managing directors,
- Directors,
- General managers, and
- Heads of function and senior managers.

Even though directors and general managers in one organisation enjoyed comparatively more influence over the strategic direction of the firm than their counterparts in another, their behaviours were consistent with each other. To the extent that our primary interest here is on behaviours, and not influence per se, a structurally derived mechanism is a useful framework in which to report the findings.

**The coalition building process: deciding who to approach for support first, second, third...**

Building large scale change proposal coalitions was found to be largely a backstage process. Coalitions were built almost always incrementally behind closed doors. Very
rarely were members enlisted simultaneously in twos or larger groups. Evidence was found to support an assertion that the order in which individuals were invited to join the coalition was influenced strongly by the hierarchical position of the coalition builder. Analysis of the results indicated the existence of four hierarchy-based coalition building models. One for each of the four tiers identified above.

During the elite style interviews participants were asked to consider their experience of building coalitions and the reasons why they had approached individuals in the sequence they did. Interviewees were invited to rank a list of seven factors. Although asked to add to the list of factors none of the participants did. The seven factors were expertise, formal seniority, informal seniority, friendship/trust, working relationship, age and physical proximity. Ranked sixth and seventh respectively by participants, age and physical proximity were argued to be insignificant factors and have consequently been omitted from the following discussion. Exhibit 6.1 illustrates the four coalition building sequences described by interviewees. Exhibit 6.2 provides working definitions for the selection criteria.

Exhibit 6.1 - Four hierarchy-based large scale change proposal coalition building approaches

Whilst there were several similarities between the approaches there were also a number of noteworthy differences. We will now consider each of the four in turn.
The chairman, chief executive officers and managing directors

The most senior members of the top management team reported a markedly different set of criteria from those below them in the organisational hierarchy. For the one chairman, eight chief executive officers (CEOs) and six managing directors (MDs) the most important determinant in approaching an individual was informal seniority. The consensus was that the commitment of a respected member of the top management team possessing attributes such as experience, perceived wisdom, and membership of various networks significantly improved the likelihood of an initiative being supported by the rest of the top management team. The following confirmatory comments offer some explanation for this stance:

"I know that because of my track record I have the power to force change through, but you have to choose your battles. Only an idiot seeks to create enemies of his advisors. It is much more productive and politically sensible to seek consensus, and for me this process begins with winning the active support of the grandees and reference group leaders." (Brian Carp, CEO)

After discussing several of the grandees in his organisation Carp continued:

"In many cases they don’t hold a lot of functional power and they don’t hold the purse strings, but because of their performance and the quality of their advice they are looked up to and listened to by the rest of the executives and senior managers. If you can get them on board you have prepared strong foundations on which to build the rest of the coalition." (Brian Carp, CEO)

"I never start building a coalition by getting my deputies involved because that looks like a three line whip to the rest of the team. Ordinarily you can’t be heavy handed about these things. You have to be intelligent about how you sow the seeds of change. I like to win the ear of individuals who are generally regarded as being well balanced, perceptive team members. Having them with you makes it much easier to win over others because they take the message forward and help to build the coalition for you." (Kurt Nightingale, CEO)
"For me informal seniority is the most important factor because it is politically sophisticated to choose your early supporters from those who have much to gain from being associated with you, and yet are not in a position to overthrow you. Choose those who the big hitters respect, and you will soon find them knocking on your door asking for a piece of the action." (Bert Starling, managing director)

The most marked difference between the chairman, CEOs and managing directors and the other hierarchical levels was the emphasis placed on working relationships as a determinant for soliciting support. For CEOs it ranked second while for directors, general managers and heads of functions it ranked only fifth. The consensus amongst those holding an organisation's highest office was that once the informal seniority faction of the support coalition had been established it was vital to ensure productive relationships between members. Individuals were only invited to join the coalition if they had or were likely to have a productive relationship with the other members. Friction and negative jockeying for position within the team were viewed as dysfunctional behaviours and likely to slow or divert the coalition from its objective. Therefore, individuals who had exhibited a tendency for such behaviour were not invited to join.

Exhibit 6.2 - Support selection criteria definitions

The following list of working definitions were those offered to and accepted by interviewees.

**Expertise**
An individual's knowledge or skills.

**Formal seniority**
The position an individual occupies in the official organisation hierarchy (as per the organisation chart).

**Informal seniority**
The position an individual occupies in the hierarchy that is different to that illustrated in the organisation structure. This may be due to factors such as experience, reputation or membership of internal and external networks.
Exhibit 6.2 - Support selection criteria definitions (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Friendship/trust</th>
<th>The emotional relationship that exists between two colleagues.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working relationship</td>
<td>The professional day-to-day interaction that takes place between colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>The difference between individuals, not the absolute figure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical proximity</td>
<td>The spatial distance colleagues have between them in the workplace. For example, occupying the same floor, same building, different sites in the same country, or different sites in different countries.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the chairman, CEOs and MDs, were the ultimate resource holders and sanctioners of change, they were aware of the need to enlist the support of the resource holders on whom the change would impact. Gaining approval from those with formal seniority facilitated effective large scale change because the most senior manager in the part of the organisation affected by the change had it within their power to actively support or oppose the planned initiative. Therefore, it was preferable to ensure, as far as possible, that they carried a positive message to their subordinates rather than a negative one. As one of the CEOs commented:

“It is courteous to ask if you can play with someone else’s ball rather than simply taking over the game or walking off with it.” (John Yew, CEO)

The fourth most important determinant in approaching a member of the top management team for support was that of friendship/trust, with the trust component being the more significant element. When attempting to plan and implement an initiative as major as large scale change it was of fundamental importance that despite any differences of opinion over the nature and content of the proposed change, the coalition members trusted each other and did not waste time questioning one another’s motives. Large scale
change was regarded as too complex for any one person to design at a tactical level, and with the speed of decision making an increasingly important capability, members had to be able to trust each other to work for the benefit of the coalition. A further point raised by the chairman, CEOs and MDs was that during the course of large scale change much time was spent in each other’s company and the long hours spent working together were made easier if the personal relationships between coalition members were convivial.

The fifth and final determinant, **expertise**, was considered a resource to be tapped into as and when necessary rather than the basis for coalition membership. However, the consensus was that if the expertise was of central importance to the success of a change proposal, then an individual was invited into the coalition.

Already possessing formal seniority by virtue of their position, the most senior members of the organisation admitted to occasionally forcing decisions on the top management team. However, they argued that compliance rather than commitment, was sought only in exceptional circumstances. Such situations were usually the result of time pressures such as the need to exploit a particularly tight window of opportunity or responding to a threat such as a take-over. Nigel Kingfisher, one of the CEOs, recounted the time when a change in legislation gave the organisation an opportunity to steal a march on its competitors and make a dramatic strategic reorientation:

> “It was the end of a long week and the forecast of heavy snows meant we were preparing to go home early for what was probably going to be a long weekend. Suddenly we got news that the government had announced new legislation which would mean the closing of a loophole by midnight. One of our analysts had noticed they were also introducing a modification to a tax that made the loophole doubly attractive for any products launched in the remaining nine hours. On hearing this I called together my inner sanctum of top managers. The guys who have been with me for years.”
> (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

After going off at a tangent to discuss where his managers lived, he returned to the account:

> “I set the ball rolling by inviting the analyst to outline the loophole and the financial size of the opportunity facing us. We then brainstormed the
benefits, drawbacks and what we would have to change if we pursued the course of action. The benefits were huge and would win us tens of millions of pounds of additional business. The drawbacks were in the changes we would have to make to the society. We would have to close one large department and while we could transfer and reskill some employees, most would lose their jobs. In a company committed to serving the community, the change would cause considerable upset, even hostility.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

Almost as an aside he interjected:

“It is part of being a CEO that you carry the can but I believe that my role is to do what is financially best for the company.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

He then went on:

“By about eight o’clock we had pretty much laid out the bones of the new product and it was decision time. Do we or don’t we? The debate was intense. One of the team was in charge of the department that would be hit by the changes and he was set against it. He argued that we should call a full board meeting immediately, but looking out of the window at the falling snow, he knew that wasn’t going to happen. The argument went backwards and forwards on a rational and emotional level for well over an hour until he said, ‘You leave me with no choice. If you go ahead with this course of action I will resign’.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

Pausing to pour us both a cup of tea he shook his head:

“I was absolutely shocked. Here was a man...a friend I had known and worked with for nearly twenty-four years putting a gun to his head and threatening to shoot himself. The room was silent and as we stared into each other’s eyes I knew he meant it. I turned to each of the other four in turn and asked for their opinion on what we should do. The outcome was three against and only two for. I tried to weigh up the pros and cons but whichever way I cut it the best financial option was to launch the new product.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)
Kingfisher concluded:

"I admitted to the group that I held the minority view, but that as chief executive the final decision lay with me and that my choice was to launch. To his credit Gerry stayed with us and finished creating the new product. At 11.52pm we faxed the treasury and Inland Revenue details of our new product. It was a very sad night. We made an extra £36m as a result of the launch and that action helped us in our quest to reposition ourselves as an aggressive, cutting edge company." (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

Forcing compliance or 'pulling rank' does have dangers if there are not exceptional circumstances such as time constraints. The present top management team of one of the organisations explained how a former chairman and CEO had been forced to resign because of his over-usage of rank and coercion. Coercive tactics, their benefits and drawbacks, are explored more fully later in this chapter, but for now we will turn our attention to a group of participants who displayed a different approach to building a large scale change proposal coalition in the top management team.

Directors

The consensus among the thirteen directors was that expertise was the most important factor in deciding which top management team member to approach for support first. They argued this was because their hierarchical position provided them with sufficient authority to develop strategic change options without seeking the immediate authority of the chairman, chief executive or managing director. Experts were used to quickly ascertain the technical viability of the proposed change. Unlike the chairman, CEOs and MDs who regarded expertise as a resource which could be tapped into when necessary, directors viewed individuals with the critical skills as core members of the coalition. Fraser Tench made the following remark:

"It is the job of a director to be thinking about the strategic direction of the company, and taking those ideas to the CEO. However, he is going to want to know the financial impact, the structural impact and in some instances the detail. So you have to be prepared. You stand to lose credibility if you don’t have answers to the most obvious questions. You
will only use ten per cent of the detail you collect, but you don’t know which ten per cent until you get in there. That’s why an expert’s your first guy on board.” (Fraser Tench, director)

Patrick Queen, who cited Pfeffer's (1992) text on power and politics in organisations several times during the interview supported this view. The following comments are a selection of those made by him during a wide-ranging conversation over a twenty minute period:

“The idea of leaving the [name deleted] franchise and taking up the UK franchise for [name deleted] had been surfaced on a couple of occasions but we hadn't done anything about it. Having studied [our existing franchiser’s] proposed strategy of becoming more mass market I felt this would endanger yet further our increasingly disillusioned core customer base of businessmen. If we elected to move to the [new] brand it would mean a shift in strategy from low middle market to upper middle market. Now while that might sound like a subtle change of direction it is actually a huge shift involving millions in refitting, rebranding, retraining and remarketing.” (Patrick Queen, director) [parentheses added to protect the identity of the company the participant organisation severed links with]

In relation to the support gathering process and the change design, he remarked:

“The first step was to bring in several people who had expertise in areas such as operations, training, property and marketing and would be able to work up the original idea into a costed model...We worked on it for about three weeks before it was ready to take into the MD. We put the model under the spotlight for an entire day. Every facet of the change was debated and debated again. ‘What if this happened?’ ‘What if that didn’t?’ and so on.” (Patrick Queen, director)

After pausing he resumed:

“Eventually we decided we hadn’t come across any killer issues and Richard gave us the go-ahead to put together a team to presenting a proposal for changing from [our old franchiser to the new one]...There is
no doubt whatsoever that I would have failed if I tried to do it all myself, and if I had gone straight to Richard, he would have kicked my butt for going to see him with a half-baked idea. If you want to have credibility with your MD, use your time with him wisely. He hears a dozen problems and proposals every week, so why did he choose mine? Because I could show him that experts had built the model!” (Patrick Queen, director)

As evidenced in the above example, once the experts had established an initial justification for proceeding with the change, the next step was to present the findings to the chairman, chief executive or managing director in an attempt to gain their support. Directors regarded formal seniority as the next step because chairmen, CEOs and MDs had the capacity to halt the change proposal, or alternatively, support its development and commit scarce resources. Whatever course of action ensued, soliciting support from the highest ranking member of the organisation was seen as the first 'make or break' point for the potential change.

The time frame between enlisting the support of experts and approaching the most senior member of the organisation was contingent upon the complexity and magnitude of the potential change. Assuming that experts were working full time on the project, directors reported ranges from as short as two weeks to as long as six months. All fifty participants were in agreement that the fastest way to build a support coalition was if the most senior member of the organisation had originated the idea for change.

Once the proposed change had been allowed to proceed by the chairman, chief executive officer or managing director the directors began broadening the coalition by approaching members of the top management team who had informal seniority within the organisation. Fred Hawk commented:

“When you have a strong commercial case for the proposed change and the backing of the top man everybody else is eager to sign up unless you are proposing the end of the world as they know it...You may find individual resistors but you wouldn’t be approaching those first. Rather, you would wait until you had a strong coalition so the full weight of numbers could be brought to bear on those not willing to commit.” (Fred Hawk, director)
The fourth and fifth most important determinants in seeking the support of a member of the top management team were friendship/trust and working relationship respectively. As the following remarks appear to indicate the consensus among directors, and indeed all the hierarchical levels, was that the trust element was of greater importance than friendship:

"Strategic change is inherently about upsetting the status quo, so there will always be winners and losers. As someone who has instigated several strategic changes I speak with some experience when I say it is important to ensure the coalition you put together is made up of people you can trust. Being friends can be an obstacle, particularly if they are going to be a loser...If you are a valued member of the management team you will always be given something else to do. So I guess I am saying that working relationships are important but they follow trust rather than friendship." (Sylvester Martin, director)

"We have to be clear what we mean by trust. It is not personal trust as in confiding secrets, but professional trust which means accepting that collectively we are aiming to do the best for the company. Of course the world is made up of shades of grey, not black and white. There will always be jostling for position and advancement, and there are people here who wouldn't hesitate to stick the knife in if they got the opportunity. But that's just part of the job." (Geoffrey Silver, director)

"I think it is important to get on with fellow directors and senior managers. If you can have a round of golf or chat over a drink, you start to build up a rapport which smooths the way in times of change. It is not about declaring your undying love for one another, it just means each of you understands where the other is coming from and that you will cut each other some slack when the time comes." (Dick Tern, director)

To summarise, there was a considerable degree of consensus and consistency among the thirteen directors as to the rationale and sequence in which members of the top management team were approached for support. The same can be said of the five general managers.
General managers

In contrast to the chairman, chief executive officers and managing directors who sought the support of individuals with *informal seniority* in order to complement their own *formal authority*, the general managers first sought the approval and support of the most senior member of the organisation. As the following series of remarks suggest, the general managers were highly aware of their relative position in the top management team and the potential amongst directors for resisting the proposal or hijacking the coalition. Consequently, the participants contended that obtaining the public backing of the chief executive or managing director boosted the credibility of the proposal and desire to be in the design coalition:

"Due to the fact that directors are removed from the day-to-day activity of the organisation, they are fearful of strategies not instigated by themselves. They are particularly worried about change that is proposed by general managers because we control the deployment of resources at the operational level. Therefore, what tends to happen is they openly resist it by finding any number of logical reasons why the proposal cannot be implemented. Reasons that usually come back to them being the only ones able to see the 'big picture'.” (Gordon Black, general manager)

He continued:

"As soon as the directors in this organisation know the substance of a proposal being tabled they go and nobble Bob [the CEO, name changed] and the thing never gets off the ground. So after years of blood, sweat and tears of trying to move us forward I have found the best way of instigating change is to go directly to the chief and explain the commercial logic to him. Once the statements have been validated the discussion inevitably turns to the impact on the company structure and who should be in the team.” (Gordon Black, general manager)

After pulling out a chart of the company structure to demonstrate the complexity of reporting relationships he concluded:
“By soliciting his advice I am then building a coalition that I know he is comfortable with, and because he had a hand in selection he also feels ownership. Once he has announced his support for the proposed change at the management meeting nobody wants to be seen to openly oppose the plan.” (Gordon Black, general manager) [parentheses added]

“I go straight to the managing director when I have a major proposal that will affect other parts of the business, otherwise if any of the directors find out they try to take over the initiative on the grounds that the change needs to rolled out and co-ordinated across the business. Once he is on-side I then go and put the rest of the coalition together.” (Charles Rook, general manager)

“About three months ago I had a great idea for a new product category which I happened to mention to one of the directors on our annual golfing day. The next thing I know he is setting up a bloody team himself and the chief executive is singing his praises from the rooftop. Never again will I be sharing any bright ideas with our directors. I will be the one knocking on the boss’s door.” (Steven White, general manager)

“I think it is fair to say that in most organisations people fear change, and with directors you have to understand they are all one or two steps away from being the top dog. They don’t want anything messing up their chances, and if a general manager threatens their progression of course they are going to resist it. Be smart, cut them out of the loop altogether. Speak to the CEO first and once he has okayed things start bringing in the directors, because you sure as hell will need them to make it work. Just make sure they are working with you and not against you.” (Robert Willow, general manager)

Once approval for the proposed initiative had been obtained from the chairman, chief executive or managing director, the general managers then switched to informal seniority as the next determinant for coalition membership. In seeking to acquire the support of respected members of the top management team, they like the chairman, CEOs and MDs, aimed to build up a critical mass of senior managers demanding change.
Unlike the CEOs who viewed expertise as a resource to be tapped into as necessary, the general managers argued that after seniority, expertise was the most important reason for inviting a member of the top management team to join the design coalition. One manager commented:

"When demonstrating executive capability it is critical the change proposal hits all the right buttons first time. This means you get the experts in. What you don't do is attempt it by yourself. I learned that lesson early on when I watched one of my former colleagues attempt to design a new logistics system without assistance. His intention was to save the company several million pounds per annum by consolidating delivery systems and suppliers." (Gordon Black, general manager)

Breaking off his account to laugh, he remarked:

"He did the analysis, conducted the design and negotiated enforceable contracts which cost us £300,000 to get out of. It was good idea but he should have involved people whose job it is to manage logistics. Needless to say he pissed people off by treading on their patch. One bright idea needlessly cost him his job." (Gordon Black, general manager)

General managers expressed the view that expert design was one of the factors most likely to convince the most senior individuals to sanction deployment of the resources necessary to implement the proposed change.

In line with the chairman, chief executives, managing directors and directors the fourth most important determinant in seeking the support of a member of the top management team was that of friendship/trust. Once again the trust component was cited as the more significant of the two. The general managers gave the same reasoning as the CEOs but added that when contracting out certain elements of a high profile change design to coalition members it was imperative no-one engaged in negative politics to slow progress or resist the proposer's initiative.

Unlike the chairman, CEOs and MDs who placed considerable emphasis on the quality of working relationship between coalition members, the general managers ranked the
factor only fifth. Explaining the rationale behind his position and the relative importance of both friendship/trust and working relationships, one general manager commented:

“It isn’t a prerequisite that coalition members are best buddies, but empathy helps when the going gets tough. Although, it is much more important for there to be trust between members. The coalition will fall apart quickly if people’s motives and actions are questionable. If you don’t have trust you can’t have a good working relationship.” (Francis Elm)

The general position was that although productive working relationships were important, they were insufficient to produce a highly cohesive and effective coalition. It was asserted that failure to ensure members had been recruited using the four most favoured criteria increased the likelihood of the coalition submitting a losing bid. Indeed, it was argued that a productive working relationship is the result of the other four factors since everyone is then aware of the reason for their inclusion in the coalition, the objective and their role in achieving it. Interviewees further suggested that although the reasons for coalition participation were very rarely stated openly, the motive for inviting particular individuals was relatively transparent since top management team members were usually well aware of their colleagues’ strengths and weaknesses.

Heads of function and senior managers

The lowest hierarchical level of top management team members interviewed as part of this study were heads of function and senior managers. Their ranking of the support selection criteria for approaching coalition candidates was, with one exception, the same as the general managers. Whereas general managers solicited support initially from the CEO —formal seniority— heads of functions sought to gather support in the first instance from members of the top management team who had informal seniority. One senior manager explained:

“In my experience it is important to have a godfather figure who is publicly supportive of your idea. It legitimises your thinking in the eyes of the organisation and it gives you a crucial breathing space to build the rest of the coalition and get things running. Potential skeptics and trouble
makers will think, ‘...if Mr so-and-so thinks this is a good idea I will wait and see how things unfold before opposing her plan.’” (Sally Ruffe, head of function)

Substantiating this position Christopher Green remarked:

“Support from a respected figure makes possible resisters wary, neutrals prepared to listen and your supporters keener to provide active commitment.” (Christopher Green, senior manager)

Gaining support from those with informal seniority was described by Leonard Plum as “establishing an unofficial barometer for how the change proposal will be received by those with formal seniority.” Mistakes could be rectified, oversights included and refinements made before the proposal was shared with other potential coalition members. One head of function stated that:

“The second echelon of executives is usually a good first port of call because in most cases they want to gain promotion to the first echelon, and are therefore constantly on the look-out for high profile projects which they can be seen to have a leading role in. Why start off in stormy seas, when it is much safer to set sail from calm waters with at least one experienced hand?” (Mark Finch, head of function)

To conclude, the heads of function and senior managers asserted that it is easier to win the support of chairmen, chief executives and managing directors if it could be demonstrated that a respected member of the top management team had already committed their support to the initiative. As this tended to reduce their chances of exposing themselves to involvement in inappropriate or ill-conceived proposals.

In this section we have identified and discussed four distinct sets of criteria for selecting and inviting top management team colleagues to join a large scale change proposal coalition. The criteria were those used by coalition builders, who could usefully be classified into one of four hierarchy-based tiers: the chairman, chief executives and managing directors; directors; general managers; and heads of function and senior managers. We noted also that the sequence in which individuals were approached was largely contingent upon the positional seniority of the coalition builder. Having
ascertained the criteria and sequencing it is now appropriate to move on to a consideration of the behaviours and tactics used by coalition builders to gain the support of key individuals.

**Inter-tier and intra-tier coalition building**

We will now consider in detail, with anecdotal evidence, the political behaviours and tactics used by members of top management teams in each of the three processes identified:

- Upward inter-tier coalition building,
- Intra-tier coalition building, and
- Downward inter-tier coalition building.

**Upward inter-tier coalition building**

It was found that the behaviour of individuals was more complex during upward inter-tier coalition building exercises than during intra-tier and downward inter-tier coalition building exercises. The evidence suggests that the larger the gap between the coalition builder and potential member, the less direct were the tactics used. In this section we will consider the range of skills and approaches used by individuals to win the approval and commitment of more senior colleagues.

**Directors’ upward coalition building behaviours and tactics.** With only the chairman, chief executive officer and/or a managing director above them, directors demonstrated more direct behaviours than did the general managers, heads of function and senior managers. It was asserted earlier that directors tended to approach experts first when building a coalition. This was so they could use the individual’s input to establish early credibility with the most senior members of the organisation and persuade them to endorse the initiative. To support this strategem directors reported using two tactics which can be described usefully as:

- Ego stroking, and
- Risk management.
**Ego stroking.** This first method aimed to disarm a potentially skeptical leader by convincing them that the large scale change being developed by the coalition would enhance their reputation. Particular emphasis was placed on demonstrating the proposal was a significant strategic or financial opportunity for the business, and would contribute to the fulfilment of the leader’s vision. The stroking process also included inferences that due to the magnitude of the proposition, only the target had the skills required to guide it through the organisation’s decision making process. The following series of remarks appear to substantiate this contention:

"It is not enough to go in with a solid business case. You have to understand that these guys have egos which need to be boosted and that means a little soft sell. Show them what they need to do, what their role would be, let them think its their idea, and push them gently into shaping the direction and membership of the design team. All the time you are reassuring them of their power, and more importantly their ability to control the transformation process." (Louise Pike, director)

"Sycophancy is never a good option, and open worship is going a bit far, but deference never did anybody any harm." (Derek Barbel, director)

"The sponsorship of the chief executive is the keystone of any coalition. If he is behind you it can make the difference between success and failure, and he knows you know that. Even though his power ultimately comes from the office, it’s smart if you make him feel you are seeking his support based on ability rather than rank." (Michael Gold, director)

In addition to selling the benefit of enhanced reputation, directors as coalition builders also focused on how the change programme would consolidate the desired member’s leadership position at the top of the organisation. It was suggested that although an enhanced reputation would help to generate such a view amongst the other members of the top management team, support was more likely to be forthcoming if the proposal helped towards this end. Receiving assurance that his comments were confidential and anonymous, Michael Gold added to his earlier statement:

"Look, you must realise that many chief executives are in it for the power, and the one thing they fear above all else is losing it. Think about Rupert
Murdoch, the moment one of his top executives seems to be garnering a bit too much power, he transfers him to a part of the business he knows nothing about. Six months later they resign. What I am saying is that I always try to stress how the transformation will help them to strengthen their grip on the company's tiller.” (Michael Gold, director)

Risk management. Directors claimed that the likelihood of winning the support of a chairman, chief executive or managing director was significantly improved if they were convinced the issue of risk management had been given due care and attention. Evidence was provided of situations in which stroking egos alone had generated only superficial and temporary commitment which evaporated when the leaders' reputation or position were threatened by association with the proposal coalition:

“I learnt a big lesson earlier this year when I was putting together a team to work on a plan which promised to revive the company's fortunes. I approached Jack [CEO's name changed] and gave him an outline of the idea. He liked it and agreed in principle that we should proceed. I also got him to agree to give it high priority status by sponsoring it. However, soon some of our assumptions started unravelling and the plan looked unfeasible.” (Sylvester Martin, director)

After taking a moment to explain what was wrong with the design he remarked:

“I think we could have overcome the problems but he dropped it like a hot potato. He withdrew the plan at the next board meeting, and I know I embarrassed him terribly. Afterwards we had a chat about my risk analysis, or rather the lack of it. My reputation has suffered a lot but more importantly I have lost the level of trust I used to enjoy with Jack.” (Sylvester Martin, director)

Concluding an assertion that he had witnessed a number of failed coalition building exercises due to poorly prepared risk management, Scott Bishop suggested:

“If you're asking the boss to put his ass in a sling, you'd better make sure the sling ain't gonna break.” (Scott Bishop, director)
General managers' upward coalition building behaviours and tactics. Interviewees in this tier reported using more circuitous tactics than directors who tended to go straight to the chief executive or managing director once they had gained support from the experts. As illustrated in Exhibit 6.1 earlier, general managers tended to seek formal seniority and informal seniority in the early stages of coalition formation. In practice this meant attempting to win the support of directors. Of the four hierarchy-based tiers used in this study to demarcate levels of seniority within top management teams, the highest levels of antagonism were found to exist between directors and general managers. The following remarks provide an insight into the difficulties encountered by one general manager immediately before he arrived back at his office a few minutes late for our interview. After refreshing his memory as to the purpose of our discussion he commented that the timing could not have been more appropriate. Standing up for the entire duration of the interview—which lasted in excess of two hours—Gordon Black began pacing around the office. The following account is a series of remarks he made during the interview:

“Sometimes you come across a director who is really great to work with. They recognise the operational issues you are facing, and the fact they are removed from the frenetic day-to-day activity. Most directors are OK, but occasionally you get a real asshole who behaves like Genghis Khan on acid. He has been put on the fast-track and believes the route to the top is by enforcing his will over everyone, regardless of whether they have more experience, expertise or a better understanding of what needs to be done.”

(Gordon Black, general manager)

Pausing to take off his jacket and telephone his secretary to order refreshments he continued:

“Let me give you an example. I have been here for eighteen years. I have seen the business grow from what was basically a start-up to market leader, and I know that I have played a big part in making that a reality. At the moment we are under increasing pressure to improve our profitability, so we have two lines of attack: increasing revenues and reducing costs. Now if you look at the market data, you can see our margins are by far the highest. This is partly due to the economies of scale we get in processing, but it is largely a function of our premium pricing...Even though we have
the largest market share the evidence suggests that we could double in size over the next twelve years. You only have to look at the number and quality of new entrants to realise how attractive this market is. My job is to run one of the two key divisions, and this year I have been given extremely demanding performance targets.” (Gordon Black, general manager)

After an interruption to the interview Black resumed:

“About a couple of weeks ago once I had studied the latest growth predictions for the market and our own research, I decided to put together an executive team to work out how we could grow the business by fifty per cent over the next five years...Now if I walk into Bob's [CEO's, name changed] office and tell him this straight off I know he will laugh me back out into the corridor. I need someone with a lot of credibility to support my assertions. So I go and see Malcolm [name changed], this hot-shot director, to explain my ideas...He sits there like a rabbit caught in fucking headlights when I tell him the scale of the plan. Eventually he comes out with a statement that it is too difficult, and there is no way he is going to fuck up his career by chasing dreams. Much safer to cut costs and show he can take tough decisions he said. Tough decisions! What could be tougher than growing the business by fifty per cent. I explained to him the ideas I want to develop but he wasn’t interested. I just stood up and left and that’s where I am now.” (Gordon Black, general manager) [CEO's name changed]

When asked what he intended to do next he replied:

“My only hope now is to go and see one of the more established guys. Someone who has seen the growth we had in the early days, and will understand what it is like to have new competition pouring into the market. I just hope and pray that twat won’t fight me over it. Chances are he won’t risk putting his head on the chopping block. He will probably just stay out of the way in case a bit of decision making slows his career down.” (Gordon Black, general manager)
Asked how important it is to establish a strong coalition in circumstances such as this one he concluded:

“Coalition is the right fucking word, because politics is what decision making is all about. You can never achieve anything by yourself. Credibility is won in numbers, and credibility comes from putting together a combination of inventive, ambitious, experienced, hard nosed and trusted individuals who know they can make a difference to the future of the business.” (Gordon Black, general manager)

The reluctance of some directors, particularly those on their organisation’s promotion fast-track, to become involved in developing major strategic decisions was reported by three of the five general managers. Described as ‘risk avoidance’ by one, another remarked:

“The benefits of cost cutting can be predicted with more accuracy and certainty than can growth estimates, which are nearly always subject to the vagaries of the marketplace. It is no wonder then that people often chose to go for the quick win to gain attention. No-one ever got sacked for reducing overheads, but in many circumstances, particularly in growth markets, it is possible to undermine future competitiveness by cutting into muscle. By the time this happens though, the person who made the decision is usually long gone, and they can always blame it on the next manager or poor implementation.” (Robert Willow, general manager)

The consensus amongst general managers was that successful recruitment and retention of directors into coalitions occurred when a director’s risk exposure was limited. Respondents cited restricting involvement to ambassadorial duties such as introducing other potential members, allaying concerns over turf issues and mediating in disputes. Directors were usually kept away from designing the operational aspects of the proposal.

Heads of function and senior managers’ upward coalition building behaviours and tactics. The seventeen participants occupying the lower ranks of their top management teams were compelled, by virtue of their position, to employ the most indirect support winning methods. Like their colleagues, the general managers, the majority chose to
keep directors away from the operational aspects of the coalition's work. The remarks of James Brown were representative of the broader body of opinion:

“Once you have got one or two of the respected heavyweights behind you the most important task is to make sure you put together a plan that will stand up to scrutiny. Directors are important supporters, and you want them with you rather than against you. They know how to make winning presentations and the direction the chief executive wants to take the company in, but they are usually too far removed from the coal-face to provide good advice about what a pragmatic change strategy looks like. Therefore, I tend to ask one of the general managers to help me prepare the detail.” (James Brown, senior manager)

Recognition that the hierarchical gap could make it difficult for senior managers to recruit support from directors and chief executives or managing directors was highlighted in the assertions made by a number of interviewees. They claimed that not having day-to-day contact with potential coalition members or a lack of familiarity from not having worked with them rendered it difficult to know how best to pitch the bid for support:

“From what I have seen the people who are best at winning support are those who know how and when to push the right buttons. That can only come from having an intimate knowledge of what turns a person on, so I tend to get someone they respect and feel comfortable with to take my message forward. It is much less risky than trying to cold sell yourself.” (Ray Bream, senior manager)

“If you are trying to win someone over who is quite a lot higher up than you, it is not enough to present a dry business case. These guys sit and listen to proposals all day long. You have to win their hearts and minds, but it is tough to know what will work and what won’t.” (Philip Birch, senior manager)

He added:

Since it is unusual to get more than one bite at the cherry I make sure I ask people who do know what will hook them. Very rarely do I go and try to
convince a very senior person to join our team because they would wonder how I came to be so well prepared, and because it would be completely obvious that I had been doing my homework they would feel manipulated. It is much better to make sure you recruit one or two individuals who have good relationships at the top and then send them to try and win their support.” (Philip Birch, senior manager)

Using others to win support and enlist members was the most popular technique of heads of function and senior managers. The estimated difficulty of convincing a more senior individual to join the coalition, the hierarchical gap between the coalition builder and the target, the magnitude and complexity of the proposed change, and the perceptions the builder believed the target had of them all combined to determine how many people a coalition builder sent to try and convince the individual to join the coalition. The greater the difficulty, hierarchical gap, magnitude and complexity, and the less positive the anticipated perception, the larger the number of people used to win the individual’s support. Persuasion tactics tended to focus on the benefits to the organisation and the political wins to the target such as high visibility and influence over key elements of the proposal design.

**Intra-tier coalition building**

It was noted in the literature review that nothing has been written about the large scale change proposal coalition building tactics of top management team members at the same level in an organisation’s hierarchy. The evidence collected in this research initiative found there to be no discernible difference in the rationale and behaviours used by directors with directors, general managers with general managers, or heads of function and senior managers with other heads of function and senior managers. Less complex and subtle than upward coalition building behaviours, but not as direct and blunt as those co-opting support downwards, coalition leaders attempting to recruit individuals of the same seniority were found to be more wary of who they invited and on what basis they entered the coalition. One director, Dick Tern, likened the situation to “scorpions in a mating dance” because of the potential for both parties to damage the career prospects of the other in order to further their own ambitions. Another director, Fred Hawk, remarked:
"If they are above then they control you. If they are below then you control them, but if they are equals then there can be tension because who controls who?" (Fred Hawk, director)

These two remarks appear to indicate an air of hostility between colleagues at the same level. However, interviewees did not convey a reluctance to enlist the support of an 'equal', albeit they were more hesitant in situations where there was little trust. Therefore, it is not surprising to find that one of the most favoured approaches for winning support was to invite individuals with whom they had successfully worked previously. The following series of remarks offer some of the more common explanations as to why this was the case:

"If I am going to provide someone with an opportunity to use me as a stepping stone, I want to make sure of two things. One, I don't get screwed, and two, I get the tastiest piece of the action." (Tom Chub, head of function)

"The reality for senior management is that life is a race for ambitious people who are always looking for a way onto the next rung of the ladder. I have seen change projects fail because people have put their own interests first. That is why if I need to choose someone with the same status as me I go for people who I know I can work with. If I had to choose between someone I could trust and an Einstein, it would be a no-brainer. I’d choose the person I trusted every time." (Andre Char, director)

"Designing change programmes is too hectic to have to worry about politics. There just isn’t the time to be constantly watching over your shoulder. I need someone who I can trust to do the right thing for the company, so I go with a person I have worked with before, or a person recommended by someone whose judgement I respect." (Ann Cherry, head of function)

Another aspect of trust closely allied to established working relationships was that of shared political agendas. Respondents claimed they preferred working with individuals who had the same view on what the future direction of the organisation should be than
those who did not. They argued that commitment levels were likely to be high since the planned change would be advantageous to them both. Charles Rook remarked:

“It is one less thing to have to worry about when you know that your colleague wants the plan to be approved as much as you do. You don’t have to worry about cracks appearing in the coalition because they suddenly reassess their commitment.” (Charles Rook, general manager)

Explaining the rationale for this he continued:

“It benefits both people if we get the go-ahead. Let me give you a good analogy. If you have ever watched the Tour de France or any other professional cycle race you will have seen how the cyclists at the front take it in turns to create a slip-stream for the others to conserve energy. It appears as if they don’t actually compete until the last few hundred metres when they break to go for the win. Of course they are working hard all the way but they accept that they need to work as a team if they want to get to the finish.” (Charles Rook, general manager)

He concluded:

“The same thing is true of managers who work their way up in the company together. If both know they are in the frame to make it to the top, it is often an unspoken rule to save the big push for the home straight when only one person can be the winner. Until then there is usually enough room for both to win.” (Charles Rook, general manager)

Louise Pike described how she had observed several colleagues “binding their futures together”, and suggested that it was not unknown for contemporaries to rise together and ultimately hold the chairman and chief executive role, or the chief executive and deputy chief executive role. This contention was borne out by at least one of the participant organisations where the former chairman and chief executive —one person held both roles— and the current chief executive had moved up through the top management team together. The pair had been responsible for integrating the company’s US operations with those of a larger company it acquired. Their close relationship was the subject of a Fortune article in which they were refered to as Batman and Robin. As a result of the
successful integration the more senior and older of the two—Batman—was awarded the roles of chairman and chief executive, while the younger of the two was made chief executive of the company’s most profitable subsidiary.

In the event that a coalition leader in the role of builder could not recruit an individual they had worked with previously or shared a common agenda, another tactic was to co-opt someone for whom the most senior members of the top management team were predicting a rapid rise within the organisation. This tactic was described by Simon Falcon as “attaching yourself to a rising star”. By way of an old adage he argued that if it was not possible to beat them to the top then it was sensible to join them. One of the senior managers, Mark Finch claimed success from “developing protégés who had repaid their debts” by supporting change proposal submissions presented by their former mentor.

**Downward inter-tier coalition building**

The political behaviour of coalition builders attempting to gain the commitment of less senior members of the top management team, was more direct than during upward coalition building initiatives. The results indicated that the skills used varied according to the difference in seniority between the coalition builder and the potential member. Although hierarchical seniority meant that compliance could usually be forced if necessary, the consensus among all interviewees was that active commitment was preferable. It was argued that compliant coalition membership often resulted in apathetic performance, clandestine resistance or sabotage during the design and implementation stage.

**Rational argument.** As with upward and intra-tier coalition building, the preferred technique for attempting to win the support of colleagues in the top management team was to present the business case for the proposed change. Interestingly the next three comments provide support for the assertion that positional seniority is implicit in downward coalition building tactics. The general manager reveals how he had to use others to add weight to his argument, while the chief executive acknowledged that individuals conform because of his position. Even though he preferred not to use coercion, the threat of it was usually enough to eliminate opposition. The director also conceded the potential for extracting compliance because of his position in the hierarchy:
"I demonstrate the rationale for change with supporting data presented by my new coalition members." (Francis Elm, general manager)

"I ask people to list their objections and then discuss them one by one until they have been overcome or they will become barriers to performance. You have to be patient and allow people time to commit and offer their support. Particularly in the management team because if you do not have them one hundred per cent behind you the change will fail." (Peter Ash, CEO)

Later he commented:

"...it is not a passive patience though, it is very much an active patience with you constantly working on them by answering their concerns, bringing your coalition to bear or their peers, or even mild coercion along the lines of 'the trains leaving. Are you coming?' Usually though you don’t have to use coercion because of your position as CEO. People usually comply if they can see that the change is particularly important to the company, but commitment is better than compliance so you try to be more sophisticated in your use of politics. It is important not be seen as manipulative. Maintaining your integrity is essential." (Peter Ash, CEO)

Fred Hawk, one of the directors concurred with the opinion that commitment is preferable to compliance. He stated:

"Nine times out of ten a person makes it into the executive team because they have demonstrated an ability to add value to the company. They understand commercial imperative and if they continue to object it is almost certainly because they will suffer if the change goes ahead, and they are trying to protect their position. Usually though, commercial logic wins the day and people fall into line. The trick is to make it a committed line, not a row of nodding dogs simply because I shouted a command." (Fred Hawk, director)

**Reward.** The combination of commercial logic and implicit hierarchical authority was usually sufficient to win commitment. However, it was noted earlier by Sylvester Martin
that there are often winners and losers in large scale change, and those who stand to lose
out are often reluctant to lend their support. Confronted with an unwilling member of the
top management team whose support was important to the success of the planned change,
coalition builders holding the position of chairman, chief executive or managing director
offered inducements to join the proposal coalition:

“The best way to think of winning support is to imagine you have a jar of
sweets. Most people like sweets not only because they taste nice but
because they are associated with being good or doing well. So when I
want someone’s support I explain to them the common sense in doing
what I propose. Most of the time that’s enough. Everyone wants to please
the boss. However, sometimes it isn’t enough because they know the
change is going to be painful. So out comes the sweetie jar, and we see if
there is anything in there they like the look of. I have given away
promotions and pay rises, bonuses, share options and a whole lot more.”
(Kurt Nightingale)

Explaining his rationale behind this view he remarked:

“It all depends on the context. How important the change is to the
company, how important the person you are talking to is to the change
succeeding, and whether or not you have any other options. The more
important the change and the person are, and the fewer alternatives you
have, the better the quality of sweets you have to give away.” (Kurt
Nightingale, CEO)

“I don’t think it is possible to take the moral high ground in this and treat
everyone equally. The buck stops with the CEO, which means it is up to
me to get things done. If that involves a bit of trading then that’s what I
do.” (William Wren, CEO)

To support his contention he provided an example. The following comments are
abstracts from a lengthy discourse regarding the episode:

“Recently, I came to the conclusion that we needed to refocus on our core
business, which meant selling off the other four businesses we have. They
are profitable, but they are a drain on the cash we generate from our main business. However, disposing of them meant that our Group directors stood to lose a considerable amount of power and in some cases their jobs. The top management team was basically split half and half with those from the core business supporting the proposal and those who would lose out opposing it. Of the eight directors who would lose out under the planned change I wasn’t worried about losing three of them.” (William Wren, CEO)

He continued:

“I called the core business directors together and explained the difficulties we were facing. In doing so I made it their problem too. I told them that we needed to find acceptable positions in the core business if we were to win them over. I gave them a week to come up with a solution. Meanwhile I started to meet each of the Group directors to find out what their concerns were. One was happy to take his pension and a redundancy package and so openly welcomed the opportunity, which left seven.” (William Wren, CEO)

After commenting on the personal life of this particular individual Wren returned to the account:

“One wanted to stay, arguing that he had become stale because of lack of commitment from the Group to his business, and now wanted a fresh challenge. I had to agree that we had been scaling down our investment and if that was the cause for his lack of performance then it was only fair to give him another chance. The third individual, Bill, said he wasn’t being pushed out and that we were wrong to sell the businesses as they were profitable.” (William Wren, CEO)

Describing Bill in more detail he remarked:

“Bill had come into the Group via one of the companies we acquired. He had a reputation as an abrasive character which didn’t sit well with the consensus management we strive for, and on top of that he knew little
about the core business. On the strength of that conversation I decided he
didn't have a future with us after the disposals...I informed him of my
decision and we started the negotiation process. He asked for a ridiculous
figure and I replied with one that I knew was too low. Over the course of
that week we edged closer together until we agreed on a figure that was
more to his liking than to mine. But he knew we didn't want any publicity
and the extra money convinced him to go quietly." (William Wren, CEO)

After further comments on Bill he resumed:

"At the end of the week I had given my directors in the core business we
met to discuss the options. I informed them that Gerry and Bill would be
leaving us and Steve would be staying on, which meant we would have to
find a sixth position. Three of the directors in the core business had broad
sets of responsibilities which meant they were able to transfer enough to
three of the six for them to have a worthwhile role...They expressed
concern that reduced responsibility would have a negative impact on their
salary and bonuses, but I promised to ensure the Compensation Committee
did not make any waves. We agreed to create three new positions for the
other three. One in charge of new brands, one with an international focus
and one in charge of business development. We then spent a couple of
hours deciding who should be offered which position." (William Wren,
CEO)

On the issue of negotiations with key individuals he recalled:

"The next step was to take the positions to the Group directors and get
their responses. Only Tony and Geoff were problems because they both
wanted to be in charge of new brands. I invited them to make a
presentation to me and submit a written paper on how our new brand
portfolio should be developed over the next five years. The author of the
one I determined to be the best would get the job...As things turned out
Tony made the best presentation and far exceeded my expectations of what
someone from outside the industry would be able to bring. Naturally,
Geoff wasn't very pleased but after I agreed to give him an improved
performance related pay package he agreed to take up the post of Director of Corporate Development.” (William Wren, CEO)

He concluded:

“So you can see from this example that a large part of winning support is negotiation, and part of being a good negotiator is being flexible. I could have forced the change through. The non-core businesses don’t even contribute five per cent of profits. But at the end of the day I knew that I wanted my guys to ratchet company performance up a gear, and for them to fully commit to that, they had to feel I empathised with their problems. The easiest form of management is dictatorship, but a fear culture will never sustain great results in the long run.” (William Wren, CEO)

The scope for issuing rewards such as share options and creating directorships was clearly possible for only the most senior members of the organisation. Directors and general managers were more restricted in the rewards they could use to persuade individuals to join their proposal coalition. Examples cited by interviewees included key roles in the design, and assistance in positioning the individual for an important role in the implementation phase. Promises of recommendations for promotion and additional responsibilities were also made, as were opportunities to develop new technical and management skills.

**Coercion.** In the event that an individual refused the rewards, and their support, or at least non-opposition, was of critical importance to the proposed change, the next step was to neutralise or eliminate their resistance. One method of neutralising an individual’s obstruction was to reconfigure structural elements of the organisation. Committees, working groups, reporting lines and business unit design are all structural levers that were used to overcome resistance. Once again interviewees from all levels were in agreement as to the need for coercion, but as the next series of remarks conveys, the tactics used were contingent on the hierarchical position of the coalition builder:

“If you have given someone the opportunity to sign up for the change and for whatever reason they won’t, then if they are a endangering the likelihood of success, you have to take corrective measures. First of all you send them messages of your displeasure. Things such as not inviting
them to discussions or workshops when ordinarily you would. Once they get the picture you throw them a lifeline, have a chat and give them an opportunity to come back into the fold. If they choose not to then you get the managing director involved and ask him to announce a few changes. Transfers of their best people, that sort of thing. They soon get the message: sign up or sign out.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

“Not so long ago I had an incident when one of my best people wouldn’t support a change I wanted to make in his division. He knew it made business sense but saw it as a threat to his power base and therefore refused to co-operate. He made things really difficult for me, missing meetings and not sending the reports my team needed to firm up the proposal. Finally I had to take action because he was starting to undermine the business, and since I knew a major overseas player was planning to enter the market in the coming months, I couldn’t stand by and play games with him.” (Paul Swan, director)

He concluded:

“I proposed transferring him to a division in which he had no experience. Seeing that he could either hang on to part of his existing portfolio or start again in another, he opted to co-operate with me...It ended up with him actually designing the changes that would impact on his division, so at the end of the day my threat got his buy-in. The crucial influence to his agreement was that he knew I could and would do it. That type of threat can only come from someone who is a very senior director or the top dog himself, because you have to be sure your power base is there if someone tries to call your bluff.” (Paul Swan, director)

The soon to retire chairman of one of Britain’s most profitable companies employed the same technique with a similar outcome:

“I am a member of the Institute of Directors and at some of our more social meetings we often discuss any problems we are having. At a recent charity event I was telling a fellow chairman about how the deputy chief executive had started to challenge and undermine some of the major
changes I had presented to the board. He suggested that I could curtail his behaviour by threatening to create the position of chief operating officer and transfer some of his powers and duties to the new position. I followed his advice and I haven’t had any trouble since.” (Luke Sparrow, chairman)

Two other techniques were commonly used by coalition builders at all levels to neutralise opposition. Firstly, segmenting the change to limit the potential for sabotage by the resistor, and secondly, exclusion from the decision making process. The following remarks illustrate how careful planning and the pressure to conform were used to overcome opposition:

“If the person failing to commit is someone who you cannot afford to lose, one way around the problem is to design the change in such a way that they have only a small part of the change to design. It is important to ensure that the dependencies and connections between change in their own area and change in the others are kept as low as possible. That way any attempt to damage the process is restricted.” (Robert Willow, general manager)

“I have led the design of a number of change programmes that I knew would cause resistance from particular members of the executive team. I was able to work around them by giving additional responsibilities to their colleagues. After a while they recognised they were one of the few being excluded from the coalition and they started to make attempts at reconciliation. People’s need for power should never be underestimated. For power to be real you must have people to influence, and if you are not involved in taking key decisions you soon feel pretty powerless.” (Andre Char, director)

“Some years ago when I was a relatively junior member of the management team at my previous organisation, I made the mistake of declining to join a coalition set up by the company chairman. He was nice enough face-to-face but I quickly found I wasn’t invited to meetings I usually attended...Over the next few weeks I was visited by a number of his very polite but insistent messengers who urged me to reconsider my decision. I finally caught on when the sixth visitor said on his way out that
Lord McKenna had always thought I had such a bright future with the firm. I literally had to go to his office and grovel before I was allowed back.” (Steven White, general manager) [Lord McKenna’s name changed]

“One of the best ways of sending a message is to start taking decisions that they are usually consulted about. Hold a committee meeting when they can’t attend and take an important decision that affects their area. All senior managers have a finely tuned sense of where the power lies, and if they detect any being taken away from them they usually come back with cap in hand.” (Colin Salmon, managing director)

If all other methods of persuasion had failed to convert the individual’s resistance into support or at least passive co-operation, and the coalition builder believed the change was in the best interests of the organisation then they took steps to remove the individual from the organisation. Clearly, removing a member of the top management team was an act that required the sanction of the chief executive officer. Interviewees were keen to point out that this course of action was only used as a last resort when either there were intense time pressures and the resistor was forcing the coalition off its critical path, the co-operation of the office held by the individual was essential to the design process, or the resistor was threatening disruption within their own area of control.

All participants were in agreement that downward inter-tier coalition building tactics inherently invoked the hierarchical position of the influencer. Whether it was persuasion through the presentation of a rational business case, reward or coercion, the coalition builder could not escape the possibility that less senior colleagues in the top management team were complying rather than committing to their involvement in the large scale change proposal coalition. The greater the gap in seniority between the coalition builder and the potential member, the greater the likelihood that compliance was a decisive factor.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented findings in relation to lines of enquiry #3 and #4. We have considered the approaches, behaviours and tactics used by members of top management teams in their capacity as builders of large scale change proposal coalitions.
We began by examining the concept of tiers in top management teams and identified four hierarchy based levels. The chairman, chief executive officers and managing directors were the most senior, followed by directors, general managers and then heads of function and senior managers. The evidence collected from fifty interviewees drawn from these positions suggested the existence of a different coalition building sequence for each level. This is the only research to identify and describe this characteristic of top management teams. These findings provide compelling reasons for academics to re-configure the research agenda into managerial elites so that the top management team is not treated as a homogenous strategic decision making group. This evidence also supports the notion that large scale change is not a rational-linear affair and the key actors within it adopt a pragmatic political behaviour based approach to winning support and coalition building for the purpose of designing and proposing large scale change. These findings also suggest that structure is an influential determinant of behaviour. Coalition builders are acutely sensitive to their position in the hierarchy in relation to those whose support they are attempting to co-opt. However, interpersonal relationships between builder and potential member and the magnitude and complexity of the large scale change being proposed are also important determinants of behaviour. The call made in chapter two for researchers to treat power as residing simultaneously in multiple locations, and to study the phenomenon in specific contexts is given strong support by the fact that these findings are the result of empirical research rather than theoretical arguments.

Having discussed the four sequences in detail, we then examined the behaviours and tactics used during upward inter-tier, intra-tier, and downward inter-tier coalition building exercises. Using anecdotal evidence it was argued that upward inter-tier building required more complex tactics than either intra-tier or downward initiatives. It was also reported that upward coalition building exercises had tier-specific tactics. A characteristic not present in intra-tier building and less pronounced in downward approaches. Intra-tier coalition building was distinguished by the wariness of individuals attempting to enlist the support of someone against whom they were often competing for advancement. The main finding from the analysis of downward inter-tier building was the inherent presence of coercion due to the higher seniority of the builder in relation to the potential member. Whether or not the coercive powers were deployed, the target of the influence was aware they lay behind the presentation of rational logic and the use of reward. The greater the hierarchical gap between the coalition builder and the target, the more likely it was for the target to join the coalition for reasons of compliance rather than
commitment. No other research has investigated large scale change proposal coalition building behaviours and tactics used in top management teams. That this study is able to describe those used in upward, downward and same level initiatives is a significant advancement in our treatment of managerial elites in the change context. It lays the foundations for further research to challenge and deepen the descriptions. The findings have important implications for academic enquiry and practitioners and these are discussed in chapter nine.

Having analysed the behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader during the building phase of a coalition's life-cycle, we will now consider those used in the next phase, when the leader's objective shifts from building to sustaining the coalition.
Chapter 7

Sustaining large scale change proposal coalitions: leadership behaviours and tactics in four coalition types

"You can't be an idealist when dealing with politics. The only way to survive and prosper is to be a pragmatist." (Simon Falcon, CEO)

Introduction

In the last chapter we considered how large scale change proposal coalitions were established. In this chapter we discuss how they were sustained successfully until the proposal was submitted for approval or rejection by the appropriate decision makers in the top management team. We consider the behaviours and tactics used by coalition leaders in their role as sustainers. The results presented in this chapter relate to line of enquiry #5 which investigated whether or not different types of large scale change proposal coalition exist in top management teams, and in the event they did, report on the key characteristics of each, and the behaviours and tactics used by coalition leaders in the different types.

Four large scale change proposal coalition types

Analysis of the interviews conducted with the fifty participants’ found four principal types of large scale change proposal coalition existed in the fourteen top management teams studied:
- Aligned coalitions,
- Unaligned coalitions,
- Unfocused coalitions, and
- Fragmented coalitions.

There were a small number of hybrid variations of the four coalition types, and it is possible that in a larger sample these would have been more pronounced. However, in this study the differences were not significant enough to support a separate categorisation. Thus, the discussion will be restricted to the four coalition types that were found across a range of organisational settings.

Of the four coalition types the most stable and cohesive was the aligned coalition. This was followed by the unaligned coalition and then the unfocused coalition. The least stable and cohesive structure was the fragmented coalition. It was found that stability and cohesion were regarded by participants as positive characteristics which encouraged the design of a change proposal likely to be approved for implementation. Consequently, the aligned coalition was the most desirable coalition type to create and sustain. However, on occasion there were circumstances when it was not possible due to interpersonal problems between coalition members or extraneous organisational and environmental factors such as resistance from colleagues or the announcement of a take-over of the organisation by another entity. Pressures which caused individuals to reassess their commitment to the coalition.

From the perspective of the coalition leader there were four key differences between the aligned coalition and the other less stable and cohesive coalitions. In less stable coalitions there was firstly, a tendency for higher levels of coercion to be used, secondly, a greater propensity to seek personal reward, and thirdly, more frequent renegotiation with members to sustain their commitment to the coalition. These three factors combined to result in the fourth factor, increased maintenance time required to keep the coalition together. These issues in the context of sustaining large scale change proposal coalitions are illustrated in Exhibit 7.1.

The closer the coalition type to the fragmented coalition, the more demanding was the task of the coalition leader in terms of the time required to sustain the group and the range of behaviours and tactics necessary to do so. We will now consider, with
anecdotal evidence, the behaviours and tactics used to sustain each of the four coalition types.

Exhibit 7.1 - Leadership issues in sustaining large scale change proposal coalitions

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<th>Coercion</th>
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**Behaviours and tactics in aligned coalitions**

An aligned coalition was one in which its members were agreed on the overall objective and how to achieve it. Activities tended to be complementary and any conflict which emerged was typically constructive tension, to the extent that it was used positively to improve coalition performance. The coalition leader’s primary concern was how to sustain the alignment of members in order to maintain effectiveness and maximise the likelihood of accomplishing the agreed objective. In general, the behaviours and tactics needed to achieve such a shift were found to be less sophisticated than those required by a leader of an unaligned, unfocused or fragmented coalition. Aligned coalitions were found most often in situations where the proposed change was relatively uncomplex or uncontroversial, or paradoxically because it was complex and controversial but time pressures forced members to align quickly behind a common objective.

One such scenario was found in an organisation where one of the directors —Sylvester Martin— described the top management team as being “at war with one another.” The company was being threatened with take-over due to poor performance. The
organisation's top management team had only a few weeks to present a credible alternative for significantly improving shareholder value. Gerry [name changed], the chief executive elected to prepare a pre-emptive bid defence by establishing a coalition tasked with designing a two-pronged strategy. The first prong was a large scale cost reduction programme, while the second prong detailed an accelerated revenue enhancement initiative based on the launch of a new product platform. The coalition—in this case the majority of the top management team—recognised the strong likelihood that they would lose their jobs in the event of a take-over, and therefore decided to put their differences aside and align behind the chief executive's strategy.

As we have already noted the primary task of the leader of an aligned coalition was to sustain the unity of intent amongst members until the submission of the change proposal. It was found that two tactics were commonly employed to do this:

- Control information dissemination, and
- Link coalition members' career progression to the successful implementation of the proposal.

**Control information dissemination**

Coalition leaders endeavoured to create stable conditions that encouraged cohesiveness amongst members. One of the favoured methods for achieving stability was the control of information dissemination within the team, and between the team and other parts of the organisation. As we see from the following series of remarks there were three key reasons for this. The first reason was that it provided a mechanism for the coalition leader to establish a position of influence over members:

"If they are being honest any senior manager will tell you that information is power. There may be occasions when you want only one or two individuals to be made aware of something so that you can influence their behaviour, or there may be times when you want to flex your muscles and prove you are the gatekeeper. The point is that you can shape people's behaviour and their opinion of you by manipulating information. You have to control information or it will undermine your authority as rumours and counter rumours spread through your team." (Richard King, CEO)
"What you have to do is divide the group into activity based units that communicate with each other through you. Make sure you are the only one who knows how everyone's contribution fits into the overall strategy, and let it be known that you are the communication lynch-pin of the coalition by being first to publicise privileged information. Everyone will then gravitate towards you to be updated on progress and to find out how the rest of the executive body views the group's work." (Bert Starling, managing director)

A second reason why coalition leaders sought to control the dissemination of information was that it enabled them to determine the content of communication with members:

"In the course of preparing a detailed change programme, there will inevitably be times when there is bad news as well as good news, and quite often you have little opportunity to decide when it happens. What you can affect is how the communication is delivered. Granted, there is news such as take-overs, closures and job losses that is too big to be controlled, but the everyday tittle-tattle and low level announcements can be packaged into a message that has your gloss on it." (James Brown, senior manager)

He recalled:

"In one team I put together I described to them how the announcement about the cutback in expenditure made the success of our new product development initiative crucial, since additional revenues would release the downward pressure on expenditure. If I hadn't done that there was a good chance they would have thrown in the towel there and then since it had implications for high cost items such as R&D and new product development." (James Brown, senior manager)

The third reason why coalition leaders attempted to control the dispersal of information was because communication provided a lever to motivate key individuals. As the following assertions suggest, this was used to encourage members to improve their own performance or to modify their behaviour for the purpose of optimising the coalition's performance:
"I have had to tell people on a number of occasions to pull their finger out. The one thing that many people forget when they take on large change planning exercises is that they can't be done on a part-time basis. People often see these projects as a good way of catching my eye by being seen to do things beyond the call of duty. The problem is they end up between a rock and a hard place because they fail at both. There are also occasions when managers don't pull their weight and I have to tell them that there is no room for passengers on the change train. A well timed reference to the chief executive's interest in our project usually does the trick." (Arthur Kestrel, managing director)

"As circumstances change you have to be able to adapt the proposition you are putting together so it remains the best option. This may mean taking one or two of the members to one side and asking them to shift their effort from one aspect of the design to another. It can be a bit tough asking someone to ditch several weeks of work that you originally sold to them as being vital, but you have to maintain flexibility within the team." (Robert Willow, general manager)

After a brief pause he continued:

"An example of this from a couple of years ago was when we had a particularly bad set of results, which meant the closure and sell-off of a number of our non-core subsidiaries. I had to ask several members of the team to start again because we had been planning to use the spare capacity of those plants. At a practical level, the members had to switch their approach from winning the buy-in of those plant managers, to informing them, at least in one instance, that they were going to be made redundant." (Robert Willow, general manager)

Link coalition members’ career progression to the successful implementation of the proposal

In order to encourage commitment coalition leaders often sought to tie members’ careers to the success or failure of the proposal’s implementation, thereby providing every
member with an incentive to ensure they produced a results oriented, pragmatic design. The following remarks indicate how the current management vogue for team working and empowerment helped to forge the linkage:

“Once I have got the team together I hold a launch party, and invite the chief executive and chairman along. Everyone gets a personal introduction and an opportunity to discuss their role. The team really enjoy it, feel important and go away on a high. Such high visibility events engender team spirit and are symbolic in the sense that you get everyone into the same boat.” (Geoffrey Silver, director)

Leaning back in his chair and closing his eyes George Lark made the following comment:

“I call this the ‘domino’ approach to team management, because if one falls down the whole lot go with them. The beauty of it is that you get to call it empowerment, because you give responsibility and accountability to individuals, thereby gaining their buy-in. It is only when the final deliverable looms they realise they are inextricably linked to the quality of their output. If the output is looking good they feel proud, and quite rightly everyone hears about their involvement. But if it looks as though it is going pear-shaped then there is nothing like the threat of negative association to develop a cohesive team and get things back on track.” (George Lark, managing director)

The last remark hints at a manipulative style of leadership but the majority of coalition leaders believed that credit should be given to those who delivered good results and blame should be laid at the doors of poor performers. Coalition leaders argued that because top management teams often consist of relatively few individuals, all of whom know each other on first name terms, members taking credit for work well done by others was seen as short-termist, and no-one admitted to having done so, although most could cite instances when it had been attempted by others. Therefore, any credit they sought was for the successful demonstration of managerial and leadership qualities and the ability to deliver the overall project.
Behaviours and tactics in unaligned coalitions

An unaligned coalition was one in which its members were agreed on the overall objective but not how to achieve it. Activities tended to be non-complementary and any conflict that occurred was often not used positively, thereby reinforcing the unaligned nature of the coalition. The primary task for the coalition leader in their role as sustainer was to align the members in order to increase the likelihood of submitting a change proposal that would be approved for implementation. In general the behaviours and tactics required to achieve such a shift were more sophisticated than those required by a leader of an aligned coalition. Unaligned coalitions were often due to the proposed change being relatively uncontroversial, but the route to delivering it somewhat contentious. This meant that coalition members would disagree as to the activities to be undertaken. As Exhibit 7.2 conveys the objective for the leader of either the unaligned, unfocused or fragmented coalition was to transform it into an aligned coalition.

It can be noted from Exhibit 7.2 that unaligned coalitions required more maintenance time generally, greater coercive measures, additional personal rewards, and renegotiation between the coalition leader and members in order for it to remain intact and working towards the delivery of a large scale change design. These additional tasks were found to require a modified set of behaviours and tactics compared with those used by the leader of an aligned coalition. However, it is important to note the tactics were additive rather than substitutive. It was proposed at the beginning of this section that the members were agreed on the objective but not how to accomplish it. When talking about unaligned coalitions, informants described the team dynamic as unstable, with individuals typically threatening to leave the coalition to join a rival initiative. Obtaining their continued support required negotiating skills and the willingness to coerce or offer reward if necessary.

In addition to the two tactics used by the leader of an aligned coalition, it was found that leaders of unaligned coalitions used three other principal tactics:

- Manipulate decision making processes,
- Create a ‘hard’ vision, and
- Activity map by majority rule.
Manipulate decision making processes. The problem of members disagreeing over how to deliver the agreed objective was resolved, in part, by modifying the manner in which decisions were made. In some instances coalitions were left unformalised and the coalition sustainer led by common consent. This meant the behaviours and tactics tended to be more complex than those used by leaders who relied heavily on formal authority by virtue of their position in the hierarchy. Respondents suggested it was difficult to identify the point where influence through formal authority gave way to non-hierarchical influencing skills, since hierarchical advantage was always implicit in discussions between individuals from different levels. Therefore, when attempting to modify decision making processes coalition leaders tended to enlist the co-operation of others rather than rely on their position in the hierarchy to enforce decisions. This finding is supported by the following comments:

"...changing the way in which decisions are made begins with finding the people in the coalition who agree with you on the way forward. You then employ divide and conquer tactics by picking off and converting the dissidents one-by-one until the group is of a sufficient size to suppress opposition and take what appears to be a democratic decision on the way forward." (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)
"If the decision making system is not working then it must be changed. Consensus management is the most ludicrous and difficult way to get things done. You can’t be an idealist when dealing with politics. The only way to survive and prosper is to become a pragmatist. In a coalition where people cannot agree on how to accomplish the goal, its leader should break the deadlock by making deals. For better or for worse you have to eliminate the obstacles at some stage, and you may be required to give ultimatums to some, and unfair disproportionate benefits to others. It is not possible in coalitions to jump up and down shouting ‘I am in charge’. You need the support of either a majority or at least the ones who are crucial to the plans being accepted.” (Simon Falcon, CEO)

He continued:

“I remember when I had to change a decision making process in order to get things moving. There were nine of us in the coalition and whilst we all agreed on what we wanted to achieve there were four views on how we should do it. We were in danger of not doing anything when I decided the situation was untenable. I waited until two of the group were overseas and then started negotiating with the four individuals who did not share the view held by three of us. I offered additional responsibilities to two, threatened one with the loss of her bonus and promised the other a six month sabbatical once the change had been implemented. If it’s broke fix it.” (Simon Falcon, CEO)

Create a ‘hard’ vision. Objectives that were poorly defined and left room for disagreement were proposed as a cause of unaligned coalitions. So called ‘soft’ visions—fuzzy and solely emotionally based—resulted in several interpretations of the ‘agreed’ objective which meant that when it came to planning activities it was exceedingly difficult to establish a mutually acceptable and achievable programme. Consequently when it came to designing large scale change, members were as likely to pull apart as pull together. In several organisations this situation was remedied by holding visioning workshops that developed a ‘hard’ vision comprising targets, measures and activities. The importance of these three factors is conveyed in the comments of coalition leaders who employed this approach:
"Looking back I have only myself to blame for not being specific enough when I was putting the team together. I painted a picture on too broad a canvas with the result that people saw different things. I suppose I was subconsciously aware of it but I turned a blind eye in favour of pumping up the team. Next time I will make the end goal very clear." (Annie Swallow, managing director)

Offering an example to evidence her analysis she commented:

"Anyway, we were about three or four days into formulating our proposition when a disagreement about the purpose of the exercise broke out between two individuals. Everyone was in the room at the time so it quickly became clear that every person had a different expectation. Eventually everyone sat in silence looking at me for the answer. I could see that I risked alienating some if I gave my answer there and then, so I announced we would hold a facilitated workshop to confirm the goal and how we were going to achieve it." (Annie Swallow, managing director)

Pausing, ostensibly to collect her thoughts, she concluded:

"I don’t think I could have chosen a better course of action. We got a recently retired director to facilitate the meeting and spent the morning hammering out a vision with tangible targets. The facilitator also made us develop measures which we all had to sign up to. By the end of the day we had a reference document containing our vision, how to get there and how to measure progress. We all signed the document and made a copy each, and from that day on we all worked in the same direction and there were no more serious disagreements." (Annie Swallow, managing director)

"For me the important thing is measurement. It is one thing having a vision and getting people’s support for it, but it is crucially important to drive down to the activity level and develop measurement systems. That way there is no room for people to disagree over the way things should be done. I find that when people try to wriggle out of projects they usually argue they didn’t know what was really involved. Make sure you have
agreed measures at the activity level and no-one can claim the vision was ambiguous.” (Richard King, managing director)

Both of these quotes make reference to the process of planning the activities that would deliver the agreed objective. This was the third principal behaviour exhibited by coalition leaders faced with the task of sustaining alignment.

Activity map by majority rule. Several coalition leaders were found to align members by inviting them to map out the activities required to deliver the agreed way forward. Once again this was often in the format of workshops. However, one useful tactic was to lay down the ground rule that the majority view would be adopted if a total consensus could not be reached in the given time frame. Those who did not agree still had to sign up:

“I actually had the suggestion made to me by one of the group who said he was fed up with the lack of progress and would follow a plan agreed to by most of the group rather than sit around arguing and not doing anything. Once everybody had agreed to this we were on our way.” (Owen Rudd, head of function)

“You have to understand how to motivate people. Even if they don’t get their own way most people will still go along if they feel they have at least been listened to. Senior managers can’t afford to go off and sulk these days or someone else will be knocking on the door to take their place. Just give people the opportunity to contribute to the design and then shape it in the direction you want by playing the role of problem owner or expert. It’s your idea and you will have spent more time thinking about the issues than they have at this stage so your scope for influencing the design is greatest at this point.” (Derek Barbel, director)

These then were some of the behaviours and tactics favoured by leaders of unaligned coalitions in their attempts to align members. As we will see in the next section, leaders of unfocused coalitions use a broader range of tactics to focus and align members into an effective team.
Behaviours and tactics in unfocused coalitions

An unfocused coalition was one in which its members were not agreed on the overall objective and consequently found it difficult to work together in a co-ordinated manner. Although conflict tended to emerge around the objective, members were willing to work together if an objective was commonly agreed. The primary concern for the coalition leader was how to focus and align the members in order to improve the likelihood of delivering an implementable plan for change. In general the behaviours and tactics required to achieve such a shift were more sophisticated than those required by a leader faced with sustaining either an aligned or unaligned coalition. Unfocused coalitions were found to occur in situations where the proposed change was complex and likely to impact on many of the coalition members' areas of responsibility. Thus, disagreement on the overall objective existed because coalition members sought to maximise self-interest.

The behaviours and tactics commonly used by leaders to improve stability and cohesion in unfocused coalitions were the same as those used by leaders of unaligned coalitions:

- Create a 'hard' vision, and
- Activity map by majority rule.

Additionally, participants referred regularly to three other techniques:

- Create an enemy,
- Produce quick wins, and
- Trade resources.

The first priority of the leader of an unfocused coalition was to establish a shared objective amongst the members since this would help to create alignment and cohesion. A number of the participants with experience of this situation resolved the problem by conducting a visioning workshop.

Create a 'hard' vision. The process was very similar to that employed by the leader of an unaligned coalition. However, the key difference was that the scale of the task in unfocused coalitions was greater since the members could not agree even on a loose vision that needed tightening up with targets, measures and activities. Workshops were used as the final step in achieving a common vision but the majority of the sustainer's
time was spent negotiating with members backstage on a one-to-one basis. The following comment supports the contention made in Exhibit 7.1 that unfocused coalitions were higher maintenance in terms of the frequency of renegotiation, and the use of coercion and personal reward as inducements for commitment:

“In the change process I led last year, there were times when I had to behave in a way that could be described as political. For example, early in the process my team could not agree on a goal and it was getting to the point of breaking up. In one of my previous jobs I worked with a great politician who taught me that to get people to do what you want it is necessary to understand their personal agendas. It seems insanely obvious, but like he said, think how much time we spend convincing people of our agendas without appreciating their own. I have used his advice ever since and I have to say it is far more effective than attempting to argue your way to victory by rational means.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

Elm then went into a lengthy account of an experience he had leading an unfocused team:

“My team were on the verge of disintegration and time was running out. My first task was to identify those who were closest to my position. Out of the seven people I thought that two had the same general idea as me, two were waiting to see which way the wind would blow and two were edging towards the view held by one individual who had gone from being my biggest supporter to my biggest opponent since her attempt to hijack the group for her own purposes. The problem stemmed in part from the fact that I was one of the more recent additions to the senior management team and I was something of an unknown quantity.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

After a brief description of his previous roles he resumed:

“I went to talk separately to the two people I thought were closest to my position and asked them three questions. What did they want to see happen? What did they want to achieve for themselves out of the project? What concerns did they have? I was a little surprised to find that the real
concern for them was not the change I was proposing, they thought that was a good idea, but the fact that, because I was new to the company, I didn’t have a track record for delivering large projects. By allying themselves to me they felt exposed.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

Pausing for a moment he then continued:

“To offset the risk they were taking I agreed to reduce the scope of the planned change to the core elements of what I thought the business had to achieve in the coming year. I also offered them higher profile roles in the coalition as workstream leaders. It was an important win for me because they are both well respected directors, and whilst they are not the most senior, they do have the reputation of getting things done and doing what is best for the business.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

He added:

“The next step was to win the support of the two who were waiting to see which way the wind was blowing. My natural instinct was to do it myself, but on reflection I decided to ask the two directors to go and win them over. Partially because they were at the same level or more senior, but also because as converts to my cause they were likely to be more convincing than me because they could offer an unbiased view...Jane [name changed] fell into line once she saw that the other two had committed their support, but Steve [name changed] realised he had room to manoeuvre and extracted a number of favours from me regarding resources in return for his support.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

Concluding his recollection of the episode Elm, by now very animated and gesticulating, remarked in an intense manner:

“We were now in a position of five against three and the momentum was building up. We started to send signals that if they weren’t going to join us we would go it alone. We had one or two meetings to get the ball rolling, and we asked the chairman for his advice and input into the planning process. Once the other guys found out that it was going to
happen with or without them they asked to rejoin the group...I told them that if there was any further disagreement as to the purpose of the group they would be cut. I also transferred some of their project responsibilities to the others who I considered to be more loyal. A lot of these threats, if you want to call them that, could only be made because I had the support of people more senior than me. I wouldn’t...couldn’t... have been as blunt by myself...As for the chap who I mentioned earlier had become an obstacle. We eventually informed him we no longer required his input.”

(Francis Elm, general manager)

Activity map by majority rule. As in the unaligned coalition, once a common vision had been established the next step involved developing a detailed plan of the activities required to formulate a design for change. Once again the most common approach was to conduct a workshop, the purpose of which was to reach a consensus on the way forward.

In addition to vision formulation and activity mapping, leaders of unfocused coalitions commonly cited the use of three tactics that leaders of aligned and unaligned coalitions did not.

Create an enemy. We noted at the beginning of this chapter that coalition leaders endeavoured to create a stable and cohesive team. It has been asserted this was achieved in part by agreeing firstly, a vision and secondly, the activities necessary to prepare a proposal for submission to the top management team. In addition to these two approaches, one other popular method of creating cohesion and stability was to identify an enemy the coalition could compete against. Participants were keen to point out that resources in organisations are finite and less than the sum of the demands placed on them by the full range of strategic options. Therefore, coalitions found themselves typically in bidding situations from which emerged winning and losing propositions. Many leaders exploited this tension to increase the level of commitment from members and generate a team spirit. The following remark is illustrative of the lengths to which some leaders would go to create a cohesive team:

“The shift in strategic direction that we were proposing required a huge investment of management time and financial resource. If accepted it would be the major undertaking of the year and supersede all other
activities. What we were proposing was a radical restructuring that meant acquiring companies and selling off non-core units.” (Fred Hawk, director)

He recalled:

“Just after we started preparing the plan, one of the other directors who was in charge of several of the units we were proposing to lose, set up his own task force to look at alternative options. He is a resourceful, hard headed businessman and I knew he would play hard to win. If we were going to be successful we would have to wring out every ounce of potential from the team. We had to want to beat them. It had to be competitive. I commandeered a project room, put a lock on it and papered over the windows so no-one could see in. I got us a microwave, fridge and kettle, and we put up motivational slogan’s around the room. The room became known as ‘the bunker’.” (Fred Hawk, director)

Some leaders went even further, taking the team off-site for the duration of the project. Holidays were sometimes cancelled, weekends often went untaken and one coalition leader even installed sofa-beds in the project room so that people did not have to go home.

Produce quick wins. In situations where the coalition was unfocused or there were competing coalitions, some leaders thought it was important to secure positive support from influential decision makers:

“There is nothing more motivating than having the chairman or chief executive come down to see how things are progressing. Tired individuals suddenly find the will to work even longer hours.” (Ray Bream, senior manager)

“I try to break the proposal formulation into stages for two reasons. Firstly, no-one is surprised by the magnitude of what we are proposing at the final presentation since they have seen it evolve, and secondly getting people to say ‘yes’ at crucial junctures is motivational for everyone involved in putting the bid together. On extremely large and complex proposals it is tough to sustain effort for long periods of time without
encouragement because as people tire they can become depressed or cynical about the chances of success. It is vitally important to receive regular boosts.” (Philip Birch, senior manager)

Trade resources. In the earlier section on creating visions we noted how some coalition leaders engaged in the trading of favours and resources as part of the renegotiation for continued commitment. It was found that members of top management teams entered into agreements in respect of secondments of key personnel, support for a members’ own initiative at some future point in time, transfer of financial resources, loaned equipment, and access to privileged information. The extent to which a coalition leader would bargain was contingent upon how important they believed it was to enjoy the continued commitment of the individual with whom they were negotiating:

“Sometimes the contribution of a particularly bloody-minded individual might be quite minor, but having their presence on the inside is infinitely preferable to having their opposition on the outside. I feel much more comfortable being able to keep an eye on someone whose commitment and motive is questionable. If that means I have to agree to scratch their back some time in the future then in my view that is a price worth paying.” (Michael Gold, director)

“I once had to agree to second three of my best people in return for a colleague’s support because the idiot had fucked up big time in sorting out the firm’s logistics and needed someone competent to bail him out. I had to have his support because our proposal impacted on the distribution fleet which was under his control.” (Geoffrey Silver, director)

“In my experience trading between executives is rife. In some companies it is more explicit than in others, but I have never worked anywhere and not had to give and take to get things done. You can’t risk blowing your plans simply because it seems unprincipled to oil the wheels. If people weren’t prepared to trade, everything would grind to a halt. Every company has a ‘favour bank’, you just have to know your limits and use it wisely.” (Scott Bishop, director)
During the course of the interviews and the subsequent analysis of the responses given by participants it became apparent there was a fourth type of coalition that seemed to operate in an imminent state of collapse. Yet in a number of cases the manager contrived to sustain the group and submit a change proposal that was approved for implementation. We will now consider the behaviours and tactics used by leaders of fragmented coalitions.

Behaviours and tactics in fragmented coalitions

A fragmented coalition was one in which its members were not agreed on the overall objective or the composition of the team. Conflict tended to arise around the objective, and members were often unhappy about working together. The primary task for the coalition leader was to un-fragment, focus and align the members in order to improve effectiveness and increase the likelihood of preparing a winning bid. In general the behaviours and tactics required to achieve such a shift were more sophisticated than those required by a leader of an aligned, unaligned or unfocused coalition. Fragmented coalitions were found to occur most often when the organisational environment was in a constant state of upheaval due to intense internal or external pressures. They were also found to exist in situations where the majority of members were attempting to use the coalition to further their own objectives.

In addition to deploying the full range of tactics employed by leaders of the other three coalition types in their role as sustainers, leaders of fragmented coalitions were willing and able to demonstrate considerable innovation and flexibility in the areas of reward, coercion and negotiation. Doing so necessitated the use of several additional tactics:

- Exploit or create a crisis,
- Disproportionate reward,
- Direct coercion,
  - 'heavy artillery',
  - 'ambush',
  - 'leg breaking', and
  - 'sacrificial lambs'.
A consistent theme in respondents' descriptions of behaviours and tactics employed or observed in strongly discordant and fragile coalitions was the direct and forceful nature of leadership actions. A typical comment was that if a coalition was close to disbanding, participative methods were unlikely to produce a common view. It was argued that any semblance of cohesion and stability was best achieved by demonstrating strong leadership. A style that often involved direct confrontation. This contentious stance was summed up best by the following remark which was delivered in a heated manner:

"You can’t be subtle when it is falling down around your ears. You have to get in people’s faces and provoke them into laying their differences on the table. It is essential to get people’s attention and focus their minds. Pussyfooting around won’t get you anywhere. You will certainly upset people and make enemies but what are your options? You play it hard because you have no other choice when your back’s against the wall. You’re not given many chances to deliver when you are at the top. Fail more than once in a big way and you’re out!" (Kurt Nightingale, CEO)

**Exploit or create a crisis.** One popular method of focusing members minds was to exploit or create a crisis that threatened the coalition and by extension the future of its members within the organisation. Crises could ‘emerge’ within the coalition or from the surrounding environment. The following remarks of Bert Starling are abstracts taken from an extended account of an experience he had of leading a fragmented coalition:

"About four or five years ago I was a member of someone else’s proposal project, and it was a disaster. Everyone had their own view on what needed to be done. It was like when you were a child at school and you would talk amongst yourselves when the teacher was trying to get your attention. You would ignore her just to see how much she would tolerate. The real problem was that Peter [name changed] failed to demonstrate leadership. We were a group of strong willed individuals and he didn’t impose himself. One day he walked into what was probably going to be our final meeting and announced that he had just spoken to a City analyst who had heard rumours we were being lined up in the market for a bid. In the same breath he stated that he was disbanding the team in order to start another one." (Bert Starling, managing director)
Laughing at his memory of the event and standing up from his chair to walk around the room, he commented:

"It was as though someone had lobbed stun grenades into the room. Two explosions, one after the other. People were reeling with shock as Peter turned on his heel to walk out. Suddenly people were clamouring for information and nobody would let him leave. People were asking him who the bidder was and what we should do. Proposals flew around the room for twenty minutes or so until it became apparent that no-one really knew what to do. People turned back to Peter for guidance. Drawing out the silence Peter made eye contact with everyone around the room before asking if anyone had a strategy that would stand up to scrutiny. No-one did." (Bert Starling, managing director)

After taking a phone call, he continued:

"Looking back now he had everyone by the balls. Until then no-one had shown any appetite for cutting back on the corporate extravagance, and it was six years since we had last launched any new products which had made a significant contribution to the bottom line. I wouldn't have thought it was possible to turn such a group of malcontents into one that produced such a high quality proposition...When the bid materialised we were able to convince the city that our plans would produce a greater return for shareholders than those of the bidder. Two years later Peter became chief executive, since then he has weeded out the trouble makers and established a highly effective team." (Bert Starling, managing director)

The problem with creating a crisis is that it escalates the risk of the coalition breaking up, and there were several examples of this happening. Instances were cited when members took the view that they were better off outside the coalition, either by themselves or as a member of a more aligned and focused rival coalition.

Disproportionate reward. An alternative to exploiting or creating a crisis was the tactic of offering attractive incentives to individuals whose support was essential to the development of the change proposal. Evidence of 'star player' rewards, significantly
beyond anything offered to other members of the coalition, was referred to by interviewees. However, it appears that such rewards were restricted to very few individuals in exceptional situations where the short term health of the organisation was at risk.

Interestingly, in the four situations where disproportionate reward was cited by interviewees as a tactic for rescuing a coalition from impending failure, none of the individuals receiving the reward were the chairman or chief executive officer. The four rewards made were: share options worth over two million pounds Sterling, promotion from general manager to deputy chief executive officer (missing out the level of director), a bonus equivalent to 4.5 times salary, and the transfer of a company owned residence to the individual who designed a re-engineered process that increased profitability by forty-six per cent over a two year period.

**Direct coercion.** In the event that creating a crisis or disproportionate reward did not create a cohesive team, leaders of fragmented coalitions claimed to use direct coercion as a last resort. Informants stressed the negative aspects of using force with colleagues, but explained it was justified for change initiatives which were critical to the future success of the organisation. Examples were given of relationships that were irrevocably damaged, and in one organisation which requested anonymity, several members of the top management team resigned in protest against a proposal to reduce the workforce by sixty per cent during a three year period.

There follows a discussion of four behaviours used by leaders of fragmented coalitions. Of the fourteen fragmented coalitions recorded in the study, eleven of them had used one or a combination of the tactics discussed below. Additionally, the insight they offer into the backstage behaviour of top management team members in the context of large scale change proposal design make them worthy of consideration.

**'Heavy artillery'.** In situations where the coalition leader was more junior than those whose support they were unsuccessfully seeking to obtain, one course of action was to ask the most senior member of the top management team to enforce co-operation. Participants with experience of this tactic asserted that it could only be used when the change was of critical importance to the organisation, and failure to deliver a proposal would undermine the chief executive’s or managing director’s right to lead:
"If you use the chief executive’s name as a weapon you had better make sure the gun’s loaded, because if they find out you are firing blanks, you might as well get a real bullet and shoot yourself.” (Ian Roach, head of function)

“When I was really up against it and the other guys were blocking because they feared what the change would mean for them, I took the decision to go and seek help from above. It’s the last card in the deck, but if you believe you are right then you have to play it.” (Paul Swan, director)

Exponents of this approach admitted that enforcement tended to generate compliance rather than commitment since members of the team were unlikely to maximise their contribution if they were working under threat of sanction. Leaders also stated that long term relationships were damaged unless individuals derived substantial benefits in return for their support. As one respondent commented:

“People regard bringing in the boss as treachery, so the only chance of forgiveness is if they make big personal wins as a result of their involvement.” (Sam Raven, head of function)

‘Ambush’. Another tactic employed to gain the compliance of obstructive coalition members involved the leader engineering a situation whereby individuals were exposed as resistors in front of the top management team. Coalition leaders invested periods of several days winning the support of key executives outside the coalition before inviting the resistors to make a presentation of the coalition’s progress.

During the presentation the pre-positioned key decision makers would question the members in order to uncover their opposition. Charles Rook asserted:

“In the event that direct accusations were not made against them, they were nevertheless left in no doubt that their non-cooperation was strongly disapproved of, and action would be taken against them later.” (Charles Rook, general manager)

‘Leg breaking’. This rather emotive term was used by one director to describe the process of eliminating an individual’s support amongst his or her own subordinates.
Respondents cited occasions when individuals were able to resist because they led large or influential units, departments or teams. Fred Hawk explained how his company had overcome a powerful individual in order to outsource one of its key functions. The director explained how the head of accounting had tried to sabotage the initiative by ensuring no member of his department supplied the financial information required to conduct a feasibility study. The coalition leader waited until the individual was abroad before appealing directly to his staff. He explained to them that if they co-operated they would have the chance to shape the change and influence their future salary packages and career paths. On returning from his trip the head of accounting found that his only realistic option was to co-operate with his staff who now believed that he had been attempting to protect his own empire rather than promote their interests.

'Sacrificial lambs'. In the most extreme circumstances coalition in-fighting compromised a top management team’s ability to set strategic direction. Two leaders of fragmented coalitions had successfully resolved the problem by removing key resistors from the organisation. It fell to the chief executive or managing director to inform the resistor of their sacking and both the interviewees stressed that such actions had only been taken once all other options had been explored. Interviewees were united in their assertion that termination of employment rather than relocation within the organisation was the appropriate course of action for dealing with individuals who refused to modify their stance if they acknowledged the damage they were causing:

“I had worked with Michael [name changed] for fifteen years and whilst we weren’t best of friends, I didn’t dislike the guy. The fact of the matter was that he was bringing the company to its knees and these days you can’t afford to stand still. Perhaps ten to fifteen years ago we could have negotiated longer, but not now when competitors are breathing down our neck every day and the City is scrutinising our performance every quarter.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

“Sometimes you are just never going to see eye-to-eye with people, and if you have behaved in an honourable manner and investigated all other routes, then they have to be taken out of the game. You cannot let a business suffer because of one or two individuals. Of course you don’t want to lose too many people so you make an example of one.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)
As with calling in the *heavy artillery* this had long term negative implications for working relationships with the remaining coalition members and both the coalition leader and the chief executive had to work hard at rebuilding an effective team and a climate of trust. In response to a question on dismissing individuals who threatened the success of large scale change proposals Kurt Nightingale gesticulated forcefully as he cited former US General Colin Powell’s now infamous press conference statement made during the Desert Storm campaign of the Gulf War in 1991:

"Executive means to execute and there are times when you have to do just that. If one of your own people is damaging the firm’s performance and they refuse to co-operate, then they become the enemy within. You must be quick and decisive. First of all you cut’em off and then you kill’em so the cancer doesn’t spread to the rest of the team." (Kurt Nightingale, CEO)

These then are four direct coercion tactics employed by leaders of fragmented coalitions. It is important to reaffirm the participants’ assertions that they were used only as a final option once all other approaches had failed. A wide range of behaviours and tactics have been discussed in the context of the four coalition types identified in this study. These are summarised in Exhibit 7.3.

**Exhibit 7.3 - Principal leadership behaviours and tactics used in four coalition types**

- **Aligned coalitions**
  - Control information dissemination
  - Link coalition members’ career progression to the successful implementation of the proposal

- **Unaligned coalitions**
  - Manipulate decision making processes
  - Create a ‘hard’ vision
  - Activity map by majority rule

- **Unfocused coalitions**
  - Create a ‘hard’ vision
  - Activity map by majority rule
  - Create an enemy
  - Produce quick wins
  - Trade resources

- **Fragmented coalitions**
  - Exploit or create a crisis
  - Disproportionate reward
  - Direct coercion
  - ‘Heavy artillery’
  - ‘Ambush’
  - ‘Leg breaking’
  - ‘Sacrificial lambs’
It has been stated at several points in this chapter that the principal task of a coalition leader is to create a stable and cohesive team. It was asserted that coalitions exhibiting these characteristics were more likely to submit a winning large scale change proposal than those which displayed less stability and cohesion. As a final footnote to this chapter it is worth discussing briefly the role of constructive tension: a term coined by Pascale (1989) to describe healthy competition amongst key decision makers and business units. The majority of participants adopted the position that a mildly competitive environment within a coalition avoided complacency and stagnation.

Interviewees did not think total harmony between members was conducive to high performance. Indeed many thought that an absence of constructive tension produced sterile, unoriginal recommendations, and most of those expressing this view could cite examples of coalition outputs that had been condemned as such by those who rejected them in favour of other submissions. However, a final note of caution on the subject of conflict and tension is appropriate. A few participants could recall coalitions that had examples of coalition outputs that had been condemned as such by those who rejected them in favour of other submissions. Top management team members advised that tension should be continuously monitored and adjusted throughout the course of a proposal’s preparation. Furthermore, optimal levels of tension were coalition specific and varied according to the interpersonal dynamics between members and the importance of the proposal to the future of the organisation.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented results relating to line of enquiry #5, which set out to consider whether or not different types of large scale change proposal coalitions exist in top management teams, and if they did, the characteristics of each and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in each type. The evidence that there are four types of large scale change proposal coalition which exist in top management teams is a major new insight. The extant literature treats coalitions as a homogenous type irrespective of the change process stage or purpose. The findings presented here suggest that coalitions can vary considerably in their nature and characteristics, and the degree of stability and cohesiveness has an influence on the likelihood of submitting a proposal which receives approval for implementation. The type of coalition also determines the behaviours and tactics required to be used by the coalition leader. This supports the arguments that the
effectiveness of behaviours is contingent upon the prevailing situation. That coercion is deemed a legitimate tactic strengthens the assertion made in chapter three of the literature review that a political behaviour based approach to managing coalitions is necessary to navigate an ambiguous and uncertain change context, characterised by competing agendas, opposition and resistance.
Chapter 8

Dissolving large scale change proposal coalitions

"Once the coalition has fulfilled its purpose and the plan has been accepted or rejected, it is important that people go their separate ways. If the coalition was successful it is tempting to keep the group together...But the fact is you can't do that. If the group is truly first class then you can get a shadow executive, which starts second guessing the real management team." (Peter Ash, CEO)

Introduction

In chapter four we examined evidence to support the assertion that large scale change proposal coalitions exhibit a five phase life-cycle. The finding that leaders of coalitions adopt three primary roles during these phases was presented and discussed. In chapter five we considered how change proposal coalitions were built, and in chapter six we discussed how they were sustained in the context of four coalition types. To conclude the results section of the thesis, this chapter will focus on the dissolution of coalitions. The results presented relate to lines of enquiry #6 and #7 which respectively set out to investigate the issues of coalition life-span and what happens once the proposal has been approved or rejected. The central finding was that coalitions should be dissolved once a proposal has been approved or rejected and any learning has been captured and transferred into the top management team with a view to improving the alignment and cohesion of future coalitions. The reasons behind this consensual assertion are explored along with a review of three favoured dissolution techniques. Dissolution of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams has not been researched previously. The behaviours, tactics and processes identified represent the first empirical insights into this unexplicated element to the change context.
The need to dissolve large-scale change proposal coalitions

In setting the context for this chapter it is important to surface and discuss the issues of instigation, motive and timing in the dissolution of coalitions. It can be argued with respect to instigation, that a coalition can be dissolved either voluntarily by its members or by edict of the chief executive. It is possible for a coalition to break up naturally once a decision on the change proposal has been made by the appropriate decision makers within the top management team. However, it was found that this tended to occur only in coalitions which had been unsuccessful in winning approval. Coalitions that had been successful tended to attempt to continue working together and increase their degree of influence over the strategic direction of the organisation. Kanter, Stein and Jick (1992) in their discussion of coalitions in the context of organisational change contended:

"Though the dominant coalition [in the top management team] takes shape because its collective interest is relatively enduring, challenges to its preeminence and new claims to membership are ever present." (Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992, p.47)

In light of this statement, the motive for dissolution is transparent: self-preservation. Therefore, it was unsurprising to find a unanimous view amongst the chairman, chief executives and managing directors that all coalitions, but particularly successful ones, should be dissolved as soon as practically possible once the proposal had been approved or rejected. Whether couched in arguments on the need to maintain ‘stability’, ‘balance’ or ‘diversity’, the evidence appears to suggest the holders of an organisation’s highest office seek to restore an environment in which their level of influence is maximised or at least not diminished. Dissolution was found to be conducted by the coalition leader and the chief executive officer unless the two roles were fulfilled by the same individual. The CEO by virtue of their structural position in the hierarchy was usually better placed to allocate new roles and responsibilities, disperse coalition members geographically if necessary, place individuals on new projects and generally make pay-offs. However, coalition leaders worked with the chief executive to execute the dissolution in the top management team. This brings us to the question of timing. It has already been mentioned that the view from the most senior interviewees was that coalitions, and specifically successful coalitions, should be broken up at the earliest feasible opportunity. However, it would be erroneous to present the view that the preference was for coalitions to be dissolved rapidly, regardless of the cost to the business. The
instigators were strongly in favour of capturing and transferring learning into the working practices of the top management team for the purpose of improving the alignment and cohesion of future coalition initiatives. Thus the question of timing was situation specific, with the decision driven primarily by the level and immediacy of threat to the existing leader on the one hand, and the nature and complexity of the learnings to be transferred on the other. The dissolution process was found to take weeks rather than months.

The problem of dealing with the issues of when, what and how to dissolve coalitions was best articulated by chief executive, Roger Oak, when he used the phrase ‘throwing out the bathwater whilst keeping the baby’. Adopting this metaphor we will now consider both the ‘bathwater’ and the ‘baby’ in order to gain an insight into the thinking and behaviours of top management team members around the time of coalition dissolution. Exhibit 8.1 summarises the arguments.

Exhibit 8.1 - Reasons for dissolving large scale change proposal coalitions

‘Throwing out the bathwater...’
- Dysfunctional organisational performance
- Transient relationships
- ‘Purging old blood’
- Avoiding ‘them and us’ attitudes in the top management team

‘...whilst keeping the baby’
- Transferable relationships
- ‘Dividing the spoils’
- Skills development
- Enhanced decision making processes
- ‘Restless ambition’
- ‘Institutionalisation of temporary teams’

‘Throwing out the bathwater...’

Although the strongest advocates of coalition dissolution were the chairman, chief executives and managing directors, there was consensus amongst all participants that coalitions should not be allowed to remain intact once the change proposal had been approved or rejected. As conveyed in Exhibit 8.1 the reasoning centred around five key arguments:

- Dysfunctional organisational performance,
- Transient relationships,
- 'Healing wounds',
- 'Purging old blood', and
- Avoiding 'them and us' attitudes in the top management team.

**Dysfunctional organisational performance.** The key concern in allowing the continuation of change proposal coalitions was their potential for negative impact on the performance of the top management team, and by extension the organisation. Participants were aligned in arguing that successful coalitions tended to upset the delicate balance that often exists between the hierarchical and non-hierarchical elements of the team. It was asserted that whilst an infusion of new perspectives, skills and ideas is essential to ensure renewal, the introduction of an influential group is likely to cause fragmentation and the emergence of uncooperative behaviours:

> "When people read books like *Barbarians at the Gate* and *Liars Poker* they gain the impression that executives spend the vast majority of their time fighting for power. In my experience teams function best when there is a degree of stability that simply couldn’t exist if people were constantly wrestling for control. Now don’t misinterpret what I am saying. People don’t love one another but generally they do respect each other’s abilities and right to ambition. It is accepted that it takes time to build up a power base and establish a right to lead and direct. If all of a sudden you allow the latest idea to rule the day you will soon have an anarchic environment in which everyone fights for themselves." (Scott Bishop, director)

Becoming highly animated, he continued:

> "Once you change the rules of the game it descends into political chaos. Anyone who has ever experienced it will testify it’s no way to manage. This is exactly what happened at my last company, which I can tell you is now a sitting take-over target. It became a lawless state in which it was impossible to do anything remotely strategic. Annual turnover of key personnel was forty percent! It is vital to listen to the latest idea, but it is wrong to let the authors of those ideas take control, otherwise you end up with the paralytic Italian style of governance." (Scott Bishop, director)
Scott Bishop's argument found support from a number of others including Patrick Queen. Turning to point at the texts in the cabinet behind his desk, he commented:

"I have read Pfeffer's book Managing with Power and I agree with him that power flows to those who can successfully confront the critical issue facing the company. So if the coalition is developing a strategy to deal with the critical performance issue then they will become increasingly important. People will start to seek them out, and they will be given more responsibilities. If the entire coalition succeeds in developing their power, and individual members decide to wield it collectively they could potentially overthrow the existing top management team." (Patrick Queen, director)

Pausing to remove Pfeffer's book from the cabinet he commented:

"Where I do not subscribe to the theory is when the coalition which successfully confronts the critical issue takes power. You cannot live in an environment of coup d'etats because they would be constant in today's world. The critical issue changes monthly in some industries. What you need is stability at the top...Sure the chief executive may not always be the best person to lead the organisation in confronting a particular issue but he doesn't have to be. He just has to create the appropriate framework. The beauty of coalitions is that you get the best people, but once the issue has been successfully dealt with they must then resume their normal activities. Just because someone makes a great coalition manager doesn't mean they would make a good leader of the company." (Patrick Queen, director)

Further support was found in the remark of Peter Ash:

"Once the coalition has fulfilled its purpose and the plan has been accepted or rejected, it is important that people go their separate ways. If the coalition was successful it is tempting to keep the group together. Everyone feels a winner, and they want to get on with implementing it. But the fact is you can't do that. If the group is truly first class then you can get a shadow executive, which starts second guessing the real management team. I have seen situations where the benefits from having a
coalition were lost because the management team imploded.” (Peter Ash, CEO)

Later in the interview he returned to the issue.

“Once people see an opportunity to increase their power by apparently legitimate means, they are quick to forget the coalition was established to benefit the company. Of course, it would be stupid to break up the group without keeping the good things, but it is important that everybody feels the break up is a normal and constructive part of the overall process.” (Peter Ash, CEO)

The impact on organisational performance of sustaining coalitions beyond the proposal phase was also considered from the perspective of personal cost to key decision makers. The following remarks, made by Geoffrey Silver, were indicative of the views expressed by other interviewees:

“It is an intense and unsustainable way of working. You give it your all and say cheerio to your family for considerable periods of time. But you don’t mind because you know it will end. Most senior managers exposed to such a way of working for an extended period, could not keep up the pace and would seek alternative opportunities outside the company...You can’t afford to lose your best people, and by best I don’t mean the chief executive. As the top man he knows that he has to subjugate himself to the company for his term of office, but for the others who know they are not going to make it to the very top, you have to manage them carefully. They have a life-time of experience, and you can’t afford for them to leave in numbers.” (Geoffrey Silver, director)

Transient relationships. It was found that the intensity of working in large scale change proposal coalitions would often have one of two effects on a relationship between members. Respondents suggested that prior to working in coalitions it was typical to have a relatively neutral opinion of a colleague. However, working intimately with someone for several weeks or months tended to produce views that moved away from neutrality towards a more definite opinion. At one extreme relations were strengthened considerably. At the other extreme relations soured to the point where individuals would
refuse to work together again. We will examine the benefits of transferable relationships later in this chapter, but first we will consider the assertion that dissolving coalitions ensured unproductive relationships remained temporary. Participants asserted that coalition dissolution meant that transient relationships would have a natural end, rather than be forced to continue. As Leonard Plum commented:

“It is inevitable that you get on with some people better than others. After all you are working in a close-knit team for months at a time, and you become like a family. Some people become blood brothers, while others you don’t want to work with again if you can help it. Because it’s a project you know it has a finite life-span, so you are kind of on your best behaviour and more tolerant.” (Leonard Plum, senior manager)

Echoing this sentiment Ann Cherry added:

“In this company I don’t think the coalition way of working would have been as successful if the teams had been forced to continue working together. I think you take forward some relationships because you worked well and they add value to your own thinking and practices, but there are others that you haven’t gained anything from which are best left behind.” (Ann Cherry, head of function)

A more general view was expressed by Matthew Mallard who suggested:

“One of the main benefits of working in coalitions is they are short term. People are exposed to new ways of thinking and working. They get to see parts of the organisation they haven’t seen or really understood before, and for many it will be the first time they have had an opportunity to actively influence the direction of the company.” (Matthew Mallard, head of function)

‘Healing wounds’. A third reason why participants believed dissolving successful proposal coalitions was preferable to sustaining them was that it forced the designers of change to rebuild relationships with those who would suffer if the planned change was implemented. The consensus was that large scale change inherently upsets the status quo, redefining decision making processes, spheres of authority, and reshaping the power
structure. Therefore, those responsible for its design had to work to ensure they still had productive relationships with members of the top management team outside the coalition. This view is conveyed in the following series of remarks from individuals who had experienced being inside and outside proposal coalitions:

"During complex change proposals it is easy to forget that you are tramping about on other people's turf, and even though they may vote for you, they probably are not going to thank you for it. Once the proposal has gone through I usually try to lay low for a while and spend time with those who will lose out under our plan. You have to heal wounds, rebuild bridges, mend fences or whatever you want to call it." (Dick Tern, director)

"It is a foolish individual who neglects to patch things up as quickly as possible, because in a matter of months he or she could find themselves losing out under another plan. You have to find wins for as many people as possible because what goes around comes around." (Stacey Trout, senior manager)

"The one part of my job I find really tough is deciding who should do what in a major re-organisation. I have worked with some colleagues for more than twenty years. Recently I was on the outside looking in and I found out how others must feel. You hear rumour and counter-rumour about what is going to happen, and it is easy to start resenting and resisting those doing the planning." (Francis Elm, general manager)

'Purging old blood'. The majority of interviewees also suggested that proposal coalitions should be dissolved once the plan had been approved because members did not necessarily have the skills required for the implementation phase. A new team would bring new ideas and skills, members of the design team could be rested, while those taken forward could be taught and coached the required skills by colleagues:

"I believe there comes a point, once the project has been okayed, when you need to inject some new blood into the team. It revitalises the initiative, creates new energy and brings a fresh perspective to things." (George Lark, managing director)
"The majority of people are pretty worn out once they get past the psychological milestone of getting the go-ahead. A good analogy is the American football team, where players are continuously taken on and off the pitch. There are teams for defence, offence and there are special teams for key moves. The system allows people to develop core competencies, much like industry with its planners and implementors. A good chief executive will rest his star players because he wants them to stick around."

(John Yew, CEO)

However, the consensus was that there should not be a complete transfusion of coalition members. Continuity of key personnel was regarded as a critical success factor for translating the blueprint into action. David Knight argued the point:

"I remember one major change programme about four years ago. The industry was going into recession and we put together a plan for restructuring the business while it was still healthy. We did a good job, but once it had been approved the managing director took everyone off the project and put together an entirely new team. He said it was because people in the business units should lead it...One could see a certain logic in his argument but I bet if you asked him now he would agree that he should have had one or two people from the design team to explain the rationale and establish the overall context. You definitely need new people but as with most things in company life it is a question of balance."

(David Knight, director)

**Avoiding ‘them and us’ attitudes in the top management team.** It was claimed that proposal coalitions which established permanent roots in the top management team reduced the level of collaboration between individuals. Coalition members tended to work together, excluding members of the wider management team. Several individuals, in different organisations, described the interpersonal dynamics as ‘them and us’:

"If coalitions actually stuck around I think it would be pretty divisive on several accounts. First, you would end up with a powerful group exerting considerable influence over the future direction of the business. Second, that group would piss off people who’s job it is to make those decisions, and third, it encourages a political environment in which you have the ‘in’
crowd and the 'out' crowd. Once you get into that way of thinking speeches about teamwork have a hollow ring.” (William Wren, CEO)

“If the team continues it sustains the thinking that somehow their work is more important than anyone else’s. It is symbolically very important to break up the group, even if some of the key individuals are given new high profile tasks. It sends a message to the rest of the management team that normal business, and equality, has been resumed.” (Mark Finch, head of function)

When asked about this allusion to feeling less than equal, he became quite agitated, leaning forward across the table and stabbing his finger in the air to make the following point:

“You better believe it. It was impossible to get time in Richard’s [name of chief executive changed] diary. He became over-involved, and if you ask me he neglected the other parts of the business. It was as though we stuck in the eye of the hurricane, because it was clear that although everything around us was up in the air, we were left sitting on our hands waiting for the storm to ride out.” (Mark Finch, head of function) [parentheses added]

Clearly there were a number of arguments put forward by participants in support of the claims that large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved once their plans had been approved or rejected. These arguments were presented with particular vigour for coalitions that had been successful. It is important to recognise that while it is easy to identify the motive of self-preservation for the chairman, chief executives and managing directors, no-one at any level in any of the top management teams favoured indefinite continuation.

‘...whilst keeping the baby’

Although all of the respondents argued in favour of disbanding proposal coalitions at the earliest feasible opportunity, it was suggested that dissolution take place only once the learnings and benefits had been captured, disseminated and embedded into the working practices of the top management team. Participants identified six positive aspects of
coalition working which can benefit the working practices of top management team members:

- Transferable relationships,
- 'Dividing the spoils',
- Skills development,
- Enhanced decision making processes,
- 'Restless ambition', and
- 'Institutionalisation of temporary teams'.

**Transferable relationships.** We noted in the earlier discussion on transient relationships that working in coalitions together tended to result in individuals holding a stronger opinion of their colleagues, and that this view could either be more or less favourable. We have already considered the reasons why it is preferable to dissolve coalitions from the perspective of unsuccessful working relationships. However, this is only one side of the story because there were a number of accounts from respondents concerning successful relationships from which all parties had derived benefits. The following series of remarks support this assertion:

"Relationships are the oil that allows the corporate decision making wheels to turn. One of the key benefits I get out of the coalition way of working is the understanding and trust I build up with some of my colleagues. It is said that when you pass steel through fire it becomes stronger, and I think the same could be said for relationships that are forged in times of change." (Steven White, general manager)

He continued:

"Hard as you may try not to, you have to lay yourself bare. Under pressure you inevitably show what makes you tick, what you care about and what you are prepared to fight battles over. But it works because everybody is in the same position. It is a zero sum game if people want to use the information against each other. I think you come out at the other end with a healthy respect for your colleagues and for a few in particular you carry forward a deeper understanding that results in a more productive working relationship." (Steven White, general manager)
"I have worked for four other companies in my career, all in different industries. In two of those I have held senior management positions. Looking back now it is quite funny to think that I once thought a good working relationship was someone with whom you didn’t fall out or could enjoy a game of golf. They were rather staid, mature industries and about the only structural change was occasional consolidation between some of the players in response to more nimble companies coming into the market as the industry’s demarcation lines blurred.” (Bert Starling, managing director)

After a short discussion about how the industries had changed over several decades he resumed:

“In this roller-coaster industry [information technology], rapid change is as common as eating your breakfast. Hardly a day goes by without a rumour of a major merger or acquisition or a breakthrough technology about to be commercialised. We are constantly driven by the fear of falling behind. Even if we did have time to play golf, it just wouldn’t provide the foundation on which to build the strength of relationship necessary to plan and drive through a robust, pragmatic change programme...You are constantly working at the edge of people’s physical and mental capacities and you have to have a deep understanding of where your colleagues are in their competence zones at any given time. Gaining such an understanding is something that only comes from working together under intense conditions, but once you have it you will beat the competition on a level playing field nine times out of ten.” (Bert Starling, managing director) [parentheses added]

“Even now I can pick up the phone and receive coaching and advice from individuals I worked with eight or nine years ago in another company. As long as you don’t abuse it, trust never dies. They know too that they can pick up the phone and call me about anything, anytime, and I will be there. It is an elevated form of networking. It is a trust network.” (Dick Tern, director)
'Dividing the spoils'. Another strong theme which emerged from the analysis of participants' responses was the need to share the positive outcomes from successful initiatives. The following selection of remarks are indicative of the views expressed:

“There has to be a pay-back time for putting your reputation on the line. I have been involved in projects where I have had to really go out on a limb for the chief executive, and if it had all failed I have no doubt I would have been canned. If you invest your reputation, time and energy it seems fair to earn a dividend. If the change is a financial success then I would expect to receive a bonus, pay rise or share options. If it is a strategic success then I would expect a promotion or at least a broadening of my responsibilities.” (David Knight, director)

“I think the trick is to avoid situations where there are obviously winners and losers, otherwise you find a mercenary culture establishes itself quite quickly, and that is not conducive to co-operation and teamwork. Of course you do have to reward sterling performance but you don’t rub other people’s noses in it. I am in favour of rewarding people over longer time frames and if possible in groups. That way you lock in good performers and link up destinies. It also keeps people on their toes rather than sitting back on their laurels.” (Robert Willow, general manager)

“What I find works well is dangling the carrot just out of reach. To keep people motivated you have to let them have a few treats but if you give them the whole carrot, then in my experience they tend to ease off a bit and become a little too self-satisfied. You have to know your top team well and keep them motivated at all times which means you can let some eat more of the carrot than others.” (Kurt Nightingale, CEO)

Skills development. Building on the idea of transferable relationships the participants shared the view that coalition working on large scale change initiatives was an effective means of broadening and deepening an executive's skill set. Members of top management teams adopted the position that the magnitude of the risk and reward directly associated with the proposed change forced designers to achieve a degree of originality and robustness not usually required in smaller scale initiatives. When asked “did you ‘grow’ as a result of the experience?” every participant replied in the
affirmative. Interestingly when asked the logical corollary “how?” it was found that managers developed to varying degrees in a number of different dimensions. These are summarised in the Exhibit 8.2.

The following series of short remarks provide a sample of the wide range of benefits derived by individuals as a result of working in coalitions on large scale change planning initiatives:

“If you are going to change the direction of the firm you have to think strategically, and planning teams are a great way of cultivating those skills amongst a number of people at the same time.” (Tom Chub, head of function)

“I confess I rated myself pretty highly on leadership until I had to lead change design teams. I have learnt so much from those around me in the last couple of years.” (Matthew Mallard, head of function)

“I had always thought I had worked in top management teams until I began working in coalitions. Then I realised I had only ever worked in top management groups. I am an extremely strong advocate of working in coalitions on a project-by-project basis. Coalitions are the future of executive working in this company. I have developed skills I didn’t even know existed five years ago.” (Robert Willow, general manager)

“As the good man [Dale Carnegie, 1953] said, it is all about winning friends and influencing people. I would add it is also about making enemies and learning how to deal with them. I have realised that once you stick your head above the parapet and start proposing changes you enter the political game and you see things in an entirely different way. The company is made up suddenly of this coalition and that coalition, and you are either with someone or against someone. You have to take a position because you need supporters to get things done. I have proved I can play that game, but you never know when the tide’s going to change.” (Patrick Queen, director) [parentheses added]
Exhibit 8.2 - Respondent skill development due to working in large scale change proposal coalitions

Terms used by fifty interviewees to describe their skill development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill developed</th>
<th>Number of respondents citing skill</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic thinking</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team working</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Man’ management</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political adeptness</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal networking</td>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial pragmatism</td>
<td>❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌  ❌</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivation (of others)</td>
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<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative thinking</td>
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<tr>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial planning</td>
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<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self confidence</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self motivation</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk management</td>
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<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Responses given by fewer than five people are not reported.

“I have got to where I am today by being a strong ideas man, but I knew that if I didn’t eliminate some of my knowledge gaps in the area of project planning and programme management I wouldn’t go any higher. Having to
build intricate yet pragmatic transformation plans has enabled me to tackle my deficiencies and I now feel confident to take another step upwards.” (Christopher Green, senior manager)

“I was always strong on the financial side of things and I could do projections and budgets until you said ‘enough’. I now realise that there is more to planning than that. I now know that if you can underpin your arguments with a compelling commercial logic you increase your chances of success, both in winning support for your proposal and extracting value from the implementation.” (Fred Hawk, director)

“I have undergone something of a personal transformation over the last twelve months. My 360 degree appraisal feedback told me that people did not enjoy working with me because I had poor communication skills. We have just completed this year’s feedback and I have improved dramatically. I don’t recognise myself from last year. Working closely with the rest of the team, both above and below me has taught me the importance of interpersonal skills.” (Paul Swan, director)

“Shareholder value is something the City are starting to ask about so we have had a consultancy come in to explain the drivers to us, and we now incorporate Economic Value Added in our major change designs. Working in coalition teams has brought the concept into sharp focus for most of the executive group.” (Philip Birch, senior manager)

“Risk and reward were never really an issue for us when our industry was slow moving, but over the last five years or so, we have seen profitability squeezed by global competition and we have had to be more particular about which projects to commercialise. I tend to be labelled the risk expert now which is certainly something I would never have been called twelve months ago.” (David Knight, director)

Even though each of the respondents developed to varying levels in different dimensions, they were unanimous in the contention that exposure to working in coalitions on large scale change planning exercises produced executives and senior managers with more ‘rounded’ skill-sets than those who did not. It was argued that individuals who worked
consistently in such an environment over a period of twelve to eighteen months were better equipped to take on the responsibility of higher office. This sentiment was best captured by Robert Willow who commented:

"I came back from a secondment overseas eager to assess myself against my colleagues. I was shocked to see they had grown to such an extent that I could no longer think of them as my peers. Their growth was beyond what I thought possible." (Robert Willow, general manager)

**Enhanced decision making processes.** Analysis of participant responses also found that working in coalitions could improve an organisation’s decision making processes. Prior to the introduction of coalition working the conventional decision making process had largely been a function of the hierarchy, with the more senior members of the top management team taking the key investment and planning decisions. However, due to the often radical reduction in elapsed decision making time —fifty to seventy per cent reduction was typical— the traditional process was not able to handle the increasing demands placed on it. Particularly as a majority of the participant organisations reported designing larger, complex change plans more frequently.

Respondents proposed that the decision making processes had changed to a model in which knowledge supplanted hierarchy as the key driver. This view appears to support an assertion that large scale change design initiatives can create a new political landscape. One in which top management teams become more fluid as power ebbs and flows from one individual or coalition to another. The ‘so what’ test when posed found that participants, including those in the most senior positions, believed the quality of decision making had improved. Largely, it must be stated, as a consequence of increased rigour and robustness in the proposals tabled. Interviewees at all levels described feeling more confident about large scale change proposals designed in coalition structures than conventional hierarchy based channels.

Decision making was further enhanced by an increase in the number of market opportunities identified. A common view expressed by participants was that coalition working created a competitive atmosphere amongst top management team members. There was constant pressure to build and be in a winning coalition. Bert Starling and Matthew Mallard commented that the constant flow of alternative strategic options benefited both individuals and the organisation. Whereas formal hierarchy based
structures were seen to encourage inertia, temporary coalitions were dynamic, stimulating initiative and innovation.

'Restless ambition'. "Executive life is never the same again after the business has been through a transformational change", commented Andre Char. A common view amongst participants was the belief that large scale change planning exercises created a spirit of restlessness in the top management team as the following comments suggest:

"It is rather like a drug. You just want to keep going. You start to search for your next fix. You want to be the one who finds the next great opportunity. You want the big bonus, the share options, but most of all you want to prove to your colleagues that you are better than they are and that you could run the show." (Geoffrey Silver, director)

"Transformation gets your adrenalin going. You feel great to have been part of something big. The pressure to perform at the top increases because it has been done once and therefore it is expected again. The era of one big change a decade has gone. These days if we don’t generate half a dozen or so major strategic options a year, of which we will pursue between two and four, then we have under-performed. It’s tough work, and for some of the guys it is a real shock to the system because they have created a comfort zone for themselves and they are being forced out of it.” (John Yew, CEO)

“I remember sitting here and thinking, this is why I wanted to make it to the top. To be able to have the power to influence people’s lives. To be able to do things for them they are unable to do for themselves. Sure I have had people complain to me about how they have lost out, but if in your heart you know the decisions should be taken, then you have got to take them. No-one likes the taste of medicine. So few people say thank you, but you feel the change. It is in the air...there is a buzz about the place, a feeling of expectation. People come into work earlier and stay later. They smile more.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

“I love this stuff. I feel proud to be able to use my skills to improve things. I feel a sense of duty to make a positive difference to people’s
lives. Two years ago this organisation was a basket case, now look at us, the City loves us and people enjoy working here.” (Peter Ash, CEO)

‘Institutionalisation of temporary teams’. It was asserted in the earlier section, enhanced decision making, that coalitions brought a dynamic to top management teams in the form of constant energy and innovation. It may seem paradoxical to talk about the institutionalisation of something temporary, but it was a phrase used in one of the organisations to describe the adoption of coalitions as the preferred method for generating strategic change options. By coining the phrase, Roger Oak intended to convey that change had become a constant, and dealing with it effectively required a more fluid structure.

Whilst the consensus was that coalitions should be dissolved, respondents were united in their belief that the coalition way of working should be embedded in the top management team. Based on his experience of working in coalitions Roger Oak stated:

“I think networks and coalitions are the future of change management and top management team working practices for several reasons. Firstly, high performers seek each other out to work together and secondly, in large organisations where there are numerous opportunities for change, high performers inevitably learn how to by-pass the bureaucracy which slows the decision making process down. Lastly, the younger generation of senior managers who are starting to come through now are naturally more team oriented than the traditional executive who got to the top usually by individual performance.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

A common view was that senior managers and members of the executive were more trusting in transferring decision making power to others on the basis that it was temporary. Bert Starling described this symbiotic nature of decision making power as “…the planets orbiting around the sun, with the hierarchical top management team being the sun and the temporary teams the planets.” He went on to argue, “…that if the sun were to be extinguished, the planets would descend into chaos, so it is in the interests of everyone for the sun to exist.”

Astronomy metaphors aside, the opinion across all hierarchical levels was that temporary coalitions within the top management team had a positive impact on organisational
performance, and therefore, are a valuable means of designing large scale change initiatives.

The mechanics of dissolution

With a strong consensus on the need to disband large scale change proposal coalitions once the benefits had been extracted, the question emerges of how dissolution is achieved. In most instances it was only the most senior individual in the organisation who could take steps to ensure the coalition was not able to exert unsolicited influence on the strategic direction of the organisation behind the scenes. The evidence suggests that three principal tactics were frequently used to dissolve coalitions:

- New roles and responsibilities,
- Geographic dispersal, and
- New projects.

New roles and responsibilities. It has already been noted that coalition members believed it was important they were rewarded for their involvement in successful large scale change proposals. The most favoured reward amongst participants was hierarchical advancement since promotion was public confirmation to the other members of the top management team, and the larger organisation, that an individual had played a key role in a successful initiative. Other benefits usually included increases in compensation, share options and access to larger bonus pools. The following two remarks were typical of the broader body of opinion:

"It is proof positive that you have done a good job and are regarded as a key strategic thinker..." (Patrick Queen, director)

"It sends a message to the rest of the senior team that innovation is encouraged and rewarded." (Annie Swallow, managing director)

The next best alternative to hierarchical advancement was a lateral move into a strategically or financially important area of the business:
“Being given responsibility for one of the core lines of business is a vote of confidence from the CEO that you have the ability to manage and grow the area.” (Fraser Tench, director)

“...such a move can go either way. You can make a success of it and go on to greater things, or you can blow it. It is always preferable to be given a growth business rather than a mature or declining one.” (Francis Elm, general manager)

Similar in status to a lateral move was the remit to establish a new business unit. However, several respondents expressed the view that this was the highest risk option with the potential to damage career prospects if the business did not become a success:

“About five years ago I was asked to set up a new subsidiary. I was lucky because with a background in venture capital I had been used to growing embryonic businesses. At the time I was reading a book that recounted how Napoleon was given the Egyptian campaign by his generals because they thought it was likely to fail, and he would be eliminated as a leadership contender...I have also witnessed situations in previous employment when the chief executive has given a seemingly impossible task to someone who they considered to be a threat to their leadership. A few were able to deliver and go on to greater things, but some didn’t and they were put out to grass in a business unit.” (George Lark, managing director)

He concluded:

“A smart chief executive tries to lock the winners into all of his major decisions because if he goes down they all go down together.” (George Lark, managing director)

“If you are going to make it to the top then sooner or later you are going to have to be confronted with growing the business. I think it is fair to test someone who appears to have the potential. Sure it is a poisoned chalice but you need to see what people are made of. Everyone looks good in a
safe environment. The real test comes when you have to stand up and be counted.” (John Yew, CEO)

The least favoured reward, because of the difficulty and risk of the task, according to the majority of interviewees was to be given a turnaround assignment:

“If the business development option is a poisoned chalice then the turnaround job is like being given a bullet with your name written on it…” (John Yew, CEO)

“Most people always think of turnarounds as cost cutting, but that is usually the quickest and easiest task. The real work starts when you have to increase revenues. Unless there has been an idiot in the job before you, there is usually a good reason why the business is in the shit. I think they are the assignments with the most pressure. They just consume all of your emotional energy. I think company doctors can do it only because they can retain a level of detachment which employees don’t have the luxury of.” (Leonard Plum, senior manager)

Awarding new roles and responsibilities enabled chief executives to break up coalitions in a positive manner. None of the participants thought that it was possible to refuse new hierarchical responsibilities without losing face and jeopardising future career development opportunities within the organisation. However, whilst positional responsibilities were the most visible symbols of recognition, a number of roles were also used to develop individuals and share the coalition’s learnings with a wider audience. Three roles in particular were found to be commonly used in the organisations studied: leaders, coaches and emissaries of change.

Chief executives and managing directors allocated leadership roles to individuals they believed had the potential to hold the organisation’s highest office at some future point in time. Examples of leadership roles included heading up prestigious internal task forces to address issues such as reducing operating costs. In one organisation the target was to reduce costs by a percentage that translated into an increase in profitability of three hundred and twenty million pounds Sterling: a task that was achieved successfully. In another company the objective was to increase the number of commercialised new products from six to fifteen per annum. Leadership roles were also given with an
external focus. Several organisations had individuals who sat on boards of environmental, charitable, arts and sports bodies. The assumption behind using leadership roles to groom individuals was that chairmen and chief executives had a duty to portray their organisations as active corporate citizens involved in the development of local communities.

In discussions about the motivation and behaviour of top management team members, the chairman, and several of the chief executives and managing directors added to their earlier comments that coalitions encourage an environment of co-operation based on mutual benefit. To further embed this benefit, key individuals were given coaching roles in which their task was to develop colleagues. Some chief executives and managing directors favoured selecting the pairings, while a smaller number including the chairman were satisfied with allowing the coaches to chose individuals. Those who preferred to select the pairings did so because it enabled them to put together team members who enjoyed a particularly strong rapport or alternatively to force individuals who did not like each other to work together. Coaching roles were found to be an effective way of reducing people’s skills deficits.

The third role which can be described as emissaries of change, refers to the task of disseminating the concept of continuous change to the broader organisation. Four of the chief executives and two of the managing directors expressed the view that if change was to become an accepted characteristic of their organisations’ cultures then it had to reach an audience beyond the key decision makers in the top management team. Walking over to a flipchart in the corner of his office Brian Carp drew a cone shape. He explained:

“It is the 1, 10, 100, 1000, 10000 principle. First one person has the idea for change, then the design coalition sell it to the rest of the executive and the senior management below them. From there it goes down through middle management to the entire organisation. By disseminating the message in waves you pick up the reference group leaders who are much more effective in selling the idea to the rank and file than I could ever hope to be.” (Brian Carp, CEO)

Carp concluded:
"The problem with preaching from the top is the physical and emotional gap between oneself and those with whom one does not have regular contact. I don't know what turns them on, and more often than not my messages would leave them cold and unmoved. If there is one thing I have learnt as the leader of several major change programmes, it is to follow up the grand speeches with a very carefully orchestrated selling programme. That is why it is crucially important to hand pick individuals who are respected by the business to sell the change design." (Brian Carp, CEO)

Geographical dispersal. In organisational environments when a dissolved coalition continued to exert a high degree of influence over the strategic direction of the organisation, chief executives were found to employ the tactic of geographically dispersing members of the coalition across the organisation in an attempt to minimise their influence. Clearly this strategy can only be employed in organisations that have multiple sites, but of the twelve participant organisations that had operations in more than one location, ten had used this approach at some time within the last five years. The following remarks are representative of the arguments used to justify the dissolution of successful teams:

"I was once nearly deposed by a coalition that built up such a momentum for its idea that a sizeable constituency in the management team thought its leader should replace me. Of all the key decision makers I had the support of only the finance director and the chief operating officer. Their intransigence was enough to see me through, but it was a narrow escape...We implemented the change successfully but the guy in question seriously blotted his copy book the next year when he put forward a couple of ludicrous suggestions concerning the takeover of two larger well known companies. We would have lost credibility in the City, and there were absolutely no financial or strategic benefits to be gained from acquiring them. His strong support base disappeared quickly and I have been able to steer the company successfully since." (Bert Starling, managing director)

He concluded:

"It was a valuable lesson though and ever since then I break up successful coalitions as quickly, efficiently and quietly as possible. Sending one or
two of the more vocal members to foreign shores for a tour of duty is usually enough to dispel any question of revolt.” (Bert Starling, managing director)

“It seems paradoxical to say that successful coalitions can be detrimental to the business, but experience suggests that it can be true. Obviously you have to use your judgement because you can’t go tarring everyone with the same brush...Successful coalitions that have quite a few members of the executive can form a powerful group, and they exert a very strong influence over the rest of the team. Their influence is at its greatest in the weeks following the acceptance of the plan, when they believe they can change the world. Whilst not in the long term interests of the business, it can be to its short term benefit if you let them cool their heels overseas for a while. Especially if the ones you send are those who are not needed for the implementation phase.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

Interestingly, the one chairman and seven of the fourteen chief executive officers and managing directors asserted that it can be important to disperse unsuccessful proposal coalitions geographically. The reasons for doing so ranged from the need to remove under-performers from the top management team to the need to maintain morale and commitment amongst the members whose proposal had been rejected:

“Coalitions that fail and constitute a significant proportion of the top team carry the danger of creating a negative, downbeat culture. It is inevitable that people will feel disappointed, embarrassed or aggrieved depending on the reasons for the plan being rejected. You have to take a balanced view in such circumstances...You have to weigh up the importance of the change to the company, understand why they failed, and calculate how much you need the individuals who were involved.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

He continued:

“You can’t wipe out your team, and you have to give second chances, but if it is clear that one or two people were not up to the task, then you have to take decisive action...I know it sounds brutal but anyone who has
worked at the top of companies for any length of time will tell you that the ‘Peter Principle’, which states that people rise to their level of incompetence, is true. It doesn’t mean that they cannot make an important contribution to the success of the company, but it does mean that contribution is likely to be best made slightly lower down or in a non-core area.” (Nigel Kingfisher, CEO)

“If people don’t move on psychologically in a short period of time there is a danger that the management team treads water because the people who were in the team are mulling over the reasons why their plan was rejected. I have seen it turn nasty because it was the rest of the management team that turned down their idea. Therefore, the moment I see signs of it becoming divisive I give them overseas assignments where they can’t do any harm.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

Opposing these views was the comment made by Richard King, which found support from Brian Carp, Annie Swallow and Simon Falcon:

“Your top management team are the real wealth creators and you have to look after them. I don’t buy into this macho crap about one chance and you’re out. You need to cultivate a team spirit which says its OK to take risks and make mistakes. In my experience one of the best pick-me-ups is a challenging foreign assignment that you know they can deliver. Six months away is usually enough to restore confidence. I make regular monthly calls to boost confidence and show they haven’t been forgotten and normally they come back in fighting spirit ready to work on new major change projects.” (Richard King, managing director)

He concluded:

“Just like the banker who is said to be poor if he never makes a bad loan, a senior manager is poor if he never makes a recommendation that is rejected. You want people to push the boundaries and challenge the way we operate. Success today is about radical, purposeful change. Unambitious, incremental change doesn’t put you ahead of the competition any more.” (Richard King, managing director)
New projects. In addition to the need to disband coalitions because they were a threat to the chief executive’s ability to set the strategic direction of the firm, a third reason was that putting individual members of successful coalitions onto new projects was a way of injecting success and best practice into other parts of the organisation. The following remarks appear to confirm this position:

“"In general people enjoy being associated with winners so I find a number of other projects that need taking forward, and I put the guys from the successful proposal on to the new ones. If the initial project was a major transformation, people tend to think those involved have the key to winning.” (Brian Carp, CEO)

“"You have to understand that being a leader is about releasing the energies of those who have ideas. Think about it, you have a number of individuals who are full of enthusiasm, packed full of learning. You can either let it sit there untapped, or you can exploit it by giving them new projects to take forward.” (Luke Sparrow, chairman)

“"It only takes one highly visible success and you can change senior management’s mindset from one of slow change to the art of the possible. I think the chief executive has an obligation to shareholders to utilise the ambitions of senior management. In this day and age ten to twenty heads have to be better than one. Maybe only one in four ideas will come off, but you have to let people run with possibilities. In fact I would say that over the last five years we have switched from the traditional structured planning approach to a simultaneous multiple option approach...You cannot predict the future like you could, you have to have a number of balls in the air at once because you don’t know which one will be appropriate until they come down.” (Roger Oak, CEO)

Conclusion

In this fourth and final results chapter we have brought the analysis of large scale change proposal coalitions to a conclusion with a consideration of the arguments for dissolution and the methods by which it can be accomplished. The results presented in this chapter
related to lines of enquiry #6 and #7 which respectively investigated the issues of coalition life-span and what happens to coalitions once a proposal has been approved or rejected.

Unanimous support from participants for the dissolution of coalitions was based on arguments that continuation had a dysfunctional impact on top management team cohesion and by extension organisational performance. Unproductive working relationships were terminated and neglected ones rebuilt. Poor performers were replaced and stability restored in the top management team. There were also several positive reasons for dissolution. Successful relationships were maintained for future large scale change proposal initiatives. Members were rewarded for their contributions, new skills were transferred into everyday working practices, and the rigour of decision making processes was improved. Top management team ambition for organisational success increased and temporary teams became the norm. It was also found that dissolution typically was conducted by the leader of the coalition in conjunction with the chief executive officer. New roles and responsibilities, geographic dispersal and new projects, were the three mechanisms most commonly used.

The dissolution of large scale change proposal coalitions has not previously been researched. Therefore, this empirical investigation represents a pioneering study. We now understand practitioners' rationale behind the need for dissolution, how it is performed and who is involved in the process. Once again we have linked behaviour with process, thereby providing a context within which to make meaning of the findings. This has been a common feature of each of the results chapters. We have considered the large scale change process from building to dissolution and the behaviours and tactics used by the coalition leader at each stage. This provides a descriptive richness which elucidates our understanding of this crucial, yet unexplored, strategic direction setting phase of the large scale change process. No other research can make such a claim. Therefore, these findings warrant serious consideration. Let us now turn to a discussion of the implications for academic enquiry, research methods and practitioners with recommendations for each.
Chapter 9

Discussion and recommendations

"Power and political processes in organizations can be used to accomplish great things." (Pfeffer, 1992, p.16)

Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to investigate the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings in the UK private sector for the purpose of informing academic enquiry and practitioners. The findings of the study presented in this thesis present large scale change as a political process. The idea that it is a rational-linear affair has been refuted with substantial empirical evidence. Top management team members seek to protect and promote their self-interest by engaging in political activity designed to manipulate the behaviours of others to achieve desired outcomes. This is the testimony of fifty top management team members in fourteen top management teams across thirteen industries in the UK private sector. The assumption, often implicit in much of the extant literature, that change is one single process has been rejected. This thesis is the first to identify and report on large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. Our understanding of managerial elites in the change context has been advanced by providing deep insights into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of those who lead them. There are important implications for academic enquiry and practitioners.

The central thrust of the literature review was that the rational-linear approach to change is not the most suitable option for organisations faced with large scale change in turbulent environments. Instead a power-oriented behaviour based approach is more
pragmatic and resilient. Furthermore, because of the increasing frequency, complexity and magnitude of large scale change it is the role of the top management team — and not chief executive officer alone — in the form of coalitions to propose and execute large scale change. Given that such change is likely to impact the structural design of the organisation there will be winners and losers within the top management team. Therefore, the coalition leader must expect to encounter resistance. To overcome opposition, build and sustain a coalition, the coalition leader must draw on personal, structural and situational sources of intraorganisational power to engage meaningfully in political activity. A wide range of behaviours and tactics ranging from the collaborative to the coercive are required by the coalition leader.

The problem with the extant literature is that it has failed to investigate the proposal design stage of the large scale change process. Change has been conflated into a single homogenous process, and discussions of power are locked in unhelpful, antagonistic debate about whether it can be found in personal, structural or situational aspects of the organisations, when in fact it resides simultaneously in all three. The research on coalition formation is largely theoretical and laboratory generated. No scholars have identified and investigated large scale change proposal coalitions. The extant literature on political behaviours and tactics in the change context is also disturbingly generic. Academics and practitioners alike have been left to try and make sense of descriptions and prescriptions and apply them to their own realities and areas of interest.

The findings presented in this thesis are the result of pioneering empirical research into large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. The evidence is context specific and describes the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings. Therefore, in this final chapter we will consider the implications for academic enquiry and practitioners. In the first section we examine what the seven lines of enquiry mean for academic enquiry by recapitulating the key findings and comparing and contrasting them with the extant literature where appropriate, and identifying new lines of enquiry for future research. In the second section we discuss the implications for research methods, and in the third section we explore the implications for practitioners. The chapter ends with a discussion of how this thesis has advanced our understanding of managerial elites in the change context and what it means for the research agenda.
Implications for academic enquiry

Line of enquiry #1

Given that large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams often exist for weeks or months do they follow a life-cycle? If so, what are the stages and what are the key characteristics of each stage?

In chapter five evidence was presented to suggest that large scale change proposal coalitions follow a five phase life-cycle. Respectively these were: initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer. No other existing empirically derived literature has reported these descriptions. Therefore, the findings represent significant new developments in our understanding of large scale change proposal coalitions.

A five phase life-cycle model

Coalitions were found to be initiated in one of two ways. Either an individual would generate an idea that was entirely new to the organisation or an idea that had been discussed in the top management team but had remained dormant would be developed. The person with the idea would then begin to approach one or two other members of the top management team to assess the possibility of forming a coalition to design a proposal. Timing and agreement on the appropriateness of the proposed change in confronting the issues facing the organisation were found to be important determinants of whether the idea sparked the coalition formation process. If the idea was congruent with the vision of the organisation’s leader then the likelihood of it being developed was greater than if it was incongruent. In this respect the finding lends support to Kanter’s (1983) remark on the importance of congruence. Similarly, if the current strategy was flexible enough to accommodate a shift in strategic direction then the chances of it finding initial support were higher than if it was not.

Elements of the literature suggest that coalitions form on the basis of agreement on the issues facing the organisation (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980; Eisenhardt and Bourgeois, 1988; Gamson, 1961; Stevenson et al, 1985). The finding that they form around the way to confront the issues is a subtle yet distinct difference. It is agreement on the
prescription rather than description. This implies a more active decision making
dynamic than has previously been thought. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois (1988) argued that
in “high-velocity” environments, executives do not have time to engage in forming
temporary coalitions. Several of the organisations studied for this thesis could be
described as operating in such conditions, as indicated by the rapidly changing nature of
the competitive landscape in terms of constant new entrants, high levels of mergers and
acquisitions, regular new product launches and aggressive pricing. The findings from
this study contradict the assertions of Eisenhardt and Bourgeois. It was found in the
research presented here that the top management teams of organisations operating in
fluid environments do engage in temporary coalition formation for the purpose of
proposing large scale change, and that once approved or rejected they seek to dissolve
the coalition so as not to re-configure the existing power structure and duplicate the
designated roles and responsibilities. This provides us with a new insight into the ability
of the top management team to organise itself for action and restore stability for the
purpose of self-preservation. To the best of this researcher’s knowledge this
characteristic has not been reported previously. Problems over gaining access to
managerial elites and the secrecy surrounding the machinations of top management
teams in large organisations is no doubt partly responsible for this. Future research
should be directed toward clarifying the reasons for formation and the prevalence of
temporary coalitions in organisations operating in environments ranging from the slow
moving to the highly fluid. Eisenhardt and Bourgeois studied eight US microcomputer
firms whereas this study investigated fourteen UK firms in thirteen industries, including
one large firm in the microcomputer industry. Therefore, future research should seek to
ascertain whether there are differences in coalition formation behaviour in different
countries.

Once the coalition had been initiated it was then built by the coalition leader. The size
and composition of the coalition was contingent upon the magnitude and complexity of
the proposed change and whether or not it intended to make radical improvements to
existing areas or reorient the organisation in a new direction. The greater the magnitude
and complexity and the more radical the change being proposed, the larger was the
coalition and the more varied was the membership. This confirms the findings of
Kanter’s (1983) six company empirical study. She remarked:

“The broader the ramifications of the issues involved in the proposed
innovation, and the greater the attendant uncertainties, the larger the
coalition of supporters needs to be if the idea for innovation is to result in productive action.” (Kanter, 1983, p.221)

Interestingly, Kanter’s study of innovation involved members of the organisation outside the top management team so it is informative to discover that the same principles around size and composition apply inside and outside the top management team. Another new finding is that potential members are attracted by emotional and political considerations such as the desire for high visibility in front of top management team colleagues, and particularly the chief executive officer. Laboratory derived theories such as Komorita and Chertkoff’s (1973) bargaining theory and Komorita’s (1974) weighted probability model consider only utilitarian outcomes such as resource distribution pay-offs. Caplow (1956) posited that the number of subordinates a coalition member would have power over would determine their selection of coalition to join. Forty years later, the opportunity to influence the strategic decision making process was found to be a more compelling reason to join. The coalitions discussed by participants in this study were found to be devoid of official management positions in the temporary structure. One of the key characteristics was the absence of control relationships, irrespective of hierarchy differences between members. Only the coalition leader could be described as holding a quasi-official position from which to direct the activities of members. Evidence was collected to support the claim that the sequence in which the coalition leader approached top management team members to join the proposal coalition was contingent upon the coalition leader’s position in the hierarchy. The chairman and chief executives adopted one approach, directors another, general managers a third, and senior managers and heads of function a fourth. The last of these findings is discussed in more detail under line of enquiry #3.

When a coalition had been established it began to design the large scale change proposal. The objective of the coalition leader was to create and maintain a cohesive and aligned coalition. It was found that coalitions which exhibited these characteristics were more likely to submit a proposal that was approved for implementation. No other empirical research has connected these characteristics with success rates. The morale of members was negatively impacted by three key factors. Firstly, if the proposal was contentious, secondly, if members were pressured to leave the coalition to join another competing group, and thirdly, if the coalition culture became one in which members sought to maximise their own self-interest. Sustaining large scale change proposal coalitions is discussed in more depth in the discussion of line of enquiry #5.
After a proposal had been approved for implementation or rejected, the results indicated that coalitions were actively dissolved, either by the coalition leader or the chief executive officer. This was to avoid the coalition—particularly a successful one—from reconfiguring the power structure and reshaping the existing decision making processes, and roles and responsibilities within the top management team. Members expected to be rewarded for their contribution to proposals which were approved for implementation. Pay-offs included promotions, pay rises, bonuses, share options and key positions during the implementation of the planned change. Coalition dissolution is considered at more length under lines of enquiry #6 and #7.

The final stage of a coalition’s life-cycle was characterised by the capture and transfer of learnings from the coalition to the working practices of the top management team. Coalition leaders and members both took part in this process. It was found that productive relationships were used to form emergent networks and micro coalitions of individuals who sought to promote shared agendas within the top management team. Once again the feature of capturing and transferring learnings has previously gone unreported in the literature. As with the proactive dissolution of the coalition, this action demonstrates that top management teams actively manage the role and life-span of coalitions and seek to adopt new and improved ways of decision making, problem solving and working together effectively as a team.

Research is urgently needed to investigate the process of capturing and learning. We know from this research that workshops and one-to-one debriefings are two mechanisms, but both of these are relatively formal methods. Are more informal methods used, and if so, what are they? If so much of politicking takes place backstage then it is reasonable to suggest that the final stages of coalition dissolution also take place behind the scenes. We know from the results that members, either as individuals or clusters of individuals, develop emergent networks and micro coalitions to support their own initiatives. Over time if these are developed they are likely to represent potent power bases which can be used to influence the strategic decision making process. This post-dissolution environment is currently unexplored and if researched would add a further layer of understanding to the change context. It provides support for the notion that top management teams are a web of multiple agendas which likely conflict, evolve constantly and unfold concurrently.
Line of enquiry #2

If large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams do follow life-cycles, are different roles, behaviours and tactics adopted by the coalition leader during each stage? If so, what are the roles and behaviours used in each stage by the coalition leader?

As well as presenting evidence on the five life-cycle phases of a large scale change proposal coalition, chapter five considered results which indicated that within the five phases coalition leaders tended to perform three sequential roles: builder, sustainer and dissolver. Once again these findings are important because despite an extensive search the existing literature does not appear to have identified these roles. As with the discussion on the three central life-cycle phases —build, sustain and dissolve— the three roles and their implications for academic enquiry will be considered under the remaining lines of enquiry.

Line of enquiry #3

Are coalition building behaviours and tactics influenced by the hierarchical position of the coalition leader in relation to the individual whose support they are attempting to enlist, and if so, how do they vary?

In chapter six we considered how coalition leaders built large scale change proposal coalitions. The first of the two major findings was that the support winning process which underpins coalition formation, is contingent upon the hierarchical position of the individual building the coalition. Although theoretically this might be expected, the processes have never been empirically identified and reported. Therefore, it can be claimed that these findings extend our understanding of coalition formation from both a processual and behavioural perspective.
Four hierarchy based coalition building approaches

Across the fourteen organisations the support gathering processes of the fifty participants was found to conform to one of four approaches. The chairman, chief executives and managing directors adopted one common approach, directors a second, general managers a third and heads of function and senior managers a fourth. These are conveyed below in Exhibit 9.1.

Exhibit 9.1 - Four hierarchy-based large scale change proposal coalition building approaches

Even though the relative influence of a general manager might be greater than that of their counterpart in another organisation both individuals tended to follow the same sequence when approaching members of the top management team for support. This leads us to conclude that behaviour is strongly influenced by structural aspects of the organisation. Such a contention would find support from those who view organisational power as a structural construct and the ultimate constraint on behaviour (Brass, 1984; Kanter, 1983). However, much of the commentary from participants indicates that their behaviour was also a function of the interpersonal relationships they had experienced previously or expected to experience with the individual they were approaching for support. Furthermore, the impact of situational factors such as timing and the congruence between the coalition builder’s idea for change and the organisation leader’s vision were also important determinants. This fusion supports the assertion made in
chapter two of the literature review that power does not reside in one location or another, but in personal, structural and situational locations simultaneously.

Commentators such as Astley and Sachdeva (1984) have criticised the study of power for becoming overly fragmented and consequently unhelpful to those attempting to explain behaviour in organisational settings. The polarity that exists between pursuing a singular theory and instigating further fragmentation casts investigation as a black and white debate, leaving little room for more realistic shades of grey. If the study of power in organisations is to break free from its current 'either-or' simplification, it will be necessary to approach the phenomenon from an entirely fresh perspective. Therefore, it is suggested that researchers should attempt to synthesise the three positions — structural, personal and situational — within specific contexts, such as large scale change proposal coalitions. Ultimately, if sufficient context specific empirical studies in organisations are conducted, a synthesised description of power will emerge. Surely this is a more robust and informative approach than trying to force connections between the current antagonistic positions.

In terms of the support winning approaches displayed by the fifty participants categorised into four hierarchy-based tiers there are several important implications for our understanding of top management team decision making processes. We know now that the hierarchical position of the coalition builder plays a key role in ordering the entry of individuals into a coalition. We know also that for the most senior members of the top management team — chairmen, chief executives and managing directors — winning the support of those with formal seniority is less important than it is to those in lower positions. Considered in conjunction with the rest of their support winning process we can see they believe it is more important that the early members are individuals who have the respect of the rest of the top management team and those with whom they have a productive working relationship. With regard to the first of these, it may be because the chairman, chief executive or managing director want to avoid the appearance of being heavy-handed and gaining compliant support rather than committed support, or it may be due to them wanting to ensure there is no immediate threat to their leadership of the coalition by surrounding themselves with other hierarchical heavyweights. Expertise appears to be of little importance. For coalition builders from the other three hierarchical tiers, formal authority, then informal authority and expertise are the three most important determinants of who to approach for support. These findings suggest that for all levels below the chairman, chief executive or managing director hierarchical support is
regarded as the first or second most important determinant of coalition membership. This appears to support those commentators who stress the inherent and unavoidable pervasiveness of structure in the decision making process.

Future research should aim to test and deepen the findings reported in this thesis. It would be valuable to understand the precise relationship between coalition size and the complexity and magnitude of change. We know from the literature that commentators such as Kanter (1983) contend that coalition size inflates with increases in these factors, and the participants of this study confirmed this. However, there appears to be no studies which produce quantitative evidence. Relative rather than absolute figures might be more enlightening because of the wide variations in the size of top management teams, and the not insignificant problem of deciding who is in the top management team. For example, it would be useful to know that one third of the members of the top management team form a coalition for a change that is predicted to improve profitability by sixty per cent. On the issue of identifying key decision makers in the organisation Pettigrew (1992, p.178) suggested, “Rather than assuming titles and positions as indicators of involvement in choice and change processes, the first task of the process scholar is to identify which players are involved, and why.” Reflecting on the lessons learned from this study this appears to be sound advice. Hierarchical titles should be used as guides, but taken in isolation they can be misleading. At one organisation considered for this study, there were four levels of director, and many US organisations have a large number of vice presidents. Still, titles are a useful starting point but the researcher must ascertain an individual’s involvement in major decisions that influence the strategic direction of the organisation. This qualification is likely to reduce the number of top management team members to the key players.

It would also be valuable to understand if there is a link between the hierarchical level of the coalition leader and the approval rate of proposals. It is reasonable to hypothesise that the chief executive officer enjoys the highest approval rate because they create compliance as a result of the structural power they hold simply from occupying the office. However, no evidence exists and what does the curve look like for those below the chief executive? Another interesting line of enquiry would be to investigate whether or not the four approaches vary according to the urgency of change?
Line of enquiry #4

What are the behaviours and tactics used by the coalition leader to build a large scale change proposal coalition within the top management team?

The second of the two major findings presented in chapter six concerned the behaviours and tactics used by the coalition leader to build a large scale change proposal coalition. No other empirical study has investigated these issues from the perspectives of inter-tier and intra-tier coalition building within the top management team.

Inter-tier and intra-tier coalition building behaviours and tactics

Coalition building behaviours and tactics are contingent on the hierarchical relationship between the coalition builder and the potential member. Different behaviours and tactics are used to recruit individuals further up in the hierarchy than if they are at the same level or lower down than the builder. In chapter three we discussed Kanter's (1983) commentary on the coalition building process. Comparisons with the findings of this thesis are difficult because her investigations were into the innovation process rather than large scale change and coalition membership was drawn principally from outside the top management team, not exclusively within it. Mechanic (1962) reported on the upward influencing behaviours of lower level members of the organisations, not junior members of the top management team, and despite citing coalitions as the most popular influencing tactic used by managers with superiors, Kipnis et al (1984) failed to describe the building tactics and behaviours employed. Similarly, Kotter (1996) was unable to provide us with an insight into how large scale change coalitions were formed, even though he identified guiding coalitions in the top management team as one of the critical success factors of business transformation exercises. It is difficult to find any commentary in the extant literature which argues that coalitions in top management teams are anything other than an important direction setting decision making unit in the change process. Yet there is a serious absence of empirical research which describes coalition building behaviours and tactics. Therefore, we are left with a pool of largely generic or implementation focused political behaviours from which to make assumptions about their relevance for an individual attempting to build a large scale change proposal coalition. Clearly, this is an unsatisfactory situation. The findings of the study presented
in chapter six are the first to describe the behaviours and tactics of coalition builders in the top management team.

We know now that upward coalition building behaviours and tactics in top management teams are focused predominantly around ego stroking and risk management. Strong personal wins such as high visibility and influence over key elements of the design along with a demonstration of how problems will be managed so the potential member can avoid being blamed for them, are effective recruitment strategies. In chapter three we discussed Kanter’s advice on selling innovation ideas and identified the underlying tone as being one of risk aversion. The findings of this study into large scale change proposal coalitions corroborates her findings, but interestingly it does not require interpretation: interviewees openly cited it as a crucial upward building tactic. For the most junior members the preferred method is the indirect route of working through others who enjoy informal seniority within the team. The greater the hierarchical gap between coalition builder and target, the greater the magnitude and complexity of the change being proposed and the lower the level of credibility the coalition builder has with the target the greater the use of intermediaries. This tells us that the credibility of both the builder and the idea for change are crucial to getting the coalition off the ground. It also tells us that top management team member interaction is a chess-like affair with key pieces being moved around strategically to achieve the desired end game. Based on these results it is clear that top management team members generally want to be wooed and they use the approach to jockey for position and derive maximum personal benefit. From a power perspective the hierarchy lines are clearly visible in the behaviours. The most senior members want to be assured of positive personal outcomes and they want to hear it from individuals who they respect. The fact that directors in particular are kept away from designing the operational aspects of the proposed change and pushed towards ambassadorial duties indicates that heavy emphasis is placed on both making the change design robust and working the decision making network outside the coalition.

As researchers we know now that intra-tier coalition building is characterised by the highest levels of suspicion over motives. Whereas upward or downward recruitment was characterised by circuitous and structural authority respectively, the main concern for individuals attempting to recruit someone at the same level is that the situation becomes politically competitive and one party or the other will use the proposal design process to advance their own career whilst taking the opportunity to damage the other’s. Members are selected on the basis of successful previous working relationships or shared political
agendas about the future direction of the organisation. Sometimes individuals decide to
work together to gain advancement within the top management team, choosing to put
aside personal competition until occupying the apex of the organisation becomes a
realistic prospect for one or both of them. Recruiting a rising star who is currently at the
same level is also a popular and effective tactic because it brings high visibility to the
project and if the idea for change is indeed large scale with far reaching consequences for
the organisation it offers high visibility in return. No other empirical research has
reported on intra-tier support gathering behaviours and tactics in large scale change
proposal coalitions.

The findings from this study provide strong support for the structural school of power,
from which one of its advocates has argued, “while personal attributes and strategies
may have an important effect on power acquisition...structure imposes the ultimate
constraints on the individual” (Brass, 1984, p.518). Downward coalition building
behaviours and tactics cannot avoid the intermediating effect of structure on behaviour,
either in the actions of the power holder, in the role of coalition builder, or in the
responses of the potential member. Coalition builders attempting to recruit the support
of individuals below them know they often do not have to extend their efforts beyond
rational argument because they have the power to instruct them to comply if necessary.
Similarly, targets know that in the final analysis they may have little option, short of
taking extreme action such as mobilising opposition, than to comply if they do not want
to be in receipt of coercive action. It would be valuable to discover whether individuals
engaged in downward coalition building exercises try less hard to be innovative and
accommodating in their approach simply because they do not have to. It would be
interesting also to understand if targets comply rather than commit and what impact this
has on commitment and loyalty. It would be valuable to discover if there is a link
between coalition type —aligned, unaligned, unfocused and fragmented— and the
number of members who were recruited by downward behaviours and tactics. Perhaps in
complex large scale change proposals coalitions which are subject to opposition and
resistance it is difficult to maintain cohesion and stability if a significant proportion of
the members joined because of compliance rather than commitment reasons. These
questions should be researched.

This description of coalition building behaviours and tactics used within and across
hierarchy levels paints a process that is strong in emotional and political tones. The
rational arguments about what is best for the organisation are there, but they are the
canvas on which the personal issues create a unique and context specific picture. This is very different from the traditional laboratory derived theories on coalition formation which make the mistake of over-emphasising the rationality of the decision and the consideration of pay-offs in purely utilitarian aspects such as a share of the resources acquired (Gamson, 1961; Komorita and Chertkoff, 1973; Komorita, 1974), or the overly simplistic political consideration of how many coalition members the individual will be able to exert control over (Caplow, 1956). Another weakness of this particular section of the literature is that it only considers coalition formation from the perspective of the potential member. The research presented here is the first to consider large scale change proposal coalition formation from the perspective of the coalition leader. Future research should seek to explore the emotional and political dimensions of coalition building behaviours and tactics. The study presented here provides a point of departure for future research to investigate inter-tier and intra-tier building behaviours and tactics in large scale change proposal coalitions. As with the findings from each of the other lines of enquiry it would be of academic interest to compare and contrast them with organisations in different countries. This would inform us whether or not there is an British model of coalition building, a European model or some other derivation such as Anglo-American. It would also be interesting to conduct research exclusively into coalition building. In this research it was only one line of enquiry out of seven. Inevitably therefore, it has not been possible to achieve the same depth. This researcher believes there are a number of interesting questions which it would be valuable to investigate. For example, what do the intermediaries gain from recruiting others into the coalition? After all, this process is not without risk for them because in performing the task they ally themselves to both the idea and the coalition builder. How are refusals handled and are they triggers of opposition and the emergence of competing coalitions? Given the argument raised in chapter two regarding the need for context specific studies of power in organisations, an investigation of inter-tier and intra-tier coalition building would provide the researcher with an opportunity to test the hypothesis that power resides in personal, structural and situational locations simultaneously. Clearly there are a number of exciting ways in which large scale change coalition building can be used to deepen our understanding of managerial elites in the change context.
One aspect of the discussion and recommendations driven out of the results is concerned with the behaviours and tactics of the coalition leader in their roles as builder, sustainer and dissolver. A second key element is the description of the processual and contextual characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions. That behaviours are context specific and structures and processes are fused with behaviours is a major step forward in the treatment of change because it elucidates its multi-dimensional nature. Change is a rational, emotional and political tapestry of behaviours framed by context. It is only by attempting to consider the complete picture that subtle images of process emerge and become relevant. Without acknowledging the interconnectedness of the different threads the researcher’s comprehension cannot move beyond the abstract. Therefore, that we are now able to describe the nature and characteristics of four types of large scale change proposal coalition and the behaviours and tactics which cause and are caused by them, breaks new ground. The findings are not the production of theoretical musings, they are the output of empirical research across a diverse range of organisational settings and because of this they merit serious consideration.

**Four types of large scale change proposal coalition**

That there are four types of large scale change proposal coalition — aligned, unaligned, unfocused and fragmented — is insightful because it deters the temptation to believe that change coalitions are homogenous and devoid of differentiating features. There is no literature which comments on these issues but academic enquiry can now depart from the position that there are several, if not many, types which vary significantly in terms of stability and cohesion. The evidence found that these characteristics were determined in part by the behaviours of members and the internal organisational environment. The less members could agree on the purpose and objectives of the coalition, and the activities required to design a proposal that satisfied these two drivers, the more likely it was that stability and cohesion would not emerge. Similarly, if tensions served to pull members
apart rather than together stability and cohesion were unlikely to be found. Unaligned, unfocused and fragmented coalitions were labels used to describe a negative escalation in these aspects. From a process perspective the more aligned a coalition was the greater the likelihood of submitting a proposal which received approval for implementation.

However, the author believes the issue of causation needs to be explored more deeply. A beachhead has been established but a more intrusive foray is required if we are to assess the relevance and significance of the interacting factors. This is because the question is rendered more complex when the behaviour of the coalition leader is introduced into the situation. The leader is responsible for organising the activities of coalition members to achieve the purpose and objectives, so their actions must contribute to the outcomes. Conversely though, the behaviours of coalition members and pressures from outside the coalition all act to influence the leader's ability to achieve consensus. We are left with the need to split out and measure the significance of each driver on both the inside of the coalition and outside of it. If we can move towards a more precise description we can generate sensitising predictions for further research into coalition dynamics to test.

We know now that the behaviours and tactics required to manage one of the four types can vary significantly. Coalition leaders need to have a versatile skill set. An interesting line of enquiry would be to investigate whether or not coalitions metamorphose between the four states, because if they do then the range of skills required by the coalition leader must be extremely wide and sophisticated. For the more coercive measures required to sustain a fragmented coalition it is difficult to imagine a junior member of the top management team being able to engage with more senior individuals and win. However, as no evidence was found to indicate that coalition leaders of less stable and cohesive coalitions had to be from the most senior echelons of the top management team, coalition leaders must have used indirect methods. Either that or the influence of structure on behaviour has been overstated by advocates of the structural school of power. An investigation which commented on these questions would serve to advance our understanding of the political aspects of the change context. The finding that coercive behaviour is a core tactic of large scale change proposal coalition leaders faced with dissension, resistance or opposition is an outright contradiction of the arguments put forward by supporters of the OD originated rational-linear approach to change. They find the use of coercion to be non-humanistic and urge change agents to 'play it straight' and seek consensus (Beckhard, 1967; Blake and Mouton, 1964, 1968; Cummings and Huse, 1989; Tannenbaum et al, 1974). Kanter's "warning the critics" is the equivalent of
the 'heavy artillery' tactic identified in this study, but 'ambush', 'leg breaking'—eliminating a resistor's support base—and 'sacrificial lambs' are much more aggressive than anything reported in the extant literature.

It is interesting to note that few of the behaviours and tactics employed would find favour with the humanistic management writers. It appears that even in relatively stable and cohesive conditions coalition leaders use political behaviours to sustain a member's commitment. For example, manipulating decision making processes to centralise power in the hands of the coalition leader is clearly designed to disenfranchise coalition members. Similarly, controlling the dissemination of information is also designed to shape behaviour. More obviously, creating a crisis and coercing an individual to comply are political actions, but in studying each of the eleven tactics used by participants in this study it is difficult to avoid the fact that they are all designed to manipulate another person's behaviour. It could be argued that the study sample is unrepresentative, but while it was not large at fifty participants, they were drawn from fourteen organisations in thirteen industries. Therefore, the findings must be taken seriously. There is no escaping the fact that political behaviours and tactics are used by leaders of large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. Such tactics portray top management team members as individuals who constantly seek to protect and promote their self-interests, yet even fragmented coalitions were found to submit innovative and challenging proposals which the organisation went on to implement successfully. These findings condemn those who argue that political behaviours have no place in the change agent's skill set. It appears that without the ability to engage in political activity by using the behaviours and tactics identified and described in this study an individual faced with leading a coalition drawn from the top management team has little chance of sustaining it through to proposal submission. Members are powerful individuals in their own hierarchical positions and are used to shaping other people's behaviour. They cannot help but bring those behaviours into the coalition. Future research should seek to investigate the coalition member's behaviour in relation to the coalition leader. What do they hope to achieve by creating instability? How do they choose their behaviours and tactics? By understanding both sides of the interaction we will deepen our understanding of the drivers, actions and processes involved in sustaining a large scale change proposal coalition. This would extend our knowledge of a previously unexplored aspect of managerial elites in the change context.
By virtue of the fact that large scale change proposal coalitions have not previously been the subject of academic enquiry, it stands to reason that the issue of dissolution has not been considered either. Therefore, the findings to this line of enquiry represent new thinking about this unexplicated element of the change process.

The need to dissolve large scale change proposal coalitions

It was found that coalitions which had been successful tended to attempt to continue working together for the purpose of extending their influence over the strategic decision making process. This caused tension between members of the top management team who were structurally endowed with decision making roles and responsibilities and viewed any extension as an infringement of their rights. Therefore, the view expressed by all fifty interviewees, was that large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved as quickly and practically as possible once a decision had been taken on whether or not to implement the proposed change. However, dissolution should not be executed without seeking to capture and transfer coalition learnings into the top management team. As a result of this thesis academics are now aware of eleven arguments why coalitions should be disbanded. Firstly, continued coalition existence is likely to lead to dysfunctional organisational performance since coalition members and individuals outside the coalition in the top management team are likely to engage in negative jockeying for power rather than focusing on fulfilling their official hierarchy roles. Secondly, unproductive relationships between coalition members can be terminated. Thirdly, damaged relationships between coalition members and those top management team members affected negatively by the proposed change can be repaired. Fourthly, more appropriately skilled individuals for the implementation phase can be brought into the process. It is important to avoid automatically awarding key roles in the execution phase to coalition members simply because they produced a good proposal. Fifthly, dissolution thwarts the emergence of ‘them and us’ attitudes between coalition members and the rest of the top management team which occurs when the former creates
—intentionally or unintentionally— exclusive decision making processes. On the more positive side a sixth reason is that productive relationships can be transferred into the top management team. Relationships in which candid debate took place were found to strengthen the strategic decision making process. Seventhly, dissolution constituted an event when members of successful coalitions could be rewarded for their involvement. Eighthly, the skills developed in the coalition could be used in the individual’s official role and shared with other members of the top management team. Ninthly, by adopting the coalition’s knowledge based decision making processes in place of the hierarchy based alternatives used in the top management team the time to develop strategic options was reduced significantly. A tenth reason was that working for short periods of time in coalitions created a culture of restless ambition amongst members of the top management team who wanted to be intimately involved in designing large scale change. The eleventh and final argument for dissolution was that the temporary team way of working should be institutionalised in the organisation. If coalitions were seen to improve the effectiveness of the top management team, then individuals were more likely to accept the existence of temporary super-influential informal structures which overlapped with formally prescribed decision making roles and responsibilities.

These arguments present top management team members as considered individuals who want coalitions to improve the performance of the top management team and by extension the organisation. McClelland (1970, 1974) would describe this as a strong socialised power motive. However, the arguments also convey the political awareness of individuals. Top management team members are acutely aware of any threat to their power and will act to prevent it. The arguments provide strong evidence that individuals oppose erosion for reasons of self-preservation rather than self-promotion. This opposes those theorists (for example, Klein, 1988; Mintzberg, 1983) who claim that political behaviour can have only negative consequences once it is introduced into the decision making process. Instead we see a more pragmatic approach by practitioners who accepting that conflict and competition are the by-products of ambition seek to find ways to extract organisational and personal benefit. Political behaviour was clearly present in all of the organisations studied and it is reasonable to assume that all had one or more individuals who pursued self-interest at the expense of colleagues and the organisation. However, no-one expressed the view that organisational politics was inherently dysfunctional. Indeed the comments of the fifty participants indicate that political behaviour is a natural feature of top management team life.
Future research should seek to deepen our understanding of the rationale behind the dissolution phase of large scale change proposal coalitions. The reasons offered above should be tested, added to, refined or rebutted if appropriate. It would be valuable to understand how the positive aspects of coalitions are captured and transferred into the top management team. We know that workshops and one-to-one debriefings are conducted by coalition leaders, but beyond these initial events we do not know the techniques used. Are there further events or is there a sophisticated descriptive and prescriptive codification process that takes place or is it a more haphazard affair left to individual members? Another intriguing question is what happens when a coalition member is not satisfied with their pay-off? What is the interplay that occurs between the dissatisfied party, the coalition leader and the chief executive? Another line of enquiry should seek to investigate the emergent networks and micro coalitions which result from the dissolution of large scale change proposal coalitions. What role, if any, do they play in the top management team and do they influence the strategic decision making process? We know that one of the reasons why dissolution takes place is because top management team members want to avoid any long term encroachment on the officially prescribed rights of office. The precise roles of the chief executive officer and the coalition leader during dissolution need to be more clearly understood. How do the two interact and what are determinants of the nature of that interaction? Hierarchical gap or strength of relationship based on mutual respect derived from previous experiences working together are just two of a range of possibilities. From an contextual point of view we should seek to understand the impact of the broader internal and external environments on the dissolution process. Does the speed and process change if, for example, the organisation suffers a sudden deterioration in its performance, or conversely a radical improvement?

Clearly there is much work to be done if we are to develop a more informed view of the dissolution process, but the finding that large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved and the identification of eleven reasons why they should be constitutes the first academic enquiry into this area. They provide an illuminating point of departure for future initiatives.
Line of enquiry #7

What happens to large scale change proposal coalitions once the proposal has been approved for implementation or rejected? Does the coalition continue, and if so, what form does it take in terms of its membership and their behaviours? Does it disband by its own choice, and if so how? Are coalitions forced to disband, and if so, who disbands them and how?

In addition to discussing the need für dissolution chapter eight also presented the findings relating to how large scale change coalitions are disbanded and who is involved in the process. Once again this is an entirely unresearched area of large scale change so the evidence provides a unique insight into the dissolution process.

The dissolution of large scale change proposal coalitions

Throughout the discussion so far it is has been made clear that members of top management teams involved in large scale change proposal coalitions recognised that it was important to align self-interest with that of the organisation. Designing large scale change proposals is a manifestation of such thinking. Individuals sought to position themselves advantageously within a strategic direction that was best for the organisation. However, when the life-cycle of the coalition entered the dissolution phase it quite obviously became pay-off time. We know the objective of the chief executive officer was to re-establish a stable and cohesive top management team strengthened with new working practices, decision making processes and skills. We know also that they wanted to avoid the emergence of a shadow top management team which undermined the ability of the existing team to lead the organisation or threatened the office of the chief executive officer. These concerns had to be balanced with the need of coalition members to be rewarded for their involvement in designing the proposed change, particularly if the change had been approved for implementation.

The extant literature on coalition membership pay-off suffers from a lack of contemporary empirical research. Unfortunately we have to satisfy ourselves with theoretical laboratory derived descriptions and predictions of behaviour. Coalition formation theorists such as Gamson (1961), Leiserson (1970), DeSwann (1973),
Komorita and Chertkoff (1973) and Komorita (1974) all thought of pay-off in terms of resources. In essence the resources that were put into the coalition were paid back with interest. These simplistic assumptions are refuted by the findings of this empirical study. Three types of pay-off were offered by chief executive officers: new roles and responsibilities, geographic dispersal, and new projects. By far the most desired by coalition members was new roles and responsibilities which took the form of hierarchical promotion, lateral moves into strategically or financially important areas of the organisation, a remit to establish a new business unit or a turnaround assignment. The last of these situations was the least sought after reward. There were two reasons why new roles and responsibilities were the most popular pay-off. Firstly, it was public acknowledgement that the individual was worthy of improved status, and secondly, it carried with it increases in salary, access to bonus pools and stock options. The pay-offs are all structural but underpinning them is the public recognition and personal reward that boosts an individual’s ego. Once again we observe the combination of structural, personal and situational factors in the workplace. It is important that researchers observe this feature and incorporate it into their investigations. Top management team members are interested in increasing their power and they look to acquire it from structural, personal or situational sources.

Three other types of role pay-off are leadership roles, coaches and emissaries of change, but these are less popular because they carry less tangible signs of structural advancement. Geographic dispersal of coalition members tells us that chief executive officers take the threat of their leadership being undermined or overthrown very seriously. Such tactics are a clear acknowledgement of the power a successful coalition can acquire during the design of a large scale proposal. This is particularly the case in coalitions dominated by hierarchical heavyweights or coalitions that contain a significant proportion of the top management team. This provides us with a new insight into the mindset and behavioural drivers of a chief executive officer. That they put coalition members on to new projects to inject coalition learnings into other parts of the organisation can be seen as serving the interests of the firm as well as their own.

Clearly, dissolution is a high risk time for the chief executive officer and one characterised by political behaviour as both chief executive and coalition members seek to protect and promote their own interests along with those of the organisation. Future research should investigate whether dissolution ever fails and results in a change of leadership for the organisation. For the chief executive to be so concerned about the
threat of the coalition would seem to suggest that this occasionally occurs. If evidence is found to support this contention then it would be valuable to understand how the process unfolds, and the behaviours and tactics of parties on both sides in what must be a highly charged political environment. If power does change hands, how does the coalition share power, and how does it consolidate its position? Furthermore, does this turbulence have any effect on top management team performance and by extension the organisation's?

Further research is needed into dissolution techniques. The ones presented above appear to focus on the individual as the recipient of the pay-off, but contemporary management literature advises rewarding teams since this encourages team working. Perhaps top management teams are an exception to this, or maybe they have sufficient power as individuals to negotiate and insist on individual reward. In this respect it would be interesting to know if top management teams are any different than other levels of the organisation.

A longitudinal study would possibly be able to ascertain how pay-offs have to evolve over time if individuals who stay at one level are to remain motivated. In organisations where the chief executive holds office for an extended period, it must mean that those immediately below them cannot be promoted. Since there must be limits to the additional roles and responsibilities that can be conferred on an individual, what pay-offs are they offered? Similarly, for individuals thought unable to progress to the next level in the hierarchy but who make a valuable contribution to the design of large scale change, what pay-offs are they offered to ensure sustained motivation? In both of these circumstances is there a switch from structural rewards to personal rewards, and if so what form do they take?

Another line of enquiry would be to study organisations in different countries to see if the pay-offs differ. Pay-off strategies in public sector organisations should also be compared and contrasted with the findings of this study. Finally, it would be interesting to know whether the ability to negotiate pay-offs is contingent upon the hierarchical level of the coalition member, and if so, what the pay-off ranges are for each level and the behaviours and tactics used to negotiate them.
Implications for research methods

As we noted in chapter four, the research objective was to investigate the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams across a range of organisational settings in the UK private sector. Conducting an empirical study presented two significant problems. Firstly, gaining access to top management team members, and secondly, overcoming the sensitivity of political behaviour as a topic for investigation. Having successfully conducted elite style semi-structured interviews with fifty members of top management teams in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries, and a pilot study with five other executives, there are several important learnings which have implications for academic enquiry and the process of conducting research. These can be considered under the following headings:

- Gaining access to top management team members,
- Investigating the sensitive topic of political behaviour, and
- Alternative research methods.

Gaining access to top management team members

As early as 1957 Kahl observed that, "those who sit amongst the mighty do not invite sociologists to watch them make the decisions about how to control the behaviour of others," (p.10). More recently several writers including Hoffman (1980) and Pettigrew (1992) have remarked on the difficulty in gaining access to managerial elites. Despite entry problems, it is difficult to find anyone who does not accept that the empirical study of managerial elites is an important area both for sociologists and management writers. Indeed, given the complexity, frequency and magnitude of large scale change in many organisations, understanding the dynamics of the key decision making group is imperative if we are to deepen our knowledge of change processes and the behaviour of individuals.

The entry method used in this research appears to be atypical. Very few managerial elite studies openly cite social and professional ties as the means of generating a sample. Commentators such as Buchanan et al (1980) and Hoffman (1980) are advocates of using professional and personal links, with the former asserting that it epitomises an
“opportunistic” and highly pragmatic approach to empirical research. The scarcity of research employing this strategy may be due to concerns over the purity of the sample, since it is not randomly selected, or it may be that some researchers choose to play down the fact that their samples are built, at least in part, by asking someone they know to effect introductions. On the other hand it might be simply that few researchers enjoy high level contacts in organisations. It is accepted the approach is open to criticism about sample purity, but the richness of the data collected in this study indicates that careful sample construction combined with an appropriate data collection method can produce insightful results which withstand scrutiny and make a valuable contribution to the knowledge base. The approach should be considered by other empirical researchers investigating managerial elites, particularly those wanting to study sensitive topics such as political behaviours, since trust is an important driver of candour.

One of the main learnings from the construction of the sample, which it is useful to share, was the need to identify trusted individuals who can be described as ‘hubs’. Hubs can be sub-divided into ‘primary hubs’ who are approached first and ‘secondary hubs’ who are approached subsequently. For the research reported in this thesis, the primary hubs were the researcher, his father and uncle, the latter two of whom both occupy senior management positions in their respective organisations. It is important to identify primary hubs because the desired characteristics of the sample can be explained at length and a vetting process established. The primary hubs provided thumbnail sketches to the researcher so only key decision makers were accepted into the sample. The three primary hubs identified nine secondary hubs who in turn introduced twenty-four appropriate participants —spokes— to the study. The remaining ‘spokes’ were contacted directly by one of the three primary hubs. This process was found to be highly effective and not at all cumbersome to operate. If anything, early contact with the secondary hub, typically an organisation’s chief executive, helped to establish trust and convince the CEO that the researcher was professional and worthy of serious consideration and input from their top management team.

A critical success factor was the speed and manner in which a request for access was made. Once a participant had been identified by one of the other two primary hubs, the author would agree the wording of the initial contact to be made by them. This was purposely kept vague and described the research as being “in the area of strategic change”. The researcher’s father and uncle were asked to say, “it is probably better if I get Nick to contact you to explain in more detail exactly what he is after”, and agree a
time—usually within the following forty-eight hours so the individual would remember the request—when either the potential participant or their secretary could be contacted. Not one individual turned down this initial request. The agreed follow-up phone call was made by the author at the specified time, and immediately followed up with a facsimilated single page request. At this time all participants were informed that the research was about "top management team interpersonal dynamics in the context of large scale organisational change." An explanation only slightly more revealing than that offered by the researcher's father or uncle. A response was requested and typically received within twenty-four hours. This approach yielded a one hundred per cent acceptance rate. Buchanan et al (1988) encouraged researchers to be as vague as possible when communicating the purpose of the research. In light of the experience here, this advice is supported, particularly since it inhibits participants preparing for the interview in order to provide data they believe is desired, or alternatively cancel their involvement due to a fear of the subject matter.

Once an interview had been conducted with a secondary hub the author would then ask if there were any other suitable participants in their top management team who could be interviewed. In the instances when a positive reply was received the secondary hub was asked to effect an introduction, and having done so the follow-up phone call procedure was repeated. Using this incremental approach a sample of fifty members of top management teams was established.

The main benefit of this approach was the control that could be exerted over the selection of participants. It was imperative that they were key decision makers who could influence the strategic direction of the organisation by instigating and playing a central role in large scale change. On several occasions individuals were rejected by the author because it was determined the potential participants were peripheral members of the top management team or too junior. This view can be arrived at by ascertaining where they sit hierarchically and a brief description of their roles and responsibilities, and their involvement to date in large scale change initiatives. These questions are more difficult to pose remotely through a questionnaire or over the telephone, and the risk of dishonest responses—which cannot be validated—is significantly higher than in face-to-face contact. Pettigrew (1992, p.176) articulates the concern over identifying who is in a top management team. Based on the experience of generating a sample for the study presented here it can be suggested that titles are used as a starting point and a guide, but
the researcher should attempt to gather evidence which supports any claim that they are a key decision maker and not simply the holder of an impressive sounding title.

**Overcoming the problem of investigating the sensitive topic of political behaviour**

The richness and candour which is clearly demonstrated in the comments of participants provides support for the elite style semi-structured interview approach used with the fifty participants. The method hinges on the ability of the interviewer and the willingness of the interviewee to create an environment of near equals. The qualification on the term equals is important. Dexter (1970, p.56) wrote of the need to create the impression that the interview is about "two reflective men trying to find out how things happen, but the less informed and experienced one (the interviewer) deferring to the wiser one and learning from him." Considerable effort was put into implementing this advice. The researcher's perception was that participants spent the first five to ten minutes deciding whether the author was worthy of their commitment to the interview. It was perceived that they did this by assessing the relevance of the questioning and the disposition of the author. This is where the value of the pilot study was realised.

A pilot study was conducted with five practicing members of top management teams. They advised on question content, process and style of delivery as well as access strategy. The pilot allowed for mistakes to be made in a safe environment and the author to develop the executive presence required to conduct a lengthy interview about the strategic issue of large scale change and the emotionally sensitive subject of political behaviours and tactics. The strong recommendation is for other researchers who find themselves confronting these issues to conduct a pilot, however self-conscious and awkward—and at times embarrassing—it may feel at first.

The first five to ten minutes of the interview were spent asking 'safe' questions about whether change strategy was the result of vision or managing emergent issues, and whether or not the pace of change in the environment influenced the formulation process. Examples were given of organisations which fit any of the possible responses, and an effort was made to display a maturity of thinking and understanding of the complex issues surrounding the decision. Simply firing off the question and awaiting a monologue was avoided at all costs. If the participant did not engage in a two-way conversation, a two-way conversation was engineered so that the author could talk for
between twenty and thirty per cent of the time during the first few questions. The ratio was adjusted in response to the reactions of the interviewee. The more relaxed and engaged the respondent was, the less the researcher talked. This approach clearly differs from the antiseptic classical style but it was found to be a highly effective means of establishing emotional rapport and technical credibility with the participant.

Blum (1952) and Burgess (1984) emphasised the need to treat the interaction as an “interview-conversation” in which both parties exchanged data, and Oakley (1981) argued that, “there can be no intimacy without reciprocity.” Both of these contribute to what Blum called a “permissive atmosphere”. That is an environment in which the interviewee feels able to talk openly about the subject of discussion. Based on the experience gained through conducting the research reported in this thesis it can be argued that the key contribution to an atmosphere which “encourages the free flow of information” (Spradley, 1979), is the creation of trust. If rich, candid and insightful data is to be extracted from interviews with members of the managerial elite the interviewee must trust the interviewer. It was found that trust is created through a mix of intimacy, credibility and risk assessment on the part of the respondent. The combination of the three elements is unique to each interview situation and the interviewer needs to be sufficiently sensitive to detect the elements which need to be emphasised, and capable of switching or reinforcing one, two or all three of the factors as necessary. The equation was found to change throughout the interview as the focus switched from ‘safe’ rational questions purely about the change process to the emotional and political aspects of leading large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics used. The more emotional and political the questions became the greater was the tendency to need to reinforce intimacy and reduce the interviewee’s feeling of risk incurred from divulging potentially damaging information about themselves and colleagues in the top management team. Interviewers who are cognisant of intimacy, credibility and risk factors and are sufficiently skilled to adjust their emphasis on each in relation to the changing rational, emotional and political context of the questions are more likely to establish trust and therefore elicit richer, more candid and insightful data than those who are not aware of these subtleties.

It is also useful to share the learning that generating a permissive atmosphere was achieved by a preparedness, on the part of the interviewer, to deviate from the interview schedule. If an interesting line of enquiry emerged then the interviewee was encouraged to develop it. If a particular element of the discussion was clearly important to the
interviewee, they were allowed to pursue it. There were several instances when interviewees entered into a monologue which was apparently for cathartic reasons. Some even acknowledged that the data was of little relevance to the interview, but more than half the participants ended the interview by remarking that they had not previously discussed political behaviour in a non-judgmental manner. That individuals enjoyed the interview and were keen to tell their stories is evidenced through the extended duration of the interactions from the requested one and a half hours to an average of two hours and twenty-four minutes. That theoretically derived descriptions and prescriptions of top management team relational dynamics add to the knowledge base is not in doubt, but when such richness can be generated simply by letting people tell their stories, there is a strong case to suggest that the research agenda should reorient its focus to exploring and advancing qualitative-empirical methodologies. If we do so then we will begin to deepen our understanding of the change context, the processes of decision making and the behaviours and tactics of those who influence the strategic direction of the organisation by proposing large scale change.

**Alternative research methods**

There are several other methodological considerations for future empirical studies into the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams.

The unit of analysis in this study was the coalition leader in the context of a large scale change proposal coalition in the top management team. The emphasis was on the relational behaviours and tactics of the individual in the role of coalition leader with members of the coalition. Despite an extensive literature search no other empirical research was found using the same unit. Therefore, further research which takes the same unit of analysis is required to support this breakthrough study. Whilst the individual is an extremely common unit of analysis, large scale change proposal coalitions are not. It is this fusion which breaks new ground. By taking the same unit we will form a clearer view of the decision making processes within the top management team in the change context. This position clearly casts the top management team and the change context as political in nature. The point of departure is an assumption that competing coalitions exist to advance alternative strategic directions and that political behaviours and tactics are used to win support and overcome opposition and resistance.
This view rejects the position that change is a rational-linear process. Another informative unit of analysis would be the large scale change proposal coalition as a group. Although presenting the researcher with access and coalition membership identification problems, as well as the need to ensure coalition completeness, such a unit would provide a more holistic view of the decision making processes, behaviours and tactics of top management team members in the formative stages of the change context. Yet another unit would be the large scale change proposal coalition member. Analysing the behaviours and tactics and motives of individuals in their interactions with the coalition leader would provide us with an insight into life on the other side of the relationship. Such a position clearly portrays coalitions as two-way decision making environments. Once again this would represent an advance in the treatment of large scale change because it refutes the often implicit assumption that decision making is mono-directional and that the leader’s will is imposed over the rest of the coalition.

Other advancements would be to move through the large scale change process into the implementation phase and consider the emergence of coalitions in top management teams for the purpose of implementing, reshaping or resisting the change designed by the proposal coalition and approved by the top management team. Once again this presents the change process and its constituent parts and parties as a dynamic environment characterised by political processes and machinations. It is only by taking a longer view of the large scale change process that we can construct a richer, more informative, holistic picture which presents change as a complex multi-dimensional, multi-layered process, directed by value and motive laden individuals, and influenced by the internal and external organisational environments that in reality it is. We must avoiding seeking the singular prescriptive theory. Rather we must create descriptive fragmentation before engaging in reconstructive synthesis.

The study reported in this thesis was the result of mostly single interviews with participants. This was due to the access rights and resources available to the researcher. A different perspective would undoubtedly be gained by conducting a longitudinal study across a range of organisational settings. The objectives of this study are ideally suited to a more lengthy investigation. The finding that large scale change proposal coalitions experience life-cycle phases would be strengthened by several data points over an extended time scale. It was found that large scale change proposal coalitions could exist for weeks or months so repeat interventions would serve to construct a more granular case study of the evolving processes and the behaviours and tactics used by the coalition.
leader to build, sustain and dissolve the coalition. Other data collection devices such as diaries issued to participants may well capture the more ‘raw’ and immediate observations of process and behaviour. Although the problems of ensuring completion, and avoiding the rewriting, sanitisation or removal of particularly blunt and emotion laden comments is difficult to manage. The possibility of direct observation using audio or video recorders is highly unlikely to be approved or produce insightful data in this researcher’s opinion, since participants will almost certainly modify their behaviour and act out an unrepresentative portrayal of their role and actions in the change process.

Larger sample sizes should also be constructed. Fifty participants in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries were as much as this researcher could reasonably establish with the timescale and resource constraints. There are a couple of interesting possibilities here. Firstly, the sample could simply be larger. Secondly, the sample could be international, drawing participants from across a range of countries and regions around the world. This would highlight commonalities and differences in process and behaviour between different cultures. The findings in the study reported here were that the processes and behaviours were common across all fourteen organisations in thirteen industries, which in itself is a major finding. However, the findings are limited to the UK private sector. It would also be interesting to extend the study into public sector organisations to investigate how large scale change initiatives are instigated and the behaviours and tactics used by those who drive them forward. It would be informative to compare and contrast the findings with those presented in this thesis.

Clearly there are limitations to the research methods used in the empirical study which underpins this thesis, and with more resources and time these could have been counteracted. As we have discussed there are a number of interesting perspectives which need to be considered in future research initiatives if a deeper and more holistic view of the change process is to be established. However, the problems of investigating the political behaviour of top management team members in the context of large scale change proposal coalitions—a previously unresearched area—demanded an innovative and sensitive approach. Despite this a rigorous methodology was constructed which means that the results warrant serious academic consideration. Having considered the implications for academic enquiry, let us now turn to a consideration of those for practitioners.
Implications for practitioners

In addition to the substantial implications for academic enquiry and research methods, the pioneering research presented in this thesis also has important implications for members of top management teams involved in proposing large scale change initiatives. In common with any research that breaks new ground the researcher is presented with the problem of choosing depth or breadth in their discussion and recommendations. In this case it was decided that since all seven lines of enquiry delivered fresh insights into this very important, yet unexplored area of large scale change, it was appropriate to adopt a wider coverage because the aim is to demonstrate to the reader that on a number of occasions the boundaries of our understanding of managerial elites in the change context have been extended. Depth will be achieved in a different forum, by presenting a more detailed discussion of each line of enquiry in its own paper.

A five phase life-cycle model and three leadership roles

A member of a top management team armed with the knowledge that large scale change proposal coalitions, such as the one they are planning to build, tend to go through five life-cycle phases and require the leader to perform three primary roles during its existence, would be more likely to gain approval for the proposal than an individual who was not availed of this information. This is not to suggest that the individual without the knowledge will fail but they face greater uncertainty over how to navigate their way through the complicated rational, emotional and political waters which they will enter. It stands to reason that if uncertainty can be reduced, the coalition leader can spend more time focusing on improving the proposal and creating personal wins for members—such as skills development—and less on reacting to unanticipated issues. In designing a complex change proposal which has far reaching implications, it is likely that unexpected events will occur. However, if the programmable aspects of coalition evolution have been planned for, the likelihood that non-programmable events will overload the coalition leader and fatally damage the coalition’s prospects of success are reduced. Furthermore, by leading a well ordered large scale change proposal coalition from which members derive personal benefits, the coalition leader will establish a track record and over time a power base of support from which to extend their influence over the strategic decision making process of the organisation. Casual observation in organisations would suggest that executives who create the impression of being in control are thought of as
being more capable and mature than those who appear not to be in control. The most senior positions in top management teams appear to be awarded, in part, to those who display characteristics of control, capability and maturity.

Clearly it is important to understand the life-cycle phases and roles because there are benefits for the organisation, coalition members and the coalition leader. One of the first and most valuable tasks the potential coalition leader can perform is to ascertain the scale of the task ahead. This first step of planning the programmable elements requires answers to the following questions:

- What is the purpose of the proposal to be designed?
- What is/are the deliverables?
- What rational, emotional and political contributions to the coalition will be needed to produce a proposal likely to be approved?
- How many people will be required to make the necessary rational, emotional and political contributions?
- How stable is the coalition likely to be?
- How long will it take to produce a proposal likely to be approved for implementation?

By answering these questions the coalition leader will be able to predict the magnitude and complexity of the large scale change proposal and the coalition to be led. Planning can then be conducted within a meaningful framework. The coalition leader will be able to assess their own skill set, identify gaps and then plan the construction of a team which eliminates, or minimises as far as possible, the shortfalls in all the critical areas of developing a proposal and winning support from the relevant decision makers within the rest of the top management team. Once this initial preparatory work has been conducted the coalition leader can then begin to approach the individuals they want to join the large scale change proposal coalition.

If a coalition leader knows that they will be required to perform the three primary and sequential roles of building, sustaining and dissolving the coalition over a period of weeks or months, this will also inform their planning. The coalition leader could study the results presented in this thesis and adopt the behaviours and tactics used by others to manage the coalition’s life-span from initiation through to the capture and transfer of
learning. When building a coalition selling and negotiating skills are necessary for one-to-one support gathering sessions with potential coalition members. The coalition leader must construct an argument that blends the rational case for change with the emotional and political reasons why it is in the interests of the target to be involved in designing the change. In those instances where a coalition leader does not enjoy the credibility to personally recruit a member, they should enlist the assistance of one or more other members who do have the relationship to approach the target on their behalf. When sustaining a coalition, the leader must maintain or create stability and cohesion between members. This can be achieved through organising events which involve the chairman and CEO visiting the team to demonstrate the importance of the initiative. Social events are also an effective means of bonding a team, and spending time regularly with members on a one-to-one basis to discuss and resolve personal issues promotes loyalty to both the leader and the coalition. Complacency can be avoided with mild criticism and dissension can be handled by discussing it openly with the individual concerned and taking prompt action, even if that means dismissing the member. Dissolving a coalition requires the coalition leader to work closely with the chief executive officer to determine the pay-off strategy for members. In addition to conducting learning capture and transfer workshops, and one-to-one debriefing sessions with members, the coalition leader can expect to be involved in allocating new responsibilities and roles, dispersing members geographically and suggesting individuals for new projects.

These insights are highly relevant for contemporary organisations faced with the need to plan and implement large scale change. A coalition life-cycle model provides a framework within which to implement the activities and predict the emergence of problems such as resistance and opposition from outside the coalition. A politically aware model avoids the contrived nature of the rational-linear approach to change which provides false hope for practitioners seeking to cope with environmental turbulence. It is the intention of the author to discuss the findings and offer descriptive and prescriptive advice in the wider forum of a management journal.

**Four hierarchy based coalition building approaches**

The finding that there were four hierarchy based approaches to building a large scale change proposal coalition is valuable to three types of individual in the top management team. Firstly, it is important that coalition leaders and potential coalition leaders are
aware of the preferred order of recruitment into a coalition because they have to build it. Secondly, it is also useful for potential members to know when they might be invited to join so they maximise their attractiveness or unattractiveness accordingly. Thirdly, those who might wish to thwart a coalition building initiative can benefit from knowing who might be approached for support so they can take counter measures.

Coalition leaders can emerge from any level of the top management team, so it useful to know that different recruitment processes are used according to the coalition leader’s position in the hierarchy. Although no linkage was identified between coalition building approach and proposal approval rates in this study, it can be reasoned that individuals at the same structural level in different organisations who were consistently found to employ the same approach were unlikely to do so if it regularly produced unsuccessful outcomes. Learning from others can save considerable time and effort since it can avoid using the wrong process or the right process in the wrong order. Importantly it can also enable the potential coalition leader to avoid making expensive political mistakes such as approaching the chief executive too early without sufficient backing, which costs the forming coalition its credibility and reduces its chances of winning approval for implementation. The costs of making an error can be high.

For example, heads of function and senior managers would be advised in the first instance to approach experienced members of the top management team who are respected for their track record, network connections, and enjoy informal seniority. Once their support has been gained they then have the legitimacy to attempt to win the backing of those with formal seniority. Expertise should then be added and followed by individuals who the coalition leader can rely on for reasons of friendship or trust. Finally, people with whom coalition members have experienced productive working relationships are recruited. However, as Exhibit 9.1 illustrated earlier in the chapter the approach used by the most junior members of the top management team are very different to that used by chairmen, chief executives and managing directors.

Knowing a tried and tested order of winning support is also important if an individual is wondering whether they will be invited to join an emerging coalition. Understanding the process allows a potential member to establish a strategy of making themselves either attractive or unattractive to the coalition. If the large scale change being proposed by the coalition appears to be something the potential member would like to be involved in, they can time their availability to maximum advantage. For example, if the potential
member in question has in-depth knowledge about the acquisition process, and this skill is essential to the success of the coalition being built by a director, the individual can ensure the director is made aware of the role they could fulfil. If their skill is scarce then theoretically they can negotiate for a higher pay-off which might take the form of a key role during the implementation phase of the proposal. Alternatively, the pay-off may be less tangible and long-termist. For example, the potential member might be satisfied with raising their profile with other key members of the top management team. This strategy might be expected for more junior individuals. The same expert would also know not to expect an early invitation from the chief executive. Once again this is useful to know because being last into the team can be emotionally debilitating and confidence sapping if the individual believes the coalition is built solely on who the chief executive rates as a high performer. Therefore, it is useful to know that it appears to be nothing personal, rather, it is simply the way in which chief executives typically construct coalitions. Understanding the four approaches is also important because it enables a person to position themselves for different roles in the coalition. The same acquisition expert may also happen to have worked productively with the chief executive on a wide range or projects, produced good results and been an effective team player. Therefore, if they want to join the coalition they could do worse than find an opportunity to remind the chief executive of their previous experiences together.

On the other hand a member of the top management team may want to avoid being approached to join a coalition which they do not think will succeed, or appears not to be in the best interests of either themselves or the organisation. There are many reasons why an individual may want to make themselves unattractive. To do so they have to look up the approach—in Exhibit 9.1—likely to be used by the coalition builder and then either present themselves at the wrong time of the support gathering process or cast themselves in one of the last roles to be filled. That way they have time to construct an argument why they cannot join the coalition or they can suggest another candidate.

The third type of top management team member for whom these findings are important are those who, for whatever reason, want to resist or obstruct the coalition building process. Such action is possible because when a resistor identifies another member of the top management team attempting to construct a coalition, they could use the information conveyed in Exhibit 9.1 to predict the recruitment path. This would enable them to stay one step ahead and approach the next candidate ahead of the coalition builder with the aim of deterring their support. The approach could be made directly by
the resistor or indirectly via other channels such as colleagues or reports which present opposing data. Although suggesting the use of these findings for obstructive purposes appears to be negative, this need not necessarily be the case. It would be wrong to assume that all large scale change proposal coalition ideas are the best option for the organisation, and it is quite likely there will be more than one proposal coalition competing for scarce resources and approval for implementation. Nevertheless, organisations are political arenas and actors in top management teams undoubtedly use power to protect and promote their self-interest. It would be naïve to believe that armed with this knowledge some parties would not seek to abuse it for personal gain. Despite this, these findings represent a positive contribution to the knowledge bank for practitioners who lead or want to lead large scale change proposal coalitions.

Inter-tier and intra-tier coalition building behaviours and tactics

Given the management literature’s fascination with managerial elites and decision making processes, change management and the political behaviour of individuals, it seems surprising there is no empirically generated research on the large scale change proposal coalition building behaviours and tactics of top management team members. Therefore, a study which goes even further and identifies specific inter-tier and intra-tier behaviours and tactics provides practicing top management team members with a unique insight into the coalition building process.

Taken in conjunction with the process of coalition formation discussed in the previous section, the findings suggest that coalition leaders seeking to win support from higher up the hierarchy than themselves must use more indirect behaviours and tactics than when attempting to recruit members from further down the hierarchy. An individual looking for support from more elevated levels should stroke the ego of the candidate by suggesting that the change will benefit their profile and reputation within the organisation. They would also be advised to infer that the proposal requires inputs which only the candidate can contribute because of their superior capabilities. However, the line between flattery and sycophancy is a fine one, and if the reason for the attention is transparent, it is unlikely the attempt to win support will be successful. Coalition builders should stress the attention that has been given to minimising the risk of failure and the consequent negative impact it would have on their more senior colleague. It is important that ego stroking is not used without risk management tactics because the
Evidence suggests that ego stroking can produce only superficial commitment which disappears when the coalition encounters opposition or resistance. The third tactic is to use another member of the top management team to approach the candidate and attempt to win their support. This is particularly effective if the emissary is respected by the potential recruit or the hierarchical gap between the coalition builder and the target is so great that the former has insufficient credibility or intimacy to persuade the latter to join.

When it comes to intra-tier coalition building, coalition builders should expect their peers at the same hierarchical level to be wary of their motives because some will assume the coalition is being used as a mechanism for the coalition leader to further their own career at the expense of the potential member. One way to get around these problems is for the coalition builder to recruit people whom they have worked successfully with previously. Another resolution is to find individuals who share the same political agenda since both people are then working for a common greater goal. A third tactic is to enlist the support of a peer who is thought of as a 'rising star' in the organisation. If the large scale change proposal offers the potential member the opportunity to perform in front of the organisation’s most senior management the evidence indicates they will be interested in joining the coalition and working to ensure it submits a proposal that receives approval for implementation.

To recruit support from members of the top management team lower down in the hierarchy than themselves, the coalition builder is able to use more direct behaviours and tactics than when targeting a potential member who is more senior or at the same level in the hierarchy. Coalition builders are able to use rational argument because they know the target is likely to comply because of the builder’s more elevated position in the hierarchy. However, the findings of the study indicate that the smaller the hierarchical gap between builder and target, the less opportunity the builder has to force support. The evidence suggests that compliance tends to produce apathetic performance, clandestine resistance and even sabotage during the implementation of the proposal. Reward is also a useful tactic to incentivise support, particularly for those individuals whose expertise is important or whose public endorsement will convince key sections of the organisation to add their support. Rewards can include promotions, pay rises, bonuses, stock options, and increased responsibilities and authority. If rational argument or reward fails to deliver support then coercion can be used to force coalition membership or remove obstructive individuals. Examples of coercion include the threat and implementation of demotions, pay reductions, loss of bonuses, reduced decision making authority and
ultimately dismissal. However, this approach should only be used if all other methods were unsuccessful or if the individual is threatening the performance of the coalition or organisation. Inappropriate use of coercion can undermine coalition and top management team morale, reduce cohesion and stability, and therefore, the likelihood of submitting an approval winning proposal.

These behaviours and tactics when used in conjunction with one of the four hierarchy-based coalition building approaches, offer practitioners prescriptive advice on how to win support and construct a large scale change proposal coalition. Once built the focus of the coalition leader switches to sustaining the coalition, and here too, the findings of the research offers practising managers a pioneering insight into the types of large scale change proposal coalition which can exist in organisations. The findings have important consequences for both coalition leaders and members.

Four types of large scale change proposal coalition

Once the coalition leader has built the coalition the objective is to sustain it to the point when the proposal is approved or rejected by the relevant decision making parties in the top management team. It is important that both coalition leaders and members are aware that four types of large scale change proposal coalition exist in top management teams. The four types are:

- Aligned coalitions,
- Unaligned coalitions,
- Unfocused coalitions, and
- Fragmented coalitions.

An understanding of the nature and characteristics of each type and an ability to diagnose the status of a coalition informs the coalition leader which behaviours and tactics are most appropriate. Coalition leaders and members alike have a strong interest in the proposal being approved for implementation, or in the event of it being rejected, to have been seen to have contributed to a well-organised initiative that was attempting to serve the best interests of the organisation.
Therefore, there is a need to attempt to create an aligned coalition since this type is most conducive to submitting a proposal that receives approval. Aligned coalitions are characterised by complementary activities and any tension which emerges can be used constructively to improve coalition performance. The leader’s primary concern is how to maintain alignment and the time they can expect to spend renegotiating commitment through reward or coercive means is low. Alignment is maintained by controlling the dissemination of information and linking coalition members’ career progression to the successful implementation of the proposal. Clearly, it is important that coalition leaders understand which coalition type they are managing, so it is necessary that they are able to diagnose status. This can be achieved by asking the following questions:

- Do I spend a significant percentage of my time renegotiating the commitment of individual members?
- Do I have to resort to reward or coercive powers, rather than rational argument to keep individuals in the coalition?
- When tension emerges is it used constructively to improve coalition performance or does it cause divisions between members?
- Are there substantial differences of opinion between members on what the objective is?
- Are there substantial differences of opinion between members on how to achieve the objective?
- Do I believe that the majority of members are trying to use the coalition to promote their self-interests ahead of the organisation’s?

If the answer to more than a couple of these questions is yes then the likelihood is that the respondent is leading an unaligned, unfocused or fragmented coalition. The more frequent and stronger the answer in the affirmative is, the greater the likelihood that the coalition is either unfocused or fragmented. There is an opportunity to develop these initial questions into a more elaborate and sensitive diagnostic for practitioners to use in the workplace. It is the intention of the author to create such a device and present it for discussion in the form of a journal paper.

Leaders of unaligned, unfocused and fragmented coalitions respectively can expect to spend increasing amounts of time renegotiating commitment through reward or coercive means. As the lack of alignment and cohesion in the three types escalates the likelihood of failing to submit an approval winning proposal increases in step. For those who do
find themselves leading one of these three types the objective is to evolve it into an aligned coalition. This is illustrated in Exhibit 9.2.

There are several behaviours and tactics which can be used to improve alignment. In addition to controlling the dissemination of information and linking career progression to the successful implementation of the proposal, the coalition leader can manipulate decision making processes so that power is either centralised in them or shared amongst supporters. The primary objective though is to remove decision making power from dissident members. Another tactic is to create a 'hard' vision which clearly defines the deliverable and how success will be measured. Once the deliverable has been agreed a fifth stratagem is for the coalition to design and organise the activities by majority decision. Sixthly, coalition leaders can also create an enemy against which the coalition can unite and direct their efforts. A seventh option is to produce a quick win since this can have the effect of creating alignment and encourage members to achieve further results. An eighth tactic is for the coalition leader to trade resources with members in return for their continued commitment. Examples of resources include the secondment of key personnel to the member's section of the organisation, the transfer of financial resources, loaned equipment and access to privileged information. A ninth option is to exploit or create a crisis so that members have little choice but to work in an agreed manner towards a common objective. An tenth tactic is to offer disproportionate rewards.
to key members of the coalition in return for their active support. The danger with this approach is that if the other members become aware of the differentiation then the collapse of the coalition is a real possibility if the leader is unable to offer similar rewards. The eleventh and most heavy handed tactic is to use direct coercion. This can take the form of asking the chief executive to enforce the will of the coalition leader. It can also involve exposing the resistant members in front of the top management team, or removing the support base of those being obstructive. Dismissal is the final coercive technique. These eleven tactics offer the coalition leader a range of options to create alignment in unaligned, unfocused or fragmented coalitions. The diversity of approaches means that the tactic can be matched to the severity of the problem. This is important since the objective is to sustain the coalition. Measures which are seen to be unfair or draconian are likely to cause the collapse of the coalition.

There are several reasons why it is important the coalition member, and not just the coalition leader, is able to diagnose the type of coalition they are working in. Firstly, it enables them to assess the likelihood of the coalition failing to submit a proposal which will be approved for implementation. We have already noted that being associated with failure repeatedly carries the risk of damaging career progression. Secondly, in light of this analysis the member will be able to make an informed decision about whether or not to remain in the coalition. Thirdly, on the basis that they do stay, they will be able to support the coalition leader in attempting to create an aligned coalition. For individuals who intend to lead their own large scale change proposal coalition this will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable learning experience.

The identification of four coalition types and eleven alignment tactics provides practitioners with a pioneering insight grounded in empirical research. It is the first study of large scale change proposal coalitions and enables coalition leaders and members to improve their understanding of the change context as well as enhancing their coalition sustaining skills.

The need to dissolve large scale change proposal coalitions

Having put considerable time and energy into building and sustaining a coalition for the purpose of designing and submitting a large scale change proposal, the coalition leader could be forgiven for wondering what should be done with the team once a decision
regarding implementation has been made. If the coalition has been successful in its submission, the members will have influenced the strategic direction of the organisation, and due to their privileged insights into the most detailed elements of the plan, have the opportunity to be key players during the execution of the plan. It is likely that there will be mixed emotions on the part of some members about whether to attempt to extend their influence into other areas of the strategic decision making process. However, the unanimous response from the fifty top management team members who participated in this research was that large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved as quickly as practically possible once the proposal had been evaluated and a decision taken on whether to proceed. It is important that practising members of top management teams understand why this is the case.

Firstly, coalitions that seek to continue their existence do not fit comfortably within the formally prescribed structure of the organisation. Nor can they be described as an emergent network since they are too well structured and have a well defined purpose. Furthermore, by the time the proposal has been submitted they have taken on a quasi-legitimacy. They have become a temporary super-influential informal structure. The dominance of an informal group is likely to cause friction with the formal top management team since the latter will feel their structurally prescribed rights are being unfairly eroded. A second reason why coalitions should be dissolved is that unproductive working relationships can be terminated. Working intensely with people for weeks or months under considerable pressure can cause stress and a deterioration in the quality of interaction and personal performance. In today’s turbulent environments where organisations need to extract as much value as possible from their top management teams, obstacles to performance need to be eliminated. Another pragmatic reason for dissolution is that it forces coalition members to rebuild relationships with colleagues in the top management team who stand to lose out under the proposed changes. The evidence suggests that in time coalition members are likely to find themselves on the receiving end of someone else’s plan. Therefore, it is wise to create an environment where change is depersonalised and regarded as a normal course of events. Furthermore, because of the increasing complexity and magnitude of change it is likely that large sections of the top management team will have a key role to play in the execution of the plan, so dealing only with other coalition members will produce a silo mentality and sub-optimal implementation. A fourth reason for disbandment is that proposal coalition members may not be the most appropriate individuals to conduct the implementation. It is likely that different skill sets will be required. A fifth argument is
that it avoids the sustainment of ‘them and us’ criticisms which characterise top management teams in which influential temporary coalitions are allowed to continue. Insularity and the subsequent failure to collaborate with colleagues outside the coalition will cause unproductive divisions within the top management team. Common to each of the five reasons is the desire to avoid negative consequences in the top management team. However, there are also six arguments for dissolution based on capturing the positive aspects of coalitions and embedding them in the working practices of top management team members.

Firstly, those conducting the dissolution should seek to identify productive intra-coalition relationships which could be transferred into the top management team. The additional energy and performance generated by pairs and small groups of individuals can be channelled towards tackling a complex issue or one of the critical uncertainties facing the organisation. Secondly, dissolution can also be used to motivate individuals by rewarding coalition members for their contribution. Such events, however informal, provide a sense of occasion and are an important symbolic aspect of management. Thirdly, coalition members enhance their personal skill sets and these learnings should be put to use in dealing with broader organisational issues. Skills likely to be developed in coalitions include: strategic thinking, leadership, team working, ‘man’ management, political adeptness, internal networking and commercial pragmatism. Fourthly, the decision making processes used in coalitions are knowledge based rather than hierarchy based. This means that decisions can be taken as much as fifty to seventy per cent faster than when using conventional hierarchical routes. In an era when many organisations operate in increasingly fluid environments and are required to adapt rapidly and frequently this is a significant and valuable modification. Large scale change proposals are also likely to be more robust and rigorous if they are designed by those with the appropriate knowledge rather than members of the top management team who believe that the magnitude demands authorship by a particularly elevated hierarchical level. Fifthly, working in coalitions can increase the energy and ambition levels of executives. Being provided with the opportunity to influence the strategic direction of the organisation, enhance skill sets and receive rewards is a potent aphrodisiac for individuals who display a strong power motive. Coalition formation is a proactive event so armed with the knowledge that proposal design is likely to take only weeks or months, executives will be encouraged to take up the short-term challenge. If enough individuals adopt this mindset the culture of the top management team will become more action-oriented, as it fulfils its role of creating strategic options. The sixth and final reason for
dissolution is that temporary teams should be institutionalised as the normal method of designing large scale change. Not only are they likely to produce more rigorous and robust proposals, faster than the conventional hierarchy based alternative, but the top management team is more likely to be tolerant of sharing influence if they know it is only for a short period and for a specific purpose.

Naturally it is necessary for coalition leaders to be cognisant of the reasoning since along with the chief executive officer they will have a key role to play in dissolving the coalition. In addition to advising the chief executive on the dissolution process and the pay-offs for members they can also run learning capture workshops and one-to-one debriefing sessions. However, it is also important for coalition members to understand the arguments because their active support will facilitate the process and enable learning capture and transfer to proceed quickly and smoothly. Interestingly it is equally important that the rest of the top management team, and particularly the chief executive officer, acknowledge the need for dissolution. If all elements of the top management team, both inside and outside the coalition accept there is a need for disbandment then temporary super-influential informal structures are more likely to be tolerated. We know from the arguments presented in the literature review that organisations are political arenas and the promotion and protection of self-interest are two causes of political behaviour emerging in top management teams. If the need for an executive to constantly bolster and advance their position can be avoided it means they will have more time to dedicate to fulfilling their legitimate role in the top management team.

The mechanics of dissolving large scale change proposal coalitions

The focus of the discussion in the last section was on the reasons why top management team members should dissolve large scale change proposal coalitions once their plans have been approved for implementation or rejected. In this final section we conclude with a consideration of who disbands coalitions and how practitioners can conduct the process. Once again the suggestions provide executives with fresh insights into a previously unexplicated area of the change context.

It is important that members of top management teams know how large scale change proposal coalitions are disbanded because they may be required, in their roles as chief executives or coalition leaders, to conduct the task. Alternatively, as coalition members
they may be part of a dissolution process. In this case it is valuable to know how the dissolution may unfold in terms of pay-off. If coalition members are aware of the methods commonly used by those who dissolve coalitions then they have the opportunity to position themselves to receive the pay-off they would consider most attractive. Three tactics can be used to produce effective dissolution.

- New roles and responsibilities,
- Geographic dispersal, and
- New projects.

In terms of new roles and responsibilities one of the most popular rewards amongst coalition members is hierarchical promotion. This is because it is public acknowledgement that an individual has made a significant contribution to the strategic direction of the organisation, and is thought capable and deserving of increased responsibility and authority. Other preferred outcomes include improved compensation and benefit packages which encompass aspects such as base salary, access to bonus pools and share options. An alternative to hierarchical advancement is a lateral move into a strategically or financially important area of the organisation. This is likely to be viewed by coalition members as an assessment on the part of the chief executive officer that they have earned his or her trust to manage a key element of the organisation. Another new role and responsibility option is the task of setting up a new business unit. Although often thought of as a high risk assignment it is likely to be preferred to a turnaround assignment, which tends to carry the highest risk of failure. Coalition members who are given this responsibility may well wonder whether they are being rewarded or punished, although it depends on the magnitude and difficulty of the turnaround.

Coalition dissolvers can also use non-positional roles to reward members. Leadership roles, coaching roles and emissary roles are three options which have been used by practitioners in a variety of organisations. An example of a leadership role is heading up a prestigious internal task force set up to confront a critical issue facing the organisation such as major cost reduction or identifying acquisition targets. Sharing the learnings of proposal coalition working in a coaching role is a way of casting the coalition member as an expert in the eyes of top management team colleagues. Individuals with strong communication skills can act as emissaries of change. This option may be particularly attractive in organisations which face the problem of 'unfreezing' their employees from their current ways of working because they do not see the need for change, fear change,
or do not know how to change. Common to all of the new roles and responsibilities discussed above is that they provide coalition members with the opportunity to make further contributions to improved organisational performance as well as broadening and deepening their own skill sets and increasing their visibility within the top management team and the wider organisational constituency.

It might not always be the case that coalition members willingly accept a return to their previous positions of influence over the strategic direction of the organisation, particularly if it is less than that enjoyed in the coalition. It is also possible that alliances of former coalition members may unite behind the scenes to re-establish influence. If this circumstance arises the chief executive can disperse the offending individuals geographically in an attempt to extinguish the problem before it becomes a threat to the stability and performance of the top management team. This tactic is also useful if a coalition member has not performed well and needs to re-establish their confidence or develop new skills away from day-to-day colleagues.

The third key tactic of the coalition dissolver is to place coalition members into new projects. This is to ensure the learnings from a successful coalition are transplanted into other parts of the organisation. Examples of learnings include a ‘can do’ culture, more efficient and effective working practices, team working skills, improved decision making processes and internal selling skills.

How to dissolve large scale change proposal coalitions effectively so that members are rewarded appropriately, and contribute to the performance of the organisation without exerting unwanted influence over its strategic direction and destabilising the top management team is an important skill for chief executive officers and coalition leaders to learn. The recommendations discussed above are the first to be made in the area of large scale change proposal coalitions, and they warrant serious consideration by practitioners because they are distilled from the rich and varied experiences of their contemporaries who were drawn from a wide range of organisational settings. It is the intention of the author to communicate these findings to a broader management audience in the near future.
Conclusion

This thesis began by identifying a serious gap in the study of managerial elites in the change context. It was asserted that given the management literature's fascination with managerial elites and decision making processes, change management and the political behaviour of individuals, it is surprising that large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams have never been investigated. The literature review criticised those who portray change as a rational-linear process which unfolds neatly. It was argued instead that change is a messy cocktail characterised by competing and conflicting interests. Therefore, a power-oriented behaviour based approach to change is more pragmatic and resilient. Furthermore, it was contended that it is the role of the top management team, rather than the chief executive officer acting alone, to establish coalitions for the purpose of designing and proposing options for large scale change. This is because of the increasing complexity, magnitude and frequency of change required in contemporary organisations. In large scale change which impacts the structural aspects of the organisation it is highly likely that some members of the top management team will benefit while others lose out. Therefore, political activity is inevitable as individuals seek to protect and promote their self-interests and those they believe to be the organisation's. In view of this the coalition leader must understand that power resides simultaneously in personal, structural and situational aspects of the organisation and must be accessed and harnessed if they are to engage meaningfully in political activity through defensive or offensive behaviours and tactics. The extant literature on coalition formation was criticised for its reliance on laboratory experiments and theoretical argument and the paucity of recent empirical study. The commentary on political behaviours and tactics in the change context were criticised for being prescriptively generic when what is required are context specific descriptions.

As a result of engaging with the extant literature seven lines of enquiry were established to investigate the nature and characteristics of large scale change proposal coalitions and the behaviours and tactics of coalition leaders in top management teams in a range of organisational settings. The objective of the empirical research was to inform academic enquiry and practitioners. Access was negotiated to fifty key decision makers in top management teams in fourteen organisations across thirteen industries in the UK private sector. One hundred and twenty hours of elite style semi-structured interviewing produced pioneering insights into large scale change proposal coalitions. The key findings were:
Large scale change proposal coalitions follow a five phase life-cycle model: initiate, build, sustain, dissolve, and capture and transfer learning.

Coalition leaders adopt three primary sequential roles: building, sustaining and dissolving.

Coalition leaders adopt one of four hierarchy-based coalition building approaches.

Coalition building processes, behaviours and tactics vary depending on whether they are upward inter-tier, intra-tier or downward inter-tier.

Four types of large scale change proposal coalition exist: aligned, unaligned, unfocused, and fragmented. Each exhibiting their own nature and characteristics, and requiring different coalition leader behaviours and tactics.

Large scale change proposal coalitions should be dissolved as quickly as practically possible once the proposal has been approved for implementation or rejected, and

The chief executive officer in conjunction with the coalition leader dissolves the large scale change proposal coalition using three principal techniques: new roles and responsibilities, geographic dispersal and new projects.

The richness and elucidatory nature of the findings compels researchers to reconsider the way in which we approach empirical investigations into sensitive topics with managerial elites. Exploiting professional and personal ties has proved to be an effective entry strategy and one which fosters the climate of trust necessary to elicit candid data. This study also compels the researcher to reconsider the drawbacks of adopting the often antagonistic approach to arguments and perspectives exemplified by the debate on the sources of power in organisations. Simplistic 'either-or' positions are unhelpful and limited in their usefulness. They cast shadows where we need light.

The results of the research represent a pioneering breakthrough in our understanding of the change context. This is the first empirical investigation into large scale change proposal coalitions in top management teams. It provides substantive support for the arguments put forward in the literature review and opens up new frontiers in the management research agenda. The findings provide a meaningful starting point from which to conduct future research and it is the intention to communicate them to a broader academic audience by publishing in appropriate journals. This research clearly portrays the large scale change proposal process, with its use of coalitions and power-oriented behaviours as a political process, rich in influencing behaviours designed to win support.
and overcome opposition and resistance. Given that it is based on the responses of practitioners it will undoubtedly strike a chord with practicing members of top management teams who to date have been educated mainly in the less unpragmatic and suitable Organisational Development originated rational-linear approach to change. This thesis pushes the researcher to view the large scale change process in a different light. One in which change is acknowledged as a complex, multi-dimensional, multi-layered process, directed by value and motive laden individuals and impacted by the internal and external organisational environments. It is hoped that this thesis encourages others to acknowledge the validity of this perspective because fusing behaviour with process will lead to a more contextualised understanding of managerial elites in the change context.
Appendix A

Interview schedule

Questions

1. The literature presents two opposing viewpoints on how to successfully manage large scale change. The first school of thought argues that change is best achieved by developing and then executing strategy, whilst the second contends that because we cannot accurately predict the future there is little point in developing strategy. In your experience which of these is likely to produce the most successful change?

2. Can the pace of change in the marketplace, be it slow, medium or rapid, determine whether an organisation tends toward strategy or managing issues as they arise in order to successfully manage change?

3. When a member of top management team proposes large scale change they often have to gather support by forming a proposal coalition of colleagues in the top management team. Does this reflect your experience?

4. [Ask if answer to previous question was yes]

Please rank the following list of criteria to indicate the order in which you would approach members of the top management team to join the proposal coalition? (Show list on separate page)

- Friendship/trust
- Formal seniority
- Informal seniority
- Age
- Working relationship
- Expertise
- Physical proximity
- Other (please specify)

5 What behaviours and tactics do you use to convince someone to join the proposal coalition?

*Supplementary: Is coercion an effective tactic?*

6 Do your behaviours and tactics vary depending on whether the potential coalition member is more senior, more junior or at the same level as you? What are the similarities and differences in behaviours and tactics?

7 Where do these support gathering exercises take place? Please indicate as many as necessary from the following options.

(Show list on separate page)

- In your office
- In the other individual’s office
- In a neutral meeting room
- Over a meal in the organisation’s building
- Over a meal outside the organisation’s building
- Over drinks in a hotel/pub/bar
- During a leisure activity
- In the corridor
- At some other venue/on some other occasion (please specify)

8 In your experience are there different types of large scale change proposal coalition? If so, what are the nature and characteristics of the different types?

9 How stable do large scale change proposal coalitions tend to be?

10 What factors determine how stable a coalition is?

11 What behaviours and tactics are used to sustain a coalition?

*Supplementary: Is coercion an effective tactic?*
12 Should large scale change proposal coalitions have a life-span?

*Supplementary:* How long is the life-span of a large scale change proposal coalition?

13 Do you think that large scale change proposal coalitions follow a life-cycle? If so, can you describe the various stages and the characteristics of each?

14 [Ask if answer to previous question was yes]

If coalitions do follow a life-cycle does the role of the coalition leader change across the phases?

*Supplementary:* If yes, what are the different roles and what are the behaviours and tactics used in each role?

15 What happens to large scale change proposal coalitions once they have been approved or rejected for implementation?

*Supplementary:* If it continues, what form does it take in terms of its membership and their behaviours?

*Supplementary:* If it disbands, is it by its own choice?

*Supplementary:* Are coalitions forced to disband, and if so who disbands them and how?

16 Do coalitions have any other purpose other than the reason for formation?

*Supplementary:* Did you experience personal growth as a result of leading or being a member of a large scale change proposal coalition? If so, what aspect of personal growth did you experience?

17 How does the proposer of large scale change overcome resistance from other members of the top management team?
Sometimes large scale change can become politicised which is to say that disagreements and opposition emerges. In your experience why do you think change becomes politicised?

What would you say are the most common reasons for large scale change proposals failing to be approved?

Thank interviewee for participating and ask if they can recommend anyone else.
Appendix B

Description of participant organisation activities

A further note on anonymity

Due to the high profile nature of many of the organisations which took part in the research it is tempting to provide the reader with the list of names of those who kindly agreed to be interviewed. The list contains many names we regularly read about in management journals, business magazines and newspapers as well as watch on television and listen to on radio. Those interviewed are the men and women who run their organisations. They are responsible for setting strategic direction, initiating and leading large scale change. In short they are the key decision makers.

However, it is not possible to name the participants through their job titles since the list of interviewee aliases is provided at the beginning of chapter four. As there can only be one chairman or chief executive officer an alias or title provides little security. Confidentiality and anonymity was sought by interviewees and promised to all. Therefore, I request the tolerance of the reader and trust the anonymity does not detract from the experiences, comments, opinions and observations shared.
The organisations

**Anglian Water PLC**

The principal activities of the Group are water supply and distribution, sewerage, sewage treatment and disposal and process engineering. The group is split into the regulated business which provides water to 4.0 million consumers a day and 1.77 million properties from the Humber in the North, the Thames in the South and from Daventry in Northamptonshire to the East coast. Anglian Water International provides long term concession operation, operations and management, process design for water and waste water treatment, innovative technologies and design and build contracts. The company was privatised in December 1989. At the time of research the company was attempting to design and implement an aggressive overseas expansion plan to generate revenue streams outside the review of the regulator.

**Barclaycard Limited**

The principal activities of the company are credit card issuing and acquisition. The company's best known product is Barclaycard which has been issued to over 7 million customers. It is a subsidiary of Barclays PLC. Set up in 1966 Barclaycard was the first to offer credit cards in the UK in conjunction with Bank of America's BankAmericard. Today it is the largest issuer of credit cards in the UK. At the time of research the company was attempting to improve its competitiveness by reducing costs and creating innovative new products to compete with the entrance of American competitors such as GM and Ford which used credit card loyalty schemes as discounts to attract customers to purchase their vehicles. At the same time rival financial institutions were launching low cost cards in an attempt to take market share away from Barclaycard.

**BP PLC**

The principal activities of the Group are the exploration and production of crude oil and natural gas; refining, marketing, supply and transportation, and manufacturing and
marketing of petrochemicals and solar power generation. The Group has major operations in Europe, North and South America, Asia, Australasia and parts of Africa. The company was privatised in three tranches in October 1979, September 1983, and October 1987. In August 1998 it announced a £45 billion merger with Amoco. This will position the company in the super-league of oil-gas giants with Shell and Exxon. At the time of research it was in the process of implementing an organisation-wide large scale change programme which involved transforming strategy, structure, culture, people, processes, and technologies to make radical improvements in competitiveness and performance.

**Brent Walker Limited**

The principal activities of the Group are the operation of betting shops and betting services. At the time of research it also had a property management business which owned several hotels and sporting stadia in the UK. Due to over-expansion in the late 1980s the company was unable to meet its borrowings. The founder, Jack Walker was removed and a bank appointed top management team was installed to run the company with a view to disposing of assets to pay off capital and interest debt. In October 1997, the company’s listing on the London Stock Exchange was cancelled and it is now operated by the principal financial lenders. At the time of research the company was attempting a radical cost cutting exercise and disposal programme.

**Britannia Building Society Limited**

The principal activities of the Group are the provision of financial services including lending activities (mortgages, mortgage risk management and insurance), savings and investment services, treasury operations, life assurance, fund management and property development. At the time of research the company was embarking on identifying options for large scale change which would increase its revenues and profits.
Gallaher Tobacco Limited

The principal activity of the Group is the manufacture and marketing of a range of cigarettes, cigars, and pipe and hand-rolling tobacco products for the United Kingdom and overseas markets. The Group’s brands include: Benson and Hedges and Silk Cut cigarettes, Hamlet cigars, Old Holborn, Amber Leaf and Samson handrolling tobacco, and Condor and Mellow Virginia pipe tobacco. In May 1997 the company’s Ordinary shares were admitted to the London Stock Exchange. Prior to this the company had been a subsidiary of American Brands Inc. At the time of research the company was conducting a large scale re-organisation of its UK sales force, a disposal programme of its non-core businesses, and the identification of overseas expansion opportunities.

Karen Earl Limited

The principal activity of the company is sponsorship marketing consultancy which includes sponsorship audit, corporate consultancy, sponsorship creation and development, contractual negotiations, sponsorship guidelines and manuals, and sponsorship exploitation. The company provides services to more than twenty of the FTSE100 members. At the time of research the top management team was in the process of designing a strategy that would deliver rapid expansion in growth.

Olivetti Limited

The principal activities of the Group are divided into the following sectors: systems and services (provision of IT services to the banking and finance sector, to public authorities, and to the retail markets, as well as specialised automation systems), telecommunications (provision of fixed-line and satellite telecommunications, provision of Internet access and on-line shopping services, publishing of entertainment and education CD-ROMs), smart cards, and document production equipment. The Group operates across all continents. The research was conducted in the company’s PC business, which it sold in spring 1997 to Piedmont International SA (Centenary Group). Olivetti is still entitled to 5 per cent of net income for the years 1997, 1998 and 1999. At the time of research the company was designing a large scale change initiative to restructure its business in the
face of mounting losses, and establish a strategy to compete with the leading US manufacturers such as Dell, Compaq and IBM.

**Perfect Pizza Limited**

The company's sole activity is the operation of pizza take-away restaurants. It is the UK’s largest pizza take-away chain. It operates in the region of 300 restaurants of which approximately 75 per cent are franchised. It is owned by Scott’s Hospitality Inc, a Canadian based multi-national company. At the time of research the company was identifying and developing organic and acquisition growth strategies.

**Scott's Hotels Limited**

The principal activity of Scott’s Hotels was the operation of Marriott hotels in the UK. In 1996 the company was sold to Whitbread PLC. At the time of research the company was owned by Scott’s Hospitality Inc, and it was conducting a large scale change programme to rebrand its hotels, increase revenues, reduce costs and create a customer-focused culture.

**SWALEC PLC**

The principal activity of the company was electricity generation and distribution. Like all the other Regional Electricity Companies it was privatised under the Conservative government. The company which served the South Wales area merged in 1997 with Welsh Water to create Hyder. At the time of research it was designing a large scale change strategy to increase profitability through cost reduction and overseas expansion. It was also attempting to identify potential acquirers or merger partners to enable it to expand outside the geographic constraints of its South Wales boundaries.
Syntex Pharmaceuticals Limited

The principal activity of the company was the research, development, manufacture and marketing of human and animal pharmaceutical products and medical diagnostic systems. At the time of research the company was attempting to refresh its new product development pipeline. However, due to the long lead time involved in creating new product development opportunities the company suffered from diminishing profitability. Therefore, it was designing a large scale change programme to reduce costs and create new products more efficiently and effectively than previously. Its world class research staff and facilities made it an attractive acquisition target and in 1994 it was acquired by Hoffman La Roche, the giant Swiss pharmaceutical company best known for Valium, the tranquiliser.

Whyte & Mackay Limited

The principal activities of the company are the manufacture and marketing of whisky and spirits. It owns several distilleries in various whisky producing regions of Scotland and its brands which are sold world-wide include Whyte & Mackay Special Reserve, Vladivar Vodka and it distributes Jim Beam for its parent Fortune Brands, Inc, the US Fortune 500 company listed on the New York Stock Exchange. At the time of research the company was undergoing a business process re-engineering programme. It was also designing a large scale change exercise based around creating closer operational links with major customers such as the supermarket chains.

Yorkshire Building Society Limited

The principal activities of the Group are concentrated on mortgage lending, deposit based savings and non-regulated insurance products. At the time of research the company was designing an organic growth strategy based on increasing the number of its customers outside its northern stronghold in the UK.

Note: Organisation names are those at the time of research. Flotations, acquisitions and mergers mean that some no longer use the same name.
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